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Title: Delilah of the Snows

Author: Harold Bindloss

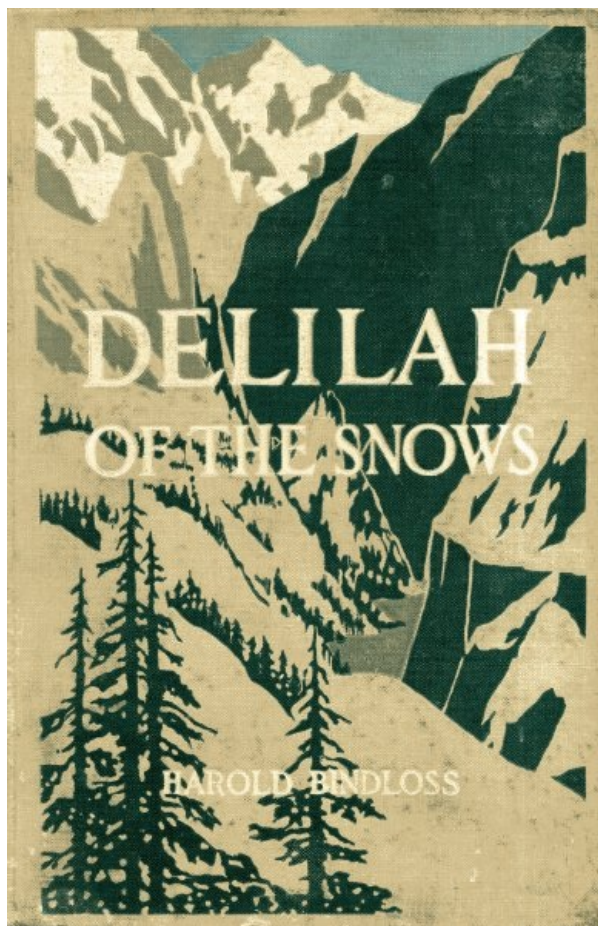
Release date: January 21, 2012 [EBook #38635]

Most recently updated: January 8, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Steven desJardins and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net> (This book was produced from scanned images of public domain material from the Google Print project.)

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# **DELILAH *of* The SNOWS**

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

*Author of "Alton of Somasco," "The Cattle-Baron's Daughter," "The Dust of Conflict," "Winston of the Prairie," "For Jacinta," "The Young Traders," etc.*



NEW YORK  
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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May 1908*

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## DELILAH OF THE SNOWS

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### I

#### INGLEBY FEELS THE BIT

The tennis match was over, and Walter Ingleby stood swinging his racket impatiently beside an opening in the hazel hedge that overhung the lane. Wisps of hay were strewn about it, but already the nut bushes were sprinkled with the honeysuckle's flowers. Beyond the hedge, cornfields blotched with poppies, and cropped meadows, faded into the cold blueness of the east.

Ingleby looked out upon the prospect with a slight hardening of his face, for he loved the quiet, green country in which there was apparently no room for him; but a little thrill of expectancy ran through him as he glanced back across the stile towards the little white village he had left a few minutes earlier. A broad meadow shining with the tender green of the aftermath divided it from the lane, and light laughter and a murmur of voices came faintly across the grass. Again a trace of grimness, which seemed out of place there, crept into his face, and it was with a little resolute movement of his shoulders that he turned and raised his eyes to the dim blue ridge behind which burned the sunset's smoky red. He vaguely felt that it was portentous and emblematical, for that evening the brightness of the West seemed to beckon him.

He had graciously been permitted to play for a somewhat exclusive club during the afternoon, as well as to make himself useful handing round tea and carrying chairs, because he played tennis well, and the president's wife had said that while there was a risk in admitting that kind of people, young Ingleby evidently knew his place, and was seldom guilty of presumption. This was true, for Ingleby was shrewd enough to realize that there were limits to the toleration extended him, though the worthy lady would probably have been astonished had she known what his self-repression occasionally cost him. That a young man of his position should not esteem it a privilege to teach beginners and submit to be snubbed by any one of importance who happened to be out of temper had never occurred to her. Still, he certainly knew his place, and having played well, to please himself and his partner, had slipped away when the last game was over, since he understood that the compliments were not for him.

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Suddenly his heart beat a trifle faster as a figure appeared in the meadow. It was a girl of about his own age, which did not greatly exceed twenty, who carried herself well, and moved, it seemed to him, with a gracefulness he had never noticed in any other woman. She wore a white hat with red poppies on it, and he noticed that the flowers he had diffidently offered her were still tucked in the belt of the light grey dress. She was walking slowly, and apparently did not see him in the shadow, so that when she stopped a moment with her hand upon the stile he could, although he felt the presumption of it, look at her steadily.

There were excuses for him, since any one with artistic perceptions would have admitted that Grace Coulthurst made a sufficiently attractive picture as she stood with the white clover at her feet and the glow of the West upon her face. It was warm in colouring and almost too cleanly cut, but essentially English, with a suggestion of pride and vigour in it. The eyes were grey, and, perhaps, a trifle too grave and imperious considering her age; the clustering hair beneath the white hat shone in the sunset a gleaming bronze. She was also very dainty, though that did not detract from the indefinite something in the pose of the shapely head and figure which the lad vaguely recognized as patrician. The term did not please him. Indeed, it was one he objected to, but he could think of nothing more appropriate, and as he watched her he became almost astonished at his temerity. Ingleby was young, and fancied he knew his own value, but he was also acquainted with the unyielding nature of social distinction, and it was wholly respectful homage he paid Grace Coulthurst. She was Major Coulthurst's daughter, and a young woman of some local importance. When she saw Ingleby a faint tinge of warmer colour crept into her face for just a moment.

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He swung off his straw hat, and held it at his knee as he raised a hand to her, and though his deference was, perhaps, a trifle overdone, it was redeemed by its genuineness, and did not displease her.

"I was afraid you would never come," he said.

The girl descended the stile before she looked at him, and then there was a suggestion of stiffness in her attitude, for the speech, which seemed to imply something of the nature of an appointment, was not a tactful one.

"Why did you think I would come this way at all?" she said.

"I don't know," said Ingleby, with a trace of confusion. "Of course, there wasn't any reason. Still, I hoped you would. That was why I waited."

Grace Coulthurst said nothing for a moment. It was, though she would never have admitted it, not altogether by accident that she had met and walked home with him somewhat frequently during the past month.

"As it happened, I was almost going round by the road, with Lilian Fownes," she said.

Young Ingleby, as she did not fail to notice, set his lips, for Miss Fownes had on that and other occasions been accompanied by her accomplished brother, who was an adept at graceful inanities.

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"Then I should not have seen you—and I especially wanted to," he said.

His voice had a little uncertain note in it, and Grace glanced at him sharply. "In that case, why did you run away as soon as the game was over?"

"Don't you know?" and Ingleby's laugh had a trace of bitterness in it. "When it is over they don't want me. Of course, we helped them to win, but that was what I was there for—that, and nothing more—while you played splendidly. You see, one depends so much upon his partner."

"Does he?"

"Of course!" and Ingleby lost his head. "Now—I don't mean at tennis only—I could do almost anything with you to encourage me. Still, that is evidently out of the question—like the rest."

He concluded somewhat incoherently, for he realized that this was going too far, and in his embarrassment naturally made matters worse by the attempted qualification. Still, though the girl's colour was a trifle higher, she was not altogether displeased, and felt that there was, perhaps, some excuse for his confidence as she glanced at him covertly. Walter Ingleby was not remarkably different from most other young Englishmen, but he had a sturdy, well set-up figure, and an expressive and by no means unattractive face, with broad forehead, fearless blue eyes, and a certain suggestive firmness of his mouth. He had also a trick of looking at one steadily with his head held well erect, and then speaking with a curious clipped curtness. It was a trifling mannerism which nevertheless carried with it a suggestion of vigour and straightforwardness. Just then there was a little scintillation in his eyes, and he looked like one who had at least the courage to attempt a good deal.

"Well," she said, in a non-committal fashion, "we certainly won the match, and I think you were wrong to slip away. One would almost fancy that you are unduly sensitive now and then."

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Ingleby laughed. "Perhaps I am, but it isn't so very astonishing that I should occasionally resent a slight that isn't meant when there are so many of them that certainly are. No doubt, it's my own fault. I should have known what to expect when I crept into the exclusive tennis club at Holtcar."

"Then I wonder why you joined it at all."

"So do I at times. Still, I wanted to see what people of position and refinement were really like, and to learn anything they might be inclined to teach me. I was ambitious, you see—and besides, I was really fond of the game."

"And you were disappointed when you met them?"

Ingleby made a little expressive gesture. "Chiefly in myself. I thought I was strong enough not to

mind being treated as a professional and politely ignored except when I was useful. Then I imagined it would be excellent discipline, and discipline is presumably good for one, as the worthy vicar, who really appears to have ideas, is fond of observing."

Again the girl glanced at him sharply, with a faint but perceptible arching of her brows.

"Isn't that a trifle patronizing?" she said. "You can't be very much older than I am, and he has, at least, seen a good deal of the world."

Ingleby laughed frankly, though there was a little flush in his face. "I know I very often talk like a fool—and the difference between you and the others is that you very seldom think it necessary to remind me of it. That is, of course, one difference. The rest——"

"I think," said the girl, severely, "we were talking about the vicar."

"Well," said Ingleby, "I really believe he means well, but he is, after all, part of the system, and naturally interested in maintaining the existing state of things. We have in England a few great bolstered-up professions, one could almost call them professional rings, and the men fortunate enough to enter them are more or less compelled to play into one another's hands. The millions who don't belong to them are, of course, outsiders, and couldn't be expected to count, you see."

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The girl stiffened perceptibly, and really looked very patrician as she turned and regarded him indignantly.

"You appear to forget that my father belongs to one of those professions," she said.

"He did," corrected Ingleby, and then stopped abruptly, as he remembered it was reputed that it was not exactly by his own wish Major Coulthurst no longer actively served his nation.

"I wonder if you have deliberately made up your mind to offend me?" asked Grace Coulthurst with icy quietness.

"You know I would cut my hand off sooner than do anything I thought would vex you," Ingleby answered. "I'm afraid I talk too much, but I can't help it now and then. There are, you see, so few people who will listen to me seriously. Unless you are content to adopt the accepted point of view, everybody seems to think it his duty to put his foot on you."

Grace's anger was usually short-lived, for she had a generous nature as well as a sense of humour, and the lad's naive admission appealed to the latter.

"Well," she said, with a little gleam in her eyes, "I really think I, at least, have listened to you with patience; but your views are likely to lead you into trouble. Where did you get them?"

Ingleby laughed. "To tell the truth, I often wonder myself. In any case, it wasn't from my father. He was a staunch and consistent churchman, and kept a little book shop. You can see it in the High Street now. He sold books—and papers behind the counter; I would like you to remember this. Still, as I said, he was consistent, and there was literature he would not handle, nor when they made him a councillor would he wink at certain municipal jobbery. The latter fact was duly remembered when his lease fell in, as well as on other occasions, and when he died, when I was fourteen, there was nothing left for me. He was a scholar, and an upright man—as well as a Tory of the old school and a high churchman."

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"Is it very unusual for a scholar to be either of the latter then?"

"Well," said Ingleby, with a little twinkle in his eyes, "one would almost fancy that it ought to be. However, you can't be in the least interested in these fancies of mine. Shall I gather you that spray of blossom?"

Grace looked curiously at him instead of at the pale-tinted honeysuckle whose sweetness hung about them. She was quite aware that he had somewhat eccentric views, and it was perhaps his originality which had attracted her when, prompted chiefly by pity for the lad who was usually left out in the cold, she had made his acquaintance; but her interest in him had increased with suspicious rapidity considering that it was only a month or two since she had delicately made the first overtures. She was quite willing to admit that she had made them, for she had understood, and under the circumstances sympathized with, the lad's original irresponsiveness, which had vanished when he saw that her graciousness sprang from a kindly nature and was unspoiled by condescension; and Grace Coulthurst could afford to do what other young women of her age at Holtcar would have shrunk from. She had also a certain quiet imperiousness which made whatever she did appear fitting.

"I am afraid you are an inveterate radical," she said.

"I scarcely think that goes quite far enough, as radicalism seems to be understood by its acknowledged leaders. Blatant is the adjective usually hurled at us; and no doubt I deserve it, as witness what you have endured to-night. Still, you see, I wasn't talking quite without a purpose, because I want you to understand my attitude—and that brings me to the point. I'm afraid I can't play with you at the tournament, as was arranged."

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"No?" said Grace, a trifle sharply, for she was very human, and after somewhat daringly showing favour to the man of low degree it was a trifle galling to discover that he failed to appreciate it. "You have, presumably, something that pleases you better to do that day?"

Ingleby turned partly away from her, and glanced across the valley. "No," he said with unusual quietness, "I think you know that could not be. I am, in fact, going away."

Grace was a trifle startled, as well as more concerned than she would have admitted, and had Ingleby been looking at her he might have seen this. It had not been exactly pleasant to hear that he was an advanced democrat, for, while by no means unduly conventional, she had an inborn respect for established customs and procedure, and she felt that the existing condition of affairs, while probably not beyond improvement, might be made considerably worse, at least, so far as she and her friends were concerned. Still, it was disconcerting to find that he was going away, for there would then be no opportunity for teaching him—indirectly, of course—the erroneous nature of his views. This, at least, was the reason she offered herself.

"Where are you going?" she asked, with studied indifference.

Ingleby swung around, with head tilted a trifle backwards—she knew that unconscious pose and the little gleam in his eyes which usually accompanied it—and looked across the cool blue-green meadows towards the fading splendours of the West.

"Out there where men are equal, as they were made to be, and the new lands are too wide for the cramped opinions and prejudices that crush one here!" Then he turned to the girl with a little laugh. "I wish you would say something quietly stinging. I deserve it for going off in that way again. Still, I really felt it."

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"Do you think I could?" and Grace's tone was severe.

Ingleby was even more contrite than she expected. "It was absurd to suggest it. You could never say an unkind or cutting thing to anybody. In fact, your kindness is the one pleasant memory I shall carry away with me. I—your see——"

He pulled himself up abruptly, but the colour was in his cheeks, and the little thrill in his voice again, while it seemed only natural that the girl should smile prettily.

"I wonder," she said, "if one might ask you why you are going?"

The lane was growing dusky now, and Grace, as it happened, held a white glove and a fold of the silvery grey skirt in an uncovered hand, for the dew was settling heavily upon the grass between the wheel ruts. Ingleby did not look at her.

"I don't think I could make you understand how sordid and distasteful my life here is—and it can't be changed," he said. "Every door is closed against the man with neither friends nor money. He must be taught his place, and stay in it, dragging out his life in hopeless drudgery, while I——"

He stopped again, and then looked his companion steadily in the face. "I have found out in the last month how much life has to offer one who has the courage to make a bold bid for what he is entitled to."

"And you expect to make it out there—which presumably means America or Canada?"

They had reached an oaken door in a mossy wall, and Ingleby stood still. "Yes," he said, slowly, "I intend to make it there. Life holds so much—I did not know how much a little while ago—and there are alluring possibilities if one has the courage to break away from the groove prejudice and tradition force him into here. I may never see you again—unless I am successful I think I never shall. Would it be a very great presumption if I asked you for something, a trifle, to carry away with me?"

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He stood looking down upon her with a curious wistfulness in his face, and Grace afterwards tried to believe that it was by accident she dropped her glove just then. In any case, next moment young Ingleby stooped, and when he straightened himself again he not only held the glove exultantly fast, but the hand she had stretched out for it. Then a patch of vivid crimson showed in Grace Coulthurst's cheek as they stood face to face in the summer twilight—the lad of low degree, with tingling nerves and throbbing heart, and the girl of station rudely shaken out of her accustomed serenity. In those few moments they left their youth behind, and crossed the mystic threshold into the ampler life of man and woman.

Then Ingleby, swinging off his straw hat, let the little hand go, and looked at the girl steadily.

"If that was wrong you will have a long while in which to forgive me," he said. "If I live and prosper out there I will bring you back the glove again—and, whatever happens, you cannot prevent my carrying your memory away with me."

Then he turned away, looked back, still bareheaded, and with a little resolute shake of his shoulders swung away down the darkening lane, while Grace inserted a key in the oaken door with somewhat unsteady fingers. She was as yet neither pleased nor angry, but bewildered, and only certain that he had gone, and her face was burning still.

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## INGLEBY STANDS BY HIS OPINIONS

It was late on Saturday night, and unpleasantly hot in the little dingy room where Ingleby sat with a companion beneath the slates of a tall, four-story house in a busy cloth-making town. There were several large holes in the threadbare carpet, and a portion of the horsehair stuffing protruded from the dilapidated sofa, while the rickety chairs and discoloured cloth on the table were equally suggestive of severe economy. A very plain bookcase hung on the wall, and the condition of the historical works and treatises on political economy it contained seemed to indicate that they had been purchased secondhand; while an oil lamp burned dimly on the mantel, for the room was almost intolerably stuffy already, and the gas supplied at Hoddam was bad and dear. A confused murmur of voices came up from the narrow street below, with the clatter of heavy shoes and the clamour of the cheap-Jacks in the neighbouring market square.

Ingleby, who had taken off his jacket, lay in a decrepit arm-chair holding a slip of paper in his hand. Opposite him sat another young man with the perspiration beaded on his face, which was sallow and somewhat hollow. He was watching Ingleby with a faint smile in his eyes.

"The little excursion doesn't seem to commend itself to you," he said.

"No," answered Ingleby drily, "I can't say it does. I had looked forward to spending a quiet day on the moors to-morrow. It will in all probability be the last Sunday I shall ever pass in this country. Besides, considering that I don't even belong to the Society, this notice is a trifle peremptory. Why should the Committee confidently expect my co-operation in enforcing the right of way through Willow Dene? I certainly did not tell anybody to keep me a place in the wagonette, which they are good enough to intimate has been done."

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"Still, after that speech you made you will have to go. You're in sympathy with the movement, anyway?"

Ingleby made a little impatient gesture. "I don't know what came over me that night, and, to tell the truth, Leger, I've been almost sorry I got up ever since. It was, in one way, an astonishing piece of assurance, and I can't help a fancy that most of those who heard me must have known a good deal more about the subject than I did."

"It's not altogether improbable," and his companion laughed. "In fact, twice when you made a point I heard a man behind me quoting your authorities. Still, they didn't expect you to be original."

"One or two of the others certainly were; but that's not quite the question. Of course, there is no excuse for the closing of Willow Dene, but driving out in wagonettes on Sunday doesn't quite appeal to me. It's over three miles, too, unfortunately. One has, after all, to consider popular—prejudice—you see."

Leger was slight of physique and of wholly undistinguished appearance, as well as shabbily dressed; but there was a hint of rather more than intelligence in his sallow face, and he had expressive brown eyes. A little twinkle crept into them just then.

"I can remember occasions when it seemed to please you to fly in the face of them, but your thoroughness isn't altogether above suspicion now and then. One has to be one thing or the other."

"You know my opinions."

"Oh, yes," said Leger smiling. "Most of your acquaintances do. It would be a little astonishing if they didn't. Still, you have a few effete aristocratic notions clinging about you. Why shouldn't we drive out on Sunday, with the traditional crimson neckties and clay pipes if it pleases us, even if our presence is no great improvement to the scenery, when it ought to be clear that we can't go any other day? Besides, what is a man of your opinions doing with those luxuries yonder?"

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He pointed to Ingleby's tennis flannels and black swimming costume which hung behind the door. Ingleby laughed.

"Are cleanliness and decency quite out of keeping with democratic views? I'm fond of swimming, and the only place where I can get into the river now is the big pool beside the Thorndale road. It's a trifle public even at seven A. M., but my landlady objects to my bathing here, and since I can't afford the necessary apparatus I don't blame her. She says it brings the plaster off the lower ceilings, and I really think it does."

"There is the establishment provided by a beneficent municipality."

"Where they charge you sixpence."

Leger nodded. "Sixpence," he said, "is certainly a consideration. Still, there are days on which one can obtain a sufficiency of water for half the sum. The plunge bath is, I believe, forty feet long."

"It is the quality and not the quantity to which I object."

Leger shook his head reproachfully. "I'm afraid those effete prejudices are still very strong in

you. You play tennis, too. How much does that cost you?"

"It's a question I'm not going to answer," and Ingleby flushed hotly. "Anyway, I've had full value for the money."

Leger smiled in a curious fashion as he looked at him, but he changed the subject and pointed to the pamphlet on the floor. "What do you think of the new apostle's speeches?"

A little sparkle crept into Ingleby's eyes. "They are," he said slowly, "almost a revelation. Even on paper one feels the passion and the truth in them. The man's a genius, and you have to believe in him. I could fancy him doing anything he liked with you if you came in contact with him."

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"It is not quite out of the question. It was an Oregon paper that first printed what he had to say, and I believe that State is on the Pacific slope where you are going. You evidently still mean to go?"

"Yes," said Ingleby shortly. "What chance is there for me—or any of us—here?"

Leger threw up the window and looked into the street. The lights of a big gin palace flared down in the narrow gap, and a stream of perspiring humanity flowed along beneath them, slatternly women, and men with flattened chests and shoulders bent by unhealthy toil, jostling one another. The garish brilliancy touched their pallid faces, and the harsh murmur of their voices came up hollowly between the tall houses with the reek of gas fumes and other confused odours. There were many poor in Hoddam, and in hot weather bargains were to be had in the neighbouring market at that hour; while trade was bad just then, and a little lower down the street shadowy figures were flitting into a pawnbroker's door. Leger's face grew a trifle weary as he watched them.

"At the best it is a poor one," he said. "One feels inclined to wonder if—this—is to last forever."

"It's too big a question. Give it up, and come out with me."

"And let the powers that be have it all their own way?" said Leger.

"I'm afraid neither you nor I can prevent them. Besides, from what this American says, there seem to be people with grievances out yonder, too. A good many of them, in fact. I expect there are everywhere."

Leger smiled. "I wonder," he said, "whether that has just dawned on you. Still, I'm not so strong as you are—and there's Hetty. You'll have to go alone, but you'll leave at least two people behind you who will think of you often."

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He stopped abruptly, for there was a patter of feet on the stairway, and Ingleby rose as the door swung open and a girl came in. She carried a basket, and appeared a trifle breathless, for the stairs were steep, but her dress was tasteful, and most men would have admitted that she was pretty. She took the chair Ingleby drew out, and smiled at him.

"Do you know that the people downstairs would hardly let me in?" she said. "You seem to be very well looked after, but I knew you wouldn't mind me. I've come for Tom."

Ingleby laughed, but it was a trifle uneasily, for he was young, and by no means the girl's equal in the matter of self-possession. In fact, one had only to look at Hetty Leger to recognize that she was capable, and could be, on occasion, a trifle daring, for there was courage as well as cheerfulness in her clear blue eyes, which met one's glance steadily from under dark and unusually straight brows.

"You have been marketing?" he said.

Hetty nodded. "Yes," she answered. "You can, if you know how to go about it, get provisions cheap after ten o'clock on Saturday night, and I have had the usual difficulty in making ends meet this week. Wouldn't it be a relief to live in a country where there was no rent to pay and you take a spade and grow what you want to eat?"

"Ingleby's going where they do something of that kind, though I believe they now and then dig up gold and silver, too," said her brother.

Hetty, for no ostensible reason, pulled up one of her little cotton gloves, which did not seem to need it, and then looked quietly at Ingleby.

"Then you are going away?" she asked.

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Her brother nodded. "Yes," he said. "To the Pacific slope of North America. He was just suggesting that we should come, too."

Hetty sat silent for several moments.

"Well?" she said at last.

"I told him it couldn't be thought of. For one thing, it would cost a good deal of money."

Hetty glanced swiftly at Ingleby, and an older man might have noticed the suppressed intentness in her face.

"I'm afraid Tom is right—though I wish you could come," he said. "When I mentioned it I didn't



remember that he isn't very strong and that it must be a very rough country for an Englishwoman. You wouldn't care to live in a log hut forty miles from anywhere, Hetty?"

The girl now looked straight in front of her. "No, I suppose not; but as I shall never get the chance, that doesn't matter. Well, I think you are wise to go. There are already more of us here than there seems to be any use for."

Ingleby almost fancied that there was something slightly unusual in her voice; but her face was impassive, and she rose with a little smile.

"It is getting late, Tom," she said. "You are both going to the demonstration to-morrow?"

Ingleby said they were, and Hetty waited a moment, apparently doing something to her hat, when her brother, who took the basket, passed out of the room. She had a pretty figure, and the pose she fell into with one rounded arm raised and a little hand busy with the hatpin was not unbecoming. She was also on excellent terms with Ingleby, who leaned against the mantel watching her until she shook the hat a trifle impatiently, when he stepped forward.

"If you want the thing put straight, let me try," he said.

Then, to his astonishment, the hand he had laid upon the hat was snatched away, and next moment Hetty, with a red spot in her cheek, stood at least a yard away from him. She had moved so quickly that he was not quite sure how she had got there.

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"Do you think I am less particular than—any one else?"

"No," answered Ingleby contritely, with a trace of confusion. "Certainly not. I would never have offered, only we are such old friends; and I think that when you brought that hat home after buying it you let me put it on for you."

Hetty's face was still a trifle flushed, but she laughed. "That," she said, "was a long time ago; but, after all, we needn't quarrel. In fact, I let Tom go on because I had something to ask you."

"Of course, anything I can do——"

Hetty smiled sardonically. "Oh, yes, I know! Still, it's really very little—or I wouldn't ask you. Just to look after Tom to-morrow. Now, he has in most ways a good deal more sense than you——"

"I can believe it," said Ingleby. "It really isn't very astonishing."

"Still, you are stronger than he is, and he hasn't been very well since he took up the night work at the mill. If there should be any trouble you will look after him?"

Ingleby promised; and, hearing her brother reascending the stairway, the girl swiftly flitted out of the room, while Ingleby sat down to consider, with the warmth still in his face, for he was not quite pleased with himself, and, as a natural result, a trifle vexed with Hetty. It was true, he admitted, that the girl had made a somewhat enticing picture as she stood with face partly turned from him and one hand raised to her head; but it was, he decided, merely the brotherly kindness he had always felt for her which had prompted his offer, and it was unpleasant to feel that he had done anything that might hurt her self-respect. Still, he could not understand why this should be so, since she had undoubtedly permitted him to put the hat on and admire her in it not so very long ago, and he failed to discover any reason why she should, in the meanwhile, have grown stricter in her views as to what was fitting. Nor could he understand her question, which suggested that she considered herself entitled to at least as much deference as a person she preferred not to name.

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Then, remembering that most young women were subject to unaccountable fancies now and then, he dismissed the matter as of no importance, after all, and once more busied himself with the American's speeches. They were certainly stirring, and made the more impression because he was unacquainted with Western hyperbole; but there was in them, as wiser men had admitted, the ring of genuine feeling, as well as a logical vindication of democratic aspirations. Ingleby was young, and his blood warmed as he read; while Hetty Leger, as she walked home through the hot streets of the still noisy town with her brother, was for once curiously silent, and almost morose, though, considering the life she led, she was usually a cheerful girl.

It was not much quieter on the following afternoon when Ingleby, who, partly as a protest against the decrees of conventionality, wore a soft cap and his one suit of light summer tweed, met Leger on the doorstep of the Committee rooms of a certain Society. Several big wagonettes were already drawn up, and men with pallid faces sat in them, neatly attired for the most part, though somewhat to Ingleby's annoyance several of them smoked clay pipes and wore brilliant neckties and hard felt hats. He was quite aware that it was unreasonable of him to object to this, but, nevertheless, he could not help it. They were, however, quiet and orderly enough, and indulged in no more than good-humoured badinage with the crowd that had assembled to see them off; but Ingleby felt inclined to protest when Leger led him to a place on the box-seat of the foremost vehicle, where a man was scattering leaflets among the crowd.

"Couldn't we sit anywhere else?" he asked. "It's a little conspicuous here."

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Leger shook his head. "That can't be helped," he said. "It's the penalty of making speeches. You are considered one of the stalwarts now. There's no use in objecting to the result when you have been guilty of the cause, you know."

"I'll be especially careful another time," said Ingleby, with a little grimace. "In the meanwhile I'm ready to do anything you can reasonably expect of me."

Then there was a cracking of whips and a rattle of wheels, and the discordant notes of a cornet broke through the semi-ironical cheer; and, as they rolled across the river, which, foul with the refuse of tanneries and dye-works, crept out of the close-packed town, a man who sat on the bridge waved his hat to the leading driver.

"Take them straight to the lock-up, Jim," he said. "It will save everybody trouble, and what's the use of going round?"

Then they wound through dusky woods out of the hot valley, and down the long white road across a sun-baked moor, where the dust whirled behind them in a rolling cloud. However, the men in the foremost vehicle got little of it, and Ingleby felt that the drive would have been pleasant in different circumstances, as he watched the blue hills that rose in the dazzling distance, blurred with heat. Only one white fleecy cloud flecked the sweep of cerulean, and the empty moor lay still under the drowsy silence of the Sunday afternoon. It seemed to him most unfitting that the harsh voices of his companions, the clatter of hoofs, and the doleful tooting of the cornet, should jar upon it. Then as they dipped into a hollow they came upon other travellers, all heading in the same direction, who hurled somewhat pointed jests at them as they passed; but these did not exactly resemble the men in the wagonettes. Their attire was by no means neat, and they had not in the least the appearance of men about to discharge a duty, while several of them carried heavy sticks.

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"I wonder what they mean to do with those bludgeons," said Ingleby a trifle uneasily.

Leger laughed. "I have no doubt they would come in handy for killing pheasants. There are, I believe, a good many young ones down in the Dene. Of course, the Committee could very well dispense with the company of those fellows, but we can't prevent any man from asserting his rights as a Briton."

"That," said Ingleby, grimly, "is in one respect almost a pity. The difficulty is that somebody will get the credit of our friends' doings."

"Of course!" and Leger laughed again. "You can't be a reformer for nothing; you have to take the rough with the smooth—though there is, as a rule, very little of the latter."

Ingleby said nothing further; but it dawned on him, as it had, indeed, done once or twice before, that even a defective system of preserving peace and order might be preferable to none at all. Still, he naturally would not admit his misgivings, and said nothing until the wagonettes rolled into a little white village gay with flowers and girt about by towering beeches. The windows of an old grey house caught the sunlight and flashed among the trees, and, as the vehicles drew up, a trim groom on a splendid horse swept out through the gate of a clematis-covered lodge.

Then there was a hoarse cheer from a group of dilapidated and dusty loungers as the men swung themselves down outside the black-beamed hostelry which bore a coat-of-arms above its portal. They were unusually quiet, and Leger, who glanced at them, touched Ingleby's shoulder.

"They'll do their work," he said. "Still, I fancy we are expected, and I'm not sure that I'd be sorry if we had the thing done, and were driving home again."

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### III CONFLICTING CLAIMS

The sunlight beat down fiercely on the shaven grass, and a drowsy hum of bees stole through the stillness of the Sunday afternoon when Grace Coulthurst and Geoffrey Esmond strolled across the lawn at Holtcar Grange. There were at least two acres of it, flanked by dusky firs and relieved on two sides by patches of graduated colour, while on the third side one looked out towards the blue hills across the deep hollow of Willow Dene into which the beech woods rolled down. A low wall, along which great urns of scarlet geraniums were set, cut off the lawn from the edge of the descent, and Grace, seating herself on the broad coping, glanced down into the cool shadow, out of which the sound of running water came up.

"It really looks very enticing on a day like this. Don't you think it is a little hard on the Hoddam people to shut them out of it?" she said.

Her companion, who leaned, with his straw hat tilted back, against one of the flower-filled urns, smiled as he glanced down at her. He was a young man of slender, wiry frame, with an air of graceful languidness which usually sat well upon him, though there were occasions on which it was not readily distinguished from well-bred insolence.

"I suppose it is, but they brought it upon themselves," he said. "Nobody would mind their walking quietly through the Dene, even if they did leave their sandwich papers and their bottles behind

them."

"I have seen wire baskets provided in such places," said Grace.

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The young owner of Holtcar Grange laughed. "So have I. In fact, I tried it here, and put up a very civil notice pointing out what they were for. The Hoddam people, however, evidently considered it an unwarrantable interference with their sacred right to make as much mess of another person's property as they pleased, for soon after the baskets arrived we found that somebody had taken the trouble to collect them and deposit them in the lake."

"A gardener could, however, pick up a good many papers in an afternoon."

"It would naturally depend upon how hard he worked, and, as you may have noticed, undue activity is not a characteristic of anybody at the Grange. Still, it would be several years before he made a young holly from which the leading stem had been cut out grow again; besides which the proletariat apparently consider themselves entitled to dig up the primroses and daffodils by basketfuls with spades."

Grace was not greatly interested in the subject, but it at least was safe, and Geoffrey Esmond's conversation had hitherto taken a rather more personal turn than she cared about.

"Still, you could spare them a few wild flowers," she said.

She turned and glanced across the velvet lawn towards the old grey house flanked by its ancient trees. The sunlight lay bright upon its time-mellowed façade, and was flung back from the half-hidden orchid houses and vineries. Esmond apparently understood her, and for a moment his eyes rested curiously upon her face.

"You mean I have rather more than my share of what most people long for? Still, you ought to know that nobody is ever quite content, and that what one has only sets one wishing for more."

Grace laughed. "One would certainly fancy that you had quite enough already—but I wonder if one might ask you if you have heard from Reggie lately?"

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Esmond's face hardened a trifle. "You, at least, might. He does not write often—naturally—though I always had a fancy that Reggie mightn't, after all, have been so very much to blame as most people seem to think. Anyway, we had a letter a few weeks ago, and he had got his commission in the Canadian mounted police. He ought to be thankful—in the circumstances."

"I am pleased to hear it," and a just perceptible trace of colour showed in Grace's cheeks. "It is rather a coincidence that my father, who went up to London a week ago, came back with the expectation of obtaining a Government post in Western Canada, a Crown Commissioner on the new gold-fields I think. He was in charge of a mining district in Western Africa, you know. I should probably go to Canada with him."

"Then one would sincerely hope that Major Coulthurst will get a post at home."

He stopped, perhaps warned by something in his companion's attitude, and she deftly turned the subject back to the grievance the Hoddam people thought they had against him. The fact that they had apparently a good deal to say to each other had in the meanwhile not escaped attention. A few lounge chairs had been laid out about a little table in the shadow of a big chestnut, and from one of them a lady of some importance in that vicinity watched the pair with distinct disapprobation. Holtcar Grange was but a portion of young Esmond's inheritance, and she had several daughters of her own. She frowned as she turned to the lady nearest her.

"That girl," she said acidly, "is making excellent use of her opportunities. It does not appear to matter which one it is, so long as he belongs to the family."

Her companion looked up languidly. "The drift of that last remark is not especially plain."

"It would have been if you had seen what went on before Reggie Esmond went, or rather was sent, out to Canada. The major was in Africa then, and the girl was staying here. She was only just out of the schoolroom, but that did not prevent her attaching herself to Reggie. It was only when he was no longer worth powder and shot that she turned her attention to his cousin."

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This, as it happened, was very little nearer the truth than such statements usually are, when made by a matron who has an unappreciated daughter's future to provide for; but the lady who heard it understood the reason for her companion's rancour.

"Grace Coulthurst," she said, "is pretty, and has really an excellent style. Besides, her father evidently has means of his own."

The first speaker smiled compassionately. "Major Coulthurst thrives upon his debts; he threw away what little money he had in speculation. Then he got himself sent out to West Africa, and either allowed the niggers too much of their own way or worried them unnecessarily, for they turned out and killed some of their neighbours who worked at the mines. That resulted in black troops being sent up, and Coulthurst, who led them into a swamp they couldn't get across, was afterwards quietly placed upon the shelf. In fact, I believe he pins his hopes upon the men appointed by the new Government remembering their unfortunate friends."

"That," remarked her companion drily, "is, after all, what a good many of us seem to think the Government is there for."

She might have said more, but a little, black-robed lady and a burly red-faced man with a merry twinkle in his eyes and a tinge of grey in his hair, appeared just then. The latter held himself well, and did not in the least look like a man who had borne much responsibility in pestilential Africa. As a matter of fact, Major Coulthurst, who was by no means brilliant either as administrator or soldier, took his cares lightly.

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"And you fancy you will get the appointment?" asked Mrs. Esmond, looking up at him.

"I hope so," said Coulthurst. "I really think the people in office ought to do something for me. I contrived to save them a good deal of trouble with the French on the frontier. Still I don't know what to do with Grace if I get it, though I had thoughts of taking her out to Canada."

Mrs. Esmond appeared to reflect for a moment or two.

"Is there any reason why you shouldn't leave her here?" she said. "I think I took good care of her before."

They had almost reached the table where the others sat, and Coulthurst stopped with a shadow of perplexity in his sunburnt face. He was a widower with insufficient means, and had one or two somewhat pointed letters from importunate creditors in his pocket then. He had also been a friend of Mrs. Esmond's for more than twenty years, but, though by no means fastidious in some respects, there were points on which he possessed a certain delicacy of sentiment.

"I almost think there is. Grace, you see, is older now," he said.

Mrs. Esmond looked up, and, as it happened, Grace Coulthurst and Geoffrey Esmond came slowly towards them across the lawn just then. The young man's gaze was fixed upon the girl, but she was looking away from him, which increased the suggestiveness of his attitude and expression, for both of those who watched them could see his face. Grace was indeed distinctly pretty, and that afternoon the indefinite but unmistakable attribute which the woman who had defended her termed good style was especially noticeable. It was expressed in the poise of the little head, the erect carriage, and even the fashion in which the light draperies hung in flowing lines about the shapely figure. Then the black-robed lady turned, and looked at Coulthurst steadily.

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"Yes," he said, though she had not spoken. "Her mother would have known what was right—and fitting, but since she was taken from me I feel it—a responsibility, to say the least."

"Could you not trust me?"

"In everything. That is, unless it was to your own disadvantage—or what would certainly be regarded so. You mean me to be frank, I think?"

"Of course! In any case, I am not sure that you are capable of concealing your sentiments."

"Then," said Coulthurst gravely, "I should like you to remember that Grace has nothing."

Mrs. Esmond smiled. "And Geoffrey has a good deal? Still, we have it on excellent authority that the value of a good woman is above rubies."

Major Coulthurst was red-faced and burly, and usually abrupt in his movements; but his attitude became him as he made his companion a little grave inclination.

"Grace is very like her mother—I cannot say more than that."

Perhaps it was not very tactful; though he did not know what the gossips had whispered when he was a reckless subaltern long ago. In any case, he had married a woman with as few possessions as he himself had, and his life had been a hard one ever since. His companion, however, smiled somewhat curiously.

"I think she is in many ways like her father too; but that is scarcely the point," she said. "I have offered to take care of her for you."

"Well," said Coulthurst quietly, "when the time comes we will try to decide, and in the meanwhile I can only thank you."

Then they joined the others, and for awhile sat talking in the shade, until Geoffrey Esmond, who had taken his place beside them, looked up suddenly with a curious contraction of his face.

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"I am almost afraid we are going to have some undesirable visitors," he said.

From beyond the trees that shut the lawn off from the village there rose the tooting of a cornet, which was followed by a cheer and a rattle of wheels. Then there was a murmur of harsh voices which broke portentously through the slumbrous quietness, and Esmond, rising abruptly, glanced at the major, who walked a little apart with him. Esmond looked worried.

"Yes," he said in answer to the major's questioning glance, "I fancy they are coming to pull my gates and fences down. Roberts, the groom, heard enough in Hoddam to suggest that they were plotting something of the kind, and I told him to have a horse saddled, though I didn't quite believe it myself. There are, however, evidently several wagonette-loads of them yonder."

"The question is," said Coulthurst sharply, "do you mean to let them in?"

The young man laughed. "I should almost have fancied it was unnecessary. Including the keepers,

I can roll up six men. That makes eight with you and me, while Leslie, who is a magistrate, as you know, lives scarcely two miles away."

"Then you had better send for him. Eight men with the law behind them should be quite enough to hold off the rabble—that is, so long as no blow is struck; but you will excuse my mentioning that you will require to keep a firm hand on your temper."

"I'll try, though I have been told it isn't a very excellent one," said the younger man. "Now, if you will beguile the women into the house, I'll make arrangements."

Coulthurst was not a clever man, but he contrived to accomplish it; and it was some twenty minutes later when he and Esmond walked down a path beneath the beeches with four or five men behind them. The major carried a riding whip, and there was a curious little smile in his eyes, while the rest had sticks, though in accordance with his instructions they made no display of them. The wood was shadowy and very still, and there was no sound but that made by startled rabbits, until they came out into the sunlight, where a spiked railing crossed a narrow glade. There was a mossy path beyond it chequered with patches of cool shadow, and a group of dusty men were moving down it towards the padlocked gate. The foremost of them stopped when they saw the party from the Grange, and then after a whispered consultation came on again.

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"Where are you going?" asked Esmond.

"Into the Dene," said one of the strangers.

"You have been to the lodge to ask permission?"

"No," said another hot and perspiring man, "we haven't. It isn't necessary."

"I'm afraid it is," said Esmond quietly. "In fact, there is a board to that effect a few yards back. No doubt you noticed it."

The man laughed. "We did. It isn't there now. We pulled it up."

Esmond flushed a trifle. "Then if you ever wish to get into the Dene I think you made a mistake," he said. "Still, as you can't get any farther to-day, you may as well go back. This gate is locked."

"That don't count," said somebody. "We'll have it off its hinges inside five minutes."

The lad swung round sharply towards the speaker, but Coulthurst laid a restraining hand upon his arm. "Steady!" he said, and raised his voice a trifle. "Now, look here, my men, you certainly can't come in, and you'll only get yourselves into trouble by trying. This is private property."

"Of course!" said one of the strangers. "Everything is. You've got the land, and you've got the water—one can't even bathe in the river now. It's not your fault you can't lay hands on the air and sunshine, too."

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There was an approving murmur from his comrades, and Esmond shook off the major's grasp.

"That is rot!" he said. "Willow Dene belongs to me, and you are certainly not coming in. I don't feel inclined to explain my reasons for keeping you out of it, and it's quite probable you wouldn't understand them. Have you brought any responsible person to whom one could talk along with you?"

The languid insolence in his even tone had an effect which a flood of invective might have failed to produce; and once more there was a murmur from the crowd, while a man with a grim, dust-smearred face held up a bludgeon.

"We've brought these, and they're good enough," he said.

Then the men moved a little, and there were cries of "Let him have a chance!" as a young man pushed his way through them. He was plainly and neatly dressed and carried nothing in his hand.

"I'm sorry our Committee is not here to lay our views before you, Mr. Esmond, which was what we had intended; but if you will try to look at the thing sensibly it will save everybody trouble," he said.

"What has become of the worthy gentlemen? Weren't they capable of walking from the 'Griffin'?" asked Esmond drily. "It really isn't very far."

The young man did not appear to notice the jibe. "The fact is, we had a little dispute among ourselves," he said. "The views of the Committee didn't quite coincide with those of the rest, but since the Committee is not here I should like to point out that the Hoddam people have passed through the Dene without hindrance for at least twenty years, and as that gives them a legal right of way they mean to continue doing it. Now, if you will make no opposition we will promise that no damage whatever will be done to your property."

"Don't you worry about the concerned Committee," said a voice from the crowd. "It's got the sulks. Only two turned out. We're going by what Mr. Leger says."

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Esmond glanced at the man in front of him, with a little sardonic smile. "I have only your assurance, and I'm afraid it would scarcely be wise to place more confidence in your friends than their leaders seem to have done. Their appearance is, unfortunately, against them."

There were cries of "Stop it, Leger; you're wasting time! Tell him to get out of the way! We're coming in!"

The young man raised his hand. "I believe they mean it, Mr. Esmond. Now, there are two sensible courses open to you. Unlock that gate and make no further opposition; or stand aside while we lift it off its hinges, and then proceed against us for trespassing. You will, if you are wise, make no attempt to prevent our getting in."

There was a moment's silence, and the little knot of men behind the gate and the crowd outside watched each other's faces. One or two were evidently uneasy, others a trifle grim, but there was a portentous murmur from the dusty rabble farther back in the shadow. Then young Esmond laughed in an unpleasant fashion as he drew the lash of his dog-whip suggestively through his hand.

"Whoever lays a hand upon this gate will take the consequences," he said.

Coulthurst touched his shoulder, and said something in his ear, but the young man moved away from him impatiently.

"Am I to be dictated to by this rabble? Let them come!" he said.

The major made a little gesture of resignation. "Well," he said, "if you are determined to make trouble I think you will get your wish."

Then the front of the crowd split up, and several men came out from it carrying between them what appeared to be the post to which the notice-board had been nailed. They came on at a ran, and, disregarding the major's warning, swung it like a battering ram. Next moment there was a crash. The gate rattled, but still held fast, while the lash of Esmond's dog-whip curled round one man's hand. He loosed his hold upon the post with a howl, his comrades recoiled, and there was an angry cry from the rear of the crowd, while a sod alighted squarely in the major's face. He wiped it quietly with his handkerchief, and then seizing Esmond by main force thrust him a few paces aside.

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"Go home, my men, and you have my word that the affair shall go no further," he said. "It's your last chance. We'll have a magistrate and several policemen here in a very few minutes."

"Look out for yourself," said somebody. "We've nothing against you. Now, pick up your post, boys, and down with the thing!"

The men with the post came on again; there was a roar from the crowd, and a crash, as the gate swung open; then as a man with a stick sprang through the gap Esmond's dog-whip came down upon his face. Next moment somebody had hurled him backwards, and the crowd rolled through the opening.

"Back there! Look after your master, Jenkins!" the major's voice rang out, and a man dropped suddenly beneath his riding-crop.

Then nobody knew exactly what happened, but while the sticks rose and fell Ingleby and Esmond, who had evaded the burly keeper, found themselves face to face. Esmond, who was flushed and gasping, swung the dog-whip round his head, but before he struck, Leger sprang straight at him with empty hands. Then a stick that somebody swung came down, and Esmond fell just clear of the rest, with a gash on his forehead from which there spread a crimson smear. Leger staggered forward, and the major gripped his shoulder and flung him into the arms of a keeper.

"Hold him fast! That's the lad who did it," he said, and faced round on the crowd with hand swung up and voice ringing commandingly.

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"You have already done as much as you will care to account for," he said. "Manslaughter is a somewhat serious thing."

The tumult ceased for a moment, and everybody saw Esmond lying very still upon the turf with the ominous smear of crimson on his blanched face. His eyes were half closed now, and they had an unpleasantly suggestive appearance. Then Ingleby stepped forward and turned to Coulthurst.

"Nobody will interfere with you while you take him away, but the man you have was not the one who struck him down," he said. "Give him up, and we'll go back quietly."

The Major smiled grimly. "I hope," he said, "to hand him to the police inside five minutes."

"Look here," said somebody, "it was all Mr. Esmond's own fault, and, so to speak, an accident. Go and get a doctor for him, and let us have our man."

There was a little hard glitter in Coulthurst's eyes. "He will find it difficult to persuade a jury of that. Stick to the lad, Jenkins, and pick Mr. Esmond up, two of you. Stand aside there, and it's possible that we will not proceed against any more of you."

Ingleby turned to the crowd. "You're not going to let them hand him to the police for a thing he didn't do?"

There was a rush and a scuffle, the major's riding-crop was torn from him, and groom and gardener and keeper were swept away, while Ingleby, laughing harshly, reeled into the shadow of the trees with his hand on Leger's shoulder.

"I think," he said, "there's nothing that need keep us here."

Then, while some of his companions pursued Esmond's retainers, and the rest stood still, uncertain what to do next, Ingleby started back through the woods towards Hoddam, dragging Leger, who seemed a trifle dazed.

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## IV LEGER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Leger was paler than usual, as well as breathless and very dusty, when he flung himself down in a dilapidated arm-chair in Ingleby's room. The window was open, for it was very hot, and Ingleby, who stood near it, appeared to be listening intently to the patter of feet that came up from the narrow street, until he moved forward and laid his hand upon the sash. Then Leger laughed hollowly.

"I don't think that's necessary, and I wish you would leave it as it is just now," he said. "Considering that you live on the fourth story they're scarcely likely to come in that way."

"I did it without thinking," said Ingleby, who turned to him a trifle flushed in face. "You're looking faint. I can get you some water—fortunately it's cheap."

"I'll be all right in a minute or two," and Leger made a little deprecatory gesture. "I'm not sure I ever made four miles quite so fast before, and the blow I got from that fellow's dog-whip, the handle end, must have shaken me. Never mind the water."

Ingleby sat down, a trifle limply, and, unconscious of the fact that his own clothes were badly torn, gazed at his companion. Leger's dusty disarray heightened the effect of his pallor, and his hair, dank with perspiration, lay smeared upon his forehead, while there was a big discoloured bruise upon one cheek. They had come home across the meadow and through the woodland instead of by the road, and neither of them remembered how many hedges and thickets they had scrambled through, since the one thing apparent was the advisability of escaping attention.

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"We made an excellent pace," Ingleby said. "I scarcely think that the others can have got here yet. They hadn't the same necessity for haste. Still, I'm almost afraid it was wasted energy. You see, the police wouldn't be very long in tracing us."

"I don't suppose so. That big military-looking fellow meant to make sure of me. No doubt he'll send a groom over with our description. He seemed to recognize you, too."

Ingleby rose abruptly and leaned against the mantel with his lips firmly set. It was several moments before he spoke again.

