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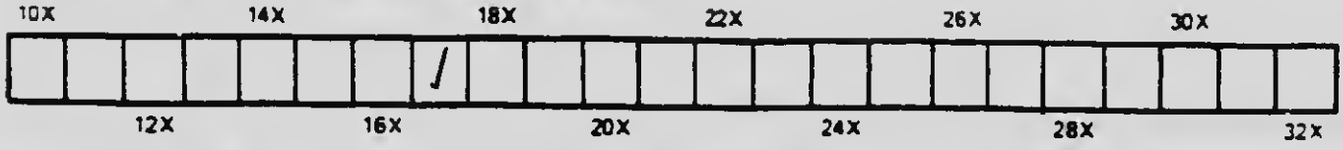

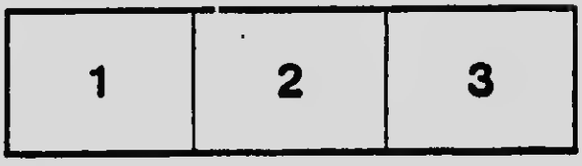

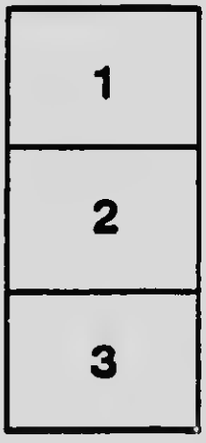

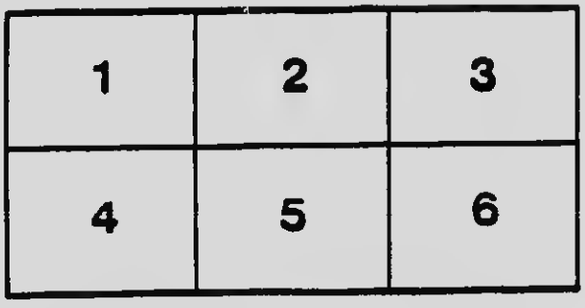

A DAMAGED REPUTATION.

"They went down a little further into the darkness."
(Chapter XXIV.)

A DAMAGED REPUTATION

By

HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "The Impostor," "Hawtrey's Deputy," "The League of the Leopard," "The Protector," etc., etc.

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CONTENTS

A DAMAGED REPUTATION

CHAPTER I

BROOKE PAUSES TO REFLECT

It was a still, hot night, and the moon hung round and full above the cedars, when rancher Brooke sat in his comfortless shanty with a whisky bottle at his hand. The door stood open, and the drowsy fragrance of the forest stole into the room, while, when he glanced in that direction, he could see hemlock and cedar, redwood and balsam, tower, great black spires, against the luminous blueness of the night. Far above them gleamed the untrodden snow that clothed the great peaks with spotless purity; but this was melting fast under the autumn sun, and the river that swirled by the shanty sang noisily among the boulders.

There are few more beautiful valleys than that one among all the ranges of British Columbia, but its wild grandeur made little impression upon Brooke that night. He felt that a crisis in his affairs was at hand, and he must face it boldly or go under once for all. His face, however, grew a trifle grim, and his fingers closed irresolutely on the neck of the bottle, for drifting was easy in that country, and pleasant, so long as one did not remember.

Even when the great peaks were rolled in tempest cloud, the snow fell but lightly among the Quatomac pines. Bright sunlight shone on them for weeks together, and it was but seldom a cold blast whipped the

still blue lake where the shadows of the cedars that distilled ambrosial essences lay asleep. There were deer and blue grouse in the woods, salmon in the river, and big trout in the lake; and the deleterious whisky purveyed at the nearest settlement was not inordinately dear. It had, however, dawned on Brooke by degrees that there were many things he could not find at Quatomac which men of his upbringing hold necessary.

In the meanwhile, his sole comrade, Jimmy, who assisted him to loaf the greater part of every day away, watched him with a curious little smile. Jimmy was big and slouching, but in his own way he was wise, and he had seen more than one young Englishman of Brooke's description take the down-grade in that colony.

"Feeling kind of low to-night?" he said, suggestively. "Now, I'd have been quite lively if Tom Gordon's Bella had made up to me. Bella's nice to look at, and 'most smart with the axe as a good many men I know. I guess if you got her you wouldn't have anything to do."

Brooke's bronze face flushed a trifle as he saw his comrade's grin, for it was what had passed between him and Tom Gordon's Bella at the settlement that afternoon which had thrust before him the question what his life was to be. He had also not surmised that Jimmy had been present at that meeting among the pines. Bella was certainly pretty and wholly untaught, while though he had made no attempts to gain her favour they had not been necessary, since the maid had with disconcerting frankness conferred it upon him. She had, in fact, made it evident that she considered him her property, and Brooke wondered uneasily how far he had tacitly accepted the position. The woman had the waywardness and wildness of the creatures of the forest, and almost as little sensibility, while he was unpleasantly conscious that he was already sinking fast to her level. With a soulless mate, swayed by primitive instincts and passions, and a little further indulgence in bad whisky, it was

evident that he might very well sink a good deal further, and Brooke had once had his ideals and aspirations.

"Jimmy," he said slowly. "I'm thinking of going away."

Jimmy shook out his corn-cob pipe. "Well, I'd 'most have expected it," he said. "The question is, where you're going to, and what you're going to do? You don't get your grub for nothing everywhere, and living's cheap here. It only costs the cartridges, and the deer-hides pay the tea and flour. Besides, you put a pile of dollars into this place, didn't you?"

"Most of six thousand, and I've taken about two hundred out. Of course I was a fool."

Jimmy nodded with a tranquil concurrence.

"Bought it on survey, without looking at it?" he said. "Going to make your fortune growing fruit! It's kind of unfortunate that big peaches and California plums don't grow on rocks."

Brooke sat moodily silent awhile. He had, as his comrade had mentioned, bought the four hundred acres of virgin soil without examining it, which is not such an unusual proceeding on the part of newly-arrived young Englishmen, and partly explains why some land-agency companies pay big dividends. For twelve months he had toiled with hope, strenuously hewing down the great redwoods which cumbered his possessions; and expended the rest of his scanty capital in hiring assistance. It was only in the second year that the truth dawned on him, and he commenced to realize that treble the sum he could lay hands upon would not clear the land, and that in all probability it would grow nothing worth marketing then. In the meanwhile something had happened which made it easier for him to accept the inevitable, and losing hold of hope he had made the most of the present and ignored the future. It was sufficient that the forest and the river fed him during most of the year, and he could earn a few dollars hewing trails for the

Government when they did not. His aspirations had vanished.

It was Jimmy who broke the silence.

"What was it you done back there in England?" he said.

Brooke smiled somewhat dryly, for it was not a very unusual question in that country. "Nothing the police could lay hands on me for. I only quarrelled with my bread and butter. I had plenty of it at one time, you see."

"That means the folks who gave it you?" said Jimmy.

"Exactly. It was the evident duty of one of them to leave me his property, and I think he would have done it, only he insisted on me taking a wife he had fixed upon as suitable along with it. There was, however, the difficulty that I had made my own choice. I believe the old man was right now, though I did not think so then, and when we had words on the subject I came out to make a home for the other woman here."

"And you let up after two years of it?"

"I did," said Brooke, with a trace of bitterness. "The girl did not wait so long. Before I'd been gone half the time she married a richer man."

Jimmy nodded. "There are women made that way," he said, reflectively. "Still, you wouldn't have to worry 'bout Bella. Once you showed her who was to do the bossing—with a nice handy strap—she'd stick to you good and tight. Still, I figure she's not quite the kind of woman you would have married in the old country."

That was very evident, and Brooke sat silent while the memories of his life in the land he had left crowded upon him. He also recoiled from the brutality of the one his comrade had pictured him leading with the maid of the bush, though it had seemed less appalling when she stood before him, vigorous and comely, a few hours ago. He had, however, made no advances to her. On that point, at least, his mind was clear, and now he realized clearly

what the result of such a match must be. Yet he knew his own loneliness and the maid's pertinacity, and once more it was borne in upon him that to stay where he was would mean disaster. Rising abruptly he flung the bottle out into the night, and then while Jimmy stared at him with indignation, laughed curiously as he heard it crash against a stone.

"That's the commencement of the change," he said. "After this I'll pitch every bottle you bring up from the settlement into the river."

"Well," said Jimmy, resignedly, "I guess I can bring the whisky up inside of me, and you'd get hurt considerable if you tried slinging me into the river."

Brooke laughed again, but just then the soft beat of horse hoofs rose from across the river, and a cry came out of the darkness.

"Strangers!" said Jimmy. "Quite a crowd of them. With the river coming down as she's doing it's a risky ford. We'll have to go across."

They went, rather more than waist-deep in the snow-water which swirled frothing about them, for the ford was perilous; and found a mounted party waiting them on the other side. There was an elderly man who sat very straight in his saddle with his hand on his hip, and Brooke, at least, recognized the bearing of one who had commanded cavalry in the Old Country. There was also a younger man, dismounted, two girls on Cayuse ponies, and an Indian, whose appearance suggested inebriation, holding the bridles of the baggage mules.

"I understand the ford is not very safe, and the Indian has contrived to leave our tents behind," said the older man. "If you can take us across, and find the ladies, at least, shelter of any kind for the night, it would be a kindness for which I should be glad to make any suitable recompense."

Jimmy grinned, for it was evident that the speaker was an insular Englishman, and quite unacquainted with

the customs of that country, wherein no rancher accepts payment for a night's hospitality. Brooke had, however, a certain sense of humour, and touched his hat, which is also never done in Western Canada.

"They can have it, sir," he said. "That is, if they're not very particular. Take the lady's bridle, Jimmy. Keep behind him, sir."

Jimmy did as he was bidden, and Brooke seized the bridle of the Cayuse the other girl rode. The half-tamed beast, however, objected to entering the water, and edged away from it, then rose with fore-hoofs in the air, while Brooke smote it on the nostrils with his fist. The girl, he noticed, said nothing, and showed no sign of fear, though the rest were half-way across before he had an opportunity of doing more than cast a glance at her. Then, as he stood waist-deep in water, patting the trembling beast, he looked up.

"I hope you're not afraid," he said. "It will be a trifle deeper presently."

He stopped with a curious abruptness as she turned her head, and stood still with his hand on the bridle gazing at her. She sat, lithe and slim, but very shapely, with the skirt of the loose light habit she had gathered in one hand just clear of the sliding foam, and revealing the little foot in the stirrup. The moon touched one side of the face beneath the big white hat with silvery light, that emphasized the ivory gleam of the firm white neck. He could also just catch the sparkle of her eyes in the shadow, and her freshness and daintiness came upon him as a revelation. It was so long since he had seen a girl of the station she evidently belonged to.

"Oh, no," she said. "What are we stopping for?"

Brooke, who had seldom been at a loss for a neat rejoinder in England, felt his face grow hot as he smote the pony's neck.

"I really don't know. I think it was the Cayuse stopped," he said.

The girl smiled.

They went on with a plunge and a flounder, and Brooke dragged the Cayuse up the bank in time to see the rest disappear into the shanty. Then he boldly held up his hand, and felt a curious little thrill run through him as he swung his companion down.

"It was very good of you to come across for us, and I am afraid you must be very wet," she said. "This is really a quite inadequate recompense."

Then she turned and left him with the pony, staring vaguely after her, flushed in face, with a big piece of minted silver in his hand. It was at least a minute before he slipped it into his pocket with a curious little laugh.

"This is almost too much, and I don't know what has come over me. There was a time when I would have been equal to the occasion," he said.

Then he turned to the stables, where Jimmy, who came in with an armful of clothing, found him rubbing down the Cayuse with unusual solicitude.

"I guess you'll have to change," he said. "Those things aren't decent, and you can put the deerskin ones on. The old man's a high-toned Englishman going fishing, and, by what she said, the younger girl's struck on frontiersmen. When you get into that jacket you'll look the real thing."

Brooke had no great desire to look like one of the picturesque desperadoes who are, somewhat erroneously, supposed, in England, to wander about the Pacific Slope, but as he mended his own clothes with any convenient piece of flour bag, he saw that his comrade's advice was good.

When he entered the shanty Jimmy had supper ready, but he realized, as he had never done since he raised its log walls, the comfortless squalor of the room. It was littered with discarded clothing, lines and traps, and broken boots, while two candles, stuck in whisky bottles, furnished uncertain illumination. He had made the

table, and Jimmy had made the chairs, but the result was no great credit to either of them, while nobody who was not very hungry would have considered the meal his comrade laid out inviting. Still, his guests had evidently no fault to find with it, and during it the girl whose pony he had led once or twice glanced covertly at him.

She saw a tall man with a bronzed face of not unpleasant English type, attired picturesquely in fringed deerskin. He had grey eyes, and his hair was crisped by the sun; but while he was, she decided, distinctly personable and still young, there was something in his expression which puzzled her. It was neither diffidence nor embarrassment, and yet there was a suggestion of constraint about him which his comrade was wholly free from. Brooke, on his part, saw a girl with brown eyes and hair, who had a faint suggestion of imperiousness about her, and wondered with an uneasiness he was by no means accustomed to what she thought of him, since he felt that the condition of his dwelling must show her the shiftless life he led. Still he shook off that thought, and others that troubled him, and played his part as host, talking, with a purpose, only of the Canadian bush; until, when the meal was over, Jimmy turned to the guests.

"A little whisky would have come in to settle those fried potatoes down," he said. "I would have offered you some, but my partner here slung the bottle into the river just before you came."

There was a trace of a smile in the face of the grey-haired man, but the girl with the brown eyes looked up sharply, and once more Brooke felt his face grow a trifle hot. Men do not as a rule fling whisky bottles into rivers without a cogent reason. He was, however, annoyed at himself that he should attach the slightest value to this stranger's good opinion.

Then, when the others seconded Jimmy's suggestion, he took a dingy fiddle from its case, and played French-

Canadian dances, as the inhabitants play them, and became sensible that there was a curious silence of attention.

"That violin has a beautiful mellow tone," said the younger girl, whom he had scarcely noticed. "I am, however, quite aware that there is a good deal in the bowing."

"It might have!" said Jimmy, who disregarded his comrade's glance. "There was once a man came along here who said it would fetch the most of one thousand dollars. You ought to hear him on the one he calls the Chopping. Play it for them, and I'll open the door so they can see the night and hear the river singing."

The girl with the brown eyes appeared surprised at this flight of fancy, which nobody would have expected of Jimmy.

"The Chopping? Oh, yes, of course I understand," she said. "This is the place of all places for it."

Brooke smiled a little. "I'm afraid it is difficult to get moonlight and mystery out of an American steel first string," he said. "One can't keep it from screaming on the shifting."

He drew the bow across the strings, and save for the fret of the snow-fed river which rose and fell in deep undertone, there was a curious silence in the room. The younger girl watched the player with grave appreciation in her eyes, and a little flush crept into her companion's cheek. Perhaps she was thinking of the dollar she had given the man who could play the famous nocturne as she had rarely heard it played before, and owned what, though she could scarcely believe it to be a genuine Cremona, was evidently an old Italian fiddle of no mean value. There was also silence for at least a minute after he had laid down the bow, and then Brooke held out the violin to the girl who had praised its tone.

"Would you care to try the instrument?" he said.

"No," said the girl. "Not after that, though it is, I think, a better one than I have ever handled."

"And I fancy I should explain that she is studying under an eminent teacher, who professes himself perfectly satisfied with her progress," said the man with the grey hair.

Brooke said nothing. He knew the compliment was sincere enough, but he had seen the appreciation in the other girl's eyes, and that pleased him most. Then, as he put away the fiddle, the man turned to him again.

"I am far from satisfied with our Siwash guide," he said. "In fact, I am by no means sure that he knows the country, and as we propose making for the big lake and camping by it, I should prefer to send him back if you could recommend us anybody who would take us there."

Brooke felt a curious little thrill of anticipation, but it was the girl with the brown eyes he glanced at. She, of course, said nothing, but, though it seemed preposterous, Brooke fancied that she knew what he was thinking and was not displeased.

"With your approval I would come myself, sir," he said. "There is nothing just now to keep me at the ranch."

The other man professed himself pleased, and before Brooke retired to his couch in the stable the matter was arranged. He did not, however, fall asleep for several hours, and then the face of the brown-eyed girl followed him into his dreams.

CHAPTER II

BROOKE TAKES THE TRAIL

THE sun had not cleared the dark firs upon the steep hillside, though the snow on the peaks across the valley glowed with saffron light, when Brooke came upon the girl with the brown eyes sitting on a cedar trunk beside

the river, and she looked up with a smile when he stopped beside her.

"I was wondering if I might ask what you thought of this country?" said Brooke.

The girl laughed a little. "If you really wish to know, I think it is the grandest there is on this earth, as I believe it will be one of the greatest. Still, my liking for it isn't so astonishing, because, although I have lived in England, I am a Canadian."

Brooke made a little deprecatory gesture. "It's a mistake I've been led into before, and I'm not sure you would consider it a compliment if I told you that I scarcely supposed you belonged to Canada. Still, perhaps you will tell me what you thought of England."

The girl did not invite him, but she drew her skirt a trifle aside, and Brooke sat down upon the log beside her. She looked even daintier, and appealed to his fancy more, in the searching morning light than she had done when the moon shone down on her.

"When you came up I was just contrasting this valley with one I remember visiting in the Old Country," she said. "It was in the West. Major Hume, who is with us now, once took me there, and we spent an afternoon at a house which, I think, is older than any we have in Canada."

"In a river valley in the West Country?" said Brooke.

The girl nodded. "Yes," she said. "Ivy, with stems thicker than your wrist, climbs about the front of it, and a lawn mown until it looks like velvet slopes to the sliding water. A wall of clipped yews shuts it in, and the river slides past it silently without froth or haste. There is a big beech wood behind it, and one little meadow, green as an emerald, between that and the river——"

"Where the stepping-stones stretch across. A path comes twisting down through the dimness of the wood, and there are firs upon the ridge above."

"Of course!" said the girl. "But how could you know?"

Brooke smiled curiously. "I was once there—ever so long ago."

His companion seemed a trifle astonished. "Then I wonder if you felt as I did, that those shadowy woods and dark yew hedges shut out all that is real and strenuous in life. One could fancy that nobody did anything but sit still and dream there."

Brooke smiled.

"Well," he said, reflectively, "there was very little else one could do. Anything that savoured of strenuousness would have been considered distinctly bad form in that valley."

A little sardonic twinkle flickered in the girl's eyes. "Oh," she said, "I know. The distinction between those who work and those who idle is marked in your country. Still, there is room for all one's activities, and the big thoughts that lead to big schemes here. How far does your ranch go?"

"To the lake," said Brooke, who understood the purport of the question. "There are four hundred acres of it, and I have been here rather more than two years."

The girl glanced at the very small gap in the forest. "And that is all you have cleared?"

"Yes," said Brooke, with a little smile. "One can lounge very successfully here. Still, even if there was not a tree upon it the soil wouldn't be worth anything, and it's only in places one can find a foot or two of it. When I first came in, an enterprising gentleman in the land agency business sold me this wilderness of rock and gravel to feed cattle and grow fruit trees on, though I fancy I am not the only confiding stranger who has been treated in the same fashion in this country."

A curious expression which Brooke could attach no meaning to, crept into his companion's face.

"I gave you a dollar last night," she said. "I have, as I told you, lived in England, and I recognized by your voice that you came from there, but of course, I hadn't——"

Brooke smiled at her. "If you look at it in one light, I scarcely think that explanation is gratifying to one's vanity. Still, you have also lived in Canada, and you ought to know that whoever parts with a dollar in this country, even under a misapprehension, very rarely gets it back."

The girl regarded him gravely a moment, and then looked away. She said nothing, although there was a good deal to be deduced from the man's speech. Then she rose as Major Hume came out of the house.

They left the ranch that day, and for a week Brooke led them through dark fir forests, and waited on them in their camps. He would also have stayed with them longer could he have found a reasonable excuse, but, as it happened, a most exemplary Siwash whom he knew appeared, and offered his services, when they reached the lonely mountain-girt lake. Then he said farewell to Major Hume, and was plodding down the homeward trail with his packs slung about him, when he met the girl coming up from the lake. She stopped abruptly when she saw him.

Then she said, quietly, "So you are going away."

"Yes," said Brooke, a trifle grimly. "An Indian I can recommend came in this afternoon. That made it unnecessary for me to stay."

"You seem in a hurry to go."

Brooke made a little gesture. "I fancy I have stayed with Major Hume quite as long as is good for me. The effort it cost me to go away was sufficiently unpleasant already. It is, you see, scarcely likely that I shall ever spend a week like the past one again."

There was sympathy in his companion's eyes, for she had seen his comfortless dwelling, and guessed tolerably

correctly what manner of life he led. There was no doubt in her mind that he was one who had been accustomed to luxury in England.

"You are going back to the ranch?" she said.

"For a little while, and then I shall take the trail. Where it will lead me is more than I know, but the ranch is as great a failure as its owner. And yet a month—or even a week—ago I was dangerously content to stay there."

The girl fancied she understood him, for she had seen broken men who had lost heart in the struggle sink to the Indian's level, and ask no more than the subsistence they could gain with rod and gun. Brooke felt a little thrill run through him as he looked at her. He realized, when he met the big grave eyes, that he had pulled himself up on the edge of a precipice a week ago. He had let himself drift recklessly during the last two years, but it was plain to him now that he would have gone down once for all had he mated with Bella.

"I think you are doing wisely," she said, quietly. "There is a chance for every man somewhere in this country."

Brooke smiled. "I am going to look for mine. Whether I shall find it I do not know, but I am, at least, glad I have seen you. Otherwise, I might have settled down at the ranch again."

"What have I to do with that decision?" and the girl regarded him steadily.

"It is a trifle difficult to explain. Still, you see, your gracious kindliness reminded me of a good deal that once was mine, and after the past week I could never go back to the old life at the ranch. I do not know why I should tell you this, and scarcely think I would have done so had there been any probability of our meeting again."

There was full comprehension in the girl's eyes, as well as a trace of compassion, and she held out a little hand.

"Good-bye!" she said quietly. "If they are of any value, my good wishes go with you."

Brooke made her a little deferential inclination, as the dainty fingers rested a moment in his hard palm; then he swung off his big shapeless hat and turned away, but the girl stood still, looking after him, until the lonely, plodding figure faded into the shadows of the pines, while it was with a little thrill of sympathy she went back to camp, for she realized it was a very great compliment the man had paid her. He was, it seemed, turning his back on his possessions, and going away, because she had awakened in him the latent sense of responsibility.

In the meanwhile, Brooke held on up the hillside with long, swinging strides. His road was rough, and in places perilous, but there was a relief in vigorous action now the decision was made, and the old apathy fell from him as he climbed towards the peaks above. It was, however, several days later when he reached the ranch, and came upon Jimmy sprawling his ungainly length outside it, basking in the sun. Still, the latter became attentive when he saw his face. This, he realized, was not altogether the same man who had left him a little while ago.

"Get up!" said Brooke, almost sharply. "I want you to listen to me. If it suits you to stay here by yourself, you can; in the meanwhile do what you like with the ranch. In return, I'll only ask you to take care of the fiddle until I send for it. I'm going away."

Jimmy nodded. "That's all right!" he said. "I guess I'll stay. I don't know any other place where one can grub out enough to eat quite so easily. Where're you going to?"

"I don't quite know," and Brooke smiled grimly. "Up and down the province—anywhere I can pick up a dollar or two daily by working for them."

"The trouble is that they're so blamed hard to stick to when you've got them," said Jimmy, reflectively.

"That girl with the big eyes has been putting notions into you?"

Brooke made no disclaimer, and Jimmy laughed. "It's a little curious—you don't even know who she is?"

"Her name is Barbara. She is, she told me, a Canadian."

"Canada's quite a big country," said Jimmy reflectively. "I guess it will be a long while before you see her again, and if you meet her in the cities she's not going to remember you. You'd find her quite a different kind of woman there. When are you going?"

"At sundown. I'd go now, but I want a few hours' rest and sleep."

Jimmy looked at him with sudden concern in his face. "Then I'll be good and lonely to-night," he said. "Say, do you think I could take out the fiddle now and then to keep me company? I guess I could play it, like a banjo, with my fingers."

"No," said Brooke dryly, "that's the one thing you can't do."

He flung himself down in his straw-filled bunk, dressed as he was, and the shadows of the cedars lay long and black upon the river when he opened his eyes again. Jimmy was busy at the little stove, and in another few minutes the simple meal was upon the table. Neither of the men said very much during it, and then Jimmy silently helped his comrade to gird his packs about him. The sun had gone, and the valley was dim and very still when they stood in the doorway.

"Good luck!" said Jimmy. "You'll come back by and by?"

Brooke smiled curiously as he shook hands with him. "If I'm ever a rich man, I may."

Then he went out into the deepening shadows, and floundering waist-deep through the ford, plodded up the climbing trail with his face towards the snow.

A man without ambition who could stifle memory might have found the life he led there a pleasant one. Bountiful Nature fed him, the hills that walled the valley in shut out strife and care, and now he was homeless altogether. He had also just six dollars in his pockets, and that sum, he knew, will not go a very long way in Canada.

As he gazed, the fleecy mist that rolled up from the river blotted out the light, and the man felt the deep stillness and loneliness as he had not done since he first came there. The last red gleam had also faded off the snow, and, with a jerk at the pack straps that galled his shoulders, he set his lips, and swung away into the darkness.

CHAPTER III

THE NARROW WAY

THE big engine was running slowly, which did not happen often, and Brooke, who leaned on the planer table, was thankful for the respite. A belt slid round above him, and on either side were turning wheels, while he had in front of him a long vista of sliding logs, whirring saws, and toiling men. Something had gone wrong with the big engine, and Brooke was waiting until the engineer should set matters right.

It was very hot in the big shed, and Brooke's thin jean garments were soaked with perspiration. The dust the planer threw off adhered in smeary patches to his dripping face, while his hair and eyebrows might have been rubbed with flour. His hands were raw and bleeding, there was a cramp in one shoulder, and an ache, which now and then grew excruciating, down all the opposite side of him.

The toilers are, as a rule at least, liberally paid in Western Canada, but a good deal is expected from them, and the manager of the mill had installed that planer because it could, the makers claimed, be run by one live man. The workmen, however, said that if he held to the contract he would very soon be dead, and Brooke was already worn out with the struggle to keep pace with steam. It was a long while since he had toiled much at the ranch, and in England he had not toiled at all, while as he stood there gasping, and hoping that the engineer would not get through his task too soon, he remembered that on the two eventful occasions in his life when he had made a commendable decision, it had brought him only trouble and strain.

He turned languidly when a man who carried an oil can came by and stopped a moment beside him.

"You're looking kind of played out," said the newcomer.

"It's not astonishing," said Brooke. "I feel quite that way."

"Then I guess that's a kind of pity. The boss will have the belt on the relief shaft in a minute now, and he allows he's going to cut every foot as much as usual by the supper hour. You'll have to shake yourself quite lively. How long've you been on to that planer?"

"A month."

"Well," said the engineer, "she broke the last man up in considerably less time than that. He had to let up sudden one day, and he's in the hospital now. Say, can't you strike somebody for a softer job?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said Brooke. "I'll have to go on till I'm beaten."

The engineer made a little gesture of comprehension as he passed on, for the attitude the Englishman had adopted is not uncommon in Canada. Men who demand, and obtain, the full value of their labour, are proud

of their manhood there, and there was an innate resoluteness in Brooke which had never been wholly awakened in England.

Suddenly, however, the belt above him ran round; there was a clash as he slipped in the clutch, and a noisy whirring which sank to a deeper tone when he flung a rough redwood board upon the table. The whirring millers took hold of it, and its splintery edges galled his raw hands as he guided it, while thick dust and woody fragments, torn off by the trenchant steel, whirled about him in a stream until his eyes were blinded and his nostrils filled. Then the board slid off the table smooth on one side, and he knew that he was lagging when the hum of the millers changed to a thin scream. They must not at any cost be kept waiting for their food, for so many feet of dressed lumber every day was due from that machine.

He flung up another heavy piece, reckless of the splinters in his hand, and peering at the spinning cutters thrust upon the end of the board, wondered whether this was what man was made for, or how long flesh and blood could be expected to stand the strain. The board went off the table with a crash, and it was time for the next, while Brooke, who bent sideways with a distressful crick in his waist, once more faced the sawdust stream with lowered head. It ceased only for a second or two, while he stooped from the table to the lumber that slid by gravitation to his feet, and he knew that to let that stream overtake him and pile up would proclaim his incapacity and defeat. So long as he was there he must keep pace with it, whatever tax it laid upon his jaded body.

He did it for an hour, flagging all the while, for it was a task no man could have successfully undertaken unless he had done such work before. Then the screaming millers closed upon a knot in the wood, and, half-dazed as he was, he thrust upon the board savagely, instead of easing it. There was a crash, a big piece of steel flew

across the table, and the hum of the machine ceased suddenly. Brooke laughed grimly, and sat down gasping. He had done his best, and now he was not altogether sorry that he was beaten.

He was still sitting there when a man in store clothes came along.

"You let her get ahead of you, and tried to make up time by feeding her too hard?" he said.

"No," said Brooke. "Not exactly! She got hold of a knot."

"Same thing!" said the other man. "You've smashed her anyway, and it will cost the company most of three hundred dollars before we get her running again. You don't expect me to keep you after that?"

Brooke smiled dryly. "I'm not quite sure that I'd like to stay."

"Then we'll fix it so it will suit everybody. I'll give you your pay order up to now, and you'll be glad I ran you out by and by. It's quite likely somebody's got a better use for you."

Brooke understood this as a compliment, and took his order, after which he had a spirited altercation with the clerk, who desired him to wait for payment until it was six o'clock, which he would not do. Then he went back to his little cubicle in the big boarding-house, and slept heavily until he was awakened by the clangour of the half-past six supper bell. He descended, and, devouring his share of the meal in ten minutes, strolled leisurely into the great general room, which had a big stove in the middle and a bar down one side of it.

He sat down, and two men, whose acquaintance he had made during his stay there, lounged across to him.

"You let up before supper-time?" said one.

"I did," said Brooke, a trifle grimly. "I broke up the Kenawa planer in the Tomlinson mill. That's why I came away. I'm not going back again."

One of the men laughed softly. "Then it was only

the square thing. Since we've been there that planer has broke up two or three men. Held out a month, didn't you? What were you at before that?"

"Road-making, firing at a cannery, survey packing. I've a ranch that doesn't pay, you see?"

The other man smiled again. "So have we! Half the deadbeats in this country are landholders, too. I guess your trouble's want of capital—same as ours. One can't do a great deal with a hundred dollars. Still, you'd have had more than that when you came in?"

"I had," said Brooke, dryly. "I put six thousand into the land, or rather the land-agent's bank, besides what I spent on clearing, and when I've paid my board and for the clothes I bought, I'll have about four dollars now."

"That's how those land-company folks get rich," said one of the men. "Was it a piece of snow mountain he sold you, or a bottomless swamp?"

"Rock. One might have drained a swamp."

The men smiled. "Well," said the first of them. "The game's an old one. It was the Indian Spring folks played it off on you?"

"No. It was Devine."

There was a little silence, and then the men appeared reflective.

"Now, if any man in that business goes tolerably straight, it's Devine," said one of them. "Of course, if a green Britisher comes along bursting to hand over the bills for any kind of land, he'll oblige him, but I'd sit down and think a little before I called Devine a thief. Any way, he's quite a big man in the province."

The bronze deepened a trifle in Brooke's face. "I can't see any particular difference between a swindler and a thief. In any case, the man robbed me, and if I live long enough I'll get even with him."

"That's going to be quite a big contract," said one of the men. "It's best to lie low and wait for another

fool when yo. 'e been taken in. Besides, there's many a worse man in his own line than Devine."

Brooke was silent. He was irritated that he had allowed himself to indulge in what he realized must have appeared a puerile threat.

During the greater portion of two years he had attempted a hopeless task, and then, discovering his folly, resigned himself, and drifted idly, perilously near the brink of the long declivity which Englishmen of good upbringing not infrequently descend with astonishing swiftness in that country, and for that, rightly or wrongly, he blamed the man who had robbed him. Then the awakening had come, and he saw that while there were many careers open to a man with six thousand dollars, or even half of them, there was only strenuous physical toil for the man with none. He had attempted it, but proficiency in even the more brutal forms of labour cannot be attained in a day, and he now looked back on a year of hardship and effort which had left an indelible mark on him.

Devine had not only taken his dollars, but had driven him out from the society of those who had been his equals, and made him one who could scarcely hope to meet a woman of refinement on friendly terms again. Coarse fare and a life of brutal toil were all that seemed left to him.

" You are the only man I've ever heard say anything good about any one in the land business," he said. " Devine has been successful so far, but even gentlemen of his talents are liable to make a mistake occasionally, and if ever he makes a big one, it will probably go hardly with him."

Another man who had been standing near the bar sauntered towards them, cigar in hand. He was dressed in store clothing, and his hands were, as Brooke noticed, not those of a workman. He had penetrating dark eyes, and the Western business man's lean, intent face, while

Brooke would have guessed his age at a little over thirty.

"I don't mind admitting that I heard a little," he said. "Those land-agency fellows have a good deal to account for. You're not struck on Devine?"

"No," said Brooke, dryly. "I have no particular cause to be. Still, that really does not concern everybody."

"Beat him out of six thousand dollars!" said one of his companions.

The stranger laughed a little. "He has done me out of a good many more, but one has to take his chances in this country. You are working at the Tomlinson mill?"

"No," said Brooke. "I was turned out to-day."

"Got no notion where to strike next?"

"No."

The stranger looked at him.

"I heard they were wanting survey packers up at the Johnston Lake in the bush," he said. "A Government man's starting to run the line through to the big range. If you took him this card up he might put you on."

Brooke took the card, and a little tinge of colour crept into his face.

"I appreciate the kindness, but still you see, you know nothing whatever about me," he said.

The stranger laughed. "I wouldn't worry. Go up, and show him the card if you feel like it. A good many people know me—you are Mr. Brooke?"

Brooke admitted it, and after a few minutes' conversation, the stranger moved away.

"Thomas P. Saxton. What is he?" said Brooke to his companions, as he glanced at the card.

"Puts through mine and sawmill deals," said one of the men. "I'd light out for Johnston Lake right away, and if you have the dollars take the cars. If you get off at Chumas, you'll only have 'bout twelve leagues to walk. I figure it will cost you four dollars."

Brooke decided that it would be advisable to take the risk, and when he had settled with his host and a storekeeper, found he had about six dollars left. When he went out, one of the ranchers looked at the other.

"I'm not that sure it was good advice you gave him," he said.

"No," said his companion.

The other man appeared reflective. "I was watching Saxton, and he kind of woke up when Brooke let out about Devine. Now it seems to me, it wasn't without a reason he put him on to that survey."

His companion laughed. "It doesn't count, anyway. The Government's dollars are certain."

"Well," said the Ontario man, dryly, "if I had to give one of the pair any kind of a hold on me, I figure from what I've heard it would be Devine instead of Saxton."

CHAPTER IV

SAXTON MAKES AN OFFER

It was raining as hard as it not infrequently does in the mountain province, and the deluge lashed the sombre pines that towered above the dripping camp, when Brooke stood in the Surveyor's tent. He was wet to the skin, as well as weary, for he had walked most of thirty miles that day over a very bad trail, and was but indifferently successful in his attempts to hide his anxiety. The Surveyor also noticed the grimness of his wet face, and dallied a moment with the card he held, for he had known what fatigue and short commons were in his early days.

"I'm sorry I can't take you, but I've two more men than I've any particular use for already," he said at last. "I can't give you a place to spread your blankets in to-night either, because the freighter didn't bring up

all our tents. Still, you might make Beasley's Hotel, and strike Saxton's prospectors, if you head back over the divide. He has a few men up there opening up a silver lead."

Brooke said nothing, and the Surveyor turned to his assistant as he moved away. "It's rough on that man, and he seems kind of played out," he said. "I can't quite figure, either, why Saxton sent him here, when he's putting men on at his mine. It seems to me I told him I was only going to take men who'd pack for me before."

In the meanwhile Brooke stood still a few moments in the rain. He was aching all over, and his wet boots galled him, while he was also very hungry, and uncertain what to do. There was nothing to be gained by pushing on four leagues to Beasley's Hotel, even if he had been capable of doing it, which was not the case, because he had just then only two or three copper coins worth ten cents in his pocket. It was, he knew, scarcely likely he would be turned out for that reason, but he had not yet come down to asking charity. Supper, which he would have been offered a share of, was also over, and there was not a ranch about, only a dripping wilderness.

It was very enviously he watched two men piling fresh branches on a crackling fire. Darkness was not far away, and already a light shone through the wet canvas of the Surveyor's tent. A cheerful hum of voices came out from the others, and a man was singing in one of them. The survey packers had, at least, a makeshift shelter for the night, food in sufficiency, and such warmth as the fires and their damp blankets might supply, while he had nowhere to lay his head. He felt, as he glanced at the black wall of bush which closed in upon the little camp, that his hardihood was deserting him, and in another minute he would go back and offer his services in return for food. Then his pride came to the rescue, and, turning away abruptly, he plodded back into the bush, where a bitter wind that came down from the snow

blew the drips from the great branches into his face.

He kept to the trail instinctively, though he did not know where he was going, or why, when one place had as little to commend itself as another, he blundered on at all, except that he was getting cold, until the creeping dark surprised him at a forking of the way. He knew that the path he had come by led through a burnt forest and the willow bush, while great cedars shrouded the other, which apparently wound up a valley towards the heights above. They promised, at least, a little more shelter than the willows, but that, he fancied, must be the trail that crossed the divide and it led into a desolation of rock and forest. He had very little hope of being offered employment at the mine the Surveyor had mentioned, and stood still for several minutes with the rain beating into his face, while, though he did not know it then, a good deal depended on his decision.

Then, attracted solely by the sombre clustering of the cedars, which promised to keep off at least a little of the rain, he turned up the valley with a shiver and finally unrolled his one wet blanket under a big tree. There was an angle among its roots, which ran along the ground, and scooping a hollow in the withered sprays, he crawled into it, and lay down with his back to the trunk. He was very cold and hungry, and he asked himself what he had gained by leaving the ranch, and could find no answer.

Still, even then, he would not regret that he had broken away. Life, it seemed, had very little to offer him, but now he had made the decision he would adhere to it, though he had arrived at the resolution in cold blood, for it was his reason only which had responded to the girl's influence, and as yet what was spiritual in him remained untouched.

Worn out as he was, he slept, and awakened in the grey dawn almost unfit to rise. There was a distressful pain in his hip-joints, and at the first few steps he took

his face went awry, but his physical nature demanded warmth and food, and there was only one way of obtaining it before the life went out of him. Whatever effort it cost him, he must reach the mine. He set out for it, limping, while the sharp gravel rolled under his bleeding feet as he floundered up the climbing trail. It seemed to lead upwards for ever.

Still, reeling and gasping, he held on, and it was afternoon, and he had eaten nothing for close on thirty hours, when a filmy trail of smoke that drifted faintly blue athwart the climbing pines beneath him caught his eye. He braced himself for the effort to reach it, and went down with loose, uneven strides, and at last he staggered into the sight of the mine.

There was a little scar on the hillside, an iron shanty, a few soaked tents and shelters of bark, but the ringing clink of the drills vibrated about them, and a most welcome smell of wood smoke came up to him with a murmur of voices. Brooke heard them faintly, and did not stop until a handful of men clustered about him, while, as he blinked at them, one, who appeared different from the others, pushed his way through the group.

"You seem considerably used up," he said.

"I am," said Brooke, hoarsely, "I'm almost starving."

It occurred to him that the man's voice ought to be familiar, but it was a few moments before he recognized him as the one who had sent him on the useless journey after the Surveyor.

"Then come right along. It's not quite supper-time, but there's food in the camp," he said.

Brooke went with him to the shanty. Saxton, so far as he could remember, asked no questions, but smiled at him reassuringly while he explained, somewhat incoherently, what had brought him there, until a man appeared with a big tray. Then Brooke ate strenuously.

Saxton hammered upon the iron roof of the shanty until a man appeared.

"Give him a pair of blankets, Ike. He can sleep in the lean-to," he said.

Brooke went with the man, vacantly, and in another few minutes found himself lying in dry blankets on a couch of springy twigs. He was sensible that it was delightfully warm, but he could not remember how he got there.

It was next morning when he was awakened by the roar of a blasting charge, and lay still with an unusual sense of comfort until the silence that followed it was broken by the clinking of the drills. Then he rose stiffly, and put on his clothes, which he found had been dried, and was informed by a man who appeared while he was doing it that his breakfast was waiting. Brooke wondered a little at this, for he knew that it was past the usual hour, but he made an excellent meal, and then, being shown into a compartment of the little galvanized iron shanty, found Saxton sitting at a table.

He looked up with a little nod as Brooke came in. "Feeling quite yourself again?" he said.

"Yes," said Brooke, "thanks to the way your men have treated me. This is, of course, a hospitable country, but I may admit that I could scarcely have expected to be so well looked after by one I hadn't the slightest claim upon."

"And you almost wondered what he did it for?"

Brooke was a trifle astonished, for this certainly expressed his thoughts.

"I should, at least, never have ventured to suggest that anything except good-nature influenced you," he said.

"Still, you felt it? Well, you were considerably used up when you came in, and, as I sent you to the Surveyor, who didn't seem to have any use for you, I felt myself responsible. That appears sufficient?"

Now, Brooke was observant, and, as might have been expected, by no means diffident.

"Since you ask, I scarcely think it does," he said.

Saxton laughed. "Take a cigar. We'll come to the point right away."

Brooke lighted a cigar, and found it good. "Thanks. I'm willing to listen as long as appears necessary."

"You have a kind of grievance against Devine?"

"I have. According to my notion of ethics, he owes me six thousand dollars, and I shall not be quite content until I get them out of him. I feel just now that it would please me especially to make him smart as well, which I quite realize is unnecessary folly."

The Canadian nodded, and shook the ash from his cigar. "Exactly," he said. "A man with sense keeps his eye on the dollars, and leaves out the sentiment. Well, suppose I could give you a chance of getting those dollars back?"

"I should be very much inclined to take it. Still, you do not mean to do it out of pure good-nature?"

"No, sir," said Saxton, dryly. "I'm here to make dollars. That has been my object since I struck out for myself at fourteen, and I've piled quite a few of them together. I'd have had more only that wherever I plan a nice little venture in mines or land up and down this province, I run up against Devine. That's quite straight, isn't it?"

"I fancy it is. You are suggesting community of interest? Still, I scarcely realize how a man with empty pockets could be of very much use to you."

"I have a kind of notion that you could be if it suited you. I want a man with grit in him, who has had a good education, and could, if it was necessary, mix on equal terms with the folks in the cities."

"One would fancy there were a good many men of that kind in Canada."

Saxton appeared reflective. "Oh, yes," he said, dryly. "The trouble is that most of them have got something better to do and I can't think of one who has any special reason for wanting to get even with Devine."

"That means the work you have in view would scarcely suit a man who was prosperous, or fastidious?"

"No," said Saxton. "I don't quite think it would. I've seen enough to show me that you can take the sensible point of view. We both want dollars, and I can't afford to be particular. I'm not sure you can, either."

Brooke sat silent awhile. He could, at least, appreciate the Canadian's candour, while events had rubbed the sentiment he had once had plenty of out of him, and left him a somewhat hard and bitter man.