"I think he did," he said. "In fact, I'd have done almost anything sooner than have had this happen; though that doesn't matter now. There's a more important question—and it has to be faced."

They looked at each other in silence for a second or two, and both their faces were very grim with the shadow of fear in them. They were young, and shrank from the contemplation of what it seemed had been done. The thing was horrible in itself, quite apart from the consequences, which promised to be disastrous.

"You mean," said Leger very quietly, "is he dead?"

Ingleby made a little gesture, and once more for almost a minute the heavy silence was intensified by the ticking of his watch and the sounds in the street below. Both of them listened intently, almost expecting to hear the tramp of heavy feet upon the stairway.

"Heaven forbid!" said Ingleby, a trifle hoarsely. "Still, he looked horribly like it. There's just one thing of which I should like to be quite certain."

"Of course!" and Leger met his comrade's gaze. "Suppose I told you I did it, would it separate us?"

"No," said Ingleby. "You know that. It might have been I; and, anyway, we were both in the thing."

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"Then, as you supposed, the military man was mistaken. I had nothing in my hands, and never even reached him."

Ingleby, in spite of his protestations, drew a deep breath of relief, but Leger, who appeared to be recovering now, smiled.

"Well," he said, "you're satisfied, but it doesn't in the least affect the position. You see, the military gentleman appeared certain he saw me strike the blow, and I scarcely think my word would go very far against his with the usual kind of jury."

"You know who did it?"

Leger smiled curiously. "I do, but you ought to understand that the fact isn't of much use to me."

"You mean?"

"I could plead not guilty, but I couldn't point out the man responsible. You see, I induced him to join the Society, and gave him the American's pamphlets—I believe the more virulent ones. They seemed to make a strong impression on him. One can't well back out of his responsibility—especially when the adversary is always ready to make the most of the opportunity. Besides, the man has a family."

Ingleby clenched one hand. "And you have Hetty."

"Yes," said Leger with an impressive quietness. "And Hetty has only me. Still, one must do what he feels he has to."

"But you can't leave Hetty—and what would happen to her if you were——"

"If I were in jail?" and Leger's face went awry. "She would be turned out of her berth to a certainty. It didn't quite strike me until you put the thing before me. There's the lad's mother too. A little horrible, isn't it? How long does one usually get for manslaughter?"

Again there was silence save for Ingleby's groan. Democratic aspirations were very well as subjects for discussion, but now that he was brought face to face with the results of attempting to realize them, they appalled him. He did not remember that usually very little worth the having can be obtained without somebody's getting hurt; and it would have afforded him no great consolation if he had remembered, since, for the time being, he had had quite enough of theories. Then he made a little abrupt gesture.

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"Tom," he said, "what dolts we are! The thing is perfectly simple. You have only to come out with me, and the fact that you've made a bolt of it will be quite enough to divert suspicion from the other man."

"There is a difficulty. Steamboat fares cost money, and I'm not sure Hetty and I have five pounds in the treasury."

Ingleby laughed almost light-heartedly. "I think I have enough to take us all out at the cheapest rates, and you must let me lend it to you, if only to prove that what you believe in isn't an impracticable fancy."

Leger slowly straightened himself. "I don't want to be ungracious—but it's a difficult thing to do. The money's yours—and you'd have nothing left."

Ingleby laid a hand on his shoulder, and gripped it hard. "Are you willing to see your sister cast adrift to save your confounded pride? The fact that she has a relative undergoing penal servitude isn't much of a recommendation to a girl who has to earn her bread. Besides, like a good many of us, you're not logical. You thought you had a claim on Esmond's property."

There was a light step on the stairway, and he stopped suddenly. "There's Hetty," he said. "We'll leave it to her."

The door swung open, and the girl came in gasping, with horror in her eyes.

"Oh," she said, "its awful! They've come in with the wagonettes, and Harry told me. How did it happen?"

"Sit down," said Ingleby gently. "Tom will explain."

Leger did so concisely, and Hetty clenched the chair-arm hard as she listened to him. Still, young as she was, she held herself in hand, and sat very still, with the colour ebbing from her face.

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"What shall we do?" she said.

"Ingleby has asked us to go out to Canada with him. He offers to lend us the money."

The girl's face flushed suddenly, and she glanced at Ingleby, who appeared embarrassed.

"How much will you have left if you do that?" she asked.

"I don't know yet. Anyway, it doesn't matter. If you make any silly objections, Hetty, Tom will go to jail."

The girl turned to her brother, with the crimson still in her cheek and her lips quivering, and it suddenly struck Ingleby that she was really remarkably pretty, though that appeared of no great moment just then.

"That would happen, Tom?" she said.

"Yes," said Leger quietly; "I believe it would."

Hetty turned again, and looked at Ingleby with a curious intentness. "You are quite sure you want us?"

Ingleby, moved by an impulse he did not understand, caught and held fast one of her hands.



"Hetty," he said, "aren't we old friends? There is nobody I would sooner take with me, but we shall certainly quarrel if you ask me a question of that kind again."

The girl's expression perplexed him, and with a sudden movement she drew her hand away. "Well," she said, "we will come. I would stay—only I know Tom would not go without me; but whatever happens we will pay you back the money."

"I don't think you want to be unpleasant, Hetty," said Ingleby. "Anyway, you have only about an hour in which to get ready, because if we're not off by the next train it's quite likely that we shall not have the opportunity for going at all. Get what you want together, and meet us behind the booking office on the main line platform. Tom and I will take the back way to the station."

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Hetty turned and went out without a word, and Leger looked at his companion.

"I don't think she meant to hurt you, but what she did mean exactly is a good deal more than I understand," he said.

Ingleby made a little impatient gesture. "I don't suppose it matters. Girls seem to have curious fancies. In the meanwhile it might be as well if we made a start. I'll lend you a decent jacket, and, as you had a cap on, it would be advisable to take my straw hat. To carry out the same notion I'll slip on my one dark suit. They usually make a point of mentioning one's clothes."

They were ready in about ten minutes, but when they had descended the long stairway Ingleby stopped in the dingy hall, and stood still a moment irresolute.

"If it wasn't for the harpy downstairs we might get clear away before anybody was aware that we had gone," he said. "I can't leave her what I owe her either, for one never does seem to have change when he wants it. How much have you got on you?"

"A handful of copper," said Leger, with a little grim smile.

Ingleby appeared to reflect. "I could send her the few shillings from wherever we stop."

"The Post Office people obligingly stamp every envelope with the name of the place it comes from. I don't think we want to leave a trail behind us."

Ingleby stood still a moment longer with a flush in his face. "Nothing would stop that woman's talking—not even a gag. It's horribly unfortunate."

"It usually is," and Leger looked at him with a curious little smile. "The worst of having a propaganda is that the people who haven't any get indignant when one doesn't live up to it. They naturally lay part of the blame on the fallacies he believes in."

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Ingleby swung round. "I'd sooner face a battery—but I'm going down."

He disappeared down the basement steps, and in another minute a harsh voice apparently vituperating him rose up, and when he rejoined his comrade his face was redder than ever.

"Now," he said, "we'll go; the sooner the better. Everybody in the neighbourhood will know what she thinks of me inside of ten minutes."

They slipped out into the street, and Ingleby stopped a moment at the end of it and looked back with a curious expression in his face. The sunlight that lay bright upon one side of it emphasized its unattractiveness. Tall houses, grim in their squalid ugliness, shut it in, and the hot air that scarcely stirred between them was heavy with the sour odours from a neighbouring tanyard. A hoarse clamour and a woman's voice, high-pitched and shrill with fear or anger, came out of a shadowy alley where unkempt children played in the gutter. The uproar did not concern them. They were apparently used to it.

"I've lived five years in the midst of—this—and now I'm almost sorry to leave it," he said. "There's no reason in us."

Then he turned again with a little resolute shake of his shoulders. "Well, we have done with it at last, and if half what one hears is true there is a chance for such as us in the country we are going to."

Leger said nothing, and it was silently they threaded their way deviously in and out of alleys and archways towards the station. Their life had been a hard one in that squalid town, but the place had, after all, been home, and they could not tell what awaited them in the unknown. They had in them the steadfastness which is born of struggle, but the unthinking courage of youth that has felt no care is quite a different thing.

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However, nobody appeared desirous of preventing their departure, and they eventually got away by a steamer for which they had to wait several days in Liverpool.

In the meanwhile Geoffrey Esmond lay one evening propped up amidst the pillows in a darkened room at Holtcar Grange. He was blanched in face, and his eyes were heavy, while a big wet bandage was still rolled about his head. Major Coulthurst was by his bedside, and a burly sergeant of police sat on the very edge of a sofa with a notebook in his hand. The window was open behind the blind, and a little cool air that brought the fragrance of flowers with it crept into the room.

"Major Coulthurst fancied he could recognize the man who assaulted you, Mr. Esmond, and I

have no doubt we will lay hands on him in a day or two," said the officer. "If you could identify him, too, it would make the thing more certain, and I would like to read you the description furnished me before we go any farther."

"If that is the usual course I don't see why I should object," said Esmond drily. "Still, isn't it a trifle suggestive?"

The sergeant did not appear to notice the irony of the inquiry, and launched out into what was, in the circumstances, a tolerably accurate description of Leger. Esmond listened quietly, with a little smile in his half-closed eyes.

"Major Coulthurst," he said, "is evidently astonishingly quick-sighted if he saw all that."

"I'm not sure I understand you, Esmond," and Coulthurst looked up sharply.

"Well," said the younger man reflectively, "I always fancied you were a sportsman, and we had our fun. Of course, while it lasted I would cheerfully have broken the Socialist fellow's head if I could have managed it, but just now the odds seem a trifle heavy against him."

Coulthurst laughed a little, but the sergeant shook his head. "That's not at all the way to look at it, sir," he said. "In a case of this kind one has, if I may point it out, a duty to society."

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"And the police?" said Esmond, who made a little gesture. "I really do not think I should ask the opinion of the latter as to what is incumbent on me. Still, that is scarcely the point. You want me to identify the man—and I can't do it."

"You must have seen him close to, sir."

Esmond laughed. "Have you ever had incipient concussion of the brain? You probably haven't. I believe they line your headgear with cork or cane. Well, in one respect, it's a little unfortunate, since it would have helped you to understand my position. Now, the major says the man's hair was light brown, but so far as I can remember it was red. Are you quite sure it wasn't, Coulthurst?"

Coulthurst appeared reflective. "He certainly had his hat on."

"A cap, sir," said the sergeant.

Esmond glanced at the major reproachfully. "You will notice, sergeant, how reliable he is."

"The fact mentioned wouldn't prevent your seeing what kind of man he was," said the sergeant, tartly. "He is described as little and pale, and of a delicate appearance."

"Then if the blow on my head is anything to go by, I really think my friend was mistaken," said Esmond. "It's my firm opinion the man was distinctly muscular."

The sergeant stood up, and closed his book. "The affair is a serious one, and we naturally look to a gentleman of your position for——"

Esmond stopped him with a gesture and a little languid smile, under which, however, the burly sergeant flushed.

"As I fancy I mentioned, there are matters in which it is hardly the province of the police to instruct me," he said. "I'm sorry I can't do anything more for you to-day, sergeant, but if you were to come round when my head has settled down a little I might be able to recollect the fellow's appearance rather more distinctly."

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"If we are to lay hands on him we must have a warrant at once."

"Then if it depends on me I'm very much afraid you will not get it—and now, as the doctor insists on quietness, you will excuse me. Can you reach the bell, Major?"

The sergeant went out fuming inwardly, and Coulthurst laughed. "I'm not quite sure that I should have let the fellow off," he said. "What made you do it?"

"I really don't know, and scarcely think it matters," said Esmond languidly. "Still, you see, I fancy we went a little farther than the law would sanction, and that being so one could scarcely expect the other fellow to pay for everything. Now, if I might remind you, Miss Coulthurst was kind enough to promise to come in and talk to me."

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## V

### THE NEW COUNTRY

It was a still evening, and Major Coulthurst and Mrs. Esmond paced slowly side by side up and down the terrace at Holtcar Grange. The house looked westward, and the last of the sunshine rested lovingly upon its weathered front, where steep tiled roof and flaking stone that had silvery

veins in it were mellowed to pale warm tints by age. Beyond it, orchid house, fernery, and vinery flashed amidst the trees; while the great cool lawn, shaven to the likeness of emerald velvet, glowing borders, and even the immaculate gravel that crunched beneath the major's feet conveyed the same suggestion to him. It was evident that there was no need of economy at Holtcar Grange, and Coulthurst, who had faced the world long enough to recognize the disadvantages of an empty purse, sighed as he remembered the last budget the post had brought him.

He had served his nation sturdily, according to his lights, which, however, were not especially brilliant, wherever work was hardest and worst paid; while now, when it was almost time to rest, he was going out again to the wilderness on the farthest confines of a new country, where even those who serve the Government live primitively. He longed to stay in England and take his ease, but funds were even lower than they usually were with him. Still, he shrank from exposing his daughter to the discomforts he was at last commencing to find it hard to bear, and she had but to speak a word and remain, with all that any young woman could reasonably look for, the mistress of Holtcar Grange. Though he roused himself with an effort he felt that his conversation was even less brilliant than usual and that his companion noticed it. It was certain that she smiled when she surprised him glancing somewhat anxiously across the lawn.

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"You have quite decided on going out?" she asked.

"I have," said Coulthurst simply. "In ten days from to-day. The commission's in my pocket—I was uncommonly glad to get it."

"Still," said Mrs. Esmond, "the pay cannot be very high, and it must be a wild country."

"It is quite sufficient for a lonely man, and now Grace—"

He stopped abruptly, a trifle flushed in face, and his companion smiled at him.

"Yes," she said, "I understand, and if it happens as we both wish I shall be content. Geoffrey has been a good son, but I could not expect to keep him always to myself—and I would rather it should be Grace than any one else."

"Thank you!" said Coulthurst simply. "Whether I have done right in allowing her to come here I do not know. In any case, I never suspected what might happen until a month ago. Then I was a trifle astonished, but the mischief was done."

Mrs. Esmond laughed, "You might have expressed it more happily, though it is perhaps only natural that there was a day or two when I would not have found fault with you."

Coulthurst said nothing further, but his thoughts were busy. He knew better than most men what life in the newer lands is, and he had no desire that Grace should share it with him. What she thought of Esmond he did not know; but the latter had told him what he thought of her, and his mother was, it seemed, content with the choice he had made. A good deal depended on the girl's fancy.

They had turned again when she came towards them across the lawn as though she did not see them, until, hearing their footsteps, she stopped abruptly. Nobody spoke for a moment or two, but she felt their eyes upon her, and the crimson grew deeper in her cheek as she turned to the elder lady.

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"I see you know," she said, with a little tremor in her voice. "You will forgive me if he feels hurt over it—but I felt I could not. Geoffrey, of course, is—"

The major groaned inwardly when she stopped, and there was a sudden slight but perceptible change in his companion. Her face lost its usual gentleness, and became for a moment not hard or vindictive, but impressively grave.

"I am glad—because he is my only son—that you had the courage to do the right thing—now," she said.

Grace flashed a swift glance at her, and the colour showed a trifle more plainly in her face, but, saying nothing, she hastily turned away. Coulthurst stood stiffly still, evidently perplexed at something in the attitude of both, until Mrs. Esmond looked at him.

"I am disappointed," she said.

Coulthurst raised his hand in protest. "It is very good of you to say so, but, while she is my daughter and I am naturally a trifle proud of her, the advantages would in one sense have been so much in her favour—"

"I don't think you apprehend me. These affairs seldom fall out as one would wish them, which is, perhaps, now and then fortunate for all concerned. It is Grace I am disappointed with."

Coulthurst smiled somewhat grimly. "I'm by no means sure that I do understand, but one thing, at least, is plain: she has made her own choice and must abide by it."

It was ten minutes later, and Mrs. Esmond had left him, when he came upon Grace sitting where a shrubbery swept round a bend of the lawn. She looked at him deprecatingly.

"I am very sorry—but it was out of the question—quite," she said.

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Coulthurst made a little gesture of resignation, for if he seldom foresaw a difficulty where others would have done so, he, at least, made no futile protest when it had to be faced.

"I suppose," he said, "you realize what you have turned your back upon to-day?"

"Still, I felt I had to do so."

Coulthurst checked a groan. "Then, since you presumably know your own mind, there is nothing more to be said. You will be ready to come out to the Northwest with me?"

Grace rose, and slipped her hand through his arm. "Father," she said, "I'm sorry—dreadfully sorry. I must be a horrid responsibility."

Coulthurst smiled, somewhat ruefully. "So am I! No doubt we will worry along as we have already done; but it is a very hard country we are going to."

It was scarcely a sufficient expression of what he felt, but Coulthurst had his strong points, and his daughter knew it was very unlikely he would ever allude to the subject again. There were, however, as usual, guests at Holtcar Grange just then, and they had formed a tolerably correct opinion as to what was happening. It was also natural that they should discuss it, and on that evening two matrons and the lady who had taken Grace's part on a previous occasion expressed their views concerning the conduct of the latter.

"The girl led him on shamefully," said one of them. "That was evident to everybody, and one would have fancied the reason was equally so—though, of course, we know now it wasn't the right one."

Grace's advocate appeared reflective, and, as it happened, her opinion was usually listened to. "I have watched the girl, and she is interesting as a study," she said. "I am, of course, not infallible, but it seems to me from what I have heard of the major that she has inherited his disregard of consequences. Coulthurst, one would conclude, is not a man who ever saved himself or others trouble by anticipating anything."

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One of her companions signified concurrence. "And the fact that the opportunity for a flirtation with the most eligible man in the vicinity appealed to her natural arrogance accounts for the rest?"

"Not exactly, though you are in a measure right. I should rather call it love of influence, for, though I'm not sure Grace Coulthurst realizes it, one could fancy that the opportunity for dominating a man of position, or more especially character, would prove almost irresistible to her. Still, one must discriminate between that and the not unusual fondness for love-making."

"The distinction is a little difficult. It seems to lead to much the same thing."

The previous speaker, who was a woman of discernment, shook her head. "There is a difference," she said. "The girl has, I think, a personality—by which I do not altogether mean physical attributes—that is apt to appeal to a man of character, though I almost fancy she will sooner or later be sorry she was ever endued with it. There is a good deal that is admirable in Grace Coulthurst, but unfortunately, in one respect, perhaps, not—quite—enough."

It was not evident that the rest altogether understood her, but Mrs. Esmond appeared just then, and the subject was changed abruptly.

In the meanwhile there were at least three people who would have found no fault with Major Coulthurst's description of Western Canada. Having discovered somewhat to their astonishment that the population of Quebec and Montreal was already quite sufficient, and that strangers without means were not greatly desired in either city, these three had, in accordance with Ingleby's previous purpose, started West again, and on the fifth day sat spiritlessly in a Colonist car as, with whistle screaming, the long train rolled into sight of a little desolate station on the Albertan prairie.

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All the way from Winnipeg a dingy greyness had shrouded the apparently interminable levels, which lay parched and white beneath an almost intolerable heat, while the lurching cars swung through a rolling cloud of dust that blurred the dreary prospect. Now, as they were slowing down, grimy faces were thrust from the windows and perspiring men leaned out from the platforms, gazing down the track and inquiring with expletives why they were stopping again.

Hetty Leger, however, sat languidly still, where the hot draught that blew in through an open window scattered the dust upon her. Her face was damp, and unpleasantly gritty, for the water in the tank had long run out. Her head ached, as did every bone in her body, for Colonist cars are not fitted as the Pullmans are, and she had with indifferent success for four nights essayed to sleep on a maple shelf which pulled out from the roof above when one wanted it. She had certainly hired a mattress, but its inch or two of thickness had scarcely disguised the hardness of the polished wood beneath it; and although the cost of it and the little green curtain had made a serious inroad on the few dollars left in her scanty purse they had not solved the problem of dressing; while the atmosphere of a close-packed Colonist car when the big lamps are lighted in hot weather is a thing to shudder at. It is also, in view of the fact that most of the passengers dispense with curtains, somewhat embarrassing to rise in the morning and wait amidst a group of half-dressed men and women for a place in the cupboard at the rear of the car where ablutions may at least be attempted when there is any water in the tank.

Presently, however, a big bell commenced to toll, and the jolting of the air-brakes flung her forward in her seat, while in another few moments the long cars stopped, and the conductor pushed his way through the perspiring passengers who surged towards the vestibule.

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"They've had a big washout up the track," he said. "You can light out and admire the scenery for two hours, anyway, if you feel like it."

Hetty looked round, but could see nothing of her brother or Ingleby. She had seen very little to admire at other prairie stations; but anything seemed better than the close heat of the car, and when the vestibule was clear at last she went out languidly and stepped down upon the track.

Beside it rose two desolate frame houses, a crude structure of galvanized iron, and a towering water tank, but that was all, and beyond them the gleaming rails ran straight to the rim of the empty wilderness. Nothing moved on its interminable levels; the dingy sky seemed suffused with heat, and along the track a smell that was stronger than the reek of creosote rose from the baked and fissured earth. The withered grass was of the same tint as the earth save where the clay on the bank of a *coulée* showed a harsh red, and the vast stretch of dusty prairie seemed steeped in the one dreary grey. This, she reflected with a sinking heart, was the land of promise to which she had journeyed five thousand miles to find a home; but, though the track was suggestively littered with empty provision cans, there was as yet very little sign of the milk and honey.

Hetty was usually sympathetic, but the sight of the frowsy passengers and unwashed children wandering aimlessly round the station aroused in her a curious impatience that was tinged with disgust that hot afternoon. She wanted to be alone, and noticing an ugly trestle bridge a mile or so ahead followed the rails until she came to it. A river swirled beneath it; but it, too, was utterly devoid of beauty, for the banks of it were crumbling sun-baked clay, and it swept by a dingy, slatey green, thick with the mud brought down by the Rockies' glaciers. However, it looked cool, and she climbed down until she found a place she could stand on, and laved her arms and face in it. Then, as it happened, a piece of the crumbling clay broke away, and one foot slipped in above the ankle, while the skirt of her thin dress trailed in the water too. It was a trifling mishap, but Hetty was overwrought, and when she had climbed back and taken off and emptied the little shoe she sat down on the dusty grass and sobbed bitterly. She felt insignificant and lonely in that great empty land, and its desolation crushed her spirits.

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She did not know how long she sat there, but at last there were footsteps behind her, and she coloured a little and strove to draw the shoeless foot beneath the hem of the dripping skirt when she saw Ingleby smiling down upon her. Then she remembered that the sleeves of the thin blouse were still rolled back, and the crimson grew plainer in her wet cheeks as with a little adroit movement she shook them down. Ingleby smiled again, in a complacent, brotherly fashion which she found strangely exasperating just then, and sitting down beside her took one of her hot hands.

"Crying, Hetty? That will never do," he said.

Hetty glanced at him covertly. His face was compassionate, but there was rather toleration than concern in it, and she pulled her hand away from him.

"I wasn't—at least, not exactly," she said. "And if I was, it was the weather—and why don't you go away?"

Ingleby smiled again, in a manner which while kind enough had yet a lack of comprehension in it that made her still angrier.

"People don't generally cry about the weather," he said.

"Well," said the girl sharply, "some of them say things they shouldn't. I heard you—in a crowded car, too."

She stopped abruptly, as she remembered the scanty privacy of the Colonist train, and that she was supposed to have been asleep about the time Ingleby had allowed his temper to get the better of him. He, however, only laughed.

"Hetty," he said, "what is the matter? I always thought you brave, and I have almost a right to know."

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"I think you have," and there was a little flash in Hetty's eyes. "It was you who brought us here, and this is a horrible country. It frightens me."

Ingleby was a trifle perplexed, and showed it. He had known Hetty Leger for four or five years, and had never seen her in a mood of the kind before. It also occurred to him, as it did every now and then, that, although she was not to be compared with Miss Coulthurst, Hetty was in her own way beautiful. Just then a pretty plump arm showed beneath the unfastened sleeve of the thin blouse, and the somewhat dusty hair with the tint of pale gold in it, lying low on the white forehead, matched the soft blue eyes, though there was a hint of more character than is usually associated with her type in Hetty's white and pink face. Ingleby noticed all this with impersonal appreciation, as something which did not greatly concern him.

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry, and by no means sure I'm very much pleased with the country myself; but I don't quite see what else I could have done in the circumstances. Still, it hurts me to see you unhappy."

Hetty turned to him impulsively. "Never mind me. I'm an ungrateful little—beast. That's the fact, and you needn't try to say anything nice—I know I am. If it hadn't been for you Tom would have been in prison now."

Ingleby looked out across the endless dusty levels. "I'm sure the country must be a good deal better than it looks—when one gets used to it," he said a trifle dubiously. "Anyway, we are three to one against it, and needn't be afraid of it while we stick together. That is the one thing we must make up our minds to do."

"There was a time when you didn't seem very sure you wanted Tom and me."

"Didn't you feel that I was right a little while ago?"

Hetty said nothing for a space. She was quick-witted, and not infrequently understood her companion rather better than he understood himself, while recollecting the half-shy delicacy which occasionally characterized him she felt a trifle comforted. It was not, she fancied, to please himself that he had been willing to leave her behind, and she watched him covertly as he, too, sat silent, gazing at the prairie with thoughtful eyes. He was not, she was quite aware, as clever as her brother, and he certainly had his shortcomings—in fact, a good many of them; but for all that there was something about him which, so far as she was concerned, set him apart from any other man. Exactly what it was she persuaded herself that she did not know, or, at least, made a brave attempt to do so, for it was evident that he had only a frank, brotherly regard for her. Still, the silence was getting uncomfortable, and she flung a question at him.

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"How much have we left?" she asked.

Ingleby laughed, somewhat ruefully. "Eight dollars, I believe. Still, we shall cross the Rockies to-morrow, and start at once to heap up riches. We are certainly going to do it, as others have; and you will never be frightened any more."

Hetty had a stout heart of her own, but nevertheless she was glad of the reassuring grasp he laid upon her shoulder as she looked out across the muddy river and desolate, grey-white plain. However, she smiled at him, and once more they sat silent until a curious and unexpected thing happened.

Far away on the rim of the prairie there was a stirring of the haze, and a dim smear of pinewoods grew out of the dingy vapour. Then a vista of rolling hills rose to view, and was lost in mist again, until high above them all a great serrated rampart of never-melting snow gleamed ethereally against a strip of blue. It was a brief, bewildering vision, sudden as the shifting of a gorgeous transformation scene, and then the vapours rolled down again; but they felt that they had looked upon an unearthly glory. Hetty turned to her companion with a little gasp.

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"Oh," she said, "it was wonderful!"

"It was real, at least," said Ingleby. "Your first glimpse of the country to which I have brought you. I think we shall be happy there—and we will remember afterwards that we saw it together."

Again the little pink tinge crept into Hetty's cheek, but she said nothing, and Ingleby's glance rested on the shoe, which he had not noticed before.

"Hetty," he said severely, "do you want to catch cold? What is that doing there?"

Hetty essayed to draw her foot farther beneath the hem of the dusty skirt, and the colour grew a trifle plainer in her face; but Ingleby made a little reproachful gesture, and taking up the shoe rubbed it with his handkerchief.

"Now," he said, "I'm going to the bridge. Put it on!"

He turned away; but the leather was stiff with water, and Hetty struggled fruitlessly with the buttons, and when she rejoined him Ingleby noticed that she was walking somewhat awkwardly.

"Stand still a minute," he said. "You can't limp back along the track like that."

He dropped on one knee, and Hetty turned her face aside when he looked up again.

"It is such a pretty little foot," he said.

Then as they went back together they met Leger on the trestle. He said nothing, but though he endeavoured to hide it there was concern in his sallow face.

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## VI HALL SEWELL

The afternoon was clear and cool, but bright sunlight filled a glade among the towering pines which creep close up to the western outskirts of Vancouver City. They are very old and great of

girth, and though here and there a path or carriage drive has been hewn through the strip of primeval wilderness the municipal authorities have been wise enough to attempt no improvement upon what nature has done for them, and Stanley Park remains a pleasance whose equal very few cities possess. It is scented ambrosially with the odours of balsam and cedar; deep silence fills the dim avenues between the colonnades of towering trunks; and from every opening one looks out upon blue water and coldly gleaming snow.

On the afternoon in question the stillness was rudely broken by a murmur of voices, unmodulated and sharp with an intonation which sounds especially out of place in the wilderness, though it is heard there often enough, from the redwoods of Oregon to where Alaskan pines spring from ten feet of snow. A crowd of people were scattered about the glade, and while some were dressed in "store clothes" and a few in coarse blue jean the eyes of all were turned towards the stump of a great cedar, sawn off a man's height above the ground, which formed a natural platform for a speaker whose address had astonished most of them. Ingleby and Leger lay a little apart from the rest, where the sunlight fell faintly warm upon the withered needles, while Hetty was seated near them upon a fallen fir, displeasure in her eyes and her lips set together. Her eyebrows also seemed unusually straight, as they often did when she was angry, and that gave to her delicately pretty face a curious appearance of severity one would scarcely have expected to find there. She was dressed tastefully, for she earned a sufficiency as a boarding-house waitress.

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Ingleby, who lay nearest her, looked up at her with a little smile.

"You would make rather a striking picture just now, Hetty," he said. "That is a most attractive frown. I don't know where you got it, but taken together with your attitude it's—I can't think of a better comparison—almost Roman."

Hetty glanced at him sharply. Her education had not been very comprehensive, and she scarcely understood the allusion; but Ingleby, who had made it at random, was nevertheless in a measure right, for there is a recurrent type of feminine beauty, not exactly common, but to be met with among women of her station in the north of England, while they are young at least, which approaches the classical. Hetty might have posed just then as a virgin sitting with turned-down thumb.

"Well," she said, "I'm vexed with you and Tom, as well as with that man. I wish he hadn't come now when we are nice and comfortable and you are both earning good wages—at least when the steamers come in."

Ingleby shook his head reproachfully. "You have spoiled it," he said. "Hasn't she, Tom? A young woman who frowns in that imperial fashion talking of wages!"

Leger only laughed as, turning over among the fir-needles, he filled his pipe again; but Hetty was still a trifle angry.

"Of course, I don't understand you," she said. "I never do, but it's a good thing I've more sense than either of you. Now, you know what came of listening to speeches of that kind in England, and you're doing the same thing again. I've no sympathy with that man. Everybody has enough to eat and looks contented and comfortable. Why does he come here worrying them?"

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Leger smiled. "I'm not sure that the contentment of ignorance is the blessing some people would like us to believe. You see, when one doesn't know what he's entitled to he's apt to be satisfied with a good deal less, while when men like Hall Sewell point out that you don't get half as much as you ought to you are apt to believe them."

Ingleby laughed, though, as Sewell's writings had stirred him to intense appreciation, even in England, he was not altogether pleased with the little twinkle in his comrade's eyes. He was quick to fire with enthusiasm, while it occurred to him that Leger was a trifle too addicted to looking at both sides of a question, and occasionally admitting the weak points of his own case with dry good-humour. He had also a shrewd suspicion that Leger was a cleverer man than himself.

"Well," he said, looking at Hetty, "if you are content to carry plates to saw-mill hands and wharf-labourers, it's more than I am to see you do so."

"Why shouldn't I?" and Hetty, who flashed a covert glance at him, noticed the tinge of heightened colour in his face and was not displeased at it. "They are all of them very civil to me, and the one who can get nothing to do as a doctor—"

"Oh, yes!" said Ingleby curtly, "I've noticed his confounded assurance. Every time I see you going round with his dinner I feel I'd like to poison him."

Leger looked up again with the twinkle in his eyes showing plainer still.

"You haven't answered her, and I'm not sure you can," he said. "She put the whole thing in a nutshell when she asked—why shouldn't she."

Ingleby was silent, but he fidgeted, and Leger grinned.

"Don't you find it a little difficult to cling to aristocratic prejudices—though I don't know how you became possessed of them—and believe in democratic theories at the same time?" he said. "One would fancy they were bound to run up against each other occasionally."

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Just then an urchin with a satchel on his back came along.

"Hall Sewell's latest speeches," he said. "Fourth edition of 'The New Brotherhood' and 'The Grip of Capital.'"

"Give me them all," said Ingleby. "How much do you want?"

"A quarter," said the lad, handing him several flimsy pamphlets, and while Hetty glanced at him severely Leger laughed.

"Twenty-five cents!" he said. "It would have purchased a packet of caramels for Hetty."

"We might manage both," said Ingleby. "I'm sorry I didn't think of it earlier, Hetty. But you haven't yet told me your opinion of the man himself."

Hetty glanced at the man upon the fire-stump. He was dressed as a workman in blue jean, which seemed to her a piece of affectation, since when workmen of that city take their recreation they usually do so attired in excellent clothing; but he had a lithe, well-proportioned figure, and it became him, though neither his face, which was bronzed by exposure, nor his hands were quite in keeping with it. It was a forceful face, with keen, dark eyes in it, but the mouth was hidden by the long moustache. Hall Sewell was, in his own sphere, a famous man whose printed speeches had been read with appreciation in Europe, and he had not long ago played a leading part in a great labour dispute. He had just finished speaking and another man was somewhat apologetically addressing the assembled populace.

Hetty, who surveyed him critically, shook her head. "If you buy me any sweets now I'll throw them away," she said. "Well, he's a good-looking man."

"Oh," said Ingleby. "He's good-looking! Can't you get beyond that, Hetty?"

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Hetty pursed her lips up reflectively. "Well, why shouldn't he be? It's a pleasure to see a man of that kind. There are so few of them. Still, I'll try to go a little further. Of course, he's clever. At least, everybody says so, but there's something wanting. I think he's weak."

"Weak!" said Ingleby indignantly. "You're wide of the mark this time, Hetty. I've read every line he has had printed, and any one could feel the uncompromising strength in it. They've put him in prison and tried to buy him, but nothing could keep a man of that kind from delivering his message."

Hetty still pursed her lips up, and when she spoke again she somewhat astonished Ingleby.

"If I were a little cleverer and richer I think that I could. That is, of course, if I wanted to," she said.

Leger looked up with a little whimsical smile. "I hope she isn't right, but she now and then blunders upon a truth that is hidden from our wisdom. Delilah is, after all, a type, you see, and one can't help a fancy that she has figured even more often than is recorded in history. Go on, Hetty."

Hetty put her head on one side. "I never could remember very much history; but that man's vain, vainer than most of you," she said. "A girl above him who pretended to believe in him could twist him round her finger."

"Above him?" said Ingleby.

Hetty looked at him curiously. "Yes. You know what everybody means by that, and it's generally a girl of that kind that men with your notions fall in love with. It's because you want so much more than is good for you that you have such notions."

"Considering that she is a girl and by no means clever, Hetty's reflections occasionally, at least, display an astonishing comprehension," said Leger. "I really don't mind admitting it, though I am her brother."

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Ingleby said nothing, though he felt uncomfortable. He was fond of Hetty in a brotherly fashion, but as he had never supposed her to be indued with any intellect worth mentioning, her occasional flashes of penetration were almost disconcerting. The last one was certainly so, for there were two people of diametrically opposed opinions whom he respected above all others: one was Hall Sewell the reformer, and the other Major Coulthurst's daughter. He was glad of the opportunity for changing the subject when the man who had been speaking stopped a moment and looked at the crowd.

"I guess I'm through, and you have been patient, boys," he said. "Hall will be quite willing to answer any reasonable questions. I'll get down."

There was a little good-humoured laughter, and a man who stood forward turned to the assembly.

"Everybody knows Jake Townson, and there's no wickedness in him. He's a harmless crank," he said. "What I want to ask Hall Sewell is who's paying him to go round making trouble among people who have no use for it or him? It's a straight question."

There was a little growl of disgust as well as sardonic laughter, and while one or two angry men moved towards the speaker the man with the dark eyes stood up suddenly.



"Let him alone, boys. We don't want to use our enemies' methods, and I'm quite willing to answer him," he said. "Nobody has paid me a dollar for what I've tried to do for the cause of brotherhood and liberty, but I was offered a thousand to betray it not a month ago."

"Name the men who did it," cried somebody.

"I will," said Sewell, "when I consider the time is ripe—they may count on that, but in the meanwhile you will have to take my word for it. So far, I've been found where I was wanted—and that as our friend suggests was generally where there was trouble—but I never took five cents for reward or fee." [Pg 61]

There was a murmur of approbation, as well as incredulity, and then a cry broke through it.

"How'd you worry along then? A man has got to live."

Sewell held his hands up, and though small and well-shaped they were scarred and brown.

"What I want—and it's very little—I can earn with the shovel and the drill. I've given your man his answer, but I'm going farther."

There was a clamour from one part of the crowd. "He's an insect. We've no use for him! Let up, Hall's talking. We're here to hear him!"

"What did I get for my pains?" said Sewell. "That's what the question comes to, and I'll tell you frankly, since, until we or our children bring in the new era, it's all that the man has to expect who believes this world can and ought to be made better. I've been ridden over by U. S. cavalry, and beaten by patrolmen's clubs. I've been hounded out of cities where I lawfully earned my bread, and sand-bagged by hired toughs. That would be a little thing if I were the only victim, but you know—you can read it in your papers almost any day—what happens to the men who have the grit to work as well as to hope for the dawn of better days for down-trodden humanity. You're to wait for it—on the other side of Jordan—your teachers say. Boys, we want it here and now, and it's coming, a little nearer every day. You have got to believe that, and when the outlook grows black get a tighter clinch upon your faith. Was it a shadow and a fancy that the men died for who went down in every struggle for the last ten years?—we needn't go back farther. Right across this prosperous continent you'll find their graves—men shot and sabred, strung to bridges and telegraph poles. Boys, we've been waiting—waiting a long while——"

He broke off abruptly, for a little, stolid park-warden and an equally unimpressed official of the Vancouver police pushed their way through the crowd. [Pg 62]

"I guess," said the former, "you'll have to light out of this. You can't hold no meetings here."

The crowd was a Canadian one, good-humouredly tolerant, respectful of constituted authority, and, what was more to the purpose, reasonably contented with their lot. They were also, as usual, somewhat deficient in the quick enthusiasm which is common across the frontier. Had ample time been afforded him the orator might have got hold of them and impressed upon them a due comprehension of their wrongs, but a good many of them were by no means sure that they had very much to complain of as yet. Still, there were angry expostulations.

"Have you any ground for preventing my speaking here?" Sewell asked.

"Yes, sir," said the warden. "I guess we have. It's down in the park charter. You can't peddle those papers either. Call your boys in."

"The men who made those laws, as usual, made them to suit themselves."

"Well," said the warden, "I guess that don't matter now. There they are. All you have to do is to keep them, and nobody's going to worry you."

There was an embarrassing silence for a moment or two, for everybody felt the tension and realized that the position was rife with unpleasant possibilities; but the stolid warden stood eyeing the crowd unconcernedly, and, as usual, the inertia of British officialdom conquered. Sewell made a little whimsical gesture of resignation, and raised his hand.

"I'm afraid we'll have to break up, boys. There's nothing to be gained for anybody by making trouble now," he said. "If we can hire a big store of any kind I'll talk to you to-morrow."

He sprang down from the stump, the crowd melted away, and Hetty laughed as she glanced at her companions.

"That man has really a good deal more sense than some people with his notions seem to have," she said. [Pg 63]

Ingleby shook his head at her. "You mean people who pull gates down on Sunday afternoons?" he asked. "Still, I scarcely think it was to save himself trouble he told them to go home, and nobody could have expected very much sympathy from the men who listened to him. He's wasting his time on them—they're too well fed. What do you think, Tom?"

Leger, who did not answer him for a moment, glanced thoughtfully through an opening between the stately trunks towards the far-off gleam of snow.

"This Province," he said drily, "is a tolerably big one, and from what I've heard they may want a man of his kind in the Northern ranges presently. It isn't the supinely contented who face the

frost and snow there, and the Crown mining regulations don't seem to appeal to the men who stake their lives on finding a little gold. They appear to be even less pleased with those who administer them."

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## VII HETTY BEARS THE COST

It was towards the end of the arduous day, and Ingleby was glad of the respite the breakage of a chain cargo-sling afforded him. The white side of a big Empress liner towered above the open-fronted shed, and a string of box cars stood waiting outside the sliding doors behind him. A swarm of men in blue jeans were hurrying across the wharf behind clattering trucks laden with the produce of China and Japan, for the liner had been delayed a trifle by bad weather, and the tea and silk and sugar were wanted in the East. Already a great freight locomotive was waiting on the side track, and, as Ingleby knew, the long train must be got away before the Atlantic express went out that evening. He had been promoted to a post of subordinate authority a few weeks earlier, and both he and Leger were, in the meanwhile, at least contented with their lot, for the great railway company treated its servants liberally.

There was, however, nothing that he could do for a minute or two, and he leaned against a tier of silk bales with a bundle of dispatch labels and a slip of paper in his hand, while Leger sat upon the truck behind him. He had, though it was no longer exactly his business, been carrying sugar bags upon his back most of that afternoon, partly to lessen the labour of Leger who had not his physique, and now the white crystals glittered in his hair and clung, smeared with dust, to his perspiring face. His sleeves were rolled back to the elbow, showing his brown arms, which had grown hard and corded since he came to Canada; while his coarse blue shirt, which was open at the neck and belted tight at the waist, displayed as more conventional attire would not have done the symmetry of a well set-up figure.

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"We are still short of a few tea chests," said Leger. "However, if you would mark the two lots I've got yonder we could clear that car for dispatch as soon as the rest come out."

Ingleby glanced at his slip. "I'll wait until I get the others. It will keep the thing straighter. There's a good deal more in sorting cargo than I fancied there could be until I tried it, and it's remarkably easy to put the stuff into the wrong car."

"Then it might be well to keep your eye on those chests of tea. I can't keep the boys off them. There's another fellow at them now."

Ingleby swung round, and signed to a perspiring man who stopped with a truck beside the cases in question.

"Leave that lot alone! It's billed straight through, express freight, East," he said. "Stick this ticket on the cases, Tom."

Leger moved away, and Ingleby was endeavouring to scrape some of the sugar off his person when a man, whom he recognized as one of the leading citizens of Vancouver, and several ladies, came down the steamer's gangway. Then he started and felt his heart throb as his glance rested on one of them, who, as it happened, looked up just then. It was evident that she saw him, and he was unpleasantly sensible that his face was growing hot. There was, he would have admitted at any other time, no reason for this, but in the meanwhile it was distinctly disconcerting that Grace Coulthurst should come upon him in his present guise, smeared with dust and half-melted sugar. Then he occupied himself with his cargo slip, for it was in the circumstances scarcely to be expected that she would vouchsafe him any recognition.

The longing to see her again, however, became too strong for him, and looking up a moment he was conscious of a blissful astonishment, for she was walking straight towards him with a smile in her eyes. She seemed to him almost ethereally dainty in the dust and turmoil of the big cargo shed, and for the moment he forgot his uncovered arms and neck, and felt every nerve in him thrill as he took the little gloved hand she held out. What she had done was not likely to be regarded as anything very unusual in that country, where most men are liable to startling vicissitudes of fortune and there are no very rigid social distinctions; but Ingleby failed to recognize this just then, and it was not astonishing that he should idealize her for her courage.

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"You are about the last person I expected to meet. What are you doing here?" she said, with the little tranquil smile that became her well.

Ingleby's heart was throbbing a good deal faster than usual, but he held himself in hand. Miss Coulthurst was apparently pleased to see him, but there was an indefinite something in her serene graciousness which put a check on him. It was, he felt, perhaps only because she was patrician to her finger-tips that she had so frankly greeted him. A girl with less natural distinction could, he fancied, scarcely have afforded to be equally gracious to a wharf-labourer.

"I am at present loading railway cars with tea and silk, though I have been carrying sugar bags most of the day," he said.

Grace showed no sign of astonishment as she glanced at his toiling comrades, and, though this was doubtless the correct attitude for her to assume, Ingleby was, in spite of his opinions, not exactly pleased until she spoke again.

"Don't you find it rather hard work?" she said. "Of course, one cannot always choose the occupation one likes here, but couldn't you find something that would be a little more—profitable?"

Ingleby laughed. "I'm afraid I can't," he said. "In this city the one passport to advancement appears to be the ability to play in the band, and I was, unfortunately, never particularly musical. Still, there is no reason why I should trouble you with my affairs. I wonder if I might venture to ask you how you came to be here?"

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"It is quite simple. Major Coulthurst was appointed Gold Commissioner in one of the mining districts, and I came out with him; but he has been sent to an especially desolate post in the Northern ranges, and I am staying with friends in the city for a week or two. Then I am going to join him."

She stopped a moment, and then looked at him reflectively. "Why don't you go North and try your fortune at prospecting, too? They have been finding a good deal of gold lately in the Green River country where my father is."

It had seemed to Ingleby almost unnatural that he should be so quietly discussing his affairs with the girl he had last seen nearly six thousand miles away. This was not the kind of meeting he would have anticipated; but as she made the suggestion a little thrill once more ran through him, for he had heard that the district in question was a great desolation, and it almost seemed that she desired his company. However, he shook off the notion as untenable, for there would be, he knew, a distinction between a placer miner and the Gold Commissioner's daughter even in that land of rock and snow.

"I have thought of it," he said. "Some day I may go, but it is at the far end of the province, and for one who works on a steamboat wharf the getting there is a risky venture. I don't suppose everybody finds gold."

"I'm afraid they don't, and the cost of transporting provisions is a serious matter to those who fail. In fact, some of them have been giving my father trouble. They appear to lay the blame of everything on the mining regulations."

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She stopped and glanced at him with a little smile. "From what I remember of your views, you would no doubt be inclined to agree with them."

Ingleby laughed, though it was pleasant to be told that she remembered anything he had said. "I really fancy I have learned a little sense in Canada, and I am not going to inflict my crude notions upon you again. Still, there is a question I should like to ask. Did Mr. Esmond of Holtcar—recover?"

Grace noticed the sudden intentness of his tone, and looked at him curiously. "Of course. In fact, he got better in a week or two, and I think behaved very generously. The police could not induce him to give them any information about the men who injured him."

Ingleby started, and the girl saw the relief in his face.

"I wonder," he said, "if you ever heard who they were supposed to be?"

Grace turned a trifle and gazed at him steadily, though there was now a little flash in her eyes.

"You," she said, with incisive coldness, "were one of them?"

Ingleby grew hot beneath her gaze, for he felt that all the pride and prejudices of her station were arrayed against him. "You will remember the form of my question. I was supposed to be one of them—but that was all," he said.

Grace's face softened, and she glanced at her companions, who, after waiting a little while, were just leaving the shed. "Of course," she said, "I should have known it was absurd to fancy that you could do anything of that kind."

"I am afraid I have kept you," said Ingleby. "Perhaps I should not have abused your kindness by letting you stop at all, but the desire to see you was too strong for me. I wonder whether even you would have dared to do as much had it been in England?"

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There was a faint flush in the girl's cheek, but she smiled as she held out her hand.

"I scarcely think we need go into that, and I can't keep the others waiting any longer," she said. "Perhaps I shall meet you in the Green River country."

She swept away with a soft swish of dainty garments, and Ingleby, whose face grew curiously intent as he watched her, climbed the slanting gangway to the deck of the liner when she disappeared. From there he could see the white tops of the ranges gleaming ethereally as they stretched back mountain behind mountain towards the lonely North. The Green River country lay

far beyond them, and there were leagues of tangled forest, and thundering rivers, to be crossed; but that day the untrodden snow he gazed upon seemed to beckon him, and a sudden longing to set out upon the long trail grew almost irresistible. There was gold in the wilderness, and with enough of it a man might aspire to anything, even the hand of a Crown Commissioner's daughter.

Then the winch beside him clattered, and he shook off the fancies as a fresh stream of bales and cases slid down the gangway. Whatever the future might have in store, there were several more hours of arduous work in front of him then. One of them had passed when Leger came hastily up to him.

"I suppose you got those last few cases?" he said.

Ingleby started. "I'm afraid I never remembered them until this moment. Have they pulled the car out, Tom?"

"It's not there, anyway. I fancied you had made the lot up. Somebody has put those cases in."

While they looked at one another the tolling of a locomotive bell broke through the clatter of the trucks, and Ingleby sped towards the door of the shed with Leger close behind him. When they reached it the hoot of a whistle came ringing down the track, and they saw the great locomotive vanish amidst the piles of lumber outside a big sawmill, with the long cars lurching through the smoke behind it. Ingleby said nothing then, but turned back into the shed with his lips set and questioned several men before he looked at Leger.

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"Nobody seems to know whether they put that tea into the through East car or not, and it's no use being sorry now we didn't see it done," he said. "The sooner we have a word with the freight-traffic agent the better."

The gentleman in question, had, however, very little consolation to offer them.

"The fast freight has got to make Kamloops ahead of the Atlantic express," he said. "She's not going to be held up more than ten minutes there, and they'll have the mountain loco ready to rush her up the loops and over the Selkirks. I'll send a wire along, but so long as the road is clear it's going to be more than any man's place is worth, to side-track that train for freight checking."

Ingleby's face grew anxious. "Well," he said, "what is to be done?"

"Nothing!" said the traffic manager. "If there's anything wrong with your sorting you'll probably hear about it in a week or so."

They went out of the office, and Ingleby turned to his comrade.

"I'm afraid we'll be adrift again before very long, and while I wish you had seen nobody moved those cases, it's my fault," he said. "There's another thing I must mention so that you may realize all you owe me. That was Miss Coulthurst of Holtcar to whom I was talking, though, of course, I should have been attending to my business instead, and from what she told me it seems that I needn't have brought you and Hetty out here at all. Esmond got better rapidly, and could not even be induced to prosecute."

Leger smiled. "Well," he said, "I'm uncommonly glad to hear it; and in regard to the other question neither of us has any intention of blaming you. So far, we have been a good deal better off than we probably should ever have been in England."

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Nothing further was said about the affair, though both of them devoted more than a little anxious thought to it, until one morning they were summoned before the head wharfinger.

"They're raising Cain in the office about a consignment of tea billed through urgent to the East that's gone down the Soo Line into the States," he said. "I guess I've no more use for either of you."

"I can't grumble," said Ingleby, who had almost expected this. "Still I should like to point out that only one of us is responsible."

"No," said Leger. "As a matter of fact, there were two, and if there hadn't been it would have come to the same thing, anyway."

The wharfinger nodded. "Well," he said, "I'd keep you if I could, but after the circus that's going on about the thing it's out of the question. I guess I'd try the Green River diggings if I were you."

They went out together, and when Ingleby was about to speak Leger checked him with a gesture. "I think I know what you mean to say—but there's another question to consider," he said.

"Trade's slack in the city just now, and taking it all round I fancy that man's advice is good. If we can induce Hetty to stay here we'll try the new mining country."

In different circumstances Ingleby would have been exultant at the prospect, but as it was he recognized his responsibility. It was, however, late that evening before they were able to lay the state of affairs before Hetty, and Ingleby was almost astonished at the quietness with which she listened.

"Well," she said, "there's no use worrying about it now. All you have to do is to try the mines. The man who came down with the gold yesterday said they were offering five and six dollars to anybody who would work on some of the claims."

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"But you don't seem to realize that we should have to leave you behind," said Leger.

Hetty laughed, and flashed a covert glance at Ingleby. "No," she said, "I'm coming with you."

The two men looked at each other, and Leger protested. "Hetty," he said, "it's out of the question. You couldn't face the snow and frost, and I don't even know how we could get you there. There are forests one can scarcely drag a pack-horse through, as well as rivers one has to swim them across, and we should probably have to spend several weeks on the trail. In fact, it seems to be an appalling country to get through."

"Go on!" said Hetty drily. "Isn't there anything else?"

"There are certainly mosquitoes that almost eat you alive. You know you never could stand mosquitoes!"

"Are they quite as big as bluebottles?" said Hetty.

Leger made a little gesture, and glanced at Ingleby, as if to ask for support, but though Hetty's brows were assuming a portentous straightness she smiled again.

"Walter was anxious to leave me behind once before, so you needn't look at him," she said. "In fact, there's not the least use in talking. I'm coming."

Ingleby said nothing. He did not wish to hurt the girl, though he fancied he knew how hard she would find the life they must lead in the great desolation into which they were about to venture. That Grace Coulthurst was going there did not affect the question, for there could be no comparison between the lot of a prospector's sister and that of the daughter of the Gold Commissioner. Then he saw that Hetty was watching him.

"Of course you don't want me, Walter," she said.

Ingleby felt his face grow hot. "Hetty," he said simply, "you ought to know that isn't so. If you must come we shall be glad to have you, and if you find the life a hard one you must try to forgive me. If I had known what I was doing I might have spared you this."

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They had decided it all in half an hour, but Ingleby frowned when he and his comrade were left alone.

"The whole thing hurts me horribly, Tom," he said. "Of course, we can worry along, and may do well—but you have read what the country is like—and Hetty—"

Leger appeared unusually grave. "It is," he said, "certainly a little rough on Hetty. She, at least, was not to blame, but she will have to face the results all the same, and whatever we have to put up with will be twice as hard on her."

Ingleby said nothing, for he realized his responsibility. In compensation for the few minutes he had spent with Grace Coulthurst, Hetty Leger must drag out months of privation and peril.

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## VIII ON THE TRAIL

Darkness was settling down upon the mountains and the chill of the snow was in the air when Hetty Leger and Ingleby sat beside a crackling fire. Down in the great gorge beneath them the white mists were streaming athwart the climbing pines, and no sound broke the deep stillness but the restless stamping of the tethered pack-horses and the soft splash of falling water. Hetty had a brown blanket rolled about her, and there were hard red blotches where the mosquitoes had left their virus on the hand she laid upon it. Leger lay not far away, and his face was swollen, but Ingleby had escaped almost scatheless, as some men seem to do, from the onslaughts of the buzzing legions which had pursued them through the swampy hollows.

A blackened kettle, a spider—as a frying-pan is usually termed in that country—and a few plates of indurated fibre lay about the fire, for the last meal of the day was over, and it had been as frugal as any one who had not undertaken twelve hours' toil in that vivifying air would probably have found it unappetizing. Where resinous wood was plentiful Ingleby could make a fire, but he could not catch a trout or shoot a deer. Indeed, a man unaccustomed to the bush usually finds it astonishingly difficult even to see one, and provisions were worth a ransom in the auriferous wilderness into which they were pushing their way. They had spent several weeks in it now, travelling, where the trail was unusually good, eight to twelve miles a day, though there were occasions when they made less than half the distance with infinite difficulty, and Hetty alone knew what that journey had cost her.

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The white peaks that gleamed ethereally high up in the blue, crystal lakes, and the endless ranks of climbing pines, scarcely appealed to her as she floundered through tangled undergrowth and ten-foot fern, or stumbled amidst the boulders beside thundering rivers. She had lain awake

shivering, with the ill-packed fir twigs galling her weary body, high up on great hill shoulders, and fared Spartanly on a morsel of unsavoury salt pork and a handful of flour, while Ingleby set his lips now and then when he saw the little forced smile in her jaded face. It was no great consolation to reflect that other women in that country had borne as much and more.

"Walter," she said, "you and Tom are very quiet. I expect you're tired."

Ingleby smiled, though his heart smote him as he saw the weariness in her eyes.

"I certainly am," he said. "Still, we can't be half as worn out as you are. You were limping all the afternoon."

"If I was it was only the boot that hurt me," said Hetty. "All those loose stones and gravel made it worse, you see. How many miles have we come to-day?"

"I feel that it must have been forty, but you shall have a rest to-morrow; and you don't look as comfortable as you ought to now. Would you mind standing up a minute?"

Hetty rose, hiding the effort it cost her, and when he had shaken up the cedar twigs into a softer cushion sank gratefully down on them. Then she turned her face aside that he might not see the little flush that crept into it as he gravely tucked the coarse brown blanket round her.

"Now," he said, "I think that ought to be a good deal nicer. You're too patient, Hetty, and I'm almost afraid we don't take enough care of you."

The girl saw his face in the firelight, and sighed as she noticed the gentleness in it. She knew exactly how far his concern for her went. Leger noticed it, but his shrewdness failed him now and then. [Pg 76]

"He will make somebody a good husband by and by," he said. "She will have a good deal to thank you for, Hetty."

Ingleby smiled with an absence of embarrassment which had its significance for one of the party.

"There are, after all, a good many advantages attached to being a single man, and I shall probably have to be content with them," he said.

"Of course!" said Hetty softly. "It is no use crying for the moon."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing in particular," and Hetty glanced reflectively at the fire. "Still, I don't think you would be content with any girl likely to look at you, and most of us would like to have a good deal more than we ever get."

Ingleby was a trifle disconcerted, though Hetty had an unpleasant habit of astonishing him in this fashion, but Leger laughed.

"It probably wouldn't be good for us to have it. At least, that is the orthodox view, and, after all, one can always do without."

"Of course!" said Hetty, with a curious little inflection in her voice. "Still, it is a little hard now and then. Isn't it, Walter?"

"Is there any special reason why you should ask me?"

Hetty appeared reflective. "Perhaps there isn't. I really don't know. Do you hear a sound in the valley, Tom?"

They listened, and a beat of hoofs came out of the sliding mists below. For the last week they had met nobody upon the trail, but now several men and horses were apparently scrambling up the hillside, for they could hear the gravel rattling away beneath them. The sound grew louder, and at last a man called to them. [Pg 77]

"Lead that beast of yours out of the trail," he said.

Ingleby glanced at his comrade, for the voice was English and had a little imperious ring in it, and Leger smiled.

"There is no doubt where that man comes from, but I scarcely think there's any great need of haste," he said.

"Do you mean to keep us waiting?" the voice rose again sharply. "It's some of your slouching prospectors, Major. Get down and cut that beast's tether, trooper."

Ingleby rose and moved out into the trail, and had just led the pack-horse clear of it when a horseman rode up. He was dressed in what appeared to be cavalry uniform and was, Ingleby surmised, that worn by the Northwest Police, a detachment of which had lately been dispatched to the new mining districts of the far North. It was also evident that he held a commission, for the firelight, which forced it up out of the surrounding gloom, showed the imperiousness in his face. It also showed Ingleby standing very straight in front of him with his head tilted backwards a trifle. Then there was a jingle of accoutrements as the young officer, turning half-round in his saddle with one hand on his hip, glanced backward down the trail.

"Look out for the low branch as you come up, sir," he said.

Ingleby stood still, nettled by the fashion in which the man ignored him, for no freighter or prospector would have passed without at least a friendly greeting, and while he waited it happened that Leger stirred the fire. A brighter blaze sprang up and flashed upon the officer's accoutrements and spurs, and then there was a pounding of hoofs, and a horse reared suddenly in the stream of ruddy light. The officer wheeled his beast with a warning shout, but Ingleby had seen the shadowy form in the habit, and seized the horse's bridle.

"Hold fast!" he said. "There's a nasty drop just outside the trail."

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Then for a few seconds man and startled horse apparently went round and round scattering fir needles and rattling gravel, until the half-broken cayuse yielded and Ingleby stood still, gasping, with his hand on the bridle, while a girl who did not seem very much concerned looked down on him from the saddle.

"You!" she said. "I fancied the voice was familiar. So you are going to the mines after all?"

The firelight still flickering redly upon the towering trunks showed Hetty Leger the curious intentness in Ingleby's gaze. Then, having done enough to disturb her peace of mind for that night, at least, it sank a trifle, and as two more men rode out of the shadow the officer turned to Ingleby.

"Have you no more sense than build your fire right beside the trail?" he asked.

Ingleby quietly turned his back on him, and patted the still trembling horse.

"I hope you were not frightened, Miss Coulthurst," he said.

Grace smiled at him, but before she could speak the young officer pushed his horse a few paces nearer Ingleby.

"I asked you a question," he said.

Ingleby glanced at him over his shoulder. "Yes," he said drily, "I believe you did."

He turned his head again, and Hetty, sitting unseen in the shadow, failed to see his face as he looked up at the girl whose bridle he held. She could, however, see the young officer glancing down at him apparently with astonishment as well as anger, and the police trooper behind sitting woodenly still with a broad grin on his face, until a burly man appeared suddenly in the sinking light. Then Grace Coulthurst laughed.

"Will you be good enough to ride on, Reggie? I told you my opinion of this horse," she said. "Father, I really think you ought to thank Mr. Ingleby."

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Major Coulthurst turned suddenly in his saddle.

"Ingleby?" he said. "Very much obliged to you, I'm sure. I have a fancy I've seen you before."

"I once had the pleasure of handing you a cup of tea at a tennis match at Holtcar."

Coulthurst laughed. "Yes," he said. "I remember it now, especially as it was a remarkably hot day and I would a good deal sooner have had a whisky-and-soda. Still, I've seen you somewhere since then, haven't I?"

"Yes, sir," said Ingleby drily. "On a Sunday afternoon—at Willow Dene."

Coulthurst laughed again, good-humouredly. "Of course I remember that, too, though I hope you've grown out of your fondness for taking liberties with other people's property. That kind of thing is still less tolerated in this country. In the meanwhile we have a good way to go before we camp. Once more, I'm much obliged to you."

He touched his horse with the spur, and when he and the troopers melted into the night Ingleby turned, with one hand closed a trifle viciously, towards the fire.

"Major Coulthurst is human, anyway, but the other fellow's insolence made me long to pull him off his horse," he said. "Is there, after all, any essential difference between an officer of the Northwest Police and a mineral claim prospector?"

"One can't help admitting that in some respects there seems to be a good deal," said Leger drily. "Still, I should scarcely fancy the Canadian ones are likely to be so unpleasantly sensible of it. The gentleman in question was apparently born in England."

"Where else could you expect a man of his kind to come from?" and Ingleby kicked a smouldering brand back into the fire, "I fancied we had left that languid superciliousness behind us. It's galling to run up against it again here."

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"My uncle's spirit in these stones!" said Leger. "Still, aren't you getting a little too old now to run a tilt against the defects of the national character? One feels more sure of doing it effectively when he's younger."

Ingleby laughed, for his ill humour seldom lasted long. "I suppose nobody can help being an ass now and then, and, after all, the best protest is the sure and silent kick when people who treat you like one unnecessarily add to your burden. Anyway, that trooper's grin was soothing. It

suggested that there was a good deal of human nature under his uniform."

"I was looking at the officer man, and scarcely noticed him. It occurred to me that the attitude you complain of probably runs in the family."

"I can't say I understand you."

"Well," said Leger reflectively, "I can't help a fancy that we once met somebody very like him on another occasion when we both lost our temper."

"At Willow Dene?"

"Exactly!" said Leger. "You can think it over. I'll wash the plates at the creek and get some water."

He turned away, leaving Ingleby considerably astonished and half-persuaded that he was right. The latter was still looking into the darkness when Hetty spoke to him.

"It's not worth worrying about. Come and sit down," she said. "Who was that girl, Walter?"

"Miss Coulthurst," said Ingleby.

Hetty moved a little so that the firelight no longer fell upon her, and Ingleby noticed that she was silent a somewhat unusual time. Then she asked, "The girl you used to play tennis with at Holtcar?"

"Yes."

Hetty wished that she could see his face. "You have met her before, in Canada?"

"Once only. On the Vancouver wharf, the day I let them put the tea into the wrong car. She was coming from the steamer."

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Hetty's face grew a trifle hard for a moment as she made a tolerably accurate guess at the cause of his neglect on the afternoon in question. Then with a sudden change of mood she laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Don't you think it would have been better for everybody if she had stayed in England, Walter?"

"I expect it would have been for Tom and you. If I had remembered what my business on the wharf was I should never have brought all this upon you."

Hetty's hand closed almost sharply on his arm. "No," she said, "I don't mean that. You see, I was really glad to get away from the boarding house."

"You assured me you liked it once," said Ingleby.

"Well, perhaps I did, but we needn't go into that. I was thinking of you just now."

Ingleby would not pretend to misunderstand her. He felt it would probably be useless, for Hetty, he knew, could be persistent.

"Men get rich in this country now and then," he said. "It would, at least, be something to work and hope for."

He could not see Hetty's face, but he noticed that there was a faint suggestion of strain in her voice.

"Do you think she would ever be happy with you even if you found a gold mine?" she said.

"What do you mean, Hetty?" and Ingleby turned towards her suddenly with a flush in his face.

"I only want to save you trouble. Don't you think when a girl of that kind found out how much there was that she had been accustomed to think necessary and that you knew nothing about, she might remember the difference between herself and you. After all, it's not always the most important points that count with a girl, you know."

She stopped somewhat abruptly, but Ingleby made a little gesture. "I would rather you would go on and say all you mean to."

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"Well," said Hetty reflectively, "if I had been rich I think I should like the man I married to do everything—even play cards and billiards and shoot pheasants—as well as my friends did. It wouldn't be nice to feel that I had to make excuses for him, and I'm not sure I wouldn't be vexed if he didn't seem to know all about the things folks of that kind get for dinner."

Ingleby's laugh was a protest, but it was only half-incredulous, for he had now and then realized with bitterness the deference paid to conventional niceties in England.

"You can't believe that would trouble any sensible woman?" he said.

"Well," answered Hetty, "perhaps it mightn't, for a little while, or if there was only one thing, you see—but if you put everything together and kept on doing what jarred on her?"

"One could get somebody to teach him."

Hetty laughed. "To be like the officer man, or Mr. Esmond of Holtcar?"



Ingleby understood the significance of the question. The little conventional customs might be acquired, but the constant jarring of opinion, and absence of comprehending sympathy or a common point of view was, he realized, quite a different thing. Still, though there was concern in his face, he had the hope of youth in him. There was silence for a moment or two, and then Hetty spoke again.

"Besides," she said, "after all, aren't gold mines a little hard to find?"

Just then Leger made his appearance, somewhat to Ingleby's relief, and ten minutes later Hetty retired to the tent while the men, rolling themselves in their blankets, lay down upon the cedar twigs beside the fire. One of them, however, did not sleep as well as usual, and Leger noticed that his sister appeared a little languid when she rose in the morning. They were weary still, and it was afternoon when they once more pushed on into the wilderness along the climbing trail that had for guide-posts empty provision cans.

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## IX HETTY FINDS A WAY

The day's work was over, and once more the white mists were streaming athwart the pines when Ingleby lay somewhat moodily outside the tent that he and Leger occupied on the hillside above the Green River. Just there the stream swirled, smeared with froth and spume, through a tremendous hollow above which the mountains lifted high their crenellated ramparts of ice and never-melting snow. Still, though usually termed one, that gorge was not a cañon in the strict sense of the word, for a sturdy climber could scale one side of it through the shadow of the clinging pines, and there was room for a precarious trail, the one road to civilization, between the hillside and the thundering river.

Farther back, the valley opened out, and up and down it were scattered the Green River diggings. From its inner end an Indian trail, which as yet only one or two white men had ever trodden, led on to the still richer wilderness that stretched back to the Yukon. Above the tent stood a primitive erection of logs roofed with split cedar and hemlock bark which served at once as store and Hetty's dwelling. She was busy inside it then, for Ingleby could hear the rattle of cooking utensils and listened appreciatively, for he was as hungry as usual, although dispirited. His limbs ached from a long day's strenuous toil, and the stain of the soil was on his threadbare jean. He and Leger had spent a good many weeks now upon a placer claim, and the result of their labours was a few grains of gold.

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He rose, however, when Hetty came out of the shanty and stood looking down into the misty valley. She was immaculately neat, as she generally was, even in that desolation divided by a many days' journey from the nearest dry-goods store and where the only approach to a laundry was an empty coal-oil can, and she turned to Ingleby with a little smile in her eyes. Hetty had her sorrows, and the life she led would probably have been insupportable to most women reared in an English town, but she had long been accustomed to turn a cheerful face upon a very hard world, and Ingleby, though he did not know exactly why, felt glad that she was there. There are women who produce this effect on those they live among, and they are seldom the most brilliant ones. Still, he did not speak, for Hetty Leger was not a young woman who on all occasions demanded attention.

"No sign of Tom!" she said.

"No," said Ingleby. "I only hope he brings something with him, and hasn't lost the flies again. I gave a man who went out a dollar each for them, and I couldn't get another if I offered ten. The plain hooks I got in Vancouver are no use either when there apparently isn't a worm in the country."

Hetty smiled, though there were reasons why a trout fly was worth a good deal to them, and one of them became apparent when she glanced at the empty spider laid beside the fire, which burned clear and red between two small logs laid parallel to each other and about a foot apart.

"If he doesn't you'll have to put up with bread and dried apples. The pork's done," she said.

It was, perhaps, not the kind of conversation one would have expected from a man at an impressionable age and a distinctly pretty girl, especially when they stood alone in such a scene of wild grandeur as few men's eyes have looked upon, but Hetty did not appear to consider it in any way out of place. Indeed, though there had been a time when she had accepted Ingleby's compliments with a smile and even became a trifle venturesome in her badinage, there had been a difference since they left England, and while Ingleby did not realize exactly what that difference was he felt that it was there. Hetty Leger had not enjoyed any of the training which is, usually, at least, bestowed upon young women of higher station; but she had discovered early that, as she expressed it, there is no use in crying for the moon, and she had a certain pride. It was also a wholesome one and untainted by petulance or mortified vanity.

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"I don't think," she said reflectively, "I would worry too much about those flies."

"No?" said Ingleby. "Nobody could have called that pork good; but dried apples *ad libitum* are apt to pall on one."

Hetty shook her head. "I'm afraid they're not even going to do that," she said. "There's very few of them left in the bottom of the bag."

Just then Leger appeared, carrying a fishing-rod which Ingleby had laboriously fashioned out of a straight fir branch. He had also a string of trout, but was apparently dripping below the knees and somewhat disconsolate. The trout were dressed ready, and he laid two or three of them in the pan, and then sat down upon one of the hearth logs.

"I expect that's the last we'll get," he said.

"You haven't whipped those flies off?" said Ingleby.

Leger nodded ruefully. "I'm afraid I have," he said. "At least, I let them sink in an eddy and hooked a boulder. It comes to very much the same thing."

Hetty laughed as she saw Ingleby's face. "Perhaps I'd better go away," she said. "Aren't there times when it hurts you to be quiet?"

"There are," said Ingleby drily. "This is one of them."

"Well," said Hetty, "you can talk when you break out. I heard you one night in the car—but we'll get supper, and then if you're very good I'll show you something." [Pg 87]

She stirred the fire, and laid out the inevitable dried apples and a loaf of bread which was not exactly of the kind somewhat aptly termed grindstone in that country. Then when the edge of their hunger was blunted she took out a very diminutive fluffy object and handed it to Ingleby.

"I wonder if the trout would be silly enough to jump at that," she said. "It's a little plumper than the other ones, but I hadn't any silk to tie it with."

Ingleby stared at the fly in blank astonishment, and then gravely passed it to Leger.

"Look at that, and be thankful you have a sister," he said.

"I am," said Leger with a little smile, though something in his voice suggested that he meant it. "But whatever did you make it out of, Hetty?"

"Strips of frayed-out cloth, the blue grouse's feathers, and the very little threads there are in a piece of cotton when you unwind it."

"The tail was never made of feathers or cotton," said Ingleby. "No more was this wing hackle. That's quite sure. Look at it, Tom. You'll notice the bright colour."

Hetty unwisely snatched at the fly, but Leger's hand closed upon it, and a moment or two later he laughed softly. "It certainly won't come out in the water, and that is presumably more than could be said of everybody's hair."

Ingleby took the fly from him, and Leger proceeded. "Now we have got over that difficulty there is another to consider."

"There generally is," said Hetty.

"This one is serious," said her brother. "One can no more live upon trout and nothing else than he can upon dried apples, and while the flour is running out we have neither dollars nor dust to buy any more with. Our friend the freighter cannot be induced to grub-stake everybody, and I'm not sure one could blame him for asking five or six times as much for his provisions as they are worth in the cities when you consider the nature of the trail. Of course, Walter and I could earn a few dollars at Tomlinson's mine." [Pg 88]

He stopped, and looked at Ingleby, whose face grew a trifle grave.

"A placer claim," said the latter, "can only be held while you work upon it continuously."

"Exactly! Seventy-two hours after we lay down the shovel any other man who thinks it worth while can seize upon our last chance of making a fortune. I think you understand that, considering the present cost of provisions, we are scarcely likely to save as much as would keep us while we try again, out of what we make on Tomlinson's claim."

Ingleby realized this and said nothing. The giving up of his claim implied the parting with certain aspirations which had of late supported him through long days of feverish toil; but one must live, and he had discovered that to work as the free miners do in that country a somewhat ample diet is necessary. He sat near the fire, and Hetty, who saw the hardness of his face, understood it.

"You really think there is gold in the claim?" she said.

"Yes," said Ingleby. "Tomlinson and one or two of the others who have played this game half their lives admitted that the signs were as good as any they had seen. Still, I'm by no means sure we can hold out until we strike it."

Hetty smiled in a curious fashion. "Especially while you have me to keep?"

Even Leger appeared astonished, and Ingleby flushed hotly as he turned to her. "Hetty," he said sternly, "what do you mean by that?"

The girl laughed, and pointed to the loaf. "That is nice bread?"

"It is," said Ingleby. "Still, I don't see what that has to do with it."

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"There's no bread like it in the Green River country," persisted Hetty. "They taught me to bake at the boarding-house. I made it."

Ingleby looked at her in astonishment. "Go on," he said. "I'll wait a little."

"Well," and though Hetty spoke quietly her voice was not quite her usual one, "what are you and Tom longing for just now more than anything?"

"The means to go on working on our claim."

"Then what would you say if I gave you them?"

Ingleby gasped. For days he had been haunted by the fear that their provisions would run out before they found the gold he believed in, for a little very simple figuring had shown that there was only a faint hope of their making more than the value of their day's labour once they relinquished the hitherto unprofitable claim. There was also, it was evident, no great probability that a mere wielder of pick and shovel would ever gain the regard of the Gold Commissioner's daughter, though Miss Coulthurst, whom he met occasionally, had of late been unusually gracious to him. He had, however, not the faintest notion of the fact that Hetty Leger read his thoughts.

"You see, it's quite simple," she said. "I made this bread, and there are men up the valley who are really finding gold. They don't want to waste a minute doing anything else, and it takes time to bake. You can't even make flapjacks in a moment. Now, if I had two or three sacks of flour I think I could get almost what I liked to ask for every loaf."

Leger looked up with a little expressive smile. "I believe she has found the way out of the difficulty."

It was, however, Ingleby at whom Hetty glanced, though it did not strike him then—as it did long afterwards—that she must have been quite aware what she was offering him.

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"Well?" she said.

Ingleby's lips were set, and his face a trifle grim. To live, even for the purpose of working for a result by which she would benefit, upon the yield of a woman's enterprise and toil did not commend itself to him, though he could not very well tell her so.

"We haven't got the flour," he said.

"No," said Hetty. "Still, it can be bought at the settlement, and no doubt you could find the pack-horses in the bush. You could go down and get it while Tom holds the claim."

"There is still the difficulty that I haven't got the money."

Hetty laughed. "I have. The wages were really good at the boarding-house. Of course, you and Tom could build the oven and chop the wood, while I wouldn't mind your kneading the dough either if you wanted to. That would leave me with nothing to do but watch the bread baking."

Ingleby still said nothing; but his face, as the firelight showed, was a trifle flushed, and Leger shook his head at him. "One can't afford to be whimsical up here," he said. "Anyway, I'm willing to give the thing a trial, and if we don't strike gold we can always go over to Tomlinson's or start baking, too. I shouldn't wonder if it should turn out as profitable as mining, and it is certainly likely to be a good deal more reliable."

Hetty once more glanced at Ingleby. "Of course, we can't make you join us if you don't want."

At last Ingleby turned to her. "Hetty," he said quietly, "I don't think you could understand how much you have done for me. I would sooner cut my hand off than let the claim go."

Hetty only smiled, and they had almost thrashed out the scheme when a thud of hoofs came up faintly through the roar of the river from the gorge below. Then the figure of a horseman became visible, and when he swung himself very stiffly from the saddle in front of the fire Ingleby rose hastily and held out his hand.

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"Mr. Sewell!" he said. "I don't mean it conventionally, this—is—a pleasure."

The stranger, who swept his wide hat off as he turned to Hetty, laughed. "I have just come in. I wonder if I could ask—Mrs. Ingleby, isn't it—for a little supper?"

The request was a very usual one in a country where the stranger is rarely turned away unfed; but Hetty, who seemed to draw a little farther back into the shadow, was a trifle slow in answering it.

"Miss Leger!" she said. "Of course, you shall have supper. Put on two more trout and fill the kettle, Tom."

Sewell gratefully took his place beside the fire, and, for he had an engaging tongue, had almost gained Hetty's confidence, which was not lightly given, by the time the meal was over. Then she looked hard at him.

"What did you come here for?" she asked.

"Wouldn't the fame of the Green River mines be excuse enough?" said the man.

Hetty shook her head. "No," she said, "I don't think it would. People who talk as you do aren't generally fond of digging."

"Then finding I wasn't wanted in Vancouver I went back into the States, and as usual got into a trifling difficulty there. That was in Colorado, where the men and the manager of a certain big mine couldn't come to terms. The manager was, as not infrequently happens, friendly with the constituted authorities, and between them and the men's executive, with whom I managed to quarrel, they made that town unpleasant for me. Of course, one gets accustomed to having his character pulled to pieces and being hustled in the streets, but they go rather farther than that in Colorado." [Pg 92]

"And so you ran away?"

Sewell laughed. "I certainly went when it was evident that I could do no good. Still, it was in the daylight, and half the populace came with me to the station."

"I asked you what brought you here," said Hetty severely.

Sewell made a little expressive gesture. "Between friends—I think I can go so far?" he asked, and it was Hetty alone he looked at. "You see, I met your brother and Mr. Ingleby in Vancouver."

Hetty regarded him silently for a moment or two. He was a well-favoured man with a curiously pleasing manner. "Yes," she said. "I think you can."

"Then I came here to see what I could do at mining—I have really used the shovel oftener than you seem to fancy—and, when it is necessary, go through by the Indian trail to the camps between this country and the Yukon. Though they will probably work on quietly while the ground is soft, they're not pleased with the mining regulations yonder."

He looked out into the soft blue darkness which now veiled the great white peaks that lay between him and the vast desolation of the Northwest, and the smile died out of his eyes. A few moments slipped by before Leger broke the silence.

"I believe that trail is scarcely practicable to a white man. Only one or two have ever tried it," he said.

"That is so much the better. I am, however, certainly going in."

There was a little silence, and then Ingleby said suggestively, "They have been sending a good many of the Northwest Police into that country."

Sewell smiled. "From one point of view I think they were wise. It's not the contented that one usually finds mining in the wilderness. The soil, of course, is British, but that, after all, does not imply very much." [Pg 93]

"You mean that the men up there have no country?" asked Leger.

"Some of them, at least, have unpleasantly good memories. They are the cast-outs and the superfluities; but, as no doubt you know, it is not their criminals the older lands get rid of now."

"That," said Hetty sharply, "is all nonsense. If they're really bad they are put into prison."

Sewell laughed. "I believe they are, now and then. Now, suppose you tell me about the Green River country."

They sat late that night about the crackling fire, though there was a vague uneasiness upon two of them. Hetty liked the stranger, as a man, but she had seen that trouble came of following out the theories he believed in; while all Ingleby wished for just then was an opportunity for toiling quietly at his claim.

Sewell naturally slept in their tent, and it was not until he had breakfasted next morning that he rode into the valley. Ingleby walked with him a short distance, and as it happened they met Grace Coulthurst on the trail. She smiled as she passed Ingleby. Sewell, his companion fancied, looked at her harder than was necessary as he sat still in the saddle, a somewhat striking figure of a man, with his wide hat in his hand.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"Miss Coulthurst, daughter of the Gold Commissioner."

"There is no reason why a prospector shouldn't look at a queen, and she has a striking face. Of course, one would hardly call it beautiful—still, it is distinctly attractive."

"You have no doubt met a good many beautiful women of her station?" asked Ingleby, who was a trifle nettled and could not quite restrain the ironical question.

Sewell laughed. "Well," he said, "I have certainly come across one or two. Besides, I had rather a fancy that I might be an artist once—a good while ago."

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Ingleby was duly astonished, but no more was said on the subject, and in another few minutes Sewell rode on up the valley alone.

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## X UNREST

It was as hot as it can be now and then during the fierce brief summer of the North, and the perspiration rose in beads on the Crown Recorder's face as he stood on the rude verandah of his log-built dwelling looking down at the tents and shanties which showed here and there amidst the pines. He was a little man with a quiet and almost expressionless face, and attired, although he lived far remote from civilization in the wilderness, with a fastidious neatness which with the erectness of his carriage furnished a hint as to his character. There was, however, nothing that any one could have termed finicking about him. He was precise, formal, and unemotional, a man of fixed opinions, as little to be moved by argument as by any attempt at compulsion, for Recorder Eshelby was one of the Insular Englishmen who, when entrusted with authority on the outskirts of the Empire, are equally capable of adding to their nation's credit or involving it in difficulties by their soulless and undeviating regard for its law. There are a good many of them, and, while occasionally respected, they are, as a rule, not greatly loved in any of England's dependencies.

Sitting in the shadowy room behind him a hard-bitten Canadian of a very different stamp watched Eshelby with an ironical twinkle in his eyes. He had won his promotion, on merit, in the Northwest Police, and there was red dust on his faded uniform, which showed a roughly stitched-up rent here and there.

Outside the sun glare was dazzling, and when he turned his eyes from Eshelby he could see the peaks gleaming with a hard whiteness against the blue. They were by no means high, for the level of perpetual snow is low in that country, and it was only on the eastern hand that they rose to any elevation. West and north a desolation of swamp muskeg, wherein few living creatures could face the mosquitoes, rock and river, stretched back to the Yukon, and Eshelby was there to carry out the mining laws of that district, which are less lenient than those of the province to the south of it.

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The valley was very still, and the drowsy fragrance of the firs crept into the dwelling; but Slavin, who would sooner have heard the clatter of shovels or the crash of a blasting charge, was not in the least deceived. He knew that unusual quietness now and then presages storm, and he had felt that there was a tension in the atmosphere for some little time. He smiled, however, when Eshelby glanced into the room.

"If they do not turn up in another minute I will walk across to the outpost with you," said the latter. "The time is up."

He spoke concisely, with a clean English intonation, and, as usual, betrayed no impatience; but Slavin fancied he was by no means pleased at the fact that a band of miners with grievances should presume to keep him waiting for even a few moments.

"I guess they'll come," he said. "If I were you I'd promise them something if it's only to humour them."

Eshelby glanced at him coldly, for he was not as a rule addicted to considering any advice that might be offered him.

"A concession," he said, "is usually regarded as a sign of wavering. In dealing with a mob of this kind firmness is necessary."

Slavin made a little gesture, and smiled in a somewhat curious fashion. He had shepherded the Blackfeet on the plains, as well as put down whisky-runners and carried out the prohibition laws, and he knew that to gain an end one must yield a point occasionally. It was, however, not his business to instruct the Crown Recorder, and Eshelby seldom deviated a hair's-breadth from the course he had once decided on.

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"Well," Slavin said, "I guess I hear them, and I'll stay right where I am. They can't see me in the shadow, and if they knew I was hanging round it might worry them. You don't want to hang out a red rag when you have a difference of opinion with a bull."

He moved his chair back a little farther from the door when a murmur of voices and pattering of feet came up through the dimness beneath the stunted pines, for he was quite aware that his warning was not likely to restrain Eshelby from a display of the exasperating crimson on the smallest provocation. Then he leaned forward with a quiet intentness in his eyes as a group of men came

out of the shadows. They were dressed for the most part in soil-stained jeans, and were all of them spare of flesh and sinewy. They had bronzed faces with a significant grimness in them, and moved with a certain air of resolution that did not astonish Slavin. They were hard men—English, Canadians, Americans, Teutons, by birth—though that meant very little to most of them then; men who had faced many perils and borne as much privation as flesh and blood is capable of. To men of their kind all countries are the same, and they have not as a rule any particular tenderness for the land which had, in their phraseology, no use for them.

They had also, or, at least, so they thought, legitimate grievances; for the exactions of the Crown were heavy, and it is because the opinions of such as they were are seldom listened to that news now and then reaches England which is unpleasant to complacent optimists with Imperialistic views. The wonder is, however, that the latter are not more frequently disturbed in their tranquillity, for even when peace and prosperity are proclaimed at St. Stephen's there is usually, and probably must necessarily be, all round the fringe of the Empire a vague unrest which is occasionally rife with unpleasant probabilities. The men of the outer marches have primitive passions, and, or they would in all probability never have been there at all, an indomitable will. Slavin, at least, understood them, and knew that while it is well to keep a tight grasp on the reins, it is not always advisable to make those driven unduly sensible of it.

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Two who came foremost stopped in front of the veranda, and one of them was a well-favoured man with restless dark eyes. Slavin fancied he had seen the picture of somebody very like him in an American paper. The rest waited a few yards away, and the man with the dark eyes greeted Eshelby, who responded with the curtest inclination, courteously.

"We have come for an answer to the request we handed you," he said.

Eshelby glanced at him coldly. "You are a free miner? What is the name on your certificate?"

"Sewell," said the other. "You may, perhaps, have heard of it?"

Slavin started a little, and then smiled to himself, for there was, at least, no sign in the Recorder's face that he attached any particular significance to the announcement.

"Well," he said, "I have, as I promised, glanced at what you are pleased to term your request, though it bears a somewhat unfortunate resemblance to a demand."

"We're not going to worry 'bout what you call it," said the man who had not spoken yet. "We have come here so you can tell us what you mean to do."

Eshelby smiled a little, though it would have been wiser if he had refrained from it.

"Personally," he said, "I can do nothing whatever."

There was a low murmur with an unpleasant note in it from the rest of the deputation. The curt *non possumus* is usually the last resource of the diplomatist when argument has failed, and it very seldom makes for peace, as everybody knows. Slavin wondered why the Crown authorities should have inflicted upon him such a man as Eshelby when his burden was already sufficiently heavy.

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"Well," said the miner grimly, "something has got to be done. We let you know what we wanted. Haven't you anything to say?"

"Only that I shall send your petition to the proper quarter."

"I wonder," said Sewell drily, "if you would tell us what is likely to be done with it there?"

"It will receive attention when the department is at liberty to consider it."

Sewell laughed. "Presumably at any time during the next two years! Can you guarantee that it will not be neatly docketed and put away for ever?"

"And," said one of the men who stood behind, "we may be dead by then. How're we going to worry through when the snow comes and it's going to cost a fortune to get provisions in when the Crown takes the big share of what most of us make?"

Eshelby did not even look at the last speaker as he answered Sewell.

"I certainly can't guarantee anything," he said.

There was a little murmur from the men, but Sewell raised his hand restrainingly. "We had," he said, with a quietness which had, nevertheless, a suggestion of irony in it, "the honour of pointing out to you some of our difficulties and suggesting how they could be obviated. We may now take it that you can give us no assurance that the matter will even receive the attention we, at least, think necessary?"

"I am," said Eshelby, "not in a position to promise you anything. The petition will be submitted to men qualified to deal with it."

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"With a recommendation that as the matter is urgent it should be looked into?"

Eshelby straightened himself a trifle. "My views will be explained to those in authority. I do not recognize any necessity for laying them before you."

The rest of the deputation had drawn a little closer to Sewell, and Slavin was watching their faces intently. He felt that unless they had confidence in their leader, and he was endued with all the qualities necessary for the part, there was trouble on hand. Sewell, who made a little forceful gesture as he glanced at the rest, was, however, apparently still master of the situation.

"Then," he said, "there is in the meanwhile nothing you can suggest?"

"I fancied you understood that already," said Eshelby. "If those whose business it is think fit to modify the regulations you complain of I will let you know. Unless that happens they will be adhered to as usual, rigorously."

His coldly even voice was in itself an aggravation, and Slavin, who saw one of the deputation move forward with a little glow in his eyes, rose sharply to his feet. He, however, sat down again next moment with a smile, for Sewell quietly laid his hand upon the man's arm, and the rest stood still in obedience to his gesture. Slavin was not astonished, for he, too, was a man who understood how to wield authority.

"Then," said Sewell, "we need not waste any more of your time. We have heard nothing that we did not expect, boys, and now we at least know where we stand."

He turned once more to Eshelby, raising his wide hat, and then moved back into the shadow of the pines, taking care, as Slavin noticed, that the others, who did not seem greatly desirous of doing so, went on in front of him. The Recorder glanced at Slavin complacently when they disappeared.

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"A little firmness is usually effective in a case of this kind," he said. "I will, of course, send on the petition, but as I scarcely suppose it will be referred to again we can consider the affair as closed."

Slavin smiled. "I am not quite so sure as you seem to be. The fellow's last remark was a significant one, and he's not the kind of man to stand still anywhere very long. Anyway, he and you between you have forced my hand, and, while I have got to take your lead, the game is going to be a risky one."

Eshelby sat down with a little gesture which implied that he had already given the trifling affair rather more attention than it merited; and Slavin went out to take such proceedings as appeared advisable, though it was not until that night that the result of them became evident.

Sewell was then sitting with eight or nine men in the general room of Hobson's Oregon Hotel. It had walls of undressed logs, but the roof was still of canvas, for Hobson had been too busy watching over his interests in several profitable claims and dispensing deleterious liquor to split sufficient cedar. There was another room in the building in which he slept with any newcomer who was rash enough to put his hospitality to the test. Rather more than a hundred miners were at work in that valley, but only a few whose views and influence with the rest were known had been invited to attend the conference.

The room was foul with tobacco smoke and the reek of kerosene, for the big lamp smoked when the roof canvas flapped now and then. Sewell sat in a deer-hide chair with a pipe in his hand, and a man with a grim, bronzed face and a splendid corded arm showing through the torn sleeve of his shirt was speaking. He spoke quietly and like a man of education.

"We have," he said, "as our host has pointed out, done the straight thing and given constituted authority a show. The constituted authority, as usual, prefers to do nothing. We naturally consider our grievances warranted, but I need not go into them again. Some of us risked our lives to get here; the rest will probably do so by holding on through the winter, and, considering how we work, it is not exactly astonishing that we wish to take back a little gold with us—which we are scarcely likely to do under the present regulations. I, however, fancy the position is plain enough to everybody."

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"The question, Hobson," said another man, "is how's it going to be altered?"

"By kicking," said Hobson drily. "You want to start in hard, and stay right there with it."

There was a murmur of approval, and a man stood up.

"That, I guess, is just the point—who's to begin, and when?" he said. "There's mighty little use in three or four of us wearing our shoes out before the rest. No, sir, Slavin would come round with his troopers and run those men out."

Sewell nodded. "Our friend has hit it; we have got to go slow," he said. "There are at least a hundred men in this valley, and a good many more with the same grievances farther west, without mentioning the Green River country, where the regulations are easier. Now, it will be your business to go round and make sure of the men here joining us. A good many of them are ready, and we'll strike when you can get the rest. The kick will have to be unanimous."

"That's so," said another man. "Lie low until we're ready. Well, when the time comes you'll have your programme?"

Sewell leaned forward in his chair with a little glow in his eyes. "Then," he said, "we will, for one thing, show Recorder Eshelby out of the valley by way of a protest, and, if it appears necessary, as it probably will do, seize Slavin's armoury. We'll make our regulations and give the Crown

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people a hint that they had better sanction them."

There was a little hum of approbation, and a man stood up. "I guess that's the platform," he said. "Half the men in this country are Americans, and Alaska is not so far away. Once we show we mean it they're coming right in, and when we start in twisting the Beaver's tail we're going to get some backing at home. Do you know any reason why we shouldn't send somebody down south to whip up a campaign fund? There was plenty of money piled up when the Chicago Irishmen were going over to ask why the British nation threw out the Home Rule Bill."

Most of the others laughed, but while there was no expression of sympathy it was significant that there was as little astonishment. Visionaries talked of founding a new republic in the North just then, and some of annexation, but still the Beaver flag flapped over every Government outpost. There were many men with grievances in that country, but they knew the world and were far from sure that there was anything to be gained by changing their accustomed burden for what might prove to be a more grievous one. There were others who, while by no means contented with the mining regulations, were still characterized by the sturdy Imperialism which is to be met with throughout most of Canada.

Hobson turned to the speaker with a whimsical grin. "The Chicago Irishmen stayed right where they were," he said. "I don't know what they did with the money, but they bought no rifles—they weren't blame fools. The moral is that what an Irishman looks at twice is too big a thing for us. No, sir, you wouldn't raise ten dollars in a month down there. America has all the trouble she has any use for already. What we want to do is to put up a good big bluff—and no more than that—on the British Empire."

"How's the Empire going to take it?" asked another.

Sewell smiled. "Patiently, I think. That is, if we go just far enough and know when to stop. They move slowly in England—I was born there—and I'm not sure they're very much quicker in Ottawa. In fact, they rather like an energetic protest, and you very seldom get anything without it. Once we show we're in earnest they'll send over a special commissioner with instructions to make any concessions he thinks will please us."

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"There are Slavin and his troopers to consider," said the man who had spoken first. "They're not going to sit still, and if any of them got hurt during the proceedings it's quite likely we might be visited by a column of Canadian militia."

Others commenced to speak—two or three together, in fact—but Sewell raised his hand.

"That eventuality will have to be carefully guarded against," he said. "Slavin seems to be a man of ability and sense, and he would never pit his handful of troopers against a hundred men. In the meanwhile, everything depends on secrecy, and no move must be made until you are sure of everybody. I will answer for the Green River men. I am going back there shortly."

Then they put their heads together to consider a scheme, and there was only a low hum of voices until Hobson stood up suddenly. A tramp of feet and a sharp order rose from outside.

"Slavin and the troopers!" he said. "We don't want him to know who's here. Get out through the roof, boys. Put the lamp out."

It was done, and while a sound of ripping and scrambling became audible in the black darkness Hobson touched Sewell's arm.

"You and I have got to see it out. I guess he's sure of us," he said.

In another moment or two somebody beat upon the door, and getting no answer drove it open. Then a sulphur match sputtered, and the trooper who stood in the entrance turned to a man behind him.

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"There are only two men here, sir," he said.

"Light that lamp," said the other man. "I feel tolerably certain there were considerably more."

Hobson stood forward when the feeble light of the blue flame made him dimly visible.

"I guess it's broke," he said.

"Bring Rignauld's lantern!" said the man in the darkness.

It was at least a minute before another trooper appeared with a light, and Sewell surmised that his companions had made good use of the time. Slavin, who, as he quite expected, was standing in the doorway, seemed to realize it too, for he glanced at the torn canvas.

"I might have thought of that," he said. "You and Rignauld will start down the trail and stop any man you come across, though I guess they're back in their tents or in the bush by now."

The trooper went out, and Slavin turned to Hobson with a smile on his face. "We have got you, anyway, and you'll spend to-night, at least, in the outpost. To-morrow I'll look into the question of the liquor-sale permits, and it's quite likely this saloon will be closed. I'll have to take you along as well, Mr. Sewell."

Sewell made a good-humoured gesture of resignation. "I suppose I'll have to come. It's a proceeding I'm not altogether unaccustomed to. Still, I'm not sure there is any charge you can



work up against me."

Slavin looked at him almost appreciatively. "Well," he said, "I fancy you're not going to make any trouble here. In fact, it's very probable that you will leave this settlement early to-morrow, though it would have been a good deal better had I choked you off from coming here. I would have done it had I known who you were. You will take any steps that seem necessary if these gentlemen try to get away, Trooper Nixon."

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Sewell spent that night at the outpost, but not in the same room with Hobson, and when he had breakfasted tolerably well Slavin came in.

"Your horse is waiting, and you will start at once—for wherever you like so long as it's outside my boundaries, though I may as well mention that every officer in the district will be warned against you," he said. "If you feel yourself aggrieved you can, of course, complain to Victoria."

Sewell made no protest. When he knew it would be useless he seldom did, and Slavin, who handed him several days' provisions, waited until he swung himself into the saddle.

"It wouldn't be wise to push your luck too hard by coming back," he said.

Sewell smiled from the saddle, and rode away. He knew that the seed was sown and need only be left to spring and ripen, though he would have felt easier had he been sure that Slavin did not know it, too. Eshelby could be trusted to stimulate the growth of the crop, but he had already grasped the capabilities of the quiet police officer, who, it was evident, was a very different kind of man.

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## XI INGLEBY VENTURES A REMONSTRANCE

It was late in the afternoon when Ingleby, who led two jaded pack-horses, limped into the Green River cañon. His long boots, which were caked with the mire of leagues of travel, galled him cruelly; every joint was aching; and it was only by an effort he kept himself on his feet at all. It had rained most of the way from the distant settlement where he had been for the flour Hetty had asked for, and during the last week he had slept by snatches amidst the dripping fern while the pitiless deluge thrashed the fir trunks that indifferently sheltered him. The few strips of natural prairie in the valleys had turned to treacherous swamps, where he sank to the knee, and every few miles there was a furious torrent to be forded perilously.

Had he been called on to make that journey under such conditions when fresh from England he would probably never have reached the cañon, but strenuous toil with pick and shovel and the simple life of the wilderness had hardened him, and endued him with the strength of will which holds the worn-out body in due subjection. Man's capacity for endurance is, as even the hard-handed bushman knows, moral as well as physical; but Ingleby was making his last effort when he reached the great rift between the hills.

The river roared close beneath him, swirling among its boulders, stained green with the clay of a great glacier, and overhead the sombre pines were blurred by mist and rain. No laden beast could scale the slope they clung to, and a treacherous bank of gravel on which a man could scarcely keep his footing dropped to the river just outside the slushy trail. Ingleby sank ankle-deep in mire at every step, but he held on doggedly with a hand on the leading horse's bridle and the rain on his face, for Leger's camp was not very far away, and he feared that if he rested now his worn-out limbs might fail him when he came to start again.

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That was sufficient to account for the sudden hardening of his face when a thud of hoofs came out of the rain. The trail was especially soft and narrow just there, and it would evidently be a risky matter to attempt to lead two horses past each other. Thrusting the leading beast close in to the inner side he raised his voice as two figures materialized amidst the trunks in front of him. Down in that great hollow the light was dim, but the clatter of accoutrements told him it was a couple of police troopers who were approaching.

"Stop where you are until I get by. There's scarcely room for both of us," he said.

It was evident that the men heard him, for one said something to the other sharply, but they did not stop. They came on at a floundering trot instead, until Ingleby saw who the foremost was and pulled the pack-horse across the trail. Then there was a musical jingling as the men drew bridle, and Ingleby and the leader looked at each other. He wore an officer's uniform and there was just then a little sardonic gleam in his dark eyes. He was also very like the man Ingleby, who now knew he bore the same name, had faced at Willow Dene.

"Why didn't you pull up behind there, packer?" he asked.

"You couldn't have got past, Captain Esmond," said Ingleby. "I was well into the narrow stretch when I called to you."