"As you observed, I can't afford to be too particular," he said. "Still, I might not be prepared to go quite so far as you would wish me."

The Canadian laughed. "I'll take my chances. Well, are you open to consider my offer?"

"You haven't made one yet."

"Then we'll fix the terms. Until one of us gives the other notice that he lets up on this agreement, you will do just what I tell you. Pay will be about the usual thing for whatever you're set to do. It would be reasonably high if I put you on to anything in the cities."

"Is that likely?"

"I've a notion that we might get you into a place where you could watch Devine's game for me. I want to feel quite sure of it before I take any chances with that kind of man. If I struck him for anything worth while, you would have a share."

Brooke's face flushed just a trifle, and again he sat silent a moment.

"Well," he said, "I suppose there are no other means, and the man robbed me."

Saxton smiled. "If we pull off the deal I'm figuring on, your share might 'most work up to those six thousand dollars. They're yours."

Brooke realized that it was a clever man he was dealing with, but in his present state of mind the somewhat

vague arrangement commended itself to him. He was, he decided, warranted in getting his six thousand dollars back by any means that were open to him.

"There is a point you don't seem to have grasped," he said. "Since I am not to be particular, can't you conceive that it would not be pleasant for you if Devine went one better?"

Saxton laughed. "I've met quite a few Englishmen —of your kind—already," he said. "That's why I feel that when you've taken my dollars you're not going to go back on me without giving me warning. Besides, Devine would be considerably more likely to fix you up in quite another way. Now, is it a deal?"

"It is," said Brooke.

Saxton nodded. "Then, as you'll want to know a little about mining, we'll put you on now, helping the drillers, at $2.50 a day. You'll get considerably more by and by. Take this little treatise on the minerals of the province, and keep it by you."

CHAPTER V

BARBARA RENEWS AN ACQUAINTANCE

THERE was an amateur concert for a commendable purpose in the Vancouver opera-house, which, since the inhabitants of the mountain province do not expect any organized body to take over their individual responsibilities, was a somewhat unusual event, and Miss Barbara Heathcote, who had not as yet found it particularly entertaining, was leaning back languidly in her chair.

"There are really one or two things they do a little better in the Old Country," she said.

The young man who sat beside her laughed. "There must be, or you never would have admitted it," he said.

"One has to be candid occasionally," and Barbara made a little gesture of weariness. "There is still another hour of it. What comes next? We were a little late, and nobody provided me with a programme."

The man opened the paper which a girl Barbara glanced at handed him.

"A violin solo," he said. "I think they mean Schumann, but they've spelt it wrong. A man called Brooke is put down for it."

"Brooke!" said Barbara, a trifle sharply. "Do you know him?"

"I can't say I do—" the man commenced reflectively, and stopped a moment when he saw the little smile in the girl's brown eyes. "What were you thinking?"

"I was wondering whether that means he can't be worth knowing."

"Well," said the man, good-humouredly, "there are, I believe, one or two decent folks in this city I haven't had the pleasure of meeting, but you were a trifle too previous. I don't know him, but if he's the man I think he is, I've heard about him. He came down from the bush lately, and somebody put him on to Naseby, the surveyor. Naseby's busy just now, and he took the man. I understand he's quite smart at the bush work, and Naseby's pleased with him. You're scarcely likely to know him."

Barbara sat silent a space, looking about her while the amateur orchestra chased one another through the treacherous mazes of an overture. The handsome building was well filled, but there were one or two empty places at hand, for the man who had sent her there had taken a row of them and sent tickets to his friends, as was expected from a citizen of his importance. It was, in the usual course, scarcely likely that she would know a man who had lately been installed in a subordinate place in a surveyor's service, for her acquaintances were people of position in that province, and

yet she had a very clear recollection of a certain rancher Brooke who played the violin.

Her companion started another topic, and neither of them listened to the orchestra, though the girl was a trifle irritated at herself for wishing that the overture had been shorter. At last the music stopped, and Barbara sat very still with eyes fixed on the stage while the usual little stir and rustle of draperies ran round the building. Then there was silence for a moment, and she was sensible of a curious little thrill as a man who held a violin came forward into the blaze of light. He wore conventional evening-dress in place of the fringed deerskin she had last seen him in, and she decided that it became his somewhat spare, symmetrical figure almost as well. Standing still a moment quietly at his ease, straight-limbed, sinewy, with a little smile in his frost-bronzed face, he was certainly a personable man, and for no very apparent reason she was pleased to notice that two of her companions were regarding him with approbation. Then he drew the bow across the strings, and she sat very still to listen. It was not music that a good many of his audience were accustomed to, but scarcely a dress rustled or a programme fluttered until he took the fiddle from his shoulder. Then, while the plaudits rang through the building, his eyes met Barbara's. Leaning forward a trifle in her chair, she saw the sudden intentness of his face, but he gazed at her steadily for a moment without sign of recognition. Then she smiled graciously, for that was what she had expected of him, and again felt a faint thrill of content, for his eyes were fixed on her when, as the applause increased, he made a little inclination.

He was not permitted to retire, and when he put the fiddle to his shoulder again she knew why he played the nocturne she had heard in the bush. It was also, she felt, in a fashion significant that it had now, in place of the roar of a snow-fed river, the chords of a grand

piano for accompaniment, though the latter, it seemed to her, made an indifferent substitute. When at last he moved away she turned to the man at her side.

"Will you go down and ask Mr. Brooke to come here?" she said. "You can tell him that I would like to speak to him."

The young man did not express any of the astonishment he certainly felt, but proceeded to do her bidding, for there was a certain imperiousness about Barbara Heathcote which was not without its effect. Brooke was putting away his fiddle when he came upon him.

"I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mr. Brooke, but it seems you know a friend of mine," he said. "If you are at liberty, Miss Heathcote would like to see you."

"Miss Heathcote?" said Brooke, for it had happened that he had never heard the girl's full name. Her companions had called her Barbara in the bush, and he had addressed her without prefix.

"Yes," said the other. "Miss Barbara Heathcote."

He glanced at Brooke sharply, or he would not have seen the swift content in his face, for the latter put a sudden restraint upon himself.

"Of course! I will come with you," he said, and a minute or two later took a place at Barbara's side.

"You do not appear very much surprised, and yet it was a long way from here I saw you last," she said.

Brooke fancied she meant that it was under somewhat different circumstances, and sat looking at her with a little smile. She was also, he decided, even better worth inspection than she had been in the bush, for the rich attire became her, and the electric radiance emphasized the gleam of the white shoulder and of the ivory neck the moonlight had shone upon when first they met.

"No," he said. "The fact is, I have seen you already on several occasions in this city."

Barbara glanced at him. "Then why did you not claim recognition?"

"Isn't the reason obvious?"

"No," said Barbara. "I scarcely think it is—unless, of course, you had no desire to renew the acquaintance."

"Does one usually renew a chance acquaintance made with a packer in the bush?"

"It would depend a good deal on the packer," said Barbara, quietly. "Now this country is——"

There was a trace of dryness in Brooke's smile. "You were going to say a democratic one. That, of course, might to some extent explain the anomaly."

"No," said Barbara, sharply, with a very faint flush of colour in her face. "I was not. Explanations are occasionally odious, but both Major Hume and his daughter invited you to their house if you were ever in England."

"The Major may have felt himself safe in making that offer," said Brooke. "You see, I am acquainted with my fellow-Britons' idiosyncrasies."

The girl looked at him with a little sparkle in her eyes. "I do not know why you are adopting this attitude, or assigning one to me," she said. "Did we ever attempt to patronize you, and if we had done, is there any reason why you should take the trouble to resent it?"

Brooke laughed softly. "I scarcely think I could afford to resent a kindness, however it was offered; but there is a point you don't quite seem to have grasped. How could I be certain you had remembered me?"

The girl smiled a little. "Your own powers of recollection might have furnished a standard of comparison."

Brooke looked at her steadily. "The sharpness of the memory depends upon the effect the object one wishes to recollect produced upon one's mind," he said. "I should have known you at once had it been twenty years hence."

The girl turned to her programme, for his candour was almost disconcerting.

"Well," she said. "Tell me what you have been doing. You have left the ranch?"

Brooke nodded.

"Road-making for one thing," he said. "Chopping trees, quarrying rock, and following other occupations of the kind."

"And now?"

Brooke's face, as she did not fail to notice, hardened suddenly, and he felt an unpleasant embarrassment as he met her eyes. He had decided that he was fully warranted in taking any steps likely to lead to the recovery of the dollars he had been robbed of, but he was sensible that the only ones he had found convenient would scarcely commend themselves to his companion.

"At present I am surveying, though I cannot, of course, become a surveyor," he said. "The legislature of this country has placed that out of the question."

Barbara was aware that in Canada a man can no more set up as a surveyor without the specified training than he can as a solicitor, though she did not think that fact accounted for the constraint in the man's voice and attitude. She was tolerably certain that something in connexion with his occupation caused him considerable dissatisfaction.

"Still," she said, "you must have known a little about the profession?"

"Yes," said Brooke, unguardedly. "Of course, there is a difference, but I had once the management of an estate in England. What one might call the more useful branches of mathematics were also, a good while ago, a favourite study of mine. One could find a use for them even in measuring a tree."

"You would find a knowledge of timber of service in Canada?" she said.

"Not very often. You see the only apparent use of

the trees on my possessions was to keep me busy two years attempting to destroy them, and of late I have chiefly had to do with minerals."

"With minerals?" said the girl, quickly, and then, as he volunteered no answer, swiftly asked, "Whose was the estate in England?"

Brooke did not look at her, and she fancied he was not sorry that the necessity of affecting a show of interest in the music meanwhile made continuous conversation difficult.

"The estate—it belonged to—a friend of mine," he said. "Of course, I had no regular training, but connexion and influence count for everything in the Old Country."

Barbara watched him covertly, and once more noticed the slight hardening of his lips, and the very faint deepening of the bronze in his cheeks. She remembered the old house in the English valley, with its trim gardens and great sweep of velvet lawn, where he had admitted that he had once been long ago. The statement she had fancied at the time was purposely vague, and she wondered now if he had meant that he had lived there.

"I suppose it does," she said. "I wonder if you ever feel any faint longing for what you must have left behind you there. One learns to do without a good deal in Canada."

Brooke smiled. "Of course! That is one reason why I am pleased you sent for me. This, you see, brings it back to me."

He glanced suggestively round the big, brilliantly-lighted building, across the rows of citizens in broadcloth, and daintily-dressed women, and then turned and fixed his eyes upon his companion's face almost too steadily. The girl understood him, but she would not admit it.

"You mean the music?" she said.

"No. It is you who have taken me back to the Old

Country. Imagination will do a great deal but it needs a fillip, and something tangible to build upon."

Barbara laughed softly, and said nothing further for a space, until the man turned to her.

"How long is a chance acquaintance warranted in presuming on a favour shown him in this country?"

Barbara smiled at him. "Until the other person allows him to perceive that his absence would be supportable. In this case, just as long as it pleases him. Now you can tell me about the road-making."

Brooke understood that she wished to hear, and when he could accomplish it without attracting too much attention, pictured for her benefit his life in the bush. He also did it humorously, but effectively, without any trace of the self-commiseration she watched for, and her fancy dwelt upon the hardships he lightly sketched. She could fancy how this man, who, she felt certain, had been accustomed to live softly in England, must have shrunk from some of his tasks, and picture to herself what he felt when he came back at night to herd close-packed with comrades whose thoughts and his must always be far apart.

At last he rose and stood still a moment, looking down on her.

"I'm afraid I have trespassed on your kindness," he said. "I am going back to the bush to-morrow, and I do not know when I shall be fortunate enough to see you again."

"That," she said, "is for you to decide. We are 'At home' every Thursday in the afternoon—and, in your case, in the evening."

He made her a little inclination, and turned away, while Barbara sat still, looking straight in front of her, until she turned with a laugh, and the girl who sat next to her glanced round.

"Was the man very amusing?"

"No," said Barbara, reflectively. "I scarcely think

he was. I gave him permission to call upon us, and never told him where we lived."

"Still, he would, like everybody else in this city, know it already."

"He may," said Barbara. "That, I suppose, is what I felt at the time, but now I scarcely think he does."

CHAPTER VI

AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY

It was late at night, and raining hard, when a line of dripping mules stood waiting beneath the pines that crowded in upon the workings of the Elktail mine. A few lights blinked among the log-sheds that clustered round the mouth of the rift in the steep hillside, and a warm wind that drove the deluge before it came wailing out of the blackness of the valley. The mine was not a big one, but it was believed that it paid Thomas P. Saxton and his friends tolerably well, in spite of the heavy cost of transport to the nearest smelter. A somewhat varying vein of galena, which is silver-lead, was worked there, and Saxton had, on several occasions, declined an offer to buy it, made on behalf of a company.

On the night in question he stood in the doorway of one of the sheds, with Brooke, for whom the Surveyor had no more work just then, beside him. Brooke wore long boots and a big rubber coat.

"It's a wicked kind of night," said Saxton. "You know what you've got to do?"

"Yes," said Brooke, a trifle dryly, "you have given me tolerably complete instructions once or twice already. The ore is to be delivered to Allonby at the Dayspring mine not later than to-morrow night, and I'm to be con-

tented with his verbal acknowledgment. The getting it across the river will, I fancy, be the difficulty, especially as I'm to send half the teamsters back before we reach it."

"Still, you have got to send them back," said Saxton. "Jake and Tom will go on, and when you have crossed the ford that will be two mules for each of you. Not one of the other men must come within a mile of the trail forking. It's part of our bargain that you're to do just what I tell you."

Brooke laughed a little. "I'm not going to grumble very much at leading two mules. I have done a good deal harder work quite frequently."

"You'll find it tough enough by the time you're through. You must be in at the mine by daylight the day after to-morrow, anyway. Allonby will be sitting up waiting for you."

Brooke said nothing further, but went out into the rain, calling to one of the teamsters, and the mules were got under way. The trail that led to the Elktail mine sloped steep as a roof just there, and was slippery with rain and mire, but the mules went down it as no other loaded beasts could have done, feeling their way foot by foot, or glissading on all four hoofs for yards together.

When they reached the level, or rather the depth of the hollow, for of level, in the usual sense of the word there is none in that country, Brooke turned and looked round. The lights of the Elktail had faded among the pines, and there was only black darkness about him.

It was a difficult road to travel by daylight, and, naturally, considerably worse at night, while Brooke had already wondered why Saxton had not sent off the ore earlier. That, however, was not his business, and, shaking the rain from his dripping hat, he plodded on. It was still two or three hours before daylight when they reached a wider and smoother trail, and he sent away three of the men.

Those who were going back vanished into the deluge, while Brooke, who took a bridle now, went on with two men again. He groped onward, splashing in the mire, until the roar of a river throbbed across the forest. Then the leading teamster pulled up his mules.

"It's a nasty ford in daylight, and she'll be swirling over it waist-deep and more just now," he said. "Still, we've got to take our chances of getting through."

"It will be light in two hours," said Brooke, suggestively. "Of course, you know better than I do whether we could make the wasted time up."

The man laughed. "I guess we could, but there's two bush ranchers just started their chopping over yonder. I had a kind of notion the boss would have told you that."

It commenced to dawn on Brooke that Saxton had a reason for not desiring that everybody should know he was sending ore away.

"I don't think he did," he said. "Anyway, if we have to go through in the dark, there's nothing to be gained by waiting here."

They went on, down what appeared to be the side of a bottomless gully, with the stones and soil slipping away from under them. Then they reached the bed of a stream, and proceeded along it, splashing and stumbling amidst the boulders. In the meanwhile the roar of the river was growing steadily louder, and when they stopped again they could hear the clamour of the invisible flood close in front of them. Brooke could see nothing beyond dim, dripping trees.

"Well," said the leading teamster, "I have struck a nicer job than this one, but it has got to be done. Tether the spare mule, each of you, and then get in behind me."

Brooke had no diffidence about taking the last place in the line. Though he was in charge of the pack train, it was evident that the men knew a good deal more about that ford than he did, and he had no particular desire to make himself responsible for a disaster. Then there was

a scrambling and splashing, and he found himself suddenly waist-deep in the river. He was, however, tolerably accustomed to a ford, and though the mule he led objected strenuously to entering the water, it proceeded with that beast's usual sagacity once it was in.

Twice, at least, his feet were swept from under him, and once he lost his grip on the bridle, and simultaneously all sight of his companions and the beast he led. Then he felt unpleasantly lonely as he stood more than waist-deep in the noisy flood, but after a few yards, floundering he found the mule again, and at last scrambled up, breathless and gasping, beneath the pines on the farther side.

"Hit it square that time!" said the teamster. "I'm not quite so sure as I'd like to be we can do it again."

They went back through the river for the rest of the mules, and were half-way across on the return journey when the leader shouted to them that they should stop. The water seemed deeper than it had been on the previous occasion, and Brooke found it difficult to keep his footing at all as he peered into the darkness. There was little visible beyond the faint whiteness of sliding froth, and a shadowy blur of trees on either shore. He could see nothing that might serve as guide, and the leading teamster was standing still, in a state of uncertainty.

"I'm afraid we're too far down stream," he said. "Head the beasts up a little."

His voice reached the others brokenly through the roar of the torrent, and with a pull at the bridle Brooke turned his face up-stream. He could hear the rest splashing in front of him until his mule lost his footing, and he sank suddenly up to the breast. Then there was a shout, and a struggling beast swept down on him with the swing of an eddy. Brooke went down, head under, and one of the teamsters appeared to be shouting instructions to him when he came up again. He had not the faintest notion of what they were, and swung round with the eddy until he was driven violently

against a boulder. There was a mule close beside him, and he contrived to grasp the bridle, and found to his astonishment that he could now stand upright without difficulty. Exactly where the others were, or where the opposite side of the river lay, he did not at the moment know; but the mule appeared to be floundering on with a definite purpose, and he went with it, until they scrambled up the bank, and he found two other men and one beast already there.

"One of them's gone," said the teamster. "There'll be trouble when we go back, but I guess it can't be helped. Anyway, there's 'most a fathom in the deep below the ford, and no mule would do much swimming with that load."

"A fathom's quite enough to cover the bags up so nobody's going to find them," said the other man.

Brooke did not quite understand why, since the ore was valuable, this fact should afford the teamster the consolation it apparently did, but he was not in a mood to consider that point just then, and all his attention was occupied when they proceeded again. The trail that climbed the rise was wet and steep, and seemed to consist largely of boulders, into which he blundered with unpleasant frequency. It was but little better when they once more plunged into the forest. Then the trees grew thinner as they climbed steadily, until at last Brooke could see the black hill shoulders rise out of the trails of mist, and the leader pulled up his mules.

"We've done 'bout enough for one spell, and nobody's going to see us here," he said. "Get a fire started. I'm emptier'n a drum."

Brooke, who knew where to find the resinous knots, was glad to help, and soon a great fire blazed upon a shelf of rock. The mules were tethered and forage given them, and the men lay steaming about the blaze until the breakfast of flapjacks, canned stuff, and green tea was ready. It was dispatched in ten minutes, and rolling

his half-dried blanket about him, Brooke lay down to sleep.

It was raining when he awakened, and they once more took the trail, while during what was left of the day they plodded among the boulders beside frothing streams, crept through shadowy forests, and climbed over treacherous slopes of gravel and slippery rock outcrop round the great hill shoulders above. Everywhere the cold gleam of snow met the eye. Brooke was not in a condition to be receptive of more than physical impressions. His long boots were full of water, his clothes were soaked, the gravel had galled his feet, and his limbs ached. The beasts were also flagging, for their loads were heavy, and the patter of their hoofs rose with a slower beat, while the teamsters said nothing save when they urged them on.

They rested again for an hour and lighted another fire, and afterwards found the trail smoother, but evening was closing in when, scrambling down from a hill shoulder they came upon a winding valley. It was filled with dusky cedars, and the mist rolled out of it, but the teamsters quickened their pace, and smote the lagging beasts. Then, where the trees were thinner, Brooke saw a smear of vapour drawn out across the ragged pines, and one of his companions laughed.

"Well," he said, "I guess we're there at last, and if Boss Allonby isn't on the jump you'll be putting away your supper, and as much whisky as you've any use for, inside an hour."

"Is it a complaint he's often troubled with?" said Brooke.

The teamster grinned, "He has it 'bout once a fortnight—when the pack beasts from the settlement come in. It lasts two days, in the usual way, and on the third one every boy about the mine looks out for him."

Brooke asked no more questions, though he hoped that several days had elapsed since the supplies from the settlement had come up, and in another few minutes they

plodded into sight of the mine. The workings appeared to consist of a heap of débris and a big windlass, but here and there a crazy log hut stood amidst the pines which crowded in serried ranks upon the narrow strip of clearing. The door of the largest shanty stood open, and the figure of a man appeared in it.

"Good evening, boys," he said. "You have brought the ore and Saxton's man along?"

One of the teamsters said they had, and turned to Brooke with a laugh.

"You're not going to have any trouble to-night," he said. "He's coming round again, and when he feels like it, there's nobody can be more high-toned polite!"

CHAPTER VII

ALLONBY'S ILLUSION

THE shanty was draughty as well as very damp, and the glass of the flickering lamp blackened so that the light was dim. It, however, served to show one-half of Allonby's face in silhouette against the shadow, as he sat leaning one elbow on the table, with a steaming glass in front of him. Brooke, who was stiff and weary, lay in a dilapidated canvas chair beside the crackling fire. It was still raining outside, and darkness had closed down on the lonely valley several hours ago, but while Brooke's eyes were heavy, Allonby showed no sign of drowsiness.

"You will pass your glass across when you are ready, Mr. Brooke," he said, and the latter noticed his clean English intonation. "The night is young yet, that bottle is by no means the last in the shanty, and it is, I think, six months since I have been favoured with any intelligent company."

Brooke smiled a little. His host was attired somewhat curiously in a frayed white shirt and black store

jacket, which was flecked with cigar ash, and had evidently seen better days, though his other garments were of the prevalent jean. His face was gaunt and haggard, but it was just then a trifle flushed, and though his voice was still clear there was a suggestive unsteadiness in his gaze. The man was evidently a victim of indulgence, but there was a trace of refinement about him, and Brooke had realized already that he had reached the somewhat pathetic stage when pride sinks to the vanity which prompts its possessor to find a curious solace in the recollection of what he has thrown away.

"No more!" he said. "I have lived long enough in the bush to find out that is the way disaster lies."

Allonby nodded. "You are no doubt perfectly right," he said. "I had, however, gone a little too far when I made the discovery, and by that time the result of any further progress had become a matter of indifference to me. In any case, a man who has played his part with credit among his equals where life has a good deal to offer one and intellect is appreciated, must drown recollection when he drags out his days in a lonely exile that can have only one end."

Brooke had already found his host's maudlin moralizings becoming monotonous, but he also felt in a fashion sorry for the man.

"If one may make the inquiry, you came from England?" he said.

Allonby laughed. "Yes, I came from England, because something happened which prevented me feeling any great desire to spend any further time there. What it was does not, of course, matter. I came out with a sheaf of certificates and several medals to exploit the mineral riches of Western Canada, and found that mineralogical science is not greatly appreciated here."

He rose, and taking down a battered walnut case, shook out a little bundle of greasy papers. Then a faint gleam crept into his eyes as he opened a little box in which

Brooke saw several big round pieces of gold. The dulness of the unpolished metal made the inscriptions on them more legible, and he knew enough about such matters to realize that no man of mean talent could have won those trophies.

"They would, I fancy, have got you a good appointment anywhere," he said.

"As a matter of fact, they got me one or two. It is, however, occasionally a little difficult to keep an appointment when obtained."

Brooke could understand that there were reasons which made that likely in his host's case, but he had by this time had enough of the subject.

"What are you going to do with the ore I brought you?" he said.

Allonby's eyes twinkled. "Enrich what we raise here with it."

"It is a little difficult to understand what you would gain by that."

Allonby smiled suggestively. "I would certainly gain nothing, but Thomas P. Saxton seems to fancy the result would be profitable to him."

"But does the Dayspring belong to Saxton?"

Allonby emptied his glass at a gulp. "As much as I do, and he believes he has bought me soul and body. The price was not a big one—a very few dollars every month, and enough whisky to keep me here. He is, however, now quite willing to part with the Dayspring, which has done little more than pay expenses."

A light commenced to dawn on Brooke, and his face grew hot. "That is presumably why he arranged that I should bring the ore down past the few ranches near the trail at night?"

"Precisely!" said Allonby. "You see, Saxton wants to sell the mine to another man—because he is a fool. Now the chief recommendation a mine has to a purchaser is the quality of the ore to be got out of it."

"But the man who proposed buying it would send an expert to collect samples for assaying."

Allonby smiled again. "It is not quite so difficult for a mine captain who knows his business to contrive that an expert sees no more than is advisable. A good deal of discretion is, however, necessary when you salt a poor mine with high-grade ore. It has to be done with knowledge, artistically. You don't seem quite pleased at being mixed up in such a deal."

Brooke was a trifle grim in face. "I have no doubt that, considering everything, it is a trifle absurd of me, but I'm not," he said. "One has to get accustomed to the notion that he is being made use of in connexion with an ingenious swindle. That, however, is a matter which rests between Saxton and me, and we may talk over it when I go back again. Why did you call him a fool?"

Allonby's face grew suddenly eager. "I suppose you couldn't raise eight thousand dollars to buy the mine with?"

Brooke laughed outright. "I should have some difficulty in raising twenty until the month is up."

"Then you are losing a chance you'll never get again in a lifetime. I would have liked you to have taken it, because I think I could make you believe in me. That is why I showed you the medals."

Brooke looked at him curiously for a moment or two.

"It is a very long time since I had the expectation of ever calling eight thousand dollars my own, and if I had them I should feel very dubious about putting them into any mine."

Allonby leaned forward and clutched his arm. "If you have any friends in the Old Country, beg or borrow from them. There is a fortune under your feet. Of course, you do not believe it. Nobody I ever told it to would ever listen seriously."

"I believe you feel sure of it, but that is quite another thing."

Allonby rose shakily.

"Listen a few minutes—I was sure of attention without asking for it once," he said. "It was I who found the Dayspring, not by chance prospecting, but by calculations that very few men in the province could make. I know what that must appear—but you have seen the medals. Tracing the dip and curvature of the stratification from the Elktail shafts, I knew the vein would approach the level here, and I put five thousand dollars—every cent I could scrape together—into proving it. We struck the vein, but while it should have been rich, we found it broken, displaced, and poor. There had, you see, been a disturbance of the strata. I borrowed money, worked night and day, and starved myself, and at last we struck the vein again, and struck it rich."

He stopped and stood staring vacantly in front of him, while Brooke heard him noisily draw in his breath.

"You can imagine what that meant!" he continued. "After what had happened in England I could never go back a poor man, but a good deal is forgiven the one who comes home rich. Then, while I tried to keep my head, we came to the fault where the ore vein suddenly ran out. It broke off as though cut through with a knife, and went down, as the men who knew no better said, to the centre of the earth. Now a fault is a very curious thing, but one can deduce a good deal when he has studied them, and a big snowslide has laid bare an interesting slice of the foundations of this country in the valley opposite. It took me a month to construct my theory. With about four thousand dollars I could strike the vein again."

"Of course you tried to raise them?"

Allonby made a grimace. "For six long years. The men who had lent me money laughed at me, and worked

the poor ore back along the incline instead of boring. Somebody has been working it—for about five cents on the dollar—ever since, and when I told them what they were letting slip all of them smiled compassionately. I am, of course, a broken man, with a brain clouded by whisky. How could I be expected to find any man a fortune?"

His brain, it was evident, was slightly affected by alcohol then, but there was no mistaking the genuineness of his bitterness, and Brooke sat silent, regarding him curiously.

"A fortune under our feet—and nobody will have it! It is one of Fate's grim jests," he said. "I spent a month making a theory, and every day of six years has shown me something to prove that theory right. Now Saxton wants to swindle another man into buying the mine for—you can call it a song."

He poured out another glass and then turned abruptly to his company. "Put on your rubber coat and come with me," he said.

Brooke would much rather have retired to sleep, but the man's earnestness had its effect on him, and he rose and went out into the rain with him. Allonby came near falling down the shaft when they stood at its head, but Brooke got him into the ore hoist and sent him down, after which he descended the running chain he had locked fast hand over hand. The level, as he had been told, was close to the surface, and while Allonby walked unsteadily in front of him with a blinking candle in his hat, they followed it into the face of the hill.

Finally, Allonby stopped and leaned against the dripping rock, as he took off his hat and held the candle high above his head. Then he pointed down the gallery the way they had come.

"Look at it!" he said, thickly. "Until we struck the ore where you see the extra timbering, I counted the dollars every yard of it cost me as I would drops of my

life's blood. I worked while the men slept. There was a fortune within my grasp if those dollars would hold out until I reached it—and fortune meant England, and I once more the man I had been. Then—we came to that."

He swung round and pointed with a wide, dramatic gesture which Brooke fancied he would not have used in his prosperous days, to a bare face of rock. It was of different nature to the sides of the tunnel, and had evidently come down from above. Brooke understood. The strata his companion had been working in had suddenly broken off and gone down, only he knew where. Brooke was very drowsy, but the scene had a curious effect on him, and compelled him to wakefulness.

"You know where that broken strata has dipped to?" he said, at last.

Allonby sat down abruptly, and thrust a bundle of papers upon his companion. "Almost to a fathom. If you know anything of geology, look at these."

Brooke, who unrolled the papers, knew enough to recognize that, even if his companion had illusions, they were the work of a clever man. There was skill and what appeared to be a high regard for minute accuracy in every line of the plans, while he fancied the attached calculations would have aroused a mathematician's appreciation. He spent several minutes poring over them, while Allonby held the candle, and then looked up at him.

"They would, I think, almost satisfy any man, but there is a weak point," he said.

Allonby smiled in a curious fashion. "The one the rest split on? I see you understand."

"You deduce where the ore ought to be—by analogy. That kind of reasoning is, I fancy, not greatly favoured in this country by practical men. They prefer the fact that it is there established by the drill."

Allonby made a gesture of impatience. "They have

driven shaft and adit for half a lifetime, most of them, and they do not know yet that one law of Nature—the sequence of cause and effect—is immutable. I have shown them the causes—but it would cost five thousand dollars to demonstrate the effect. Well, as no one will ever spend them, we will go back."

He had come out unsteadily, but he went back more so still, and, as he fell down now and then, Brooke had some difficulty in conveying him to the foot of the shaft. When he had bestowed him in the ore hoist, and was about to ascend by the chain, Allonby laughed.

"You needn't be particularly careful. I shall come down here head-foremost one of these nights, and nobody will be any the worse off," he said.

Then Brooke went up into the darkness, and with some difficulty hove his companion to the surface. They went back to the shanty together, and as Allonby incontinently fell asleep in his chair, Brooke retired to the bunk set apart for him.

When he awakened next morning Allonby was already about, and looked at him curiously when he endeavoured to re-open the subject.

"It is not considerate to refer next morning to anything a man with my shortcomings may have said the night before," he said

"I'm sorry," said Brooke. "Still, it occurred to me that you believed very firmly in the truth of it."

Allonby smiled dryly. "Well," he said, "I do. What is that to you?"

"Nothing," said Brooke. "What is the name of the man Saxton wishes to sell the mine to?"

"Devine," said Allonby, and went out; while Brooke departed when he had made his breakfast.

CHAPTER VIII

A BOLD VENTURE

It was a hot morning shortly after Brooke's return to the Elktail mine, and Saxton sat in his galvanized shanty with his feet on a chair and a cigar in his hand. He wore soil-stained jean, and seemed very damp, for he had just come out of the mine. Thomas P. Saxton was what is termed a rustler in that country, a man of unlimited activity, troubled by no particular scruples, and keen to seize on any chances that might result in the acquisition of even a very few dollars.

Brooke, who had been speaking, sat watching him with a faint ironical appreciation. The man was delightfully candid, at least with him, and though he was evidently not averse from sailing perilously near the wind, it was done with boldness and ingenuity. There was a little twinkle in his keen eyes as he glanced at his companion.

"Well," he said, "one has to take his chances when he has all to gain and very little to let up upon. That's the kind of man I am."

"I believe you told me you had got quite a few dollars together not very long ago," said Brooke reflectively.

The smile became a trifle plainer in Saxton's eyes. 'I did, but very few of them are mine. Somehow I get to know everybody worth knowing in the province, and now and then folks with dollars to spare for a venture hand them me to put into a deal."

"On the principle that one has to take his chances in this country?"

Saxton laughed good-humouredly. "Well," he said.

"I never go back upon a partner, any way, and when we make a deal the other folks are quite at liberty to keep their eyes on me. They know the rules of the game, and if they don't always get the value they expected they most usually lie low and sell out to another man instead of blaming me. It pays their way better than crying down their bargain. Still, I have started off mills and wild-cat mines that turned out well, and went on coining dollars for everybody."

"Which was no doubt a cause of satisfaction to you!"

Saxton shook his head. "No, sir," he said. "I felt sorry ever after I hadn't kept them."

Brooke straightened himself a trifle in his chair, for he felt that they were straying from the point.

"Industrial speculations in this province remind me of a game we have in England. Perhaps you have seen it," he said. "You bet a shilling or half-a-crown that when you lift up a thimble you will find a pea you have seen a man place under it. It is not very often that you accomplish it. Still, in that case—here is—a pea."

"And there's nothing but low-grade ore in the Dayspring? Now, nobody ever quite knows what he will find in a mine if he lays out enough dollars looking for it."

"That," said Brooke, dryly, "is probably correct enough, especially if he is ignorant of geology. What I take exception to is the sprinkling of the mine with richer ore to induce him to buy it. Such a proceeding would be called by very unpleasant names in England, and I am not quite sure it mightn't bring you within the reach of the law here. Mind, what you may think fit to do is, naturally, no concern of mine, but I have tolerably strong objections to taking any further personal part in the scheme."

"The point is, that we're playing it off on Devine, the man who robbed you, and has once or twice put his foot on me. I was considerably flattened when I crawled

from under. He's a big man and he puts it down heavy."

"Still, I feel it's necessary to draw the line at a swindle."

Saxton made a little whimsical gesture. "Call it the game with the pea and thimble. Devine has got a notion there's something in the mine, and I don't know any reason why I shouldn't humour him. He's quite often right, you see."

"It does not affect the point, but are you quite sure he isn't right now?"

"You mean that Allonby may be?"

"I shouldn't consider it quite out of the question."

Saxton laughed softly. "Allonby's a whisky-skin, and I keep him because he's cheap. Everybody knows that story of his. Anyway, Devine doesn't want the mine to keep. He has to get a working group with a certain output and assays that look well all round before he floats it off on the English market. If he knew I was quietly dumping that ore in I'm not quite sure it would rile him."

Brooke sat silent a space. He had discovered by this time that it is not advisable to expect any excess of probity in a mining deal, and that it is the speculator, and not the men who face the perils of the wilderness, who usually takes the profit. A handful or two of dollars for them, and a big bank balance for the trickster stock manipulator, appeared to be the rules of the game.

"Still, if another bag of ore goes into the Dayspring you can count me out," he said. "No doubt it's a trifle inconsistent, but I take no further share in selling the mine."

Saxton shook his head reproachfully. "Those notions of yours are going to get in your way, and it's unfortunate, because we have taken hold of a big thing," he said. "I'm an irresponsible planter of wild-cat mining schemes, you're nobody, and between us we're

going to best Devine, the biggest man in his line in the province, and a clever one. Still, that's one reason why the notion gets hold of me. When you come in ahead of the little man there's nothing to be got out of him, and Devine's good for quite a pile when we can put the screw on."

"You expect to accomplish it?" he said.

"Well," said Saxton, "I mean to try. We can't squeeze him much on the Dayspring, but we want dollars to fight him with, and that's how we're going to get a few of them. It's on the Canopus I mean to strike him."

"The Canopus!" said Brooke, who knew the mine in question was considered a rich one. "How could you gain any hold on him over that?"

"Oh the title. By jumping it. Devine takes too many chances now and then, and if one could put his fingers on a little information I have a notion the Canopus wouldn't be his. I guess you know that unless you do this, that, and the other, after recording your correct frontage on the lead or vein, you can't hold a mine on a patent from the Crown. Suppose you have got possession, and it's found that there was anything wrong with the papers you filed, the minerals go back to the Crown again, and the man who's first to drive his stakes in can re-locate them. It's done now and then."

Brooke sat silent a space. A jumper—as the man who re-locates the minerals somebody else has found, on the ground of incorrect record or non-compliance with the mining enactments, is called—is not regarded with any particular favour, but his proceedings may be, at least, perfectly legitimate, and there was a certain simplicity and daring of conception in the new scheme that had its effect on Brooke.

"I will do what I can within limits," he said.

Saxton nodded. "Then you will have to get into the mine, though I don't quite know how we are going to

fix it yet," he said. "Anyway, we've talked enough for one day, and you have to go down to the settlement to see about getting those new drills up."

Brooke set out for the settlement, and slept at a ranch on the way, where he left his horse, which had fallen lame, for it was a two days' journey, while it was late in the afternoon when he sat down to rest where the trail crossed a bridge. The latter was a somewhat rudimentary log structure put together with the axe and saw alone, of a width that would just allow one of the light wagons in use in that country to cross over it, and, as the bottom of the hollow the river swirled through was level there, an ungainly piece of trestle work carried the road up to it. There was a long, white rapid not far away, and the roar of it rang in deep vibrations among the rocks above. Brooke found the pulsating sound soothing, and as he watched the glancing water slide by his eyes grew heavy.

He did not remember falling asleep, but by and bye the sombre wall of coniferous forest that shut the hollow in seemed to dwindle to the likeness of a trim yew hedge, and the river now slid by smooth and placidly. There was also velvet grass beneath his feet in place of wheel-rutted gravel and brown fir needles. Still, the scene he gazed upon was known to him, though it seemed incomplete until a girl with brown eyes in a long white dress and big white hat appeared at his side. She fitted the surroundings wonderfully, for her almost stately serenity harmonized with the quietness and order of the still English valley. Then when he would have spoken the picture faded, and he became suddenly conscious that his pipe had fallen from his hand, and that he was dressed in soil-stained jean which seemed quite out of keeping with the English lawn. That was his first impression, but while he wondered vaguely, a pounding of hoofs became audible, and he recognized that something unusual was going on.

He shook himself to attention, and looking about him saw a man sitting stiffly erect on the driving seat of a light wagon and endeavouring to urge a pair of unwilling horses up the sloping trestle. They were Cayuses, beasts of native blood and very uncertain temper, bred by Indians, and, as usual, about half-broken to the rein. They also appeared to have decided objections to crossing the bridge. The river frothed beneath it, the ascent was steep with a twist in it, and a small log, perhaps a foot through, spiked down to the timbers, served as sole protection. It would evidently not be difficult for a pair of frightened horses to tilt a wheel of the very light vehicle over it.

Brooke, who knew that it is not always advisable to interfere in a dispute between a bush rancher and his horses, sat still, until it became evident to him that the man did not belong to that community. He was elderly, for there was grey in the hair beneath the wide hat, while something in the way he held himself and the fit of his clothes suggested a connexion with the cities. It was, however, evident that he was a determined man, for he showed no intention of dismounting, and responded to the off horse's vicious kicking with a stinging cut of the whip. The result of this was a plunge, and one wheel struck the foot-high guard with a crash. The man plied the whip again, and with another plunge and scramble the beasts gained the level of the bridge. Here they stopped altogether. Brooke sprang to his feet.

"Hadn't you better get down, sir, or let me lead them across?" he said.

The man cast a momentary glance at him, and his little grim smile and the firm grip of his long, lean fingers on the reins supplied a hint of his character.

"Not until I have to," he said. "They're going to cross this bridge."

Brooke moved a few paces nearer. It was one thing for a rancher accustomed to horses and bridges of that

description to take pleasure in such a struggle, but quite another in the case of a man from the cities, and he had misgivings as to the result of it. The latter, however, showed very little concern, though the near horse was now apparently endeavouring to kick the front of the wagon in. Then Brooke sprang suddenly towards them as both backed the wagon against the log. He fancied that one wheel was mounting it when he seized the near horse's head, but after that he had very little opportunity of noticing anything.

The beast plunged, and came near swinging him off his feet, the wagon pole creaked portentously, and the whip fell swishing across the other horse's back again. Then there was a hammering of hoofs, and a rattle; the team bolted incontinently, and because the bridge was narrow, Brooke, who lost his hold, sprang upon the log that very indifferently guarded it. It was, however, rounded on the top, and next moment he found himself standing knee-deep in the river, shaken, and considerably astonished, but by no means hurt. A drop of ten feet or so is not very apt to hurt an agile man who alights upon his feet. He saw the wagon bounce upon the half-round logs, as with the team stretching out in a furious gallop in front of it, it crossed the trestle on the opposite side, and vanish into the forest; and then finding himself very little the worse, proceeded to wade back to the bridge. He was plodding up the climbing trail when a shout came down and he saw the man had pulled the wagon up. When Brooke drew level he looked at him with a little dry smile.

"I guess you and the Cayuses came off the worst," he said.

Brooke glanced at the horses. They were flecked with lather, but quiet enough now, and it was evident that the driver had beaten the spirit out of them on the ascent.

"I fancied the result would have been different a little while ago," he said.

The stranger laughed. "I 'most always get my way," he said. "Still, I didn't pull the team up to tell you that. You're going in to the settlement?"

Brooke said he was, and the stranger bade him get up, which he did, and seized the first opportunity of glancing at his companion. The man who drove the wagon was unusually gaunt, and while his eyes, which were brown, and reminded Brooke curiously of somebody else's, seemed to scintillate with a faint sardonic twinkle, there was a suggestion of reticence in his firm thin lips, and an unmistakable stamp of command upon him. Brooke fancied that he was in his own sphere a man of some importance.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said. "I don't like to be beaten, and it's a thing that doesn't happen very often. Besides, when a horse is too much for a man it's kind of humiliating. There's something that doesn't strike one as quite fitting in the principle of the thing."

Brooke laughed. "I'm not sure it's worth while to worry very much over a point of that kind, especially when it seems likely to lead to nothing beyond the probability of being pitched into a river."

"Still," said the stranger, with the little twinkle showing plainer in his eyes, "in this case it was the other man who fell in."

"I fancy it quite frequently is," said Brooke, reflectively. "That is usually the result of meddling."

The stranger nodded. "You have been here some time, but you are an Englishman," he said.

"I am," said Brooke. "Is there any reason why I should hide the fact?"

"You couldn't do it. How long have you been here?"

"Four years in all, I think."

"What did you come out for?"

"I fancy my motive was not an unusual one. To pick up a few dollars."

"Got them yet?"

"I can't say I have."

"There are not many who would have admitted that," he said. "When a man has been four years in this country he ought to have put a few dollars together. What have you been at?"

"Ranching most of the time. Road-making, saw-milling, and a few other occupations of the same kind afterwards."

"What was wrong with the ranch?"

"Almost everything," Brooke said. "It had a good many disadvantages besides its rockiness, sterility, and an unusually abundant growth of two-hundred-feet trees. Still, it was the man who sold it me I found most fault with. He was a land agent."

"One of the little men?"

"No. I believe he is considered rather a big one—in fact, about the biggest in that particular line."

The sardonic gleam showed more plainly in the stranger's eyes. "He told you the land was nicely cleared ready, and would grow anything?"

"No," said Brooke. "He, however, led me to believe that it could be cleared with very little difficulty, and that the lumber was worth a good deal. I daresay it is, if there was any means whatever of getting it to a mill, which there isn't. He certainly told me there was no reason it shouldn't grow as good fruit as any that comes from Oregon, while I found the greatest difficulty in getting a little green oat fodder out of it."