"That," said the policeman, "is a trifle unfortunate—for you. It ought to be tolerably evident that I can't wheel my horse now." [Pg 109]

It was apparently out of the question, but Ingleby's wet face grew a trifle grim, for the assurance with which the young officer claimed precedence was exasperating, and he knew that any miner in the valley seeing him hampered by two laden beasts would have made way for him. One of them, it was evident, must leave the trail, but Ingleby felt that the question which that one would be was by no means decided yet. He glanced at the swirling pool below, and though he fancied there was no great depth of water, it was clear to him that even if he could lead the worn-out beasts down the slippery slope of gravel he could never drag them up again.

"You should have foreseen that when I warned you to stop," he said.

A little flicker of colour showed in Esmond's face, but he sat easily, and, as it seemed to Ingleby, insolently, still in his saddle, looking at him with an excellent assumption of ironical incredulity, as though unwilling to believe that he had heard correctly. This was the more exasperating because Ingleby had his share of the sturdy English independence, and an almost unreasoning dislike of anything that savoured of arrogance. It was, however, consoling to remember that in the wilderness the patrician is held of no more account than the manhood inherent in him warrants, and must either waive his claim to superiority or support it by his own resources. There was also no sign that the trooper sympathized with his officer.

"Will you be good enough to get out of my way?" asked Esmond with portentous quietness.

There was no answer; and he touched his horse with the spur. The beast floundered forward splashing in the mire; but Ingleby stood still with a grim wet face in the middle of the trail, and a faint trace of astonishment crept into the young officer's eyes, for, as sometimes happens in the case of men with sufficient belief in themselves, he had hitherto found the world inclined to take him at his own valuation. Now he found the position as galling as it was unexpected, for it was evident that the nerve of the wet and miry man who stood awaiting him with exasperating quietness was quite equal to his. [Pg 110]

Esmond's blood was up, and it is very probable that he would have risked the encounter had he been free from official responsibility. As it was, however, he remembered that an officer of police is not warranted in riding down an unoffending citizen, and in addition to this the heavily-laden pack-horse drawn right across the trail promised to prove an embarrassing obstacle even if Ingleby had not been standing beside it with a heavy fir staff in his hand. It occurred to Esmond that there was very little to be gained except damage to his personal dignity by riding into two bags of flour, while a second pack-horse similarly encumbered blocked the trail close behind.

Thus at the last moment he swung himself backwards with a wrench upon the bridle, and there was a scattering of mire and gravel as his horse reeled down the slope to the river. The beast was used to the mountains, and the man had ridden from infancy, so that when they plunged to the girth in the swirling pool he was still in the saddle, and Ingleby saw that his face was dark with a flush of anger. How he was to get out was his own business, and it was evident that he was in no danger, so Ingleby turned and gazed at the trooper, who sat still with a faint but suggestive twinkle in his eyes.

"I don't want to wait here. Both the beasts and I are badly played out," he said.

The trooper rubbed his chin with a wet hand, and glanced at his officer, who had, however, his back to him just then as he picked his way amidst the boulders.

"Well," he said, "I guess if I got down and edged out to the off side you might pass me. The trail's a little wider here." [Pg 111]

"Thanks!" said Ingleby, and looked at the man as he carefully led his beasts by him. The trooper also looked at him, with a little comprehending grin.

"Somebody's going to make trouble if he can find a speck on anything to-morrow," he said.

He swung himself into the saddle with all the haste he could contrive, and with one eye still upon his officer. Ingleby plodded on, and, as dusk was closing in, limped into sight of a ruddy blaze among the pines. Leger, who had heard his approach, took the pack-horses' bridles, and Ingleby stood stupidly still, blinking at him.

"I've got it," he said, pointing to the flour. "Where is it to go? I'll give you a hand to heave it down."

Leger laughed and pointed to the shanty. "Go right in. I'll manage the bags myself," he said. "Tomlinson and the boys have been up and built us a new store-shed."

Ingleby turned towards the shanty, and as he neared the doorway a slim figure cut against the light, and a hand was stretched out to draw him in. Then he felt a little thrill run through him as he stood in the welcome warmth with Hetty looking up at him. There was an almost maternal gentleness and compassion in her eyes, for Ingleby's face was a trifle grey and the water ran from him. Then she turned swiftly and thrust an armful of clothing upon him.

"Put them on this minute; they're warm and dry. There's a light in the new shed," she said. "Then come back here. You're not to go outside again."

Ingleby was glad to obey her, and when he came back Hetty had drawn a rude chair of deerhide towards the fire.

"Sit down, and don't worry about trying to talk," she said.

Ingleby sank wearily into the chair, and lay there in a state of blissful content watching her with half-closed eyes. It was an inestimable luxury to be free from the chill of his saturated clothing and feel the warmth creep through him, but by degrees he became sensible that his contentment had more than a physical origin. The soft rustle of Hetty's dress was soothing as she laid out a simple meal; her quick, light footsteps suggested a gratifying anxiety to minister to his comfort; and he found the fashion in which she smiled at him, as she did once or twice, especially pleasant. Hetty had a spice of temper and a will of her own, but she was also endued with the kindness which makes up for a good many deficiencies. Ingleby turned his head at last and looked at her languidly.

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"You make this shanty feel like home—though it is a very long while since I had one," he said.

Hetty flushed, ever so slightly, and Ingleby naturally did not notice it.

"We have been making improvements since you left," she said. "It really doesn't need very much to make a place look comfortable."

Ingleby appeared reflective. "Well," he said, "I suppose it doesn't. I don't know how you manage it, Hetty, but everything seems just as one would like it when you arrange it. Still, that's not quite what I mean either. I'm really not sure I know what I do mean—you see, I'm sleepy."

Hetty stopped close beside him and looked down with a little smile, though there was just a shade more colour than usual in her face.

"You are worn out, and needn't worry about it until you have had supper," she said. "If I had known you would come back like this I would never have let you go."

"Still, you wanted the flour."

"I didn't mean you to wear yourself out to save those lazy miners from baking their own bread."

Ingleby shook his head. "I shall be all right to-morrow, and I'm going to talk," he said, "That wasn't why you sent me. One doesn't start a bakery out of philanthropy."

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"Well," said Hetty, "you know I wanted the money."

"For Tom and me!" said Ingleby reproachfully. "I felt horribly mean about it all the way to the settlement."

"Is it very unpleasant then to let me do anything for you?"

"No," said Ingleby. "That is, of course, it's generally very nice. Still, in this case——"

Hetty looked at him curiously. "Oh, I know! Still, you seemed quite angry once because I didn't care to let you lend Tom the money to bring us out."

"That, of course, was very different."

Hetty smiled. "Yes," she said. "When one is a girl it usually is."

Ingleby, who was very drowsy, did not seem quite sure what to make of this, and gazed meditatively at the fire.

"That stone hearth wasn't there when I left," he said. "Who made it, Hetty?"

"Tomlinson. Tom went round to tell the boys about the bakery, and Tomlinson came over to show him how to build the oven."

"And he made this chair? Now I think of it we hadn't one before, and Tom certainly didn't make it. It's too comfortable."

"Yes," said Hetty.

"And he built the new shed?"

"He certainly did!"

Ingleby seemed by no means pleased. "It seems to me," he said severely, "that Tomlinson has been doing a good deal here. Now, you ought to know that when you want any improvements made you have only to ask Tom and me."

"Could you build a chimney like that one?"

"No," said Ingleby decisively. "If I must be honest, I don't think I could. Still, there wasn't the least occasion to ask Tomlinson. He must have been here more than once?"

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"I believe he was here three or four times."

"Why did he come so often?"

Hetty laughed. "He said it was to see how Tom was getting on with the oven."

"Of course!" said Ingleby. "Well, I suppose one excuse was as good as another. One would, however, fancy that Tomlinson had quite enough to do looking after his mine."

Hetty flashed a swift glance at him, but Ingleby was not looking at her. He was too drowsy to be quite sure of what he felt, but the fact that Tomlinson had been there on several occasions was far from pleasing him. Just then Tom Leger came in with the kettle which he had boiled on the fire outside, and Ingleby roused himself.

"I suppose you have struck nothing on the claim?" he said.

"No," said Leger. "Only a trace of colour, but I don't want to talk of that to-night. You can tell us about your journey when you have had supper."

Ingleby did so, though the narrative was distinctly tame in its unvarnished conciseness until he came to his meeting with Esmond. He had no desire that Hetty should know what he had endured on her account, while it is, after all, difficult to make another person understand what one feels like when worn-out to the verge of exhaustion. Ingleby did not attempt it, but his tone changed a trifle as he tried to picture the policeman floundering in the river. Leger laughed softly, but the firelight showed a little flash in Hetty's eyes.

"Splendid!" she said, and her voice had a little vindictive ring.

Leger looked up with a whimsical smile.

"You appear almost as angry with the man as Walter was," he said.

"Well," replied Hetty sharply, "so I am."

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It did not occur to Ingleby to wonder why the fact that the policeman had attempted to drive him off the trail should cause her so much indignation, and when Hetty abruptly asked a question calculated to give a different trend to the subject Leger answered her.

"I fancy I should have endeavoured to let him scrape by if I had been there," he said. "Crowding a police officer of that kind into a river may be soothing to one's ruffled temper, but I can't help concluding that it's likely to turn out expensive."

Ingleby did not answer this, and shortly afterwards retired to the tent, where he spent the next ten hours in dreamless sleep. He rose a little later than usual next morning, but did his accustomed work at the mine, though Leger fancied he was a trifle preoccupied during most of the day. Shortly before they left their task in the evening they saw Tomlinson climbing the trail to their camp with a heavy burden on his shoulders. The miner had apparently got rid of it when they met him coming back, and smiled in a deprecatory fashion in answer to Ingleby's inquiring glance.

"I struck a fir that was full of resin knots when I was chopping props," he said. "It kind of struck me Miss Leger would have some use for them at the bakery, and I just took one or two along."

Ingleby appeared rather more reflective than ever when the big miner went on, and finally laid his hand on his companion's shoulder.

"Of course, it's not exactly my business, but are you wise in encouraging that man to prowl about the shanty continually, Tom?" he said.

Leger looked at him in astonishment. "I'm not aware of having done it, but if it pleases him to come there why shouldn't he?"

"I suppose it doesn't occur to you that there is anything unusual in the fact that a man whose time is worth a good deal just now should spend several hours of it hacking pine knots out of trees and then scramble two miles with as much as a horse could carry on his back over an infamous trail?"

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"You mean that he does not do it to please you or me?"

"Yes," said Ingleby. "That is it exactly. Of course, I know I'm taking an unwarranted liberty, but if I had felt that Hetty could have had any liking for him I should not have mentioned it to you. Still, don't you think it might be better if she didn't see so much of him?"

Leger laughed. "So far, at least, she hasn't shown the smallest sign of recognizing the merits of the fortunate Tomlinson."

Ingleby looked down across the pines. "We are old friends, and you won't mind my saying that I'm very glad."

"Well," said Leger, who glanced at him sharply, "I can't quite see why you should be. The man has an excellent character, and I like him. He has also, what some folks would consider of as much importance, a profitable mine."

"Still, he isn't half good enough for her," persisted Ingleby.

Leger did not speak for a moment, and during the somewhat embarrassing silence his face grew a trifle grave. Then, he said quietly, "I fancy that is a point for Hetty to decide."

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## XII THE MAJOR'S BEAR

Darkness had closed down on the hillside, and supper was over, when Ingleby and Leger lounged on a cedar log outside the shanty. Hetty lay close by in the deer-hide chair, and Tomlinson had stretched his long limbs just clear of the fire. He lay placidly smoking, with no more than an occasional deferential glance at Hetty. Now and then the flickering firelight touched his face and showed the harsh lines of its rugged chiselling and the steadiness of his contemplative eyes. Tomlinson, it was generally admitted, could do more with axe and shovel than most of the men in that valley, but a certain deliberateness of speech and gesture characterized him in repose. He was a man who worked the harder when it was necessary because he seldom wasted an effort.

It was slowly he raised his head and glanced at Hetty. "The boys can get away with another twenty loaves this week," he said. "Jake figured you'd have seven or eight more of them from the gully workings coming in. They told him they'd no use for flapjacks or grindstones when they could get bread like that."

"Very well," said Hetty. "I'll have an extra batch ready on Saturday."

She cast a little quick glance at Ingleby, for it was gratifying that he should have this testimony to the quality of her bakery, though it was scarcely necessary. The venture had, in fact, been a success from the commencement, and though Hetty's flour was rapidly running out she found it just as profitable to bake what the miners brought her at a tariff which in few other regions would have been thought strictly moderate. She was also as popular as her bread, for she turned nobody away, though there were men in that valley with neither money nor provisions left who had failed to find even the colour of gold. Her boys, she said, would strike it rich some day, and one must risk a little now and then; but it is not given to many women to win the faith and homage accorded her by most of them in return for a handful of flour. Tomlinson, however, had not delivered all his message yet.

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"I ran up against Wolverine Gordon yesterday," he said. "He wants more salt in his bread. Says that sweet dough's ruining his digestion, and if you can't fix it to suit him he'll do his own baking. I guess I'd let the old insect have his salt by the handful."

Hetty laughed good-humouredly. "I must try to please him."

Tomlinson watched her with grave, reflective eyes. "Gordon was 'most glad to eat cedar bark not long ago," he said. "Did you ever get a dollar out of him?"

"That," said Hetty quietly, "is not your business, Mr. Tomlinson."

The long-limbed miner apparently ruminated over this.

"Well," he said, "I guess it isn't, but you just let me know when you want any debts collected. I figure I could be quite smart at it."

"They do it with a gun in your country?" asked Leger.

Tomlinson held up a hard and distinctly large-sized hand. "No, sir! If ever I get that on one of the fakirs who sling ink at us I guess I'll make my little protest."

There was silence for a minute or two, and during it the beat of hoofs came out of the valley. They drew nearer, and Tomlinson laughed softly as he glanced at the listeners' faces.

"Hall Sewell! He's coming back," he said.

"Mr. Sewell is across the divide ever so far away," said Hetty.

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"Well," said the big prospector, "that cayuse of his is coming up the trail 'most too played out to put its feet down."

It was five minutes later when Sewell appeared leading the horse, which was in almost as sorry a case as he was. His jean garments hung about him torn to rags, and his face was gaunt and drawn with weariness and hunger. He stood still, smiling at them, in the uncertain light of the fire.

"I've come back—warned off by the police as usual," he said. "In the language of the country, nobody seems to have any use for me."

The naive admission appealed to Hetty as much as the signs of privation, which were plain upon him, did, and stirred her more than any account of a successful mission would have done. Sewell was, perhaps, aware of this, for he had the gift of pleasing women.

"Well," she said, "where else would you come to? Whenever you want it there's room here for you. Walter, take his horse, and then spread his blankets out near the fire. Tom, you'll get another trout and fill the kettle."

They did her bidding, though Ingleby wondered a little as he set about it, for Hetty had astonished him somewhat frequently of late. He had long regarded her as a girl devoid of

intellectuality, to be petted with brotherly kindness and taken care of in case of necessity, and it had never occurred to him until he came to Canada that there was any depth of character in Hetty Leger. It was, in fact, almost disconcerting to find that she had changed into a capable woman who had by her enterprize alone enabled him and her brother to hold on to their claim. She was virtually mistress now, as the commands she had given him indicated; but, while it afforded him a gratification he did not quite understand to do her bidding, it was a trifle difficult to accustom himself to the position.

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In the meanwhile Tomlinson, who chafed inwardly because no commands had been laid on him, lay, with respectful admiration, watching her prepare Sewell's supper. When it was ready Sewell made an excellent meal, and then stretched himself out wearily on a pile of branches near the fire. The red light flickered uncertainly upon the towering trunks behind him, and now and then fell upon the long-limbed Tomlinson lying in the shadow and Hetty sitting in her deer-hide chair with Ingleby and Leger stretched close at her feet. It never occurred to her that there was anything anomalous in this. They were, in the phraseology of the country, her boys, and though Hetty Leger was far from clever she had the comprehension that comes of sympathy, and she understood and ruled them as a woman with greater intellect probably could not have done. The night was cool and still, and the hoarse murmur of the river came up in pulsations across the pines.

"After a long journey through the bush this is exceptionally nice, even though it is a little rough on Miss Leger," said Sewell, with a quiet smile. "Her cares are increasing, for another of her boys has come home a trifle the worse for wear to-night, but I scarcely think she minds. It is the women who never do mind that are worth all the rest."

Once more Ingleby was astonished and gratified. Sewell was, of course, a speaker by profession, but there was a vibration in his voice which signified that this was more than a passing compliment. Ingleby believed implicitly in Sewell, and the fact that the man he looked up to should regard Hetty as he evidently did had naturally its effect on him, since it not infrequently needs the appreciation of others to make clear the value of that which lies nearest to one. Hetty, however, as usual evinced no originality.

"When you came in one would have fancied it was quite a long while since you were a boy," she said.

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"Now and then I feel it is. Men who lead the life I do grow old rapidly, you see. We are, in fact, nurtured on the storm, but that is really no reason why we shouldn't occasionally like to rest in the sunshine."

"It has been dark 'most an hour," said Tomlinson the practical.

Sewell turned and glanced at him reproachfully. "It is always sunshine where Hetty Leger is."

"Well," said Hetty, with a little laugh, "you haven't seen me when the dough won't rise, and I don't like idle boys. They get into mischief. What are you going to do?"

"Peg down a claim and earn my living virtuously. I have, you see, tried mining already. I like this end of the valley, and because you have made me one of the family I fancy I'll put up a shanty here. That brings on the question of provisions, and when I was clambering down the range I came upon two or three black-tail deer. I'm going back to get one as soon as the stiffness has worn off me. Will you or Leger come with me, Ingleby?"

"Walter will go," said Hetty.

Ingleby turned towards her slowly, and she noticed the jaded look in his face, which was a trifle hollow as well as bronzed. He had toiled with a fierce, feverish impatience for long weeks at two profitless claims, and mind and body felt the strain. Still, he remembered that it was some time since he had contributed anything to the common fund.

"I've ever so much on hand," he said. "Send Tom."

Hetty made a little authoritative gesture. "Tom couldn't hit a deer to save his life, and my boys are expected to do what they're told. You will take him, Mr. Sewell, and if you let him come back to the claim in less than a week I'll be vexed with you."

Ingleby, who knew that Hetty could be persistent, permitted Sewell to arrange the expedition; and when the latter retired shortly afterwards, Tomlinson, who had said very little, looked up.

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"You like that man?" he asked.

"Of course!" said Hetty. "If I hadn't I wouldn't have had him here."

Tomlinson said nothing further, but Hetty laughed when he glanced inquiringly at Ingleby.

"You needn't ask Walter. There are two people he believes in before anybody else, and Mr. Sewell's one of them."

"And I guess I know who the other is," said Tomlinson, who was a trifle tactless now and then.

Hetty looked at him instead of at Ingleby.

"No," she said reflectively, "I don't think you do. It doesn't matter who she is, anyway, and you

haven't told me what you think of Mr. Sewell."

Tomlinson, who watched her with steady eyes, sat silent a moment as though ruminating over something he could not quite understand. Then he said, "The man has grit. Still, I haven't much use for his notion of going round trailing out trouble."

"It isn't difficult to find it," said Ingleby.

"Well," said Tomlinson, "I'm not going to light out when it comes along my way; but I guess I'll wait until it does, like a sensible man, and just now I have no use for any. Our folks in Oregon are poor, and if my luck holds out there's an old woman who's had 'bout as much trouble as she can bear going to have an easy time the rest of her life."

He stopped a moment and rose leisurely to his feet. "Well, I'll go along now. I guess Sewell means well. Good night."

He turned away, and when he lumbered into the shadow of the pines Leger smiled at Ingleby.

"It seems to me that Tomlinson's recommendation didn't go very far," he said.

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Ingleby laughed, a trifle scornfully. "Did you expect anything else? When a man who could have made himself almost anything he wished gives himself up to a life of privation for the good of his fellows, it's a little gained when men of Tomlinson's description are willing to admit that he probably has good intentions."

He retired to sleep shortly afterwards, for he and Leger commenced their labours at sunrise every day. A week later, towards dusk one evening, he and Sewell stopped near the edge of a deep ravine some distance from their camp in the ranges.

The torrent which had worn it out moaned far down in the shadow below, and the sombre firs rolled up to the edge of it two hundred yards away. Thickets of tall fern and salmon-berry hung over the brink, and for a score of yards or so a slope of soil and gravel sprinkled with tufts of juniper and dwarf firs ran down steeper than a roof. Then it broke off abruptly, and from where they stood Ingleby could not see the bottom of the gulf beneath, though he knew that the depth of such cañons is often several hundred feet. They had left their camp that morning, and one small black-tail deer, which Sewell had shot, was all they had to show for a day of strenuous labour.

"No way of getting across there," said Sewell as he flung himself down at the foot of a cedar. "It's a little unfortunate, too, because from what Tomlinson said it's a good bear country on the opposite side. One deer won't last very long even if we can manage to dry it, and there are parts of the black bear that are a good deal nicer than you might suppose."

"Have you ever tried them?" asked Ingleby.

Sewell laughed. "I have. In fact, I lived on black bear for rather longer than I cared about when I was up in the ranges once before. It's not unlike pork. I mean the kind the Canadian usually keeps for home consumption."

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That a man, who could probably get nothing else, should have lived on bear meat is, of course, not necessarily any great recommendation, but the fact tended to increase Ingleby's respect for his companion. There was, it seemed, very little that Sewell had not done or borne for the cause of the Democracy, and Ingleby had already indued him with the qualities of Garibaldi. Other men, older and shrewder than he was, are, however, occasionally addicted to idealization; and Sewell could certainly ride and shoot as well as he could rouse the hopes and passions of the multitude—which was a good deal. Ingleby, who could do neither, had the Englishman's appreciation of physical capability, and it had once or twice been a grief to him to discover that other exponents of the opinions Sewell held were flabby, soft-fleshed men whose appearance warranted the belief that the adoption of the simple laborious life they lauded would promptly make an end of them.

The hard and wiry Sewell, who, while he preached his gospel, earned his bread by bodily toil, a man of comely presence and finished courtesy, Spartanly temperate in everything but speech, with unquestioned physical as well as moral courage, approached in his opinion the Paulinian ideal. It was, however, seldom that he permitted it to become apparent, for Ingleby, like most men who shape their lives by them, kept his deeper thoughts to himself, and on that occasion he complained about a boot which had split in an untimely fashion at a seam, until Sewell looked up.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked.

Ingleby, who had not lived very long in the bush, naturally heard nothing until the sudden crash of a rifle was flung back by the hillside. Then there was a sharp smashing of undergrowth, and it was plain to him that a beast of some description was travelling through the bush.

"A bear!" exclaimed Sewell. "The small black kind go straight at everything which lies between them and their covert. I fancy that one's partly crippled, too. It's your shot. If he breaks cover you might stop him for the man he belongs to."

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Ingleby took up the rifle he was not greatly accustomed to, and waited, crouching, with his eyes on the forest and one foot drawn under him while the snapping and crackling drew nearer, until a shambling form lurched out of a thicket. Then, while the foresight, which he could not keep still, wobbled all over it, he pressed the trigger, or, at least, attempted to do so as the miner to whom

the rifle belonged had instructed him. He felt the butt jar his shoulder, and the smoke blew in his eyes, while a man burst out of the undergrowth. There was no sign of the bear, and Ingleby fancied it had plunged over the edge of the ravine. The man was red in face, and gasped as he brandished his rifle in their direction.

"Who the devil are you trying to shoot?" he said.

He did not stop, however; and Sewell, who recognized him as Major Coulthurst, sprang to his feet, and sent a warning shout after him.

"Hold on, sir. There's a big gully right in front of you," he said.

The major did not seem to hear him, and next moment there was a crash as he floundered through a thicket. Then he disappeared suddenly, and Ingleby felt a little shiver run through him as he heard a suggestive rattle of stones.

"Gone over!" he said hoarsely. "Still, the top part's not quite so horribly steep."

They made for the spot at a floundering run, for it is a trifle difficult to travel fast in the bush, and came gasping to a rent in the undergrowth on the edge of the gully. Ingleby set his lips as he looked down.

The major, who looked up at them with fear in his eyes, lay full length on the steepest part of the slope beneath, with both hands clenched upon a little bush of juniper. Two or three yards beneath him lay a shadowy gulf, and the dull roar of water that came up suggested its depth.

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"I think this thing is coming out," he said.

Ingleby saw a diminutive fir close to the man, and two more between himself and the edge of the cañon, for in that country the firs will grow on anything short of an upright wall, and next moment he swung himself over the edge. However, he did it cautiously, taking care to drive his feet well into the gravel, and finally contrived to slide down to the nearest tree. Sewell was evidently coming down behind him, for the stones went rattling by and struck the upturned face beneath. It was flushed and distorted, with swollen veins on the forehead, for the man was evidently feeling the strain.

"Can you hold on for a minute or two, sir?" Ingleby asked.

"I might manage one—not more," was the hoarse answer.

"That should do," said Ingleby reassuringly, and letting himself go again clutched at the tree close above the brink of the declivity. He also grasped Sewell, who was coming down backwards amidst a shower of stones; and, when he arrived safe, lay full length with his comrade's hand upon his waist and one arm stretched out. Nor did he stop to consider whether he could get back to the tree again when the major clutched his hand.

"Hold fast, and we'll pull you up," he said.

Next moment a strenuous grip closed upon his hand, and he felt his arm being drawn out of its socket as he strove to bend his back. Coulthurst was horribly heavy and apparently incapable of rendering him any assistance. Indeed, for a moment or two he was far from sure that they would not slide down into the shadowy gorge together. He could see the major's suffused face and hear Sewell gasping behind him.

Then Coulthurst, apparently by a supreme effort, raised himself a trifle, and he was a foot or two nearer the fir when he lay prone again. Ingleby fancied he could feel his sinews cracking, and knew they would not endure that tension long.

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"Reach your left hand back!" said Sewell hoarsely. Ingleby did so, and felt the bark of the slender tree, while Sewell leaned out recklessly over him and clutched Coulthurst's shoulder. Then, for a few seconds, they made a very grim effort, until the major got one foot under him and seized the tree. After that there was no great difficulty, and when they dragged him out of peril he lay still, gasping, for almost a minute. Then he raised himself so that he could sit.

"I think my rifle went over," he said. "Where's the bear?"

Sewell's eyes twinkled, and Ingleby laughed, as did the major.

"Of course!" he said. "Very much obliged, I'm sure. I mean it. But—where is—the bear?"

Personal peril was not exactly a new thing to the major, who was also a man of fixed ideas; but he made a little comprehensive gesture when Sewell glanced significantly at the edge of the precipice.

"I don't know, sir, and really don't think an attempt to find out would be advisable," he said.

As a matter of fact, they never did discover what became of the bear; but in the meanwhile nobody said anything further for a moment or two. Then the major rubbed his leg.

"We couldn't very well stay here all night—and I've hurt my knee," he said.

Ingleby glanced at the almost precipitous descent. "I'm afraid we couldn't get you up without a rope."



"I am quite satisfied that you couldn't, and don't propose to let you try," said the major. "There are, however, the pack-horse lariats at my camp, and it can't be more than two miles away. I have a police trooper there. One of you could get up?" [Pg 128]

Ingleby fancied that it was within his powers.

"I'll try, sir, if it's only because I believe I came very near shooting you," he said.

Coulthurst laughed. "You were within an ace of it."

Ingleby said nothing further, but crawled very cautiously up the slope.

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### XIII

#### ESMOND ACQUIRES INFORMATION

Ingleby contrived to discover Coulthurst's camp, and when a police trooper carrying a stout lariat accompanied him back to the ravine they had some little difficulty in transporting the major, who was no light weight, to the surface. It was, however, safely accomplished, and Ingleby was not greatly astonished to hear he had in the meanwhile insisted upon their spending at least that night in his commodious tent. Sewell possessed the useful faculty of making a good impression upon almost anybody, and generally exercised it, even when it did not appear worth while.

They spent the next day with the major, who extended them a bluff but cordial invitation to visit him at his official residence, which Ingleby, for reasons of his own, promised to do. He was, however, a little astonished that Sewell, who had not his inducement, and could scarcely be expected to consider Major Coulthurst's patronage any particular compliment, should evince an equal alacrity. Still, he did not feel warranted in inquiring his comrade's reasons, and promptly forgot all about it when a few days later he and Leger bottomed upon gold. It was not a rich find. Indeed, they laboriously transported and washed down a good many hundred-weights of débris in return for an insignificant quantity of the precious metal; but it was sufficient to fill Ingleby with fresh ardour, and he lengthened his hours of toil until it was with difficulty he dragged himself back at night to the camp on the hillside. Every stroke of pick and drill brought him so much nearer the realization of his aspirations. [Pg 130]

Leger protested now and then, but Hetty, who was wiser, said nothing, though there were times when she watched Ingleby, who naturally never suspected it, with anxious eyes. The physical strain and tension were commencing to tell on him, for even the experienced placer miner seldom knows whether the next few strokes of the shovel will bring him wealth or make it evident that he has thrown his toil away.

There, however, came an evening when Ingleby desisted early in order to redeem his promise to Coulthurst, and when he had made what he felt was a very insufficient toilet Sewell, who had pegged out a claim in the vicinity, arrived at the bakery. Hetty and Leger were sitting, as usual at that hour, beside the fire, and there was a little twinkle in the latter's eyes as he glanced at Sewell.

"I suppose," he said, "Major Coulthurst knows whom he is to have the pleasure of entertaining."

Sewell laughed. "I felt it my duty to inform him; but my name did not seem to convey very much to him. In fact, I don't mind admitting that one could have fancied he had never heard of it. Then, having a certain sense of fitness, I endeavoured to make him understand what my views were. They didn't appear to affect him greatly, either. He was good enough to predict that I would probably grow out of them."

"He hasn't told you all," Ingleby broke in. "Major Coulthurst graciously admitted that most men are occasionally afflicted with fancies of the kind when they are young. No sensible person minded it. He had even indulged in them himself when his colonel had been unduly hard on him, and he seemed quite under the impression that people generally took to our opinions by way of protest when they fancied themselves badly used."

For a moment it almost seemed to Ingleby that Sewell's face hardened, and he remembered that his comrade had appeared faintly disconcerted when the major expressed this view in camp. It had naturally not occurred to Ingleby that Major Coulthurst's deductions, like those of other men with no great appearance of intelligence, might come near the truth now and then. Hetty, who was looking at Sewell, did not, however, appear to notice anything unusual. [Pg 131]

"So you told him who you really were?" she asked.

Sewell, for no very evident reason, stooped and flicked a little dust off one of his boots, and it was a few moments later when he looked up with a smile.

"I think you heard me mention it," he said. "You are ready, Ingleby?"

Ingleby stood up, with a somewhat rueful glance, not altogether unwarranted, at his attire. He did not know what Hetty meant, and felt no great interest in the question, for he had a supreme faith in one man and one woman, and if he had discovered that Sewell had been charged with felony it would not have concerned him greatly. He would have believed in him, almost in spite of the evidences of his senses.

Coulthurst received them cordially when they reached his little log-built dwelling, which stood not far from the police outpost beyond the cañon where a tremendous wall of hillside shut in the adjacent valley. That region, while unpleasantly remote from civilization, was still accessible, and the Gold Commissioners' quarters were, considering their situation, far from uncomfortable. There was even a very artistic set of chessmen at which Coulthurst glanced during a pause in the conversation.

"I was once in a native Indian state, and those pieces are a little memento," he said. "They played the game rather well there, and I've had a liking for it ever since."

Now Ingleby's father had also played chess well, and he knew a little of the game; but he was accustomed to yield his comrade priority and was more than usually content to do so that evening. Sewell, who seemed to understand this, smiled.

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"I'm afraid I should make a very indifferent opponent, sir, but that is your affair," he said.

Coulthurst drew out a little table with some alacrity, and Grace and Ingleby found a place apart from them. The latter made no great attempt at conversation, for he was worn-out by a long day's toil and quite content to be there and listen to his companion. Ingleby could talk when he felt prompted to; but, like other men with the capacity for strenuous effort, he could be silent without embarrassing himself or those about him.

In the meanwhile the surroundings had their effect on him. The soft light of the big shaded lamp was pleasant after the glare of the crackling fire; the hangings that hid door and windows conveyed to one who had lived as he had done a suggestion of comfort and luxury; and his eyes did not miss the fashion in which each trifle brought up through long leagues of forest on the pack-saddle had been arranged. Grace Coulthurst had artistic tastes, and she had also, to some extent, the means of indulging them.

It was, however, her propinquity that most affected him. Her daintiness appealed to his senses, and the faint perfume that hung about her and the touch of her gown when it brushed against him sent a little thrill through him. Miss Coulthurst was possibly not unaware of this, but she was none the less gracious to him. Ingleby was a well-favoured man, and physical effort and endurance with a wholesome singleness of purpose had set a stamp on him that almost amounted to distinction. Athletic toil and plain living, with the moral discipline which binds the worn-out flesh in obedience to the will, have a refining influence on most men, and there was in Ingleby's gaunt face, steady eyes, and clear, bronzed skin the faint suggestion of spirituality which in that country, at least, not infrequently characterizes even the placer miner of low degree. Grace Coulthurst, who had quick perceptions, recognized it, but naturally kept her impressions to herself.

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"Mr. Sewell plays chess very well," she said. "In fact, he made what seemed to me a really brilliant opening."

"He is one of the men who do everything that is worth while well," said Ingleby. "That sounds a little comprehensive, but I almost think it's no more than the fact."

Grace asked no very pertinent question that Ingleby could remember; but she nevertheless induced him to speak of his comrade, which, being simple of mind in some respects, he had evident pleasure in doing. In the meanwhile she watched the man at the chess-table, and it seemed to her that part, at least, of his friend's belief in him was justified. Sewell's face was expressive and mobile as well as forceful, and there was a subtle suggestive gracefulness in his speech and gesture which was not to be found in Ingleby's. Then she smiled, and changed the subject.

"I wonder," she said, "why he sacrificed the castle?"

"The knight," said Ingleby gravely, "was certainly not a very good exchange."

Grace laughed. "I scarcely think you would ever, as they say in this country, go back on a friend. My father, as he said, is fond of the game, but that doesn't go very far, after all."

"He plays it creditably."

"And Mr. Sewell, as you are quite aware, plays it exceptionally well. I wonder if he realizes that the major is not fond of losing."

Ingleby smiled as he again glanced round the room. Then he turned to her, the origin and complement of its refinement, and she read his thoughts without difficulty.

"I scarcely think that anybody who knows how we live would blame him," he said.

Grace laughed. "Then," she said, "as I'm not quite sure that I know, suppose you tell me."

Ingleby did so in simple fashion, and it is probable that most young women would not have found his story entertaining. Grace Coulthurst, who had lived in the bush, however, had comprehension

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and could fill in a good deal that he did not supply. It was also, in its own way, to one who knew that country, an epic, a recital of man's high endeavour and herculean grapple with untrammelled nature, for in the struggle for the subjugation of the wilderness the placer miner leads the van. The smothering rush of slipping gravel, the crash of shattered props as the little shaft closed up, and the unexpected fall of half-charred trees had a place in it, as well as the monotony of toil, and the girl listened gravely.

"And you have found the gold?" she said.

"A little," said Ingleby, "but not half enough. We have failed to bottom quite on the old creek bed, and are going to sink again or drive an adit."

The mention of insufficiency was in itself significant, for though he had spoken no word in Canada that could afford the slightest hint of the aspirations that had animated him Grace was quite aware of them. There are not many women who do not know when a man is in love with them.

"But there are only two of you, and it will take you ever so long," she said.

"Still, we will get it done," and there was a curious brightness in Ingleby's eyes.

Grace noticed the hollowness of his quiet face and the leanness of his hard, scarred hands, and her heart grew soft towards him. The sign of the strain was plain upon him, though the breaking point had not yet been reached, and it was for her that he had done so much.

"And you expect the effort will be warranted?" she said.

Ingleby turned and looked at her gravely.

"Men get rich placer mining now and then, and it might happen to me," he said. "In fact, I almost think from what one or two of the old prospectors tell me that I am going to be successful. I don't know if you will understand me, but after a life like mine the probability of being so is a little overwhelming." [Pg 135]

There was a tension in his voice which had its effect upon the girl, and she sat silent for a moment or two until the major's voice broke sharply in on them.

"Check! I fancied at one time the game was in your hands, but there's seldom much use in anticipating when there are points you can't foresee," he said.

Grace glanced at Ingleby, who smiled.

"I'm afraid Major Coulthurst is right. One can only wait," he said.

Just then there was a tapping at the door, and Ingleby moved abruptly when Esmond came in. The officer, however, showed no sign of astonishment when he saw who was there, but smiled as he looked at Grace, and turned to the major.

"I have just come across for a few minutes, and will not disturb you, sir," he said. "I don't suppose you have any objections to my looking over your register?"

"No," said Coulthurst. "It's yonder. Has anything gone wrong?"

Esmond's eyes rested for just a moment on Sewell. "Only two or three of the men talking rather wildly, sir. Somebody has been putting notions into their heads. It occurred to me I might as well make sure they all had certificates."

"Quite right!" said Coulthurst appreciatively. "I have decided objections to their doing me out of my money."

Esmond took down the register, which was not remarkably well kept, and had some little trouble in tracing out the information he desired. At last, however, he read, "Thomas Leger, Free miner's certificate, Five dollars; also Five dollars, Walter Ingleby."

He made a careful note of the date, and then turned over the pages systematically. Later on he found, "Walter Ingleby, Five dollars," but there was no further entry for Leger. Then he put the book back, and the major glanced at him. [Pg 136]

"Check!" he said. "I almost think I've got you, Mr. Sewell. You found what you wanted, Reggie?"

"Yes, sir," said Esmond, whose eyes now rested on Grace and Ingleby. "I fancy I have."

He crossed the room in a leisurely fashion, and Ingleby rose when Grace turned to him.

"You have no doubt come across Mr. Ingleby in the course of your duties, Reggie, but I should like to present him formally as one of my friends," she said.

Esmond made Ingleby, who responded as briefly, a little curt inclination.

"I have," he said, "certainly met Mr. Ingleby at least twice already."

"I believe I remember one occasion," said Grace, with a little twinkle in her eyes. She had naturally not heard of the second encounter. "I'm not sure you were in quite as good a temper as usual that night. Still, you see, circumstances are very different now."

Esmond laughed, but there was a dryness in his tone which Ingleby afterwards remembered.

"Circumstances have a trick of changing somewhat rapidly in this country," he said. "You have, I believe, bottomed on gold, Mr. Ingleby?"

"Yes," said Ingleby.

"You struck it rich?"

"No," said Ingleby. "Still, the signs are promising. We hope to be more fortunate when we have driven our adit."

"How long do you expect to be over it?"

"It is a little difficult to tell."

Esmond appeared to reflect, and Grace, who watched him, did not quite understand his face.

"Well," he said, "I suppose placer mining is always a trifle uncertain. One would almost fancy that baking was more profitable. Your friend Miss Leger seems to be doing well, or is it your venture?" [Pg 137]

Ingleby wondered if this was meant for Miss Coulthurst's enlightenment; but he could not very well permit his dislike of the man, who would seize such an opportunity, to become apparent then, and there was also something in Esmond's tone which suggested that he might, after all, have a different purpose. Unfortunately, he had no notion of what that purpose was.

"She is," he said quietly, "selling a good deal of bread."

"At excellent prices! Still, she probably deserves all she gains. It would cost a good deal to bring flour up. How did she get it?"

Ingleby was a little astonished at the man's persistence, and Grace noticed it.

"Are you going to turn baker, too?" she asked.

Esmond laughed in a fashion which brought the blood to Ingleby's face. Still, he answered the man's question.

"I went down for it," he said.

Just then the major's voice broke in again. "A very good fight, Mr. Sewell. I scarcely think I could have beaten you if you hadn't let me see your game. However strong your position is, that is very seldom wise."

"Major Coulthurst," said Esmond, "is now and then astonishingly accurate. One could generalize from such a speech as that. But to resume the topic, wasn't it a little careless of you, Ingleby? You invalidate your record when you leave a placer claim."

Ingleby, secure, as he fancied, smiled. "Leger," he said, "holds a share with me."

"Of course!" said Esmond, as though the subject had no longer any interest to him. "So you left Leger! Well, I must get back to the outpost now. Grace, you will excuse me."

He went out, and while Grace entertained Ingleby the major and Sewell, who lost again, played another game. Then she made and served them coffee with her own hands, and Ingleby, at least, went back to his tent filled with the memory of how she did it. [Pg 138]

In the meanwhile Grace, sitting by the fire when he had gone away, glanced at her father.

"I wonder," she said, "what you think of Mr. Sewell?"

"The man," said Coulthurst, "is, in spite of the opinions he seems to hold, evidently a gentleman; I can't think of a more appropriate word for it. There is also, I fancy, a good deal more in him than any one who was not good at reading character might suppose. He plays chess exceptionally well. In fact, almost as well as I do."

Grace smiled a little. "I fancied he did," she said. "Were you equally pleased with his companion?"

"Yes," said the major reflectively. "He strikes me as sensible and solid—and one has a fancy that there's often a screw loose somewhere about brilliant men. They are apt to—double up unexpectedly—when the strain comes. The other kind I always find are more likely to wear well."

Grace laughed, but made no observation. Major Coulthurst, as she was quite aware, was almost painfully solid himself, but he had, at least, stood the rough usage of a hard world remarkably well, and she was disposed to admit the correctness of his opinion. Still, there was, in spite of his name, something about Sewell that Ingleby did not possess which appealed to her.

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## THE NECESSARY INCENTIVE

While Ingleby and Sewell made their way back to their tent Esmond sat thoughtfully in his comfortless room at the outpost, cigar in hand. He felt distinctly pleased with his astuteness, but he was by no means sure what use he would make of the information Ingleby had somewhat unwisely supplied him. Esmond was merely a capable police officer with certain defects in his character, and not a clever scoundrel. In fact, he had his good points, or he would not have retrieved his credit, in a service which demands a good deal from those who would rise in it, after becoming involved in difficulties in England; but he was arrogant, vindictive, and apt to be carried away by his passions.

He disliked Ingleby, and would in any circumstances have found it difficult to forgive the miner for having twice caused him to appear at a disadvantage, while the fact that Grace Coulthurst had shown Ingleby some degree of favour was an almost worse offence. Esmond had the prejudices that occasionally characterize men of his station, and it seemed to him distinctly unfitting that the Gold Commissioner's daughter should patronize, as he expressed it, a placer miner. He was not exactly in love with her, though he had once come near being so, but he cherished a tenderness for her which might in favourable circumstances have ripened. The circumstances were not, however, favourable, for there was a certain stain on his reputation which he fancied Major Coulthurst, at least, remembered.

It was therefore pleasant to feel that he held the whip over the presumptuous miner, and could apply it when advisable, though he had in the meanwhile no very definite purpose of doing so. It was not his business to see that Major Coulthurst carried out the mining laws, and, in any case, Ingleby had found no gold that would render the sequestration of his claim a matter of very much moment; besides which Esmond reflected that it would be considerably more congenial to humiliate him openly in person instead of inflicting a malicious injury on him by the hand of another man. An opportunity would no doubt be forthcoming, and he could afford to wait. With this commendable decision he flung his cigar away, and went to bed.

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However, he became a little less sure that reticence was advisable when he saw that Ingleby and Sewell visited the Gold Commissioner every now and then; and it happened, somewhat unfortunately, that he dismounted to take up a stirrup leather when riding back to his outpost through the cañon one evening. Save for the hoarse roar of the river the tremendous hollow was very still, and the sound of voices came faintly up to him. Turning sharply, he made out two figures among the pines, and an expletive rose to his lips as he recognized them. One was a miner in miry long boots and soil-stained jean, the other a girl in a light dress.

Esmond's eyes grew a trifle vindictive as he watched them, and though he had one foot in the stirrup he did not obey the impulse that prompted him to swing himself to the saddle and ride away. Instead he led the horse behind a wide-girthed cedar and stood still, with a trace of darker colour in his face. It was unfortunate that he did not know Grace had met Ingleby by accident and that he could not hear their conversation when they stopped for a few minutes by the edge of the river.

"You have not been near us for awhile," said the girl.

"I have been busy, though I am not sure that is a very good excuse," said Ingleby. "Besides, one feels a little diffident—in the circumstances—about presuming too much on Major Coulthurst's kindness."

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Grace laughed, though she understood the qualification. "I am, of course, not going to press you, but come when you wish. The major, if one might mention it, rather approves of you, and when he and Mr. Sewell play chess there is nobody to talk to me."

Ingleby, who had sense enough to take this admission for what it was worth, looked thoughtful.

"Sewell," he asked, "has been there without me?"

"Once or twice."

"Then he certainly never mentioned it to me."

"Does he give you an account of everything he does?" and Grace laughed. "How is your work at the mine progressing?"

"Slowly. In fact, considering our appliances, we have had almost overwhelming difficulties to contend with. Still, one could scarcely expect you to be interested in them."

"I am, however," and there was a faint but subtle suggestion of sympathy in the girl's voice that sent a thrill through him.

It cost him an effort to hold himself in hand; but Ingleby had been taught restraint in Canada, one sign of which was that he seldom inflicted his opinions on other people. He had decided that it would be time to let his aspirations become apparent when he had found the gold and made himself a position; it never occurred to him that the girl was probably quite aware of them already. It was not an easy thing to hide them, and, though he was growing accustomed to the discipline, the topic she had suggested was a safe one.

"Well," he said, "the gold we expect to strike lies in what was presumably an ancient river bed, though there is, strange to say, very little of it in the Green River now. It was probably deposited there thousands of years ago, and it is evident that we have struck only the outer edge of the patch of sand and gravel containing it. We tried tunnelling, but twice the soil came in and nearly buried Leger, and at Tomlinson's advice we sank another shaft. All the work had to be done again, and we often go on half the night now. It is, I think, only a question if we can hold out long enough, for winter is coming. Still, it—must—be done."

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He had not purposed to indulge in more than a very matter-of-fact narration, and had, in one respect, certainly not exceeded this; but there was a curious ring in his voice; and Grace understood his thoughts as she flashed a swift glance at him. His face, which was a trifle haggard, had grown intent, and the little glint in his eyes had its meaning. Grace Coulthurst recognized, as Hetty Leger had done some time earlier, that Ingleby was toiling harder than was wise. She also knew as well as if he had told her what purpose animated him. Still, she had no intention of admitting it just then.

"I think," she said, "you should be careful not to do too much, and if you are going back to work to-night you must come no farther."

Ingleby protested, but Grace was resolute, and, turning, left him standing in the trail. She walked homewards thoughtfully with a faint trace of colour in her face, for the man's unexpressed devotion had stirred her. Then, in a somewhat unfortunate moment, she looked up and saw Esmond waiting beside the trail for her. A glance at his face sufficed to show her that he was quite aware she had not come there alone, and roused in her a curious sense of antagonism. It had become evident to her already that he bore no particular good will toward Ingleby.

"The view is really worth even your attention," she said.

Esmond knew what the suggestion of hardness in her tone meant, and smiled as he glanced, down the froth-smeared river towards the tremendous rift in the rocks through which it thundered. Beyond it the mists were streaming across the deep valley and crawling filmily athwart the pines that climbed in serried battalions towards the gleaming snow.

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"It is. In fact, I scarcely think I could improve on it; but it was not the view that kept me here," he said.

"No?" and Grace's voice was a trifle harder still.

Esmond looked at her steadily. "I had," he said, "the pleasure of seeing you coming down the cañon—a little while ago."

His meaning was very plain, but he had given her an opportunity, for Grace had noticed that the cedar he stood near was great of girth and the undergrowth was trampled at one side of it. The man winced as she moved forward a little and glanced at it.

"I suppose," she asked, with quiet contempt, "that was why you thought it necessary to lead your horse out of the trail?"

Esmond, who had not expected affairs to take this turn, fumed inwardly. He was not quite sure why he had stayed there at all, but in his indignation he had become possessed by a vague and very senseless notion that a friendly remonstrance might be admissible, and, at least, afford him an opportunity for expressing his opinion of Ingleby. He was, of course, by no means a clever man, and angry at the time, or he would never have made that mistake; but his purpose was not altogether a base or selfish one. Grace Coulthurst, who was of his own station, must, he felt, be guarded against herself, and, since there was apparently nobody else available, he undertook the task. He became vindictive, however, when he realized that it would be difficult to carry out his commendable purpose.

"I think we need not go into that," he said. "Perhaps I did wrong, but it would only lead us away from the topic I want to talk about. Has it occurred to you that unless you put a stop to his presumption that miner fellow might get ideas into his head?"

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Grace appreciated his courage in persisting, especially in view of the result of her previous thrust; but while she was not exactly sure of her sentiments towards Ingleby, he was, at least, the man who loved her, which counted a good deal in his favour. Esmond, she was quite aware, chiefly loved himself.

"Isn't that a trifle vague? What ideas do you mean?" she asked.

Esmond stood silent a moment or two, for his task was becoming unpleasantly difficult; but his bitterness against Ingleby rashly determined him to go on.

"I should prefer not to be more definite—and I'm not sure that it is necessary," he said. "Still, one might, perhaps, venture to warn you that the miners and my troopers, who, of course, have eyes, have already found an entertaining topic."

Grace Coulthurst's face grew a trifle colourless with anger, though she did not quite believe him.

"So you can listen while your policemen discuss—me?" she said.

"No," said Esmond unguardedly. "I would have risked my commission by thrashing the man I heard mention you."

A sardonic gleam crept into Grace's eyes. "Then, since you haven't done it, it is a little difficult to understand how you could be aware of what they are saying."

The man's embarrassment was evident, but it lasted only a moment, and he made a little abrupt gesture.

"I'm no match for you at this game, Grace," he said. "Of course, I'm taking a great liberty, but if you think a little you might find some excuse for me."

"For playing the spy on me?"

Esmond's lips set tight, and the bronze in his cheeks took on a still deeper tinge; but there was, as is usually the case, good as well as evil in him, and he was to some extent endeavouring just then to discharge what he considered a duty. [Pg 145]

"I suppose I deserve it, and I am in your hands, but you can be angry with me afterwards if you will let me speak. We are old friends, and I feel that implies a certain responsibility. There is nobody else in this country except the major who would concern himself about you, and he, with all due respect to him, seldom sees beyond his nose."

There was a suggestion of genuine solicitude in his voice now, but Grace was, unfortunately, far from being conciliated.

"And you possess the faculty of seeing very much farther?"

Esmond made a little deprecatory gesture. "In this case, at least. You see, I know the presumption of those half-trained fellows of Ingleby's description, and I would like to save you the unpleasantness I think you are courting. There are times when one has to be candid. The fellow is quite capable of fancying you are in love with him."

He stopped, for there was a red spot of anger in Grace Coulthurst's cheek, which was otherwise curiously colourless.

"I think," she said incisively, "you had better change the topic. You have gone quite far enough."

Esmond gazed at her with evident appreciation. She had never seemed so alluring to him as she did just then while she stood very straight in front of him quivering a little with ill-suppressed anger. In fact, he felt very far from sure that he was not in love with her. Still, he persisted.

"It would have been less preposterous had he been a man with any education or nicety of feeling; but you have even to take his antecedents on trust, and a good many of the men here have a somewhat astonishing history."

Grace stopped him with a little imperious gesture. "I have heard enough," she said. "In fact, a good deal more than I shall probably ever forgive you. Besides, it was scarcely advisable of you to allude to other people's antecedents. One would have fancied that you had a better memory." [Pg 146]

Esmond closed one of his hands, for he had almost hoped that Grace had not heard of the little discreditable affair in England. The contempt in her face made the fact that he had deceived himself unpleasantly plain.

"I scarcely think that is quite what one would have expected from you," he said. "A little charity is always advisable—and you may find it indispensable."

He swung himself into the saddle, and Grace went on alone, well content that he had gone, but nevertheless wondering whether she had ventured too far on Ingleby's behalf, for she realized that the rejoinder which had closed the discussion was not altogether excusable. She did not care to ask herself why Esmond's insinuations should have stirred her to an indignation that was stronger than her sense of what was fitting.

Esmond rode back to the outpost furious, and, since he could not retaliate on the girl, decided to seize the first opportunity for injuring the man, and he had reasons for believing that one would shortly be offered him. It is, however, probable that he would never have profited by it had not the girl stung him to vindictive passion. It was, though she was not aware of it, by no means a kindness Grace Coulthurst had done Ingleby.

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## XV INGLEBY STRIKES IT RICH

It was late at night, but the red light of a fire flickered among the trunks where a creek swirled across the bottom of the valley, and Leger, who had just flung fresh branches upon it, leaned against the rude windlass at the head of the adjacent shaft. The roar of the river seemed to have sunk to a lower tone that night, and save for its dull reverberations there was deep silence among the pines across which the fleecy mists were drifting. It seemed to emphasize the harshness of

the persistent clink of the pick which broke sharply though the stillness of the night.

Leger was stiff in every joint, and his limbs were aching from a long day's labour. He was also wet with the dew and now and then shivered a little, for the night air was chilled by the snow; but he scarcely noticed this as he listened to the sound of his comrade's toil below. He had not Ingleby's incentive, but it is probable that very few men would have concerned themselves much about weariness or discomfort just then. The shaft they had painfully driven had at last reached, or was very close upon, the ancient river bed, and now any stroke of the pick might make the result of their labour plain to them. It might be disastrous failure or a competence for the rest of their days, and the oldest prospector could have done no more than guess at the probabilities. Placer mining is a gamble in which, in the Northwest, at least, man stakes the utmost toil of his body, and often his life, on the chance of finding a very uncertain quantity of the precious metal.

At last the tension grew almost unendurable, and Leger, worn-out as he was, felt his courage fail him. His body craved sleep, and he dreaded the answer to the question which had occupied him ceaselessly for the last few days. He felt that should it be unfavourable he could hardly face it then, and even the harrowing uncertainty was better than a negative.

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"Come up, Walter. I'm getting cold," he said.

There was a harsh laugh below, and a voice that sounded strained and hollow rose from the shaft.

"Then sit by the fire!" it said.

"Come up!" said Leger sharply. "If you must have the truth, I've borne about as much as you could expect of me to-day. We'll probably know the result soon enough."

"I can't wait," said Ingleby.

Leger said nothing further. He could not leave his comrade there, and he sat down by the windlass with his fingers trembling a little on the pipe he did not light. The faint sighing in the fir tops had died away, and only the noise of man's petty activity ran on, discordant and, it almost seemed, presumptuous. A half-moon hung above the shoulder of a towering peak wrapped in a mantle of everlasting white, the river twinkled in the gloom below; but it counted for nothing with Leger that earth and sky were steeped in a profound serenity. He was sensible only of the jar of the pick below.

In the meanwhile Ingleby, stripped to the waist, toiled feverishly by the light of a few blazing resin-knots in the narrow pit. His hands were bleeding, and the dew of effort dripped from him while he swung with the clinking pick like an automaton. He was grimed with mire, his long boots were sodden, and the drip from the shaft side splashed upon his naked shoulders, while his face was grim and grey with the weariness he did not feel. At last there was a sharp ringing as the pick went down, and while his raw hands tingled he flung the implement aside.

"Bed rock or a boulder!" he said hoarsely. "Send the bucket down."

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It was a bald announcement, but that was not a time for speech, and Leger fully realized the significance of it. The crazy windlass rattled, and the rude receptacle of deer-hide stretched on a willow-hoop came down. Ingleby filled it with the shovel, and then pressed down a further load of sand and soil and pebbles with quivering hands.

"Heave!" he said sharply.

The bucket went up, and it was with a little grim smile Ingleby struggled into his rent shirt, though the operation cost him at least a minute. There was, he knew, a necessity for keeping his head now, and, holding himself in hand by an effort, he crawled slowly up the notched fir-pole lowered into the little shaft. Then he and Leger, saying nothing, proceeded to the creek with the heavy bucket and a big indurated basin. Ingleby went in knee-deep, with the firelight flickering on him, and with a twirl of his hands washed out half the lighter contents of the basin. Then he glanced at Leger.

"Shall we try it now?" he said.

"No," said Leger, a trifle hoarsely. "Put in the rest."

Ingleby emptied into a little heap what was left in the basin, after which he filled it again, and repeated the process several times while Leger stood still upon the bank watching him. Neither said anything, though there was a strained expectancy in their faces that showed the importance of the result. At last there was nothing left in the bucket, and Leger's hands shook as he scooped up the little heap upon the bank and flung it into the basin.

"Get it done!" he said.

Ingleby stepped back into the stream, and was busy some little time tilting and twirling the basin, and now and then stirring its contents with his hand. Then he very carefully let the water run away, and waded with a curious slowness to the bank. He stood there for a tense moment while he and Leger looked at each other, until the latter, turning, stirred the crackling fire.

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"Pour it out!" he said hoarsely. "I can't stand much more of this."

Ingleby shook out the contents of the basin on a little strip of hide, and for a moment or two could



scarcely discern anything, for his heart throbbed painfully and his sight was a trifle dim. Then he made out that there were little yellow grains scattered about the hide, and when he stirred the fragments of stone and pebbles with his fingers larger particles of the same hue became visible. He straightened himself slowly with a little gasp, and the blood surged to his face.

"I almost think—we've struck it rich!" he said.

Leger said nothing whatever, for there are times when it is difficult to express one's feelings articulately, and he stood quite still in the firelight blinking at Ingleby. Then he sat down, and scraping the precious grains into a little bag poised it in his hand.

"There will be no need for any more baking—at this rate. We'll go home and tell Hetty," he said.

"She's asleep," said Ingleby, whose voice shook a little.

"Perhaps she is," said Leger, with a curious smile. "I fancy I shall rest to-night."

They climbed the hillside together, Ingleby carrying the little bag; but he scarcely saw the glow of the fire that still burned outside the shanty or the clustering pines. His heart no longer throbbed as it had done, and while a curious lassitude came upon him, alluring visions floated before him. Then as they stopped in front of the shanty a shadowy figure slipped out of it, and, for the firelight fell upon them, Hetty felt her fingers quiver as she glanced at Ingleby's face.

"Oh!" she said with a little gasp, "you have found the gold!"

Ingleby gravely held out the bag. "That is the first of it—and it's yours," he said. "If it hadn't been for you we should never have held the mine. One third of it all belongs to you." [Pg 151]

Hetty took the gold with a little smile.

"I am very glad you found it—and remembered me," she said.

Then she turned away somewhat abruptly, and went back into the shanty.

"Hetty scarcely seems as delighted as one would have expected," said Ingleby.

Leger, whose face had grown a trifle grave, laughed in a fashion which suggested that it cost him an effort. "One so seldom gets a windfall of this kind that it's a trifle difficult to know how to express one's satisfaction. The only thing that occurs to me is to smash all the cooking utensils, but, considering the distance from the settlement, that would scarcely be convenient."

Ingleby, who flung himself down beside the fire, made no answer, but vacantly drank the coffee and ate the food that Hetty brought him. He was, in fact, almost oblivious of his surroundings, for again his fancy was busy with alluring visions, and now that the tension was over his perceptions were dulled by the weariness of his worn-out body. At last, however, he became sensible that Leger was no longer there and that Hetty was sitting alone on the opposite side of the sinking fire.

"Where's Tom?" he asked.

"I think he's asleep," said Hetty. "It's no wonder. Aren't you very tired, Walter?"

Ingleby laughed drowsily and stretched his aching limbs. "I really believe I am, though I scarcely felt it until this moment. What are you sitting up for, Hetty?"

"I don't quite know. Still, one doesn't come into a fortune every day. I suppose it is a fortune, Walter?"

Ingleby's face grew a trifle grave. "It at least looks like it, but nobody could tell just now. A placer mine often works out unexpectedly." [Pg 152]

"Still, if it doesn't, what are you going to do?"

"Why don't you say—we?"

Hetty smiled curiously, and shook her head. "You will not want Tom and me now."

"If you fancy I would ever be willing to lose sight of either of you you are doing me a wrong. Haven't I been living on your bounty—on what you made by baking with your own little hands? Would we have found the gold if it hadn't been for you?"

Hetty flushed a little, but she persisted.

"I'm not sure the new friends you will make would approve of us," she said.

"Then," said Ingleby decisively, "they will not be friends of mine. You don't seem to understand that you have a third share in the mine, and Tom holds another. The result of that will be that you will be able to live as you like and dress as prettily as anybody. Still, don't you think that old print gown—I suppose it is print—you put on to bake in is worth all a court-lady's finery?"

Hetty once more shook her head. "I should still be Hetty Leger—who waited at a boarding-house, and sold bread to the miners," she said. "If I pretended to be any one else people would only find me out and laugh, as well as look down on me. Nothing that I could put on or any one could teach me would make me quite the same as—Miss Coulthurst—you see."

Ingleby, who had not expected this, was not exactly pleased. He was very grateful to Hetty, and thought, which was how he expressed it, a good deal of her; but since she had raised the point, there was certainly a difference between her and Grace Coulthurst. It did not occur to him that the difference might, after all, be in Hetty's favour, and that there were qualities she possessed which are worth more than many accomplishments and a reposeful manner. In the meanwhile Hetty appeared to expect an answer, and he felt that she had placed him in a difficulty.

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"What you have suggested applies as much to me," he said.

Hetty laughed. "I was wondering what you would say—and I suppose it does. Still, nobody seems to mind the little difference so much in a man when he has plenty of money. You are going to marry Miss Coulthurst if you get rich, Walter?"

"Yes," said Ingleby gravely, "if she will have me, which I am afraid is far from certain; but I must make myself more than a placer miner first. That is why, if Tom is willing, I shall probably start a contractor's business and build roads and bridges. They are always wanted in this Province, and I fancy making them wouldn't be so very difficult. Tom would stay in the office—he has the brains, you see—and I like the outside life in the bush. It is a useful profession that everybody looks up to here, and we could, of course, bring out a young English engineer."

He had sunk back a little upon the pile of branches where he lay, and Hetty noticed that his eyes were heavy; but he roused himself with an effort.

"We will go back to Vancouver when the mine works out. You shall choose the house—one of the pretty ones outside the town with the wooden pillars and painted scrollwork. We will get a China boy to cook for you—and you shall have a pair of ponies to drive in Stanley Park. Tom will keep the books and get the orders while I do the work. Roads and bridges, flumes and dams, are always wanted—and I must be more than a placer miner."

Then his head sank forward, and Hetty, who sat still for a minute, rose with a little wistful smile, and looked down at him. He lay with eyes quite closed now, and one arm stretched out, for the needs of the worn-out body had at last proved stronger than his will. His jacket had fallen open to the waist, and Hetty noticed how thin he was and the hollowness of his quiet face. Then she slipped softly into the tent where Leger lay asleep, and coming out with a coarse brown blanket, spread it over Ingleby, though as she did it the flickering light showed a rich damask in her cheek. Then laying fresh wood on the fire she stole away and left him to sleep. The great branches that met above him kept off the dew, and one could sleep as well there as in the tent.

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The sun had cleared the redwoods when he opened his eyes again and saw Leger smiling down at him.

"It's a very long while since I got up so late, and I don't quite know how I came to be lying here," he said. "I suppose I fell asleep beside the fire, but in that case it's a little difficult to understand how I could have got the blanket and tucked myself in."

Then he stood up and stretched himself, while Leger glanced at him curiously.

"I don't think it matters very much. You looked half-dazed when I left you, and scarcely likely to remember what you did," he said. "Breakfast is almost ready, and we have a good deal on hand to-day."

Within the next half-hour they were at work again, and by afternoon had satisfied themselves of the richness of the claim. They also, in accordance with established custom, put up a little flag to show all whom it might concern that they had bottomed on gold. As it happened, nobody but a police trooper, who asked them a few questions, saw it, for the pines were thick and most of the placer workings situated farther up the valley. The trooper mentioned the matter to Esmond, and the latter forthwith called upon Major Coulthurst. His opportunity had come.

"I wonder if you know that your friend Ingleby has struck gold?" he said.

"I didn't," said Coulthurst, who did not appear to notice his sardonic tone. "I'm pleased to hear it."

Esmond's smile might have meant anything. "It would," he said, "have been wiser if Ingleby had stayed on his claim. You remember that he left it for a considerable time."

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"I do," said Coulthurst, who glanced at him inquiringly, with a trace of dryness. "In different circumstances it might have cost him his title."

Esmond sat silent for a moment or two.

"So far as I understand the enactments, one only holds a placer claim on the condition that the work goes on continuously," he said.

"In the case you are referring to I believe it did. Ingleby left his partner in possession."

Esmond smiled. "It is, one understands, essential that everybody holding a mineral claim of any kind should have a free miner's certificate."

"Of course! Ingleby and Leger each took one out. I remember it very well."

"All certificates," said Esmond, "expire on the thirty-first of May."

"Ingleby renewed his," said Coulthurst, and stopped abruptly.

"Ingleby, as you remember, invalidated his title."

Coulthurst rose sharply and took down his register. He flicked over several pages and closed it with a little bang. Then as he turned to Esmond his face grew a trifle grim.

"I'm not quite sure how far my authority goes until I look it up," he said. "I have rather a liking for Ingleby."

Esmond smiled in a deprecatory fashion. "It is not exactly my business, but one would fancy that you couldn't very well discriminate, sir. Anything of the kind would have an undesirable effect upon the other men."

"That is my affair," and Coulthurst glanced at him sharply. "It is a little difficult to understand why you raised the question only when they had found the gold."

"I fancy that it is very natural, sir. It is no part of my duty to see the mining regulations are carried out, and it was not until I heard they had struck the lead that I remembered the little fact I noticed in looking over your register. It seemed advisable to let you know. The men seem inclined to find fault with everything just now, and if it came out that Ingleby's claim had not been sequestered when it should have been they might get it into their heads that you had winked at the irregularity because you were on good terms with him. That would naturally increase my difficulties with them."

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Coulthurst stood looking at him with a hardening face. "I am," he said, "very sorry that this has happened, but it will be gone into. May I trouble you to send one of your troopers over for Ingleby and Leger?"

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## XVI AN INVALID RECORD

Supper had just been finished, and Ingleby was lying, pipe in hand, beside the creek waiting until Leger should bring another load of wash-dirt from the mine. The sunlight was still pleasantly warm, the air filled with the balsamic odours of the pines, and there was a little smile of unalloyed content in Ingleby's face as he drank them in. Though he had toiled since morning, those few minutes would be the only rest he would enjoy until long after darkness closed in, and once more he indulged in visions of a roseate future as he made the most of them.

They had washed up each bucket-load as they brought it to the surface, and the result had made the richness of the mine increasingly plain. Ingleby was getting accustomed to the fact that he was now, in all probability, at least, comparatively rich, and already his brain was occupied with half-formed projects. They did not include a further course of prospecting, for he had discovered that placer mines are addicted to playing out with disconcerting rapidity, and that in case of the deep lodes it is not as a rule the man who records the claim, but the capitalist or company-jobber, who takes the profit.

He would go back to civilization and embark on an industrial career, for there was, he fancied not altogether incorrectly, wealth awaiting the resolute and enterprising man with sufficient money who was willing to play his part in laying the foundations of the future prosperity of that rich land, and he had a young man's faith in his abilities which was in his case more or less warranted. Then when he had won a footing he would boldly ask Major Coulthurst for his daughter's hand. Social distinctions count for little in Western Canada, and, though the waiting would be hard, there was consolation in the thought that every bold venture would bring him so much nearer her. Ingleby was proud, and content to possess his soul in patience until he had shown that he could hold his own with his fellows and hew his own way to fortune.

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It was, at least, a wholesome resolution, and there was behind it a vague participation in the belief held by primitive peoples and proclaimed in courts in the days of chivalry, that man before he mated should be required to make his manhood plain by deeds accomplished and pain endured. It was not fitting, he felt, that the woman should give everything or stoop too far. He must have something to offer, as well as the ability to lift himself to her level; and through all there ran the desire of the democratic Englishman for an opportunity to prove himself at least the equal of those accounted his betters.

Before Leger reached him with the bucket there was a rustling in the tall fern behind him, and Tomlinson came out upon the bank of the creek. He glanced at the little flag above the mine and the pile of debris at the water's edge, and then took up the pan Ingleby had laid down and dipped it in the stream. A whirl of it in his practised hand was enough for him.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I guess you've struck it rich!"

Ingleby laughed and handed him a little bag.

"I almost think we have. Feel that!" he said.

Tomlinson poised the bag in one hand, and then sat down with a little gesture of assent, for he was not by any means a demonstrative man.

"Well," he said, "it will make it easier for Hetty, and I'm glad of it. Slaving away at that bakery isn't the kind of thing for her. It's going to the opera at Vancouver with the best of them she ought to be doing. I guess that would suit most young women quite as well as baking bread; but it's a little rough on me that Hetty Leger would sooner stay right where she is."

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"What do you mean?" asked Ingleby.

"Tom knows," said Tomlinson, ruefully. "I haven't put it quite straight to Hetty. Just now, anyway, it wouldn't be any good. She's quite happy holding on to that blame bakery, though what she wants to do it for is more than I can figure. It can't be the money, because I've a claim back yonder that's turning out a pile of it every day, and she could have all she'd any use for."

Ingleby found himself in a position of some perplexity. He could not well admit that there was any reason why an honest man of excellent character, such as Tomlinson appeared to be, should not marry Hetty, and yet the mere probability of this was distasteful to him. It was, in fact, unpleasant to contemplate the possibility of Hetty's marrying anybody. He remembered that she had by no means displayed the satisfaction one would have expected when they found the gold, and from this it appeared that Tomlinson's suggestion that she was quite content to continue the bakery was warranted. It was, however, difficult to discover any reason for this, and he was still considering the question when Leger came up. Tomlinson turned to him.

"You kept the thing kind of quiet. Told nobody yet?" he said.

"Only one of the policemen. We were too busy to spend a good deal of the day coming over to let the boys know, though Ingleby was thinking of going across to-night. You have a good claim already, and you can't hold more than one, you know."

Tomlinson nodded. "That's quite right," he said. "It's kind of unfortunate Sewell isn't here. You don't know where he is?"

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"No," said Ingleby. "He has been away for two days looking for a deer. I suppose anybody pegging off a claim next to ours would strike gold?"

"It's quite likely. He'd get the colour, sure, but when the creek that washed the metal out was running it dropped the heavy stuff only here and there. Anyway, the chances would be good enough, I figure. What policeman was it you told?"

"Probyn."

Tomlinson's face hardened suddenly. "Oh, yes!" he said. "He's quite often hanging around here."

It occurred to Ingleby now that the trooper in question had certainly found occasion to visit their mine or the bakery somewhat frequently, but just then the lad in question appeared and came up to them. He disregarded Tomlinson, who showed no sign of recognizing him, and looked at Ingleby.

"Major Coulthurst would be glad if you and Leger could find it convenient to see him now," he said.

"What does he want?" asked Leger sharply.

"I don't know," said the trooper. "I'm telling you what he said."

There was a curious silence for a moment or two, and Ingleby felt a little thrill of apprehension run through him. Then Tomlinson rose with sudden abruptness.

"I guess you've got to go. I'm coming along," he said.

"The Recorder did not mention you. If he'd been anxious for your company he probably would have done so," said the trooper drily.

Tomlinson looked at him with a little glint in his eyes, and then laid his hand on Ingleby's shoulder.

"I've played this game quite a long while, and I guess I know the pointers 'most as well as anybody," he said.

Ingleby said nothing, but his face became suddenly intent, and, though the pace they made was fast, he grew feverishly impatient as they swung along the trail to the Gold Commissioner's office. Coulthurst was awaiting them when they reached it and glanced at Tomlinson inquiringly.

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"You have some business with me?" he said.

Tomlinson sat down uninvited, with a smile. "Well," he said, "the fact is, I don't quite know yet. When you've trouble with the Crown folks in the cities you can take a lawyer along. At this game I'm 'most as good as one."

Coulthurst made his indifference apparent by a gesture. "I don't suppose it matters. Will you sit down, Mr. Leger? There's a seat yonder, Ingleby."

Ingleby sat down, and, with a sinking heart, watched him open a book. There was a difference in Coulthurst's manner. He was precise and formal and did not appear quite comfortable. One could almost have fancied that what he was about to do was distasteful to him.

"You left your claim on or about the twentieth of June, Ingleby," he said. "You did not return until —"

"Hold on!" said Tomlinson. "You've got to prove that. I guess there's no reason why you should admit anything, Walter."

Just then there were footsteps outside, and Ingleby looked up sharply as Esmond came in. He appeared a trifle disconcerted when he saw what was going on, and turned towards the door again.

"I didn't know you were busy, sir," he said.

"Sit down," and the major's tone was very dry. "I should prefer you to hear this affair with me. You remember on what day Mr. Ingleby left his claim?"

Tomlinson nodded. "That's the straight thing, Major," he said. "Keep him right there. I guess the insect's at the bottom of everything."

"We can dispense with your advice," said Coulthurst, chillingly, though there was a suggestion of a twinkle in his eyes.

In the meanwhile Ingleby looked at Esmond, and his face was a trifle pale, though a faint tinge of darker hue showed in the young officer's cheek. He was apparently not altogether free from embarrassment. It was Ingleby who spoke. [Pg 162]

"I have no doubt Captain Esmond remembers exactly when I left the claim, sir, and there is nothing to be gained by disputing over a day or two," he said. "I was away a good deal longer than the seventy-two hours the law permits."

"Which invalidates your title!" said the major. "You failed to notify me or claim the privilege which under certain conditions I might have accorded you."

Ingleby, who had been anxious hitherto, but by no means dismayed, gasped.

"If I understand the regulations, it would be quite sufficient to leave another miner to carry on the work on my account. Besides, under the mineral-claim enactments which I think apply, the title would, in any case, revert to my partner."

Esmond, who appeared to have recovered his tranquillity, smiled a little, and there was a curious silence in the room as Coulthurst took down a book. Ingleby could feel his heart throbbing as he listened to the sharp rustle of the leaves while the major looked for the clause he wanted.

"You hold a free miner's certificate, Leger?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Leger, and then started visibly, while Ingleby, who saw his face, closed one hand a trifle as he leaned forward in his chair.

"You can produce it?" said the major.

Leger dejectedly passed the paper across to him, but Ingleby, who found the suspense becoming unendurable, turned to him.

"Tom," he said hoarsely, "you didn't neglect to renew it?"

Leger did not seem to remember that anybody else was there. He smiled wryly and made a little gesture. [Pg 163]

"I'm afraid I did," he said. "I hadn't the money when the time came round. I didn't want you to know that—and I couldn't ask Hetty. We scarcely expected to find anything, you see. Afterwards, I suppose it slipped my memory."

Ingleby said nothing, though his face was very grim, and the little thud of Coulthurst's hand upon the book broke sharply through the silence.

"Should a free miner neglect to renew his certificate upon expiry all mineral-claims held by him under it revert to the Crown," he said.

Then he stood up, straight and burly, though his face was a trifle flushed.

"I'm sorry, Ingleby, but I'm afraid you have thrown away your claim."

Ingleby sat very still for part of a minute with one hand closed tightly. Then he also rose.

"I can't blame you, sir," he said hoarsely. "I don't think there is anything to be gained by protesting."

"Well," said Tomlinson, "you're 'way more patient than I would be. Why did they let you go on working until you had found the gold?"

Ingleby turned and looked at the police officer with a very unpleasant glint in his eyes. "That," he said, "is a little kindness for which, I fancy, I am indebted to Captain Esmond."

He would have gone out, but Tomlinson laid a hand upon his arm and turned to the Recorder.

"Now," he said, "I'm going to do some talking. That claim's Ingleby's, Major, until you've declared it open, and wiped out his record."

"Well," said Coulthurst drily, "I am sorry to find myself compelled to do it. The claim lately held by Walter Ingleby and Thomas Leger, having reverted to the Crown, is open for relocation. A notice will be issued to that effect. I may, however, point out—to you—that no free miner can hold more than one claim in the same vicinity."

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"That's all right," said Tomlinson. "The one I've got is quite enough for me. You have a certificate, Ingleby. Take out a new one, Leger."

Leger drew the little bag from his pocket, but Tomlinson waved it aside, and threw another down before Coulthurst, glancing at Esmond as he did so.

"That gold came out of the reverted mine, and they might claim it wasn't yours. We'll make sure," he said. "There's a man worth keeping your eye on who has a hand in this deal. More than the necessary amount there, sir? Let him have his certificate. I'll look in for the rest any time that suits you."

Coulthurst's eyes twinkled a little as comprehension dawned on him, and he passed Leger the paper.

"I fancy any advice that prospector Tomlinson desires to give you would be worth considering," he said.

Tomlinson wasted no further time, but drove Ingleby and Leger before him out of the room.

"It's rustle now!" he said. "There's nothing to stop either of you pegging a new claim down on the lead alongside the old one. It's even chances you strike it quite as rich there. Get your stakes in!"

"Where are you going?" asked Leger.

Tomlinson laughed. "To put the boys on the lead. Still, it's quite likely that a friend of mine will relocate your old claim a little ahead of them. He'll be there 'most as soon as the major puts up his notice that it's open. He may think it worth while to let me in somehow for telling him."

He set off at a run, and as he disappeared Ingleby and Leger, leaving the winding trail, went straight through the undergrowth towards the cañon. Vigorous movement with a definite purpose was a relief to them, and they were gasping and dripping with perspiration when at last they stopped beside the sequestered claim. Nobody else had reached it, and the bush was very still, but it was in feverish haste they hewed and drove in certain square-faced stakes. They were still on the lead, and once more a little hope sprang up in them.

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In the meanwhile Coulthurst sat at his table looking hard at Esmond.

"I hope," he said grimly, "that you are now satisfied."

Esmond met his gaze without embarrassment. "I'm not sure I quite catch your meaning, sir."

"In that case," said Coulthurst, "it is a trifle difficult to understand how you came to hold a commission in a service in which one understands intelligence is necessary. I have carried out the law, but I don't mind admitting that I do not appreciate being made use of in this fashion. It is very evident you do not like Ingleby."

Esmond, who made no disclaimer, appeared to reflect for a moment or two.

"Well," he said, "you have, perhaps, some ground for feeling aggrieved, sir; but I can't help thinking that I have done nothing that was unnecessary."

"I am not blaming you for—doing your duty."

"I scarcely think you would be warranted in considering me very much at fault for going a little beyond it. I admit that it would please me to see Ingleby driven out of the valley. The fellow's presumption is almost insufferable."

Coulthurst glanced at him sharply, and his face grew a trifle red. "Ingleby is very young in comparison with myself, but you were once good enough to allude to him as a friend of mine, and you certainly met him at my house as my guest. If there was any particular meaning in your speech, it would be better to come straight to the point. I don't like hints."

"I can only offer you my excuses for momentary bad memory, sir. Absurd as it may seem to you, I'm far from sure that Ingleby is likely to be content with the status mentioned. A very little reflection should make the warning clear. In the meanwhile I have a couple of troopers waiting for me."

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He went out, and Coulthurst sat still at his table gazing vacantly in front of him with his lips unusually firmly set. Then he rose with a little shake of his shoulders and a gesture of relief.

"The thing is quite out of the question. Grace has too much sense," he said.

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## XVII

### TROOPER PROBYN'S MISADVENTURE

Nobody blamed Coulthurst for dispossessing Ingleby of his claim. In fact, the bluff and usually good-humoured major was more or less a favourite with the miners, who admitted that while it was rough on Ingleby no other course was open to him. For all that, the affair made an unfortunate impression when news leaked out of the part Esmond had played in it, for the latter's arrogance had gone a long way to gain him the hearty dislike of every man in the valley.

The Canadian is, as a rule, a sturdy imperialist with democratic tendencies, a type of citizen which would elsewhere probably be thought an anachronism. There were, however, as Sewell had pointed out, a good many men in the North just then who had no country, and a vague unrest and discontent, that once or twice came near producing unpleasant results, spread sporadically across the wilderness that season. Nobody was pleased with the mining regulations, and there were quiet Canadian bushmen who thought the drafting of detachments of the Northwest Police into that country not only unnecessary, but a reflection upon them. There were also other men, who had carried the memory of their wrongs with them from lands ruled by the mailed fist, to whom this symbol of imperial authority was as a red rag to a bull, and here and there a heavy responsibility was laid on the agents of the Crown.

Major Coulthurst, however, felt very little. He was not a keen-sighted man, and there were no signs of discontent in the Green River country so far, at least, as he could discern. It was true that Sewell, who played chess with him somewhat frequently, now and then made disturbing recommendations which the major occasionally went so far as to consider; but the country was apparently quiet, and might have remained so, in spite of Esmond's insolent tactlessness, had it not been for a little mistake made by Trooper Probyn.

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He was a reckless stripling with a certain grace of manner which he could scarcely have acquired in the ranks of the Northwest Police, though men whose family name is well known in the older country occasionally join that service for reasons which they do not as a rule explain. He was comely, and he not infrequently loitered at the bakery, even when he was supposed to be elsewhere at his duty. It happened that he stood there one Saturday afternoon, watching Hetty Leger with undisguised appreciation, when there was nobody else about. He had perhaps chosen that particular time because Leger, who had shown that he did not approve of him, was at the mine; but there were smears of flour upon his uniform which suggested what his occupation had been.

Hetty, who rather liked the lad, looked distinctly pretty just then, as, with sleeves rolled to the elbow, she moulded a loaf for the oven. The bush was very still, and it was pleasantly cool in the shadow of the pines, which rolled in sombre ranks down the face of the hill. It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Hetty smiled as she held out the bread.

"You can put this loaf in and seal up the oven if you're very good," she said.

Probyn seized the loaf somewhat clumsily, so that in steadying it Hetty's fingers left an impression on the plastic dough.

"Now," said Probyn gravely, "that ought to make it worth another ten dollars to anybody."

"Would you think it worth all that?"

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"A hundred," said Probyn, "would not be too much. I'd buy the thing now only, unfortunately, I haven't a coin of any kind by me. There are, you see, a good many disadvantages attached to being a police trooper."

"Are there?" said Hetty. "Then why did you become one, and what would you have liked to be?"

"That," answered the lad, with a trace of dryness, "is neither here nor there." Then his eyes twinkled again. "A baker! Couldn't you give me that loaf on credit—to keep forever?"

"I certainly couldn't. Besides, you would eat it the first time you were hungry. Hold it still while I make it smooth again!"

She did it with dainty little pats, and the lad watched her, openly appreciative, with his head on one side, for her pose and the movements of arm and shoulder effectively displayed a prettily moulded figure.

"There's a little bit you have left out. Hadn't you better go round it again?" he said.

It was, perhaps, not altogether wise of Hetty to laugh provokingly as she glanced at him; but she was young, and masculine approbation was no more distasteful to her than it is to most young women. She also believed—as she had, indeed, once pointed out to Tom Leger—that, though Trooper Probyn had very little sense, there was not a grain of harm in him.

"Why? It's quite smooth enough," she said.

"You do it so prettily. Of course, that's only what one would expect from a girl with a hand like that. The wrist runs into it so nicely, too. When some people try to work their wrists get red, you

know."

"Put the bread into the oven—now," said Hetty severely.

The lad, who noticed a certain warning tone he had heard before, did as he was bidden, and luted up the door of the big clay-built oven. When he returned there was no longer any of Hetty's arm visible beneath her sleeve.

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"It's getting late, and I have the boys' supper to look after," she said significantly.

Probyn knew by the lengthening of the shadows that this was true, and he had still a long round to make; but he was a trifle more inconsequent than usual that afternoon, and in place of taking his departure leaned against a cedar.

"Well," he said, "I mean to stay a little. It's very pleasant here."

The statement was perfectly warranted, for the sound of the river came up soothingly across the pines, and through openings between them one could see the tremendous ramparts of never-melting snow that cut cold and white against the blue. Hetty, too, standing with fluffy hair a trifle disordered, and with the sunlight streaming between the great branches upon her, was very alluring; but still, it was unfortunate that Trooper Probyn did not go. He was not aware that Tomlinson, who had had difficulties with the flume he was building, was just then coming up the hillside in a somewhat uncertain temper.

"You have been here quite an hour," said Hetty.

"A year," said Probyn, "wouldn't be half enough for me. Now, I've a piece of news I hadn't the heart to tell you—and you'll try to be brave. Esmond is sending two or three of us South very shortly, and I'm very much afraid I will be one of them."

"Is that all?" and Hetty laughed.

The lad looked at her reproachfully. "You seem to bear up astonishingly well. It will be different with me. You may even have married one of those miner fellows by the time I come back again."

There was no apparent reason why the suggestion should drive the smile out of Hetty's eyes; but it certainly did; though Probyn did not notice her sudden change of mood.

"Yes," he said, "I'm afraid I'll have to go, and that's why I want you to give me something to remember you by when I'm far away. It needn't be very much. That pretty little ribbon at your neck would do."

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The request was not out of keeping with the trooper's usual conversation, which consisted largely of badinage, and Hetty could not be expected to realize that he now and then meant what he said. It, however, happened that Ingleby, who said it suited her complexion, had once laughingly bought her that ribbon in a Vancouver dry-goods store.

"You certainly can't have it," she said, a trifle sharply.

Probyn, who perversely fancied her decisiveness was assumed and intended to be provocative, lost his head.

"Then you don't mean to give me a trifle of that kind after chopping wood for you two days every week and kneading an ovenful of bread?" he said.

"No," said Hetty, who was by no means anxious to detain him now. "It wasn't anything like that often, and I told you I was busy. Why don't you go?"

"Then I'm afraid I'll have to take it," said Probyn, with a reckless laugh.

In another moment his hand was on Hetty's shoulder, and it was unfortunate he did not see the indignation in her face as she strove to thrust him away. There was no doubt about the genuineness of it now, for her cheeks were flushed with anger; but the trooper's persistence was not lessened by the fact that a pin entered one of his fingers as he clutched at the little bow. The momentary pain, indeed, drove what little sense he had out of his head, and he became the more determined upon obtaining possession of the coveted ribbon.

Just then a big, long-limbed man with a grim, bronzed face came out of the shadow of the pines and stopped for a moment with a smothered expletive. It was not altogether unnatural that he should misunderstand the situation, and he sprang forward suddenly when he recovered from his astonishment. Probyn had by this time succeeded in tearing away the bow, and there was a rustle of draperies as Hetty, who shook off his relaxing grasp, inconsequently fled; but in another moment a hard hand fell upon his shoulder and swung him round. In fact, so rude was the wrench that he reeled backwards for a pace or two, and on recovering his balance found himself face to face with a big and very angry man who regarded him out of half-closed eyes in a distinctly unpleasant fashion.

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"It's you, Tomlinson! What the devil did you mean by that?" he said.

"Well," said the miner drily, "I guess it ought to be quite plain to you."

Probyn, who looked around, saw that Hetty had vanished into the shanty.



"Now, look here, there really isn't the slightest reason why you should make an ass of yourself," he said. "I am, of course, not telling you this because I am afraid of anything you can do."

Tomlinson's face grew a little darker in hue as he glanced at the strip of crumpled ribbon still in the lad's hand.

"I want that thing. Pass it across," he said.

Probyn smiled, for his recklessness was, perhaps, partly accounted for by the fact that there was what is usually termed good blood in him.

"I'll have considerable pleasure in seeing you hanged first," he said.

"Well," said Tomlinson, "we'll fix all that. Now, light out of this. You don't want the circus right in front of the shanty."

The lad made a little gesture of comprehension as he swung round, and Tomlinson gravely walked after him until they could no longer be seen from the shanty. Then Probyn turned to him again.

"We're far enough, I think," he said.

He stood, strung up, but apparently impassive, with his left arm across him and his right hand clenched at his side, and only a suggestion of watchfulness in his steady eyes. Tomlinson smiled grimly.

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"If I were to hit you hard I'd kill you, sure. I'm raised to-day," he said. "I guess a souse in the creek will have to do instead."

Probyn saw that the issue must be faced, and he was by no means deficient in courage, or he would not have ridden long with the Northwest Police. Stepping forward, with a thrust from his right foot, he feinted with his left hand at the miner's face, and then, swinging downwards with lowered head, got in a right-hand body blow that would probably have staggered another man. Tomlinson, however, took it with no more than a gasp, and flinging out his right hand closed with him, which was singularly unfortunate for Trooper Probyn. He had been accounted tolerably proficient with the gloves in another land, but it is not for pastime that men fight in the wilderness, and there the disablement of one's opponent by any means available is the object of the game.

Probyn had the pride which breeds courage and endurance, as well as vigour; but he had not swung the axe and shovel for twenty years, as Tomlinson had done, in the strenuous, unceasing grapple with unsubdued Nature which hardens every muscle and sinew in the men of the Northwest. They have the pride of manhood in place of the pride of birth, and a grim optimism which chiefly finds expression in attempting that which is apparently beyond accomplishment, and in holding on, in spite of frost and snow and icy gale, until achievement comes. Thus it came about that in a very few seconds Trooper Probyn recognized that he was no match for the miner, though he had no intention of admitting it or of being put into the creek if he could by any means avoid it.

For several strenuous minutes they reeled, locked together, about the trail, and fell against the trees, while neither of them concerned himself greatly about the strict rules of the game. They smote when it was possible and clinched when they could; but all the time they were drawing steadily nearer the creek.

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In the meanwhile Leger and Ingleby, as well as one or two miners who purposed purchasing bread from Hetty, came out from among the pines, and a corporal of police rode up on the opposite side of the creek. The miners, who did not notice him, naturally stopped.

"It's that young ass Probyn," said Ingleby. "No doubt he deserves all he is apparently getting."

"He is in uniform, anyway," said Leger. "We'll have to stop them. Let the lad go, Tomlinson!"

Tomlinson did not hear him, for just then he swung the trooper off his feet, and staggering forward a pace or two fell with him into the creek. They splashed into the water, and apparently rolled over and over in the midst of it, while confused shouts rose from the miners.

"Pull him off. No, stand clear. Let them have a show!"

Then the corporal of police, trotting forward, pulled his horse up at the edge of the creek.

"Let up on that man, prospector," he said sharply.

Tomlinson seemed to hear him, for he relaxed his hold and slowly stood up, while Trooper Probyn rose in the middle of the creek with the water draining from him and blood on his cheek. The miners gathered round, but the corporal sat stiffly in his saddle with expressionless face.

"Stand off, you," he said, with a glance at them, and then turned to Probyn. "Now, what in the name of thunder is the meaning of this circus?"

"It's a little difference of opinion," said the trooper. "Prospector Tomlinson felt I'd said something insulting to him."

The corporal appeared to reflect. "Considering where you were sent to, I can't quite figure what

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you were doing here, anyway; but that's not the point," he said. "I'll trouble you to come along to the outpost, Tomlinson."

One of the miners stepped forward. "He's staying where he is," he said. "I guess the trooper made the trouble and only got what he wanted. Hadn't both of you better light out of this?"

There was a little grim murmur of approbation, but the corporal, who dropped his bridle, looked at the men with steady eyes.

"I'm not asking your opinions, boys," he said.

Then Probyn turned to him. "As a matter of fact, they're right in one respect," he said. "The little row had nothing to do with any question of duty. It was a private affair of mine. If it appears necessary, you can report it to Captain Esmond."

Once more the corporal, who was a shrewd man, appeared to reflect. "Well," he said, "I saw your grey tethered when I came along the trail. You'd better get him. If you're wanted we'll come along for you, Tomlinson."

Tomlinson turned, and looked at Probyn. "I guess," he said, slowly and distinctly, "if ever you start the same circus again I'll kill you."

The corporal, who did not appear to hear him, though everybody else did, wheeled his horse, and Probyn walked by his stirrup when he rode away. Then Ingleby turned to Tomlinson.

"There's a good deal I want to know," he said.

"Well," said the big miner drily, "there's very little you need worry about. You see, that young trooper isn't fond of me, and there was a kind of unpleasantness when we ran up against each other."

"You were coming down the trail from the bakery when I saw you," said Leger.

"Yes," said Tomlinson, "we were."

"Then," said Leger, "since he ran up against you, Probyn must have been going there."

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Tomlinson appeared to be considering the point. "Well," he said, "it looks quite like that."

There was evidently no more to be got out of him, and Leger and Ingleby went up the trail together towards the bakery. Tomlinson, however, stayed behind, and slipped a little crumpled bow of ribbon into his pocket.

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## XVIII INGLEBY GOES AWAY

It was a week after the sequestration of the claim, and Ingleby leaned against a cedar with the firelight on his face, which was unusually resolute, and a bundle of clothing and blankets at his feet. Hetty sat on one of the hearth-logs in the shadow watching him quietly, and Leger stood in the doorway of the shanty with something very like anger in his eyes. He had for the last ten minutes enlarged upon every reason he could think of why Ingleby should remain with them, and the latter was still apparently as firmly decided as ever on going away.

"There's not a grain of sense in your point of view," said Leger. "It's sentiment run to seed, and sentiment of the most maudlin kind, at that. Of course, I know all this is useless—nothing would move you—but it's some small relief to let you know what I think of you. I suppose you will admit that what you're going to do isn't quite in keeping with the theories you once professed to believe in."

Hetty, who had a spice of temper, laughed. "Walter never believed in them—he only thought he did. He's like the rest of you. You keep your ideas to talk about and worry people with."

Ingleby made a little deprecatory gesture. "I've no doubt I deserve it, Hetty, but you ought to see that I can't stay here. I should, in fact, have gone away before, but I felt almost sure we would find the gold sooner or later."

"Who is responsible for throwing the claim away?" broke in Leger.

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"Both of us, I fancy. Anyway, that's not quite the question."

Leger made a last effort. "Now," he said, "you know very well that your chance of finding gold on the new claim is good, and we can very easily afford to grub-stake you until you strike it. In this country it's quite a common arrangement. Apart from that—since you seem to be so abnormally sensitive—there's enough for you and me to do chopping wood for the oven in the evenings to square the account altogether. I have, of course, pointed that out already; but if you will make an

effort, I think you will remember that there was a time when you insisted on lending me what was, in the circumstances, a considerable sum of money."

"I can remember most clearly that only the fear of seeing you arrested for manslaughter induced a certain young lady to agree to it."

Hetty looked up sharply. "I'm not going to answer that—I'm too vexed," she said. "It isn't the least use trying to persuade him, Tom."

"No," said Leger, with a little gesture of resignation, "I'm afraid it isn't. You are going to work for Tomlinson, Walter?"

"Yes," said Ingleby. "That is, now and then—a day or two to keep me going while I find out what is in the claim. He wants more water, and is putting up a flume. I had a five-dollar bill from him yesterday."

He stopped a moment, and the firelight showed there was a trace of deeper colour than usual in his face as he held out a little strip of paper to Hetty.

"Will you put that to my credit, and let me have two loaves now?" he said.

Leger said something viciously that was not very distinct, while Hetty sat still a moment glancing at the paper without touching it, and then gravely held out her hand. [Pg 179]

"You will get them in the store," she said.

Ingleby disappeared into the shadows, and the two who were left said nothing whatever, but Hetty moved a trifle so that Leger could not see her face. Then Ingleby came back with the bread, and quietly slung his traps about him before he held out his hand.

"I don't want to go, Hetty, but it can't be helped," he said. "Of course, I'll come back often in the evenings."

Hetty did not move out of the shadow, and though Ingleby did not seem to notice it there was a curious hardness in her voice.

"Well," she said quietly, "I suppose you know best."

Ingleby turned away, and shook himself in a fashion that suggested relief as he swung down the trail. He had left a good deal behind him, and it was a hard thing he had done, much harder, in fact, than he had ever anticipated; but he could not live on the bounty of a girl. For all that, he shrank from the loneliness of the life before him, and his fancy would dwell upon the evenings he had spent with Hetty and Leger beside the crackling fire. Hetty was by no means clever—at least, in some respects; but he did not expect her to be so, and where she was there was also cheerfulness and tranquillity. Now the bush in front of him seemed very black and lonely.

He had scarcely disappeared when Hetty, rising slowly, crumpled a strip of paper in her hand and flung it into the fire. As it happened, it fell upon the side of one of the logs a little distance from the hottest blaze, and Leger made a little instinctive movement, and then sat still again.

"I suppose you realize what that is?" he said.

"Yes," said Hetty, whose face showed flushed in the flickering light, "it is a five-dollar bill."

Leger looked at her sharply, and then laughed. "Well," he said, "I suppose you can afford it—and, after all, I'm not sure it isn't the best thing you could do with it." [Pg 180]

Hetty said nothing but went into the shanty, and it was next morning before Leger, who looked very thoughtful as he sat beside the fire, saw any more of her. He had already realized that the possession of a pretty sister is a responsibility.

For a week or two afterwards Ingleby alternately assisted Tomlinson in the building of a flume and worked on his claim, but it was, perhaps, fortunate that he had now shaken off the fierce impatience which had driven him to overtax his strength when hope was strong in him. Indeed, of late a curious lassitude had crept upon him, though he still toiled on; and it was only the fact that provisions were a consideration which induced him to accompany Sewell and Tomlinson on an expedition to look for a black-tail deer.

Tomlinson brought a tent with him, and Ingleby and Sewell were sitting outside it one evening when Trooper Probyn and the corporal came up leading a laden horse. Horses were very little use for riding in that country, but there were trails they could with some difficulty be led along, and the few strips of natural prairie afforded them a precarious sustenance. There was also no other means of transport except the miner's back. The corporal bade Probyn pull the beast up beside the tent and loosed the pack-lariat.

"You can get up when we've hove the traps off, and see if the Indian's there," he said. "If he is, bring him along. I guess we'll make nothing by pushing on to-night."

Trooper Probyn, swinging himself into the saddle, scrambled up the hillside, which was comparatively clear of undergrowth just there, while the corporal sat down beside the fire.

"We've had supper. You don't mind our camping here?" he asked.

"There's room in the tent. It's a fair-sized one," he said. "You're going on into the ranges?"

The corporal looked at him meditatively. "Right through to the Westerhouse Gully, if we can get there. It appears a blame rough country; but Captain Esmond has a notion that a trail could be made this way, and from Westerhouse one could make the Yukon. It's part of his business to see what can be done to open up communication."

Sewell turned and glanced towards the snow which stretched in a great white rampart across the valley. Beneath it a tremendous wall of rock dropped to the pines below, which crawled round the crests and up the gullies of a desolation of jumbled crags. Dark forest streaked by filmy mist filled the devious hollows at their feet.

"You are right about the country. I should imagine it to be a particularly rough one," he said.

"Well," said the corporal, "it seems quite certain the Indians used to go through after the deer and salmon; and it's believed that one or two white men have made Westerhouse that way, too."

He stopped a moment, and glanced at Sewell. "You were away somewhere quite a while, weren't you?"

Sewell laughed, and Ingleby, who watched them both, wondered whether the corporal knew that he was one of the few white men who had traversed the defiles of the divide.

"I was," he said. "Still, you see, it really isn't any other person's business where I go to."