"You went back, and tried to cry off your bargain?"

Brooke glanced at his companion. "I really don't know any reason why I should worry you with my affairs. My case isn't at all an unusual one."

"I don't know of any why you shouldn't. Go right on."

"Then I never got hold of the man himself. It was one of his agents I made the deal with, and there was

nothing to be obtained from him. In fact, I could see no probability of getting any redress at all. It appears to be considered commendable to take the newly-arrived Britisher in."

The other man smiled dryly. "Well," he said, "some of them 'most seem to expect it. Ever think of trying the law against the principal?"

"The law," said Brooke, "is apt to prove a very uncertain remedy, and I spent my last few dollars convincing myself that the ranch was worthless. Now, one confidence ought to warrant another. What has brought you into the bush? You do not belong to it."

The stranger laughed. "There's not much bush in this country, from Kootenay to Caribou, I haven't wandered through. I came up to look at a mine. I buy one up occasionally."

"Isn't that a little risky?"

"Well," said the other. "It depends. There are goods, like eggs and oranges, you don't want to keep."

"And a good market in England for whatever the Colonials have no particular use for?"

The stranger laughed. "Know anything about the Dayspring?"

"Not a great deal," Brooke said, guardedly. "I have been in the workings, and it is for sale."

"Ore worth anything at the smelter?"

Now Brooke was perfectly certain that such a man as his companion appeared to be would attach no great importance to any information obtained by chance from a stranger.

"There is certainly a little good ore in it," he said, dryly.

"That is all you mean to tell me?"

"It is all I know definitely."

The stranger smiled curiously. "Well," he said, "I guess I know a little more."

Brooke changed the topic, and listened with growing

interest, and a little astonishment, to his companion as they drove on. The man seemed acquainted with everything he could mention. He was even more astonished when, as they alighted before the little log hotel at the settlement, the host greeted the stranger.

"You'll be Mr. Devine who wrote me about the room and a saddle horse?" he said.

"Yes," said the other man, who glanced at Brooke with a little whimsical smile, "you have addressed me quite correctly."

Brooke said nothing, for he realized then something of the nature of the task he and Saxton had undertaken, while it was painfully evident that he had done very little to further his cause at the first encounter. He also found the little gleam in Devine's eyes almost exasperating, and turned to the hotel-keeper to conceal the fact.

"Has the freighter come through?" he said.

"No," said the man. "Bob, who has just come in, said he'd a big load and we needn't expect him until to-morrow."

Devine had turned away now, and Brooke touched the hotel-keeper's arm. "I don't wish that man to know I'm from the Elktail," he said.

"Well," said the hotel-keeper, "you know Saxton's business best, but if I had any share in it and struck a man of that kind looking round for mines I'd do what was in me to shove the Dayspring off on to him."

CHAPTER IX

DEVINE MAKES A SUGGESTION

THERE was only one hotel, which scarcely deserved the title, in the settlement, and when Brooke returned to it an hour after the six o'clock supper, he found Devine sitting on the verandah. He had never met the man

until that afternoon, and had only received one very terse response to the somewhat acrimonious correspondence he had insisted on his agent forwarding him respecting the ranch. He was, therefore, while he would have done nothing to avoid him, by no means anxious to spend the remainder of the evening in Devine's company. The latter was, however, already on the verandah, and looked up when he entered it.

"I had almost a fancy you meant to keep out of my way," he said.

Brooke sat down, and there was a trace of dryness in his smile.

"If I had felt inclined to do so, you would scarcely expect me to admit it."

Devine laughed, and handed his cigar-case across. "Some of you folks from the old country are a trifle tender in the hide, but I don't mind telling you that there was a time when I spent an hour or two every day keeping out of other men's way. They wanted dollars I couldn't raise, you see, and now and then I had to spend mornings in the city because I couldn't get into my office on account of them. I meant to pay them, and I did, but there was no way of doing it just then."

Brooke's smile was a trifle curious, and might have been construed into implying a doubt of his companion's commendable intentions, but the latter did not appear to notice it, and he took one of the cigars offered him, and found it excellent.

"They were probably persistent men," he said.

Devine glanced at him sharply, but Brooke's face was expressionless.

"Well," he said, tranquilly, "I contrive to pay my debts as the usual thing, but we'll let that slide. What are you at up here in the bush?"

"Mining, just now," said Brooke. "To be more definite, acting as handy man about a mine."

"You'd make more rock-drilling. Feel fond of it?"

"I can't say I do. Still, I have a notion that it is going to lead to the acquisition of a few dollars presently."

Devine sat silent, apparently reflecting, and then looked up again.

"Now," he said, "suppose I was to make you an offer, would you feel inclined to listen to me?"

Brooke had acquired in England a composure which was frequently useful to him, but he was young, and started a trifle, while the blood showed through his clear skin.

"I think I could promise that much, at least," he said.

"Well," said Devine, "I have some use for a man who knows a little about bush ranches and mines, and understands the English folks who now and then buy them from me. I could afford to pay him a moderate salary."

Brooke closed one hand a trifle, and the bronze deepened in his face. The opportunity Saxton had been waiting for was now, it seemed, being thrust upon him, and yet he felt that he could not avail himself of it. It was clear that he had everything to gain by doing so, but there was, he realized now, a treachery he could not descend to.

"I am afraid I can't quite see my way to entertaining it."

"No?" said Devine. "I guess you have your reasons?"

Brooke felt that he could scarcely consider the motive which had induced him to answer as he did a reason. It was rather an impulse he could not hold in check, or the result of a prejudice, but he could not explain this, and a somewhat illogical bitterness against Devine took possession of him.

"When I first came into this province my simplicity cost me a good deal, and I almost think I should rather feel myself impelled to warn any of my countrymen I came into contact with against making rash ventures in land and mines than induce them to do so," he said.

Devine smiled dryly. "That is tolerably plain talk, anyway. Still, it ought to be clear that a man can't keep on taking folks' dollars without giving them reasonable value anywhere. We needn't, however, worry about that. I made you an offer, and you have decided that it wouldn't suit you?"

Again Brooke sat silent a space. He felt in some degree bound to Saxton, though he had certainly earned every dollar the latter had handed him, and it had been agreed that a verbal intimation from either would suffice to terminate the compact between them. There was also no reason why he should do anything that would prejudice him if he entered Devine's service, and a very faint hope commenced to dawn on him that there might be a way out of the difficulty. Devine appeared to be a reasonable man, and he determined to at least give him an opportunity.

"It is probably an unusual course, but before I decide I would like to ask a question," he said. "We will suppose that you or one of your agents had sold a man who did not know what he was buying a tract of worthless land, and he demanded compensation. What would you do?"

"The man would naturally look at the land and use his discretion?"

"We'll assume that he didn't. Men who come into this country at a time when everybody is eager to buy now and then most unwisely take a land-agent's statements for granted."

"Then," said Devine, dryly, "they take their chances, and can't blame the other man."

"Still, if the buyer convinced you that your agent knew the land was worth nothing when he sold it him?"

Devine glanced at him sharply. "That would be a little difficult, but I'll answer you. I've been stuck with a good many bad bargains in my time, and I never went back and tried to cry off one of them. No, sir. I

took hold and worried the most I could out of them."

"Then you would not make the victim any compensation?"

"Not a cent. I shouldn't consider him a victim. That's straight?"

"I scarcely think anybody would consider it ambiguous," Brooke said, dryly. "It demands an equal candour, and I have given you one of my reasons for deciding that it would not suit me to enter your service. I can't help wondering what induced you to make me the offer."

Devine laughed. "Well," he said, "so am I. I had, as I told you, a notion that I might have a use for a man of the kind you seem to be, but I'm not quite so sure of it now. Though I don't know that I'm especially thin in the skin, some of the questions you seem fond of asking might make trouble between you and me."

He rose with a little sardonic smile and went into the hotel, leaving Brooke on the verandah staring at the dusky forest vacantly, for his thoughts were not exactly pleasant just then. He had been offered a chance Saxton, at least, would have eagerly seized upon, and it was becoming evident that there was very little of the stuff successful conspirators are made of in him. He could not ignore the fact that it was a conspiracy they were engaged in, for he meant to get his six thousand dollars back, and found it galling to remember that it was a kindness Devine had purposed doing him.

He had also misgivings as to what his confederate—Saxton—would have to say about his decision, and after all it was evident that he owed him a little.

The freighter came in early next morning with the drills, and Brooke, who hired pack-horses, set off with them, but as he drove the loaded beasts out of the clearing he saw Devine watching him from the verandah, with a little smile. He made a salutation, and Brooke, for no apparent reason, jerked the leading pack-horse's bridle

somewhat viciously. It was a long journey to the mine, but he reached it safely, and found Saxton expecting him impatiently. They spent an hour or two getting the drills to work, and then sat down to a meal in the galvanized shanty.

Saxton was damp and stained with soil, and one of his hands was bleeding, but he laughed as he glanced at the heavy, doughy bread and untempting canned stuff on the table.

"I guess I don't get my dollars easily," he said. "There are quite a few ways of making them, but the one the sensible man has the least use for is with the hammer and drill. Still, I'm going back to the city, and we'll try another one presently. You'll stay here about a week, and then there'll be work for you. I've heard of something while you were away."

"So have I!" said Brooke. "I met Devine, and he gave me an opportunity of entering his service."

Saxton became suddenly eager. "You took it?"

"No," said Brooke dryly. "I did not. I had reasons for not doing so, though I feel it is very probable that you would not appreciate them."

Saxton stared at him in astonishment. "Well," he said, "I guess I wouldn't. Still, can't you understand what kind of chance you've thrown away? I might have made 'most anything out of the pointers you could have picked up and given me."

Brooke smiled dryly. "I don't think you could," he said. "I wouldn't have given you any."

Saxton turned towards him resolutely, his black eyes intent. "Now," he said, "I want a straight answer. Are you going back on your bargain?"

"No. If I had meant to do that, I should naturally have taken Devine's offer. As I have told you, I am going to get my six thousand dollars out of him. That is, of course, if we can manage it, about which I am more than a little doubtful."

Saxton laughed contemptuously. "You would never get six dollars out of anybody who wasn't quite willing to let you have them," he said. "A struggling man has no use for the notions you seem proud of."

"I really can't help having them," said Brooke, with a little smile.

Saxton shook his head. "Well," he said, "it's fortunate you're not going to be left to yourself, or somebody would take the clothes off you. Now, I've heard from a friend of mine, who has a contract to build the Canopus folks a flume. It seems they want more water, and it's Devine's mine."

"How is that going to help us?"

"Since Leeson made that contract, he got the offer of another that would pay him better, and he's willing to pass it on at Devine's figure to any one who will take it off his hands. Now, I'll find you a man or two and tools, and when they're ready, you'll start for the Canopus and build that flume."

"The difficulty is that I haven't the least notion how to build a flume."

Saxton made a little impatient gesture. "Then I guess you have got to learn, and there are plenty of men to be hired in the bush who do. You know how to rough down redwood logs and blow out rocks?"

Brooke admitted that he did.

"Then the thing's quite easy," he said. "You look at the one they've got already, and make another like it."

"Well," said Brooke, "I'll try it, but that brings us to the question, what else do you expect from me? It is very probable that I shall make an unfortunate mistake for both of us, if you leave me in the dark. I want to understand the position."

Saxton explained it at length, and Brooke leaned back in his chair, glancing abstractedly through the open door as he listened, for his mind took in the details mechanic-

ally, while his thoughts were otherwise [illegible] that his confederate apparently consid[illegible] pose perfectly legitimate, and even [illegible] intensified the disgust he felt, but once [illegible] himself that he could not afford to be partic[illegible] was, it seemed, a price to everything, and if he [illegible]er to regain his status he must let no more opportunities slip past him.

Still the memory of the old house in the English valley, and a certain silver-haired lady who had long ago paced the velvet lawns that swept about it, with her white hand upon his shoulder, returned to trouble him. She had endeavoured to instil the fine sense of honour that guided her own life into him, and he remembered her wholesome pride and the stories she had told him of the men who had gone forth from that quiet home before him. Most of them had served their nation well, even those who had hewn down the ancient oaks and mortgaged the wheat-land in the reckless Georgian days, and now, when the white-haired lady slept in the still valley, he was about to sell the honour she had held priceless for six thousand dollars in Western Canada. Nevertheless, he strove to persuade himself that the times had changed and the old codes vanished, and sat still listening while Saxton talked on. He stopped abruptly, and looked hard at Brooke.

"Now I think you've got it all," he said.

"Yes," said Brooke, whose face had grown a trifle grim, "I fancy I have. I am to find out, if I can, how far the third drift runs west, and when the driving of it began. Then one of us will stake off a claim on Devine's holding and endeavour, with the support of the other, to hold his own in as tough a struggle as was probably ever undertaken by two men in our position. You see I have met Devine."

Saxton laughed. "I guess he's not going to give us very much trouble. He'll buy us off instead, once we

make it plain that we have got the whip hand of him. Your share's six thousand dollars, and if you lay them out as I tell you, you'll go back to England a prosperous man."

Brooke smiled a trifle dryly. "I hope so," he said. "Still, I shall have left more than I could buy with a great many dollars behind me in Canada."

CHAPTER X

THE FLUME BUILDER

It was a hot afternoon, and a long trail of ethereal mist lay motionless athwart the gleaming snow above, where Brooke stood dripping with perspiration in the shadow of a towering pine. The red dust was thick upon him, and his coarse blue shirt, which was badly torn, fell open at the neck as he turned his head and looked down fixedly into the winding valley. A lake flashed like a mirror among the trees below, but the strip of hillside the forest had been hewn back from was scarred and torn with raw gashes, and the dull thumping of the stamp-heads that crushed the gold-bearing quartz jarred discordantly through the song of the river.

The blotch of man's crude handiwork marred the pristine beauty of the wilderness. Brooke, however, was very naturally not concerned with this just then. He was engaged in building a flume, or wooden conduit to bring down water to the mine, and was intently watching two little trails of faint blue smoke with a thin red sparkle in the midst of them which crept up a dark rock's side.

He had no interest whatever in the task when he undertook it, but by degrees the work took hold of him. He was not by nature a lounger, and was endued with pertinacity. Thus it came about that when he found

the building of the flume taxed all his ingenuity, as well as his physical strength, he became sensible of a wholly unanticipated pleasure in the effort, and had almost forgotten the purpose which brought him there.

"How long did you cut those fuses to burn?" he said to Jimmy, who had come up to assist him from the ranch.

The latter glanced at the two trails of smoke, which a handful of men, snugly ensconced behind convenient trees, were also watching.

"I guessed it at four minutes," he said. "They're 'bout half-way through now. Still, I can't see nothing of the third one."

"No," said Brooke. "Nor can I. That loosely-spun kind snuffs out occasionally. Quite sure they're not more than half-way through?"

"No," said Jimmy, reflectively. "I'd give them 'most two minutes yet. Hallo! What in the name of thunder are you going to do?"

It was not an unnatural question, because when those creeping trains of sparks reached the detonators the rock would be reft asunder by giant powder and a shower of ponderous fragments and flying débris hurled across the valley, while Brooke bounded down the slope.

Jimmy stared at him in wonder, and then set off without reflection in chase of him. He was not addicted to hurrying himself when it was not necessary, but he ran well that day, with the vague intention of dragging back his comrade, whose senses, he fancied, had suddenly deserted him. The men behind the trees were evidently under the same impression, for confused cries went up.

"Go back! Stop right there! Catch him, Jimmy; trip him up!"

Jimmy did his best, but he was slouching and loose of limb, while Brooke was light of foot and young. He was also running his hardest, with grim face and set lips, straight for the rock, and was scrambling across the débris beneath it, which rolled down at every step, when Jimmy

reached up and caught his leg. There was a shout from the men behind the trees, two of whom came running towards the pair.

"Pull him down! No, let go of him, and tear the fuses out!"

Nobody saw exactly what took place next, and neither Brooke nor Jimmy afterwards remembered; but in another moment the latter sat gasping among the débris, while his comrade clambered up the slope alone. It also happened, though everybody was too intent to notice this, that a girl, with brown eyes and a big white hat, who had been strolling through the shadow of the pines on the ridge above, stopped abruptly just then. She could see the trail of sparks creep across the stone, and understood the position, which the shouts of the miners would have made plain to her if she had not. She could not see the man's face, though she realized that he was in imminent peril, and felt her heart throb painfully. Then, in common with the rest of those who watched him, she had a second astonishment, for he did not pull out the burning fuses, but crawled past them, and bent over something with a lighted match in his hand.

Brooke in the meanwhile set his lips as the match went out, and struck another, while a heavy silence followed the shouts. The men, who grasped his purpose, now realized that interference would come too late, and those who had started from then went back to the trees. There only remained Brooke, clinging with one hand to a cranny of the rock while he held the match, and Jimmy, rising apparently half-dazed from among the débris.

Then the third fuse sparkled, and Brooke sprang down, grasped Jimmy's shoulder, and drove him before him. There was a fresh shouting, and now every one could see two men running for their lives for the shelter of the pines. It seemed a very long while before they reached them, and all the time three blue trails of smoke and sparkling lines of fire were creeping with remorseless certainty up

the slope of stone. The girl upon the ridge above closed her hands tightly to check a scream, and men who had braved many perils in their time set their lips or murmured incoherently.

In the meanwhile the two men were running well, and there was a hoarse murmur of relief when at last they flung themselves into the shadow of the pines. It was followed by a stunning detonation, and a blaze of yellow flame, while the hillside trembled, when the smoke rolled down. Flying fragments of rock came out of it, there was a roar of falling stones, a crashing in the forest where great boughs snapped, and the lake boiled as though torn up by cannon shot. Then a curious silence followed, and the girl in the white hat retired hastily as the fumes of giant powder, which produce dizziness and nausea, drifted up the hillside.

Brooke sat down on a felled log, Jimmy leaned against a tree, while the men clustered round them.

"I figured you'd be blown into very little pieces less than a minute ago," said one of those who stood by. "What did you do it for, anyway?"

Brooke blinked at the questioner. "Third fuse snuffed out," he said. "It would have spoiled the shot. I cut it to match the others, and lighted it."

This was comprehensible, for to rend a piece of rock effectively, it is necessary to apply the riving force at several places at the same time.

"Still, you could have pulled the other fuses out and put new ones back. It would have been considerably less risky," said another man.

Brooke laughed breathlessly. "It certainly would, but I never thought of that," he said.

Brooke and Jimmy turned away together to inspect the result of the shot, and one of the miners who looked after them said, "When that man takes hold of anything he puts it through 'most every time."

Jimmy glanced at his comrade.

"I guess you were too busy to see a friend of yours a little while ago?" he said.

"I expect I was," said Brooke. "Anyway, nobody I'm acquainted with is likely to be met with in this part of the province, unless it was Saxton."

"No," said Jimmy, "it wasn't him. Saxton doesn't go trailing round in a big white hat and a four-decker skirt with a long tail to it."

Brooke turned a trifle sharply. "You mean Miss Heathcote?"

"Yes," said Jimmy, reflectively, "if it's the one that was Barbara last time, I guess I do. She was up yonder ten minutes ago."

He pointed to a forest-covered ridge above the mine, but Brooke, looking up with all his eyes, saw nothing but the serried ranks of climbing pines. As it happened, however, the girl, who stood amidst their shadows, saw him, and smiled. She had noticed Jimmy's pointing hand, and fancied she knew what his companion was looking for.

"Then you are certainly mistaken," he said. "There is nowhere she could be staying at within several leagues of the Canopus."

"There's the Englishman's old ranch house Devine bought. It's quite a good one."

Brooke started a little.

"She certainly couldn't be staying there. It's quite out of the question," he said.

"Well," said Jimmy, "I can't think of any other place, unless she's living in a cave."

Brooke said nothing further, but signed to the men who were waiting, and proceeded to roll the shattered rock out of the course of his flume. He felt it was certain that Jimmy was mistaken, for the only other conclusion appeared preposterous, and he could not persuade himself to consider it. Still, he thought of the girl often during the rest of the afternoon, and when he strolled up

the hillside after supper he was thinking of her still. He climbed until the raw gap of the workings was lost among the pines, and then lay down.

The evening was still and cool, for the chill of the snow made itself felt once the sunlight faded from the valley. A great quietness reigned among the pines which towered above him, two hundred feet to their topmost sprays. He was worn out in body, but his mind was clear and free, and, lying still, unlighted pipe in hand, he gave his fancy the rein, and, forgetting Devine and the flume, dreamed of what had once been his, and might, if he could make his purpose good, be his again.

The sordid details of the struggle he had embarked upon faded from his memory, while through all his wandering fancies moved a vision of a girl in a long white dress, who looked down upon him fearlessly from a plunging pony's back.

Then he started, and a little thrill ran through him as he wondered whether it was a trick his eyes had played him or he saw her in the flesh. She stood close beside him, with a grey cedar trunk behind her, in a long trailing dress, but the white hat was in her hand now, and the little shapely head bared to the cooling touch of the dew. Still, she had materialized so silently out of the shadows that he almost felt afraid to move lest she should melt into them again, and he lay very still, watching her until she glanced at him. Then he sprang to his feet with a smile.

"I would scarcely venture to tell you what I thought you were, but it is consoling to find you real," he said.

"Why?" said the girl.

"Because you are not likely to vanish again. You must remember that I first saw you clothed in white samite, with the moon behind your shoulder in the river."

The girl laughed. "I wonder if you know what white samite is?"

"I don't," said Brooke, reflectively. "I never did,

but it seems to go with water lapping on the rocks and mystery. Still, you—are—material, fortunately."

"Very," said Barbara. "Besides, I certainly did not bring you a sword."

Brooke appeared to consider. "One can never be quite certain of anything—especially in British Columbia. But how did you come here?"

The girl favoured him with a comprehensive glance, which Brooke felt took in his well-worn jean, coarse blue shirt and badly-rent jacket.

"I was about to ask you the same thing," she said.

"I came here on a very wicked pack-horse—one that kicked, and on two occasions came very near falling down a gorge with me. I am now building a flume for the Canopus mine—if you know what that is."

Barbara laughed. "I fancy I know rather more about flumes than you did a little while ago. At least, I have reason to believe so, from what a mining foreman told me this afternoon. He, however, expressed unqualified approval, as well as astonishment, at the progress you had made. You see, I happened to observe what took place before the shot was fired a few hours ago."

"Then you witnessed an entirely unwarranted piece of folly."

A curious little gleam crept into Barbara's eyes, but she smiled. "You could have cut those fuses, and relighted them afterwards, but, since you did not remember it, I don't think that counts. What made you take the risk?"

"Well," said Brooke, reflectively, "after worrying over the probable line of cleavage of that troublesome rock, it seemed to me that if I wished to split it, I must explode three charges of giant powder in certain places simultaneously. Now, if you examine what you might call the texture of a rock, though, of course, a really crystalline body——"

Barbara made a gesture of impatience. "That is not in the least what I mean—as I fancy you are quite aware."

"Then," said Brooke, with a faint twinkle in his eyes, "I'm afraid I don't quite understand the moral causes of the proceeding myself, though I have heard my comrade describe one quality which may have had something to do with it as mulishness. It was, of course, reprehensible of me to be led away by it, especially as when I took the contract I really didn't care if the flume was never built."

"And now you mean to finish it if it ruins you?"

"No," said Brooke, "I really don't think I do. In fact, I hope to make a good many dollars out of it, directly or indirectly."

He had spoken without reflection, and was sensible of a most unpleasant embarrassment, which the girl did not fail to notice.

"Building flumes is evidently more profitable than I thought it was," she said. "Still, you will no doubt make most of those dollars—indirectly?"

Brooke decided that it was advisable to change the subject. "I have," he said, "answered—your—question."

"Then I will do the same. I came here, because one can see the sunset on the snow from this ridge, most prosaically on my feet."

"But from where?"

"From the old ranch house in the valley, of course!"

Brooke made an effort to retain his serenity.

"But that is where Devine lives when he comes here. It's preposterous!" he said.

Barbara felt astonished. "I really don't see why it should be. Mrs. Devine is there. We have to entertain a good deal in the city, and are glad to get away to the mountains for quietness occasionally."

"But what connexion can you possibly have with Mrs. Devine?"

"I am," said Barbara, quietly, "merely her sister."

Brooke positively gasped. "And you never told me!"

"Why should I? You never asked me, and I fancied everybody knew."

Brooke stood silent a moment, then he turned, as the girl moved, and they went back along the little rough trail together.

"Of course, I can think of no reason," he said, quietly. "Still, the news astonished me."

Barbara glanced away from him. There was only one way in which she could account for his evident concern at what she had told him, and the deduction she made was not altogether unpleasant to her, though, as it happened, it was not the correct one. The man was, as he had told her, without friends or dollars, but she knew that men with his capacities do not always remain poor in that country, and there were qualities which had gained her appreciation in him, while it had not dawned on her that there might also be others which only meet with her disapprobation.

"If you had called at the address I gave you in Vancouver, you would have known exactly who I was, but there is now nothing to prevent you coming to the ranch," she said.

Brooke glanced down somewhat grimly at his hard, scarred hands and his clothes, and a faint flush crept into the girl's face.

"Have I to remind you again that you are not in the English valley?" she said. "Mr. Devine is proud of the fact that he once earned his living with the shovel and the drill."

"I am not sure that the one you imagine is my only reason for feeling a trifle diffident about presenting myself at Mr. Devine's house," said Brooke.

Barbara looked at him with a little imperious smile. "I did not ask you for any at all. I merely suggested

that if you wished to come we should be pleased to see you at the ranch."

Brooke made her a little inclination, and said nothing, until, when another white-clad figure appeared among the pines, the girl turned to him.

"That is Mrs. Devine," she said. "Shall I present you?"

Brooke stopped abruptly. He meant to use whatever means were available against Devine, but he could not profit by a woman's kindness to creep into his adversary's house.

"No," he said, almost harshly. "Not to-night. It would be a pleasure—another time."

Barbara looked at him with big, grave eyes, and the faintest suggestion of colour in her cheeks. "Very well," she said. "I need not detain you."

Brooke swung round, and as Mrs. Devine strolled towards them, retired into the shadow of the pines.

CHAPTER XI

AN EMBARRASSING POSITION

THE wooden conduit which sprang across a gorge just there on a slender trestle was full to the brim, and Brooke watched the crystal water swirl by with a satisfaction which was distinctly new to him, while the roar it made as it plunged down into the valley from the end of the uncompleted flume came throbbing across the pines. Though it was a very crude piece of engineering, that trestle had cost him hours of anxious thought and days of strenuous labour, and now he surveyed it with a pride which was scarcely warranted by its appearance. It was, however, the creation of his hands and brain, and capable of doing its work effectively.

Then he smiled somewhat curiously as he remembered with what purpose he had taken over the contract to build the flume from its original holder, and walked along it until he stopped where the torrent that fed it swirled round a pool. The latter had rapidly lowered its level since the big sluice was opened, and he stood looking at it intently while a project, which involved a fresh struggle with hard rock and forest, dawned upon him. A little sparkle came into his eyes, and he stood with head flung back a trifle, busy with rough calculations, and once more oblivious of the fact that he was only there to play his part in a conspiracy, until a man with grey in his hair came out of the shadow of the pines.

"I came up along the flume and she's wasting very little water," he said. "Not a trickle from the trestle! You must have spent quite a pile of dollars over it."

Brooke smiled dryly, for that was a point he had overlooked until the cost had been impressed upon him.

"I'm afraid I did, Mr. Devine," he said. "Still, I couldn't see how to get the work done more cheaply without taking the risk of the flume settling a little by and by. That would, of course, have started it leaking. What do you think of it?"

Devine smiled as he noticed his eagerness. "It seems to me that risk would have been mine," he said. "I've seen neater work, but not very much that looked like lasting longer. Who gave you the plan of it?"

"Nobody," said Brooke, "I worried it out myself."

Devine nodded, and flashed a keen glance at him as he said. "What are you looking at that pool for?"

Brooke stood silent a moment or two. "Well," he said, diffidently, "it occurred to me that when there was frost on the high peaks you might have some difficulty in getting enough water to feed the flume. Now, with a hundred tons or so of rock and débris and a log framing, one could contrive a very workable dam. It would ensure you a full supply and equalize the pressure."

"You feel equal to putting the thing through?"

"I would at least like to try."

"Then you can let me have your notions."

Brooke unfolded his crude scheme, and the other man watched him keenly until he said, "If that meets with your approbation I could start two of my men getting out the logs almost immediately."

Devine smiled. "Has it struck you that there is a point you have forgotten?"

"It is quite possible there are a good many."

"You can't think of one that's important in particular?"

"No," said Brooke, reflectively, "not just now."

A little sardonic twinkle crept into Devine's eyes. "Well," he said, "before I took hold of any contract of that kind I would like to know just how much I was going to make on it, and what it would cost me."

Brooke laughed. "Of course!" he said. "Still, I never thought of it until this moment."

"It's quite clear you weren't raised in Canada," said Devine. "You can worry out the thing during the afternoon and bring along any rough plan you'd like to show me to the ranch this evening. That's fixed? Then there's another thing. Has anybody tried to stop you getting out lumber?"

"No," said Brooke. "I met two men who appeared to be timber-right prospectors more than once, but they made no difficulty."

Devine, who seemed astonished, said dryly, "You are more fortunate than I am."

Brooke went back to his work, and supper had been cleared away in his double tent when he completed his simple toilet preparatory to his visit to the ranch. Jim, who had assisted in it, stood surveying him complacently.

"Now," he said, with a nod of approbation, "I guess you'll do when I've run a few stitches up the back of you. Stand quite still while I get the tent needle."

Brooke glanced at the implement he produced somewhat dubiously, for it was of considerable thickness and several inches long. "I suppose," he said, resignedly, "you haven't got a smaller one?"

Jimmy shook his head. "I guess I wouldn't trust it if I had," he said. "I want to fix that darn up good and strong so it will do you credit. There are two women at the ranch, and it's quite likely they'll come in and talk to you."

Brooke made no further protest, but he smiled somewhat curiously as Jimmy stitched away. His work was not remarkable for neatness, and Brooke remembered that the two women at the ranch were fresh from the cities, where men do not mend their clothes with pieces of tents or cotton flour bags. Then he decided that, after all, it did not matter what they thought of him. One would probably set him down as a rude bush chopper, and the other, whose good opinion he would have valued under different circumstances, was a kinswoman of his adversary.

"Now," said Jimmy, breaking off his thread at last, "I guess you might go 'most anywhere if you stand with your face to the folks who talk to you, and don't sit down too suddenly. Be cautious how you get up again if you hear those stitches tearing through."

Brooke went out, and discovered that Jimmy had, no doubt as a precautionary measure, sewn several of his garments together as he walked towards the ranch. Devine, to whom the scheme suggested had commended itself, was waiting him in a big log-walled room. He sat by the open window. The rest of the room was dim. Two women sat back in the shadow and Devine moved in his chair as he answered one of them.

"I know very little about the man, but I never saw more thorough work than he has put in on the flume," he said. "That's 'most enough guarantee for him, but there are one or two points about him I can't quite worry

out the meaning of. For one thing, the timber-righters haven't stopped him chopping."

Mrs. Devine looked thoughtful, for she was acquainted with the less pleasant aspect of mine-owning, but Barbara broke in.

"It is a little difficult to understand what use timber-rights would be to anybody here," she said. "They could hardly get their lumber out, and there are very few people to sell it to if they put up a mill."

"I expect they mean to sell it me," said Devine, a trifle grimly.

"But you always cut what you wanted without asking anybody."

"I did. Still, it seems scarcely likely that I'm going to do it again. If any one has located timber-rights—which he'd get for 'most nothing on a patent from the Crown—he has never worried about them until the Canopus began to pay. Of course, one has to put in timber as he takes out the ore, and it seems to have struck somebody that the men who started it on the Canopus has burnt off all the young firs they ought to have kept. That's why he bought those timber-rights up."

"Still there are thousands of them nobody can ever use, and you must have timber," said Barbara.

"Precisely!" said Devine. "That man figures that when I get it he's going to screw a big share of the profits in this mine out of me."

"But that is infamous extortion!" said the girl.

Devine laughed. "Well," he said, "it's not going to be good business for the man who puts up the game, but I don't quite see why he didn't strike Brooke for a few dollars as well. Men of his kind are like ostriches. They take in 'most anything."

He might have said more, but Brooke appeared in the doorway just then and stood still with, so Barbara fancied, a faint trace of disconcertion when he saw the women, until Devine turned to him.

"Come right in," he said. "Barbara tells me she has met you, but you haven't seen Mrs. Devine. Mr. Brooke, who is building the new flume for me, Katty."

There was no avoiding the introduction, nor could Brooke escape with an inclination, as he wished to do, for the lady held out her hand to him. She was older and more matronly than Barbara, but otherwise very like her.

"We are very pleased to see any of Barbara's friends," she said. "You apparently hadn't an opportunity of calling upon us in Vancouver?"

Brooke glanced at Barbara, who was not exactly pleased with her sister just then, and met his gaze a trifle coldly. Still, he was sensible of a curious satisfaction, for it was evident that the girl who had been his comrade in the bush had not altogether forgotten him in the city.

"I left the day after Miss Heathcote was kind enough to give me permission," he said.

He was conscious of a desire to avoid further civilities then, and because he was quite aware that Barbara was watching him quietly, it was a relief when Devine turned to him.

"We'll get down to business," he said. "You brought a plan of the dam along?"

He led the way to the little table at the window, and while Mrs. Devine went on with her sewing and Barbara took up a book again, Brooke unrolled the plan he had made with some difficulty. Then the men discussed it until Devine said, "You can start it when it pleases you, and my clerk will hand you the dollars as soon as you are through. How long do you figure it will take you?"

"Three or four months," said Brooke, and looking up saw that the girl's eyes were fixed on him.

"Well," said Devine, "it's quite likely we will be up here part, at least, of the time. Now you'll have to put on more men, and I haven't forgotten what you admitted

the day I drove you into the settlement. You'll want a good many dollars to pay them."

"If you will give me a written contract, I daresay I can borrow them from a bank agent or mortgage broker on the strength of it."

"Oh, yes," said Devine, dryly. "It's quite likely you can, but he would charge you a percentage that's going to make a big hole in the profit."

"I'm afraid I haven't any other means of getting the money."

"Well," said Devine, "I rather think you have. In fact, I'll lend it you as the work goes on."

Brooke felt distinctly uncomfortable, for this was the last thing he had desired or expected.

"I have really no claim on you, sir," he said at length.

Devine smiled dryly. "I guess that is my business. Now is there any special reason you shouldn't borrow those dollars from me?"

Brooke felt that there was a very good one, but it was one he could not well make plain to Devine. He was troubled by an unpleasant sense of meanness, and though he would not look at her, was also sensible that Barbara Heathcote was watching him covertly.

"I would, at least, prefer to grapple with the financial difficulty in my own way, sir," he said.

Devine made a gesture of indifference. "Then, if you should want a few dollars at any time, you know where to come for them. Now, I guess we're through with the business and you can talk to Mrs. Devine—who has been there—about the Old Country."

Brooke did so, and managed to forget the purpose which had brought him to the ranch. His hostess was quietly kind, and evidently a lady who had appreciated and was pleased to talk about what she had seen in England, which was, as it happened, a good deal.

In the meanwhile a miner came for Devine, who went

out with him, and by-and-by Mrs. Devine also left the room. Then Barbara smiled a little as she turned to Brooke.

"I wonder," she said, quietly, "why you were so unwilling to meet my sister? There is really no reason why anybody should be afraid of her."

Brooke was glad that the dimness which was creeping across the valley had deepened the shadow in the room, for he was not anxious that the girl should see his face just then.

"You assume that I was unwilling?" he said.

"It was evident, though I am not sure that Mrs. Devine noticed it."

"Well," he said, "Mrs. Devine is a lady of station, and I am, you see, merely the builder of one of her husband's flumes. One naturally does not care to presume, and it takes some little time to get accustomed to the fact that these little distinctions are not remembered in this country."

Barbara laughed. "One could get accustomed to a good deal in three or four years. I scarcely think that was your reason."

"Why?" said Brooke.

"Well," said the girl, reflectively, "the fact is that we do recognize the distinctions you allude to, though not to the same extent that you do; but it takes rather longer to acquire certain mannerisms and modes of expressing oneself than it does to learn the use of the axe and drill. To be more candid, any one can put on a flume-builder's clothes."

"I fancy you are jumping at conclusions."

"It is possible. Why wouldn't you take the dollars you needed when Mr. Devine was willing to lend them to you?"

"It really isn't usual to make a stranger an advance of that kind," said Brooke, reflectively. "Besides, I might spend the dollars recklessly, and leave the work

unfinished. Everybody is subject to occasional fits of restlessness here."

Barbara laughed. "You had a much better reason than that. Now I think we were what might be called good comrades in the bush?"

Again Brooke felt a little thrill of pleasure.

"Yes," he said, almost grimly, "I had a better reason. I cannot tell you what it was, but it may become apparent presently."

Barbara asked no more questions, and while she sat silent, Mrs. Devine came in with a little dainty silver set on a tray. Maids of any kind, and even Chinese house-boys, are scarce in that country, especially in the bush, and Brooke realized that it must have been with her own hands she had prepared the meal. Once more Brooke was sensible of a most unpleasant embarrassment.

"Barbara and I got used to taking a cup of coffee in the evening when we were in England," she said. "Talking of the Old Country reminded me of it. Will you pour it out, Barbara?"

Barbara did so, and Brooke's fingers closed more tightly than was necessary on the cup she handed to him, while the cracker he forced himself to eat came near choking him. This was absurd sentimentality, he told himself, but, for all that, he dared scarcely meet the eyes of the lady who had, he realized, prepared that meal out of compliment to him. It was a relief when it was over and he was able to take his leave, but, as it happened, he forgot the plan he had laid down, and Barbara, who noticed it, overtook him in the log-hall.

"We shall be here for some little time—in fact, until Mr. Devine has seen the new adit driven," she said.

Brooke understood that this was a general invitation, and smiled.

"I am afraid I shall scarcely venture to come back again," he said. "Mrs. Devine is very kind, but still, you see—it really wouldn't be fitting."

Then he turned and vanished into the darkness, and Barbara went back with a curious look in her eyes.

CHAPTER XII

BROOKE IS CARRIED AWAY

THE flume was finished, and the dam already progressing well, when one morning Devine came out, somewhat grim in face, from the new adit he was driving at the Canopus. The captain of the mine also came with him, and stood still, evidently in a state of perplexity, when Devine looked at him.

"Well," said the latter, brusquely, "what are we going to do, Wilkins?"

The captain blinked at the forest.

"There's plenty of timber yonder," he said.

"There is," said Devine dryly. "Still, as we can't touch a log of it, it isn't much use to us. There is no doubt about the validity of the patent that fellow holds it under either, and he doesn't seem disposed to make any terms with me."

Wilkins appeared to reflect. "Hanging off for a bigger figure, but there are points I'm not quite clear about. Mackinder's not quite the man to play that game, and if it had been left to him, once he saw there were dollars in the thing, he'd have jumped right on to them and lit out for the cities to raise Cain with them. Now, I wonder if there's a bigger man behind him."

"That's my end of the business," said Devine. "The question is—What about the mine? You feel reasonably sure we're going to strike ore that will pay for the crushing at the end of that adit?"

Wilkins lowered his voice a trifle.

"We have got to, sir—and it's there if it's anywhere,"

he said. "You have seen the yield on the lower workings going down until it's just about worth while to keep the stamps going, and there are signs that the pay dirt's running right out. Still, I guess the chances of striking it again rich on a different level are good enough for me to put every dollar I have by me in on a share of the crushings. I can't say any more than that."

"No," said Devine, dryly. "Any way, I'm going on with the adit. But about the timber?"

"Well, we will want no end of props. It's quite a big contract to hold up the side of a mountain when you're working through soft stuff, and the split-logs we've been worrying along with aren't going to be much use to us. We want round props, grown the size we're going to use, with the strength the tree was meant to have in them."

Devine looked thoughtful. "Then I'll have to get you them. Say nothing to the boys, and see nobody who doesn't belong to the gang you have sent there puts his foot in any part of the mine. It is, of course, specially necessary to keep the result of the crushings quiet."

Wilkins went back into the adit, and Devine proceeded to flounder round the boundaries of the Englishman's abandoned ranch, which he had bought up for a few hundred dollars, chiefly because of the house on it. It consisted, for the most part, of a miry swamp, while the rest was rock outcrop on which even the hardy conifers would not grow. Devine had a survey plan with him, but he could see no means of extending his rights beyond the crumbling split-rail fence, and inside the latter there were no trees that appeared adapted for mining purposes.

Devine, however, was not the man to be readily turned aside. He wanted mine props, and meant to obtain them, and, though his face grew a trifle grimmer, he climbed the hillside to where Brooke was busy knee-deep in water at the dam. He signed to him, and then, taking

out his cigar-case, sat down on a log and looked at the younger man.

"Take one!" he said.

Brooke lighted a cigar, and sat down. "We'll have another tier of logs bolted on to the framing by to-morrow night," he said.

Devine glanced at the dam indifferently. "You take kindly to this kind of thing?" he said.

Brooke smiled a little, for he had of late been almost astonished at his growing interest in his work.

"I really think I do, though I don't know why I should," he said. "I never undertook anything of the description in England."

"Then I guess it must be in the family. Any of your folks doing well back there as mechanics?"

Brooke smiled somewhat dryly. As a matter of fact, a near kinsman of his had gained distinction in the Royal Engineers, and another's name was famous in connexion with irrigation works in Egypt. He did not, however, feel it in any way incumbent on him to explain this to Devine.

"I could not exactly say they are," he said.

"Well," said Devine, "I was thinking over another piece of work you might feel inclined to put through for me."

Brooke became suddenly intent, and Devine noticed the little gleam in his eyes as he said, "If you can give me any particulars——"

"Come along," said Devine, a trifle grimly, "and I'll show you them. Then if you still feel willing to go into the thing we can worry out my notions."

Brooke rose and followed him along the hillside. When they had made a mile or so Devine stopped and looked about him.

"It wouldn't cost too much to clear a ground-sled trail from here to the mine," he said. "A team of mules could haul a good many props in over it in a day."

"But where are you going to get them from?" said Brooke.

Devine smiled curiously. "Come along, and I'll show you."

Again Brooke went with him, wondering a little, for he knew that a cañon would cut off all further progress presently, until Devine stopped once more where the hillside fell sheer away beneath them.

"Now," he said, quietly, "I guess we're there. You can see plenty of young firs that would make mining props yonder."

Brooke certainly could. The hillside in front of him rose, steep as a roof, to the ridge where the tufts of ragged pines were silhouetted in sombre outline against the gleaming snow behind. They rolled upwards in serried ranks, and there was apparently timber enough for half the mines in the province. The difficulty, however, was the reaching it, for, between him and it, a torrent thundered through a tremendous gap, whose walls were worn smooth and polished for four hundred feet or so. Above that awful chasm rose bare and slippery slopes of rock, on which there was foothold for neither man nor beast. What the total depth was he did not know, but he recoiled instinctively from the contemplation of it.

It was, as a picture, awe-inspiring and sublime, but from a practical point of view an apparently insurmountable barrier between the owner of the Canopus mine and the timber he desired. Devine, however, knew better, for he was a man who had grappled with a good many apparently insuperable difficulties, and Brooke became sensible that he expected an expression of opinion from him.