The corporal nodded with dry good-humour. "I guess it wasn't Westerhouse, anyway," he said. "I'm not sure we'll get there, though an Indian came along to the outpost who figured he could take us."

Ingleby glanced at Sewell with a little smile. The corporal's belief in the capabilities of the police was admirable, and more or less warranted, for the wardens of the Northwest are hard-riding men; but he was, after all, from the prairie, and horses are very little used in the Green River country. Ingleby, however, fancied he was not quite certain that communication had not been already effected with the Westerhouse Gully. Sewell, who apparently understood Ingleby's glance, said nothing.

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"There are only two of you here?" asked the corporal.

"No," said Ingleby. "Tomlinson is with us. He went out this afternoon to look for a deer, and should be back any minute now."

The corporal looked thoughtful. "I'm not quite sure we'd have camped here if I'd known that," he said. "Still, if you can keep your man in hand, I guess I can answer for the trooper."

Ingleby fancied they could promise this, and for a while nothing more was said. Darkness crept up the valley, though there was still a saffron light on the towering snow, and the peaks that lay in shadow cut with a cold, blue whiteness against a wondrous green transparency. Then the dew began to settle, calling up the drowsy odours of the pines, and an impressive stillness pervaded the mountain solitude. It grew colder rapidly, and Ingleby, who rose and flung fresh branches on the fire, stood looking towards the west, a spare black figure, with outline clean-cut as a cameo against the flickering light, when the sharp ringing of a rifle came suddenly down the valley. It rang from rock to rock, as the hillsides flung it back, and died away among the dimness of the pines.

"Tomlinson!" said Sewell. "I fancy he has got that deer. There's scarcely wood enough to keep the fire in until morning, Walter. If you don't want to light another for breakfast, hadn't you better cut some more?"

Ingleby, who took up an axe, moved back into the bush, and the silence was broken by a rhythmic thudding that vibrated among the shadowy trunks, which was unfortunate, because it tended to confuse the corporal's hearing. He was an opinionated man, and a good deal depended upon his being able to correctly locate a sound just then. He would, however, probably have done so, had his attention not been fixed upon the tobacco he was shredding. A minute or two had passed when the crash of a rifle came down the valley again, and he laughed.

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"I guess your man didn't get that deer right off," he said.

Sewell smiled, and waited until Ingleby came back with an armful of wood.

"Our friend suggests that Tomlinson has been throwing cartridges away," he said.

"Well," said Ingleby, "it's a thing he very seldom does, and I feel almost sure the last shot came from a different direction, and was farther off. Probably Trooper Probyn fired at something in the bush."

It was an unfortunate suggestion, for the corporal, who had spent a good many years on the lonely levels of the prairie, was, with some reason, proud of his fine sense of hearing, and it by no means pleased him that a young man new to the wilderness should presume to throw the least doubt upon his ability to locate a rifle shot. This naturally confirmed him in his belief in the correctness of his opinion.

"It was Tomlinson who fired twice," he said. "I guess Probyn knows better than to blaze away Government ammunition without permission."

Ingleby said nothing. The point was, or so it appeared to him, of no importance; and the three, drawing in closer to the fire, sat smoking in silence while the pale stars came out above the pines. At last there was a tramp of feet, and Tomlinson strode out of the shadows carrying a deer with its forelegs drawn over his shoulders. He threw it down, and stood flushed and gasping, with the firelight on his face. Ingleby fancied he did not see the corporal, who could, however, see him.

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"I suppose you didn't meet Trooper Probyn?" asked Sewell.

Tomlinson started a little, and there was for a moment a curious look in his face, which did not escape the corporal's attention.

"No," he said shortly. "I don't know that I want to. What is he doing here?"

"He went out to meet an Indian who's to show us a trail across the divide," said the corporal. "Rode out 'most an hour ago. He'd keep the range side."

"Then, as I came down the south fork of the creek, I wouldn't have met him, anyway," said Tomlinson promptly. He stood still a moment, and then turned to Ingleby. "Hang that deer up, Walter. I'll have supper, if it's ready."

Sewell set food and a can of green tea before him, and he ate in silence until Ingleby glanced at him.

"Did you get that deer a little while ago?" he said.

"No. It was two hours since, anyway."

"Still, we heard you shooting."

Tomlinson, who was an excellent shot, and somewhat proud of the fact, laughed in a slightly embarrassed fashion.

"Well," he said, "I guess you may have done so, but I didn't get the deer. It was in the fern, and the light was going. I just got the one shot, and it was too dark to follow up the trail."

"One shot?" said Ingleby, with a little smile. "The corporal heard two, both close together, and there certainly was another."

"Then it was another man who fired it," said Tomlinson shortly. "I guess I don't often waste cartridges."

The corporal, who was usually a trifle persistent, took up Tomlinson's rifle and pushed back the slide of the magazine.

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"A forty-four Marlin! It was full when you went out?" he said.

"Yes, sir. Two cartridges gone. You'll find one bullet in yonder deer."

The corporal, for no particular reason, jerked a cartridge into the chamber, and then snapped it out. "You use nicked bullets?"

Tomlinson did not, as everybody noticed, appear exactly pleased. In fact, it was not difficult to fancy that he was a trifle embarrassed. It is a little easier to bring down a deer with a bullet that will split up into a torn strip of metal when it meets a bone than with one that has a solid nose and makes a clean, punctured wound.

"Well," he said, "I don't know any reason why I shouldn't, and now and then I get the hack-saw and cut one or two across. When I go shooting it's a deer I want."

Nothing more was said on that point, though Ingleby fancied that the corporal was a little incredulous still. He rose, and looked up the trail as though listening.

"I can't quite figure what is keeping Probyn," he said. "The Indian was to meet him at sundown, where the North Creek fork twists round the rocks, and he should have been back by now."

They sat silent a minute or two, but no sound came out of the silence of the pines. There was not even the murmur of water. The wilderness was very still.

Then Tomlinson laughed. "Perhaps he's not coming back."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well," said the miner, "I've heard Esmond has been worrying the boys lately. They don't seem quite fond of him, anyway. It kind of seemed to me Probyn might have lit out without you."

Now it is not often that a trooper takes the risk of discharging himself from the ranks of the Northwest Police, but the thing has been done. It was, however, unfortunate that Tomlinson made the suggestion. The corporal's face grew a trifle grim as he looked at him.

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"I've no use for that kind of talk," he said. "There's not a man up here I'm not 'most as sure of as I am of myself."

"Then he's probably up there with the Indian," said Ingleby. "It would be a little risky leading a horse down the big gully in the dark."

Another hour passed, and as there was still no appearance of Trooper Probyn, the corporal decided that Ingleby was right, and, rolling themselves in their blankets, they lay down inside the tent. They were fast asleep when a beat of hoofs came out of the silence of the night as a jaded horse floundered along the hillside, and the corporal wakened only when there was a trampling of undergrowth outside the tent. He shook the blankets from him and stood up.

"Is that you, Probyn? Tether the beast and come in," he said.

There was no answer, and the corporal, stooping suddenly, touched Tomlinson's shoulder.

"I guess you had better get up. You're awake, Ingleby?" he asked.

Ingleby, who had been roused by the sound, noticed that he had not asked Tomlinson this; but they were both on their feet in another moment and went out of the tent. The fire had almost burned out, but a few red brands still gave a faint light, and the spires of the pines seemed a little blacker and sharper than they had been when the men went to sleep. It was very cold, for dawn was coming, and they shivered a little as they looked about them. There was nothing to excite apprehension, only a jaded horse that stood just within the uncertain light with loose bridle and lowered head, but Ingleby felt a curious uneasiness come upon him. The sight was unpleasantly suggestive.

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"Probyn!" the corporal called again.

There was no answer, and, though he scarcely knew why, Ingleby felt that he did not expect one. Then the horse, moving very lamely, walked up to the corporal, whom it apparently recognized, and he laid a hand upon the bridle.

"Throw on a piece or two of wood and stir the fire," he said.

Ingleby did it, and nothing more was said until a blaze sprang up. Then the corporal ran his hand along the horse's coat. There was a smear of blood on it when he glanced at it.

"Been travelling quite fast before he dried," he said. "Through some thick bush, too; here's a scar where a branch ripped the hide. Looks to me as though he'd been scared and bolted, though I don't quite see what has lamed him."

The rest watched him with a curious intentness while he lifted one of the beast's hoofs. It was plain to all of them that there was something wrong, but nobody cared to give his misgivings vent. Then as the firelight blazed up a little more Ingleby touched the corporal.

"You are looking in the wrong place," he said.

The corporal raised his head, and saw a deep, red scar. Stooping, he drew a brand from the fire, and the men looked at one another uneasily when he held it up.

"Yes," he said grimly. "That was made by a bullet. I figure the beast was going away from the man who fired it."

Again there was silence for almost a minute. The pines were growing a trifle blacker and clearer in outline, and it was very cold. Ingleby shivered again, for a curious creepy feeling troubled him. The corporal stood very still, a tense black figure, apparently gazing fixedly at Tomlinson. It was the latter who spoke first.

"I fired once—at the deer," he said.

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"Well," said the corporal, with a curious certainty that jarred on Ingleby's nerves, "Probyn's back yonder, and it will be daylight in an hour. We'd better look for him."

Then he turned towards the jaded horse. "It's kind of unfortunate that beasts can't talk."

Nobody said anything further, and they plodded silently into the gloom that still shrouded all the hillside. It was dusk when they came back again, but they had found no sign of Trooper Probyn, or anything that might account for his disappearance, except an empty 44-cartridge lying not far from his trail.

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## XIX TROOPER PROBYN COMES BACK

It was late next night when the corporal reached the police outpost, and on the following morning Esmond and Major Coulthurst sat at a little table in the latter's dwelling. The corporal, who had told his story concisely, had just gone out, and Coulthurst, who rolled an unlighted cigar between his fingers, was grave in face. Esmond glanced at him inquiringly.

"It is, in one respect, not exactly your business; but you and I are between us responsible for the tranquillity of the Green River country, and I should be glad of your opinion, sir," he said. "I don't want to make a mistake just now. There is no doubt that most of the men are in an uncertain temper, and they do not seem pleased with me."

Coulthurst smiled, a trifle drily. "I presume you don't want me to go into that?"

"No. The fact is, after all, of no great importance. The point is—what do you make of the corporal's story?"

The major appeared to be taxing his brain for a moment or two. "Not being a detective, I can make nothing at all. I suppose he is trustworthy?"

"As reliable a man as there is in the force. Let me try to set out what we know. Tomlinson thrashed Probyn and pitched him into the creek. Neither of them would explain the cause of the trouble, which is a trifle significant; but Tomlinson was heard to say that if the trooper played the same game again he would kill him. He is apparently not an impulsive man, and the corporal seems to think it was a warning and not mere bluster."

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"That," said Coulthurst, "gives you a little to go upon. We can admit that Tomlinson fancied he had a grievance against the trooper. He is not the man to say a thing of that kind without sufficient reason."

"Then Probyn leaves Sewell's camp, and never comes back. Sewell, Ingleby, and the corporal hear two shots, apparently from the same part of the range."

"I understand Ingleby does not admit that."

Esmond smiled. "One would scarcely expect Ingleby to agree with a corporal of police. Still, I may point out that he has been less than a year in the bush, and the corporal has, at least, spent most of his life on the prairie. You know the effect the life my troopers lead has in quickening the perceptions. Most of them could locate and tell you the meaning of a sound I couldn't hear at all."

Coulthurst made a sign of concurrence. "His view is certainly worth a good deal more than Ingleby's. Still, admitting that the two shots were fired from about the same place, it doesn't necessarily follow that they were fired by the same person."

"We know that, leaving out Probyn, Tomlinson and the Indian could have been the only men on that part of the range just then. When Tomlinson appeared he seemed disconcerted to find the corporal there. He also showed signs of embarrassment when questioned about the shots, and persisted that he fired no more than one. When told which way the trooper had gone he stated that he had come in just the opposite one. It is significant that he did not mention where he had been until then. Several hours later Probyn's horse came back grazed by a bullet, and a forty-four cartridge was found beside the trail. That is the size of rifle Tomlinson uses."

"It seems to me the several hours are the difficulty."

"Not necessarily. Whoever shot Trooper Probyn would naturally be afraid of his horse doing exactly what it did, and fired at it. The wounded beast would probably run as long as it was able. It is evident that it must have smashed through several thickets. Somebody fired at it, and the man who did so was the one who shot Probyn."

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"You don't know he was shot. I'm not sure I should find it necessary to keep quite as tight a hand on your troopers as you do," said the major suggestively.

Esmond flushed a little. "I feel absolutely certain the lad never intended to give us the slip."

"There were two men in the vicinity about that time," said Coulthurst reflectively.

"Tomlinson was known to have a grievance against Probyn. The Indian, who apparently did not turn up at all, had never seen him. Men do not kill one another without a strong inducement, and nobody would expect to find much money on a police trooper."

"His carbine," said the major, "would be worth a little."

"The man had an excellent rifle of his own."

"Well," said Coulthurst, "it is tolerably easy to see what all this points to, but I could never quite believe Tomlinson would do the thing. There's another point that strikes me."

Esmond appeared expectant, though he had consulted Coulthurst more from a sense of duty than because he looked for any brilliant suggestion.

"It's rather an important one," said the major gravely. "You can't well have a murder without a corpse, you see."

Esmond failed to hide a little sardonic smile. "That is a trifle obvious, sir. You have no advice to offer me?"

"I have. It's good as far as it goes. Lie low, and keep your eyes open until you find Probyn."

Esmond rose. "I suppose that is the only thing, after all, though it looks very much like wasting time. I feel quite sure there will be a nicked forty-four bullet in him when I do."

He went out; but the longer he considered the major's advice the more reasonable it appeared to him. Esmond, with all his shortcomings, had a keen sense of duty, and had he consulted his own inclination would have wasted no time in seizing Tomlinson. He was, however, quite shrewd enough to recognize that he was not regarded with favour, and that, although the major did not seem to realize it, the miners were not likely to content themselves with looking on while he did anything that did not meet their views. He had reasons for believing that once Tomlinson's culpability was evident he need expect no trouble from them; but it was equally plain that unless he had definite proof it would be a risky thing to lay hands on him. Esmond was arrogant and impulsive, but he had discovered in the Northwest that it is not always advisable to run counter to popular opinion, and in this case there was a faint probability that Tomlinson's friends might be right. He therefore set himself to wait as patiently as he could until Trooper Probyn should be found; while the men, who for the most part believed Probyn to be living, waited for him to come back—which he eventually did, though by no means in the fashion they had expected.

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There had been a sudden rise of temperature, and a warm wind from the Pacific had sent the white mists streaming across the mountain land. It had rained for several days, as it usually does in the northern wilderness in those circumstances, and the snow on the lower slopes had melted under the warm deluge. The river swirled by, thick with the wreckage of the forests the snow had brought down, frothing between its crumbling banks; and on a certain Saturday evening most of the men in the valley assembled by the ford where the trail crept perilously down the opposite side of the cañon. It appeared very doubtful whether any man or beast could cross it then, but the freighter, with mails and provisions, was already overdue, and they had awaited him anxiously for a week or so. It was possible that he might arrive that evening; and, in any case, the six o'clock supper was over and there was very little else to do.

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Ingleby, Leger, Hetty, and Tomlinson were there with the rest, and they sat among the roots of a great cedar where it was a little drier. The rain had stopped at last, but all the pines were dripping, and the river came swirling out of a curtain of drifting mist. The hoarse roar it made filled all the cañon.

Hetty was vacantly watching the slow whirl of an eddy when a great trunk that plunged into it held her eye. It had been a stately hemlock well over a hundred feet in height and great of girth, and now it gyrated slowly round the pool, a splendid wreck, with far-flung limbs that thrashed the water as they rose and fell. Then the great butt tilted, and there was a crash that rang high above the turmoil of the flood as the branches that smashed and splintered struck a boulder whose wet head rose just above the foam. The forks held for a moment, and then the ponderous trunk swung again and, with its shattered limbs whirling about it, drove madly down the white rush of a rapid.

It was an impressive sight, and the sound of rending and smashing was more impressive still; but when the trunk had gone Hetty found her attention fixed upon the pool. It swirled and lapped upon the rocks with nothing on its surface now but muddy smears of foam, but she watched it with a vague sense of expectancy. It seemed to her that she and that sullen eddy alike were waiting for what should follow. Another trunk, with branches that heaved out of the turmoil and sank into it again, was coming down the river, but a dusky, half-submerged object slid on in front of it. Hetty could scarcely see it save when it was lifted by the buffeting of the flood, until it plunged into the head of the eddy. Then she rose suddenly.

"Look at it," she said. "It's like—a bundle of old clothes!"

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Ingleby, who was nearest her, stood up. The light was growing dim in the cañon, and it was a moment before he could make out what she pointed to. Hetty, however, was staring at it with a curious intensity, and there was, he noticed, apprehension in her eyes. The object drove on quietly, an insignificant dusky blur, swinging and swaying with the pulsations of the river, and Ingleby felt the girl's hand close suddenly on his arm.

"Oh," she said, with a little gasp, "it's coming straight here. I'm afraid of it, Walter."

The thing swung in towards them with the whirl of the eddy, and Ingleby had for a moment a glimpse of a white patch in the water that was horribly suggestive of a face. Then he seized Hetty's hand, and drew her with him as he turned away.

"Stay there!" he said, when a great pine rose between them and the river, and went scrambling back to the water's edge.

Two or three other men, among whom was Tomlinson, had reached it by this time, and Sewell stood on a boulder gazing at the stream, while the dusky object, drawn almost under now, swung by amidst a rush of foam. Then he stepped down, and looked steadily at the men about him.

"I fancy Trooper Probyn has come back," he said.

Ingleby was close beside him, and for a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. In less than another minute the object they had seen would swing out with the outflow at the tail of the pool, and the long white rapid would whirl it beyond their reach into the gloom again. Night was close at hand, and, if they let him pass, Trooper Probyn would by morning have travelled far into the heart of a wilderness where it was scarcely likely that any of them would ever overtake him. The rivers of the North run fast, and that is a country wherein the strongest man must travel slowly. It seemed to Ingleby that it might be better to let him go. Then he was ashamed of the doubt that this implied, and Sewell, who knew what he was thinking, glanced for just a second in Tomlinson's direction.

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"One can't hide the truth. It will come out," he said, and then raised his voice. "That's a man we have something to do for. The rapid will have him in a minute, boys."

Tomlinson was first into the water, with Ingleby almost at his side, and the rest floundering and splashing close behind. They went straight, while the thing that swung with the eddy went round, but they were in the lip of the rapid before they came up with it. Ingleby gasped as he braced himself against the flood which broke in a white swirl to his waist, while the stream-borne gravel smote his legs, and he clutched at the big miner as Trooper Probyn drove down on them.

He evaded Tomlinson, but Ingleby, stooping, seized his uniform, and tightened his hold on his companion as his feet were dragged from under him. He could almost have fancied that Trooper Probyn struggled to be free from them, and while the current frothed about him Tomlinson was dragged backwards by the strain. Ingleby went under, still clinging fiercely to the sodden tunic, and for a second or two it seemed that all of them, the dead and the living, must go down the rapid together, in which case no man could have distinguished between them when they were washed out at the tail of it. Then a man clinging to his comrade with one hand seized Tomlinson; there was a straining of hardened muscles, a wild splashing and floundering, and, while one who leaned across a boulder gasped and wondered if his arm was leaving its socket, the line swung into slack water again. Still, Ingleby had driven against a stone with a thud that drove out most of the little breath left in him.

They brought Probyn ashore between them, and Sewell, who kept his head, left them a moment and went straight up the bank, where he came upon Hetty standing with hands closed at her sides. She could see very little beyond a group of men bending over something that lay between them.

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"Go back to the shanty. Make a big fire and some coffee," he said.

Hetty did not seem to understand him. "Tomlinson held on to him, but he struck a stone," she said. "I couldn't see any more, but—of course—you brought him out? Is he hurt?"

Sewell looked astonished. "Hurt!" he said. "You must know that the man is dead."

Then comprehension dawned upon him, as he remembered that he had for several anxious moments fancied that the man who seized Trooper Probyn would drive with him down the rapid.

"I scarcely think Tom is any the worse—and Ingleby appears to have got off with a bruise on his head," he said.

He saw the sudden relief in Hetty's face, for she had not remembered the need of reticence then; but she turned away from him silently, and he went back to the river, where the group made way for him. Sewell, who held only an unremunerative claim, was already an influence in the Green River country.

The light was rapidly failing, but he could still see the faces of the men, who turned to him as though uncertain what to do. Tomlinson stood still among the rest, and his voice and attitude were both unmistakably compassionate.

"I hove him into the creek. I 'most wish I hadn't now," he said. "He was young and had no sense, but there was good hard sand in him."

Sewell turned, and looked down on Trooper Probyn, who lay very still, a rigid shape in sodden uniform, with the water running from him, and his face partly turned away from them, which was just as well.

"Two of you go for Captain Esmond, boys," he said. "It will be some time before you make the outpost, and I want the rest of you. There is something we have to do in the meanwhile. The police make mistakes now and then, and it is, I think, our business as well as Captain Esmond's."

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He knelt down, and presently pointed to a little hole, very small and cleanly cut, in the soaked tunic.

"I think you know what made that," he said. "One of you get down. I can't do what is necessary, alone."

Nobody seemed very anxious, which was, perhaps, not astonishing, and it was not until Sewell looked up again that Ingleby, who shivered a little, knelt down. He wondered when he saw that Sewell's fingers were very steady as he opened the tunic and saturated vest. Then the latter signed to the men to draw a little nearer, and pointed to what appeared to be a folded pad of wet cotton held in place by a strip of hide. He moved it a little so that all could see it, and then let the tunic fall again. Ingleby was, however, the only one who noticed that there was something in Sewell's hand that had not been there before.

"There is nothing to show whether Trooper Probyn was dead when he reached the water, though I think he was," he said. "He was certainly shot, and it is evident that he did not shoot himself. His uniform isn't charred, you see. Then you saw the pad. Police troopers do not make their shirts or patch their clothes with cotton flour-bags, and a man hit where Probyn was would not be very likely to bandage himself. The man who shot him tried to save his life. Why should he do that if he meant to kill him?"

There was no answer, and Sewell stood up. "We don't know what has happened, boys. Perhaps

we never shall; but it seems to me one thing is certain—it wasn't murder."

There was a little murmur of concurrence, and then Sewell made a gesture.

"It's getting dark, and we're most of us very wet," he said. "One or two of you cut a few fir boughs, and we'll make a litter."

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It was done, and in another few minutes a line of wet and silent men plodded behind their comrades who carried Trooper Probyn up the climbing trail.

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## XX ACCESSORIES

Esmond was not at the outpost when the messengers reached it, nor was the corporal there, and it was two troopers to whom the miners delivered the dead lad. This fact, however, appeared to afford Sewell a certain satisfaction, and he and Tomlinson went back with Ingleby through the growing darkness to Leger's shanty. It was once more raining hard when they reached it, and when Hetty had set a kettle of coffee before them they sat steaming in the little log-walled room with the door shut. Each of them was aware that there was a good deal to be said, and in all probability little time in which to say it; but the subject was difficult, and Hetty had cleared the table when Sewell turned to Tomlinson.

"There's a plant in this country whose leaves the Indians believe are efficacious in stopping blood," he said. "I wonder if you could tell me where to find it?"

Tomlinson looked up with evident astonishment.

"If there is, I never heard of it," he answered. "I've no use for worrying 'bout any plants just now."

Then he glanced round at the faces of the rest, and his eyes rested a moment upon Hetty. "I'm in a tight place, but you don't believe I did the thing?"

"Of course not!" said Hetty, with a little flash in her eyes. "Why don't you answer him, some of you?"

Ingleby would have spoken, but Sewell held up his hand. "I'm not sure you know how tight the place is, Tomlinson. If you'll listen I'll try to show you."

He spoke for two or three minutes, and even Ingleby, who had long looked up to him as a man of brilliant ability, was a trifle astonished at the acumen which marked every point of the tersely logical exposition. It apparently left no loophole for doubt as to who had killed Trooper Probyn, and once or twice Leger moved uneasily. There was, however, a little incredulous smile in Hetty's eyes.

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"Now," said Sewell incisively, "have you anything to tell us?"

Tomlinson sat gazing at them stupidly, with the veins on his bronzed forehead swollen, and a dusky hue in his face. Ingleby was troubled as he watched him, and Leger leaned forward in his seat as though in a state of tense expectancy, but still the faint smile flickered in Hetty's eyes. For almost a minute they could hear the wailing of the pines and the rain falling on the roof. Then Tomlinson spoke.

"I fired once—at a deer. That's all," he said.

Ingleby was conscious at once of a certain sense of shame and an intense relief, for he recognized the truth in the miner's voice, and Sewell had set out with relentless effectiveness the view the prosecution might be expected to take. The latter laughed as he glanced at Hetty.

"You would not have believed he did it if I had talked for hours?" he asked.

"No," said Hetty simply.

Sewell made her a little inclination, and then turned to the rest with a smile.

"We have only reason to guide us, and we argue clumsily," he said. "Women, we are told, have none—in their case it apparently isn't necessary. They were made differently. Insight, it seems, goes along with the charity that believes no evil."

It was not evident that Hetty quite understood him, for she sat looking at the fire with hands crossed in her lap, and Sewell turned to Tomlinson.

"I think the boys would believe you, as we do, but that, after all, scarcely goes very far. We have Esmond and the corporal to consider, and they are certainly not troubled with instinctive perceptions or any excess of charity. What is more to the purpose, they wouldn't try you here."

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Tomlinson made a little forceful gesture. "Now, if I'd nobody else to think of I'd stop right where I

am; but there's an old woman back there in Oregon who's had trouble with the rest of us—most all she could bear—and half of what I took out of the claim was to go to her. She was just to sit still and be happy, and never work any more. I guess it would break her heart if they hung me here in Canada."

He stopped a moment, and glanced at Hetty. "Still, she'd never believe I did it. She's like you."

There was very little on the face of the statement, but a good deal lay behind it, as Hetty apparently realized, for a flush spread across her cheek for a moment and then faded away.

Tomlinson turned to the others with a gesture that was merely clumsy now. "I'm going away, boys, and I want a partner to hold my claim for me. If I leave it without an owner it falls to the Crown. You'd do the square thing by me and a widow woman on a half-share, Mr. Sewell?"

It was an offer most men would have eagerly closed with, but Sewell shook his head.

"You must ask some one else—it wouldn't do," he said. "I have never taken a dollar I didn't earn, and, you see, I would scarcely have tried to show you that you must clear out right away if I had meant to make a profit by your doing so."

Tomlinson smiled a little. "Is there a man along the Green River who'd believe that of you?"

"There are," said Sewell drily, "at least a few in other places who would be glad to make the most of the story. In fact, if certain papers got hold of it, I'm not sure I could live it down. That wouldn't matter greatly, only, you see, a professional agitator's character doesn't belong to himself alone. Still, you are quite right on one point. You must have a partner—now. The agreement could, perhaps, be upset if it was made after it was known that there was a warrant out for you."

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It appeared to all of them that Sewell had thrown away an opportunity for winning what might amount to a competence for life; but he only smiled at Tomlinson, who turned to Ingleby.

"Then it has to be you. A half-share, and you and Leger can work the thing between you. Neither of you is going to go back on me?"

Ingleby almost gasped, and his face flushed a little. It had seemed quite fitting that the offer should be made to Sewell, but there was no apparent reason why it should be thrust on him. He also saw that Leger was as little anxious to profit by it as he was himself.

"Do you suppose I would take advantage of your necessity by making a bargain of that kind?" he asked.

Tomlinson made a clumsy gesture. "You'd have to let your own claim go. A man can't hold two placer claims, and you're on the lead," he said. "I've got to have a partner, and I guess I'm not offering any more than the thing's worth to me."

"He's right in one respect," said Sewell. "There are, of course, men in the valley who would be glad to take the claim on a smaller share—but they're not here now, and Esmond and his troopers may turn up at any minute. Besides, the prospects of your finding gold on the claim you hold are tolerably good."

"I'll be gone in 'bout five minutes," said Tomlinson quietly. "If none of you will have the claim, it falls to the Crown."

That, at least, was evident, and Leger nodded when Ingleby glanced at him.

"A half-share is more than you are entitled to, but what you can do for Tomlinson is, as he pointed out, worth something, and you would have to let your own claim go," he said.

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"Then I'll offer him a thousand dollars for a third share, on condition that he takes a four months' bill for them. I'll divide the risk and profit with you, Leger."

Leger smiled. "It seems to me Tomlinson is taking all the risk there is. If you don't find the money in the mine it's scarcely likely that you will meet the bill. Still, the notion's a good one. The thing has a more genuine look when it's based on value received."

The agreement was drawn up hastily on a scrap of uncleanly paper with Sewell's fountain pen, but he made it hard and fast, while Hetty flitted busily between the shed and the shanty. Then Sewell carefully wiped and put away his pen.

"Do you know where you're going, Tomlinson?" he asked.

"No," said the miner simply, "I hadn't quite thought of that."

"Then if you head south for the settlements you will certainly be overtaken. In fact, I'm not sure the corporal will not have sent a man along the trail already. You can't live in the ranges with nothing to eat, and that only leaves Westerhouse. They would never expect you to strike out for there, but if you will listen for two minutes I'll tell you the trail."

He was scarcely so long, for time was precious, but, though few men unused to the wilderness would have understood or remembered most of what he said, it was quite plain to Tomlinson, who nodded.

"Well," he said, "I'll light out when I've got the major to record the agreement."

They pointed out that this was not exactly necessary and entailed a risk, but Tomlinson was quietly resolute.

"I'm going away to save my claim, and I'll make quite sure," he said. "It's an old woman back in Oregon I want the money for. She hasn't another son—they're all gone but me. Well, I guess I'm ready. The troopers would pick up my trail if I took a horse along."

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He was scarcely a minute stowing the provisions Hetty thrust upon him inside two blankets, which he rolled up and lashed with strips of deer-hide to pack upon his back; and he wasted no time in thanks; but when Sewell opened the door he walked gravely up to the girl, and laid both his big hands on the one she held out to him.

"I guess I'm not going to worry you any more. It's scarcely likely I'll ever come back," he said.

Hetty's face flushed a little, and there was a slight tremor in her voice.

"It's all my fault," she said.

Tomlinson slowly shook his head. "You couldn't do anything that wasn't just right if you tried, and you'll think of me now and then," he said. "I'm going to remember you while I live."

He did not wait for her answer, but turned abruptly away, and Hetty stood still a moment with hot cheeks and misty eyes. Then she moved hastily forward, and touched Ingleby's arm as he went out of the door.

"There's one of the horses in the swamp. Couldn't you put the pack-saddle on him and make a trail down to the ford?" she said. "The troopers couldn't help seeing it. The ground's quite soft."

Ingleby laughed. "Of course! It's an inspiration, Hetty."

He was some little time catching the horse, and when he reached the commissioner's house Coulthurst was already sitting with a book in front of him. He looked up with a little dry smile when Ingleby came in.

"It is after my usual office hours, but I understand from Mr. Sewell that you are anxious I should register you to-night as one of the owners of the claim held by Tomlinson?" he asked.

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"Yes, sir," said Ingleby. "There are one or two reasons that make it advisable."

He fancied there was a very faint twinkle which might have suggested comprehension in Coulthurst's eyes as the latter took up a pen.

"Then I think I can make an exception in your case, especially as Tomlinson seems equally anxious, and we will get the business done," he said.

There was silence for a minute or two, and they waited with an impatience that was the fiercer because it was suppressed while Coulthurst turned over the papers in front of him and took down a book. There was no sound but the splashing of the rain upon the roof and the snapping of the little stove, but Ingleby felt his nerves tingle as he listened. Coulthurst, however, closed the book at last and handed him a paper.

"That should meet your requirements, and it will be quite in order for you to carry on the work at the claim should Tomlinson be absent from any cause," he said, and stopping abruptly looked up as though listening. "I fancy you were wise in getting the agreement recorded—now. Delays, as you are aware, are apt to be especially dangerous in case of a placer claim."

He appeared to busy himself again with his book; but Tomlinson rose suddenly, and stood a moment, tense and strung up, with head turned towards the door, as a sound that suggested men and horses splashing in the mire reached them faintly through the rain. Then he stepped forward towards the veranda by which they had entered, but Ingleby seized his arm and pointed towards the other door at the back of the room. He and Sewell knew that one could reach the bush that way through the outbuilt kitchen.

Coulthurst, who could not see the door from where he sat, looked up from his book for just a moment, and did not appear to notice that Tomlinson was no longer in front of him.

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"I presume there is nothing more I can do for you, and that is apparently Captain Esmond. I think he has some business with me," he said.

The hint that he would excuse them was plain enough, even if it went no further, and he drew another bundle of papers towards him. This, no doubt, accounted for the fact that he failed to notice that while Leger and Sewell moved towards the veranda, Ingleby slipped out through the other door. Sewell, however, gasped with relief when he saw it swing silently to. Just then there was a tramp of feet outside, and in another few moments Esmond sprang upon the veranda, splashed with mire and dripping with rain. Two wet troopers appeared behind him, carbines in hand. He stopped them with a little gesture of command, and then, striding past Sewell and Leger into the room, appeared to have some difficulty in restraining himself when he saw only the major there.

"You will excuse me for coming in unceremoniously, sir, but I had reasons for believing Tomlinson was here," he said.

"He was here," said Coulthurst. "In fact, I don't quite understand how it was you didn't meet him going away."

"I certainly did not," and Esmond flashed a keen glance at him. "If I had done so, I should naturally not have troubled you about him."

Coulthurst appeared reflective.

"He was here. In fact, I have just done some business for him," he said, and stopped; for one of the troopers cried out, and all could hear a thud of hoofs and the smashing of undergrowth. Coulthurst glanced suggestively at Esmond.

"That sounds very much like somebody riding through the bush," he said.

Esmond certainly wasted no time now in ceremony. He was on the veranda in another moment and shouting to the trooper, who led up a horse. They vanished amidst a rustle of trampled fern, and Sewell laughed as he and Leger turned back towards the shanty. [Pg 207]

"One could fancy Major Coulthurst belonged to the aristocracy some of our friends are pleased to consider played out; but there are at least signs of intelligence in him," he said. "He is, by the way, I am somewhat proud to claim, a friend of mine, though that is, of course, no compliment to him."

"Well," replied Leger drily, "it is seldom wise to generalize too freely, which is a mistake we make now and then. After all, it may be a little hard on the major to blame him for being a gentleman. He probably couldn't help it, you see."

He had spoken lightly to hide his anxiety; but now he stopped a moment and stood listening intently. A faint sound of splashing and scrambling came up out of the hollow through the rain.

"It's not a trail most men would care to ride down in daylight, but they seem to be facing it," he said. "If they caught Ingleby it would complicate the thing."

"It's scarcely likely," said Sewell. "He got away two or three minutes before they did."

"The difficulty is that Ingleby can't ride as you and the troopers can."

Sewell touched his shoulder.

"Listen," he said, and Leger heard the roar of the river throb across the dripping pines. "When they get near the ford the troopers are scarcely likely to hear anything else through that, and they would naturally not expect the man they're after to double back for the cañon. If they push on as they seem to be doing, they should be a good way down the trail by morning."

They both laughed at this, and were sitting in the shanty half an hour later when Ingleby limped in, smiling and very miry, with his jean jacket badly split. [Pg 208]

"Tomlinson got away?" he asked.

"Presumably," said Leger. "We were almost afraid you hadn't. We haven't seen him. Where are Captain Esmond and his troopers?"

Ingleby laughed. "They were riding very recklessly over an infamous trail with my horse in front of them when I last saw them. I was just then behind a tree. The beast I couldn't stop simplified the thing by flinging me off. I hadn't any stirrups, perhaps fortunately."

"They'd catch the horse eventually," said Sewell.

"Of course! That is, if they could keep in the saddle long enough, which is far from certain, considering the state of the trail. Then they would naturally fancy that Tomlinson had taken to the range. In fact, I shouldn't wonder if they spent most of to-morrow looking for his trail. Still, there is a question I should like to ask. Why did you worry Tomlinson about that plant?"

Sewell took a little packet from his pocket and opened it. There were one or two pulpy leaves inside it.

"Those grew on the plant in question, which Tomlinson had never heard of. The Indians use them for stopping blood," he said. "I took them from the body of Trooper Probyn."

There was silence for a little while, and during it the sound of the river came up to them in deep pulsations through the roar of the rain. Then Leger laughed.

"I'm afraid Captain Esmond and his troopers will be very wet," he said. "He is a capable officer, but such simple-minded persons as Hetty and Ingleby are now and then a match for the wise."

"Haven't you left somebody out?" asked Ingleby.

"Major Coulthurst," said Leger, "is, of course, the Gold Commissioner, and could not be expected to have any sympathy with such a man as Tomlinson. It would, in fact, be unpardonable to suggest that he could be an accessory. Still, it is, perhaps, not quite out of the question that people outside the class to which Hetty and Ingleby and I belong should possess a few amiable qualities." [Pg 209]

"You and Ingleby and Hetty?" said Sewell reflectively.

Leger looked at him with a little smile.

"Yes," he said, "you heard me quite correctly. It's not worth discussing, but I scarcely think one could place you in quite the same category."

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## XXI A DOUBTFUL EXCHANGE

It was the Monday morning after the flight of Tomlinson when Ingleby stood beside a pile of debris on the claim which was no longer his. The rain had stopped, and there was a wonderful freshness in the mountain air. Overhead the mists were streaming athwart the forest, pierced by arrows of golden light, and the fragrance of redwood and cedar filled the hollow. It is a scent that brings sound rest to the jaded body when night closes down and braces it as an elixir in the coolness of the dawn. Ingleby drank it in with vague appreciation. There was hope in it and vigour, and as he stood with the torn blue shirt falling apart from his bronzed neck, looking out on the forest with steady eyes, there was something in his attitude which suggested the silent, hasteless strength of the wilderness.

The impulsiveness which had afflicted him in England had gone, and steadfastness had grown in its place. The crude, half-formed thoughts and theories which had worked like yeast in him had ceased their ebullition, purging themselves, perhaps, by the froth of speech, and had left him with a vague optimism too deep for articulate expression. Faith he had always had, and now the half-comprehending hope that looks beyond all formulas had also come. So much, at least, the wilderness had done for him. He laughed as he turned towards Sewell and Leger, who sat on the pile of thrown-up gravel behind him.

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"I've been standing here almost five minutes, doing nothing—I don't know why," he said. "One does not, as a rule, get rich that way in this country."

Leger grinned at him. "You have just finished a remarkably good breakfast, for one thing," he said. "Still, haven't you made an admission? You always knew why you did everything in England."

Ingleby smiled good-humouredly. "Well," he said, "I'm seldom quite so sure now. Perhaps, it's because I'm older—or it may be the fault of the country. Floods and frosts, slides of gravel, and blue-grit boulders are apt to upset the results one feels reasonably certain of here. That recalls the fact that I broke out a quantity of promising-looking dirt the last time I went down this shaft, and didn't try the colour."

"You have sunk several shafts now, and you're evidently improving," said Sewell. "The original one wasn't sunk or driven. It was scratched out, anyhow."

"Three or four, and I've made some two hundred dollars out of the lot of them. In fact, I've been spending my labour profitlessly ever since I came into the country. That is, at least, so far as one can see."

Sewell smiled. "There's a good deal in the reservation. The whole country's full of just such holes from Caribou to Kootenay. A few men took gold out of them. The rest put something in."

"Buried hopes," said Leger with a grin.

"Probably," answered Sewell. "Now and then buried men. Still, the ranches and the orchards came up after them. It was presumably good for somebody, although a little rough on the prospectors in question."

Leger appeared reflective. "I wonder if any one could grow plums and apples on Captain Esmond. In the language of the country it's about the only use it could have for him. Well, I've smoked my pipe out. Are we going to stay here and maunder any longer, Ingleby?"

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"I'm going down the mine; though, as it doesn't belong to me now, I don't know why. Still, it's close on bottom, and I'd like to try the colour of the dirt I broke out on Saturday."

He went down the notched pole, and filled the bucket Sewell lowered after him, and, when the latter hove it up, they proceeded to the creek, and the others sat down while Ingleby washed out its contents. Neither of them showed any particular interest in what he was doing. They had been some time in the gold-bearing region now, and had discovered that it is generally wise to expect very little. Then Ingleby scrambled up the bank with a curious look in his face, and gravely held out the pan.

"Placer mining is a tolerably uncertain thing, but here's a result I never anticipated two or three days ago," he said. "Look at this!"

They bent over the pan, and their faces grew intent at the sight of the little grains of metal in its

bottom. Then Leger looked up with a gasp.

"You've struck it again," he said. "Apparently as rich as ever!"

Ingleby stood still a moment, gazing straight in front of him with vacant eyes, and one hand closed a trifle at his side.

"Yes," he said harshly. "The second time, and once more it's of no use to me. When I recorded as part-owner of Tomlinson's claim, this one fell in to the Crown. You're on the lead, Tom, and you'll strike it, too; but you can get your stakes in, Sewell. Sunday's an off day, or the major would have had his notice out by now."

It was a relief to do anything just then, and he cut and drove in two of the location pegs the law required. Then when the last was driven he turned to Sewell with grim quietness.

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"Well," he said, "why don't you get away and make your record? There's no reason you should throw away a fortune, too."

Sewell smiled a little. "For one thing, Major Coulthurst would certainly not be up when I reached his office. For another, before I record the claim there's something to be said. The law, you see, cannot be expected to cover every contingency, and, if you look at it from one point of view, the claim is still yours. I'll buy the goodwill of you, if you'll take my bill."

Ingleby shook his head impatiently. "I can't sell you what isn't mine," he answered. "Anybody who thinks it worth while can record that claim. It belongs to the Crown. I have my share in Tomlinson's mine, and, in one respect, I'm not sorry to see this one come into your possession. You, at least, would not consider the gold you took out belonged to yourself."

Sewell looked at him with an expression in his face which somewhat puzzled Leger.

"No?" he said. "It's not wise to be too sure of anything, Ingleby."

"I believe you told us you had struck gold once before. What did you do with it? When we met you in Vancouver you hadn't the appearance of a man who has a balance at his bank."

A suggestion of darker colour crept into Sewell's face. "You can't carry on a campaign of any kind without funds. The one I embarked upon not long before you came across me was too big for us. It broke the exchequer, and landed me in jail."

"Precisely!" said Ingleby. "And what title have I to the money you would hold in trust? That is the difference between us. I'm not a leader—I'm glad of it just now—and what gold I find I want for myself."

Once more Sewell's expression furnished Leger with food for reflection, though Ingleby did not appear to notice it. It is now and then a trifle embarrassing to have one's good deeds proclaimed to one's face, and Leger was aware that all Sewell gained was usually expended on the extension of his propaganda; but that did not seem to account for everything, and he fancied the man had winced at his comrade's speech, as though it had hurt him. Then Sewell made a curious little gesture.

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"It is," he said, "seldom worth while to decide what other people will do. They don't know themselves very frequently. Well, since nobody ever persuaded you, I'll get on and record the claim."

He left them, and neither Ingleby nor Leger broke the silence as they pushed on up the valley, near the farther end of which Tomlinson's claim lay. Leger knew that, because his claim adjoined the one his comrade had allowed to fall to the Crown, he, too, would in all probability find gold, and, since now it would all be his, that fact alone was sufficient to occupy him. Still, he was getting accustomed to the dramatic unexpectedness of the results of placer mining; and he was also sensible of a certain sympathy for Ingleby, who held no more than a third-share in Tomlinson's mine. Then he recalled Sewell's face and wondered again.

The man had certainly appeared embarrassed, and that had its significance in connection with what Ingleby had said. Sewell was certainly entitled to use what gold he dug toilsomely from the earth as seemed best to him, and there was no reason why he should devote it to the liberation or enlightenment of those he might regard oppressed unless he wished. That he had done so hitherto was, it seemed to Leger, plain; but he fancied it was to be different now. This led to the question, what did Sewell, who lived with Spartan simplicity, want the gold for—and to that there was no answer until he changed the what to whom. Then a reason suggested itself, for Sewell of late had played chess with Major Coulthurst frequently, more often, indeed, Leger fancied, than Ingleby knew.

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It was a relief to both of them when they reached Tomlinson's mine, which was by no means imposing at first sight, consisting, as it did, of a little gap in the forest strewn with blackened branches and charred fir stumps, a shanty, a pile of shattered rock and gravel, and a black hole with a very rude windlass straddling it. It did not count at all that it was engirdled by towering trees whose sombre spires, lifted one beyond the other in climbing ranks, led the wondering vision upwards ever across the face of a tremendous crag, where they clung dotted against the grey rock in the fissures, to the ethereal gleam of never-melting snow. It was sufficient that the clink of the shovel and clatter of flung-up gravel came out of the scented shadow, in token that Tomlinson's claim was on the lead, the bed which had been worn out and left ages ago by the

Green River, or some other, which had washed away the matrix rock.

Ingleby stopped beside the windlass and rolled the sleeves of his blue shirt to the elbow as he looked into the shadow beneath him.

"Exactly what is down there I don't know, and it seems a little astonishing now that I didn't ask Tomlinson when I bought the mine," he said. "There should be a thousand dollars, anyway. Tom, are you going to stand shares with me?"

Leger looked at the shaft, and for no very apparent reason became sensible of unpleasant misgivings.

"No," he said. "You hold only a third-share, anyway, and I'm not sure that if you split it up there would be enough for two. Still, I'll stay with you until this evening. You should have some notion how the thing will work out by then."

They went down and toiled steadily for several hours in the short heading Tomlinson had driven. Then Leger ascended and hove up the bucket Ingleby filled, after which they transported the debris to the rocker at the adjacent creek. Tomlinson's flume, which would bring the water to the mine, was not finished yet. By the time this was done the dinner hour had come, and Leger looked at Ingleby as he took up his axe. [Pg 216]

"Would you like to go on?" he asked.

"No," said Ingleby, with a little harsh laugh. "There was a time when if I'd had no food since yesterday I should not have stopped, but one gets over that. Besides, I almost fancy we shall know quite soon enough what a third-share in the Tomlinson mine is worth."

Leger made a fire, and Sewell appeared while they ate.

"I have made the record. How have you got on?" he inquired.

Ingleby pointed to the pile of soil and stones and sand. "So far. We are not going any farther until after dinner. It is not very long since I turned prospector, but I have twice bottomed on gold and had to let it go. The last occasion was only two or three hours ago—and I'm not quite sure I've got over it yet."

Sewell nodded sympathetically. "There is gold here—though it's remarkable that nobody seems to know how much," he said. "Tomlinson apparently was not communicative."

"That," said Ingleby, "is, of course, the question. If there is not a good deal a third-share is scarcely likely to recompense me for leaving the other claim, especially when there is a thousand dollars to come out of this one. That's one reason I'm getting dinner before I go any further. I bought a pig in a poke, you see, and now I'm almost afraid to open it."

"I wonder why you made the bargain, especially in view of the fact that Tomlinson told you the chances of striking gold on your own claim were good."

Ingleby appeared a trifle confused. "Well," he said, "Tomlinson had found gold while I hadn't then—and one naturally prefers a certainty. The man was in a difficulty, too." [Pg 217]

"Tomlinson, in fact, made use of the old woman back in Oregon somewhat artistically."

Ingleby flushed a trifle. He was one who, though he had, formerly, at least, proclaimed his views, nervously concealed his charities.

"Tomlinson never meant to wrong me of a dollar. He isn't that kind of man," he said.

"No," said Sewell, with a little laugh, "I scarcely think he did. Well, are we to help you with the wash-up?"

They toiled for awhile knee-deep in very cold water while the rocker clashed and rattled, and Ingleby, whose face grew a trifle grim as the time wore on, washed out the residue of its contents in a little pan. Then, for the others insisted, when there was a good deal of the pile left, they went back to the mine; and the hour of supper had crept round again when Ingleby came out of the stream carrying the result of all that they had done in a little pan. He stood still a moment in the shadow of the pines, and his lips were set and his eyes unusually grave as he looked at Sewell.

"If your new claim turns out dirt equal to what we found this morning you will go South rich," he said. "I would sooner you had it than anybody else—and I don't think I grudge it you."

Sewell took the pan from him and glanced into it. "I'm sorry," he said simply. "The thing is done now, and I can't make you a partner unless you let Tomlinson's claim go, which I presume you don't mean to do."

"That is, of course, quite out of the question. Tomlinson went out believing it was safe with me."

"Then we come back to the other suggestion. I still fancy you are entitled to sell me what one might consider your option on the claim. There are men in the valley who would have willingly handed you their bill for a thousand dollars for the information you supplied me." [Pg 218]

Ingleby looked at him steadily, with his head held back a little.

"It already belonged to the Crown," he said. "Have I ever done anything that would lead my



friends to believe they could bestow alms on me?"

Sewell smiled. "I fancy there are one or two of them who advocate a community of property!"

It occurred to Leger that it might be advisable to change the subject. "I'm afraid we usually stop there," he said, with a grin. "It has seemed to me lately that there are two difficulties in the way of bringing an equitable division, about, though most people only recognize the obvious one, which is, however, serious enough. I mean inducing the people who have anything worth having to part with it."

"And the other?"

"The other," said Leger reflectively, "would consist in inducing the people who have very little to receive it. There are a few of them who wouldn't be willing to do so—at least, in the Colonies. They want to reap only what they have sown."

"It isn't quite clear that they will be permitted."

Leger smiled drily, though he looked hard at Sewell. "Well," he said, "I almost fancy one could leave it to them. It would be an unfortunate thing for the men who insisted on getting in the way of the sickle."

Then he turned to Ingleby, and laid a hand on his shoulder. "It might be worse," he said.

"Yes," answered Ingleby, who laughed a little, though it cost him an effort, "considerably. The man who has what is evidently a very good living in his hands really doesn't deserve very much sympathy. Still, you see, I twice threw away what looked like a fortune. Any one would find the reflection apt to worry him."

They went away and left him sitting on a blackened cedar stump in the desolate clearing. The clink of the shovels no longer rose from beyond the sombre trees, and there was deep stillness in the hollow. The gaps in the forest grew duskier, and a peak across the valley flung a cold blue shadow athwart the gleaming snow. The dew was settling heavily; but Ingleby sat still, grave in face, seeing nothing, until he rose with a little resolute shake of his shoulders and, slipping down from the stump, took up his axe.

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He had twice thrown away a fortune, and with it, for a time, at least, the prospect of realizing a very precious hope; but fortunes are now and then retrieved suddenly in that country; and, in any case, a man who would work must eat.

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## XXII ALISON'S SAULT

Some weeks had passed since Ingleby took over Tomlinson's claim, when one lowering evening Grace Coulthurst pulled up her cayuse pony in the depths of the Green River valley. Leaden cloud had veiled the peaks since early morning, and now the pines were wailing dolefully beneath a bitter breeze. A little dust of snow, fine and dry as flour, whirled about her, and the trail was hard as adamant beneath her pony's feet. The beast pricked its ears and stamped impatiently, for it had been bred in the wilderness and knew what was coming.

Grace, whose fingers were growing stiff, relaxed her grasp on the bridle, and looked about her observantly, but without uneasiness. She was some distance from home, and daylight was dying out unusually early, while few horses unaccustomed to the mountains could have scrambled over either of the trails. There were two of them, foot-wide tracks which climbed up and down steep hollows and twisted round great fallen trees, and she had stopped at the forking, though there was, she knew, very little to choose between them.

The bush was a little thinner just there, but she could see nothing beyond dim colonnades of towering trunks that were rapidly fading into the gloom. The cold was nipping, and she shivered when the breeze dropped a moment. The silence was startling, and she felt it almost a relief when a low crescendo murmur like the sound of distant surf rose from the pines as the wind awoke again. Then a puff of powdery snow stung her tingling cheeks, and she shook the bridle and turned the cayuse into the lower trail.

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She had ridden to the mines at the head of the valley early in the afternoon, while her father walked by her stirrup, which, considering the nature of the trail, he had no difficulty in doing. Indeed, he had led, and now and then dragged, the horse up parts of it. There had, as not infrequently happened, been a dispute concerning the boundaries of a placer claim, and the commissioner had gone over to adjudicate. He was not a brilliant man, but he showed no one favour, and the whimsically expressed decisions which he apparently blundered upon gave general satisfaction and are still remembered in the Green River valley. It was also characteristic of him that he had saved more than one difficult situation, in which a logical exposition of the mining laws would probably have been unavailing, by a little free badinage.

In the meanwhile his daughter, whom he had bidden ride home, realized without any undue anxiety that it might be advisable to reach there as soon as she could. She was at home in the saddle, and rightly thought herself secure from any difficulty that might not be occasioned by the weather. The free miner is a somewhat chivalrous person, which is going far enough by way of appreciation, since the epithet which might suggest itself to those acquainted with his characteristics has little meaning in the land to which he belongs, where men have outgrown the need of meretricious titles. Still, when a thin white haze blotted out the dim colonnades and obscured the firs beside the trail she strove to quicken the cayuse's pace a trifle. The beast was apparently already doing what it could, clambering up slopes of gravel, sliding down them amidst a great clatter of stones, and turning and twisting amidst tangled undergrowth.

Now and then a drooping branch whipped the girl as she went by or shook the snow that was gathering on it into her face, and the withered fern smote smears of white powder across her skirt. Winter was closing in earlier than any one had expected, and that night an Arctic cold descended suddenly upon the lonely valley. Her hands grew numb on the bridle, all sense of feeling seemed to go out of the foot in the stirrup, and at last it was with difficulty she pulled up the cayuse, which appeared as anxious to get home as she was. They had floundered round the spreading branches of a great fallen tree, and now there no longer appeared to be a trail beneath them.

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Grace shivered all through as she looked about her. The pines were roaring in the sliding haze; the air was thick with dust, not flakes, of snow. Here and there she could dimly see a tree, but the white powder obscured her sight and stung her face when she lifted it. She could not remember having passed that fallen tree when riding out, nor could she recall how long it was since she had seen the narrow trail in front of her. Where it was now she did not know, but there was, at least, the sound of the river on one side of her, when she could hear it across the moaning of the trees. In heading for it she would probably strike the trail again, and once more she spoke to the cayuse and shook the bridle. She was becoming distinctly anxious now.

Then a hazy object appeared suddenly a few yards in front of her, and stopped at her cry, while in another moment Ingleby was standing by her stirrup, and her apprehensions melted away. It was significant that she was by no means astonished. She felt that it was only fitting that when she wanted him he should be there. The mere sight of his face, of which she caught a faint glimpse, was reassuring.

"Do you know that I am very glad I met you? Where is the trail?" she said.

Ingleby did not protest that it afforded him an equal gratification, and if he had done so it would probably not have pleased her. Grace was critical, and rather liked the reticence which was, it seemed, in harmony with his character—that is, since he had, fortunately, grown out of the evil habit of discussing social economics.

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"I don't think it can be far away. In fact, I was Just trying to cut off a bend of it," he said, with a little laugh.

"It isn't exactly a pleasant night for a stroll through the bush," said Grace suggestively.

"No," replied Ingleby, who fell into the snare. "Still, you see, they were expecting me at the bakery."

Grace was by no means pleased at this. Certain observations Esmond had once let fall with a purpose had not been without their effect on her, and she remembered that the girl at the bakery was, it had to be admitted, pretty. It also appeared likely that she was what is now and then termed forward. Grace's displeasure, which she did not, of course, express, might, however, have been greater had there been any delay in the man's answer.

"Then if you will show me the trail I will not keep you. I am getting cold," she said.

Ingleby took the bridle, and he and the cayuse floundered through what appeared to be a horrible maze of fallen branches and tangled undergrowth. In fact, Grace fancied she heard her skirt rip as they struggled in it. Then the bush became a little clearer, and they went on more briskly, up and down steep slopes and past dim blurs of trees, while soil and gravel alike rang beneath the cayuse's feet. How long this continued Grace did not exactly know, nor had she any notion as to where they were. The only reassuring thing was the glimpse she had of Ingleby plodding on beside her horse's head, which was, however, quite sufficient. Still, civility demanded something, and at last she bade him stop.

"I'm afraid I must be taking you away from the bakery," she said.

Ingleby laughed. "I am, of course, not going there now."

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That should have been sufficient, but Grace was not quite contented. Compliments on her beauty seldom pleased her, but she liked to feel the hold she had upon those she attracted, and was not averse to having it explained to her.

"No?" she said. "Then where are you going?"

Ingleby appeared a trifle astonished, as though he considered the question quite unnecessary, which was naturally gratifying.

"To the Gold Commissioner's residence," he said.

"With my permission?" and Grace laughed.

Ingleby did not look at her. He was apparently staring at the forest, which loomed through the whirling haze a faint blur of vanishing trees, and he flung the answer over his shoulder.

"I think I would venture to go without it to-night," he said.

This was significant, but although the snow was certainly getting thicker and the cold struck through her like an icy knife, Grace no longer felt any apprehension. She was not unaccustomed to physical discomfort and peril, and there could be, she felt, no doubt of her reaching home safely while Ingleby plodded at the horse's head. He was young, and by no means assertive, but there were men in the Green River valley who shared her confidence in him. Still, the rough flounder through the brushwood was becoming irksome, and where the trees were smaller she could not avoid all the drooping branches by swaying in the saddle, and at last she bade him pull up again.

"We are a long while striking the trail," she said.

"Yes," said Ingleby, without turning towards her.

Grace leaned down and touched him. "Why haven't we found it? I mean you to tell me."

The man made a little gesture, for he recognized that tone.

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"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "We have struck it, and didn't recognize it. In fact, we must have gone straight across and left it behind us."

Grace sat still and looked at him. She could not see his face; he was no more than a blurred shadowy shape in the haze of sliding snow. Still, she could make out that he was standing very straight with slightly tilted head, and she knew the intentness of gaze and look of tenacity in the hidden face which usually accompanied that attitude. His answer also pleased her. There was no attempt at concealing unpleasant probabilities, for the man spoke frankly as to one whom he regarded as his equal in courage and everything except, perhaps, bodily strength. In the meanwhile, however, they were alone in the wilderness, cut off from all hope of succour by anything but their own resources in a haze of snow, with their limbs slowly stiffening under the Arctic cold.

"Then what are we to do?" she asked.

"Push on," said Ingleby. "The river must be close at hand to the right of us. That is why I'm keeping to the higher ground. I don't want to strike until we have passed Alison's Sault."

He wrenched at the bridle; but Grace had faint misgivings as they floundered on again. Sault in that country implies a fall or rapid, and the one in question was called after a prospector who had drowned himself and a comrade there. It swept down to the mouth of the cañon in a wild white rush, studded with great boulders that bruised and scarred the pines the flood hurled down on them; and what made it more perilous in the dark was the fact that the trail dipped to the brink of the smaller rapids at the tail of it. Indeed, it was often necessary to splash knee-deep through the slack of them along the shore; and Alison had come by his death through mistaking the big sault for one of the smaller ones on a black night. The man who fished him out of an eddy a week later said that Alison looked very much as though he had been put through a threshing mill.

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It was, Grace fancied, half an hour later when they floundered down a declivity, with the roar of the river growing louder in their ears. It was with difficulty she kept in the saddle, and she was vaguely conscious that her skirt was rent to tatters, though she was too stiff and cold to trouble about that now. Even in the thicker timber the snow was almost bewildering, and it was only now and then she could see Ingleby scrambling and floundering in front of her. He was evidently making his course by sound, for there was nothing that she could discern to guide him.

Then somehow they slid down a bank, and there was a splash that told her the cayuse was in the water. Ingleby seemed to be struggling with the beast, but she could not make out why he did so. Nor did it seem of any moment. She was dazed and bewildered and intolerably cold. There was a further splashing, a plunge, and a flounder; the water rose to her stirrup, and for a few horrible moments she felt that the beast was going downstream with her. It was evident by the depth that they were in the Sault. She fancied she cried out in her terror and that Ingleby shouted in answer, but the roar of the river drowned the sound. In another few seconds, however, the horse apparently struck rock with its hoofs again; then the water that had lapped about her skirt seemed to fall away, and in a frantic scrambling Ingleby dragged the pony up the bank. The cayuse stood still, trembling, at the top of it, and Ingleby was apparently quivering, too, for his voice shook a little as he answered her half-coherent questions.

"Alison's Sault!" he said hoarsely. "It should have been behind us. I never recognized it until the river swept my feet from under me. I suppose I was dazed by the snow."

Grace sat silent a moment. She knew that they had looked death in the face, for nothing made of flesh and blood could carry the life in it through the mad turmoil of rock and flood in Alison's Sault. The roar of the river was very impressive now, and the man's voice had shown that he was shaken by some strong emotion which was not personal fear. Then, as the crash of a great pine against a stream-swept stone rang through the deep reverberations, she bent down and touched his shoulder. The contact was momentary, but she felt a little quiver run through him.

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"Nobody could have recognized it on such a night. It was not your fault," she said.

"I can't forgive myself. The cayuse got out of hand—I couldn't hold him. He was heading out into the stream. If that ledge hadn't been there——"

He stopped with a gasp, and Grace was glad to recognize that of the two she was the one who showed less concern. She guessed what he was feeling, but could not restrain the desire to make certain.

"Well," she said. "If the shelf of rock had not been there?"

Ingleby turned and seemed to be listening to the river. Perhaps he did it unconsciously, but the hoarse roar of the flood among the boulders was sufficient answer.

"You were not cumbered with a horse that had lost its head. There is a little slack close to the bank," she said.

The man turned and seemed by his attitude to be gazing at her in astonishment.

"You can't suppose I should have scrambled out alone?" he said.

There was a suggestion of anger in his voice which Grace recognized as wholly genuine. She had met and formed her own opinion of the protestations of not a few young men in her time, and it was evident to her that, while Ingleby's attitude became him, he did not recognize the fact.

"You felt yourself responsible then?" she suggested.

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"No," said the man slowly. "I certainly didn't; though it's clear that I was. I don't think I felt anything except that—you—were in the rapid."

This was also evidently perfectly sincere, but he seemed to pull himself up abruptly, and laughed in a fashion that suggested embarrassment.

"You will not remember that little speech. It's not the kind of thing one is pleased with afterwards; but, in the circumstances, it was, perhaps, excusable," he said.

He gave her no opportunity for answering, but struck the cayuse, and they went on again. Still, Grace had noticed the tremor in his voice, and knew that he had meant exactly what he said. Nor was she displeased at it.

Then the thoughts and fancies which the moment of peril had galvanized into activity grew blurred again, and she was only sensible of the physical pain and weariness and an intolerable cold, as the man and beast stumbled on. Twice again they dipped to the river, which, however, scarcely rose to his knee, and after that there was only a sliding past of snow-dimmed trees, while by a grim effort she kept herself in the saddle. Then at last a light blinked in front of her through the filmy haze, the cayuse stopped, and Ingleby, it seemed, lifted her down. At least, she felt his arm about her, and then found herself standing beside him before the commissioner's dwelling without any very clear notion of how she came there. It was only afterwards she remembered, with tingling cheeks, how she had seen a miner walk away with a one-hundred-and-forty-pound bag of flour. Then they went into a lighted room together, and stood still, gasping, a moment, with a distressful dizziness creeping over both of them. Ingleby apparently roused himself with an effort, and threw the door open.

"Keep away from the stove," he said, a trifle faintly. "There's a chair yonder."

He stood in the entrance, white with snow, looking at her. The blood was in her head now, and a most unpleasant tingling ran through her half-frozen limbs, but Ingleby was a trifle grey in face.

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"You can shut the door in another minute or two. I may come back to-morrow to make sure you are none the worse?" he asked.

Grace looked at him with a smile. "You can't go away now."

Ingleby turned and glanced at the whirling haze that swept athwart the light in the veranda.

"I'm afraid I must," he said. "It would be difficult to get off the trail as far as the bakery, and there is apparently nothing I can do for you here. Somebody lighted the fire?"

"One of the police troopers," said Grace. "That doesn't matter. It is snowing harder than ever. You can't go away."

She had brushed aside the dictates of conventionality, and the blood was in her face and a curious sparkle in her eyes. They had been close to death together a little while ago, and it was a long way to the bakery. Still, it was not this fact alone that impelled her to bid him stay.

"I'm afraid I must," he said slowly, as with an effort. "You see, there is something I have to talk over with Leger. He expects me. Besides, it would be advisable to send back any of the boys who may be there to see what has become of the major."

Then he turned abruptly, and Grace, who had scarcely remembered the major, laughed curiously when he went out of the door. She knew now, at least, exactly what she felt for Ingleby, and had he stayed and declared boldly what his wishes were, it is probable that Coulthurst would have been astonished when he came home. Ingleby, however, had gone away, and the girl was left

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standing, flushed in face, with the melting snow dripping from her, beside the stove, which she remembered with some little satisfaction was precisely what he had told her not to do. Then with a little disdainful gesture she swept into the adjoining room.

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## XXIII INGLEBY LOSES HIS HEAD

A keen frost had followed the snow, but there was warmth and a brightness in the little inner room of the Gold Commissioner's house. Its log walls and double casements kept out the stinging cold, the stove snapped and crackled, and a big lamp diffused a cheerful light. Ingleby, who had just come in, sat with his back to the logs, with Coulthurst and Grace opposite him. Grace was in the shadow, but the light shone full upon the major's weather-darkened face.

"Grace," he said, "is, as you can see, none the worse, but it was a fortunate thing you turned up when you did. Very much obliged to you for taking such good care of her."

It was evident to Ingleby that Coulthurst did not know what had nearly happened at Alison's Sault. He had, in fact, already had reasons for surmising that Miss Coulthurst did not think it advisable to tell her father everything.

"I'm not sure it wouldn't have been better if I had not met Miss Coulthurst, sir," he said. "In that case she would probably have gone back, and waited with you until daylight, which would have saved you both a good deal of anxiety. Of course, when we made up our minds to push on, I had no idea the snow would be so bad."

"It's questionable whether she could have found the way. I could see nothing whatever, and scarcely fancy I would have got here if two of the older prospectors hadn't come with me. In fact, I scarcely remember a worse night anywhere, and one result of it is an unpleasant twinge in the shoulder. I never used to get anything of that kind. I suppose I'm getting old."

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It occurred to Ingleby that Coulthurst was certainly looking older than he had done in England. There was a good deal of grey in his hair, his cheeks were hollower, and there were deepening lines about his eyes. Ingleby felt sorry for the man, who had served his nation for so small a reward, that after a life of hardship he must bear the burden still, and yet the fact was in one respect encouraging. Since Coulthurst's means were scanty, there was less probability of his objecting too strenuously to the successful miner who aspired to his daughter's hand; and, though not so rich as the one Ingleby had thrown away, Tomlinson's claim was yielding well. He, however, said nothing, and Coulthurst went on again.

"A devil of a night! It would be hard on any one in the ranges. I wonder where Tomlinson could have gone?"

"One would naturally expect him to head for the settlements," said Ingleby indifferently.

"He left no trail behind him if he did. At least, Esmond's troopers couldn't find any. There was, however, a good deal it is difficult to understand about the affair. One point that would strike anybody is how Tomlinson got away from here without being seen by Esmond, who turned up almost as he must have gone off the veranda."

"It really is a trifle hard to understand, sir."

They looked at each other steadily for a moment or two, and then Ingleby could have fancied that there was a twinkle in Coulthurst's eyes.

"Perhaps it was as well he got away after all," he said. "Appearances were against him, and it might have gone hard with him; but I can't quite bring myself to believe that Tomlinson did the thing."

Then Grace, who laughed softly, broke in. "Of course," she said, "you tried very hard."

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A moment later there was a tramp of feet outside, and the major, who passed into the outer room, came back in a minute or two. He smiled at Ingleby somewhat drily.

"It isn't news of Tomlinson," he said. "Noel has brought the Frenchman over. They've been burrowing into each other's claims, and if I can't straighten the thing out they'll probably settle their differences in their own way with the shovel. I shall probably be half an hour over it, but don't go."

He went out, and left Ingleby with Grace. She looked none the worse for the journey she had made the previous night, and was dressed with unusual simplicity. Ingleby did not know what the fabric was, or whether the colour was blue or grey, nor did it occur to him that its severe simplicity was the result of skill; but he noticed that it enhanced the girl's beauty and added a suggestion of stateliness to her figure, of which Miss Coulthurst was probably quite aware. She

looked up at him with a little smile when a murmur of excited voices rose from the adjoining room.

"They will, of course, both be disgusted with his decision, whatever it is," she said. "A Gold Commissioner has really a good deal to put up with."

"Major Coulthurst's position is naturally a responsible one," said Ingleby.

Grace laughed. "With a very disproportionate emolument—which is a point one has to consider after all. I'm not sure it wouldn't have been better if he had been a prospector."

Ingleby's pulse throbbed a trifle faster. He had no great knowledge of the gentler sex; but he was not a fool, and it seemed to him that the girl had not spoken altogether without a purpose.

"I don't think you really believe that," he said.

"Perhaps I don't," and Grace appeared to reflect. "At least, I suppose I shouldn't have done so once, but, of course, a prospector who has done sufficiently well for himself can take any place that pleases him in Canada."

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"Still, you don't think that right."

"It would naturally depend a good deal upon the prospector."

Ingleby sat still, almost too still, in fact, for a moment or two; but he could not hide the little gleam in his eyes. He had, it is true, democratic views, that is, so far as everybody but Grace Coulthurst was concerned; but he was quite willing to admit that she was a being of a very different and much higher order than his own. That added to the attraction she had for him; and now she had suggested that they were, after all, more or less on the same level. It was almost disconcerting. He did not know what to make of it; but while he pondered over it she flashed a quick glance at him.

"I wonder if you know how Tomlinson got away?" she asked.

It was apparently an astonishingly abrupt change of subject, but when Ingleby, who had grown wiser in the meanwhile, afterwards recalled that night, he was less sure that it might not have been, after all, part of an instinctive continuity of policy. He had discovered by then that even very charming and ingenuous women not infrequently have a policy.

"I don't mind admitting that I do—to you," he said.

Grace was pleased and showed it. It is gratifying to feel that anybody has complete confidence in one, and the possession of a common secret of some importance is not infrequently a bond between the two who share it. Ingleby realized this and felt with a curious gratification that the girl recognized it as clearly as he did. Still, she had said nothing that could lead him to believe so.

"Then you no doubt know where he went?" she asked.

"I naturally know that, too."

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Grace smiled. "That means you helped him to get away. Are you wise in admitting that you were an accessory? Captain Esmond is a friend of ours."

Ingleby made her a little whimsical inclination, though there was a look in his eyes which was not quite in keeping with it.

"I am," he said, "quite safe in your hands."

It was a fortunate answer, and worth the more because he was not usually a very tactful person, as the girl was aware. She was afflicted by a craving for influence, and it was not the adulation of men she wanted, but an insight into their thoughts and purposes, and the privilege of controlling them. Thus Ingleby, who did not know it, could not have done more wisely than he did in admitting that he had an unquestioning confidence in her. He was, as she had discovered some time ago, in spite of his simplicity, a man capable of bold conceptions and resolute execution, the type of man, in fact, that usually came to the front in Western Canada. She had the intelligence to realize and weigh all this, and yet there was a strain of passion in her which he had awakened.

"I almost think you are," she said. "How is the new claim progressing?"

"Reasonably well. In fact, although Sewell is apparently getting rich on the one I threw away, I can't complain. What he makes will, at least, be spent on what he thinks is doing good, while I want mine for my own selfish purposes."

"They are necessarily selfish?"

Ingleby laughed, though the little glow crept into his eyes again. "Well," he said, "I suppose so. You see, a third-share in Tomlinson's claim is not of itself of much value to me. It only provides the money to make a start with."

Grace nodded comprehendingly. He was crude in his mode of expression, but she understood him.

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"That implies a going on?" she asked.

"It does," and Ingleby laughed. "There is room, I think, in this Province for men who will take big risks, and boldly stake what they have on the advancement of its prosperity. I'm not sure there is any reason I shouldn't be one of them."

"And gather in the money? More than you are entitled to? Haven't you been changing your opinions?"

Ingleby made a little whimsical gesture, which alone sufficed to show that he had, as the girl expressed it to herself, expanded.

"I suppose I have—that is, I have modified them. One has to now and then," he said. "Still, you see, the men I mean don't grind money out of others. They create it. They take hold of the wilderness, bridge the rivers, drive the roads through it, and the ranches and the orchards follow. Every man who makes a new home in the waste owes a little to them."

"Still, all that is not done easily. One must have the faith—and, as you suggest, the money with which to make the start. Even then the ladder is hard to climb."

Ingleby involuntarily glanced down at his hands, and the girl noticed the scars on them, which, however, did not repel her. She also noticed the spareness of his frame, the curious transparency of his darkened skin, and the brightness of his eyes, all significant of an intensity of bodily effort. The man had been purged of grossness, moral and physical, by toil in icy water and scorching sun, and the light that shone out through his eyes was the brighter for the hardships he had undergone. He had gained more than vigour while he swung the shovel and gripped the drill with hands that bled from the blundering hammer stroke, after other men's work was done. It is possible that he had also gained more than tenacity of will.

"Still," he said slowly, "I think I shall manage it."

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Grace felt that this was likely. She realized the purpose which animated him, and there suddenly came upon her a desire that he should tell it to her. She knew that he would do so when he felt the time was ripe; but she wished to hear it now, or, at least, to see how far his reticence would carry him. She leaned forward a little and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"It will be a struggle," she said. "Is it worth while?"

Ingleby stirred uneasily beneath her gaze, for it seemed to him that she had brushed aside every distinction there might be between them. He did not know how she had conveyed this impression, but he felt it. She was also very close to him. As she moved, the hem of her skirt had touched him, and he felt the blood tingle in his veins.

"It would be worth dying for," he said.

Grace laughed in a curious fashion. "The money, and the envy of less fortunate men?"

Ingleby stood up suddenly, though he scarcely knew why he did so, or how it came about that he yielded with scarcely a struggle now to the impulse that swept him away. It is, however, possible that Grace Coulthurst, who had only looked at him, understood the reason.

"Success would be worth nothing without another thing," he said. "Like what I have already, the money wouldn't be mine, you see. I am not poor now—but I should never have held on here by any strength of purpose that was in me alone. I borrowed it from another person."

He stopped abruptly, half-afraid, wondering what had happened to him that the truth should be wrung from him in this fashion. Then he saw the clear rose colour creep into the girl's cheeks and the sudden softening of her eyes, and his courage came back to him. He had ventured too far to be silent now.

"Yes," he said, "there is somebody I owe everything to—and it's you."

Grace no longer looked at him, but sat still now with hands clasped on her knees, and Ingleby felt the silence becoming intolerable. There was still a murmur of voices in the adjoining room, and he could hear the wind outside moaning among the pines.

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"I suppose I have offended past forgiveness. I did not mean to tell you this to-night," he said.

Grace looked up for a moment. "Oh," she said softly, "I think I knew—and you see I am not blaming you."

Ingleby quivered visibly, and his face grew hot; but while the desire to kneel beside her and seize the clasped hands was almost irresistible, he stood still, looking gravely down upon her, which was, perhaps, not wise of him.

"You knew?" he said.

"Is that so difficult to understand, after what happened at Alison's Sault?"

Ingleby bent down and took one of her hands, but he did it very gently, though the signs of the fierce restraint he laid upon himself were in his face.

"I should never have told you, Grace—I lost my head," he said. "Still, the one hope that has led me so far, and will, I think, lead me farther, has been that I might—one day when the time was ripe—induce you to listen, and not send me away. Now it must be sufficient that you are not

angry. I can take no promise from you."

"Is it worth so little?" Grace said softly.

Ingleby's grasp tightened on her hand until it grew almost painful. "It would," he said, "be worth everything to me, but I dare not take it now. What I am, you know—but the claim is yielding well—and I only want a little time. Until I can ask Major Coulthurst for you boldly you must be free."

Grace looked up at him. "And you?"

"I," said Ingleby with a little grave smile, "was your very willing bondsman ever so long ago."

The hot flush had faded from his face, and the girl swept her skirt aside, and made room for him beside her. There was, she knew, no fear of his again breaking through the restraint he had laid upon himself. She was, however, not altogether pleased at this, for while it was evident that his attitude was warranted, the self-command which now characterized it was not quite what she had expected. It scarcely appeared natural under the circumstances.

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"Well," she said, "we will let it be so, and I have something to tell you. I am going to Vancouver for the winter. In fact, I should have left already but for the snow."

Ingleby started visibly. "You are going away?"

"Yes," said Grace, with a trace of dryness in her smile; "is that very dreadful? You will go away in due time, too. While you struggle for what you think will buy my favour, I must wait patiently."

"I suppose I have deserved it," and Ingleby winced. "Still, it will be horribly hard to let you go. It is a good deal to know that you are here even when I may not see you."

Grace smiled. "Well," she said, "if that would afford you any great satisfaction, is there any reason why you should not go to Vancouver too? Most of the placer miners do."

Ingleby's glance at her suggested that the notion had not occurred to him. Regular work at the mine would be out of the question until the spring came round again, and already several of the men were talking of leaving the valley. He could also readily afford to spend a few months in Vancouver now. Still, there was one insuperable obstacle.

"If I had only kept my claim!" he said. "It is horribly unfortunate I let it go."

"How does that affect the question?"

"I made a compact with Tomlinson to hold his claim for him."

Once more the colour crept into Grace's face. "You do not mean to let that stop you when there are men you could hire to do what the law requires?"

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"You don't seem to understand," and there was a trace of astonishment in Ingleby's eyes. "One could not depend absolutely upon them, and I made a bargain with Tomlinson. That claim is worth everything to him and his mother—I think it is—back in Oregon."

The flush grew plainer in Grace's cheek. She was a trifle imperious, and now her will had clashed with one that was as resolute as it. She was, however, sensible that she had blundered.

"Those men could do almost as much as you could, which would, after all, be very little just now," she said. "I never meant that you should risk the claim falling in."

"They might fall sick, or get hurt."

"And that might happen to you."

"I should, at least, have kept my word to Tomlinson," said Ingleby gravely.

Grace was too proud to persist. He was right, of course, but the fact that he would sooner part from her than incur the slightest risk of breaking faith with Tomlinson had nevertheless its sting. That, however, she would not show.

"Then I suppose I must not complain," she said. "You evidently have no intention of doing so."

Ingleby made a little gesture. "It will be hard—but it can't be helped," he replied. "As you said, I must go away too one day. Still, I think that I, at least, will feel by and by that it was all worth while."

Then there was a tramp of feet in the adjoining room, and he raised the hand he held and just touched it with his lips. It was not what Grace would have expected from him, but she noticed that he did not do it awkwardly.

"That is all I ask until I have won my spurs," he said. "Just now I am only the squire of low degree."

Grace said nothing, for the door opened and the major came in.

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## XXIV

### THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

It was a bitterly cold night, and Hetty Leger sat close to the fire which crackled on the big hearth in the bakery shanty. It flung an uncertain radiance and pungent aromatic odours about the little room, but there was no other light. Kerosene is unpleasantly apt to impart its characteristic flavour to provisions when jolted for leagues in company with them on the same pack-saddle, and the bringing of stores of any kind into the Green River country was then a serious undertaking. Tom Leger sat by the little table, and Sewell lay upon a kind of ottoman ingeniously extemporized out of spruce-twigs and provision bags.

It was significant that they were assembled in what had been Hetty's private apartment, for the bakery had grown, and there were two other rooms attached to it now. Leger had also struck gold a little while ago, and there was no longer any necessity for Hetty to continue baking, though she did so. She said she had grown used to it, and would sooner have something to do; but it had seemed to Leger that while everything was done with her customary neatness and system there was a change in her, and he fancied she did her work more to keep herself occupied than because she took pleasure in it. It had not been so once. In fact, the change had only become perceptible after Ingleby left the bakery; but Leger was wise in some respects and made no sign that he noticed this.

On that particular evening Hetty had not displayed her usual tranquillity of temper, and she turned to her brother with a little shiver.

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"Can't you put on some more wood? It's disgustingly cold," she said. "If I'd known they had weather like this here I'd have stayed in Vancouver."

Leger remembered that she had once professed herself perfectly contented with the Green River country, but he did not think it advisable to mention the fact. He rose and flung an armful of wood upon the fire, and then stood still smiling.

"You know you can go back there and stay through the winter, if you would like to," he said.

"That's nonsense," said Hetty. "How could I go myself? You and your friends haven't made everybody nice to everybody yet. I'm not going, anyway, and if you worry me I'll be cross."

She looked up sharply and saw that Sewell's face was unnaturally grave.

"Of course," she said, "you were grinning at Tom a moment ago. Still, I can't help it if I am a very little cross just now. It's the cold—and Tom spoiled the last batch of bread. It is cold, isn't it? If it hadn't been, we shouldn't have seen you."

"I don't know why you should seem so sure of that," said Sewell.

Hetty looked at him sharply. "Well," she said, "I am. You would have gone on to the major's. You know you would. What do you go there so often for?"

Sewell had occasionally found Hetty's questions disconcerting, but he saw that she expected an answer.

"I am rather fond of chess," he said.

Hetty smiled incredulously. "That's rubbish!"

"The major, at least, likes a game, and after pulling him back into this wicked world from the edge of a gully one naturally feel that he owes him a little."

"You didn't pull him. It was Walter. Hadn't you better try again?"

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Sewell appeared a trifle embarrassed, for he saw that Leger was becoming interested.

"It is, to some extent, my business to understand the habits of the ruling classes," he said reflectively. "You see, it's almost necessary. Unless I know a little about them, how can I persuade anybody how far they are beneath us, as I'm expected to do?"

Hetty laughed. "Well," she said, "you haven't tried to do anything of that kind for a long while now. Anyway, it seems to me that you knew a good deal about them before you ever saw Major Coulthurst. Of course, it's not my business, but if I were the major I'd make you tell me exactly what you were going there for."

Sewell apparently did not relish this, though he laughed. It happens occasionally that those most concerned in what is going on are the last to notice it, and it had not occurred to Coulthurst or Ingleby that Sewell spent his evenings at the Gold Commissioner's dwelling frequently. He had, however, not often met Ingleby there, and it was significant that neither of them ever mentioned Grace Coulthurst to the other. In any case, Sewell did not answer, and while they sat silent there was a tramp of feet outside and the corporal came in. He was a taciturn and somewhat unsociable man, but he smiled as he looked at Hetty and sat down where the rude chimney Tomlinson had built was between him and the one small window.

"It's a bitter night, and there's 'most four foot of snow on the range. I figured I'd look in to tell you it will be two or three days yet before you get the flour the folks at the settlements are sending up," he said. "A trooper has just come in with the mail, and he left the freighter and his beasts held up by the snow."

He stopped a moment, and looked at Leger somewhat curiously. "Somebody has just gone away?"

"No," said Leger. "We have had nobody here. We are expecting Ingleby, but he hasn't turned up yet."

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"Quite sure he's not outside there?"

"It's scarcely likely. It's a little too cold for anybody to stay outside when he needn't. Ingleby would certainly come in."

"Well," said the corporal, "I guess I didn't see anybody, after all. It was quite dark, anyway, in among the trees. Winter's shutting down on us 'most a month before it should have done. It's kind of fortunate we sent the horses out when we did. I don't know what they wanted to bring them for. Nobody has any use for horses in this country."

It was evident that the worthy corporal was bent on getting away from what he felt to be an awkward topic, and Hetty laughed outright at his quite unnecessary delicacy.

"No," she said, "you know you saw somebody, and fancied it was one of the boys waiting to see me."

The corporal appeared embarrassed, but was wise enough not to involve himself further. "Well," he said, "when I was coming along the trail I saw a man slip in behind a cedar. That kind of struck me as not the usual thing, and I went round the other way to meet him. It was quite a big tree, and when I got around he wasn't there. You keep the dust you get for the bread in the shanty, Leger?"

"Yes," said Leger. "Most of the boys who come here know where it is. I really don't think there is any reason why they shouldn't, either."

"No," said the corporal reflectively, "I guess there isn't. I'll say that for them. Still, I did see somebody."

He contrived to glance round at the faces of the rest, unnoticed by any of them except Hetty, and was satisfied that they knew no more than he did. The corporal had been a long while a policeman, and had quick perceptions. He decided to look into the matter later.

"Well," he said, "I guess it's not worth worrying over."

He drew a little closer to the fire, and nobody said anything for a minute or two, though Hetty glanced towards the little window. The room was dim except when a blaze sprang up, and turning suddenly she stirred the fire, and then, for no very apparent reason, set herself to listen. The bush outside was very still, and she could hear the frost-dried snow fall softly from a branch. Then there was a sharp snapping of resinous wood in the fire, and it was not until that died away she heard a sound again. It was very faint, and suggested a soft crunching down of powdery snow. Nobody else seemed to hear it, not even the corporal, who was apparently examining a rent in his tunic just then, and she had almost persuaded herself that she had fancied it when she glanced towards the window again. A flickering blaze was roaring up the chimney now.

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Then a little shiver ran through her, and closing her hands tight she stared at the glass in horror. A face was pressed against it, a drawn, grey face that seemed awry with pain. There was, however, something that reminded her of somebody in it, and she was about to cry out when she felt a hand laid restrainingly on her arm. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that her brother was also gazing at the window, and then she knew suddenly to whom the face belonged. It had gone when she looked round again, and it was evident that neither Sewell nor the corporal had seen it. Unfortunately, it appeared very unlikely that the man outside could have seen the latter, and she knew that something must be done, or in another moment or two Prospector Tomlinson would walk into the arms of the policeman. Leger appeared incapable of suggesting anything and was gazing at her with apprehension in his eyes.

It was a singularly unpleasant moment. Hetty was aware that she and her brother owed Tomlinson a good deal, and, in any case, it would be particularly distasteful to see him arrested. She was also by no means certain that her brother and Sewell would permit it, and the corporal was a heavily-built man. It very seldom happens that a Northwest policeman lets a prisoner go; and Hetty was quite aware that the result of a struggle might be disastrous to everybody. She realized this in a flash, and then there was a sound of shuffling feet outside in the snow. They were approaching the doorway, and she knew it would be flung open in another moment or two. Then the inspiration came suddenly.

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"There's somebody outside," she said, and laughed as she noticed the bewildered consternation in her brother's eyes. "If it's Ingleby I don't think I'll let him in."

Her voice was almost as steady as usual, and apparently Leger alone noticed the suggestion of strain in it, while next moment she crossed the room and threw the door open. It was narrow, however, and she stood carefully in the middle of it.

"You're not coming in, Walter, until you cut some wood," she said. "You never touched the axe the last time you came."

Hetty's nerve almost failed her during the next few moments, and she felt the throbbing of her heart while the man the others could not see blinked at her stupidly. She dare venture no plainer warning, and he was apparently dazed with cold and weariness.

"I'm not going to stand here. It's too cold," she said. "If you're too lazy to do what I tell you, I'll ask the corporal."

Then she banged the door to, and went back to her seat with a little laugh that sounded slightly hollow to her brother, at least.

"If there's one thing Walter doesn't like it's chopping wood—and that's why I wouldn't let him off," she said. "He hasn't troubled to come round and see me for a week. I'm vexed with him."

Now, the corporal was, of course, aware that throughout most of Western Canada visitors to a homestead not infrequently lighten their hostess's labour by washing the dishes or carrying wood. In the case of the miners, who were pleased to spend an hour at the bakery, chopping wood for the oven was the most obvious thing, though those specially favoured were now and then permitted to weigh out flour or knead the bread. There was thus nothing astonishing in what Hetty had apparently said to Ingleby, nor did Sewell, who provoked the corporal into an attempt to prove that the troopers' carbine was a more efficient weapon than the miners' Marlin rifle, appear to notice anything unusual, and only Leger saw that Hetty's colour was fainter than it had been and that she was quivering a little.

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In the meanwhile there was a tramp of feet outside, which grew less distinct, until the ringing chunk of the axe replaced it, and Leger wondered how he could make Sewell understand that it was desirable to cut the discussion short. He could think of no means of doing it and glanced at Hetty anxiously, for how long the corporal meant to stay was becoming a somewhat momentous question. A man accustomed to the axe can split a good deal of wood in ten minutes, even when he works by moonlight; and it was evident that the one outside could not continue his chopping indefinitely without the corporal's wondering what was keeping him.

Ten minutes passed, and the regular thud of the axe rang through the forest outside, while the corporal, who was a persistent man, still discussed extractors and magazine springs. Leger felt the tension becoming intolerable. Then Hetty contrived to catch Sewell's attention, and, looking at him steadily, set her lips tight. The corporal had, as it happened, turned from the girl; but she saw a gleam of comprehension in Sewell's eyes.

"Well," he said reflectively, "I suppose you are right. I like the easier pull-off of the American rifles. One is less apt to shake the sights off the mark, but no doubt with men accustomed to the handling of rifled weapons, as the police troopers are, the little extra pull required is no great matter."

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The corporal was evidently gratified. "I've shown quite a few men they were wrong on that point, and now I guess I must be getting on. You'll excuse me, Miss Leger?"

He put on his fur-coat and opened the door, but Hetty's heart throbbed again when he stopped a moment. As it happened, the fire was flashing brilliantly, and the corporal appeared to be looking down at the footprints by the threshold.

"I've seen Ingleby twice since the snow came, and he was wearing gum-boots," he said. "The man who was outside here had played-out leather ones on."

"Walter has an old pair he wore until lately," said Leger. "There's a good deal of sharp grit in the Tomlinson mine, and he'd probably come along in the boots he went down in."

This appeared reasonable, and the corporal made a little gesture as though to show that he concurred in it, and then, stepping forward, disappeared into the night. Sewell rose and shut the door, and then glanced at Hetty, who stood quivering a little in the middle of the room.

"I fancy one of you has something to tell me," he said.

Hetty gasped. "Oh," she said, "I thought he meant to stay until morning! It was getting awful, Tom."

Then she looked at Sewell. "Don't you know?" she said. "It's Tomlinson."

"Now," said Sewell, whose astonishment was evident, "I think I understand. There can scarcely be many girls capable of doing what you have done."

Hetty made a little sign of impatience. "Yes, there are—lots of them. Of course, you think all women are silly—you're only a man. Besides, Tom pinched me. But why are you stopping here and talking? Go and bring him."

Both Leger and Sewell went, and Tomlinson came back with them. He was haggard and ragged, and his thin jean garments were hard with the frozen snow-dust. He dropped into the nearest chair and blinked at them.

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"Yes," he said, "I'm here and 'most starving. Get me something to eat, and I'll try to tell you."

They gave him what they had, and he ate ravenously, while Hetty's eyes softened as she watched him.

"You have had a hard time?" she said.

"Yes," answered the man slowly, "I guess I had. I got stuck up in the range. Couldn't make anything of the gorge in the loose snow. Tried to crawl up over the ice track and dropped through. Burst the pack-straps getting out, and don't know where most of the grub and one blanket went to. It was the bigger packet. That was why I had to come back. I don't quite know how I made the valley."

"When did you lose the grub?" asked Sewell.

Tomlinson shook his head. "I don't quite know," he said. "I guess it must have been 'most three weeks ago."

Leger looked at Sewell, for that was quite sufficient to give point to the bald narrative.

"What was in the smaller package would scarcely keep a man in health a week," he said. "I'm not going to keep you talking, Tomlinson, but—although it's fortunate you did so—why did you stop outside instead of coming in?"

"I saw a man," said Tomlinson. "I figured it wouldn't be wise to show myself until I was sure of him. Then when I crawled up to the shanty I didn't seem to remember anything. I only wanted to get in."

He stopped, and looked at Leger. "I can't push on to-night—I'm 'most used-up, but I'm not going to stay here and make trouble for you. I'll light out again to-morrow."

"You are going to lie down and sleep now," said Hetty severely. "We'll decide what is the wisest thing to do to-morrow, but you shan't leave the shanty for a day or two, anyway. No, I'm not going to listen to anything. He's to sleep in the store, Tom."

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Tomlinson appeared desirous of protesting, but Leger laid a hand on his shoulder and led him into an outbuilt room.

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## XXV

### TOMLINSON GETS AWAY

The early Canadian supper had been cleared away, and Sewell was sitting with Grace Coulthurst opposite him by the little stove in the inner room of the Gold Commissioner's dwelling, as he had done somewhat frequently of late. The major was apparently occupied with his business in the adjoining room, for they could hear a rustle of papers, and now and then the shutting of a book, through the door, which stood partly open. He closed one a trifle noisily, and the next moment his voice reached them.

"This thing has kept me longer than I expected, but I must get it finished before I stop. Esmond's sending a trooper off first thing to-morrow," he said. "Still, I shall not be much longer, and then we'll get out the chess."

Coulthurst had spoken loudly, and as Sewell and Grace did not raise their voices it appeared probable that he could not hear what they were saying. Sewell smiled as he glanced at the girl.

"I am not particularly impatient, or sorry for Major Coulthurst, though one could fancy that his dislike of official correspondence is quite as strong as his fondness for chess. He knows exactly what he has to do, and does it without having to trouble about the results, which in his case concern the Crown. That naturally simplifies one's outlook."

"The major," said Grace reflectively, "has arrived at an age when one does not expect too much, and is content with the obvious, which is certainly an advantage."

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"And we, being younger, are different in that respect?"

Grace was a trifle disconcerted, which occasionally happened when Sewell talked to her, though she looked at him with a little smile in her eyes. It was, at least, not very clear to her why she found it pleasant to discuss such questions with him in a confidential voice when she had, to all intents and purposes, plighted herself to Ingleby. Sewell was always deferential, but there was something in his attitude which suggested personal admiration for her, though she was not quite sure that the vague word "liking" was not a little nearer the mark. How far that liking went she did not know, but while she had no intention of allowing it in any way to prejudice her regard for Ingleby, Sewell was, she knew, of subtler and more complex nature, and the craving for influence was strong in her. She knew what, under any given circumstances, Ingleby would probably do, and though this was satisfactory in one respect it had its disadvantages. She had long been troubled with a fondness for probing into masculine thoughts and emotions, and it pleased her to

find an opportunity for directing them, which was not often afforded her in Ingleby's case. His programme was usually cut and dried, and it was, as a rule, an almost exasperatingly simple one.

"I suppose we are," she said. "When I know what is expected of me, I usually want to do something else."

Now Sewell was not aware how matters stood between her and his comrade, but he might have guessed what she was thinking, for his next remark was curiously apposite.

"I'm not sure that the obvious people are not the most fortunate," he said, with a little laugh. "They know exactly what they want, which not infrequently means that what they have to do to get it is equally plain. It must necessarily save them a good many perplexities. Now take the case of my very obvious comrade, Ingleby."

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"Well?"

"Ingleby wants to make a fortune placer mining."

"Which is, from your point of view, a most reprehensible thing!"

Sewell laughed. "That is not quite the point. Perhaps he means to do good with it, and it ought to be quite plain that Ingleby has no real sympathy with Communist notions. In any case, he sets about it in the simplest fashion by working most of every day and often half the night as well. The result is that he has acquired what is apparently a competence and is more or less contented with everything. Any one can see it in the way he looks at you lately."

Grace smiled, for it was evident that there were directions in which Sewell's penetration was defective.

"The fortune will probably come later," she said. "And then—"

"Yes," said Sewell, with a little gesture of comprehension. "Since he has made his mind up, he will, I fancy, manage that, too. Ingleby is that kind of person. Then, if he does not do so sooner, he will naturally marry Hetty Leger."

Grace turned to him sharply and then directed his attention to the fact that the door at the bottom of the stove admitted rather too much draught. He was a moment or two adjusting it, and when he looked up again she was smiling indifferently.

"You are sure of that?" she said.

"I think so. Ingleby invariably does the obvious thing, and she is eminently suited to him. I'm not sure he recognizes it yet; but it will certainly become evident, and then he will save himself and everybody trouble by marrying her off-hand."

Grace sat silent for almost a minute. It was perfectly clear that Sewell did not know what his comrade's aspirations were, even as Ingleby did not know how far her acquaintance with Sewell went. She was not altogether displeased that it should be so, though she felt that it would, after all, make no great change in their relations to each other had they been aware. She did not desire Sewell as a lover, though it was pleasant to feel that he valued her approbation and that she had his confidence.

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"There are, of course, advantages in doing the obvious thing," she said, with a little laugh. "I suppose we are really different from Ingleby in that respect?"

Sewell looked at her reflectively. "I think you are. One could almost fancy you wanted so many things that you couldn't quite decide which was the most important and give up the rest. The difficulty is that we can't very often have them all, you see."

It seemed to Grace that there was some truth in this. "You," she said, "speak feelingly—as though it were from sympathy."

"Well," said Sewell, with a curious little smile, "perhaps I do. In fact, I'm not sure I'm not diagnosing my own case. A little while ago I had a purpose and believed in it, though the belief naturally cost me a good deal."

"The creation of a new Utopia out of the wreck of the present social fabric?" asked Grace, a trifle maliciously.

"Something of the kind, though I did not expect to do it all myself. While I was sure the thing was feasible, the fact that I was, or so I felt, taking a little share in bringing it about was sufficient for me. Now, however, I am not quite so sure on any point as I used to be, which is why I often envy Ingleby."

Grace felt a little thrill of satisfaction. He had, of course, spoken vaguely; but she wondered how far she was responsible for the change in the opinions which he had held until a little while ago. She knew that he had borne a good deal because of them, for Ingleby had told her so.

"Then there may be a little good in a few of our institutions as they stand?" she said.

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"Of course!" answered Sewell, who smiled again. "Most of them are, however, capable of improvement. I am quite as sure of that as ever. The question is, whether anybody would gain much if it were effected too rudely."

Grace was not greatly interested in the point. She preferred a more personal topic, but she saw an opportunity for trying how far her influence went. It had been a trifle painful to find that Ingleby had not yielded to it when she had desired him to spend the winter in Vancouver and leave somebody else to hold Tomlinson's claim. Sewell was, she recognized, a cleverer man than he, and it would be consoling if he showed himself more amenable.

"I think not—at least, so far as anybody in the Green River country is concerned," she said. "It seems to me that its tranquillity depends a good deal on you."

"On me?"

Grace smiled. "Of course! You know it as well as I do. Wouldn't it be better for your friends to put up with a few little grievances rather than run the risk of bringing a worse thing upon themselves?"

"Would we do that?"

"I think so. The major is a lenient commissioner; and the law would be too strong for you."

Sewell laughed. "That," he said, "would have to be proved, and I am not sure it is a good reason you are offering me."

Grace nodded. "No," she said, "perhaps it isn't. You rather like opposition, don't you? Still, I think one could leave it to your good sense, while I would especially like to see all quiet this winter in the Green River valley. That, however, could, of course, scarcely be thought a reason at all."

Sewell made no disclaimer, but he looked at her with a curious intensity.