"The timber is certainly there, but I quite fail to see how it could be of the least use to anybody situated where we are," he said. "That cañon is one of the deepest in the province."

Devine nodded, but the little smile was still in his eyes,

and he pointed to the one spot where, by crawling down the gully a torrent had fretted out, an agile man might reach a jutting crag a couple of hundred feet below.

"The point is that it isn't very wide," he said. "It wouldn't take a great many fathoms of steel rope to reach across it."

Brooke realized that, because the crag projected a little, this was correct; but the suggestion conveyed no particular meaning to him.

"No," he said. "Still, it isn't very evident what use that would be."

Devine laughed. "Have you never heard of an aerial tramway? It's quite simple—a steel rope set up tight, a winch for hauling, and a trolly. With that working, and a skid-slide up the gully, one could send over the props we want without much difficulty. It would be cheaper than buying off the timber-righters."

Brooke gasped as the daring of the scheme dawned on him. If one had nerve enough to undertake it the thing was feasible, and he turned to Devine with a glow in his eyes.

"It could be done," he said. "Still, do you know anybody who would be willing to stretch that rope across?"

Devine looked at him steadily, noticing the intentness of his face.

"Well," he said, dryly, "I was going to ask you."

The blood surged into Brooke's forehead, and for the time he forgot his six thousand dollars and that the man who made the suggestion had plundered him of them. He had, during the course of his English education, shown signs of a certain originality and daring of thought which had slightly astonished those who taught him, and then had lounged three or four years away in the quiet valley, where originality of any kind was not looked upon with favour. The men and women he had been brought into contact with in London were also, for the most part, those who regarded everything from the

accepted point of view, and his engagement to the girl his friends regarded with disapproval had been in part, at least, a protest against the doctrine that no man of his station must do anything that was not outwardly befitting to it.

The revolt had brought him disaster, as it usually does, but it had also thrust upon him the necessity of thinking for himself, though even during his two years' struggle on the worthless ranch he had not realized what qualities he was endued with, for it was not until he met Barbara Heathcote by the river that they were wholly stirred into activity Then ambition, self-confidence, and lust of conflict with men and Nature asserted themselves, for it was, in point of fact, a sword she had brought him.

"Then I'll undertake ," he said, with a little vibration in his voice.

Devine looked hard at him again. "Feel sure you can do it? You'll want good nerves."

"I think I can," said Brooke.

"Then you can go down to the Mineral Development's new shaft, where they have one of those tramways working, and see how they swing their ore across the valley. I'll give you a line to the manager."

Devine said nothing further as they turned back towards the mine, but Brooke felt that the bargain was already made. Brooke left him presently, and, turning off where the flume climbed to the dam, came upon Jimmy, tranquilly leaning upon his shovel while he watched the two or three men who toiled waist-deep in water.

"I was kind of wondering whether she wouldn't be stiffer with another log or two in that framing?" he said, in explanation.

"Of course!" said Brooke, dryly. "It's more restful than shovelling. Still, that's my affair, and you'll have to rustle more and wonder less. I'm going to leave you in charge here."

Jimmy grinned. "Then I guess the way that dam will grow will astonish you when you come back again. Where're you going to?"

Brooke told him, and Jimmy contemplated the forest reflectively.

"Well," he said, "nobody who saw you at the ranch would ever have figured you had snap enough to put a contract of that kind through. Still, you have me behind you."

"A good way, as a rule," said Brooke dryly. "Still, I shouldn't wonder if you were quite correct. I scarcely think I ever suspected I had it in myself."

Jimmy still ruminated. "A man is like a mine. You see the indications on the top, but you can't be sure whether there's gold at the bottom until you set the drills going or put in the giant powder and shake everything up. Still, I can't quite figure how anything of that kind could have happened to you."

Brooke flashed a quick glance at him, but Jimmy's eyes were vacant.

"There is a good deal of gravel waiting down there, and only two men to heave it out," he said.

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy, tranquilly. "Still, it's a good while until it's dark and I was thinking. Now, if you had the dollars you threw away over that ranch, and me for a partner, you'd make quite a smart contractor. While they're wanting flumes and bridges everywhere it's a game one can pile up dollars at."

Brooke's face flushed a trifle, and he slowly closed one hand. "Confound the six thousand dollars, and you for reminding me of them!" he said.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OLD LOVE

NEXT morning Brooke set out for the Mineral Development Syndicate's new shaft, which lay a long day's ride

nearer the railroad through the bush, and was well received by the manager.

"Stay just as long as it pleases you and look at everything you want, though you'll have to excuse me going round with you to-day," he said. "There's a party of the directors' city friends coming up, and it's quite likely they'll keep me busy."

Brooke was perfectly content to go round himself, and he had acquired a good deal of information about the working of aerial tramways when he sat on the hillside watching a rattling trolly swing across the tree tops beneath him on a curving rope of steel. A foreman leaned on a sawn-off cedar close by, and glanced at Brooke with a little ironical grin when a hum of voices broke out behind them.

"You hear them? I guess the boss is enjoying himself," he said.

Brooke turned his head and listened, and a woman said, "But how do those little specks of gold get into the rock? It really looks so solid."

"That's nothing," said the foreman. "She quite expects him to know how the earth was made. Still, the other one's the worst. You'll hear her starting in again once she gets her breath. It's not information she's wanting, but to hear herself talk."

The prediction was evidently warranted, for another voice broke in, "What makes those little trucks run down the rope? Gravity! Of course, I might have known that. You haven't anything like that at those works you're a director of, Shafton?"

Brooke started a little, for though the speaker was invisible her voice was curiously familiar. It was also evidently an Englishman who answered the last remark, and Brooke became intent. Then there was a patter of approaching steps, and he rose to his feet as the strangers and the mine manager came down the slope. There were several men, one of whom was palpably an

Englishman, and two women. One of the latter stopped abruptly, with a little exclamation.

"Harford—is it really you?" she said.

Brooke quietly swung off his wide hat, and while most of the others turned and gazed at him, stood still a moment looking at her. He did not appreciate being made the central figure in a dramatic incident, but it was evident that the woman relished the situation. Several years had certainly elapsed since she had tearfully bidden him farewell with protestations of unwavering constancy, but he realized with faint astonishment that he felt no emotion whatever.

"Yes," he said. "I think it is."

The woman made a little theatrical gesture, and in that moment the few illusions Brooke still retained concerning her vanished. She seemed very little older than when he parted from her, and at least as comely, but her shallow artificiality was very evident to him now.

Then she turned swiftly to the man who stood beside her, looking on with a little faintly ironical smile. He was a personable man, but there was a suggestion of weariness in his face.

"This is Harford Brooke, Shafton. Of course you have heard of him!" she said with a coquettish smile, which it occurred to Brooke was not, under the circumstances, especially appropriate. "Harford, I don't think you ever met my husband."

Brooke stood still and the other man nodded. "Glad to see you, I'm sure," he said. "Met quite a number of Englishmen in this country."

Then he turned towards the other woman as though he had done all that could be reasonably expected of him, and when the manager of the mine led the way down into the valley Brooke found himself walking with the woman who had flung him over a few paces behind the rest of the party.

They went down into the hollow and climbed a steep ascent towards the clashing stamp-heads, but the woman appeared in difficulties, and gasped a little until Brooke held out his arm. He had already decided that her little high-heeled shoes were distinctly out of place in that country, and wondered at the same time what kind Barbara Heathcote wore, for she, at least, moved with lithe gracefulness through the bush. His companion looked up at him as she leaned upon his arm.

"I was wondering how long it would be before you offered to help me. You used to be anxious to do it once," she said.

Brooke smiled a little. "That was quite a long time ago. I scarcely supposed you needed help, and one does not care to risk a repulse."

"Could you have expected one from me?"

There was an archness in the glance she cast him which Brooke was not specially gratified to see. "One," he said, "never quite knows what to expect from a lady."

His companion made no immediate answer, but by and by she once more glanced up at him.

"I am really not used to climbing, if Shafton is, and I am not going any further just now," she said.

A newly-felled cedar lay near the trail, but its wide-girthed trunk stood high above the underbush, and Brooke dragged up a big hewn-off branch to make a foot-stool before his companion sat down on it. The branch was heavy, and she watched his efforts approvingly.

"Canada has made you another man. Now, I do not think Shafton could have done that in a day," she said. "Of course, he would never have tried, even to please me."

Brooke, who was by no means certain what she wished him to understand from this, leaned against a cedar looking down at her gravely. This was the woman who had embittered several years of his life, and for whom he had flung a good deal away, and now he was most clearly sensible of his folly. Had he met her in a drawing-

room, or even the Vancouver opera-house, it might not have been quite so apparent to him, but she seemed an anachronism in that strip of primeval wilderness.

"You really couldn't expect him to," he said, with a little laugh. "He has never had to do anything of that kind for a living, as I have."

He held up his hands, and noticed her little shiver as she saw the scarred knuckles, hard, ingrained flesh, and broken nails.

"Oh," she said, "how cruel! Whatever have you been doing?"

"Building flumes and dams, though that will hardly convey any very clear impression to you. It implies swinging the axe most of every day, and working up to the waist in water occasionally."

"But you were always so particular in England."

"I could naturally afford to be. It cost me nothing when I was living on another man's bounty."

The woman made a little gesture. "And you gave up everything for me!"

Brooke laughed softly, for it seemed to him that a little candour was advisable. "As a matter of fact I am not quite sure that I did. My native wrong-headedness may have had its share in influencing me. Any way, that was all done with—several years ago."

"You will not be bitter, Harford," and she cast him a glance of appeal. "Can anything of that kind ever be quite done with?"

Brooke commenced to feel a trifle uneasy. "Well," he said, reflectively, "I certainly think it ought to be."

To his relief his companion smiled and apparently decided to change the subject. "You never even sent me a message. It really wasn't kind."

"It appeared considerably more becoming to let myself sink into oblivion. Besides, I could scarcely be expected to feel certain that you would care to hear from me."

The woman glanced at him reflectively. "I have often thought about you. Of course, I was dreadfully sorry when I had to give you up, but I really couldn't do anything else, and it was all for the best."

"Of course!" said Brooke, and smiled when she glanced at him sharply. "I naturally mean in your case."

"You are only involving yourself, Harford. You never used to be so unfeeling."

"I was endorsing your own statement, and it is, at least, considerably easier to believe that all is for the best when one is prosperous. You have a wealthy husband, and Helen, who wrote me once, testified that he indulged you in—she said every caprice."

"Yes," said his companion, "Shafton is certainly not poor, and as husbands go, I think he is eminently satisfactory."

"One would fancy that an indulgent and wealthy husband would go a tolerably long way."

"Prosperity is apt to kill romance," she said. "One is never quite content, you know, and I feel now and then that Shafton scarcely understands me. Shafton is conventional and precise. You know exactly what he is going to do, and that it will be right, but one has longings now and then for something original and intense."

Brooke regarded her with a little dry smile. One, as he had discovered, cannot have everything, and as she had sold herself for wealth and station it appeared unreasonable to repine because she could not enjoy a romantic passion at the same time. It also occurred to him that there were depths in her husband's nature which she had never sounded, and he remembered the look of cynical weariness in the man's face. Lucy Coulson was one who trifled with emotions as a pastime, but Brooke had no wish to be made the subject of another experiment in simulated tenderness.

"Well," he said, "no doubt most people long for a

good deal more than they ever get ; but your friends must have reached the stamps by now, and they will be wondering what has become of you."

"I scarcely think they will. The men seem to consider it a waste of time to talk to anybody who doesn't know all about ranches and mines, and Shafton has Miss Goldie to attend to. She has attached herself to him like a limpet, but she is, of course, a Canadian, and I really don't mind."

Almost involuntarily Brooke contrasted her with a Canadian who had spent a week in the woods with him. Barbara Heathcote had never appeared out of place in the wilderness, for she was wholly natural and had moved amidst those scenes of wild grandeur as though in harmony with them, with the stillness of that lonely land in her steady eyes. There was no superficial sentimentality in her, for her thoughts and emotions were deep as the still blue lakes, and he could not fancy her disturbing their serenity for the purpose of whiling an idle day away.

"You are not the man I used to talk nonsense with, Harford," said his companion. "This country has made you a little grim. Why don't you go back again ?"

"I am afraid they have too many men with no ostensible income in England."

"Still, you could make it up with the old man."

Brooke's face was decidedly grim. "I scarcely think I could. Rather more was said by both of us than could be very well rubbed off one's memory. Besides, I think you know what kind of man he is ?"

Lucy Coulson leaned forward a trifle, and there was a trace of genuine feeling in her voice. "Harford," she said, "he frets about you—and he is getting very old. Of course, he would never show anybody what he felt, but I could guess, because he was once not long ago almost rude to me."

"What did he say ?" asked Brooke a trifle impatiently.

"Nothing that had any particular meaning by itself, but for all that he conveyed an impression, and I think if you were to go back——"

"Empty-handed!" said Brooke. "There are circumstances under which the desire for reconciliation with a wealthy relative is liable to misconception. If I had prospered it would have been easier."

Lucy Coulson looked at him thoughtfully. "Perhaps I did use you rather badly, and it might be possible for me to do you a trifling kindness now. Shall I talk to the old man when I go home again? I see him often."

Brooke shook his head. "I shall never go back a poor man," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Everybody travels nowadays, and Shafton is never happy unless he is going somewhere. We started for Japan, and decided to see the Rockies and look at the British Columbian mines. That is, of course, what Shafton did. He has money in some of them, and is interested in the colonies. I have to sit on platforms and listen while he abuses the Government for neglecting them. Of course, I never expected to meet you here—and almost wonder if there is any reason beyond the one you mentioned that has kept you here so long."

"I can't quite think of any other, beyond the fact that I have a few dollars at stake," he said.

"There is nothing else?"

"No," said Brooke, a trifle too decisively. "What could there be?"

His companion smiled. "Well," she said, "I fancied there might have been a Canadian. They are not all very good style, but some of them are almost pretty, and—when one has been a good while away——"

The man flushed a trifle at the faint contempt in her tone. "I scarcely think there is one of them who would spare a thought for me. I should not be considered especially eligible even in this country."

"And you have a good memory!"

Brooke felt slightly disconcerted, for it was not the first delicate suggestion she had made. "I don't know that it is of any benefit to me. You see, I really haven't anything very pleasant to remember."

Lucy Coulson sighed. "Harford," she said, "you must try not to blame me. If one of us had been richer—I, at least, can't help remembering."

"I don't think you should," he said. "Your husband mightn't like it, and it is a long while ago, you know."

A little pink flush crept into the woman's cheek and she rose leisurely. "Perhaps he will be wondering where I am, after all," she said. "You must come and make friends with him. We may be staying for some time yet at the C.P.R. Hotel, Vancouver."

Brooke went with her and spent some little time talking to her husband, who made a favourable impression upon him, while when he took his leave of them, the woman let her hand remain in his longer than there was any apparent necessity for.

"You must come down and see us—it really isn't very far, and we have so much to talk about," she said.

Brooke said nothing, but he felt that he had had a warning as he swung off his big shapeless hat and turned away.

CHAPTER XIV

BROOKE HAS VISITORS

THE afternoon was hot, and the roar of the river in the depths below emphasized the drowsy stillness of the hillside and climbing bush, when Brooke stood on the little jutting crag above the cañon. Two hundred feet above him rose a wall of fissured rock, but a gully, down which the white thread of a torrent frothed, split through that grim battlement, and already a winding strip of some-

what perilous pathway had been cut out of and pinned against the side of the chasm. Men with hammers and shovels were busy upon it, and the ringing of the drills broke sharply through the pulsations of the flood, while several more were clustered round the foot of an iron column, which rose from the verge of the crag, where the rock fell in one tremendous sweep to the dim river.

Close beside it, and overhung by the rock wall, stood Brooke's double tent, for, absorbed as he had become in the struggle with the natural difficulties that must be faced and surmounted at every step, he lived by his work. He was just then, however, not watching his workmen, but looking up the gorge, and a little thrill of pleasure ran through him when two figures in light draperies appeared at the head of it. Then he went up at a pace which Jimmy, who grinned as he watched him, wondered at, and stopped beside the two women who awaited him.

"I was almost afraid you would not come," he said. "You are sure you would care to go down now you have done so?"

Mrs. Devine gazed down into the tremendous depths with something that suggested a shiver, but Barbara laughed. "Of course," she said. "Those men go up and down with big loads every day, don't they?"

"They have to, and that naturally makes a difference," said Brooke.

"Then we can go down because we wish to, which is, in the case of most people, even a better reason."

Mrs. Devine permitted Brooke to assist her down the zig-zag trail, while Barbara followed with light, fearless tread. They reached the tent without misadventure. The door was triced up to form an outer shelter, and Barbara was a trifle astonished when Brooke signed them to enter.

She had seen how he lived at the ranch, and the squalid discomfort of the log room had not been without its significance to her, but there was a difference now. No-

thing stood out of place in that partition of the big double tent, and from the spruce twigs which lay a soft, springy carpet on the floor, to the little nickelled clock above her head, all she saw betokened taste and order. Even the neat folding chairs and table shone spotlessly, and there was no chip or flaw upon the crockery laid out upon the latter. There had, it seemed, been a change, of which all this was but the outward sign, in the man who stood smiling beside her.

"Tea at four o'clock is another English custom you may have become addicted to, and you have had a climb," he said. "Still, I'm afraid I can't guarantee it. Jimmy does the cooking."

Jimmy, as it happened, came in with a teapot in his hand just then. "Well," he said. "I guess I'm considerably smarter at it than my boss. I've a kettle that holds most of a gallon outside there on the fire, and here's two big tins of fixings we sent for to Vancouver."

Mrs. Devine smiled, but Brooke's face was a trifle grim, as he glanced at his retainer, and Barbara did not look at either of them just then. She was gratified that he could think of these trifles in the midst of his activities. She, however, took the white metal teapot, which was burnished brilliantly, from Jimmy, who, in spite of Brooke's warning glances, still hung about the tent, contemplating her with evident approbation as she passed the cups.

"I guess she does it considerably smarter than Tom Gordon's Bella would have done," he said, with a wicked grin. "Bella had no use for teapots either. She'd have given it you out of the kettle."

The glance Brooke rewarded him with was almost venomous, for he had seen the swift inquiry which had flashed into them fade as suddenly out of Barbara's eyes. She could not well admit the least desire to know who Tom Gordon's Bella was, though she would not have been unwilling to be enlightened. Jimmy, however,

beamed upon Mrs. Devine, who had taken up her cup.

"I hope you like it. No smoke on that," he said. "When you use the green tea a smack of the resin goes well as flavouring, especially if it's brewed in a coal-oil tin. Now, there's tea they make right where they sell it in Vancouver, but what you've got is different. I guess it's grown in China, or it ought to be, for the boss he sent me down, and says he——"

"Isn't it about time you made a start at getting that boulder out?" said Brooke, dryly.

Jimmy retired unwillingly, and Brooke glanced deprecatingly at his guests. "We have been comrades for several years," he said.

"Of course!" said Mrs. Devine, with a little smile. "Still, I don't think you need be so anxious to hide the fact that you have taken some pains to provide these dainties for us. It would have been apparent in any case. We know how men live in the bush."

Brooke made no disclaimer, though a faint trace of colour deepened the bronze in his face, for he remembered the six thousand dollars, and winced under her graciousness. Then they discussed other matters, until at last Barbara laid aside her cup.

"We came to see the cañon, and how you mean to put the rope across," she said.

She glanced at her sister, but Mrs. Devine resolutely shook her head. "I have seen quite as much of the cañon as I have any wish to do," she said. "You can go with Mr. Brooke, my dear."

They left her in the tent, and Brooke led the girl to a seat on a dizzy ledge, from which the rock fell away in one awful smooth wall.

"Now," he said, quietly, "you can look about you."

Barbara, who had been too occupied in picking her way to notice very much as yet, drew in her breath as she gazed down into the tremendous chasm. The sunshine lay warm upon the pine-clad slopes above, but no ray of

brightness streamed down into that depth of shadow, and its eerie dimness was thickened by the mist which drifted filmily above the river's turmoil.

"Oh," she said, with a little gasp, "it's tremendous!"

"A trifle overwhelming!" said Brooke, reflectively, "and yet it gets hold of one. There is a difference between it and the English valley you once mentioned."

"Of course!" she said. "One is glad there is, since it is typical of both countries. You couldn't tame this river and set it gliding smoothly between mossy stepping-stones."

"No," said Brooke, "I scarcely think one would wish to if he could. One feels it wouldn't be fitting."

"And yet we shall put the power that's in it into harness by and by."

"Without taming it?"

Barbara nodded. "Yes," she said. "If you had ever stood in a Canadian power house, as I have done once or twice, you would understand. You can hear the big dynamos humming in one low, deep note while the little blue sparks flicker about the shafts. They stand for controlled energy; but the whole place rocks with the whirring of the turbines and the thunder of the water plunging down the shoots. The river that drives them does it exulting in its strength. You couldn't fancy it lapping among the lily leaves in sunlit pools. It hasn't time."

"Then you, who personify reposefulness, admire force?"

Barbara held her hand up. "When it accomplishes anything I do; but listen," she said. "That sound isn't the discord of purposeless haste. There's a rhythm in it. It's ordered and stately harmony."

Brooke sat still, watching the little gl[illegible] her brown eyes, until she turned again to him.

"You are going to put that rope across?" she said.

"I am, at least, going to try. There will, however, be difficulties."

Barbara smiled a little. "There generally are. Still, I think you will get over them. It would be worth while."

"I almost think it would. Still, it is largely a question of dollars, and I have spent a good many with no great result already."

"My brother-in-law will not see you beaten. He would throw in as much as the mine was worth before he yielded a point to the timber-righters."

Brooke noticed the little hardness in her voice. "If he did, you would evidently sympathize with him?"

"Of course, though it wasn't exactly in that sense I meant it would be worth while. One would naturally sympathize with anybody who was made the subject of that kind of extortion. If there is anything detestable, it is a conspiracy."

"Still," said Brooke, "it is in one sense a legitimate transaction."

"Would you consider yourself warranted in scheming to extort money from any one?"

Brooke did not look at her. "It would, of course, depend—upon, for example, any right I might consider I had to the money. We will suppose that somebody had robbed me——"

"Then one who has been robbed may steal?"

Brooke made a little deprecatory gesture. "I'm afraid I have never given any questions of this kind much consideration. We were discussing the country."

Barbara laughed. "Of course. I ought to have remembered. I am, however, going to venture on dangerous ground again. I think the country is having an effect on you. You have changed considerably since I met you at the ranch."

"It is possible," and Brooke met her gaze with a little smile in his eyes. "Still, I am not quite sure it was altogether the fault of the country."

Barabara looked down at the cañon. "Isn't that a little ambiguous?"

"Well," said Brooke, "it is, but I saw you first clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, in the midst of a frothing river—and I am not quite sure that you were right when you said it was not a sword you brought me."

Barbara flashed a swift, keen glance at him. "Then beware in what quarrel you draw it—if I did. One would expect such a gift to be used with honour. It could, however, be legitimately employed against timber-righters, claim-jumpers, and all schemers and extortioners of that kind."

She stopped a moment, and looked at him. "Do you know that I am glad you left the ranch?"

"Why?"

"What you are doing now is worth while."

"You mean helping your brother-in-law to get ahead of the timber-righters?"

"No," said Barbara. "That is not what I mean, though if it is any consolation to you, it meets with my approbation, too."

"Then what I was doing before was not worth while?"

"That," said Barbara, "is a question you can answer best. The question is—Can you do nothing better still? This province needs big bridges and daringly-built roads."

"I'm afraid not," and Brooke smiled a trifle wryly. "It costs a good many dollars to build a big bridge, and it is apparently very difficult for any man to acquire them so long as he works with his own hands."

"Still, isn't it worth the effort—not exactly for the dollars?"

Brooke looked at her gravely, with a slight hardening of his lips.

"I think it would be in my case," he said. "The difficulty is that I should run a heavy risk if the effort was ever made. Now however, I had, perhaps, better show you how far we have got with the tramway."

There was, as it happened, not very much to show, and before half an hour had passed Barbara and Mrs. Devine

climbed the steep ascent, while Brooke returned to redeem the hour spent with them by strenuous toil. It was also late that night before he flung aside the sheet of crude drawings and calculations he was making, and leaned back wearily in his chair. His limbs were aching, and so were his eyes, and he sat still awhile with them half-closed in a state of dreamy languor. He had dropped a tin shade over the lamp, and the tent was shadowy outside the narrow strip of radiance. There was no sound from the workmen's shanty, and the roar of the cañon broke sharply through an impressive stillness, until at last there was a faint rattle of gravel outside that suggested the approach of a cautious foot, and Brooke straightened himself suddenly as a man came into the tent. Brooke started a little.

"Saxton!" he said.

Saxton laughed, and flung down his big hat. "Precisely!" he said. "There are camps in the province I wouldn't have cared to come into like this. It wouldn't be healthy for me, but in this case it seemed advisable to get here without anybody seeing me. Left my horse two hours ago at Tomlinson's ranch."

"It was something special brought you so far on foot?"

"Yes," said Saxton, "I guess it was. I came along to see what you were doing here so long."

"I was building Devine a dam, and I am now stretching a rope across the cañon to bring his mine props over."

Saxton stared at him with blank astonishment.

"I want to understand," he said. "You are putting him a rope across to bring props over with?"

"Yes," said Brooke. "Is there anything very extraordinary in that?"

Saxton laughed harshly. "Under the circumstances, I guess there is. Do you know who's stopping him cutting all the props he wants right behind the mine?"

"No," said Brooke, dryly. "Devine doesn't either,

which I fancy is probably as well for the man. The one who holds the rights is, I understand, only the dummy."

"Then I'll tell you now. It's me"

Brooke started. "I warned you against leaving me in the dark."

Saxton slammed his hand down on the table. "Well," he said, "who would have figured on your taking up that contract? What do you want to build his sling-way for?"

"To tell the truth, I'm not quite sure I know. The thing, you see, got hold of me."

"You don't know!" and Saxton laughed again unpleasantly. "It's no great wonder they were glad to send you out here from the Old Country. The last thing I counted on was that my partner would spoil my game. You'll have to stop it right away."

Brooke closed his eyes a trifle, and looked at him. "No," he said. "That is precisely what can't be done."

There was no anger in his voice, and he made no particular display of resolution, but Saxton seemed to realize that this decision was definite. He sat fuming for a space, and then made a little emphatic gesture, which expressed complete bewilderment as well as desperation.

"Well," he said, "what did you do it for? You wouldn't take Devine's dollars when he wanted to hire you, and now you're building flumes and dams for him. I can't see any difference. There's no sense in it."

"I'm afraid there is really very little myself. Still, there is, at least, what one might call a distinction. You see, I took over another man's contract, and what I'm doing now doesn't make it necessary for Devine to favour me with his confidence."

Saxton shook his head in a fashion that suggested he considered his comrade's case hopeless. "And it's just his confidence we want!" he said. "You don't seem able to get hold of the fact that you can't make very many dollars and keep your high-toned notions at the same time.

Well," he said resignedly, " we may do something with that prop sling when we jump the claim. How are you getting on about the mine ? "

" In point of fact, I'm not getting on at all. Each time I try to saunter into the workings, I am civilly turned out again. Devine, it seems, will not even let the few men who work on top in."

Saxton appeared to reflect. " Now, I wonder why," he said. " He's too smart to do anything without a reason, and he's not afraid of you, or he'd never have had you round the place. Still, you'll have to get hold of the facts we want before we can do anything, but I'm not quite sure what use I'll make of those timber-rights in the meanwhile. They cost me quite a few dollars, and it may be a while yet before anybody takes them from me. Building that slingway isn't quite what I expected from Devine after buying up forests to oblige him."

" Well, I will do what I can, but I wish Devine would give me those dollars back of his own accord. I'm almost commencing to like the man."

Saxton shook his head. " You can't afford to consider a point of that kind when it's against your business," he said. " Anyway, if you can give me a blanket, I'll get some sleep now. I have to be on the trail again by sun-up."

Brooke gave him his own spruce-twig couch, and made him breakfast in the chilly dawn, and then was sensible of a curious relief as his confederate vanished into the filmy mists which drifted down the gorge.

CHAPTER XV

SAXTON GAINS HIS POINT

BROOKE was very wet and physically weary, which in part accounted for his dejected state of mind, when he led

his jaded horse up the last few rods of climbing trail that crossed the big divide. It had just ceased raining, while a cold wind, which set him shivering, shook a doleful wailing out of the scattered pines. One of them had fallen, and, stopping beside it, he looped the bridle round a broken branch, and sat down to rest and think. Since he expected to meet Saxton in another hour, he had food for reflection.

Since he had last seen Saxton, he had lived in a state of tension, waiting for the time when circumstances should render the carrying out of their purpose feasible, and yet clinging to a faint hope that he might, by some unknown means, still be relieved of the necessity of persisting in a course that was becoming more odious every day. The dam was almost completed, but it was with dismay he had counted the cost of it, and twice the steel rope had torn up stays and columns, and hurled them into the cañon, while he would, he knew, be fortunate if he secured a profit of a couple of hundred dollars as the result of several months of perilous labour. Prosperity, it was very evident, was not to be achieved in that fashion. He had also seen very little of Barbara Heathcote for some time, and she had been to him as a mental stimulant, of which he felt the loss, while now his prospects seemed as dreary as the dripping waste he stared across with heavy eyes. All this, as it happened, bore directly upon his errand, for it once more brought home the fact that a man without dollars could expect very little in that country, while there was, it seemed, only one way of obtaining them open to him.

He had decided that he was warranted in recovering the six thousand dollars by any means available, and it was evidently folly to take into account the anger and contempt of a girl who could, of course, be nothing to him. Her station placed that out of the question, since it would, so far as he could see, be a very long time indeed before he could secure even the most modest competence,

and he felt that there was a still greater distinction between them morally; but, in spite of this, he realized that the girl's approbation was the one thing he clung to.

Then he rose with a little hardening of his lips, and, flinging himself wearily into the saddle, strove to shake off his thoughts as the jaded horse floundered down into the valley. They were both too weary to attempt to pick their way, and went down sliding and slipping, until they reached the thicker timber. It was sunrise when he had ridden out from the Canopus mine, with his horse's head turned towards the settlement, and dark was closing down when at last he dropped, aching all over, from the saddle at the door of Saxton's shanty at the Elk-tail mine. The latter was by no means effusive in his greeting.

"I wasn't quite sure the message I sent you from Vancouver would fetch you, though I made it tolerably straight," he said.

"You certainly did," said Brooke. "In fact, I don't know that you could have made it more unlikely to bring me here. Still, what put the fancy that I might disregard it into your head?"

Saxton looked at him curiously. "Well," he said, "you seemed to be quite at home in several senses, and making the most of it there. There are folks who would consider that girl with the big eyes pretty."

Brooke swung round sharply. "I think we can leave Miss Heathcote out. It's difficult to understand how you came to know what I was doing at the Canopus? You were in Vancouver."

Saxton appeared almost disconcerted. "Well," he said, "I figured on what was most likely when I heard Miss Heathcote was still there."

He saw that he had made another mistake, and wondered whether Brooke, who had, as it happened, done so, had noticed it, while the fact that the latter's face was

now expressionless roused him to a little display of vindictiveness.

"I heard something about her in Vancouver, which it's quite likely she didn't mention to you. It was that she's mighty good friends with one of the Pacific Squadron officers. She has a good many dollars of her own, and they're mostly folks who make a splash in their own country."

Brooke afterwards decided that this must have been an inspiration, but just then he felt that Saxton was watching him, and showed no sign of interest.

"If she did, I don't remember it, though I should consider the thing quite probable," he said. "Still, as Miss Heathcote's fancies don't concern us, wouldn't it be more to the purpose if you got me a little to eat?"

Saxton summoned his cook, and nothing more was said until Brooke had finished his meal. Then his host looked at him as they sat beside the crackling stove.

"Isn't it 'bout time you made a move at the Canopus?" he said. "So far as you have gone, you have only spoiled my hand. You didn't go there to build Devine flumes and dams."

"In point of fact, I rather think I did. The difficulty is that I am still unable to get into the mine. Nobody except the men who get the ore is even allowed to look at the workings."

A little gleam crept into Saxton's eyes. "Now, it seems to me that Devine has struck it rich, or he wouldn't be so concerned particular. It's quite plain that he doesn't want everybody to know what he's getting out of the Canopus. It's only a mine that's paying folks think of jumping."

"Has it struck you that he might wish to sell it, and be taking precautions for the opposite reason?"

Saxton made a little gesture of approval, though he shook his head. "You show you have a little sense now and then, but there's nothing in that view," he said. "Is

a man going to lay out dollars on dams and wire-rope slings when he knows that none of them will be any use to him?"

"I think he might. That is, if he wanted investors, who could be induced to take it off his hands, to hear of it."

"The point is that he has only to put the Canopus into the market, and they'd pile down the dollars now."

"Still, it is presumably our business, and not Devine's, you purposed to talk about."

Saxton nodded. "Then we'll start in," he said. "You can't get into the mine, and it has struck me that if you could your eyes wouldn't be as good as a compass and a measuring-chain. Well, that brings us to the next move. When Devine left Vancouver a week ago, he took up a tin case he keeps the plans and patents of the Canopus in with him. Those papers will tell us all we want to know."

"I have no doubt they would. Still, I don't see that we are any nearer getting over the difficulty. Devine is scarcely likely to show them me."

"You'll have to lay your hands upon the case. It's in the ranch."

Brooke's face flushed, and his lips set tight. Then he spoke on impulse, "I'll be hanged if I do!"

Saxton regarded him with a little sardonic smile.

"Now," he said, quietly, "you'll listen to me, and put aside those notions of yours for a while. Devine robbed you—once—and he has taken dollars out of my pocket a good many times, while I can't see any great difference between glancing at another man's papers and crawling into his mine. We're not going to take the Canopus from him anyway—it would be too big a deal—but we have got to find out enough to put the screw on him."

Brooke sat silent a space, with the blood still in his cheeks and one hand closed. He was sensible of a curious disgust, and yet it was evident that his confederate was

right. There was, after all, no great difference between the scheme suggested and what he had already been willing to do, and yet he was sensible that it was not that fact which chiefly influenced him, for Saxton had done wisely when he hinted at Barbara Heathcote's supposititious fondness for the naval officer. Brooke had already endeavoured to contemplate the likelihood of something of this kind happening, with equanimity, and there was nothing incredible about the story. The restraint which had counted most with him was suddenly removed, and he turned to Saxton with a little decisive gesture. He certainly owed Devine nothing, and his confederate had, when he needed it badly, shown him what he fancied was, in part, at least, genuine kindness.

"Well," he said, "I will do what I can."

"Then," said Saxton, dryly, "you had better do it soon. Devine goes next week across to the Sumas valley, where he's selling land, every now and then. I guess he's not likely to take that case with him. You'll get hold of it, and find out what we want to know, as soon as he's gone."

"The question is—How am I to manage it? You wouldn't expect me to pick the lock of his safe?"

"Well," he said, "if I figured I could do it, I guess I wouldn't let that stand in my way. Still, I'm not sure that he has any, and it's even chances he keeps the case under some books in the room he has fixed up as office at the ranch."

Brooke straightened himself in his chair, with a little shake of his shoulders. "Now," he said, "we'll talk of something else. This isn't particularly pleasant. Give me a cigar, and tell me how you purpose stimulating the progress of this great province when you get into the Legislature."

Saxton did so at length, and it was perfectly evident that he saw no incongruity between what he purposed to do when in the Legislature and the means he adopted of

getting there, for he sketched out reforms and improvements with optimistic ability.

Brooke started before sunrise next morning, and was walking stiffly up the climbing trail to the Canopus mine, with the bridle of the jaded horse in his hand, when he came upon Barbara Heathcote amidst the pines. She apparently noticed his weariness and the mire upon the horse.

"The trail must have been very bad," she said.

"It certainly was," said Brooke, who, because it did not appear advisable that any one should suspect he was riding to the Elktail mine, had taken the trail to the settlement when he set out. "When there has been heavy rain, it usually is. The trail-choppers should have laid down logs in the Saverne swamp."

"But what took you that way?" said the girl. "It must have been a tremendous round."

Brooke realized that he had been indiscreet, for nobody who wished to reach the settlement was likely to cross that swamp.

"As a matter of fact, it is," he said.

Barbara glanced at him, as he fancied, rather curiously, but she changed the subject. "I have a friend from Vancouver, who heard you play at the concert, here, and we had hoped you might be persuaded to bring your violin across to the ranch to-night. Katty asked Jimmy to tell you that we expected you. That is, if you were not too tired."

Brooke felt the blood creep into his face. He longed to go, but he had a sense of fitness, and he felt that he could not, after the arrangement he had made with Saxton, betray the girl's confidence by visiting the ranch again as a respected guest. No excuse but the one she had suggested, however, presented itself, and it seemed to him advisable to make use of it with uncompromising candidness. Her friendliness hurt him, and since it presumably sprang from a mistaken good opinion, it would be a slight

relief to show her that he was deficient even in courtesy.

"I'm almost afraid I am," he said.

Barbara Heathcote had a good deal of self-restraint, but there was a trace of astonishment in her face.

"Then we will, of course, excuse you," she said. "You will, I hope, not think it very inconsiderate of me to stop you now."

Brooke said nothing, but tugged at the bridle viciously, and trudged forward into the gloom of the pines, while Barbara, who would not admit that she had come there in the hope of meeting him, turned homewards thoughtfully. As it happened, she also met the freight-packer, who brought their supplies up, on the way.

"Where is Saverne swamp? Behind the range, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes, miss," said the freighter.

"Then if I wished to ride into the settlement, I could scarcely go round that way?"

The man laughed. "No," he said. "I guess you couldn't. Nobody heading for the settlement would take that trail."

He went on, and Barbara stood still, looking down upon the forest with a little pink tinge in her cheeks and a curious expression in her eyes. Remembering the trace of disconcertion he had shown, she very much wished to know where Brooke had really been.

CHAPTER XVI

BARBARA'S RESPONSIBILITY

DARKNESS had closed down outside, and the lamp was lighted in Devine's office, which occupied a projection of the wooden ranch. Behind it stood the kitchen, and a short corridor, which gave access to both, led back from

its inner door to the main building. Another door opened directly on to the clearing, and a grove of willows, past which the trail led, crept close up to it, so that any one standing among them could see into the room. There was, however, little probability of that happening, for nobody lived in that stretch of forest, except the miners whose shanty stood almost a mile away. Devine sat opposite the captain of the mine across the little table, and he had let his cigar go out, while his face was a trifle grim.

"The last clean-up was not particularly encouraging, Tom," he said.

Wilkins nodded, and there was a trace of concern in his face. "The trouble is that the next one's going to be worse," he said. "The pay-dirt's getting scarcer as we cut further in, and I have a notion that the boys are beginning to notice."

Devine glanced at the little leather-bound book he held, in which was entered the net yield of gold from the ore the stamps crushed down, and noted the steady decrease.

"It's plain that the vein is working out," he said. "It remains to be seen whether we'll strike better rock with the adit on the different level. I don't notice signs of that yet."

Wilkins shook his head. "I guess I haven't seen any for a week, and we're spending quite a pile of dollars trying to hold the hillside up. The signs were all on top," he said.

"There are ranges where you can strike it just as sure and easy as falling off a log, but I guess something long ago shook these mountains up, and mixed up all the rock. There's only one man figures he knows how it was done, and he won't talk about it when he's sensible."

"Allonby, of the Dayspring!" said Devine. "Now, the last time we worried about the thing you told me you considered our chances good enough to put your savings in. Would you feel like doing it to-day?"

"No, sir," said Wilkins, dryly, "I wouldn't."

Devine sat thoughtfully silent for a minute or two.

"You went through the Dayspring?" Devine said, at length.

"I did. So far as I can figure, it's a mine that will make its living, and nothing worth while more. 'Bout two or three cents on the dollar."

"Allonby thinks more of it."

A little incredulous smile crept into the captain's eyes. "When he has got most of a bottle of rye whisky into him! Allonby's a skin."

"Well," said Devine, "I'm going over to talk to him, and I needn't keep you any longer. In the meanwhile only you and I have got to know what the Canopus is really doing."

The captain's smile was very expressive as he went out, but when the door closed behind him Devine sat still with wrinkled forehead and thoughtful eyes while half an hour slipped by. He was, however, not addicted to purposeless reflections, and the results of his cogitations as a rule became apparent in due time. He cheerfully took risks, or chances, as he called them, which the average English business man would have shrunk from. He staked his dollars boldly, and when he lost them, which happened now and then, accepted it as what was to be expected, and usually recouped himself on another deal.

That was why he had bought the Canopus under somewhat peculiar circumstances, and extended the workings without concerning himself greatly as to whether every stipulation of the Crown mining regulations had been complied with, until the mine proved profitable, when it had appeared advisable not to court inquiry, which might result in the claim being jumped by applying for corrected records. It also explained the fact that although he had no safe at the ranch, he had brought up all the plans and papers relating to it from his Vancouver office, and kept them merely covered by certain

dusty books. Nobody who might feel an illegitimate interest in them would, he argued, expect to find them there.

While he sat there the inner door opened softly, and Barbara, who came in, laid a hand upon his shoulder. Devine looked up at her quietly.

"Are you never astonished or put out?" she said. "You didn't expect me?"

Devine smiled a little. "Well," he said, "I don't think I often am. What brought you, anyway?"

"It's getting late," and Barbara sat down. "You have been here two hours already. Now, you show very little sign of it, but I can't help a fancy that you have been worrying over something the last day or two. I suppose one could scarcely expect you to take me into your confidence."

"The thing's not big enough to worry over, but I have been thinking. We have struck no gold in the adit, and now when we're waiting for the props the Englishman has dropped the rope into the cañon. That contract is going to cost him considerable."

Barbara wondered whether he had any particular reason for watching her, or if she only fancied that his gaze was a trifle more observant than usual.

"Still, I think he will get a rope across," she said.

"Oh, yes," said Devine indifferently. "There's grit in him. A curious kind of man. Wouldn't take a good offer to work for me, and yet he jumped right at those contracts. He's going to find it hard to make them pay his grocery bill. I guess he hasn't told you anything?"

"No," said Barbara, a trifle hastily. "Of course not. Why should he?"

Devine smiled. "If you don't know any reason you needn't ask me. You can't make a Britisher talk, anyway, unless he wants to."

Taking up a bundle of documents, he turned to her again.

"You see those papers, Bab? They're plans and Crown patents for the mine. I'm going away to-morrow, and can't take them along, so I'll put them under that pile of old books yonder. Now, if I was to tell Katty to make sure the doors were fast she'd get worrying, but you have better nerves, and I'll ask you to see that nobody gets in here until I come back again. Nobody's likely to want to, but I'll put a screw in the window, and give you the key."

Barbara laughed. "I shall not be afraid. Are the papers valuable?"

"No," said Devine, with a trace of dryness. "Not exactly! In fact, I'm not quite sure they would be worth anything to anybody in a month or two. Still, the man who got hold of them in the meanwhile might fancy he could make trouble for me."

"How?" said Barbara.

"I can explain part of it," he said. "When I took hold of the Canopus, it didn't seem likely to pay me for my trouble, and I didn't worry about the patents or how far they covered what I was doing. Now, if you drive beyond the frontage you've made your claim on, it constitutes another mine, which isn't covered by your record and belongs to the Crown. It's open to any jumper who comes along. Besides, unless you do a good many things exactly as the law lays down, your patent mayn't hold good, and any one who knows the regulations can record the claim."

"That means you or the previous owner neglected one or two formalities, and an unscrupulous person who found it out from those papers could take the Canopus away from you?"

Devine smiled grimly. "Yes," he said. "That is, he might try."

"I understand," said Barbara. "Still, there are no strangers here, and I don't think you have a man who would attempt anything of that kind about the mine."

"Or at the cañon?"

Barbara was sensible of a curious little thrill of anger, for Brooke was at the cañon, but she looked at him steadily.

"No," she said. "I am quite sure that is the last thing one would expect from anybody at the cañon, but if we stay here Katty will be wondering what has become of me."

Devine rose and followed her out of the room, and in another half-hour the ranch was in darkness. He rode away early next morning, and the big, empty living-room seemed lonely to the two women who sat by the window when night drew in again. No sound but the distant roar of the river broke the silence, and Mrs. Devine shivered a little.

"I suppose quietness is good for one, but it gets a trifle depressing now and then," she said. "Why didn't you ask Mr. Brooke to come across?"

"You may have noticed that he never comes when my brother-in-law is not here, and then he brings drawings or estimates of some kind with him."

Mrs. Devine appeared reflective. "Grant has not been away for almost two weeks now, and it is quite that time since we have seen Mr. Brooke," she said. "Didn't we ask him to come when you had Minnie here?"

"You did," said Barbara, with a flush. "He asked me to excuse him."

"Because Grant was away?"

"No," said Barbara, dryly. "That, at least, was not the reason he gave me. He said he was—too tired."

Mrs. Devine laughed, for she had noticed the hardness in her sister's voice.

"It really must have been exasperating. He should have thought of a better excuse," she said. "No doubt you will find a way of making him realize his contumacy."

"I am almost afraid I shall not have the opportunity."

"And you can't very well attempt to make one, especi-

ally as I remember now that Grant told me he was very hard at work at the cañon. It would be even worse to be told he was too busy, since that implies that one has something better to do."

Barbara smiled, for she was unwilling to admit, even to herself, and much less to anybody else, that she felt the slightest irritation at the fact that Brooke had shown no eagerness to avail himself of the invitation she had given him. Still, she was very far from feeling pleased with him.

"I dare say he has," she said.

"Then he is, at least, not doing it very successfully. The rope fell into the cañon."

"I am not very sure there are many men who would have attempted to put a rope across at all," said Barbara, and did not realize for a moment that she had, to some extent, betrayed herself. She might feel displeased with the flume-builder herself, but that was no reason why she should permit another person to disparage his capabilities, all of which her sister was probably acquainted with.

"Well," she said, indifferently, "we hope he will be successful. The man pleases me, but I would like to know what Grant thinks about him."

"Then why don't you ask him?"

Mrs. Devine shook her head. "Grant never tells anybody his opinions until he's tolerably sure he's right, and I fancy he is a little undecided about Mr. Brooke as yet," she said. "I'm going to bed."

She lighted a lamp, but when she went out Barbara made her way to her room without one. There was nobody else beyond Wilkins' wife in the ranch, and she had retired some time ago. Barbara sat down by the open window of her room, looking out into the night. A half-moon was now slowly lifting itself above the faintly-gleaming snow, and she could see the pines roll away in sombre battalions into the drifting mists below.

It was the flume-builder her thoughts hovered round,

and she endeavoured fruitlessly to define the attraction he had for her, or, as she preferred to consider it, the reason for the interest she felt in him. She wondered vaguely how much of it was due to vanity resulting from a recognition of the fact that it was she who had roused him from a state of too acquiescent lethargy. Then she wondered why the fact that he had not long ago excused himself from spending an evening in her company at the ranch should have hurt her, as she now admitted that it did.

She felt far from sleepy, and sat still, shivering a little now and then, while the moon rose higher above the snow, until its faint light drove back the shadows from the swamp. The clustering pines shook off their duskiness, and grew into definite tracery; an owl that hooted eerily flitted by on soundless wing, and she felt the silence become suddenly almost overwhelming. There was no wind, but she could hear the little willow leaves stirring, it seemed, beneath the cooling dew, for the sound had scarcely strength enough to make a tangible impression upon her senses. It, however, appeared to grow a trifle louder, and she found herself listening with strained attention when it ceased awhile, until it rose again, a trifle more clearly. She glanced at the cedars above the clearing, but they stood sombre and motionless, and she leaned forward in her chair with heart beating more rapidly than usual as she wondered what made those leaves move.

Then a shadow detached itself from the rest, and its contour did not suggest that of a slender tree. It increased in length, and, remembering Devine's papers, she rose with a little gasp. Her sister, as he had pointed out, had delicate nerves, Mrs. Wilkins was dull of hearing, and, as the men's shanty stood almost a mile away, it was evident that she must depend upon her own resources. She stood still, quivering a little, and then with difficulty repressed a cry when the dim figure of a man appeared

in the clearing. Two minutes later she slipped softly into the room where Katty Devine lay asleep, and opened a cupboard set apart for her husband's use, while, when she flitted across the stream of radiance that shone in through the window, she held an object that gleamed with a metallic lustre clenched in one hand.

CHAPTER XVII

BROOKE ATTEMPTS BURGLARY

THE half-moon Barbara watched from her window floated slowly above the serrated tops of the dusky pines when Brooke groped his way through their shadow across a strip of the Englishman's swamp. The ranch which he was making for rose darkly before him with the willows clustering close up to that side of it, and he stopped and stood listening when he reached them. He started at a faint rattle in the house. It ceased suddenly, but it had set his heart throbbing unpleasantly fast, though he was sensible of a little annoyance with himself because this was the case.

There was nothing he need fear, and he was, indeed, not quite sure that the prospect of facing a physical peril would have been altogether unpleasant then. Devine was away, the women were doubtless asleep, and it was the fact that he was about to creep like a thief into a house where he had been hospitably welcomed which occasioned his uneasiness.

A bent branch from which the bruised leaves drooped limply caught his eye, for he had trained his powers of observation following the deer at the ranch, and moving a trifle he noticed one that was broken. It was evident that somebody had recently forced his way through the thicket towards the house, and he wondered vacantly why any one should have done so when a good trail led

round the copse. The question would probably not have occupied his attention at any other time, but just then he was glad to seize upon anything that might serve to distract his thoughts from the purpose he had on hand.

He could not, however, stay there considering it, and following the willows he came to the door of the ranch kitchen, behind which the office stood, and once more he stopped to listen. Though nobody could see him, he felt his face grow hot as he laid one hand upon the door and inserted the point of a little steel bar in the crevice.

The door, however, somewhat to his astonishment, swung open at a touch, and he crept in noiselessly with an even greater sense of degradation. He crossed the kitchen, carrying the little bar, and did not stop until he reached the office door. This stood ajar, but he stood still a moment in place of going in, longing, most illogically, for any interruption. There was a low rustle that set him quivering. Somebody, it appeared, was moving about the room in front of him. Then a board creaked sharply, and with every nerve strung up he drew the door a trifle open.

A faint stream of radiance shone in through the window, but it fell upon the wall opposite, and the rest of the room was wrapped in shadow, in which he could just discern a dim figure that moved stealthily. It was evidently a man who could have come there with no commendable purpose, and as he recognized this a somewhat curious thing happened, for Brooke's lips set tight, and he clenched the steel bar in a fit of venomous anger. It did not occur to him that his own object was, after all, very much the same as the stranger's, and creeping forward noiselessly with eyes fixed on the dusky figure he saw it stoop and apparently move a book that stood on what seemed to be a box. That movement enabled him to gain another yard, and then he stopped again, bracing himself for the grapple, while the dim object turned towards the light.

Brooke could hear nothing but the throbbing of his heart, and for a moment his eyes grew hazy; but that passed, and he saw the man hold up an object that was very like a tin case. He moved again nearer the light, and Brooke sprang forward with the bar swung aloft. Quick as he was, the stranger was equally alert, and stepped forward instead of back, while next moment Brooke looked into the dully-glinting muzzle of a pistol.

"Stop right where you are!" a voice said.

Brooke did as he was bidden, instinctively, and for a second or two the men stood tense and motionless, looking at one another with lips hard set. Brooke recognized the intruder as a man who wheeled the ore between the mine and stamps, and remembered that he had not been there very long.

"What do you want here?" he said.

The man smiled grimly, though he did not move the pistol, and his eyes were unpleasantly steady.

"I was going to ask you the same thing, but it don't count," he said. "There's a door yonder, and you have 'bout ten seconds to get out of it. If you're here any longer you're going to take steep chances of getting hurt."

Brooke realized that the warning was probably warranted, but he stood still, stiffening his grasp on the bar, for to vacate the position was the last thing he contemplated. Barbara Heathcote was in the ranch, and he did not remember that she had also two companions. Then while they stood watching each other a door handle rattled, and Brooke heard a rustle of draperies.

"Look behind you!" said the stranger, sharply.

Brooke, too strung up to recognize the risk of the proceeding, swung round almost before he heard him, and then gasped with consternation, for Barbara stood in the entrance, holding up a light. She was, however, not quite defenceless, as Brooke realized when he saw the gleaming pistol in her hand. Next moment his folly became evident, for there was a hasty patter of

feet, and when Brooke turned again the stranger had almost gained the other door of the room. Barbara, who had moved forward in the meanwhile, however, now stood between him and it, and turning half round he raised the pistol menacingly. Then with hand clenched hard upon the bar, Brooke sprang.

There was a flash and a detonation, the acrid smoke drove into his eyes, and he fell with a crash against the door, which was flung to in front of him. He had, as he afterwards discovered, struck it with his head and shoulder, but just then he was only sensible of an unpleasant dizziness and a stinging pain in his left arm. Then he leaned somewhat heavily against the door, and he and the girl looked at each other through the filmy wisps of smoke while a rapid patter of footsteps grew less distinct. Barbara was white in face, and her lips were quivering.

"Are you hurt?" she said, and her voice sounded curiously strained.

"No," said Brooke, with a little hollow laugh. "Not seriously, anyway. The fellow flung the door to in my face, and the blow must have dazed me. That reminds me that I'm wasting time. Where is he now?"

Barbara made a little forceful gesture. "Half-way across the clearing I expect. You cannot go after him. Look at your arm."

Brooke turned his head slowly, and saw a thin, red trickle drip from the sleeve of his jèan jacket, which the moonlight fell upon.

"I scarcely think it's worth troubling about. The arm will bend all right," he said. "Still, perhaps you wouldn't mind if I took this thing off."

He seized the edge of the jacket, and then while his face went awry let his hand drop again.

"It might, perhaps, be better to cut the sleeve," he said. "Could you run this knife down the seam? The jean is very thin."

The girl's hand shook a little as she opened the knife he passed her, and just then a cry came down faintly from one of the rooms above. Barbara moved into the corridor.

"Nothing very dreadful has happened, and I am coming back in a minute or two, but don't come down," she said authoritatively.

Then she came towards him quietly, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Keep still, and I will not be long. Katty is apt to lose her head," she said.

Her fingers still quivered a little, but she was deft in spite of it, and when the slit sleeve fell away Brooke sat down with a little smile.

"Very sorry to trouble you," he said. "I don't know much about these things, but the artery evidently isn't cut, and I don't think the bone is touched. That means there can't be very much harm done. Would you mind tying my handkerchief tightly round it where I've laid my finger?"

Barbara, who did so, afterwards sat down in the nearest chair, for she felt a trifle breathless as well as somewhat limp, and there was an embarrassing silence. A little filmy smoke still drifted about the room, and a short steel bar, a tin case, and a litter of papers lay between them on the floor. There were red splashes on one or two of the papers.

"The man must have dropped them," said Barbara, quietly. "He, of course, brought the bar to open the door with."

Brooke did not answer the last remark.

"I fancy he dropped them when he flung the door in my face," he said.

"Of course!" said Barbara. "He had his hands full." Then a thought struck her, and she looked up suddenly at the man.

"But, now I remember, you had the bar," she said.

"Yes," said Brooke, very simply, "I certainly had."

He saw the faint bewilderment in her eyes. It, however, vanished in a moment or two, but Brooke decided that if he guessed her thoughts correctly he had done wisely in admitting the possession of the bar.

"Of course! You hadn't a pistol, and it was, no doubt, the only thing you could find," she said. "I'm afraid I did not even remember to thank you, but to tell the truth I was too badly frightened to think of anything."

Brooke nodded comprehendingly.

"I scarcely think I deserve any thanks," he said.

Barbara made a little gesture. "Pshaw!" she said. "You are not always so conventional, and both I and Grant Devine owe you a great deal. The man must have been a claim-jumper, and meant to steal those papers. They are—the plans and patents of the Canopus."

She stopped a moment, and then, seeing Brooke had noticed the momentary pause, continued, with a little forced laugh and a flush in her cheeks, "That was native Canadian caution asserting itself. I am ashamed of it, but you must remember I was rather badly startled a little while ago. There is no reason why I should not tell—you—this, or show you the documents."

Brooke made a little grimace as though she had hurt him physically.

"I think there is," he said.

The girl stared at him, and he saw only sympathy in her eyes.

"I'm afraid my wits have left me, or I would not have kept you talking while you are in pain. Your arm hurts?" she said.

"No," said Brooke, dryly. "The arm is, I feel almost sure, very little the worse. Hadn't you better pick the papers up? You will excuse me stooping to help you. I scarcely think it would be advisable just now."

Barbara knelt down and gathered the scattered documents, while the man noticed the curious flush in her face when one of them left a red smear on her little white fingers. Rising, she held them up to him half open as they had fallen, and looked at him steadily.

"Will you put them straight while I find the band they were slipped through?" she said.

Brooke fancied he understood her. She had a generous spirit, and having, in a moment of confusion, suggested a doubt of him, was making amends in the one fashion that suggested itself. Then she turned away, and her back was towards him as she moved slowly towards the door, and when a plan of the Canopus mine fell open in his hand. The light was close beside him, but he closed his eyes and there was a rustle as the papers slipped from his fingers, while when the girl turned towards him his face was awry, and he looked at her with a little grim smile.

"I am afraid they are scattered again," he said. "It was very clumsy of me, but I find it hurts me to use my left hand."

Barbara thrust the papers into the case. "I am sorry I didn't think of that," she said. "Even if you don't appreciate my thanks you will have to put up with my brother-in-law's, and he is a man who remembers. It might have cost him a good deal if anybody who could not be trusted had seen those papers—and now no more of them. Don't move again until I tell you."

Brooke made no answer, and Barbara went out into the corridor.

"Will you dress as quickly as you can, Katty, and come down," she said; "I don't know where you keep the decanters, and I want to give Mr. Brooke, who is hurt, a glass of wine."

Brooke protested, but Barbara laughed. "It will really be a kindness to Katty, who is now, I feel quite sure, in a state of terror."

It was three or four minutes later when Mrs. Devine appeared, and Barbara turned towards her.

"There is nothing to be gained by getting nervous now," she said. "A man came in to steal Grant's papers about the mine, and Mr. Brooke, who saw him, crept in after him, though he had only a little bar, and the man had a pistol. I fancy Grant is considerably indebted to him, and we must at least, keep him here until one of the boys brings up the doctor."

Brooke rose to his feet, but Barbara moved swiftly to the door and turned the key in it.

"No," she said, decisively. "You are not going away when you are scarcely fit to walk. Katty, you haven't brought the wine yet."

Brooke sat down again, and making no answer, looked away from her, for though he would greatly have preferred it, he scarcely felt capable of reaching his tent. Then there was silence for several minutes until Mrs. Devine came back with the wine.

"You are going to stay here until your arm is seen to. My husband would not be pleased if we did not do everything we could for you," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

BROOKE MAKES A DECISION

It was the second morning after the attempt upon the papers, and Brooke lay in a basket chair on the little verandah at the ranch. In spite of the doctor's ministrations his arm was a good deal more painful than he had expected it to be, his head ached, and he felt unpleasantly lethargic and limp. It, however, seemed to him that this wound was not sufficiently serious to account for this, and he wondered vaguely whether it resulted from too strenuous physical exertion

coupled with the increasing mental strain he had borne of late. That question was, however, of no great importance, and in the meanwhile it was pleasant to lie there and listen languidly while Barbara talked to him.

Her quiet graciousness had a soothing effect upon the man who had risen unrefreshed after a night of mental conflict which had continued through the few brief snatches of fevered sleep. Brooke felt the need of moral stimulant as well as physical rest, for the struggle he had desisted from for the time was not over yet.

He was tenacious of purpose, but it had cost him an effort to adhere to the terms of his compact with Saxton, and it was with a thrill of intense disgust he realized how far it had led him when he came upon the thief, for there was no ignoring the fact that it would be very difficult to make any great distinction between them. It had also become evident that he could not continue to play the part Saxton had allotted him, and yet if he threw it over he stood to lose everything his companion, who was at once a reproach to him and an incentive to a continuance in the career of deception, impersonated. Her society and his few visits to the ranch had shown him the due value of the refinement and congenial environment which no man without dollars could hope to enjoy. He could, in the meanwhile, neither nerve himself to bear the thought of the girl's scorn when she realized what his purpose had been, nor bid her farewell and go back to the aimless life of poverty. One thing alone was certain. Devine's papers were safe from him.

He lay silent almost too long, watching her with a vague longing in his gaze, for her head was partly turned from him. Perhaps she felt his eyes upon her, for she turned at last and glanced at him.

"I have been thinking—about that night," she said.

"You really shouldn't," said Brooke, who felt suddenly uneasy. "It isn't worth while."

Barbara smiled. "That is a point upon which opin-

ions may differ, but I understand your attitude. You see, I have been in England, and you apparently believe it the correct thing to hide your light under a bushel there."

"No," said Brooke, drily, "at least, not all of us."

Barbara shook her head. "There are," she said, "several kinds of affectation, and I am not to be put off. Now, you are quite aware that you did my brother-in-law a signal service, and contrived to get me out of a very unpleasant and perilous situation."

The colour deepened a little in Brooke's face, and once more he was sensible of the humiliation that had troubled him on previous occasions, as he remembered that it was by no means to do Devine a service he had crept into the ranch.

"I really don't think there was very much risk," he said. "Besides, you had a pistol."

Barbara laughed. "I never fired a pistol in my life, and I fancy there was nothing in the one in question."

Brooke glanced at her a trifle sharply. "You meant to fire at the man?"

"I'm afraid I did. Was it very dreadful? He was there with an unlawful purpose, and I saw his hand tighten just as you sprang at him. Still, I was almost glad when the pistol did not go off."

She seemed to have some difficulty in repressing a shiver at the recollection, and Brooke sat silent for a moment or two with his heart throbbing a good deal faster than usual. He could guess what that effort had cost his companion, and that it was his peril which had nerved her to overcome her natural shrinking from taking life. Perhaps Barbara noticed the effect her explanation had on him, and desired to lessen it, for she said: "It really was unpleasant, but I remembered that you had come there to ensure the safety of my brother-in-law's property, and one is permitted to shoot at a thief in this country."

Brooke, who could not help it, made a little abrupt movement, and felt his face grow hot as he wondered what she would think of him if she knew the purpose that had brought him there.

"Of course!" he said. "I am, however, inclined to think you saved my life. The man probably saw your hand go up, and that made him a trifle too precipitate. Still, perhaps, he only wanted to look at the papers and had no intention of stealing anything."

Barbara, who appeared glad to change the subject, smiled.

"Admitting that, I can't see any great difference," she said. "The man who runs a personal risk to secure a wallet with dollar bills in it that belongs to somebody else naturally does not expect commendation, or usually get it, but it seems to me a good deal meaner thing to steal a claim by cunning trickery. For instance, one has a certain admiration for the train robbers across the frontier. For two or three road-agents to hold up and rob a train demands a good deal of courage, but to plunder a man by prying into his secrets is only contemptible. Don't you think so?"

Brooke winced beneath her gaze.

"Well!" he said slowly, "I suppose it is. Still, you see [illegible] excuses even for such a person."

[illegible]! Surely—you—do not feel capable of inventing any for a claim-jumper?"

Brooke felt that in his case there were, at least, one or two.

"Well," he said, "I wonder if you could make any for a train-robber?"

Barbara appeared reflective. "We will admit that the dishonesty is the same in both cases, though that is not quite the point. The men who hold a train up, however, take a serious personal risk, and stake their lives upon their quickness and nerve. Daring of that kind commands a certain respect. The claim-jumper, on

the contrary, must necessarily proceed by stealth, and, of course, rarely ventures on an attempt until he makes sure that the law will support him, because the man he means to rob has neglected some trivial requirement."

"Then it is admissible to steal, so long as you do it openly and take a personal risk? Still, I have heard of claim-jumpers being shot."

Barbara laughed. "They probably deserved it. Now, I think I have made out my case for the train-robber, but I cannot see why you should constitute yourself an advocate for the claim-jumper."

Brooke contrived to force a smile. "It is," he said, "often a little difficult to make sure of one's motives, but we can, at least, take it for granted that the man who robs a train is the nobler rascal."

Barbara sat silent awhile. "It was fortunate you arrived when you did that night," she said, meditatively. "Still, as you could not well have known the man meant, to make the attempt, or have expected to find anybody still awake at the ranch, it seems an almost astonishing coincidence."

"It certainly was," he said. "I have, however, heard of coincidences that were more astonishing still."

Barbara nodded. "No doubt," she said. "We will let it go at that. As you may have noticed, we are now and then almost indecently candid in this country, but I agree with my brother-in-law who says that nobody could make an Englishman talk unless he wanted to."

"Silence is reputed to be golden," said Brooke reflectively, "and I really think there are cases when it is. At least, there was one I figured in when some two or three minutes' unchecked speech cost me more dollars than I have made ever since. It happened in England, and I merely favoured another man with my frank opinion of him. After a thing of that kind one is apt to be guarded."

"I think I should cultivate a sense of proportion.

Can one make up for a single mistake in one direction by erring continually in the opposite one? Still, that is not a question we need go into now. You expect to get the rope across the cañon very shortly?"

"Yes," said Brooke, whose expression changed suddenly, "I do."

"And then?"

"I don't know. I shall probably take the trail again. It does not matter greatly where it may lead me."

There was a curious little vibration he could not quite repress in his voice, and both he and his companion were, under the circumstances, silent a trifle too long, for there are times when silence is very expressive. Then it was Barbara who spoke.

"You will be sorry to go?"

Brooke looked at her steadily, with his lips set, and his fingers quivering a little, for he realized at last what it would cost him to leave her. For a moment a hot flood of passion and longing threatened to sweep him away, but he held it in check.

"What answer could I make? The conventional one demanded scarcely fits the case," he said.

"But the dam will not be finished," said Barbara, who realized that she had made an unfortunate start.

Again Brooke sat silent. It seemed folly to abandon his purpose, and he wondered whether he would have sufficient strength of will to go away. It was also folly to stay and sink further under the girl's influence, when the revelation he shrank from would, if he persisted in his attempt to recover his dollars, become inevitable. Still, once he left the Canopus he must go back to a life of hardship and labour. He sat very still, with one hand closed, not daring to look at his companion until she spoke again.

"You say you do not know where the trail may lead you, and you do not seem to care. One would fancy that was wrong," she said.

"Why?"

"In this province the trail the resolute man takes usually leads to success. We want bridges and railroad trestles, forests cleared, and the valleys lined with roads. You can build them."

Brooke shook his head, though her confidence in him had its due effect.

"I wish I was a little more sure," he said. "The difficulty, as I think I once pointed out, is that one needs dollars to make a fair start with."

"They are, at least, not indispensable, as the history of most of the men who have done anything worth while in the province shows. Isn't there a certain satisfaction in starting with everything against one?"

"Afterwards, perhaps. That is, if one struggles through. There is, however, one learns by experience, really very little satisfaction at the time, especially if one scarcely gets beyond the start at all."

Barbara smiled a little, though she looked at him steadily. "You," she said, "will, I think, go a long way. In fact, if it was a sword I gave you, I should expect it of you."

Brooke came very near losing his head just then, though he realized that, after all, the words implied little more than a belief in his capabilities, and for a few insensate moments he almost decided to stay at the Canopus and make the most of his opportunities. Saxton, he reflected, might put sufficient pressure upon Devine to extort the six thousand dollars from him without the necessity for his part becoming apparent at all. With that sum in his hands there was, he felt, very little he could not attain; and then he shook off the deluding fancy, for it once more became apparent that the deed which gave Saxton the hold he wished for upon Devine would, even if she never heard of it, stand as a barrier between Barbara Heathcote and him.

"One feels inclined to wonder now and then whether success does not occasionally, at least, cost the man who achieves it more than it is worth," he said. "The actual record of the leaders one is expected to look up to might, in that connexion, provide one with a fund of astonishing information."

Barbara made a little gesture of impatience. "Is the poor man the only one who can be honest?"

"One would feel inclined to fancy that the man who is unduly honest runs a risk of remaining poor."

"I think that is an argument I have very little sympathy with," said Barbara. "It is, you see, so easy for the incapable to impeach the successful man's honesty. It is an attitude I scarcely expected from you."

Brooke smiled somewhat bitterly.

"You will, however, remember that I have made no attempt to persuade you of my own integrity."

Just then, as it happened, Mrs. Devine came into the verandah with a packet in her hand.

"These are the papers the man tried to steal," she said. "Since you insist upon going back to the cañon to-day, I wonder if you would take care of them?"

Brooke gasped. "You wish me to take them away?"

"Of course! My nerves are really horribly unsettled, and I was sent to the mountains for quietness. How could any one expect me to get it when I couldn't even sleep for fear of that man or some one else coming back for these documents again?"

"They are of considerable importance to your husband," said Brooke.

"That is precisely why I would like to feel that they were safe in your tent. Nobody would expect you to have them there."

Brooke turned his head a little so that he could see Barbara's face.

"I appreciate your confidence," he said, and the girl noticed that his voice was a trifle hoarse. "Still, I

must point out that I am almost a stranger to Mr. Devine and you."

Barbara smiled a little, but there was something that set the man's heart beating in her eyes.

"I feel quite sure my sister's confidence is warranted," she said.

Brooke, who glanced at the single seal, laid down the packet, and Mrs. Devine smiled. "I feel ever so much easier now that is off my mind," she said.

She went out, and left him and Barbara alone again, but Brooke knew that the struggle was over and the question decided once for all. The girl's trust in him had not only made those papers inviolable so far as he was concerned, but had rendered a breach with Saxton unavoidable. He knew now that he could never do what the latter had expected from him.

"You appeared almost unwilling to take the responsibility," said the girl.

Brooke smiled curiously. "I really think that was the case," he said. "In fact, your confidence almost hurt me. One feels the obligation of proving it warranted—in every respect—you see. That is partly why I shall go away the day we swing the first load of props across the cañon."

Barbara felt a trace of disconcertion. "But my brother-in-law may ask you to do something else for him."

"I scarcely think that is likely," said Brooke with a little dry smile.

Barbara said nothing further, and when she left him Brooke was once more sensible of a curious relief. When Jimmy arrived that evening to accompany him back to his tent at the cañon, and expressed his satisfaction at the fact that he did not appear very much the worse, he smiled dryly.

"That," he said, "is a little astonishing. I am, I think, warranted in believing myself six thousand dollars worse off than when I went away."

Jimmy stared at him incredulously.

"Well," he said, "I never figured you had that many, and I don't quite see how you could have let them get away from you here. Something you didn't expect has happened?"

Brooke appeared reflective. "I'm not quite sure whether I expected it or not, but I almost hope I did," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

BROOKE'S BARGAIN

THERE was a portentous quietness in the little wooden town which did not exactly please Mr. Faraday Slocum, the somewhat discredited local agent of Grant Devine, as he ascended the steep street from the grocery store. The pines closed in upon it, but their sombre spires were growing dim, for dusk was creeping up the valley. The latter fact brought Slocum a sense of satisfaction and at the same time a growing uneasiness. He had, as it happened, signally failed to collect a certain sum from the store-keeper, who had expressed his opinion of him and his doings with vitriolic candour, and it was partly as the result of this that very little escaped his notice as he proceeded towards his dwelling.

A straggling row of stores and houses, log and frame and galvanized iron, jumbled all together in unsightly confusion, stretched away before him towards the gap in the forest where the railroad track came in, but it was the groups of men who hung about them which occupied his attention. He saluted them with forced good-humour as he went by, but there was no great cordiality in their responses, and some of them stared at him in uncompromising silence. There was, he felt, a certain

tension in the atmosphere, and it was not without a purpose he stopped in front of the wooden hotel, where a little crowd had collected upon the verandah.

"It's kind of sultry to-night, boys," he said.

Nobody responded for a moment or two, and then there was an unpleasant laugh as somebody said. "You've hit it; I guess it is."

Slocum remembered that most of those loungers had been glad to greet him, and even hand him their spare dollars, not long ago; but there was a decided difference now. He was a capable business man, who could make the most of an opportunity, and the inhabitants of the little wooden town had shown themselves disposed to regard certain trifling obliquities leniently, while they or their friends made satisfactory profits on the deals in ranching land and building lots he recommended. That, however, was while the boom lasted, but when the bottom had dropped out, and many of them found themselves saddled with unmarketable possessions, they commenced to be troubled with grave doubts concerning the rectitude of his conduct. Slocum was quite aware of this, but he was a man of nerve, and quietly walked up the verandah steps.

"It's that hot I must have a drink, boys. Who's coming in with me?" he said, genially.

A few months ago a good many of them would have been willing to profit by the invitation, but that night nobody moved, and Slocum laughed.

"Well," he said, "I'm not going to worry you. This is evidently a temperance meeting."

He passed into the empty bar alone, and a man who leaned upon the counter in his shirt sleeves shook his head as he glanced towards the verandah.

"They're not in a good humour to-night; somebody has been talking to them?" he said.

Slocum smiled, though he had already noticed this, and taken precautions the bar-keeper never suspected.

"I guess they'll simmer down. Who has been talking to them?" he said.

"The two ranchers you sold the Hemlock Range to. Now, I don't know what their notion is, but I'd light out for a little if I was you."

Slocum appeared to reflect. "Well," he said, "I may go to-morrow."

"I'd go to-night," said the bar-keeper. "I guess it would be wiser."

Slocum, who did not consider it necessary to tell him that he quite agreed with this, went out, and a few minutes later stopped outside his house, which was the last one in the town. A big, rudely-painted sign, nailed across the front of it, recommended any one who desired to buy or sell land and mineral properties or had mortgages to arrange to come in and confer with the agent of Grant Devine. He glanced back up the street, and was relieved to notice that there was nobody loitering about. Then he looked at the forest the trail led into, which was shadowy and still, and, slipping round the building, went in through the back of it. A woman stood waiting him in a dimly-lighted room, which was littered with feminine clothing, besides two big valises and an array of bulky packages. She was expensively dressed, but her face was anxious.

"You're quite ready, Sue?" he said.

The woman pointed to the packages. "Oh, yes," she said. "I'm ready, though I'll have to leave most two hundred dollars' worth of clothes behind me. I've no use for taking in plain sewing while you think over what you've brought me to in the penitentiary."

Slocum smiled dryly. "If you hadn't wanted quite many dry goods, I'm not sure it would have come to this. Tom will have the horses round in five minutes. You don't figure on taking all that truck with you?"

"I do," said the woman. "I've got to have something to put on when we get to Oregon!"

"Well," said Slocum, grimly, "I'll be quite glad to get out with a whole hide, and I guess it couldn't be done if we started with a packhorse train or a waggon. I hadn't quite fixed to light out until I got the message that Devine, who didn't seem pleased with the last accounts, was coming in."

"Could you have stood the boys off?"

"I might have done," said Slocum, reflectively. "Still, I couldn't stand off Devine. It's dollars he's coming for, and I've got 'bout half the accounts call for here."

"You're going to leave him them?"

Slocum laughed. "No," he said.

"I guess they'll come in handy in Oregon. I'm going to leave him the boys to reckon with. They'll be here with clubs soon after the cars come in, and we'll be a league away down the trail by then."

A patter of horsehoofs outside cut short the colloquy, though there was a brief altercation when the woman once more insisted on taking all the packages with her. Slocum terminated it by bundling her out of the door, and, when she tearfully consented to mount a kicking pony, swung himself to the saddle. Still, for several minutes his heart was in his mouth, as he picked his way through the blacker shadows on the skirt of the beaten trail, until a man rose suddenly out of them.

"Hallo!" he said. "Where're you going?"

Slocum gave his wife's pony a cut with the switch he held, and then laughed as he turned to the man.

"I guess that's my business, but I'm going out of town."

"Quite sure?" said the other, who made a sudden clutch at his bridle.

He did not reach it, for Slocum was ready with hand and heel and the switch came down upon the outstretched arm. Then there was a rapid beat of hoofs, and Slocum swept off his hat to the gasping man.

"I guess I am," he said. "You'll tell the boys I'm sorry I couldn't wait for them."

Then he struck his wife's horse again. "Let him go," he said. "We'll have three or four of them after us in about ten minutes."

The woman said nothing, but braced herself to ride, and, while the beat of hoofs grew fainter among the silent pines, the man on foot ran gasping up the climbing trail. There was bustle and consternation when he reached the wooden town, and, while two or three men who had good horses hastily saddled them, the rest collected, and presently a body of silent men proceeded towards the Slocum dwelling. As they stopped in front of it, the hoot of a whistle came ringing across the pines, and there was an increasing roar as a train came up the valley. That, however, did not, so they fancied, concern them, and they commenced a parley with the local constable, who came hurrying after them.

"What d'you figure on doing with those clubs, boys?" he said.

"Seasoning them," said somebody. "Mine's quite soft and green. Now, why're you not taking the trail after Slocum? The province allows you for a horse, and Hake Guffy's has three good legs on him, anyway."

The constable waved his hand, deprecatingly. "He fell down and hurt one of them hauling green stuff to the depot. I guess I'd have to shove him most of the way. What've you come round here for, anyway?"

The man who had spoken made a little gesture of resignation. "Well," he said, "we are going in to see if Slocum has left any of the dollars he beat us out of behind him."

"No," said the constable, stoutly. "Nobody's going in there without a warrant, unless it's me."

There was a little murmur. The man was elderly, and a trifle infirm, but he turned upon the threshold and faced the crowd resolutely.

"Go home!" said one man. "They're not your dollars, anyway."

"Boys," and the old man swung an arm aloft, "I'm going to make considerable trouble for the man who lays a hand on me. Slocum wasn't fool enough to leave anything he could carry off."

"We don't want to hurt you," said one, "but we're going in."

There was a growl of approbation, and the men were closing in upon the door when a stranger pushed his way through the midst of them, and then swung round and stood facing them beside the constable. He held himself commandingly, and the crowd gave back a little.

"Go home, boys!" he said. "I'll most certainly have the law of any man who puts his foot inside this door."

There was a little ironical laughter. Half the men of the settlement were present there, and a good many of them had bought land from, or trusted their spare dollars to, Slocum.

"Who are you, anyway?" said one.

The stranger laughed. "The man who owns the building. My name's Devine."

It was a bold announcement, for those who heard him were not in the best of humours then, or disposed to concern themselves with the question how far the principal was responsible for the doings of his agent.

"The boss thief!" said somebody. "Get hold of him, and bring him along to the hotel. Then, if Thorkell can't lock him up, we'll consider what we'll do with him."

"No," said another. "He'll keep for a little without going bad, and we're here to see if Slocum left anything behind. Break that door in!"

It was a critical moment, for the crowd surged closer about the pair. At any sign of weakness it would, perhaps, have gone hardly with them, but the elderly con-

stable stood very still and quiet, with empty hands, while Devine fumbled inside his jacket. Then he swung one foot forward, and his right arm rose, until his hand, which was clenched on a dusky object, was level with his shoulder.

"Boys," he said, dryly, "somebody's going to get hurt in another minute. This is my office, and I can't do with any of you inside it to-night."

"Then, if you hand our dollars out, it would suit us most as well," said the spokesman.

Devine appeared to laugh softly. "I guess there are very few of them there. Anybody who can prove a claim on me will get satisfaction, but he'll have to wait. You'll find me right here when you come along to-morrow."

"Are you going to give every man back the dollars Slocum got from him?"

Devine laughed openly.

"No," he said, dryly. "That's just what I'm not going to do. A man takes his chances when he makes a deal in land, and can't expect to cry off his bargains when they go against him. Still, if any one will bring me proof that Slocum swindled him, I'll see what I can do, but I guess it will be very little if some of you destroy the books and papers he recorded the deals in. You'll have to wait until to-morrow, while I worry through them."

His resolution had its due effect.

"I guess there's sense in that," said one.

"I'm for letting him have until to-morrow, anyway," said another. "Still, the papers aren't there. Where's John Collier. He picked up some books and truck Slocum slung away when he met him on the trail."

"I've got them right here," and another man stepped forward. "I was coming in from the ranch when I heard two horses pounding down the trail, and jumped clear into the fern. The man who went past me tried

to sling a package into the gully, but dropped the thing. He went on at a gallop, and I groped round and picked the package up."

Devine lowered the pistol, and turned quietly to the crowd. "Now, if you'll let me have those books and go home quietly, I'll have straightened Slocum's affairs out by to-morrow, and be ready to see what can be done for you."

The men were evidently wavering, and there was a brief consultation, after which the leader turned to Devine.

"We've no use for making any trouble that can be helped, and we'll go home," he said. "You can have those books, and a committee will come round to see what you've fixed up after breakfast to-morrow."

Devine nodded. "I guess you're wise," he said. "Good-night, boys!"

They went away, and left him to go in with the constable, who came out in a few minutes with a contented grin, which suggested that Devine had signified his appreciation of his efforts liberally. The latter, however, sat down, dusty and worn with an arduous journey, to undertake a night's hard work. He had left the Canopus before sunrise, and spent most of the day in the saddle, but nobody would have suspected him of weariness as he sat, grim and intent of face, before a table littered with papers.

The settlement was very still, and the lamp-light paling as the chilly dawn crept in, when at last he opened a book that recorded Slocum's dealings several years back. Devine smiled somewhat dryly as he came upon one entry—

"24th. 6,000 dollars from Harford Brooke, in purchase of 400 acres bush land, Quatomac Valley. Ref. 22, slip B.

Devine turned up 22 B, and read: "Mem. About 150 acres 200-foot pines, with gravel sub-soil, and very

little mould on top of it. Rest of it rock. Oregon man bid 1000 dollars on the 2nd, but asked for re-survey and cried off. 12th. Gave Custer four days' option at 950. 20th. Asked the British sucker 6,500, and clinched the deal at 6,000."

Devine closed the book, and sat thoughtfully still for a minute or two. The epithet his agent had applied to Brooke carried with it the stigma of puerile folly in that country, and Devine had usually very little sympathy with the men it could be fittingly attached to. Still, he felt that nobody could term his contractor a sucker now, and he had just discovered that he had been systematically plundered himself. Several points which had given him food for reflection also became suddenly plain, and he lighted another cigar before he fell to work again. He had, however, in the meanwhile, decided what course to adopt with Brooke, when he went back to the Canopus mine.

CHAPTER XX

THE BRIDGING OF THE CAÑON

It was a week or two after he undertook the investigation of Slocum's affairs, and once more the light was failing, when Devine stood at the head of the gully above the cañon. His wife and Barbara were with him, and they were about to descend, when a cluster of moving figures appeared on the opposite hillside. So far as Devine could make out, they were rolling down two or three small firs.

The river was veiled in white mist now, but there was sufficient light above to show the rope which spanned the awful chasm. It swept downwards in a flattened curve, slender and ethereal, and lost itself in the gloom of the rocks across the cañon. Barbara, however,

fancied she realized what it had cost the flume-builder to place it there, and, as he glanced at it, a somewhat curious look crept into Devine's eyes. He knew that slender thread of steel had only been flung across the hollow at the risk of life and limb, and under a heavy nervous strain.

"If we are going down, hadn't we better start?" said Mrs. Devine.

Devine smiled. "I'm not sure we'll go at all. It seems to me Brooke means to give the thing a private trial before he asks me to come over and see it work, and that's why he waited until it was almost dark. Can you make him out, Barbara?"

Barbara had already done so, but she realized that her sister's eyes were upon her, and for no very apparent reason preferred not to admit it.

"It is getting a little shadowy among the pines, and Katty used to tell me she had sharper eyes than mine," she said.

Mrs. Devine laughed. "Still," she said reflectively, "I scarcely think I have seen Mr. Brooke quite so often as you have."

"Well," Devine said, "I'm older than either of you, but I can make him out myself now. As usual, he seems to be doing most of the work."

Nobody said anything further, and the moving figures stopped where the rope ran into the shadows of the rocks, while it was a few minutes later when a long, dusky object swung out on it. It slid somewhat slowly down the incline, and then stopped where the slight curve led upward, and remained dangling high above the hidden river. A shout came faintly through the roar of water in the gulf below, and the dark mass oscillated violently, but otherwise remained immovable.

"What are they doing? Shouldn't it have run all the way across?" asked Mrs. Devine.

Devine nodded. "I guess they're 'most pulling their

arms off trying to haul the thing across," he said. "It should have come itself, but the sheave the trolly runs on must have jammed, or they haven't pulled all the kinks out of the rope."

The suspended trunk still oscillated, and a faint clinking came up with a hoarse murmur of voices from the hollow. Devine, who pointed to a fallen cedar, took out his cigar-case.

"We'll stay and see the thing out," he said. "I guess the boys have quite enough to worry them just now."

Barbara surmised that most of the anxiety would fall on Brooke, and wondered why she should feel as eager as she did to see the fir trunk safely swung across.

In the meanwhile, it was growing darker, and she could not quite see what the dim figures across the river were doing. They did not, in fact, appear, to be doing anything in particular, beyond standing in a group while the rope no longer oscillated.

Then it was with a little thrill of anticipation she saw there was a movement among the dusky figures at last, but it cost her an effort to sit still when one of them appeared to move out on the rope, for she felt she knew who it must be. Devine rose sharply, and flung his cigar away, while his wife seemed to shiver apprehensively.

"One of them is coming across. Isn't it horribly dangerous?" she said.

Devine nodded. "It depends a good deal on what he means to do, but if he figures on clearing the jammed trolly there is a risk, especially to a man who has only one sound hand," he said. "They've slung him under the spare one. It's most probably Brooke."

Mrs. Devine glanced at Barbara, and fancied that the rigidity of her attitude was a trifle significant. The girl, however, said nothing, for her lips were pressed together, and she felt a shiver run through her as she watched the

dusky figure sliding down the curving rope. She held her breath when it stopped, and swung perilously beside the pine trunk which oscillated too, and then clenched her fingers viciously as it rose and apparently clutched at something overhead. Then she became sensible of the distressful beating of her heart, and that the tension was growing unendurable.

Barbara never knew how long she sat there with set lips and straining eyes, but the time seemed interminable, until at last she gasped when Devine moved abruptly.

"I guess he has done it," he said. "That man has hard sand in him."

The dusky trunk slid onward, the dangling figure followed it; and a hoarse cry, that had a note of exultation in it as well as relief, came up when they vanished into the gloom beneath the dark rock's side.

"They've got him, but I guess that's not all they mean," said Devine. "Whatever was wrong with it, he has fixed the thing. They've beaten the cañon. The sling's working."

Then Barbara, rising, stood very straight, with a curious feeling that she had a personal part in those men's triumph. It did not even seem to matter when she felt that Mrs. Devine was looking at her.

"Why don't you shout?" said the latter, significantly.

Barbara laughed, but there was a little vibration in her voice her sister had not often noticed there.

"If I thought any one could hear me, I certainly would," she said.

They stayed where they were a few minutes, until once more a faint creaking and rattling came out of the mist, and an object, that was scarcely distinguishable, swung across the chasm. Another followed, until Barbara had counted three of them and Devine laughed dryly as they turned away.

"It's eight miles round by the cañon foot, where one

can get across by the big redwood log, but I guess they'd have taken the trail if Brooke hadn't given them a lead," he said. "It's not easy to understand any one, but that's a curious kind of man."

"Is Mr. Brooke more peculiar than the rest of you?" asked Barbara.

"It kind of seems to me he is being pulled hard two ways at once just now," said Devine, with a laugh.

Barbara asked no more questions, and said very little to her sister as they walked home through the pines. She could not blot out the picture which, for a few intense minutes, she had gazed upon, though it had been exasperatingly blurred, and, she felt, considering what it stood for, ineffective in itself—a dim, half-seen figure, dwarfed to insignificance, swinging across a background of filmy mist. There had been nothing at that distance to suggest the intensity of the effort which was the expression of an unyielding will, but she had, by some subtle sympathy, grasped it all—the daring that recognized the peril and disregarded it, and the thrill of the triumph, the wholesome satisfaction born of the struggle with the primitive forces of the universe which man was meant to wage.

That the man who had bridged the cañon would admit any feelings of the kind was, she knew, not to be expected. Men of his description, she had discovered, very seldom do. Yet he had once told her that she had brought him a sword, and, as she had certainly shivered at his peril, she could, without asking herself troublesome questions, now participate in the victory he had won.

In the meanwhile, Brooke had flung himself down in a folding-chair in his tent. He was soaked with perspiration, his hard hands still quivered a little from the nervous strain, but he was, for the time being, sensible of a quiet exultation. He had done a difficult and dangerous thing, and the flush of success had swept away all his anxieties. He, however, found it a trifle difficult to sit

still, and was carefully selecting a cigar in an attempt to compose himself, when a man came in, and took the chair opposite him. Then his face grew a trifle hard, and all sense of satisfaction was suddenly reft away from him.

"I scarcely expected you quite so soon, Saxton," he said. "Here are cigars; you'll find some drinkables in the box yonder."

Saxton opened the box he pointed to, and then looked at him with a grin as he took out a bottle.

"I've no great use for California wine. Bourbon whisky's good enough for me," he said. "Who've you been entertaining? Not Devine, anyway."

"Isn't the question a little outside the mark?"

Saxton laughed. "Well, I'm here; but on the other occasions it was I who sent for you."

"There is, however, a difference on this one. The fact is, I've been busy."

"Well," said Saxton, "we'll get down to the business one. Still, how'd you get your arm in a sling?"

"Are you sure you don't know?"

"Quite!" and Saxton's sincerity was evident. "How should I?"

"I had fancied you knew all about it by this time, and felt a little astonished that you didn't come over, but I see I was mistaken. I tried to get hold of Devine's papers, and came upon another man attempting the same thing. During the difference of opinion that followed he shot me."

Saxton rose, and, kicking his chair aside, condemned himself several times as he moved up and down the tent.

"To be quite straight, I put another man on to it, as you didn't seem to be making much of a show," he said. "Still, what in the name of thunder did he want to shoot you for, when he knew you were standing in with me?"

"I can't say. The difficulty was that I was not as well informed as he seems to have been. It would have paid you better to be frank with me. Hasn't the man come back to you?"

"No," and Saxton's face grew a trifle vicious, "he hasn't—concern him! You see what that brings us to? It's plain he meant to find out what I wanted, and then, if he couldn't make use of it himself, sell it to me. There are three of us after the same thing now."

Brooke shook his head. "No," he said, dryly, "I don't think there are. You and the other man make two, while I scarcely fancy either of you will get hold of the papers, because I gave them back to Devine, and he has sent them to Vancouver."

"You had them?" and Saxton gasped.

"I had," said Brooke. "They were put up in a very flimsy packet, which Mrs. Devine handed me. I did not, however, look at one of them."

Saxton stared at him.

"Well," he said, "may I be shot if I ever struck another man like you! What, in the name of thunder, made you let Devine have them back for?"

"I really don't think you would appreciate my motives, especially as I'm not quite sure I understand them myself. Anyway, I did it, and that, of course, implies that there can be no further understanding between you and me. I've had enough of it."

Saxton appeared to restrain himself with an effort.

"No doubt I could worry along as well without you, but there's a question to be answered," he said, dryly. "Do you mean to give me away?"

"It's not one I appreciate, and it seems to me a trifle unnecessary. You can reassure yourself on that point."

Saxton took a drink of whisky. "Well," he said, meditatively, "I guess I can trust you, and I'm not going to worry about letting you off the deal. There's just

another thing. It's business I have on hand, and life's too short for any man to waste time he could pile up dollars in, trying to get even with a partner who has gone back on him. I've a kind of liking for you—but you'll most certainly get hurt if you put yourself in my way. It's a friendly warning."

CHAPTER XXI

DEVINE'S OFFER

EVENING had come round again when Brooke called at the ranch, in response to a brief note from Devine, and found the latter sitting at his office table.

"Take a cigar, if you feel like it, Mr. Brooke. We have got to have a talk," he said.

Brooke did as he suggested, and when he sat down, Devine passed a strip of paper across to him.

"There's your cheque for the tramway. I'll ask you for a receipt," he said. "Make up an account of what the dam has cost you to-morrow, and we'll try to arrange the thing so's to suit both of us."

Brooke appeared a trifle astonished. "It is by no means finished, sir."

"Well," said Devine, dryly, "I'm not quite sure it ever will be. The mine no longer belongs to me. It's part of the Dayspring Consolidated Mineral Properties. I've been working the thing up quietly for quite a while now, and I've a cable from London that the deal's put through."

Brooke, remembering what he had heard from Saxton, looked hard at him. "You have sold it out to English company promoters?"

"Not exactly! I'm taking so many thousand dollars down, and a controlling share of the stock. I'm also the

boss director, with power to run operations as appears advisable. How does the deal strike you?"

"Since you ask for my opinion, I fancy I should have preferred a good many dollars, and very little stock."

Devine glanced at him with a curious smile.

"You believe Allonby's a crank?"

"Other people do. On my part, I'm not quite sure of it. Still, the men who spend their money to prove him right will run a heavy risk, especially as there appears to be no ore that's worth reduction in the mine, so far as it has been opened up."

"How do you know what is in the Dayspring?" and Devine looked at him steadily.

Brooke made a little gesture. "I don't think that point's important," he said. "You, no doubt, had a purpose in telling me as much as you have done?"

Devine did not answer for a moment or two, and Brooke was sensible of a slight bewilderment as he watched him.

Then Devine made a sign that he desired attention. "When I told you this, I had a purpose," he said. "We are going to spend a pile of dollars on the Dayspring, and my part of the business lies in the city. Wilkins stays right at the Canopus, and while Allonby goes along with the mine it's too big a contract to reform him. I want a man to take charge at the Dayspring under him, and we might make it worth your while."

Brooke gasped, and felt his face becoming warm.

"I have very little practical experience of mining, sir," he said.

Devine nodded tranquilly. "Allonby has enough for two, but he lets up and loses his grip when the whisky comes along," he said. "Still, I guess you have got something that's worth rather more to me. You couldn't help having it. It was born in you."

Brooke sat silent for a space, with an unpleasant realization of the fact that Devine's keen eyes were

watching him. He had come there with the intention of severing his connexion with the man, and now that astonishing offer had been made him in the very room he had not long ago crept into with the purpose of plundering him. Every detail of what had happened on that eventful night came back to him, and he remembered, with a sickening sense of degradation, how he had leaned upon the table where Devine was sitting then and permitted the startled girl to force her thanks on him. Devine looked at him with disconcerting steadiness.

"You have more reasons than the one you gave me for not taking hold?" he said.

Suddenly, Brooke made up his mind. He was sick of the care of deception, and he now seized upon the opportunity of placing a continuance in it out of the question.

"I have, and can't help fancying that one of them is a tolerably good one," he said. "You see, you really know very little about me."

"Go on," said Devine. "I'm quite willing to back my opinion of a mine or man. Besides, I have picked up one or two pointers about you."

"Still," said Brooke, very slowly, "you don't know why I came here to build that flume for you."

Then he gasped with astonishment, for Devine laughed.

"Well," he said, "I guess I do."

Brooke rose abruptly, and stood looking down on him.

"You know I meant to jump the claim?" he said.

"I had a notion that you meant to try."

"And you let me stay on?" Brooke said.

"I did. It was plain you couldn't hurt me, and there was a kind of humour in the thing. I had just to put my hand down and squelch you when I felt like it."

Brooke recognized that he had deserved this. He wondered vacantly at his folly in even fancying that he or Saxton could prove a match for such a man.

Then Devine made a little gesture. "Hadn't you better sit down? We're not quite through yet."

Brooke did as he suggested.

"Still——" he said.

Devine smiled again. "You don't quite understand? Well, I'll try to make it plain. You make about the poorest kind of claim-jumper I ever ran up against. You haven't it in you. If you had you'd have stayed right with it, and not let the dam-building get hold of you so that you scarcely remembered what you came here for. You couldn't help that, either."

To be turned inside out in this fashion was almost too disconcerting to be exasperating, and Brooke sat stupidly silent for a moment or two.

"After all, we need not go into that," he said. "I suppose what I meant to do requires no defence in this country, but while I am by no means proud of it, I should never have undertaken it had you not sold me a worthless ranch. I purposed doing nothing more than getting my six thousand dollars back."

"You figure that would have contented the man behind you?"

Brooke was once more startled.

"You think there was another man?" he said.

Devine laughed. "I guess I'm sure. Who is he?"

"That, is more than I feel at liberty to tell. I have, however, broken with him once for all."

Devine made a little gesture which implied that the point was of no great importance. "Well," he said, "I guess I've no great cause to be afraid of him, if he was content to have you for a partner. The question is—Are you going to take my offer?"

"You are asking me seriously?"

"I am. It seems to me I sized you up correctly quite a while ago, and you have had about enough claim-jumping. As the mining laws stand, it's a legitimate occupation, and you tell me you only figured on getting your dollars back. Well, if you want them, you can work for them at a reasonable salary."

"Then you disclaim all responsibility for your agent's doings?" he said.

"No," said Devine, dryly. "If Slocum had swindled you, it would have been different, but you made a foolish deal, and you have got to stand up to it. Nobody was going to stop you surveying that land before you bought it, or getting a man who knew its value to do it for you. I'm offering you the option of working for those six thousand dollars. Do you take it?"

Brooke scarcely considered. The money was no longer the chief inducement, for, as Devine had expressed it, the work had got hold of him.

"Yes," he said, simply.

Devine nodded. "Then we'll go into the thing right now," he said. "You'll start for the Dayspring soon as you can to-morrow."

An hour had passed before they had arranged everything. Then, as it happened, Brooke came upon Barbara in the log-walled hall as he was leaving the ranch, and stood still a moment irresolute. Whether Devine would tell her or his wife what had passed between them he did not know, but it appeared probable, and just then he shrank from meeting her.

"So you are not going out on the trail that leads to nowhere in particular, after all?" she said.

Brooke showed his astonishment. "You knew what Devine meant to offer me?"

"Of course!" and Barbara smiled. "I think he did wisely."

"Now, I wonder why?"

Barbara laughed softly. "Don't you think the question is a little difficult, or do you expect me to present you with a catalogue of your virtues?"

"I'm afraid the latter is out of the question. You would want, at least, several items."

"And you imply that I should have a difficulty in finding them?"

Brooke had spoken lightly, partly because the interview with Devine had put a strain on him, and he dare scarcely trust himself just then, but a tide of feeling swept him away, and his face grew suddenly grim. The girl was very alluring, and her smile showed that she had reposed her confidence in him.

"Yes," he said, "you would have the greatest difficulty in finding one, and I am almost glad that I am going away to-morrow. Such a man as I am is scarcely fit to speak to you."

Barbara was distinctly startled. She had never heard the man speak in that fashion, and his set face and vibrant voice were new to her.

"I suppose we, all of us, have moods of self-depreciation occasionally," she said. "Still, one would not have fancied that you were unduly morbid, and one part of that little speech was a trifle inexplicable."

Brooke laughed, but the girl noticed that one of his lean, hard hands was closed as he looked down on her.

"There are times when one has to be one's self, and civilities don't seem to count," he said. "I am glad that I am going away, because if I stayed here I should lose the last shred of my self-respect. As a matter of fact, I have very little left, but that little is valuable, if only because it was you who gave it me."

"Still, one would signally fail to see how you could lose it here."

Brooke stood still, looking at her with signs of struggle, and, she could almost fancy, passion, in his set face.

"You will probably understand it all by and by," he said. "I can only ask you not to think too hardly of me when that happens."

Then, as one making a strenuous effort, he turned abruptly away, and Barbara went back to the room where her sister sat, very thoughtfully.

Brooke in the meanwhile swung savagely along the trail, beneath the shadowy pines, for he recognized, with

a painful distinctness, that Barbara Heathcote's view of his conduct was by no means likely to coincide with Devine's, and he could picture her disgust when the revelation came, while it was only now, when he would in all probability never meet her on the same terms again, he realized the intensity of his longing for the girl.

CHAPTER XXII

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

It was already late at night, but the mounted mail carrier had not reached the Dayspring mine, and Allonby, who was impatiently waiting news of certain supplies and plant, had insisted on Brooke sitting up with him. It was also raining hard, and, in spite of the glowing stove, the shanty reeked with damp, while there was a steady splashing upon the iron roof above.

Brooke lay drowsily in a canvas chair, while Allonby sat at the uncleanly table, with a litter of burnt matches and tobacco ash as well as a steaming glass in front of him. His eyes were bleared and watery, and there were curious little patches of colour in his haggard face, while the gorged, blue veins showed upon his forehead. He had been discoursing in a maudlin fashion which Brooke, who had endeavoured to make the best of his company during the last three months, found singularly exasperating, but he moved abruptly when a stream of water from the roof descended upon his grizzled head.

"That," he said, "is one of the trifles a man with a sense of proportion makes light of. The curse of this effete age is its ceaseless striving after luxury."

Brooke laughed softly, as he watched the water run down the moralizer's nose. "It is," he said, "at least, not often attainable in this country."

"Which is precisely why men grow rich in the Colonies.

Now, here are you and I, who at one time in our lives re- four or five courses for dinner, not only subsisting, ving upon grindstone bread, flapjacks, molasses, contents of certain cars from Chicago, which one even be certain are what they are averred to be."

tancy you are taking a good deal for granted," ke said dryly.

Allonby made a deprecatory gesture. "I am seldom mistaken about the points of a man who has moved in good society, though I may admit that it was the ruin of me. Had I been brought up in this country, one-third of my income would have sufficed me, and I should have made provision for my grey hairs with the rest. As it was, I wasted my substance, and, unfortunately, that of other men who had undue confidence in me, in London clubs, with the result that I am now what is sometimes termed a waster in the land of promise."

"It is not very difficult to get through a good deal of one's substance in a certain fashion, even in Canada," and Brooke glanced reflectively at the array of empty bottles.

"That point of view, although a popular one, is illusory, which can be demonstrated by mathematics. A man, it is evident, cannot drink more than a certain quantity of whisky. His physical capacity precludes it, while even in my bad weeks the cost of it could not well exceed some eight dollars. Excluding that item, one could live contentedly here at an outlay of one dollar daily, if he did not, unfortunately, possess a memory."

It seemed to Brooke that this latter observation might be true, if one had, at least, any hope for the future. Allonby's day was nearly done, and he had only the past to return and trouble him, but Brooke felt just then that, in spite of his pride in the profession which had been rather forced upon him than adopted, he had very little to look forward to, since he had, by his own folly, made the one thing he longed for above all others

unattainable. He had been three months at the Dayspring, and had heard nothing from Barbara. She must, he fancied, have discovered the part he had played by this time, and would blot him out of her memory, while now, when it seemed conceivable that he might make his mark in Canada, all that this implied had become valueless to him. Wealth and celebrity might perhaps be attainable, but there would be nobody to share them with, for he realized that Barbara Heathcote did not possess the easy toleration on certain points which appeared to characterize Saxton and Devine. In the meanwhile, Allonby did not seem pleased with his silence.

"You are," he said, a trifle thickly, "by no means an entertaining companion. Here am I, who was accustomed to fare sumptuously in London clubs, living on the husks and other metaphorical etceteras, and endeavouring to console myself with profitless reflections. I am, of course, in the simile of the country, a tank, or whisky-skin, but I am still a man who found a fortune and stripped himself of everything but whisky to develop it."

Brooke laughed to conceal his impatience. "Then you are as sure as ever about the silver? We have got a good way down without finding very much sign of it."

Allonby rose, and leaned, somewhat unsteadily, upon the table.

"It is the one thing I believe in. All I made in Canada is sunk in this mine, which no longer belongs to me, and when I make the great discovery not a dollar will fall to my share."

"Then it is a little difficult to understand what you are so anxious to find the silver for."

Allonby swayed a trifle on his feet. "You," he said, "are deficient in comprehension, but you never won a case of medals that were coveted by the keenest brains among all those who hoped to enter your pro-

fession. Of what use are dollars to a whisky-tank who will, in all probability, be found mangled at the bottom of the shaft one day? Still, when I made the calculations we are now working on, there was no man in the province with a knowledge equal to mine, and I ask no more than to prove them right."

Brooke sat silent, because he could think of nothing appropriate to say.

Then Allonby lurched unsteadily to the door, and held his hand up as he opened it.

"Listen!" he said. "Is that the mail carrier? I must know when we'll get those drills and the giant powder before I sleep. The sinking goes on slowly, and life is uncertain when one drinks whisky as I do."

Brooke listened, and, for a time, heard only the splash from the pine boughs and the patter of the rain. Then a faint, measured thudding came up the valley, and he remembered afterwards that he felt a curious sense of anticipation. The sound swelled into the beat of horse-hoofs floundering and slipping on the wet gravel, and Brooke smiled at his eagerness, for though he had, he fancied, cut himself off from all that concerned his past in England, he had never been quite able to await the approach of a mail carrier with complete indifference.

Then there was a clatter of hoofs on wet rock, and a shout, as a man pulled his jaded beast up in the darkness outside, while a dripping packet was flung into the room. Brooke could see nobody, but a voice said, "That's your lot; I guess I can't stop. Got to make Truscott's before I sleep, and the beast's gone lame."

The rattle of hoofs commenced again, and Brooke sat idly watching Allonby, who was tearing open the packet with shaky fingers.

"The tools and powder are coming up," he said. "Hallo! Excuse my inadvertence, Brooke. This one's apparently for you."

Brooke caught the big blue envelope tossed across to

him, and when he had taken out several precisely folded papers and glanced at the sheet of stiff legal writing, sat still, staring vacantly straight in front of him. The uncleanly shanty faded from before his eyes and he was not even conscious that Allonby, who had laid down his own correspondence, was watching him until the latter broke the silence.

"I know that style of envelope, but it is, presumably, too long since you left England for it to contain any unpleasant reference to a debt!" he said. "Has somebody been leaving you a fortune?"

Brooke smiled in a curious, listless fashion. "No," he said, "not a fortune. Still, I suppose one could almost consider it a competence."

"Then you appear singularly free from the satisfaction one would naturally expect from a man who had just received any news of that description," said Allonby, dryly.

Brooke's face grew grim. "If it had come a little earlier it might have been of much more use to me."

Once more Brooke sat motionless, with the letter in his hand, and the enclosures that had slipped from his fingers strewn about the floor. He had been left with what any one with simple tastes would have considered a moderate competence by the man he had quarrelled with, and he gathered from the lawyer's letter that, if he wished it, there would be no difficulty in at once realizing the property. It naturally amounted to considerably more than six thousand dollars he had sold his self-respect for, and at the moment he was only sensible of a bitter regret that the news had not come to hand a little earlier.

If that had happened, he would never have made the attempt upon the papers, and might have broken with Saxton without the necessity for any explanation with Devine. He had no doubt that the latter had acquainted his wife and Barbara, which meant that he would be branded for ever as rather worse than a thief in her eyes.

The money which would have saved him, and might have bought him happiness, was, he felt, almost useless to him now.

Brooke gazed at the letter he held with vacant eyes. Then it occurred to him that there was a discrepancy between the time when the will was made and that on which the news of it had been sent to him, and as he stooped to pick up the papers he came upon a black-edged envelope. He recognized the writing, and, hastily opening it, found it was from an English kinsman.

"You will be sorry to hear that Austin Dangerfield has succumbed at last," he read. "He was, perhaps, a little hard upon you at one time, but Clara and I felt that he was right in his objections to Lucy all along, and no doubt you realized it when she married Shafton Coulson. However that may be, the old man mentioned you frequently a little before the end, and seemed to feel the fact that he had driven you away, which was, no doubt, what induced him to leave you most of his personal property. Baron and Rodway will have sent you a schedule, and, as one of the executors, I would say that we had some difficulty in finding where to address you until we heard from Coulson that Lucy had met you. There is one point I feel I should refer to. As you will notice, part of the estate is represented by stock in a Canadian mine. Austin, whose mental grip was getting a trifle slack latterly, appears to have been led rather too much by Shafton Coulson in the stock operations he was fond of dabbling in, and I fancy it was by the latter's advice he made the purchase. There is very little demand for the shares on the market here, but you will perhaps be able to form an accurate opinion concerning their value."

Brooke laid down the letter, and took up the lawyers' schedule. Then he laughed curiously as he realized that a considerable proportion of his legacy was represented by shares in the Dayspring Consols. One of the

mines, he knew, was liable to be jumped at any moment, and the other was worthless, unless the opinion of his half-crazy companion could be taken seriously.

Allonby turned at the sound. "One would scarcely have fancied from that laugh that you were feeling very much more pleased than you were when you hadn't gone into the affair," he said.

"Then it was a tolerably accurate reflection of my state of mind," said Brooke. "This legacy, which came along two or three months after the time when it would have been of vital importance to me, consists in part shares in this very mine. That is naturally about the last thing I would have desired or expected, and results from one of the curious conjunctions of circumstances which, I suppose, come about now and then. When the thing one has longed for does come along, it is generally at a time when the wish for it has gone."

"Commiseration would be a little unnecessary," said Allonby. "The competence you mention will certainly prove a fortune before you are very much older."

"I don't feel by any means as sure of it as you seem to be. Still, it doesn't greatly matter."

Allonby, with some difficulty, straightened himself. "I am," he said, "a wastrel and a whisky-tank, but I'll live to show the men who look down on me with contemptuous pity what I was once capable of. That is all I am holding on to life for."

For a moment he stood almost erect, and then collapsed suddenly into his chair. "Devine has a brain of another and very much lower order, though it is of a kind that is apt to prove more useful to its possessor, and in his own sphere there are very few men to equal him. If I do not fall down the shaft in the meanwhile, we will certainly show this province what we can do together. And now it is advisable for me to go to bed, while I feel capable of reaching it. My head is at least as clear as usual, but my legs are unruly."

CHAPTER XXIII

BROOKE'S CONFESSION

THE Pacific express had just come in, and the C.P.R. wharf at Vancouver was thronged with a hurrying crowd when Barbara Heathcote and her sister stood leaning upon the rails of the s.s. *Islander*. Beneath them a stream of passengers flowed up the gangway. Barbara, who was crossing to Victoria, watched them languidly, until an elaborately-dressed woman ascended, leaning upon the arm of a man whose fastidious neatness of attire and air of indifference to the confusion about him proclaimed him an Englishman. She made a very slight inclination when the woman smiled at her.

"It is fortunate she can't very well get at us here," she said, glancing at the pile of baggage which cut them off from the rest of the deck. "Three or four hours of Mrs. Coulson's conversation would be a good deal more than I could appreciate."

"You need scarcely be afraid of it in the meanwhile," said Mrs. Devine. "It is a trifle difficult to hear one's self speak."

"For which her husband is no doubt thankful. Until I met them once or twice I wondered why that man wore an habitually tired expression."

Mrs. Devine laughed. "You don't like the woman?"

"No," said Barbara, reflectively. "I really don't know why I shouldn't, but I don't. She certainly poses too much, and the last time I had the pleasure of listening to her at the Wheelers' house she patronized me and the country too graciously."

"I wonder if she asked you anything about Brooke?"

"No," said Barbara, a trifle sharply. "Where could she have met him?"

"In England. She seemed to know he was at the Dayspring, and managed, I fancy intentionally, to

leave me with the impression that they were especial friends in the Old Country. I wonder if she knows he will be on board to-day?"

"Mr. Brooke is crossing with us?" said Barbara, with an indifference her sister had some doubts about.

"Grant seemed to expect him. He is going to buy American mining machinery or something of the kind in Victoria. I believe it was he Grant left us to meet."

Barbara said nothing, though she was sensible of a curious little thrill. She had not seen Brooke since the evening he had behaved in what was an apparently inexplicable fashion at the ranch, and had heard very little about him. She, however, watched the wharf intently, until she saw Devine accost a man with a bronzed face who was quietly threading his way through the hurrying groups, and her heart beat a trifle faster than usual as they moved together towards the steamer.

In the meanwhile Devine was talking rapidly to Brooke.

"Here is a letter for you that came in with yesterday's mail," he said. "Struck anything more encouraging at the mine since you wrote me?"

"No," said Brooke. "I'm afraid we haven't. Still, Allonby seems as sure as ever and is most anxious to get the new plant in."

Devine appeared thoughtful. "You will have to knock off the big boring machine anyway. The mine's just swallowing dollars, and we'll have to go a trifle slower until some more come in. English directors didn't seem quite pleased last mail. Somebody in their papers has been slating the Dayspring property, and there's a good deal of stock they couldn't work off. In fact, they seemed inclined to kick at my last draft, and we'll want two or three more thousand dollars before the month is up."

Brooke would have liked to ask several questions, but between the clanging of the locomotive bell and the roar

of steam, conversation was difficult, and Devine's voice only reached him in broken snatches.

"Got to keep your hand down—spin every dollar out. I'm writing straight about another draft. Use the wires the moment you strike anything that would give the stock a lift."

"If you're going it's 'bout time you got aboard," said a seaman, who stood ready to launch the gangway in; and Brooke went up with a run.

Then the ropes were cast off, and he sat down to open his letter under the deckhouse, as the big white steamer swung out from the wharf. It was from the English kinsman who had previously written him, and confirmed what Devine had said.

"I'm sorry you are holding so much of the Canadian mining stock," he read. "You are, perhaps, better posted about the mine than I am, but though the shares were largely underwritten, I understand the promoters found it difficult to place a proportion of the rest, and my broker told me that several holders would be quite willing to get out at well under par already."

It was not exactly good news from any point of view, and Brooke was pondering over it somewhat moodily when he heard a voice he recognized, and looking up saw a woman with pale blue eyes smiling at him.

"Lucy!" he said, with evident astonishment.

"You looked so occupied that I was really afraid to disturb you," said the woman. "Shafton is talking politics with somebody, and I wonder if you are too busy to find a chair for me."

Brooke got one, and his companion, who was the woman Barbara had alluded to as Mrs. Coulson, sat down, and said nothing for a while as she gazed back across the blue inlet.

"This," she said at last, "would really be a beautiful country if everything wasn't quite so crude."

"It is certainly not exactly adapted to landscape-

gardening," said Brooke. "A two-thousand foot precipice and a hundred-league forest is a trifle big. Still, I'm not sure its inhabitants would appreciate such praise."

Lucy Coulson laughed. "They are like it in one respect—I don't mean in size—and delightfully touchy on the subject. Now, there was a girl I met not long ago who appeared quite displeased with me when I said that with a little improving one might compare it to Switzerland. I think her name was Devane, though it might have been her married sister's. Perhaps it's Canadian."

She fancied a trace of indignation crept into the man's bronzed face.

"One could scarcely call Miss Heathcote crude," he said.

Lucy Coulson did not inquire whether he was acquainted with the lady, but made a mental note of the fact.

"It, of course, depends upon one's standard of comparison," she said. "No doubt she comes up to the one adopted in this country. Still, though the latter is certainly pretty, what is keeping—you—in it now?"

"Then you have heard of my good fortune?"

"Of course! Shafton and I were delighted. Your executors wrote for your address to me."

Brooke started as he recognized that she must have learned the news a month before he did, for a good deal had happened in the meanwhile.

"Then it is a little curious that you did not mention it in the note you sent inviting me to meet you at the Glacier Lake," he said.

Lucy Coulson lifted her eyes to his a moment, and then glanced aside, while there was a significant softness in her voice as she said, "The news seemed so good that I wanted to be the one who told it you."

Again Brooke felt a disconcerting sense of embarrassment.

"It apparently became of less importance when I did not come," he said with a trace of dryness. "There is a reliable postal service in this country. Do you remember exactly what day you went to the Lake on?"

Mrs. Coulson laughed, and made a little half-petulant gesture. "I fancied you did not deserve to hear it when you could not contrive to come forty miles to see me. Still, I think I can remember the day."

She told him in another moment, and Brooke was sensible of a sudden thrill of anger that was for the most part a futile protest against the fact that his destiny should lie at the mercy of a vain woman's idle fancy, for had he known on the day she mentioned he would never have made the attempt upon Devine's papers. Barbara Heathcote, he decided, doubtless knew by this time what had brought him to the ranch on the eventful night, and even if she did not the imposition he had been guilty of then remained as a barrier between him and her.

"Harford," she said, gently, "are you very vexed with me?"

Brooke smiled in a somewhat strained fashion. "No," he said, "I scarcely think I am, and I have, at least, no right to be. I don't know whether you will consider it a sufficient excuse, but I was very busy on the day in question. I was, you see, under the necessity of earning my living."

"I think there was a time when you would not have let that stand in the way, but men are seldom very constant, are they?"

Brooke made no attempt to controvert the assertion. It seemed distinctly wiser to ignore it, since his companion apparently did not remember that she had now a husband who could hardly be expected to appreciate any unwavering devotion offered her. Then she turned towards him with disconcerting suddenness.

"Why don't you go home now you have enough to

live, with a little economy, as you were meant to do?" she said.

Brooke, who did not remember that she previously endeavoured to lead up to the question, started, for it was one which he had not infrequently asked himself of late, and the answer that the opportunity of proving his capabilities as a dam-builder and mining engineer had its attractions was, he knew, not quite sufficient in itself. Then, as it happened, Barbara Heathcote and Mrs. Devine, who appeared in the companion, came towards them along the deck, and Lucy Coulson noticed the glow in his eyes, that was followed by a sudden hardening of his face. Perhaps she guessed a little, or it was done out of wantonness, for she laid her white-gloved hand upon his arm and leaned forward a trifle.

"Harford," she said, looking up at him, "once upon a time you gave me your whole confidence."

Brooke hoped his face was expressionless, for he was unpleasantly sensible of that caressing touch upon his arm, as well as of the fact that his attitude, or, at least that of his companion, was distinctly liable to misconception by any one aware that she was another man's wife. He had no longer any tenderness for her, and she had in any case married Coulson.

"That was several years ago," he said.

Lucy Coulson laughed, and, though it is probable that she had seen them approach, turned with a little start that seemed unnecessarily apparent as Barbara and Mrs. Devine came up, while Brooke hoped his face did not suggest what he was thinking. As a matter of fact, it was distinctly flushed, which Barbara naturally noticed. She would have passed, but that Mrs. Coulson stopped her with a gesture.

"So glad to see you!" she said. "Can't you stay a little and talk to us? Harford, there are two unoccupied chairs yonder."

Brooke wished she would not persist in addressing

him as Harford, but he brought the chairs, and Mrs. Devine sat down. Barbara had no resource but to take the place beside her, and Lucy Coulson smiled at both of them.

"I believe Mrs. Devine mentioned that you had met Mr. Brooke," she said to the girl. "He is, of course, a very old friend of mine."

She contrived to give the words a significance which Brooke winced at, but he sat watching Barbara covertly while the others talked, or rather listened while Lucy Coulson did. Barbara scarcely glanced at him, but he fancied that Devine had not told her yet, or she would not have joined a group which included him at all. So half an hour slipped by while the white-painted steamer rolled along, past rocky islets shrouded in dusky pines, across a shining sea.

Mrs. Coulson, however, had no eyes to spare for any of it, for when they were not fixed upon the girl she was watching Brooke.

"Some of the men we met in the mountains were delightfully inconsequent," she said at length. "There was one called Saxton at a mine, who spent a good deal of one afternoon telling us about the reforms that ought to be made in the administration of this province, and which I fancy he intended to affect. The man was so much in earnest that one had to listen to him, and Shafton told me afterwards that he was, where business was concerned, evidently a great rascal. Still, perhaps, it is a little unwise to single the man out individually. There is always a risk of somebody who hears you being a friend of the person when you do that kind of thing—and now I remember he mentioned Mr. Brooke."

Brooke noticed that Barbara cast a swift glance at him, and wondered with a sudden anger if Lucy Coulson had not already done him harm enough. Then Barbara turned towards the latter.

"Saxton," she said, "is an utterly unprincipled man. You probably mistook his reference to Mr. Brooke."

Mrs. Coulson laughed. "Of course, I may have done, though I think he said Harford was a partner of his."

There was a sudden silence, and Brook felt Barbara's eyes upon him. He also saw that Mrs. Devine was rather more intent than usual, and that Lucy Coulson was wondering at the effect of what she had said. He felt that now she had mentioned the condemning fact, his one faint chance was to let Barbara have the explanation from his own lips instead of asking it from Devine. Still, he could scarcely do so when the rest were there, and Lucy Coulson, at least, showed no intention of leaving him and the girl alone. It was, in fact, almost an hour later when her husband crossed the deck and she rose.

Then as the steamer swung round a nest of reefs that rose out of a white swirl of tide the sea breeze swept that side of the deckhouse, and Mrs. Devine departed for another wrap or shawl. Lifting her head, Barbara looked at the man steadily.

"Was that woman's story true?" she said.

Brooke made a little gesture which implied that he attempted no defence.

"It was," he said.

A faint sparkle crept into Barbara's eyes. "You know what you are admitting?"

"I am afraid I do."

Barbara Heathcote had a temper, and though she usually held it in check it swept her away just then.

"Then, though we only discovered it afterwards, you knew that Saxton was scheming against my brother-in-law, and bought up the timber-rights to extort money from him?"

Again Brooke made a little gesture, and the girl, who seemed stirred as he had scarcely believed her capable of being, straightened herself rigidly.

"And yet you crept into his house, and permitted us —it is very hard to say it—to make friends with you! Had you no sense of fitness? Can't you even speak?"

"I'm afraid there is nothing I can plead in extenuation except that Grant Devine's agent swindled me," he said.

Barbara laughed scornfully. "And you felt that would warrant you playing the part you did. Was it a spy's part only, or were you to be a traitor too?"

Then Brooke, who lost his head, did what was at the moment, at least, a most unwise thing.

"I expect I deserve all you can say or think of me," he said. "Still, I can't help a fancy that you are not quite free from responsibility."

"I?" said Barbara, incredulously.

Brooke nodded. "Yes," he said, desperately, "under the circumstances it isn't exactly complimentary or particularly easy to explain. Still, you see, you showed me that the content with my surroundings I was sinking into was dangerous when you came to the Quatomac ranch; and afterwards the more I saw of you the more I realized what the six thousand dollars I hoped to secure from Devine would give me a chance of attaining."

He broke off abruptly, as though afraid to venture further, and Barbara watched him a moment, with lips set. Then she laughed in a fashion that stung him like a whip.

"And you fancied there were girls in this country with anything worth offering who would be content with such a man as you are?" she said. "One has, however, to bear with a good deal that is said about Canada, and perhaps you would have been able to keep the deception that gained the appreciation of one of them up. You are proficient at that kind of thing."

"I am quite aware that the excuse is a very poor one."

The girl felt that whether it was dignified or not the relief speech afforded was imperative.

"Haven't you even the wit to urge the one creditable thing you did?"

Brooke contrived to meet her eyes. "You mean when I came into the ranch one night. You don't know that was merely a part of the rest?"

The blood rushed to Barbara's face. "The man was your confederate, and you fell out over the booty—or perhaps you heard me coming and arranged the little scene for my benefit?"

"No," said Brooke, with a harsh laugh. "In that case the climax of it would have been unnecessarily realistic. You may remember that he shot me. Still, it happened that we both came there with the same purpose, which is somewhat naturally accounted for by the fact that your brother-in-law was away that night."

"And you allowed me to sympathize with you for your injury, and to fancy——"

Barbara broke off abruptly, for it appeared inadvisable under the circumstances to let him know what motive she had accredited him with.

"My brother-in-law is naturally not aware of this?" she said.

"I, at least, considered it necessary to acquaint him with most of it before I went to the Dayspring. No doubt you will find it difficult to credit that, but you can confirm it. You would evidently have been less tolerant than he has shown himself!"

Barbara stood up, and Brooke became sensible of intense relief as he saw Mrs. Devine was approaching with a bundle of wraps.

"I would sooner have sacrificed the mine than continue to have any dealings with you," she said.

Then she turned away, and left him sitting somewhat limply in his chair and staring vacantly at the sea. He saw no more of her during the rest of the voyage,

but when, two hours later, the steamer reached Victoria, he went straight to the cable company's office and sent his kinsman in England a message which astonished him.

"Buy Dayspring on my account as far as funds will go," it read.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALLONBY STRIKES SILVER

WINTER had closed in early, with Arctic severity, and the pines were swathed in white and gleaming with the frost when Brooke stood one morning beside the crackling stove in the shanty he and Allonby occupied at the Dayspring mine. A very small piece of rancid pork was frizzling in the frying-pan, and he was busy whipping up two handfuls of flour with water to make flapjacks of. He could readily have consumed twice as much alone, for it was twelve hours since his insufficient six o'clock supper, but he realized that it was advisable to curb his appetite. Supplies had run very low, and the lonely passes over which the trail to civilization led were blocked with snow, while it was a matter of uncertainty when the freighter and his packhorse train could force his way in.

When the flour was ready he stirred the stove to a brisker glow, and, crossing the room flung open the outer door. It was still an hour or two before sunrise, and the big stars scintillated with an intensity of frosty radiance.

Brooke felt the cold strike through him with the keenness of steel, and was about to cross the space between the shanty and the men's log shelter, when a dusky figure, beating its arm across its chest, came out of the latter.

"Are the rest of the boys stirring yet?" he said.

The man laughed.

"I guess we've had the stove lit 'most an hour ago," he said. "They've no use for being frozen, and that's what's going to happen to some of us unless we can make Truscott's before it's dark. Say, hadn't you better change your mind, and come along with us?"

Brooke made a little sign of negation, though it would have pleased him to fall in with the suggestion. Work is seldom continued through the winter at the remoter mines, and he had most unwillingly decided to pay off the men owing to the difficulty of transporting provisions and supplies. There was, however, a faint probability of somebody attempting to jump the unoccupied claim, and he had of late become infected by Allonby's impatience, while he felt that he could not sit idle in the cities until the thaw come round again. Still, he was quite aware that he ran no slight risk by remaining.

"I'm not sure that it wouldn't be wiser, but I've got to stay," he said. "Anyway, Allonby wouldn't come."

The other man dropped his voice a little. "That don't count. If you'll stand in, we'll take him along on the sled. The old tank's 'most played out, and it's only the whisky that's keeping the life in him. He'll go out on the long trail sudden when there's no more of it, and it's going to be quite a long while before the freighter gets a load over the big divide."

Brooke knew that this was very likely, but he shook his head. "I'm half afraid it would kill him to leave the mine," he said. "It's the hope of striking silver that's holding him together as much as the whisky."

"Well," said the man, "I've been mining twenty years, and it's my opinion that, except the little you're getting on the upper level, there's not a dollar's worth of silver here."

He moved away, and when Brooke went back into the shanty, Allonby came out of an inner room shivering.

His face showed grey in the lamp light, and he looked unusually haggard.

"It's bitter cold, and I seem to feel it more than I did last year," he aid. "We will, however, be beyond the necessity of putting up with any more unpleasantness of the kind long before another one is over. I shall probably feel adrift then—it will be difficult, in my case, to pick up the thread of the old life again."

"If you stay here, I'm not sure you'll have an opportunity of doing it at all," said Brooke. "It's a risk a stronger man than you are might shrink from."

"Still, I intend to take it. If I leave Dayspring before I find the silver, I leave it dead."

Brooke made a little gesture of resignation. "Well," he said, "I have done all I could, and now, if you will pour that flour into the pan, we'll have breakfast."

Both men were silent during the frugal meal, for they knew what they had to look forward to, and the cold silence of the lonely land already weighed upon their spirits. Long weeks of solitude must be dragged through before the men who were going south that morning came back again, while there might very well be interludes of scarcity, and hunger is singularly hard to bear with the temperature at forty degrees below zero.

Just then there was a knock upon the door, which swung open, and a cluster of shadowy figures appeared outside it. One of them flung a deerhide bag into the room.

"We figured we needn't trail quite so much grub along, and I guess you'll want it," a voice said. "Neither of you changed your minds 'bout lighting out of this?"

"I don't like to take it from you, boys," said Brooke, who recognized the rough kindliness which had prompted the men to strip themselves of the greater portion of their provisions. "You can't have more than enough for one day's march left."

"I guess a man never hits the trail so hard as when he knows he has to," somebody said. "It will keep us on the rustle till we fetch Truscott's. Well, you're not coming?"

For just a moment Brooke felt his resolution wavering, and, under different circumstances, he might have taken Allonby by force, and gone with them, but by a somewhat involved train of reasoning he felt that it was incumbent upon him to stay on at the mine because Barbara Heathcote had once trusted him. It had been tolerably evident from her attitude when he had last seen her that she had very little confidence in him now, but that did not seem to affect the question.

"No," he said, with somewhat forced indifference. "Still, I don't mind admitting that I wish we were."

The man laughed. "Then I guess we'll pull out. We'll think of you two now and then when we're lying round beside the stove in Vancouver."

Brooke said nothing further. There was a tramp of feet, and the shadowy figures melted into the dimness beneath the pines. Then the silence of the mountains suddenly seemed to grow overwhelming. Brooke turned to Allonby, who smiled.

"You will," he said, "feel it considerably worse before the next three months are over, and probably be willing to admit that there is some excuse for my shortcomings in one direction. I have put in many winters here."

Brooke swung round abruptly. "I'm going to work in the mine. It's fortunate that one man can just manage that new boring machine."

He left Allonby in the shanty, and toiled throughout that day, and several dreary weeks, during most of which the pines roared beneath the icy gales, and blinding snow swirled down the valley. What he did was of very slight effect, but it kept him from thinking, which, he felt, was a necessity, and he only desisted at length from

physical incapacity for further labour. The snow, it was evident, had choked the passes, so that no laden beast could make the hazardous journey over them, for the anxiously-expected freighter did not arrive, and there was an increasing scarcity of provisions as the days dragged by; while Brooke discovered that a handful of mouldy flour and a few inches of rancid pork daily is not sufficient to keep a man's full strength in him. Then Allonby fell sick, and one bitter evening, when an icy wind came wailing down the valley, it dawned upon his comrade that his condition was becoming precarious. Saying nothing, he busied himself about the stove, and smiled reassuringly when Allonby turned to him.

"Are we to hold a festival to-night, since you seem to be cooking what should keep us for a week?" said the latter.

"I almost fancy it would keep one of us for several days, which, since you do not seem especially capable of getting anything ready for yourself, is what it is intended to do," said Brooke. "I shall probably be that time in making the settlement and getting back again."

"What are you going there for?"

"To bring out the doctor."

Allonby raised his head and looked at him curiously. "Are you sure that with six or eight feet of snow on the divide, you could ever get there?"

"Well," said Brooke, cheerfully, "I believe I could, and, if I don't, you will be very little worse off than you were before. You see, the provisions will not last two of us more than a few days longer, and you can take it that I will do all I can to get through the snow. Since you are not the only man who is anxious to find the silver, your health is a matter of importance to everybody just now."

Allonby smiled curiously. "We will consider that the reason, and it is a tolerably good one, or I would not let you go. Still, I fancy you have another, and it is appreciated. You will find my working plans in the

case yonder should anything unexpected happen before you come back. Life, you know, is always a trifle uncertain."

"That," said Brooke, decisively, "is morbid nonsense. You will be down the mine again in a week after the doctor comes."

"Well," said Allonby, with a curious quietness, "I should, at least, very much like to find the silver."

Brooke changed the subject somewhat abruptly, and it was an hour later when he shook hands with his comrade and went out into the bitter night with two blankets strapped upon his shoulders. Their parting was not demonstrative, though they realized that the grim spectre with the scythe would stalk close behind each of them until they met again, and Brooke, turning on the threshold, saw Allonby following him with comprehending eyes. Then he suddenly pulled the door to, and swung forward, knee-deep in dusty snow, into the gloom of the pines.

It was late on the third night when he floundered into a little sleeping settlement, and leaned gasping against the door of the doctor's house before he endeavoured to rouse its occupant. The latter stared at him almost aghast when he opened it, lamp in hand, and Brooke reeled, grey in the face with weariness and sheeted white with frozen snow, into the light.

"Steady!" he said slipping his arm through Brooke's. "Come in here. Now, keep back from the stove. I'll get you something that will fix you up in a minute. You came in from the Dayspring—over the divide? I heard the freighter telling the boys it couldn't be done."

Brooke laughed harshly. "Well," he said, "you see me here, and, if that's not sufficient, you're going to prove the range can be crossed yourself to-morrow."

The doctor, when he heard Brooke's story, nodded tranquilly. "I'm afraid I haven't done any mountain-

eering, but I had the long-distance snowshoe craze rather bad back in Montreal," he said. "You're not going to give me very much of a lead over the passes, anyway, unless you sleep the next twelve hours."

Brooke, as it happened, slept for six and then set out with the doctor in blinding snow. He had fifty pounds upon his back now, and once they left the sheltering timber it cost them four strenuous hours to make a thousand feet. Part of that night they lay awake, shivering in the pungent fir smoke in a hollow of the rocks, and started again, aching in every limb, long before the lingering dawn, while the next day passed like a very unpleasant dream with the young doctor.

For hours they crawled through juniper scrub or stunted wisps of pines, where the trunks the winds had reaped lay piled upon each other in tangled confusion, with the sifting snow blown in to conceal the pitfalls between. Then, when the pitiless blue above them grew deeper in tint until the stars shone in depths of indigo, they stopped again, and made shift to boil the battered kettle in a gully, down which there moaned a little breeze that seared every patch of unprotected skin. The doctor collapsed behind a boulder, and lay there limply while Brooke fed the fire.

"I'm afraid you'll have to fix supper yourself to-night," he said. "Just now I don't quite know how I'm going to start to-morrow, though it will naturally have to be done."

"Yes," Brooke said. "Nobody not hardened to it could expect to stand more than another day in the open up here."

He got the meal ready, but very little was said during it, and for a few hours afterwards the doctor lay coughing in the smoke of the fire, while his gum-boots softened and grew hard again as he drew his feet, which pained him intolerably between whiles, a trifle further from the crackling brands. He staggered when at last Brooke,

finding that shaking was unavailing, dragged him upright.

"Breakfast's almost ready, and we have got to make the mine by to-night," he said.

The doctor could never remember how they accomplished it, but his lips were split and crusted with blood, while there seemed to be no heat left in him, when Brooke stopped on a ridge of the hillside as dusk was closing in.

"The mine is close below us. In fact, we should have seen it from where we are," he said.

Worn out as he was, the doctor noticed the grimness of his tone. "The nearer the better," he said. "I don't quite know how I got here, but you scarcely seem at ease."

"I was wondering why Clonby has not lighted up yet," Brooke said, dryly. We will probably find out in a few more minutes."

Then he went reeling down the descending trail, and did not stop again until he stood with the shanty looming dimly in front of him across the little clearing. It seemed very dark and still, and the doctor stopped abruptly when his comrade's shout died away.

"He must have heard you at that distance," he said.

"Yes," said Brooke, a trifle hoarsely. "If he didn't, there's only one thing that could have accounted for it."

Then they went on again slowly, until Brooke flung the door of the shanty open. There was no fire in the stove, and the place was very cold, while the darkness seemed oppressive.

"Strike a match—as soon as you can get it done," said the doctor.

Brooke broke several as he tore them off the block with half-frozen fingers, for the Canadian sulphur matches are not usually put up in boxes, and then a pale blue luminescence crept across the room when he held one aloft. For a moment Brooke felt a curious relief.

"He's not here," he said.

The doctor understood the satisfaction in his voice, for his eyes had also turned straight towards the rough wooden bunk, and he had not expected to find it empty.

"The man must have been fit to walk. Where has he gone?" he said.

Brooke fancied he knew, and, groping round the room, found and lighted a lantern.

"If you can manage to drag yourself as far as the mine, I think it would be advisable," he said.

The doctor went with him, and somehow contrived to descend the shaft. Brooke leaned out from the ladder, swinging his lantern when they neared the bottom, and his shout rang hollowly among the rocks. There was no answer, and even the doctor, who had never seen Allonby, felt the silence that followed it.

"If the man was as ill as you fancied, how could he have got down?" he said.

"I don't know," said Brooke. "Still, I think we shall come upon him not very far away."

They went down a little further into the darkness, and then the prediction was warranted, for Brooke swung off his hat, and the doctor dropped on one knee when Allonby's white face appeared in the moving light. He lay very still, and, when a few seconds had slipped by, the doctor looked up, and meeting Brooke's eyes, nodded.

"Yes," he said. "It must have happened at least twelve hours ago. Cardiac affection, I fancy. There is something in his hand, and a bundle of papers beside him."

Brooke glanced away from the dead man, and noticed the stain of giant powder on the rock, and shattered fragments that had not been there when he had last descended. Then he turned again, and took the piece of stone the doctor had dislodged from the cold fingers.

"It's heavy," said the latter.

"Yes," said Brooke, quietly. "A considerable percentage of it is either lead or silver. I fancy I know what brought on the cardiac affection."

The doctor, who said nothing, handed him the papers, and Brooke, who opened them vacantly, started a little when he saw the jagged line, which, in drawings of the kind, usually indicates a break, was now traced across the ore vein in the plan. There was also a scrap of paper with his name scrawled across it, and he read—

"When you have got your dollars back four or five times over, sell out your stock."

He scarcely realized its significance just then, and, moving the lantern a little, looked down on Allonby's face.

"I wonder if the thing we long for most invariably comes when it is no use to us?" he said. "Well, we will go back to the shanty."

CHAPTER XXV

BARBARA IS MERCILESS

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when Brooke stopped a moment as he entered the verandah of Devine's house, which stood girt about by sombre pines on the outskirts of Vancouver city. The front of the wooden house was brilliantly lighted, and he could hear the chords of a piano.

It was evident that Mrs. Devine was entertaining, and standing there, draped from neck to ankles in an old fur coat, he felt that he, with his frost-nipped face and hard scarred hands, would be distinctly out of place amidst an assembly of prosperous citizens, while he was

by no means certain how Mrs. Devine or Barbara would receive him. Often as he had thought of the latter since he made his confession, he felt scarcely equal to meeting her just then. Still it was necessary that he should see Devine, and flinging his cigar away he moved towards the door.

A Chinese house boy took his coat from him in the hall, and as he stood under the big lamp it happened that Barbara came out of an adjacent door with two companions. Brooke felt his heart throb, though he did not move, and the girl, who turned her head a moment in his direction, crossed the hall, and vanished through another door. Then he smiled very grimly, for, though she made no sign of being aware of his presence, he felt that she had seen him. This was no more than he had expected, but it hurt nevertheless. In the meanwhile the house boy had also vanished, and it was a minute or two later when Mrs. Devine appeared, but Brooke could not then or afterwards decide whether she had heard the truth concerning him, for, though this seemed very probable, he knew that Barbara could be reticent, and surmised that Devine did not tell his wife everything. In any case, she did not shake hands with him.

"My husband, who has just come home, is waiting for you in his smoking-room," she said. "It is the second door down the corridor."

Brooke fancied that she could have been a trifle more cordial. It also happened that while he proceeded along the corridor one of Barbara's companions turned to her.

"Did you see the man in the hall as we passed through?" she said.

Barbara was not aware that her face hardened a trifle, but her companion noticed that it did. She had certainly seen the man and had felt his eyes upon her, while it also occurred to her that he looked worn and haggard, and she had almost been stirred to compassion.

"He is a Mr. Brooke—from the mine," she said.

"Brooke!" said her companion. "The man from the Dayspring? I should like to talk to him."

Barbara made a little gesture, the meaning of which was not especially plain. She had read the sensational account of the journey Brooke and the doctor had made through the ranges, which had by some means been supplied the press. It made it plain to her that the man was doing and enduring a good deal, and she was not disposed to be unduly severe upon a repentant offender, even though she fancied that nothing he could do would ever reinstate him in the place he once held in her estimation.

"Since Grant Devine will probably bring him in you may get your wish," she said, indifferently.

Devine in the meanwhile was turning over several pieces of broken rock which Brooke had handed him.

"Yes," he said, "that's most certainly galena, and carrying good metal by the weight of it. How much of it's lead and how much silver I naturally don't know yet, but, anyway, it ought to leave a good margin on the smelting. You haven't proved the vein?"

"No," said Brooke, "I fancy we are only on the edge of it, but it would have cost me two or three weeks' work to break out enough of the rock to form any very clear opinion alone, and I was scarcely up to it. It occurred to me that I had better come down and get the necessary men, though I'm not sure we can contrive to feed them or induce them to come."

Devine nodded. "You must have had the toughest kind of time!" he said. "Well, we'll bid double wages, and you can offer that freight contractor his own figure to bring provisions in."

He stopped with a glance at Brooke's haggard face. "I guess you can hold out another month or two."

"Of course," said Brooke quietly.

"It's worth while. Allonby was quite dead when you got back to him?"

"Yes, I and the doctor buried him. He used giant powder."

Devine laid down his cigar. "It was a little rough on Allonby, for it was his notion that the ore was there, and now, when it seems we've struck it, it's not going to be any use to him. I guess that man put a good deal more than dollars into the mine."

Brooke knew that this was true, but Devine made a gesture which seemed to imply that after all that aspect of the question did not concern them.

"I'll send you every man we can raise," he said. "I've got quite a big credit through from London, and we can cut expenses by letting up a little on the Canopus."

"But you expected a good deal from that mine."

"No," said Devine, dryly, "I can't say I did. It's quite a while since we got a good clean-up out of it."

Brooke sat silent for a moment or two. "Are you sure it's wise to tell me so much?" he said. "There are men in this city who would make good use of any information I might furnish them with."

Devine smiled. "Well," he said, "I guess it is. You've had about enough of playing Saxton's game, and though I don't know that everybody would do it, I'm going to trust you."

"Thank you," said Brooke quietly.

"We'll let that slide. Now when I got the specimen and your note I figured I'd increase my holding, and cabled a buying order to London, but I had to pay more for the stock than I expected. It appears that a man called Cruttenden had been quietly taking any that was put on the market."

Brooke knew that his trustee had, as directed, been buying the Dayspring shares, but he desired to ascertain how far Devine's confidence in him went.

"That didn't suggest anything to you?" he said.

"No," said Devine, dryly "it didn't. Besides, the man who snapped up everything that was offered hadn't

waited until you struck the ore. Still, I'd very much like to know what he was buying that stock for."

Brooke did not tell him. Indeed, he was not exactly sure what had induced him to cable Cruttenden to buy. He had acted on impulse with Barbara's scornful words in his ears, and a vague feeling that to share the risks of the man he had plotted against would be some small solace to him, for he had not at the time the slightest notion that the hasty act of self-imposed penance was to prove remarkably profitable.

"I scarcely think it is worth while worrying over that point," he said. "There are folks in our country with more money than sense, and it is just as likely that the man did not exactly know why he was doing it himself."

Devine laughed. "Well," he said, "we'll go along now and see what the rest are doing."

Brooke would sooner have gone back to his hotel, but Devine persisted, and he was one who usually carried out his purpose. Brooke was accordingly presented to a good many people whom he had never seen before, and did not find remarkably entertaining, though he fancied that most of them appeared interested when they heard his name. The reason for this did not become apparent until he stopped by a girl who looked up at him.

"You are Brooke of the Dayspring, are you not?" she said.

"I certainly come from that mine," said Brooke, and the girl turned to one of her companions.

"You wouldn't believe he was the man," she said.

Brooke was not unaccustomed to the directness of the West, but he felt embarrassed when two pairs of eyes were fixed upon him in what seemed to be an appreciative scrutiny.

"One would almost fancy that you had heard of me," he said.

The girl laughed. "Well," she said, "most of the folks in this province who read newspapers have. There

was a column about you and your sick partner and the doctor. You carried him across the range when he was too played out to walk, didn't you ? "

" No," said Brooke, a trifle astonished. " I certainly did not. He was a good deal too heavy, as a matter of fact, and I was not very fit to drag myself. But when did this quite unwarranted narrative come out, and what shape did it take ? "

They told him as nearly as they could remember, and added running comments and questions both at once.

Brooke, who understood a little about Western journalism, waited until they stopped, for the thing was becoming comprehensible to him.

" Now," he said, " I know how the story got out. I didn't think the doctor would be guilty of anything of that kind, but no doubt he told the little schoolmaster at the settlement, who is a friend of his, and, I believe, addicted to misusing ink. Still, you see, the thing is evidently inaccurate."

Brooke laughed, and then glancing round saw Barbara approaching. He fancied that she could not well have avoided seeing him unless she wished to, but she passed so close that her skirt almost touched him. Brooke felt his face grow warm, and was glad that his companions' questions covered his confusion.

Just then, and somewhat to his relief, Mrs. Devine came up to him. " There are two or three people here who heard you play at the concert, and I have been asked to try to persuade you to do so again," she said. " Clarice Marvin would be delighted to lend you her violin."

Seeing that it was expected of him, Brooke agreed, and there was a brief discussion during the choosing of the music. Then it was discovered that the piano part of the piece fixed upon was unusually difficult, and the girl who had offered Brooke the violin said, " You must ask Barbara, Mrs. Devine."

Barbara, being summoned, made excuses when she

heard what was required of her, until the lady violinist looked at her in wonder.

"Now," she said, "you know you can play it if you want to. You went through it with me only a week ago."

A faint tinge of colour crept into Barbara's cheeks, but saying nothing further, she took her place at the piano, and Brooke bent down towards her when he asked for the note.

"It really doesn't commit you to anything," he said. "Still, I can obviate the difficulty by breaking a string."

Barbara met his questioning gaze with a little cold smile.

"It is scarcely worth while," she said.

Then she commenced the prelude, and there was silence in the big room when the violin joined in. Nor were those who listened satisfied with one sonata, and Barbara had finished the second before she once more remembered whom she was playing for. Then there was a faint sparkle in her eyes as she looked up at him.

"It is unfortunate that you did not choose music as a career," she said.

Brooke laughed, though his face was a trifle grim.

"The inference is tolerably plain," he said. "I really think I should have been more successful than I was at claim-jumping."

Barbara turned away from the piano, and Brooke, who laid down the violin, took the vacant place beside her.

"Still, I'm almost afraid it's out of the question now," he said, looking down at his scarred hands. "The kind of thing I have been doing the past few years spoils one's wrist. You no doubt noticed how slow I was in part of the shifting."

The girl noticed the leanness of his hands and the broken nails, and then glanced covertly at his face. It was gaunt and hollow, and she was sensible that there was a suggestion of weariness in his pose, which had not

been there before. Again a little thrill of compassion ran through her, and she felt, as she had done during the sonata, that no man could be wholly bad who played the violin as he did.

"Why did you stay at the Dayspring through the winter?" she asked.

"Well," said Brooke, reflectively, "I really don't know. No doubt it was an unwarranted fancy, but I think I felt that after what I had purposed at the Canopus I was doing something that might count in balancing the score against me, though, of course, I'm far from certain that it could be balanced at all. You see, it was a little lonely up there, especially after Allonby died, as well as a trifle cold."

"I think I understand," she said. "It was probably the same idea that once led your knights and barons to set out on pilgrimages with peas in their shoes, though it is not recorded that they did the more sensible thing by restoring their plundered neighbours' possessions."

Brooke laughed. "Still, my stay at the Dayspring served a purpose, for, although somebody else would no doubt have done so eventually, I found the galena, and I didn't go quite so far as the gentlemen you mention after all. No doubt it is very reprehensible to steal a mine, or, in fact, anything, but I don't know that charitable people would consider that feeling tempted to do so was quite the same thing."

Barbara started a little.

"I never quite grasped that point before," she said. "You certainly stopped short of——"

"The actual theft," said Brooke. "I don't, however, mind admitting that the thing never occurred to me until this moment, but I can give you my word that I never glanced at the papers after you handed them to me."

There was a trace of wonder in Barbara's face.

"Then I really think I did you a wrong, but we are,

I fancy, neither of us very good at ethics," she said languidly, though she was now sensible of a curious relief. The man had, it seemed, at least, not abused her confidence altogether.

"Hair-splitting," said Brooke, reflectively, "is an art very few people really excel in, and I find the splitting of rocks and pines a good deal easier. You were, of course, in spite of your last admission, quite warranted in not seeing me twice to-night."

"I think I was," said Barbara. "You see, I believed in you. In fact, you made me, and it was that I found so difficult to forgive you."

It was a very comprehensive admission, and Brooke, whose heart throbbed as he heard it, sat silent awhile.

"Then," he said, "it would be useless to expect that anything I could do would ever induce you to once more have any confidence in me?"

"Yes," she said, quietly, "I am afraid it is."

Brooke made her a little inclination. "Well," he said, "I scarcely think anybody acquainted with the circumstances would blame you for that decision. And now I fancy Mrs. Devine is waiting for you."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE JUMPING OF THE CANOPUS

THE snow was soft at last, and honey-combed by the splashes from the pines, which once more scattered their resinous odours on a little warm breeze, when Shyanne Tom came plodding down the trail to the Canopus. He was a rock-driller of no great proficiency, which was why Captain Wilkins had sent him on an errand to a ranch; and was then retracing his steps leisurely. He had turned out of the trail to relight his pipe in the shelter of a big

cedar, which kept off the wind, when he became sensible of a beat of horse-hoofs close behind him.

Shyanne turned sharply round because he could not think of any one likely to be riding down that trail, which only led to the Canopus, just then. As it happened, he stood in the shadow, and it is difficult to make out a man who does not move amidst the great grey-tinted trunks, but the sunlight was on the trail, and Shyanne was struck by the attitude of one of the horsemen who appeared among the trees. There were five or six of them, and the beasts were heavily loaded with provisions and blankets, as well as axes and mining tools. The last man, however, led a horse which carried nothing at all, and the leader, who had just pulled his beast up, was holding up his hand. It was evident to Shyanne that they had seen his tracks in the snow, but, as that was a peaceful country, he failed to understand why it should have brought the party to a standstill. He, however, stayed where he was, watching the leader, who stooped in his saddle.

"It can't be more than a few minutes since that fellow went along, and his tracks break off right here," he said. "I guess there's a side trail somewhere, though the bush seems kind of thick."

"A rancher looking for a deer," said another. "Anyway, if he'd heard us, he'd have stopped to talk."

The leader appeared reflective. "Well," he said, "I can't quite figure where he could have come from. Still, I guess we needn't worry, so long as he hasn't seen us."

He shook his bridle, and while one or two of the men turning in their saddles looked about them the horses plodded on, but Shyanne stood still for at least five minutes. He was not especially remarkable for intelligence, but it was evident to him that the men had a sufficient reason for desiring that nobody should see them. Then he put his pipe away, and proceeded cir-

cumspectly up the trail, with the print of the horse-hoofs leading on before him, until they turned off abruptly into the bush. The meaning of this was incomprehensible, since it was not the season when timber-right or mineral prospectors started on their journeys, and Shyanne decided that it might be advisable to go on and inform Wilkins of what he had seen. Still, he made no great progress, for the snow was soft, and, after all, the Canopus did not belong to him.

About the time he reached it, Brooke, who had come up there on some business with Wilkins, was lounging, cigar in hand, on the verandah at the ranch. Why he stayed there when there was no longer any reason he should not go back to England, and Barbara had told him that his offences were too grievous to be forgiven, he did not exactly know. He was wondering, disconsolately, whether time would soften her indignation, when Wilkins came into the verandah.

"It's kind of fortunate you're here to-night. We've got to have a talk," he said.

Brooke gave him a cigar, and leaned against the balustrade, when he slowly lighted it.

"You can't let me have the men I asked for?" he said.

Wilkins made a little gesture. "All you want. Now, you just let me have a minute or two."

Ten had passed before he had related what Shyanne had told him, and then Brooke, who saw the hand of Saxton in this, quietly lighted another cigar.

"Well," he said, "what do you make of it? They're scarcely likely to be timber-righters?"

"They might be claim-jumpers."

"Still, nobody could jump a claim whose title was good."

Wilkins appeared a trifle uneasy.

"The fact is, our title isn't quite as good as it might be. That is, there's a point or two anybody who knew

all about it could make trouble on," he said, and then turned, a trifle impatiently, to Brooke. "You take it blame quietly. I had kind of figured that would astonish you."

Brooke laughed. "I had surmised as much already. We'll suppose the men Shyanne saw intend to jump the claim. How will they set about it?"

"They'll wait until they figure every one's asleep—twelve o'clock, most likely, since that would make it easy to get their record in the same day, though it's most of an eight hours' ride to the office of the Crown recorder. Then they'll drive their stakes in quietly, and while the rest sit down tight on the pegged-off claim, one of them will ride out all he's worth to get the record made. After that, they'll start in to bluff the dollars out of Devine."

"Then what are we going to do?" Brooke said.

"Turn out the boys, and hold the jumpers off as long as we can, while somebody from our crowd rides out to put a new record in. When a claim's bad in law anybody can stake it, and the Crown will register him as owner until they can straighten out the thing."

"Then what do you expect from me?"

Wilkins' answer was prompt and decisive. "We'll have a horse ready. You'll ride for the company."

"I certainly seem the most suitable person, and you can get the horse ready," he said.

Wilkins disappeared into the darkness, and Brooke, who was feeling chilly now, went back to the stove, while it was two hours later when he took his place behind one of the sawn-off firs which dotted the hillside above what had been one of the most profitable headings of the mine. The half-moon was higher now, and the pale radiance showed the six-foot stumps that straggled up the slope until the bush closed in on them.

Half an hour slipped by, and there was a sound from the forest, while Brooke, who found the waiting un-

pleasant, grew chilly. It would, he felt, be a relief when the jumpers came.

The shadows of the firs were black upon the clearing, but a dark patch was projected suddenly beyond the rest, and a voice came faintly through the whispering of the trees.

"Stand by," it said. "They're coming along."

Then Brooke set his lips as a human figure, carrying what seemed to be an axe, materialized out of the gloom. Another appeared behind it, and then a third, while when a fourth became visible, Wilkins rose suddenly.

"Now, what in the name of thunder are you wanting here?" he said.

The foremost man jumped, but the rest came on at a run, and a man behind them shouted, "Don't worry 'bout anything, but get your stakes in. I'll do the talking."

Then, while Brooke slipped away, Wilkins stepped out into the moonlight with a rifle gleaming in his hand. "Stop right where you are," he said. "Where's the man who wants to talk?"

The men stopped, irresolutely. There were six in all, but rather more than that number of shadowy objects had appeared unexpectedly among the sawn-off stumps.

While they waited, Saxton stepped forward. "Well," he said, "you see me."

"Oh, yes," said Wilkins, dryly, "and I guess I've seen many a squarer man. What do you want crawling round our claim, anyway?"

"It's not yours. Your patent's bad, and we're going to re-locate it for you. Have you got those stakes ready, boys?"

"Bring them along," said Wilkins. "I'm waiting."

He stood stiff and resolute, with the rifle at his hip, and the moonlight on his face, which was very grim, and

once more the claim-jumpers glanced at their leader dubiously.

Then Saxton's voice rose sharply. "Hallo!" he said. "What the——"

Wilkins swung round, and saw three or four more figures enter the clearing from the opposite side, and they also carried stakes and axes.

"Figured you'd get in ahead of us, Saxton," said one of them.

Saxton evidently lost his temper.

"Well," he said, "I guess I'm going to do it, you slinking skunk. If it can't be fixed any other way, I'll strike you for shooting Brooke."

Wilkins laughed. "Any more of you coming along? It's a kind of pity you didn't get here a little earlier."

They knew what he meant in another moment, when the sound of a horse ridden hard through slushy snow rose from the shadows of the pines. Wilkins made a little ironical gesture.

"I guess you'll never get rich claim-jumping, boys," he said.

Then Saxton's voice rose again. "The game's not finished. We'll play you for it yet," he said. "Where's that horse? Get your stakes in."

He vanished in another minute, but his followers remained, and there was a very lively scuffle about the stakes Brooke had already hammered in. They were torn up and replaced several times before the affray was over.

In the meanwhile, three men, who realized that, under the circumstances, a good deal would depend upon who was first to reach it, were riding hard by different ways towards the recorder's office, and Brooke, having no great confidence in the horse Wilkins had supplied him with, had taken what was at once the worst and shortest route. That is not a nice country to ride through in daylight, even when there is no snow upon the ground,

and there were times when he held his breath as the horse plunged down the side of a gully with the half-melted snow and gravel sliding away beneath its hoofs.

Still, it was long since he had felt in the same high spirits, and when they reached more even ground the rush through the cold night air brought him a curious elation. He felt he was, at least, doing what might count in his favour against the past, and, apart from that, there was satisfaction to be derived from the reckless ride itself. He had, however, only a blurred recollection of most of it, flitting forest, peaks that glittered coldly, the glint of moonlight on still frozen lakes, and the frequent splashings through icy fords, until, when the firs rose black and hard against the dawn, they reeled down to the bank of a larger river, from which the white mists were streaming. It swirled by thick with floating ice, and the horse strenuously objected to enter the water at all. Twice it reared at the stabbing of the spurs, but Brooke contrived to keep his saddle until he and the beast slid down the bank together, and there was a splash as they reached the water.

It was most of it freshly-melted ice, and when he slipped from the saddle, the cold took his breath away, and he clung by the stirrup leather, gasping and half-dazed, while the beast proceeded unguided for a minute or two. At last they staggered up the opposite bank, where a man he could not see very well in the dim light sat looking down on him from the saddle. Brooke recognized him as the one who had shot him at Devine's ranch.

"Saxton has taken the high trail and he'll cross by the bridge, but I guess we're quite a while ahead of him," he said. "Now, do you know any reason why we shouldn't pool the thing?"

Brooke stared at him, divided between indignation and appreciation of his assurance.

"Yes," he said, "several, and one of them is quite sufficient by itself."

"Figure it out," said the other. "I tell you Saxton can't make our time over the high trail, though it's a better road. Now that one of us will get there first is a sure thing, but it's quite as certain it can't be both, and I'd be content with half of what you bluff out of Devine. That's reasonable."

Brooke felt his face grow a trifle hot.

"I can't make a deal with you on any terms," he said. "Ride on, or pull your horse out of the trail."

"I guess that wouldn't suit me," said the other man, and when Brooke had his foot in the stirrup, suddenly swung up his hand.

Then there was a flash and a detonation, and the horse plunged. The flash was repeated, and while Brooke strove to clear his foot of the stirrup, the beast staggered and fell back on him. It, however, rolled and struggled, and he contrived to drag himself away.

When he was next sensible of anything, he could hear a very faint thud of hoofs far up the climbing trail, and, after lying still for several minutes, ventured to move circumspectly. He felt very sore, but all his limbs appeared to be in their usual places, and, rising shakily, he found, somewhat to his astonishment, that he could walk. The horse was evidently dead, but there was, he remembered, a ranch not very far away, and a probability of the other man still breaking one of his own limbs or his horse's legs. Brooke accordingly decided to hobble on to the ranch, and somehow accomplished it, though the man who opened the door to him looked very dubious when he asked him for a horse.

"The only beast I've got isn't worth much, but you don't look up to taking him in over the lake trail," he said.

He, however, parted with the horse, and hove Brooke into the saddle, while the latter groaned as he rode away.

One arm and one leg were stiff and aching, and at every jolt his back hurt him excruciatingly, but a few hours later he rode, spattered with mire and slushy snow, into a little wooden town, and had afterwards a fancy that somebody offered to lift him down. He was not sure how he got out of the saddle, but he proceeded, limping stiffly, with his wet clothes sticking to his skin, to the Crown mining office. The recorder looked hard at him, and pointed to a chair.

"You may as well sit down. If my surmises are correct, there is no great need for haste," he said.

Brooke's face, which was a trifle grey, grew suddenly set.

"Some one else has already recorded a new claim on the Canopus?" he said.

"Yes," said the recorder. "In fact, two of them, and the last man was good enough to inform me that there was another of you coming along."

"Then you can't give a record?"

"No," said the other man, with a little smile. "I'm not sure that any of you will get one in the meanwhile; that is, not until we have obtained a few particulars from Mr. Devine."

"I have come on behalf of him."

"That," said the recorder, "is, under the circumstances, no great recommendation. In fact, there are several points your employer will be asked to clear up before we go any further with the matter."

Brooke contrived to make his way to the hotel, and flung himself down to rest, when he had ascertained when the Pacific express came in.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST ROUND

THE whistle screamed hoarsely as the long train swung out from the shadow of the pines, and Brooke raised himself stiffly in his seat in a big, dusty car. A saw-mill veiled in smoke and steam swept by, and he caught the gleam of the blue inlet Vancouver City is built above. He felt dizzy as well as stiff, while he commenced to wonder whether his strength would hold out until he had seen Devine and finished his business in the city.

Then the cars lurched a little, there was a doleful tolling of a bell, and when the long, dusty train rolled slowly into the depôt he dropped shakily from a vestibule platform. He managed to reach Devine's office, and found that he was out. He would, however, be back in another hour, his clerk said, and it occurred to Brooke that he could, in the meanwhile, consult a doctor. The latter asked him a few questions, and then sat looking at him thoughtfully for a moment or two.

"It's not quite clear to me how the horse came to fall on you. You were dismounted at the time?" he said. "Still, after all, that's not quite the question."

Brooke smiled a little. "No," he said. "I scarcely think it is."

"Well," said the doctor, dryly, "whichever way you managed it, the snow was either very soft or something else took the weight of the beast off you, but I don't think you need worry greatly about that fall. Lie down for a day or two, and rub some of the stuff I'll give you on the bruises. Now, suppose you tell me what you've been doing for the last few months."

Brooke did so concisely, and the doctor nodded. "Pretty much as I figured," he said. "You want to

stop it right away. Go down the Sound on a steamboat, or across to Victoria for two or three weeks, and do nothing."

"That's out of the question."

The doctor made a little gesture. "Then, if you go on taking it out of yourself, there'll be trouble, especially if you worry. Go slow, and eat and sleep all you can for a month."

Brooke thanked him, and went back to Devine's office thoughtfully. He felt that the advice was good, though there were difficulties in the way of his acting upon it. He had already realized that the strain of the last few months, the insufficient food and feverish work, were telling upon him, but he had made up his mind to hold out until the work at the Dayspring was in full swing and the value of the ore lead had been made clear beyond all doubt. Then there would be time to rest.

Devine was in when he reached the office, and looked hard at him, but he said little while Brooke told his story.

"Well," he said, "it's quite likely that we'll have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Saxton to-morrow. He'll hang off until then, and when he comes I'll be ready to talk to him. In the meanwhile, you're coming home with me."

Brooke hoped that he did not show the embarrassment he felt, for, much as he longed to see her, it was, after their last meeting, difficult to believe that Barbara would appreciate his company, and he scarcely felt in a mood for another taste of her displeasure.

"I have decided on going out on the express this evening," he said. "There is a good deal to do at the Dayspring, and I could scarcely expect Mrs. Devine to be troubled with me. Besides, you see, I came away——"

He glanced significantly at his clothes, but Devine, who rose, laid a hand on his shoulder

"You're coming along," he said. "I may want you to-morrow."

Brooke, who felt too languid to make another protest, went with him, and when they reached the house on the hillside, Devine led him into a room which looked down on the inlet.

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a big lounge chair. "I'll send somebody to look after you, and, unless you look a good deal better than you do now, you'll stay right here to-morrow."

He went out, and Brooke, who let his head, which ached a good deal, sink back upon the soft upholstery, wondered vacantly what Mrs. Devine would think when she saw him there. He still wore the garments he was accustomed to at the mine, and he felt that long boots and soil-stained jean were a trifle out of place in that dainty room. He was drowsy and a trifle dizzy, while the room was warm, and it was with a little start he heard the door-handle rattle a few minutes later. Then, while he endeavoured to straighten himself, Barbara came in.

"I feel that I ought to offer you my excuses for being here, though I am not sure that I could help it," he said. "Devine insisted on bringing me."

Barbara did not notice him wince as with pain when he turned to her, for she was not looking at him.

"Then why should you make any? It is his house," she said.

This was not very promising, for Brooke felt it suggested that, although the girl was willing to defer to Devine's wishes, they did not necessarily coincide with hers.

"It is!" he said. "Still, I seem to have acquired the sense of fitness you once mentioned, and I feel I should not have come. One is, however, not always quite so wise as he ought to be, and I was feeling a trifle worn out when your brother-in-law invited me. That probably accounted for my want of firmness."

Barbara glanced at him sharply, and noticed the gauntness of his face and the spareness of his frame, which had become accentuated since she had last seen him. It also stirred her to compassion, which was probably why she endeavoured, as she had done before, to harden her heart against him.

"No doubt you spent last night in the saddle, and the trails would be bad," she said. "I believe they are getting some tea ready, and, in the meanwhile, how are you progressing at the mine?"

Brooke realized that she had heard nothing about his ride or the jumping of the Canopus, and determined that she should receive no enlightenment from him. This may have been due to wounded pride, but it afterwards stood him in good stead. He accordingly roused himself, with an effort, to talk about the mine. The girl on her part noticed the weariness in his eyes and found it necessary to remind herself of his offences, for the story he told was not without its effect on her. It was, though he omitted most of his own doings, a somewhat graphic one, and she realized a little of the struggle he and the handful of men Devine had been able to send him had made, half-fed, amidst the snow. Still, his composure and the way he kept himself in the background irritated her.

"One would wonder why you put up with so much hardship. Wasn't it a little inconsequent?" she said.

Brooke's gaunt face flushed. "Well," he said, "one is under the painful necessity of earning a living."

"Still, could it not be done a little more easily?"

"I don't know that it is, under any circumstances, a remarkably simple thing, but that is not quite the question, and, since you seem to insist, I'll answer you candidly. In my case, it was almost astonishingly inconsequent—that is, as I expect you mean, about the last thing any one would naturally have expected from me. Still, I felt that, after what I had done, I had a good deal

to pull up, you see; though that is a motive with which you apparently can scarcely credit me."

Barbara smiled. "It was your own actions that made it difficult."

"I admitted on another occasion that I am not exactly proud of them, but there was some slight excuse."

"Of course!" said Barbara. "There were the dollars of which my brother-in-law plundered you."

Brooke looked at her with a little glint in his eyes. "You," he said, slowly, "can be very merciless."

"Well," said Barbara. "I might have been less so had I not expected quite so much from you. After all, it does not greatly matter—and here is the tea."

"I think it matters a good deal," said Brooke, who took the cup she handed him.

Brooke appeared to be holding his cup with quite unnecessary firmness, and she fancied his colour was a trifle paler than it had been, but he smiled.

Then there was a crash, and Brooke's cup struck the leg of the chair, while his plate rolled across the floor, and Barbara's dress was splashed with tea. The man sat gripping the chair, while his face grew grey; but when she rose he apparently recovered himself with an effort.

"Very sorry!" he said, slowly. "Quite absurd of me! Still, I have had a good deal to do—and very little sleep—lately."

Barbara was wholly compassionate now. "Sit still," she said, quietly. "I will bring you a glass of wine."

"No," said Brooke, a trifle unevenly. "I must have kept you here half an hour already, and I am afraid I have spoiled your dress into the bargain. That ought to be enough. If you don't mind, I think I will go and lie down."

He straightened himself resolutely, and Barbara, who called the house-boy, stood still, with a warm tinge in her face, when he went out of the room. The man was

evidently worn out and ill, and yet he had endeavoured to hide the fact to save her concern, while she had found a most unbecoming pleasure in flagellating him.

She had engagements that evening, and did not see him, while he had apparently recovered during the night, for, when she came down to breakfast, Mrs. Devine told her that he had already gone out with her husband. In point of fact, an eight-hours' sleep had done a good deal for Brooke, who lunched with Devine in the city, and then went with him to his office to wait until the Pacific express came in.

"The train's up to schedule time. I sent to ask them at the depôt," said Devine. "I guess we'll have Mr. Saxton here in another ten minutes."

The prediction was warranted, for he had about half-smoked the cigar he lighted when Saxton was shown in. The latter smiled as he glanced at Brooke.

"It was quite a good game you put up, and you got away five minutes before I did," he said. "Still, three men are a little too many to jump a claim when I'm one of them."

Brooke's face grew grim, for he saw Saxton's meaning, but Devine regarded the latter with a sardonic smile.

"Sit down and take a cigar," he said. "I guess you came here to talk to me, and Mr. Brooke never meant to jump the claim."

"No?" and Saxton assumed an appearance of incredulity very well. "Now I quite figured that he did."

"You can fix it with him afterwards," said Devine. "It seems to me that we're both here on business."

"Then we'll get down to it. I have put in a record on the Canopus mine. I guess you know your patent's not quite straight on a point or two."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"The Crown people seem to be. Now, I can't draw back my claim without throwing the mine open to any-

body, but I'm willing to hold on and trade my rights to you when I've got my improvements in. Of course, you'd have to make it worth while, but I'm not going to be unreasonable."

Devine laughed a little. "There was once a jumper who figured he'd found the points you mentioned out. He wanted eight thousand dollars. Would you be content with that?"

"No," said Saxton, dryly. "I'm going to strike you for more."

There was silence for a moment or two, and Brooke leaned forward a little as he watched his companions. Saxton was a trifle flushed in face, and his expression suggested that he was completely satisfied with himself and the strength of his position. Devine's attitude was, however, not quite what one would have expected, for he did not look in the least like a man who felt himself at his adversary's mercy. He sat smiling a little.

"Well," he said, reflectively. "I guess the man I mentioned was sorry he asked quite as much as he did. What is your figure?"

"I'll wait your bid."

Devine sat still for several moments, with the little sardonic smile growing plainer in his eyes.

"One dollar," Devine said.

Saxton gasped. "Bluff!" he said. "That's not going to count with me. You want a full hand to carry it through, and the one you're holding isn't strong enough. Now, I'll put down my cards."

"One dollar," said Devine, dryly.

Saxton stood up abruptly, and gazed at him in astonishment. "I tell you your patent's no good."

"I know it is."

Again there was silence, and Brooke saw that Saxton was holding himself in with difficulty.

"Still, you want to keep your mine," he said.

"You can have it for what I asked you, and if you can

clear the cost of working, it's more than I can do. The Canopus was played out quite a while ago."

Even Brooke was startled, and Saxton sat down with all his customary assurance gone out of him. He seemed to grow suddenly limp, and his cigar shook visibly in his nerveless fingers.

"Now," he said, and stopped while a quiver of futile anger seemed to run through him, "that's the last thing I expected. What'd you put up that wire sling for? I can't figure out your game."

Devine laughed. "It's quite easy. You have just about sense enough to worry anybody, or you wouldn't have dumped that ore into the Dayspring, and worked off one of the richest mines in the province on to me. Well, when I saw you meant to strike me on the Canopus, I just let you get to work because it suited me. I figured it would keep you busy while I took out timber-rights and bought up land round the Dayspring. Nobody believed in Allonby, and I got what I wanted at quite a reasonable figure. I'm holding the mine and everything worth while now. There's nothing left for you, and I guess it would be wiser to get hold of a man of your own weight next time."

Saxton's face was colourless, but he put a restraint upon himself as he turned to Brooke.

"You knew just what this man meant to do?"

"Oh, yes," said Devine, dryly. "He told me quite a while ago. You're going? Haven't you any use for that dollar?"

Saxton said nothing whatever, but the door slammed behind him, and Brooke, who, in spite of Devine's protests, went back to the Dayspring that evening, never saw him again.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BROOKE DOES NOT COME BACK

DEVINE went home a little earlier than usual after Saxton left him, and dusk was not far away when he sat recounting the affair in his wife's drawing-room. She listened with keen appreciation, and then looked up at him.

"But where is Brooke?" she said.

Devine smiled. "I guess he's buying mining tools. You can't keep that man out of a hardware store," he said. "I wanted to bring him back, but he was feeling better, and made up his mind to go out on the Atlantic express. He asked me to make his excuses, as he had fixed to meet an American machinery agent, and wasn't quite sure he could get round."

"Perhaps it is just as well," said Mrs. Devine, who appeared reflective. "Do you think you are wise in encouraging that man to come here, Grant?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it that. I brought him. He didn't want to come."

"You are quite sure," and Mrs. Devine's smile implied that she, at least, was a trifle incredulous. "Hasn't it struck you that Barbara——"

"So far as I've noticed lately, Barbara didn't seem in any way pleased with him."

Mrs. Devine made a little impatient gesture. "That," she said, "is exactly what I don't like. Barbara wouldn't have been angry with him—if it was not worth while."

Devine laughed. "I guess I was of no great account when you married me."

"Pshaw!" said Mrs. Devine. "Anyway, you hadn't

plotted to steal a mine from the people I belonged to."

Devine's eyes twinkled. "It showed his grit, and 'most anything is considered square in a mining deal. Besides, there were the six thousand dollars Slocum took out of him."

"I am quite aware that such transactions are evidently not subject to the ordinary code, but, seriously, if you would be content with Harford Brooke as my brother-in-law, it is considerably more than I would be. We don't even know why he left the Old Country."

"Well," said Devine, dryly, "I guess I have a notion. I've been finding out a good deal about him. But get on with your objections."

"Barbara has a good many dollars."

"So has Brooke. You needn't worry about that point."

Mrs. Devine's astonishment was very apparent.

"Then whatever is he working at the mine for—and why didn't you tell me before?"

"I guess it's because that kind of thing pleases him, and, anyway, it's only since last mail came in I knew."

"You're quite sure, now?"

"I'll tell you what I heard. There was a man who bought up our stock in England when nobody else seemed to have any use for it. The directors wanted to know a little about him, and they found it was a trust account. He was taking up the stock for another man, who had been left quite a few dollars, and that man was called Harford Brooke. The executor, it seems, told somebody that the man he was buying for was here. Now, it's not likely there are two of them in this part of Canada."

The door, as it happened, was not closed, and Mrs. Devine was too intent to hear it swing open a little further. "The dollars," she said, "are by no means the most important consideration, but still——"

She stopped abruptly at a sound, and then turned

round with a little gasp, for Barbara stood just inside the room. Then there was a disconcerting silence for a moment or two, until the girl glanced at Devine.

"Yes," she said, quietly. "I heard. When did Mr. Brooke buy that stock?"

Devine understood the question, and once more the twinkle crept into his eyes.

"Well," he said, "it was quite a while before they found the silver. I don't know what he did it for. Now, I guess I've been here longer than I meant to stay. You'll excuse me, Katty."

He seemed in haste to get away, and when the door closed behind him the two who were left looked at one another curiously. Mrs. Devine was evidently embarrassed.

"I suppose," she said, dryly, "you don't know why Brooke bought those shares, either?"

"I think I do," said Barbara, with unusual quietness. "He had a reason——"

She stopped abruptly, and there was once more an awkward silence, until she made a little impulsive gesture.

"Oh!" she said, sharply now, "I feel horribly mean. He stayed there through the winter when they had scarcely anything to eat, and bought that stock when nobody else would have it or believed in the Dayspring. Then he risked his life to save the Canopus, and when he came down, worn out and ill, I had only hard words for him."

"Well," said Mrs. Devine, dryly, "the sensation is probably good for you. You don't seem to remember that he also tried to jump the mine."

Barbara turned towards her with a little sparkle in her eyes. "Have you—never—done anything that was wrong?"

Mrs. Devine naturally saw the point of this, but while she considered her answer, Barbara, who had a good

deal to think of, abruptly turned away. Glancing at her watch, she went straight to a room, from the window of which she could see the road to the depôt, for she knew the Atlantic express would shortly start, and she had not been told that Brooke was not coming back. Exactly what she meant to say to him she did not know, but she felt she could not let him go without, at least, a slight expression of her appreciation of what he had done. She knew that he would value it, and that it would go far to blot out the memory of past unkindness.

He, however, did not appear on the road, as she had expected; and she grew a trifle anxious when the tolling of a bell came up from the depôt by the wharf as the big locomotive backed the long cars in. It was also significant that she did not notice that the room, which had no stove in it, was very cold. Then looking down she saw men with valises pass across an opening between the roofs and express wagons lurching along the uneven road. The train would start very soon, and there was at least one admission she must make, but the minutes were slipping by and still Brooke did not come. The man, it almost appeared, was content to go away without seeing her, though she felt compelled to admit that in view of what had passed at their last meeting this was not altogether astonishing. Still, the fact that he could do so hurt her, and she waited in a state of painful tension. A very few minutes would suffice for him to climb the hill, and even if there was no opportunity for an explanation, which now appeared very probable, a smile might go a long way to set matters right.

The few minutes, however, slipped by as the rest had done, until at last the locomotive bell slowly clanged again, and the hoot of a whistle came up the hillside and was flung back by the pines. Then a puff of white smoke rolled up from the wharf, and Barbara turned away from the window with the crimson in her face as the cars swept through an opening between the clustering

roofs. The train had gone, and the man would not know how far she had relented towards him. She could settle to do nothing during the rest of the evening, and scarcely slept that night, though she naturally did not mention the fact when she and Mrs. Devine met at breakfast next morning. Instead, she took out a letter she had received a week earlier.

"It's from Hetty Hume, and the English mail goes out to-day," she said. "She suggests that I should come over and spend a few months with her. I really think we did what we could for her when she was here with the Major."

Mrs. Devine took the letter. "I fancy she wants you to go," she said. "She mentions that she has asked you several times already."

Barbara appeared reflective. "So she has," she said. "In fact, I think I'll go. The change will do me good."

"Well," said Mrs. Devine, "I suppose you can afford it, but if you indulge in many changes of that kind you're not going to have very much of a dowry."

"Do you think I need one?"

Mrs. Devine laughed as she glanced at her. "Perhaps in your case it wouldn't be necessary, and though it is a very long way, I fancy that you might do worse than go to England and stay there while Hetty is willing to keep you."

A little flush crept into Barbara's cheek, but she said quietly, "I think I'll start on Saturday."

She did so, and it came about one night, while the big train she travelled by swept across the rolling levels of the Assiniboian prairie, that Brooke sat in his shanty at the Dayspring with Jimmy, who had just come down from the range, standing in front of him. The freighter had still now and then a difficulty in bringing them provisions in, and whenever Jimmy found the persistent plying of drill and hammer pall upon him he would go out and look for a deer, though it was not always that he

came back with one. On this occasion he brought a somewhat alarming tale instead.

"A big snow-slide must have come along since I was up on that slope before, and gouged out quite a cañon for itself," he said.

"Come to the point," said Brooke. "I'm sufficiently acquainted with the meteorological perversities of the country."

"Slinging names at them isn't much use. I've tried it, and any one raised here could give you points at the thing. Now before I came to Quatomac I was staying up at the Tillicum ranch, and I'd just taken a new twelve-dollar pair of gum-boots off one night when there was a waterspout up the valley that washed me and Jardine out of the house. We sailed along until we struck a convenient pine, and sat in it most of the night while the flood went down. Then I hadn't any gum-boots, and Jardine couldn't find his house."

"I believe you told me you went down the river on a door on the last occasion," Brooke said, wearily. "Still, it doesn't greatly matter. What has all this to do with the hollow the snow-slide made in the range?"

"Well," said Jimmy, "I guess you know the way the big rock outcrop runs across the foot of the valley. Now, before the snow-slide or the waterspout came along the melting snow went down into the next hollow, and the one where the outcrop is got just enough to keep the outlet of the creek that comes through it open."

"I do. Will it be an hour or more before you make it clear how that concerns anybody?"

"No, sir. I'm getting right there. The snow's melting fast, and the drainage from the big peak isn't going the way it used to now. The foot of the valley's quite a nice-sized lake, and the stream has washed most of the broke-up pines the snow brought down into the outlet gully. I guess you have seen a bad lumber jam?"

Brooke had, and he started as he recognized the

significance of what was happening, for once a drifting log strikes fast in a narrow passage the stream is very apt to pile up and wedge fast those that come behind into a tolerably efficient substitute for a dam, while when log still follows log the result is usually an inextricable confusion of interlocked timber.

"When the jam broke up we'd have the water and the wreckage down on the mine," he said.

"All there is of it," said Jimmy. "It would cost quite a pile of dollars to dry the workings out."

Brooke strode to the door and flung it open, but there was black darkness outside and a persistent patter of rain. Then he swung round with an objurgation, and Jimmy grinned.

"I guess it's no use. You couldn't see a pine ten foot off, and there isn't a man in the country who would go down that gully with a lantern in his hand," he said. "Go off to sleep. You'll see quite as much as you want to, anyway, to-morrow."

Brooke stood still and listened a moment or two while the hoarse roar of a river which he knew was swirling in fierce flood among the boulders far down in the hollow came up in deep reverberations. It was a significant hint of what was likely to happen when the pent-up water poured down upon the mine. Still, there was nothing he could do in that darkness.

"Sleep!" he said. "When almost every dollar I have —and a good deal more than that—is sunk in the mine."

"Well," said Jimmy, "in your place, if I could make sure of the dollars, I'd take my chances on the rest. Now and then I'm quite thankful I haven't any. It saves a mighty lot of worry."

He swung out of the shanty, and Brooke, who flung himself down on his couch of spruce twigs, endeavoured to sleep, though he had no great expectation of succeeding. As it happened, he lay tossing or holding himself still by an effort the long night through, for he had set

his whole mind on the prosperity of the Dayspring. A good deal of his small fortune was also sunk in it, though that was not of the greatest moment to him. He had a vague hope that when the mine was, through his efforts, pouring out high-grade ore, he might reinstate himself in Barbara's estimation. Then the dollars would be valuable to him.

It was two hours before the dawn, and still apparently raining hard, when he rose and lighted the stove. He felt a trifle dizzy and very shivery as he did it, but the frugal breakfast put a little warmth into him, and he went out into the thick haze of falling water and up the hillside, walking somewhat wearily and with considerably more effort than he had found it necessary to make a few months ago.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FINAL EFFORT

A DIM, grey light was creeping through the rain when Brooke stopped on a ridge of hillside that broke off from the parent range above the mine. The snow upon the lower slopes had mostly melted now, though that on the great hill shoulders would swell the frothing rivers for months to come, and, sinking ankle-deep in quaggy mould, he went down through the dripping undergrowth until he stopped again on the verge of what had become in the last few days a muddy lake.

The wreckage of the higher forests was strewn upon it, but Brooke noticed that it drifted steadily in one direction, and, floundering along the water's edge, he reached a narrow gully, which had served as outlet for the stream through the ridge that hemmed in the valley. The passage was, however, now choked by a mass of groaning

timber, which was apparently growing every hour, and it already seemed scarcely possible to cut through that pile of wreckage. Once the pent-up water, which seemed rising rapidly, burst the jam, it would come down in an overwhelming torrent upon the mine, and he sat down on a fallen redwood to consider how the difficulty could be grappled with.

He, however, found it no easy matter to keep his mind upon the question at all. His head was aching, he felt unpleasantly limp, as well as wet and cold, and the distressful stiffness of his back suggested that he had by no means recovered from the effects of his fall. The long months of strenuous physical toil, the scanty and often wholly insufficient food, and exposure to bitter frost and snow, had left their mark on him, while now, worn out in mind and body as he was, he realized that a last grim effort was demanded from him. How it was to be made he did not know, and he was sitting still, shivering, with the rain running from him, when Jimmy and another man from the mine appeared. It was almost light now, and the miner glanced at the gathering water with evident concern.

"I guess something has got to be done," he said.

Brooke lifted himself shakily to his feet, and blinked at the man.

"It has, and if you'll bring the boys up we'll make a start," he said. "Now I don't know that we could cut that jam, and if we did it would only turn the lake loose on the mine. What I purpose is to break a new cut through the rise, and run enough water off to ease the pressure. Then we might, if it appeared advisable, get at the jam. In the meanwhile every man I can spare from here will start in cutting out a ten-foot trench at the mine. That would take away a good deal of any water that did come down."

"I've been at this kind of work 'most all my life, and that's 'bout how I would fix it," said the other man.

"Well," said Brooke, "there's just another point. Once you get started, you'll go right on, and there'll be very little sleep for any one until it's done, but we'll credit you with half extra on every hour's time in the pay-bill."

The man laughed. "You needn't worry 'bout that. I guess the boys will see you through," he said.

He disappeared into the rain, and the struggle commenced when he came back with the men. There were but a handful of them in all, and their task appeared almost beyond accomplishment, even to those born in a country where man and Nature unsubdued come to the closest grapple, and human daring and endurance must make head against the tremendous forces that unloose the rivers and slowly grind the ranges down. Worn out, aching in every limb, and with heavy eyes, Brooke braced himself to bear his part in it.

For three days they toiled with pick and shovel and clinking drill, and the roar of the blasting charges shook the wet hillside, but while the trenches deepened slowly the water rose. By night the big fires snapped and sputtered, and the feeble lanterns blinked, through the rain, while wild figures, stained with mire and dripping water, moved amidst the smoke, and those who dragged themselves out of the workings lay down on the wet ground for a brief hour's sleep. Brooke, however, did not close his eyes at all, and where his dripping figure appeared the shovels swung more rapidly, and the ringing of the drills grew a trifle louder. The pace was, however, too fierce to last, and, though even the men who work for another toil strenuously in that land, it was evident to him that while their task was less than half done, they could not sustain it long.

Baffled in one direction, he had also changed his plans, for the ridge was singularly hard to cut through, even with giant powder, and he had withdrawn most of the men from it and sent them to the trench, which would,

he hoped, afford a passage to at least part of the water that must eventually come down upon the mine. It was late on the third night when it became evident that this would very shortly happen, and he sat, wet through and very weary, in his tent on the hillside, when Jimmy and another man came in.

"Water's riz another foot since sundown, and I guess there's lakes of it ready to come down yonder," said the miner. "So far as I could make out, there's quite a forest of smashed-up logs sailing along to pile up in the jam."

Brooke lifted a wet, grey face, and blinked at him with half-closed eyes.

"Then, I'm afraid there are only two courses open to us," he said. "We can wait until the jam breaks up, when there'll be water enough to fill the Dayspring up and wash the plant above ground right down into the cañon, or we must try to cut it now."

"And turn the lake loose on us with the trench 'bout half big enough to take it away?" said Jimmy.

"Yes," said Brooke, grimly. "You have a six-foot dam thrown up. I'm not sure it will stand, but it's a good deal less likely to do it when the lake is twice as big."

Jimmy looked at the other man, who nodded. "The boss is right," he said. "You can't stop to look for the nicest way out when you're in a blame tight place. No, sir, you've got to take the quickest one. When do you figure on starting on the jam, Mr. Brooke?"

"Now."

The man appeared astonished, and shook his head. "It can't be done in the dark," he said. "I guess nobody could find the king log that's keying up the jam, and though the boys aren't nervous, I'm not sure you'd get one of them to crawl down that gully and over the live logs until it's light. They couldn't see to do anything with the axe anyway."

Brooke smiled dryly. "Since they will not be asked to do it, that does not count. I purposed trying giant powder, and going myself; that is, unless Jimmy feels anxious to come along with me."

"I don't," said Jimmy, with decision in his tone. "If it was anybody else, watching him would be quite good enough for me. Still, as it isn't, I guess I'll have to see you through."

"Thanks!" said Brooke. "You can let them know what to expect at the mine, Cropper. I'll want you to put the detonators on the fuses with me, Jimmy."

The other man went out, and the two who were left proceeded to nip down the fulminating caps on the strips of snaky fuse, after which they carefully embedded them in sundry plastic rolls, which looked very like big candles made of yellow wax. These they packed in an iron case, and then, carrying an axe and a big auger, went out of the tent. The rest of the men left at the ridge were waiting them, for every one understood the perilous nature of the attempt, though, as two men were sufficient for the work, there was nothing that they could do, and they proceeded in a body through the dripping undergrowth towards the gully. Here a big fire of resinous wood was lighted, and when at last the smoky glare flickered upon the wet rocks in the hollow, Brooke, stripped to shirt and trousers, flung himself over the edge.

He dropped upon a little ledge, and made another yard or two down a cranny, then a bold leap landed him on a second ledge, and the groaning trunks were close beneath him when he dropped again. The glare of the fire scarcely reached him now, and Jimmy, who alighted close by him, looked up longingly at the flickering light above.

"It wasn't easy getting down, and I'd feel better if I knew just how we were going back," he said. "I guess it's not quite wise either to bang that can about on the rocks."

This was incontrovertible, for while giant powder, which is dynamite, is, with due precaution, comparatively safe to handle, and cannot be exploded without a detonator, so those who make it claim, it is still addicted to going off with disastrous results on very small provocation. Brooke, who had the case containing it slung round his back, was, however, looking down on the logs that stirred and heaved beneath him with the water spouting up through the interstices between. He could see them when the fire grew brighter.

"The king should not be far away, from the look of the jam," he said. "If we can't cut it, we may jar it loose. Giant powder strikes down. Let me have the axe."

Jimmy glanced at him, and shook his head, for Brooke's face showed drawn and grey in the flickering light.

"I'll do any chopping that's wanted," he said.

He dropped upon the timber, and the gap he splashed into closed up suddenly as he whipped out his leg. Then, with Brooke behind him, he crawled over the grinding logs, and by and by drove the point of the auger into one that seemed to run downwards through the midst of them. It was a good many feet in girth, and Brooke gasped heavily when he also laid hold of the auger crutch. The hole they made was charged with one of the yellow rolls, and, moving to a second log, they bored another, while the mass shook and trembled under them, and twice a great spout of water fell splashing upon them. The jam might resist the pressure for another week, or break up at any moment, and whirl down the gully in chaotic ruin. Still, with the rain beating down upon them, the pair toiled on until several sticks of explosive had been embedded, when Brooke rose very stiffly and straightened himself as he took a little case out of his pocket.

"I don't know that we've got the king, but the general shake-up ought to loosen it," he said. "Light your fuse,

Jimmy, and then get up. I'll come when I'm ready."

Jimmy looked up, and saw a cluster of dark figures outlined against the glow of the fire, for the men had crowded to the edge of the gully.

"Stand by to give us a lift up, boys," he said.

Then he turned away, and was rather longer than he liked persuading a damp match to ignite. The fuse, however, sparkled readily, and, groping his way across the logs, he clutched a ledge of rock. It was wet and slippery, and he slid back from it, hurting one arm, while, when he regained the narrow shelf, a voice was raised warningly above.

"Let her go," it said, "Jimmy's fuse will be on to the powder before you're through."

Jimmy turned, and dimly saw his comrade still apparently stooping over one of the logs.

"Have I got to come back and bring you?" he shouted.

Brooke stood up, and a faint sparkling broke out at his feet. "Go on," he said. "It's burning now."

Jimmy said nothing further. Those fuses were short, and he was anxious to be clear of the gully. Still, even though he decided to sacrifice the axe, it was not an easy matter to ascend the almost precipitous slope of slippery rock, and as he climbed higher the glare of the fire in his eyes confused him. He had, however, almost reached the top when there was a crash and a rattle of stones below him, and he twisted round, while a hoarse shout rang out.

"Get hold of him!" cried one of the men. "Oh, jump for it. He'll be over the ledge!"

For a moment Jimmy had a glimpse of a wet, white face, and a hand, apparently clinging to a cranny, and then the flicker of firelight sank and left him in black darkness. He did not understand exactly what had taken place, but it was unpleasantly evident that the fuses would soon reach the powder, while his comrade,

whom he could no longer see, was apparently unable to ascend the gully.

"Can't you get him?" shouted somebody.

"Jump down. Put the fuses out!" said another man.

Jimmy was, fortunately, one of the slow men who usually keep their heads, and while he glanced down at the twinkling fuses in the dark pit beneath him, he swung up a warning hand.

"Light right out of that, boys. It can't be done," he said. "Hold on, partner. Let me know where you are—I'm coming along."

A faint shout answered him, and Jimmy made his way downwards until he could discern a dusky blur, which he surmised was Brooke, close beneath him. Taking a firm hold with one hand, he leaned down and clutched at it, and then, with every muscle strained, strove to drag his comrade up. Jimmy was a strong man, but Brooke, it seemed, was able to do very little to help him, and Jimmy's fingers commenced to slacken under the tension. Then Brooke, who made a convulsive flounder, lost the grip he had, and the arm Jimmy clung to was torn away from him. A dull sound that was unpleasantly suggestive rose from a ledge below.

Then while Jimmy leaned down, blinking into the darkness and ignoring the risk he ran, a yellow flash leapt out below, and there was a stunning detonation. It was followed almost in the same moment by another, and the solid rock seemed to heave a shiver, while the hollow was filled with overwhelming sound and a nauseating vapour. Giant powder strikes chiefly downwards, which was especially fortunate for two men just then, but the rock was swept by flying fragments of shattered trunks, and Jimmy cowered against it half dazed. Then another sound rose out of the acrid haze as the rent trunks crushed beneath the pressure, and there was an appalling grinding and smashing of timber. It was succeeded by a furious roar of water.

A minute had probably slipped by when once more a man who showed faintly black against the firelight leaned over the edge of the gully.

"Hallo! Are either of you alive," he cried.

Jimmy roused himself with an effort. "Well," he said, hoarsely, "I guess I am. I don't quite know whether Brooke is."

"Then I'm coming down," said the other man. "We have got to get him out of the stink if there's anything left of him."

Jimmy grasped the necessity for this, since the fumes of giant powder are in confined spaces usually sufficient to prostrate a strong man, and several of his comrades apparently came down instead of one, bringing lanterns and blazing brands with them. There was a slippery ledge a little lower down the gully, and while the nauseating vapour eddied about them and the shattered wreckage went thundering past below, they made their way along it until they came on Brooke.

He was lying partly upon the ledge, with his feet in the swirling torrent and his shirt rent open. There was a big red smear on it, his lips were bloodless, and one arm was doubled limply under him. Jimmy stooped and shook him gently, but Brooke made no sign, and his head sank forward until his face was hidden. Then Jimmy, who slipped his hand inside the torn shirt, withdrew it, smeared and warm.

"He's bleeding quite hard, and that shows there's life in him. We have got to get him out of this right now," he said.

None of them quite remembered how they did it, for few men unaccustomed to the ranges would have cared to ascend that gully unencumbered by daylight, but it was accomplished, and when a litter of fir branches had been hastily lashed together they plodded behind it in silence down the hillside.

As they floundered down the trail a man met them

with the news that very little of the water had got into the mine, but that did not appear of much importance to any one just then. After all, the Dayspring belonged to an English company, and it was Brooke, who lay in the litter oblivious of everything, they had worked for.

CHAPTER XXX

THE OTHER CHANCE

THE blink of sunlight was pleasantly warm where Barbara sat with Hetty Hume on a seat set back among the laurels which just there cut off the shrewd wind from the English lawn. A black cloud sailed slowly over the green hill-top behind the old grey house, and the close-cropped grass was sparkling still with the sprinkle of bitter rain, but the scent of the pale narcissus drifted up from the borders and the sticky buds of a big chestnut were opening overhead. Barbara glanced across the sweep of lawn towards the line of willows that swung their tasselled boughs above the palely flashing river. This was [illegible] well-ordered England, where Nature was [illegible]n's dominion centuries ago. As she glanced at it her companion laughed.

"The prospect from here is, I believe, generally admitted to be attractive, though I have not noticed any of my other friends spend much time in admiring it," she said. "Still, perhaps it is different in your case. You haven't anything quite like it in Canada."

"No," said Barbara. "Any way, not between Quatomac and the big glacier. You remember that ride?"

"Of course I" said Hetty Hume. "I found it a little overwhelming. That is, the peaks and glaciers. I also

remember the rancher. The one who played the violin. I suppose you never came across him again ?"

"I met him once or twice. At a big concert—and on other occasions."

Barbara's smile was indifferent, but she was silent for the next minute or two. She had now spent several weeks in England, and had found the smooth, well-regulated life there pleasant after the restless activity of the one she had led in Western Canada, where everybody toiled feverishly. She felt the contrast every day, and now the sight of that softly-sliding river, whose low murmur came up soothingly across the lawn, recalled the one that frothed and foamed amidst the Quatomac pines, and the roar that rose from the misty cañon. That, very naturally, also brought back the face of the flume-builder, and she wondered vaguely whether he was still at the Dayspring, and what he was doing then, until her companion turned to her again.

"We will really have to decide about the Cruttendens' dance to-night," she said. "It will be the last frivolity of the season in this vicinity."

"I haven't met Mrs. Cruttenden, have I ?" said Barbara, indifferently.

"You did, when you were here before. Don't you remember the old house you were so pleased with lower down the valley ? In any case, she remembers you, and made a point of my bringing you. Cruttenden has a relative in your country, though I never heard much about the man."

Barbara remembered the old building very well, and it suddenly flashed upon her that Brooke had on one occasion displayed a curious acquaintance with it.

"You would like to go ?" she said.

"I, at least, feel I ought to. We are, of course, quite new-comers here. In fact, we had only bought Larchwood just before you last came over, and it was Mrs. Cruttenden who first took us up. One may live a very

long while in places of this kind without being admitted within the pale, you see, and even the rank of major isn't a very great warranty, especially if it has been gained in foreign service instead of Aldershot."

Miss Hume stopped as her father came slowly down the pathway with a grey-haired lady, whose dress proclaimed her a widow, and the latter's voice reached the girl's clearly. Her face was, so Barbara noticed, very expressive as she turned to her companion.

"I think you know what I really came for," she said. "I feel I owe you a very great deal."

Major Hume made a little deprecatory gesture. "I have," he said, "at least, seen the papers, and was very glad to notice that Reggie has got his step. He certainly deserved it. Very plucky thing, especially with only a handful of a raw native levy to back him. Frontal attack in daylight—and the niggers behind the stockade seem to have served their old guns astonishingly well!"

"Still, if it had not been for your forbearance he would never have had the opportunity of doing it," said the lady. "I shall always remember that. You were the only one who made any excuse for him, and he told me his colonel was very bitter against him."

The pair passed the girls, apparently without noticing them, and Barbara did not hear Major Hume's answer, but when he came back alone later he stopped in front of them.

"You were here when we went by?" he said.

"Yes," said Hetty. "We heard you quite distinctly, too, and that suggests a question. What was it Reggie Ferris did?"

Major Hume smiled dryly. "Stormed a big rebel stockade with only a few half-drilled natives to help him. If you haven't read it already, I can give you a paper with an account of the affair."

"That," said Hetty, "is, as you are aware, not what I

wished to ask. What was it he did before he left the line regiment? It was, presumably, something not especially creditable—and I always had an idea that he owed it to you that the result was not a good deal more unpleasant."

The Major appeared a trifle embarrassed. "I scarcely think it would do you very much good to know," he said. "The thing wasn't a nice one, but there was good stuff in the lad, who had been considerably more of a fool than a rogue, and all I did was to persuade the Colonel, who meant to break him, to give him another chance. It seems I was wise. Reggie Ferris has had his lesson, and has from all accounts retrieved his credit in the Colonial service."

"If I remember correctly, you once made a bad mistake in being equally considerate to another man," said Hetty, reflectively.

"I certainly did, but you will find by the time you are as old as I am that taking it all round it is better to be merciful."

"The Major," said Hetty, with a glance at Barbara, "is a confirmed optimist—and he has been in India."

Major Hume smiled. "Well," he said, "the mistake one makes from that cause hurt one less afterwards than the ones that result from believing in nobody. Now, there was that young woman who was engaged to Reggie——"

"He has applied the suggestive epithet to her ever since she gave him up," said Hetty. "Still, I really don't think anybody could have expected very much more from her."

"No," said the Major, grimly. "In my opinion she went further than there was any particular necessity for her to do. She knew the man's shortcomings when she was engaged to him—and she should have stuck to him. You don't condemn any one for a single slip in your country, Miss Heathcote?"

Barbara made no answer, for this, it seemed, was just what she had done, but Hetty laughed.

"You couldn't expect her to admit that their standard in Canada is lower than ours," she said. "Still, you haven't told us yet what Reggie Ferris did."

Major Hume laughed as he turned away, "I am," he said, "quite aware of it."

He left them, and Hetty smiled as she said: "The Major has not infrequently been imposed upon, but nothing will disabuse him of his cheerful belief in human nature, and I must admit that he is quite as often right as more censorious people. There was Lily Harland who gave Reggie Ferris up, which, of course, was probably only what he could have expected under the circumstances, but Reggie, it appears, is wiping out the past, and I have reasons for surmising that she has been sorry ever since. Nobody but my father and his mother ever hear from him now, and if that hurts Lily she has only herself to blame. She had her opportunity of showing what faith she had in the man, and can't expect to get another just because she would like it."

She wondered why the warm colour had crept into her companion's face, but Barbara said nothing, and vacantly watched the road that wound up through the meadows out of the valley, until a moving object appeared where it crossed the crest of the hill. In the meanwhile her thoughts were busy, for the Major's suggestive little story had not been without its effect on her, and the case of Reggie Ferris was, it seemed, remarkably similar to that of a certain Canadian flume-builder. The English soldier and Grant Devine had both been charitable, but she and the girl who was sorry ever since had shown themselves merciless, and there was in that connexion a curious significance in the fact that Reggie Ferris, who was now brilliantly blotting out the past, wrote to nobody but his mother and the man who had given him what the latter termed another chance. Bar-

bara remembered the afternoon when she waited at the window and Brooke, who, she fancied, could have done so had he wished, had not come up from the depôt. She could not ignore the fact that this had since occasioned her a vague uneasiness.

In the meanwhile the moving object had been growing larger, and resolved itself into a gardener who had been dispatched to the nearest village on a bicycle.

"We will wait until Tom brings in the letters," said Hetty.

It was a few minutes later when the man came up the path and handed her a packet. Among the letters she spread out there was one for Barbara, whose face grew suddenly intent as she opened it. It was from Mrs. Devine, and the thin paper crackled under her tightening fingers as she read—

"I have been alone since I last wrote you, as Grant had to go up to the Dayspring suddenly and has not come back. There was, I understand, a big flood in the valley above the mine, and Brooke, it seems, was very seriously hurt when endeavouring to protect the workings. I don't understand exactly how it happened, though I surmise from Grant's letters that he did a very daring thing. He is now in the Vancouver hospital, for although Grant wished him brought here, the surgeon considered him far too ill to move. His injuries, I understand, are not very serious in themselves, but it appears that the man was badly worn out and run down when he sustained them, and his condition, I am sorry to say, is just now very precarious."

The rest of the letter concerned the doings of Barbara's friends in Vancouver, but the girl read no more of it, and sat still, a trifle white in the face, until Hetty turned to her.

"You don't look well," she said. "I hope nothing has happened to your sister or Mr. Devine?"

"No," said Barbara, quietly, though there was a faint

tremor in her voice. "They are apparently in as good health as usual."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Hetty, with an air of relief. "There is, of course, nobody else, or I should have known it, though you really seem a trifle paler than you generally do. Shall we go in and look through these patterns? I have been writing up about some dress material, and they've sent cuttings. Still, I don't suppose you will want anything new for Mrs. Cruttenden's?"

"No," said Barbara. "In fact, I'm not going at all."

Hetty glanced at her sharply, and then made a little gesture of comprehension.

"Very well!" she said. "Whenever you feel it would be any consolation you can tell me, but in the meanwhile I have no doubt that you can get on without my company."

She moved away, and Barbara, who was glad to be alone, sat still, for she wished to set her thoughts in order. This was apparently the climax all that had passed that afternoon had led up to, but she was just then chiefly conscious of an overwhelming distress that precluded any systematic consideration of its causes. The man whom she had roused from his lethargy at the Quatomac ranch was now, she gathered, dying in the Vancouver hospital, but not before he had blotted out his offences by slow endurance and unwearying effort. She would have admitted this to him willingly now, but the opportunity was, it seemed, not to be afforded her, and the bitter words with which she had lashed him could never be withdrawn. She who had shown no mercy, and would not afford him what Major Hume had termed another chance, must, it seemed, long for it in vain herself.

By degrees, however, her innate resolution rose against that decision, and she remembered that it was not, in point of time at least, a very long journey to British Columbia. There was nothing to prevent her setting out when it pleased her; and then it occurred to her that

the difficulties would be plentiful at the other end. What explanation would she make to her sister, or the man, if —and the doubt was horrible—he was, indeed, still capable of receiving it? He had never in direct speech offered her his love, and she had not even the excuse of the girl who had given Reggie Ferris up for throwing herself at his feet. She was not even sure that she could have done it in that case, for her pride was strong, and once more she felt the hopelessness of the irrevocable. She had shown herself hard and unforgiving, and now she realized that the man she loved—and it was borne in upon her that in spite of his offences she loved him well —was as far beyond her reach as though he had already slipped away from her into the other world at whose shadowy portals he lay in the Vancouver hospital.

There had been a time, indeed the occasion had twice presented itself, when she could have relented gracefully, but she could no longer hope that it would ever happen again, and it only remained for her to face the result of her folly, and bear herself befittingly. It would, she realized, cost her a bitter effort, and she rose with a tense white face and turned towards the house. Hetty met her in the hall, and looked at her curiously.

"There are, as you may remember, two or three people coming in to dinner," she said. "I have no doubt I could think out some excuse if you would sooner not come down."

"Why do you think that would please me?" said Barbara, quietly.

"Well," said Hetty, a trifle dryly, "I fancied you would sooner have stayed away. Your appearance rather suggested it."

Barbara smiled in a listless fashion. "I'm afraid I can't help that," she said. "Your friends, however, will presumably not be here for an hour or two yet."

Hetty made no further suggestions, and Barbara moved on slowly towards the stairway. She came of a stock

that had grappled with frost and flood in the wild ranges of the mountain province, and courage and steadfastness were born in her, but she knew there was peril in the slightest concession to her gentler nature she might make just then. What she bore in the meanwhile she told nobody, but when the sonorous notes of a gong rolled through the building she came down the great stairway only a trifle colder in face than usual, and immaculately dressed.

CHAPTER XXXI

BROOKE IS FORGIVEN

IT was a pleasant morning, and Brooke lay luxuriating in the sunlight by an open window of the Vancouver hospital. His face was blanched and haggard, and his clothes hung loosely about his limbs, but there was a brightness in his eyes, and he was sensible that at last his strength was coming back to him. Opposite him sat Devine.

"You will be fit to be moved out in a day or two, and I want to see you in Mrs. Devine's hands," he said. "We have a room fixed ready, and I came round to ask when the doctor would let you go."

Brooke shook his head. "You are both very kind, b I'm going back to the Old Country," he said. "Still, I don't know whether I shall stay there yet."

Devine appeared a trifle disconcerted. "We had counted on you taking hold again at the Dayspring," he said. "Wilkins is getting an old man, and I don't know of any one who could handle that mine as you

have done. Quite sure there's nothing I could do that would keep you?"

Brooke lay silent a moment or two. He was loth to leave the mine, but during his slow recovery at the hospital a curious longing to see the Old Country once more had come upon him. The ambition to prove his capabilities in Canada had deserted him since his last meeting with Barbara, and he had heard from Mrs. Devine that it would probably be several months before she returned to Vancouver. He realized that it was she who had kept him there, and now she had gone, and the mine was, as Devine had informed him, exceeding all expectations, there was no longer any great inducement to stay in Canada.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't think there is. I feel I must go back, for a while at least."

"Well," said Devine, who seemed to recognize that protests would be useless, "it's quite a long journey. I guess you can afford it?"

Brooke felt the keen eyes fixed on him with an almost disconcerting steadiness, but he contrived to smile.

"Yes," he said, "if I don't do it too extravagantly, I fancy I can."

"Then there's another point," said Devine, with a faint twinkle in his eyes. "You might want to do something yonder that would bring the dollars in. Now, I could give you a few lines that would be useful in case you wanted an engagement with one of your waterworks contractors or any one of that kind."

"I scarcely think it will be necessary," said Brooke, with a little smile.

"Well," said Devine, "I have a notion that it's not going to be very long before we see you back again. You have got used to us, and you're going to find the folks yonder slow. I can think of quite a few men who saved up, one or two of them for a very long while, to go home to the Old Country. and in about a month thev'd

had enough of it. The country was very much as they left it—but they had altered. We have room for a good many men of your kind in this country. That's about all I need say. When you feel like it, come right back to me."

He went out a few minutes later, and Brooke lay still thoughtfully, with his old ambitions re-awakening. There was, he surmised, a good deal of truth in Devine's observations, and work in the mountain province that he could do. Still, he felt that even to make his mark there would be no great gain to him now. Barbara could not forgive him, but she was in England, and he might, at least, see her. Whether that would be wise he did not know, and scarcely fancied so, but the faint probability had its attractions, and he would go and stay there—until he had recovered his usual vigour, at least.

It was, however, a little while before the doctors would permit him to risk the journey, and several months had passed when he stood with a kinsman and his wife on the lawn outside an old house in an English valley. The air was still and warm, and a full moon was rising above the beeches on the hillside. Its pale light touched the river, that slid smoothly between the mossy stepping-stones, and the shadows of clipped yew and drooping willow lay black upon the grass. There was a faint smell of flowers that linger in the fall, and here and there a withered leaf was softly sailing down, but that night it reminded Brooke of the resinous odours of the Western pines, and the drowsy song of the river, of the thunder of the torrent that swirled by Quatomac. His heart was also beating a trifle more rapidly than usual, and for that reason he was more than usually quiet.

"I suppose your friends will come?" he said, indifferently.

Mrs. Cruttenden, who stood close by him, laughed. "To the minute! Major Hume is punctuality itself. I fancy he will be a little astonished to-night."

"I shall be pleased to meet him again. He was to bring Miss Hume?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Cruttenden, with a keen glance at him. "And Miss Heathcote, whom you asked about. No doubt she will be a trifle astonished, too. You do not seem quite so sure that the meeting with her will afford you any pleasure?"

Brooke smiled a trifle grimly. "The most important question is whether she will be pleased to see me. I don't mind admitting it is one that is causing me considerable anxiety."

"Wouldn't her attitude on the last occasion serve as guide?"

Brooke felt his face grow warm under her watchful eyes, but he laughed.

"I would like to believe that it did not," he said. "Miss Heathcote did not appear by any means pleased with me. Still, you see, you sometimes change your minds."

"Yes," said Mrs. Cruttenden, reflectively. "Especially when the person who has offended us has been very ill. It is, in fact, the people one likes the most one is most inclined to feel angry with now and then, but there are circumstances under which one feels sorry for past severities."

Brooke started, for this appeared astonishingly apposite in view of the fact that he had, as she had once or twice reminded him, told her unnecessarily little about his Canadian affairs. The difficulty, however, was that he could not be sure she was correct.

"You naturally know what you would do, but, after all, that scarcely goes quite as far as one would like," he said.

Mrs. Cruttenden laughed softly. "Still, I fancy the rest are very like me in one respect. In fact, it might be wise of you to take that for granted."

Just then three figures appeared upon the path that

came down to the stepping-stones across the river, and Brooke's eyes were eager as he watched them. They were as yet in the shadow, but he felt that he would have recognized one of them anywhere and under any circumstances. Then he strode forward precipitately, and a minute later sprang aside on to an outlying stone as a grey-haired man, who glanced at him sharply, turned, with hand held out, to one of his companions. Brooke moved a little nearer the one who came last, and then stood bareheaded, while the girl stopped suddenly and looked at him. He could catch the gleam of the brown eyes under the big hat, and, for the moon was above the beeches now, part of her face and neck gleamed like ivory in the silvery light. She stood quite still, with the flashing water sliding past her feet, etherealized, it seemed to him, by her surroundings, and a complement of the harmonies of the night.

"You?" she said.

Brooke laughed softly, and swept his hand vaguely round, as though to indicate the shining river and dusky trees.

"Yes," he said. "You remember how I met you at Quatomac. Who else could it be?"

"Nobody," said Barbara, with a tinge of colour in her face. "At least, any one else would have been distinctly out of place."

Brooke tightened his grasp on the hand she had laid in his, for which there was some excuse, since the stone she stood upon was round and smooth, and it was a long step to the next one.

"You knew I was here?" he said.

"Yes," said Barbara, quietly.

Brooke felt his heart throbbing painfully. "And you could have framed an excuse for staying away?"

The girl glanced at him covertly as he stood very straight looking down on her, with lips that had set suddenly, and tension in his face. The moonlight shone

into it, and it was, she noticed, quieter and a little grimmer than it had been, while his sinewy frame still showed spare to gauntness in the thin conventional dress. This had its significance to her.

"Of course!" she said. "Still, it did not seem necessary. I had no reason for wishing to stay away."

Brooke fancied that there was a good deal in this admission, and his voice had a little exultant thrill in it.

"That implies—ever so much," he said. "Hold fast. That stone is treacherous, and one can get wet in this river, though it is not the Quatomac. Absurd to suggest that, isn't it? Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel?"

Barbara also laughed. "Do you wish the Major to come back for me?" she said. "It is really a little difficult to stand still upon a narrow piece of mossy stone."

They went across, and Major Hume stared at Brooke in astonishment when Cruttenden presented him.

"By all that's wonderful! Our Canadian guide!" he said.

"Presumably so!" said Cruttenden. "Still, though my wife appears to understand the allusion, it's more than I do. Anyway, he is my kinsman, Harford Brooke, and the owner of High Wycombe."

Brooke smiled as he shook hands with the Major, but he was sensible that Barbara flashed a swift glance at him, and, as they moved towards the house, Hetty broke in.

"You must know, Mr. Cruttenden, that your kinsman met Barbara beside a river once before, and on that occasion, too, they did not come out of it until some little time after we did," she said.

"That," said Cruttenden, "appears to imply that they were in the water."

"I really think that one of them was," said Hetty. "Barbara had a pony, but Mr. Brooke had not, and his appearance certainly suggested that he had been bathing.

In fact, he was so bedraggled that Barbara gave him a dollar. She had, I must explain, already spent a few months in this country."

Brooke was a trifle astonished, and noticed a sudden warmth in Barbara's face.

"If I remember correctly, you had gone into the ranch, Miss Hume," he said, severely.

"No," said Hetty. "You may have fancied so, but I hadn't. I was the only chaperon Barbara had, you see. I hope she didn't tell you not to lavish the dollar on whisky. No doubt you spent it wisely on tobacco."

Brooke made no answer, and his smile was somewhat forced; but he went with the others into the house, and it was an hour or two later when he and Barbara again stood by the riverside alone. Neither of them quite knew how it came about, but they were there with the black shadows of the beeches behind them and the flashing water at their feet. Brooke glanced slowly round him, and then turned to the girl.

"It reminds one of that other river—but there is a difference," he said. "The beeches make poor substitutes for your towering pines, and you no longer wear the white samite."

"And," said Barbara, "where is the sword?"

Brooke looked down on her gravely, and shook his head. "I am not fit to wear it, and yet I dare not give it back to you, stained as it is," he said. "What am I to do?"

"Keep it," said Barbara softly. "You have wiped the stain out, and it is bright again."

Brooke laid a hand that quivered a little on her shoulder. "Barbara," he said, "I am not vainer than most men, and I know what I have done, but unless what once seemed beyond all hoping for was about to come to me, you and I would not have met again beside the river. It simply couldn't happen. You can forget all that has gone before, and once more try to believe in me?"

"I think," said Barbara quietly, "there is a good deal that you must never remember, too. I realized that"—and she stopped with a little shiver—"when you were lying in the Vancouver hospital."

"And you knew I loved you, though in those days I dare not tell you so? I have done so, I think, from the night I first saw you, and yet there is so much to make you shrink from me."

"No," said Barbara, very softly, "there is nothing whatever now—and if perfection had been indispensable you would never have thought of me."

Brooke laid his other hand on her shoulder, and, standing so, while every nerve in him thrilled, still held her a little apart, so that the silvery light shone into her flushed face. For a moment she met his gaze, and her eyes were shining.

"Do you know that, absurd as it may sound, I seemed to know that night at Quatomac that I should hold you in my arms again one day?" he said. "Of course, the thing seemed out of the question, an insensate dream, and still I could never quite let go my hold of the alluring fancy."

"And if the dream had never been fulfilled?"

Brooke laughed curiously. "You would still have ridden beside me through many a long night march, and I should have felt the white dress brush me softly where the trail was dark."

"Then I should have been always young to you. You would never have seen me grow faded and the grey creep into my hair."

Brooke drew her towards him, and held her close. "My dear, you will be always beautiful to me. We will grow old together, and the one who must cross the last dark river first will, at least, start out on the shadowy trail holding the other's hand."

It was an hour later when Barbara, with the man's arm still about her, glanced across the velvet lawn to the

old grey house beneath the dusky slope of wooded hill. The moonlight silvered its weathered front, and the deep tranquillity of the sheltered valley made itself felt.

"Yes," said Brooke, "it is yours and mine."

Barbara made a little gesture that was eloquent of appreciation. "It is very beautiful. A place one could dream one's life away in. We have nothing like it in Canada. You would care to stay here always?"

"Any place would be delightful with you."

The girl laughed softly, but her voice had a tender thrill in it, and then she turned towards the west.

"It is very beautiful—and full of rest," she said. "Still, I scarcely think it would suit you to sit down in idleness, and all that can be done for this rich country has been done years ago."

"I wonder," said Brooke, who guessed her thoughts, "if you would be quite so sure when you had seen our towns."

"Still, one would need to be very wise to take hold there—and I do not think you care for politics."

"No," said Brooke, with a faint, dry smile. "Besides, remembering Saxton, I should feel a becoming diffidence about wishing to serve my nation in that fashion. There are men enough who are anxious to do it already, and I would be happier grappling with the rocks and pines in Western Canada."

"Then," said Barbara, "if it pleases you, we will go back to the great unfinished land, where the dreams of such men as you are come true."

THE END

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