"Events," he said slowly, "may be too strong for me, and when I am sure they are right, I cannot go counter to my opinions."

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"Of course!" and the girl leaned forward a little nearer him, resting one hand on the arm of her chair. "That is more than I would ever ask of you. Still, perhaps you could——"

Sewell looked at her gravely, and laid his hand upon the one that rested on the chair.

"I will," he said quietly, "with that one reservation, do whatever appears most likely to preserve tranquillity."

Grace did not shake his grasp off, as she should have done. Indeed, a little thrill of triumph ran through her as she realized the significance of what had happened. The man who held her hand fast had borne imprisonment for his beliefs, and had also braved hostile mobs, hired bravos, and detachments of U.S. cavalry, and now she had made him captive with a smile. It was, from one point of view, a notable achievement, and it did not dawn on her that if regarded from another point what she had done might wear a different aspect. Just then a book in the other room was closed with a bang, and Grace drew her hand away as Coulthurst came in.

"Sorry to leave you alone so long, but we can get the chessmen out at last," he said.

Sewell set out the pieces, and Grace, who flashed a little smile at him, which implied that there was now a confidence between them, took up a book. As it happened, neither of them knew that Prospector Tomlinson was plodding down the trail that led south through leagues of forest and snow-blocked defiles towards the settlements just then, though the fact had its results for both of them.

A half-moon hung low above the white shoulder of a hill, and here and there a shaft of silvery light shone down upon the snowy trail which wound in and out through the gloom of the firs. Tomlinson was one of the simple-minded persons who content themselves with doing the obvious thing, and, as it was quite plain to him that he could not stay at the bakery without probability of being discovered and getting his hosts into trouble, he had, in spite of Hetty's protests, persisted in setting out for the settlements, though he was still scarcely capable of the journey and it had been pointed out that there was a likelihood of his falling in with the police troopers. The latter fact did not, however, so far as Tomlinson could see, affect the question. The one thing that was clear to him was that he could not permit Hetty and Tom Leger to involve themselves in difficulties.

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He carried two rolled-up blankets and a good many pounds of provisions, as well as a Marlin rifle, for it was a very long way to the settlements, and the snow was deep in the passes. He also walked slowly and with an effort, for the strength he had exhausted had scarcely come back to him yet, while the dusty snow balled beneath his worn-out boots.

The bush was very still, for only a low murmur came up across the pines from the rapids, which were free of ice. The trees rose above him, solid spires of blackness cut sharp against the white hillside beyond them, and Tomlinson was glad of their shadow, because the corporal and one of the troopers had gone down the trail that afternoon, and, uncertain whether they had come back, he had no wish to meet them. It is scarcely likely that he would have done so, for he had an excellent sense of hearing and was making very little noise, had not a trooper stopped to do something to his newly-issued winter coat, which did not fit him comfortably. He spent some little time over it, as it was necessary to take his big mittens off, and the corporal improved the occasion by sitting down on a fallen tree to light his pipe. They were both a little outside the trail and in black shadow.

Tomlinson, in the meanwhile, came to an open space some two or three score yards across. There were black firs all about it, but the snow among them seemed deeper, and, as he could hear nothing but the murmur of the river, he made haste to cross it. It appeared advisable that nobody should see him. He had almost reached the gloom of the firs again when he heard a little, scraping sound not unlike that the rubbing of a sulphur match would make, and he stood still listening until a faint blue radiance appeared amidst the trees, and then he moved towards the nearest undergrowth with long and almost noiseless strides. In another moment he stopped abruptly, and a man in uniform, who came out from the dark gap of the trail, also stopped and appeared to gaze at him. He carried a carbine. The men were close together, and the moon, which had just cleared the dark fir-tops, shone down on both of them. The miner's face, as the policeman saw, was drawn and grim.

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"Tomlinson!" he gasped and then appeared to shake his astonishment from him. "Stop right where you are!"

Tomlinson said nothing but, springing forward, hurled himself into the undergrowth, which opened with a crash and then closed behind him, while the trooper, who glanced over his shoulder as if to see where the corporal was, wasted another moment. Then he, too, sped across the little gap in the forest, floundering through loose snow; and fell into a barberry bush, which held him fast. So far, fortune had favoured Tomlinson; but as he flitted through the bush looking for a little bye-trail which he knew was near, the corporal appeared suddenly from behind a tree and threw his carbine up.

"Hold on!" he said. "I've something to say to you."

A stray gleam of moonlight that shone down just there flung a patch of brightness athwart the snow, and Tomlinson could see the white face pressed down upon the carbine-stock, but he did not pull up. Instead, he leapt into the shadow, and in another second there was a pale flash, and a sharp detonation rang among the trunks. Then he whipped behind a tree, and, seeing two men close behind him now, flung up his rifle. In his country a man who is shot at usually considers himself warranted in retaliating, and Tomlinson was accustomed to the rifle. In fact, he handled it much as an English sportsman does a gun, by the balance of it, and with an instinctive sense of direction which did not necessitate the aligning of the sights. The result of this was that as the butt came home to his shoulder the trooper dropped his carbine with a cry, and Tomlinson sprang away once more through the smoke. He might have got away altogether, but the corporal could shoot as well as he could, and a few seconds later the fugitive felt a stinging pain in one shoulder.

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He staggered but recovered himself again, and running a few yards farther dropped into a thicket, and wriggled under it on his hands and knees. Then, while an unpleasant faintness crept over him, he felt for the long knife which the prospector uses for cutting up an occasional deer. It did not appear advisable to snap another cartridge into the rifle-breech just then, and the knife would prove equally serviceable if his pursuers crawled into the thicket after him. Prospector Tomlinson was, like most of the men who sojourn in that wilderness, a little primitive in his notions, and the troopers had fired on him.

One of them made a good deal of noise floundering through a belt of undergrowth just then, and only stopped when the corporal called to him.

"Where's that blame branch-trail?" he asked.

"It's right here," said the trooper. "I guess our man's lit out along it."

Time was of some consequence, and the corporal did not deem it advisable to stop and consider. A man floundering through the undergrowth would, he reasoned, be heard a long way off, while a bushman could proceed with very little noise along a beaten track. Thus, as he could hear nothing, it appeared very probable that Tomlinson had taken the latter. He and the trooper pushed on along it for awhile, but there was no sign of the prospector, and they came back moodily to where they had last seen him, and proceeded to search every thicket in the vicinity. They spent at least an hour over it, but there was still no appearance of Tomlinson, and at last the corporal sat down disgustedly upon the fallen fir.

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"I feel 'most certain I plugged him once," he said. "What d'you let go your carbine for?"

The trooper held the weapon up in the moonlight and glanced at the grey smear down the barrel. Then he held up his left hand, which was stained with red.

"I'm not quite sure if the top of one of my fingers is on or not," he said. "Anyway, my mitten's full of blood."

The corporal nodded curtly. "I guess it will grow again," he said. "Well, it seems to me nobody could do anything more to-night. We'll pick his trail up soon as it's daylight." Then they shook the powdery snow from them and plodded on towards the outpost.

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## THE OBVIOUS THING

The stars were paling overhead, and the snow that cut against the sky was growing white again; but it was very cold among the pines where Leger was busy about the crackling fire. A column of smoke rose slowly straight up into the nipping air, and the blaze flickered redly upon the clustering trunks, while the sound of an unfrozen rapid broke faintly through the snapping of the fire. Leger, who felt his fingers stiffening, took up his axe, and the rhythmic thudding rang sharply in the stillness of the woods when Hetty appeared in the door of the shanty, shadowy and shapeless in the coarse blanket she had thrown about her shoulders. She shivered a little as she looked around her.

"It has been a bitter night—the cold woke me when the fire got low," she said. "Tomlinson must have felt it horribly. I wonder where he's getting his breakfast? You shouldn't have let him go."

Leger laughed and leaned upon his axe. "I couldn't have stopped him, and I don't think you need worry. The cold is scarcely likely to hurt him—he's used to it. He is probably three or four leagues away down the trail by now."

"That isn't very far."

"It's tolerably good travelling in this country. Besides, nobody except Sewell and Ingleby has the faintest notion that he was here."

Hetty appeared reflective. "I wasn't quite sure about the corporal that night. He's too quiet and has eyes all over him. Still, I suppose Tomlinson has got away—of course, he must have done so. His running away would look very bad if they did get hold of him. Isn't that kettle boiling, Tom?"

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Leger stooped above the fire, and then, straightening himself, suddenly stood still listening. He could hear the sound of the rapid, and nothing else for a moment or two, until a crackle of undergrowth came out of the gloom below. Then there was a tramp of footsteps coming up the trail, and Hetty turned to him sharply.

"Tom," she said, with a little gasp, "who can it be?"

Leger laid down the kettle he held in his hand. "The troopers, I'm afraid," he said.

The light was growing clearer, and they could see each other's faces. Hetty's was flushed and apprehensive, Leger's portentously quiet.

"They've come for Tomlinson," she said. "Tom, do you know why he threw Probyn in the creek?"

"I fancy I could guess. Tomlinson, however, never mentioned it."

"He wouldn't," and Hetty gasped again. "Tom, I'll never forgive you if you let the troopers know anything about him."

"I really don't think that was necessary," said Leger, with a faint, dry smile.

Hetty clenched one hand tight. "Oh," she said, "can't we run away?"

Leger turned and pointed to a shadowy figure that materialized out of the gloom among the trees below. There were others behind it, and the two stood still watching them as they came quickly up the trail. Then they stopped at a sharp word, and a man in a big fur-coat stepped forward. Hetty had no difficulty in recognizing him as Esmond.

"Are you willing to tell me where Prospector Tomlinson is? It would be the wisest thing," he said.

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"I don't think that is quite the point," answered Leger quietly. "You see, I don't know."

"Then I'll ask you where he went when he left here last night?"

"You fancy he was here?"

Esmond made a little sign of impatience. "I should like to warn you that a good deal depends upon the way you answer me. You probably know that the person who hides a murderer or connives at his escape is liable to be tried as an accessory."

Leger stood silent a moment or two. It seemed rather more than probable that Esmond had only supposed it likely that Tomlinson had visited the bakery; but that did not greatly matter after all. His course was clear, and that was to allow the officer to believe as long as possible that Tomlinson was in the vicinity. Every minute gained would be worth a good deal to the fugitive.

"I scarcely think I need worry myself about that," he said. "You see, before you could charge me as an accessory you would have to prove that Tomlinson really killed Probyn. It's tolerably clear that you can't have a trial without a prisoner, and I don't mind admitting that Tomlinson isn't here."

Esmond smiled unpleasantly, and signed to one of the troopers, who went into the shanty. "He certainly isn't very far away. I have no doubt you could tell me where he would make for; but you do not seem to know that he was shot, and, we have reason to believe, badly wounded within a league of your house last night."



It was growing light now, and he saw the sudden horror in Hetty's eyes.

"If you have any control over your brother, Miss Leger, I think it would be wise for you to use it," he said. "You would not like him to get himself into trouble?"

Hetty straightened herself a little. "If he knew where Tomlinson was and told you, I'd be ashamed of him forever—but he doesn't," she said. [Pg 264]

Esmond glanced at her sharply. She stood very straight, regarding him with a set, white face, and it was evident that she was resolute. Then he turned to Leger.

"Are you willing to expose your sister to a very serious charge?" he asked.

Again Leger stood silent, but when he glanced at her a little flash showed in Hetty's eyes.

"You daren't disgrace us both. Remember, it was all my fault," she said.

Then Leger turned to the officer. "I do not know where Tomlinson is. That is all I have to tell you."

Esmond raised his hand. "Then I arrest you both for concealing Prospector Tomlinson and contriving his escape. You will hand them over to Robertson at the outpost, Trooper Grieve, and then come on after us as fast as you can. I don't wish to submit either of you to any indignity, Leger, unless you are likely to make it necessary."

Leger's face turned crimson, but he made a little sign of comprehension. "We will make no attempt to get away."

Esmond signed to the trooper, who pointed somewhat shamefacedly to the shadowy path among the pines as he swung his carbine to the trail. Then Hetty and Leger moved on in front of him, while Esmond and the others vanished into the bush. It was almost daylight now, and the troopers spent some time tracing Tomlinson's footsteps between the trunks. They also found the thicket where he had flung himself down, but that, after all, told them very little, and both the bye-trail and the larger one were tramped too hard for his worn-out boots to leave any recognizable impression.

It was, however, evident that Tomlinson could have adopted only one of two courses. If he had escaped uninjured he would certainly head for the settlements along the beaten trail, down which a trooper had been sent already; but no wounded man could face that arduous journey, and assuming that the corporal's shot had taken effect, he would, as a matter of course, be lurking somewhere in the valley. In that case the trailing of him could only be a question of a day or two, for even if he could face the bitter frost in the open he must have food, and there would be no difficulty in tracing the footsteps of any one who brought it to him. The one question was whether Tomlinson was badly hurt, and as the corporal, who fancied so, could not be quite sure, Esmond pushed on southwards along the trail. If Tomlinson had not headed in that direction he was in the valley, and, if so, he certainly could not get away. [Pg 265]

As a matter of fact, he was just then lying weak from loss of blood in a little, decrepit shanty on an abandoned claim. He had contrived to reach one of the miners' dwellings late the previous night, though he was never quite sure how he accomplished it, and fell in across the threshold when its astonished owner opened the door. The man, however, kept his head, and within an hour Tomlinson was carried to the claim in one of the more distant gorges, where it appeared a little less likely that Esmond would lay hands on him. Now he was huddled half-sensible, in his blanket upon a pile of cedar twigs, with Ingleby and a young American, who had just dug out a carbine-bullet which had badly smashed his shoulder-blade, sitting by his side. Ingleby did not know whether his companion was a qualified surgeon; but he had, at least, contrived to cut out the bullet and stanch the wound. He appeared a trifle anxious about his patient.

"The shock would have dropped a man raised in the cities right off, but I think we'll pull him round," he said. "Still, it's not going to be done in a day or two."

The fact was very evident, and Ingleby nodded. "How long do you think it will be before he can walk again?" he said. [Pg 266]

"A month, anyway, and quite likely six weeks; that is, before you could let him start out on the trail. I don't quite know what we're going to do with him in the meanwhile."

Tomlinson, who appeared to understand him, looked up with his face awry.

"You're not going to do anything," he said half-coherently. "I'll give myself up. I can't stay here and make trouble for the boys."

"You go to sleep!" said the other man severely, and made a little sign to Ingleby, who sat silent for a minute or two after Tomlinson sank back again on the twigs.

"That's just the point," he said. "The boys don't mean to let the police have him?"

"No," and Ingleby's manner suggested that the subject was not worth discussion. "They wouldn't think of it for a minute. I'd have nothing more to do with them if they did."

The American nodded. "Well," he said, "I can pull the man round, but I'm not going to answer for what will happen if the troopers get hold of him. He's tough, but he wants looking after, and

there's no one at the outpost knows more than enough to pull a stone out of a cayuse's hoof."

"You can take out a bullet, anyway," said Ingleby suggestively.

"Oh yes. I'd have had quite a nice practice by this time if it had been convenient for me to stay in Connecticut. As it happened, it wasn't."

Ingleby looked at him steadily. "Tomlinson," he said, "is a friend of mine, and that, of course, implies an obligation. You, so far as I know, have had very little to do with him, and it seems only reasonable to warn you that you may get yourself into serious trouble by looking after him. The law is generally carried out in our country."

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The American laughed. "I can take my chances. I'm not going back on a sick man, anyway."

They said nothing more for awhile until a man who had apparently been running came in.

"Where's Sewell?" he gasped.

"I don't know," said Ingleby. "He wasn't at home this morning. Most likely he's looking for a deer."

"Then I guess you'll have to do. Esmond has trailed Tomlinson to the bakery. He has got Hetty and Tom Leger at the outpost now."

Ingleby rose suddenly to his feet. "You're quite sure?"

"Well," said the other, "I guess I ought to be. I met them. Trooper Grieve didn't stop their talking, and they told me. Esmond tried to bluff where Tomlinson was out of them, and they're to stand in with him as accessories."

It was evident to Ingleby that since Sewell was away a heavy responsibility devolved upon him as a friend of Tomlinson and Leger. He was expected to do something, and, as usual, he did the obvious thing without counting what it would cost him.

"Where is Esmond?" he asked.

"Hitting the trail to the settlements all he's worth," said the other man.

"Then go round and let the boys know what you have told me. They can meet outside Ransome's shanty. The dinner-hour will do. I'll be there to meet them."

The man went out, and at the time appointed Ingleby stood outside a little hut of bark and logs with a crowd of bronze-faced men about him. They were somewhat silent, but their manner was quietly resolute. It suggested that their minds were made up and that they were only waiting for a leader in whom they had confidence. Ingleby had gained their liking, but he was young, and they were not quite sure whether he would be the man or whether they must choose another. In the meanwhile they were willing to give him a hearing. It was evident that he was equal to the occasion when he stepped forward and looked at them with steady eyes.

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"Boys," he said, "do any of you believe Tomlinson killed Trooper Probyn?"

There was a general murmur of dissent, and Ingleby made a little sign of concurrence. "Are you willing to let the troopers have him? You must remember that the thing looks bad against him, and he will not be tried by you."

The murmurs were articulate now, and it was very clear that not a man there had the least intention of giving up Tomlinson.

"Then it should be quite plain that you will have to keep the troopers from him. It is only a question of a day or two at the longest before they trail him. They may do it to-night. Esmond will very soon find out that he isn't pushing on in front of him for the settlements."

A big man stood forward, and glanced at the rest. "There's not a trooper in this valley going to lay hands on Tomlinson."

Again the murmurs rose portentously, and Ingleby smiled.

"Well," he said, "since the trouble can't be shuffled off, we may as well face it now. We have got to make a stand and maintain it until Esmond finds he has to humour us. He has Leger and his sister in the outpost. Do you know any reason why we shouldn't take them out?"

"I guess not," said the man who had spoken already. "Still, if there's any shooting, two or three of us are going to smell trouble as well as Tomlinson."

"There will not be any," said Ingleby. "Esmond has only two men at the outpost. Nobody wants to hurt them. The thing can be done without it. In fact, that's essential. I want three or four determined men."

They were forthcoming, but one of the rest asked a question.

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"Have you figured what's going to happen when Esmond comes back?" he said.

"I have," said Ingleby. "He will have a handful of tolerably active men under his orders then, but only a handful, after all. Now, the outpost's outside the cañon, and there's a spot where a log barricade would effectively block the trail. The troopers will have to be kept outside it until we

can arrive at a compromise. Esmond will probably make it. It would be two months, anyway, before he could get more troopers in, and if there's another heavy snowfall it mightn't be done till spring."

None of those who listened could find fault with the scheme. It was evidently workable, and they had already decided that Tomlinson was not to be given up at any cost. That, as Ingleby had pointed out, would necessarily involve them in difficulties with the police. There was thus very little further discussion, and the men went back, a trifle thoughtfully, to their work until the evening.

It seemed to most of them a long while coming, and to none of them slower than it did to Hetty Leger, who sat with her brother in a very little, log-walled room at the outpost as dusk was closing down. Tom Leger, glancing at her as she sat huddled in a chair by the window, fancied that she was crying.

"Why did we come here, Tom?" she said. "Everything has gone wrong since we left Vancouver."

"The outlook certainly isn't very cheerful just now," said Leger, with a rueful smile. "Still, after all, you made a good many dollars at the bakery, and my claim is doing well. Ingleby will see that while I'm kept here the work is carried on. One can put up with a good deal of inconvenience when he's washing out gold-dust."

"Dollars!" said Hetty. "And gold-dust! Is there nothing else worth having?"

"Well," said Leger drily, "when you have no prospect of getting it, it's as well to content oneself with dollars. If I remember rightly you used to think a good deal of a shilling in England."

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Hetty glanced at him sharply with hazy eyes. "What do you mean by—no prospect of getting it?"

"I don't quite know. You suggested the notion. Anyway, I scarcely think Esmond can make out very much of a case against us. He doesn't really know that Tomlinson was at the bakery."

"It isn't that that's worrying me. It's—everything," said Hetty.

"I don't think you need cry over Tomlinson. The boys will take care of him."

"I wasn't crying about Tomlinson. In fact, I'm not sure I was crying at all. Still, you see, it was all my fault."

Leger smiled whimsically. "Well," he said, "I scarcely think that should afford you any great satisfaction, though it almost seems to do so. No doubt it's part of a girl's nature to make trouble of the kind."

Hetty closed one hand. "I'm going to be angry in a minute. That's not the way to talk to any one who's feeling—what I am just now."

Leger rose and patted her shoulder. "I'd sooner see you raging than looking as you do. Shake the mood off, Hetty. It isn't in the least like you."

Hetty said nothing but turned from him and looked out of the little window. A young trooper was leaning over the rude balustrade of the veranda, and beyond him the sombre pines rolled down the darkening valley. Night had not quite fallen yet, though a half-moon that showed red and frosty was growing brighter above the white shoulder of a hill. Another trooper was apparently busy in the adjoining room, for they could hear his footsteps as he moved, but that was the only sound. Then a face rose suddenly into sight above the floor of the veranda where the trooper could not see it. It was a horrible, grey face, and Hetty shrank back, while her chair grated harshly on the floor. In another moment Tom Leger's hand closed tightly on her arm.

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"Keep still!" he said. "It's a masked man. I fancy the boys have come for us."

Hetty looked again, and saw that a strip of deer-hide with holes cut in it was tied across the face. Then she became sensible that there was something suggestively familiar in the attitude of the man who, moving noiselessly, raised himself erect and stood watching the trooper, whose back was towards him.

"Oh," she gasped, "it's Walter!"

"Be quiet!" said Leger, and the grasp upon her arm grew tighter.

Another face appeared between the rails, but the first man had already swung one leg over them, and in another moment he sprang forward along the veranda. The trooper heard him and swung round, but even as he did so the newcomer flung his arms about him and they reeled together down the little stairway. Then the second trooper flung open the door, but as he ran out of it two or three men who had apparently crept into the veranda grappled with him, and Hetty could hear them tumbling up and down the adjoining room. Then there was a brief silence until somebody burst open the door of the room in which she was shut. A masked man who strode in grasped her shoulder, and she struggled vainly as he drew her towards the door.

"I won't go. It will only get you into worse trouble," she said.

The man laughed. "If I had to face it all my life, do you think I would leave you here?"

Hetty recognized the tension in his voice, and something that seemed to answer it thrilled in her;

but she still protested, and the man, who flung an arm about her waist, swung her off her feet. He did not let her go until he set her down, flushed and gasping, among the pines outside.

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Then she laughed. "I'm not sure you could have done that in England, Walter."

"No," said Ingleby. "Anyway, you wouldn't have let me, but we can't stop to talk now. Esmond may come back at any time, and there is a good deal to do." He turned from her suddenly. "You have got those fellows' carbines?"

"Oh yes," said another man. "We'd better bring along their cartridges and heave them in the river too. We haven't hurt either of them much, considering."

Ingleby signed to the rest, though he still held Hetty's arm. "Now," he said, "the sooner we light out of this the better it will be for everybody."

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## XXVII THE BLOCKADE

The moon was high above the white peaks, and a stinging frost was in the air, when Ingleby and Leger sat a little apart from a snapping fire behind a great redwood trunk that had been felled across the trail in the constricted entrance to the cañon. It was wide of girth, and lay supported on the stumps of several splintered branches breast-high above the soil, with the rest of its spreading limbs piled about it in tremendous ruin. On the side where the fire was some of them had been hewn away, and a handful of men lounged smoking in the hollow between them and the trunk. Another man stood upon the tree, apparently looking down the valley, with his figure cutting blackly against the blueness of the night.

Sewell leaned against a shattered branch a few feet away from Ingleby, gazing about him reflectively. He noticed that the great butt of the fir was jammed against the slope of rock that ran up overhead, too steep almost for the snow to rest upon it, and that the top of the tree was in the river some twenty yards away. The stream frothed and roared about it in a wild white rapid, though long spears of crackling ice stretched out behind the boulders, and there was a tremendous wall of rock on the farther side. It was absolutely unscalable, and from the crest of it ranks of clinging pines rolled backwards up a slope that was almost as steep.

It was evident that nobody coming from the police outpost or the commissioner's dwelling could approach the fallen tree except by the trail in front, and on that side the branches formed an entanglement an agile man would have some difficulty in scrambling through, even if nobody desired to prevent him, while two or three of the men beside the fire had rifles with them. The rest had axes. Sewell, who noticed all this, glanced towards them thoughtfully. He could not see their faces, but their silence had its significance, and there was a vague suggestion of resolution in their attitudes. Most of them were men of singularly unyielding temperament, who had grappled with hard rock and primeval forest from their youth up.

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"It is a tolerably strong position, and it's the strength of it that particularly pleases me," he said. "If there were any prospect of his getting in Esmond would no doubt try it. As it is, he will probably find it advisable to stop outside and compromise."

"I'm glad you're satisfied," said Leger. "Still, it's a little unfortunate you were not here this morning. In that case we might have found some other means of getting over the difficulty, though I'm not sure that there was any."

Ingleby glanced sharply at Leger. His face was clear in the moonlight, and it was expressionless, but his tone had been suggestively dry, and for just a moment an unpleasant fancy flashed upon Ingleby. It was certainly unfortunate that Sewell, whom everybody looked to for guidance, had been away that day, and the fact might have had significance for any one who doubted him. Ingleby, however, had unshaken confidence in the man and thrust the thought from him. Sewell smiled as he turned to Leger.

"I was looking for a deer," he said. "Anyway, you had Ingleby."

"Ingleby," said Leger, "is usually where he's wanted. Some men have that habit. It's a useful one, though I'm afraid I haven't acquired it. In fact, I fancy I'm rather like Trooper Probyn. He was addicted to turning up just when it would have been better for everybody if he had stayed away."

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He turned from them somewhat abruptly and strolled towards the men about the fire, while Sewell looked thoughtful as he filled his pipe.

"Leger doesn't appear to be in a particularly pleasant mood, but he's right in one respect," he said. "It would have been a good deal better if he and Hetty had been anywhere else when Esmond turned up at the bakery. Of course, they couldn't help it, but the result of it is going to be serious. It is not exactly convenient that the thing should have happened now."

Ingleby made a gesture of comprehension as he glanced towards the men about the fire. Their big axes gleamed suggestively, and the rifle of the man upon the tree twinkled coldly where the moonlight rested on the line of barrel.

"It's all of it unfortunate," he said deprecatingly. "I suppose I'm responsible—but I don't quite see what else anybody could have expected me to do. I couldn't leave Hetty in Esmond's hands. It was out of the question. The police wouldn't have much difficulty in making her out an accessory."

Sewell smiled. "That was all that occurred to you?"

"Yes," said Ingleby. "I think so. I don't seem to remember anything else. Anyway, it was sufficient."

He made a little forceful gesture which suggested even more plainly than what he said that the thought of leaving Hetty exposed to any peril was intolerable.

"And you inconsequently decided to put up a bluff of this kind on the British nation because Esmond might involve in difficulties a girl with whom you are not in love. I'm presuming you are not in love with her?"

Ingleby seemed a trifle disconcerted. "No," he said sharply. "Of course I'm not. What made you suggest it?"

Sewell laughed. "Well," he said, "for one thing, if you had been in love with her, you could scarcely have done anything that would have made the fact clearer."

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There was silence for a minute or two, and Ingleby leaned upon the tree with his thoughts in confusion. He was not in love with Hetty Leger, but it was certainly a fact that her arrest had filled him with an almost unaccountable consternation. He also remembered the curious little laugh with which she had clung to him, and that it had stirred him as no trifling favour Grace Coulthurst had ever shown him had done. The commissioner's daughter had, however, certainly never leaned upon his shoulder with her arms about him, though he had on one occasion, when she was half-frozen, practically carried her into her father's dwelling. The thought of it was, in a curious fashion, almost distasteful, as well as preposterous. His regard for her was largely that of a devotee, an æsthetic respect which would have made any display of purely human proclivities on the part of the goddess a trifle disconcerting.

There are men like Ingleby whose life is, partly from inclination and partly from force of circumstances, in some respects one of puritanical simplicity, especially in the back blocks of England's colonies; and, startled by Sewell's suggestion, he tried to reason with himself as he leaned against the tree. He remembered now how he had thrilled to the girl's touch as, half-crying and half-laughing, she had rested in his arms a few hours ago, and he could not admit the almost unpleasant explanation that this was because they were man and woman. Still, he had felt her heart beating upon his breast, and something in his nature had, it seemed to him, awakened and throbbed in response to it. It was, he felt, not sensual passion; it was not love, since it was Grace Coulthurst he loved; and his confusion grew more confounded as he vainly strove to classify it. Ingleby, as one who did the obvious thing, and was usually doing something unless he was asleep, had seldom been led into any attempt to unravel the complexities of human thought and emotion. Men of his temperament are as a rule too busy for anything of the kind. It is material facts that interest them, and their achievements are usually apparent and substantial, written in that country on hard rock and forest or on the orchards and wheatfields that smile where the wilderness has been.

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"Well?" said Sewell at length.

Ingleby made a little gesture. "The thing is done. Why I did it doesn't, after all, greatly matter. We have the results of it to face just now."

"Precisely! That's why I'm pleased you chose a very convenient spot to chop the tree in. There's one of them becoming apparent already."

He pointed across the fallen log, and the man who stood upon it made a little sign. The tree was in the shadow, but beyond it lay a narrow strip of moonlit snow, upon which the dusky pines closed in again. A man moved out into the strip, walking cautiously, and carrying a carbine. He stopped abruptly, dropping the butt of it with a little thud, and, turning his head, he apparently glanced at somebody behind him.

"They've chopped a big tree right across the trail," he said.

His voice rang clearly through the nipping air, and Ingleby almost envied him as he stood unconcernedly still, a dusky, motionless object, with a blacker shadow projected in front of him on the gleaming snow. He, at least, had no responsibility, and was there to do what he was bidden, while the law would hold him guiltless. The brief and decisive attempt on the outpost had scarcely given Ingleby cause for thought, but it was different now. There was nothing exhilarating in standing still and wondering what course the police would take, while other men have felt misgivings when brought face to face with constituted authority with arms in its hand.

Sewell in the meanwhile moved quietly towards the fire.

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"You will leave this thing to me, boys," he said. "Above all, keep your hands off those rifles. It's a

bluff we're putting up."

By this time several other men had moved out upon the strip of snow, and one who came up from behind walked past them and stopped not far from the tree. Ingleby could see his face in the moonlight, and recognized him as Esmond. He looked up at the man who, though he had handed his rifle to a comrade, still stood upon the log regarding him quietly.

"Well," he said, "what are you doing there?"

"Seeing that nobody gets over," was the uncompromising answer.

Esmond laughed, as though he had partly expected this. "There are no doubt more of you behind there. If you have one, I would prefer to talk to your recognized leader."

Sewell sprang up upon the tree. "I think I can venture to claim my comrades' confidence," he said. "In any case, I am quite willing to accept the responsibility for anything that has been done."

"You may be asked to remember that," said Esmond drily. "Do you mind explaining why you felled this tree?"

"I think the man who answered you already made that clear. To prevent anybody's getting over. Once you recognize that it would be difficult to do it without our permission, we'll go a little further."

"Then you are deliberately placing obstacles in the way of the police carrying out their duty? I warn you that it may turn out a serious matter."

Sewell laughed. "I'm not sure the question is a very happy one. It is rather too suggestive of Monday morning in England. Still, I suppose what we mean to do amounts to that, although we will have pleasure in permitting you to enter the valley when you wish, on one or two perfectly reasonable conditions."

"It remains to be seen whether you can keep us out." Esmond raised his voice a trifle. "Climb up on that log, Trooper Grieve, and let me know who Prospector Sewell has with him," he said. "You have authority to fire on anybody who tries to prevent you." [Pg 279]

It seemed to Ingleby that Esmond had displayed a good deal of tact. He was aware that in an affair of the kind the right start counts for a good deal, and that if the miners permitted the trooper to survey their position it might lead to an unwished-for change in their attitude. If they did not, it would make them the aggressors, and there was the further difficulty that they would probably shrink from offering violence to a single man.

"The trooper must not be hurt, boys, but he must not get up on the log," he said, and turned to Sewell with a little gesture of deprecation.

Sewell nodded. "You're right—if we can manage it," he said.

In the meanwhile the young trooper was walking towards the barrier. Ingleby surmised that he had no great liking for his task, but beyond the fact that he was holding himself unusually straight, and looking steadfastly in front of him, he showed no sign of it. The moonlight was on his face, and it was almost expressionless.

"Stop right where you are," said one of the miners sharply. "I guess you'd better!"

The trooper did not stop, nor did he answer. If he had his misgivings as a human being, he was also a part of the great system by which his nation's work is done and its prestige maintained; and he went on with stiff, measured strides which suggested the movements of an automaton. A handful of men behind the log, and another handful standing in the moonlight on the gleaming snow, stood silently watching him, and most of them felt an almost unpleasant sense of tension.

Then he came to the branches, and stopped a moment, as though uncertain what to do. His carbine presented the difficulty, since to scramble over that tangle of branches and twigs both hands would be necessary. Then he slung it behind him, and every one could hear the sharp snap of the clip-hook through the bitter air. After that there was a crash as he plunged into a maze of dusky needles, and he was gasping when he emerged again. He was, however, still coming on, crawling over branches, swinging himself under some of them, while two miners waited for him, intent and strung up, behind the log. When he reached it the top of the bark was almost level with his head, and, throwing an arm upon it, he essayed to draw himself up. At the same moment two pairs of sinewy hands seized his shoulders, and lifted him from his feet. Then there was a shout and a swing, and he was hurled backwards like a stone. He broke through the shadowy needles amidst a crash of snapped-off twigs, and there was a confused floundering in the darkness below. Then a head rose out of it, and the trooper stood straight in the moonlight upon the fork of a great limb, looking back towards his officer now. [Pg 280]

"Am I to try again, sir?" he asked.

There was a burst of approving laughter from the miners, and the trooper sprang down from the branch and moved towards his comrades when Esmond made a sign, while a man who had been speaking apart with the latter suddenly stepped forward.

"It's the major," said one of the miners. "Give him a show. Come right along, sir. Nobody going to

hurt you!"

Coulthurst made a little gesture with a lifted hand, and his remarks were brief.

"You'll gain nothing by making fools of yourselves, my men," he said. "The law is a good deal too strong for you. Now, try to tell me sensibly what is worrying you, and if it comes within my business I'll see what I can do."

Sewell stood up upon the log, and took off his big, shapeless hat. There was silence for a moment while the major looked at him. [Pg 281]

"Mr. Sewell," he said gravely, "I'm sorry to see you here."

"I'm a little sorry myself, sir," said Sewell. "Still, that's not quite the point, and if you will listen for a minute or two I will try to make our views clear. They are really not unreasonable. In the first place we want Tomlinson tried here by his peers, which, although a little unusual, could, I think, be done. If Captain Esmond can prove him guilty, we will give him up, and he can get a regular court to confirm the verdict. Then we ask immunity for the men who held up the outpost, and one or two trifling modifications of the mining regulations which are probably within the discretion afforded you by your commission."

"It seems to me," said Coulthurst drily, "that you are asking a good deal. More, in fact, than you are likely to get. You insist on all that?"

"We feel compelled to do so, sir."

Coulthurst made a little sign and moved back to where Esmond stood. They conferred together, and the major spoke again.

"Captain Esmond is willing to promise that if you go home straightway no proceedings will be taken against any man for his share in this night's work. He will promise you nothing further, and I may say that in this I quite concur with him. I must warn you that what you are doing is a very serious thing."

"Then," said Sewell quietly, "there is nothing more to be said. We have strength enough effectively to prevent Captain Esmond from going any further up the valley. It would be better for everybody if he did not compel us to make use of it."

Esmond, who had been unusually patient hitherto, apparently lost his self-command.

"We will endeavour to whip the insolence out of you," he said. "By the time the thing is settled your leaders will be exceptionally sorry for themselves." [Pg 282]

He drew back a little with the major, and they appeared to be talking earnestly for a space. It seemed to Ingleby that Esmond wished to chance an attack; but perhaps the troopers were worn-out, or the major recognized the strength of the miners' position, for at last he made a little sign, and the men moved back silently into the shadow of the pines. Then the tension slackened, and Ingleby shivered a little as he strode towards the fire.

"It's horribly cold, though I never felt it until a minute or two ago," he said. "Well, I suppose we are in for it now!"

Sewell laughed in a curious fashion. "I almost think so. Captain Esmond is not a very imposing personage in himself, but he stands for a good deal, you see. Still, it's tolerably evident that he will not trouble us any more to-night."

A few minutes later another miner climbed up on the log, and the rest lay down, rolled in their blankets, about the crackling fire.

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## XXVIII SNOWED IN

Two months passed almost uneventfully after the felling of the tree, for Esmond found no means of forcing the entrance to the valley. The cañon furnished the only road to it, and he found a band of determined men ready to dispute his passage each time he appeared before the tree. A company of sappers could scarcely have raised them a more efficient defense than the one they had made at the cost of an hour's labour with the axe, and Esmond reluctantly recognized that it was practically unassailable by the trifling force at his command. An attempt to carry it by assault could only result in his handful of men being swept away, and strategy proved as useless, for when the troopers floundered upstream at night through the crackling ice-cake in the slacker flow of the rapid they came to a furious rush of water, and with difficulty gained the bank again. An attempt to crawl up to the barrier in the darkness resulted as unsuccessfully, for a man leapt up upon the log with a blazing brand almost as they left the shelter of the pines.

The getting in was also only half the difficulty, for even if he passed the barrier the miners could muster a score of men for every one he had. It was thus apparently useless to provoke actual hostilities. The cards were evidently in Sewell's hand, and it was clear that he recognized this and had his men in perfect command. Not a shot had been fired—indeed, no miner had actually been seen with a rifle—and the only act of overt violence was the hurling of Trooper Grieve from the log. In the meanwhile Esmond had written to the Provincial authorities in Victoria, but two different troopers who set out with his letters came back again. The snowfall had been abnormal, and, though they were hard men, they admitted that to force a way through the passes was beyond their ability. As one result of this, Grace Coulthurst had abandoned all idea of going to Vancouver.

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In the meanwhile work was being carried on slowly and painfully in the valley, where the men thawed the soil with great fires on the shallow claims and postponed the washing until the ice should melt again. Between whiles they mounted guard behind the log, and slept when they could. They were as far from submission as ever, but the tension had slackened long ago, and there was nothing but the breastwork to show that imperial authority was being quietly set a nought in the Green River valley. It was merely a question whose provisions would hold out longest now; but the question was a vitally important one and one night three or four of the leaders sat discussing it in Sewell's shanty.

"So far, everything has gone very much as one could expect," he said. "The trouble will naturally come in the spring when Esmond can bring more troopers in. That is, of course, unless we can make terms before then, which is, I fancy, quite probable."

"And if we can't?" asked the American who had attended to Tomlinson. "That police captain shows very little sign of backing down."

"Then we'll have to bring over the men from Westerhouse," said Ingleby. "I think they'll come, and, because it will not be difficult to block out Slavin, who is in command of the police there, if he comes along after them, the position will be much the same as before."

He looked at Sewell, who, however, did not appear to have heard him.

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"What's going to stop the other people from sending a whole regiment along?" asked the American.

"The British official character," said Sewell drily. "It wouldn't look well, you see, and it would hurt somebody's dignity to admit that it was necessary,—that is, of course, so long as we play our cards cleverly. This trouble would be regarded from the official point of view as merely a little temporary friction which could be got over if handled tactfully. Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if Esmond is quietly reprimanded for causing it; but one has to remember that if you persist in making our rulers see what they don't wish to, they're apt to display an activity that's likely to prove as unpleasant to men in our position as it is unusual. They don't want to move if they can help it, but somebody has to smart for it if they're forced to."

"That's quite right," said another man. "I remember Riel, and they'd have let him down again if he'd known enough not to aggravate them by killing that man at Fort Garry. Well, I guess we've no use for that while Esmond keeps his head, and the one question is what we're going to eat. It's quite certain I can't live on cedar bark. We want grub, and we've got to get it. There are men right here who could break a trail to anywhere."

"If we try the usual one we'll only clear it for Esmond to bring troopers in," said Ingleby.

That was evident to everybody, and there was silence until Sewell spoke again.

"I've been well up the south fork of the river looking for deer," he said. "The valley's level, and I didn't strike a rapid, while with the snow on the river one could keep clear of the timber. The slight thaw we had should make a good crust for travelling, and it wouldn't be much trouble to make a few jumper-sleds for the provisions. The difficulty is that whoever went would have to cross the divide from headwater and pick up the usual trail on the other side."

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"Nobody has ever been over," said another man. "I've no use for crawling up precipices with a big flour-bag on my back."

"That might be because nobody has ever tried," said Sewell. "One advantage in going that way is that Esmond wouldn't know you had either gone out or come back again. We don't want to make a road for him." Then he turned to the American. "How's Tomlinson to-night?"

"Going very slow. The frost's against him. Wound won't heal, and half-rotten pork and bread isn't quite the thing to feed a sick man. He should have been on his feet quite a while ago."

There was a brief discussion, and as the result of it twenty men, of whom Ingleby was one, were fixed upon to make the attempt. They were all of them willing, and started two days later before the stars had paled, while every man in the valley, except those on guard behind the log, assembled to see them go, though Ingleby did not know that Hetty Leger stood a little apart from them watching the shadowy figures melt into the gloom beneath the pines. It was, everybody knew, by no means certain that all of them would come back again.

They made their way up-river, dragging a few rude sledges with them, and they crossed the big divide in the face of one of the blinding snowstorms that rage on the higher ranges most of the



winter. That cost them a week of tremendous labour; and then they floundered through tangled muskegs, where the stunted pines that grew in summer out of quaggy mire had been reaped and laid in rows by the Arctic winds. Their branches were strewn about them, and the men smashed a way through the horrible maze, making, with infinite pains, scarcely a league a day. Still, the muskegs were left behind, and the ground was clearer in a big *brûlée* where fire had licked up undergrowth and branches and the great trunks rose gauntly, charred and tottering columns. There they made as much as four leagues in a day through ashes and dusty snow, and at last came out on the trail to the settlement, dragging with them one man whose feet were frost-bitten. Nobody had crossed the divide before; but that was probably because nobody had hitherto been driven by necessity into trying, and now, as usually happens in that country, the thing attempted had been done.

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The settlement was not an especially cheerful spot, consisting as it did of three or four log-houses roofed with cedar shingles which their owners had split, a store, and a frame hotel covered in with galvanized iron, though slabs of bark had been largely used as well. They, however, rested there several days, and they needed it, while the hearts of most of them sank a trifle at the contemplation of the journey home. They had set out light, but the store was crammed with provisions, which the freighter, who had somehow brought them there, had abandoned all hope of taking farther. It was evident they must each go back with a load which a man unaccustomed to the packing necessary in that country could scarcely carry a mile, and the hardest prospector among them shrank from crossing the divide with such a burden. The thing, however, had to be done, and on the night before their departure they were arranging their packs in the store when the man who kept it pointed to a pile of bags and cases in a corner.

"That's the police lot, and I guess they'll want the grub," he said. "I can't quite figure why none of them have come in for it, but you could strike them for transport on anything you took along."

The reason Esmond had not sent down to inquire about his stores was, of course, quite plain to the miners; but nobody in that settlement knew which way they had reached it or what had happened in the Green River valley, and Sewell laughed.

"I am not," he said, "a freight-ox or a dromedary, and the rest of us have already got a good deal more than any one could reasonably expect them to carry."

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The storekeeper glanced at a stout deal box. "Well," he said, "I guess there's not much more than twelve pounds in there, and it's for the major—tea and coffee and some special fixings from Vancouver. If he don't get it, he and Miss Coulthurst will come right down to drinking water. The freighter couldn't take more than a half-case of whisky in for him last time, and I guess that's not going to last the Gold Commissioner long."

Ingleby, who was acquainted with the major's habits, surmised that this was very probable, but it appeared of much less consequence than the fact that Grace might also have to do without even the few small comforts it had hitherto been possible to bring into the Green River country. He no longer remembered the galling of the pack-straps or the tremendous struggle over the big divide, but laid his hand upon the box.

"We'll manage this one, anyway," he said. "I'll take it along with me."

Then, turning at the sound of a step, he saw that Sewell, who had followed apparently with the same purpose, was looking at him.

"Well," he said, "what do you want?"

"You can't take that case," said Sewell. "My pack's lighter."

Ingleby was a trifle astonished. "I was first," he said. "Is there any special reason why you should have it instead of me?"

Sewell laughed, though his tone was not quite his usual one.

"No," he said. "If one must be candid, I scarcely think there is."

It had never occurred to Ingleby that his comrade might have set himself to gain Miss Coulthurst's favour and in a measure succeeded. He would have thought the notion preposterous in view of Sewell's opinions, and he smiled good-humouredly.

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"It really doesn't matter. I wouldn't have let you have it, anyway," he said, and drew the storekeeper aside.

They started at daybreak next morning, and before they had gone a league Ingleby found that the extra twelve pounds made his burden almost insupportable. Still, he set his lips and bore it, taking a grim pleasure in the nip of the straps that galled his shoulders as he remembered for whom he was carrying the box. They were raw, and he was worn-out when the men made camp beneath a towering fir as the coppery sun went down, but it was very much worse on the morrow when he rose with aching limbs from the frozen soil to start again. Somehow he kept his place with the others throughout that weary day and the ones that dragged by after it, though when he remembered them afterwards the blurred pictures his fancy called up were like an evil dream of fatigue and pain.

They sank ankle-deep in ashes in the *brûlée*, rent their limbs and garments smashing through the muskeg, melted the snow with their camp-fires by lakes and streams whose shores even the

wandering prospector's foot had scarcely trodden, and slept, or lay awake shivering, with boots in the embers and half-frozen bodies radiating like spokes from the hub of crackling fire, while the smoke, which was sharp with the sting of the resin, curled about them. Ingleby's shoulders bled daily and troubled him seriously in the frost at night, a seam of his boot had fretted a raw place across his foot, and in the bitter mornings the cold struck deep and keen. Twelve pounds more count for a good deal when the burden is already all that its bearer is fit to carry, and the effort drained the store of heat in his worn-out body and left nothing for the up-keep of its vitality. That heat is the source of energy everybody knows, but only those who have taxed every muscle in the cold of the Northwest realize the fact's full significance. The man who has tried his strength too hard in the Arctic frost may char his boots in the camp-fire, but he cannot get warm. To add to his troubles, Ingleby had no proper mittens, and when the one extemporized from a strip of flour-bag burst, the hand with which he clutched the pack-straps split at every finger joint and at that temperature a sore will rarely heal.

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The others were not in much better condition, though day by day the line of weary men stumbled on in a silence that seemed the grimmer for the burst of anathemas from the one or two of them who had to be dragged up from the fire and brutally shaken into wakefulness when the hour to resume the journey came. Then they came to the tremendous barrier of the divide, a rampart of ice and snow which even in summer no man new to that country would attempt to climb.

It cost them a day to make the first thousand feet or so, and then they lost count of the rest, during which they dragged themselves upward from dwarf pine to pine or crawled along scarped slopes with the peaks still above them. They were waist-deep in snow when they crossed the ridge through the gap of a ravine down which all the winds of heaven apparently rioted, but they fought their way foot by foot, and were floundering down the farther side when Ingleby, who was staggering, grey in face, behind the rearmost of them, lost his footing and rolled down a declivity. He brought up with a crash in a juniper, and rising, half-dazed, recovered his legitimate burden and dragged himself on again. He could scarcely see the others, for his head was throbbing intolerably and his sight was dim, but it seemed to him that he was travelling a little more easily than he had done. It was, however, not until they lay beside a snapping fire that night with their packs piled behind them as a barrier to the bitter wind, that the reason for this became apparent.

"Where's that case of yours?" asked one of the men.

Ingleby glanced behind him, and then laid down the blackened can of tea he held and rose unsteadily.

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"You haven't got it," he asked hoarsely, "none of you?"

There was a little sardonic laughter, and one of the others said, "I guess we've got 'most enough without humping another case along for anybody."

"Then I must have left it where I fell into that juniper this afternoon."

He shook his galled shoulders, which were bleeding through the shirt that was glued to them, and he winced as the movement tore it from the wound. Then he turned slowly away from the fire.

"Hold on. Where are you going?" said one of the men.

"Back for the case. If I'm fortunate, I may make camp before you start to-morrow."

He stopped for just a moment, and looked back at the fire with a fierce physical longing in his eyes, for all that was animal in him craved for food and the rest of repletion. Sewell, he saw, was lying half-asleep, with a partly consumed flapjack fallen from his hand.

"Now, see here," said somebody, "we can't wait for you. Unless we get down out of the frost into thick timber by to-morrow night, it's quite likely one or two of us will stay up here altogether. You've got a straight warning. Let the blame thing go."

Ingleby said nothing. He knew that if he dallied his flesh would master him, and he limped out of the firelight with a groan. The red flicker faded suddenly, and he was alone on a great sloping waste where a few dwarf firs and junipers were scattered, black as ink on a ground of blinking white, under the big coppery moon. There was a pain in every joint, the rag wound about one hand was stiff, and he dare not move his shoulders now, while at every step the torturing boot ate into his flesh. That was all he remembered, for he could never recall afterwards much of what he felt and did that night.

He was not back at the camp next morning, and when his comrades had waited an hour or two they moved on slowly without him. One can live in the open under a greater cold than they were called upon to face, that is, if one is provided with costly furs and sleeping bags to suit it; but there are reasons why the prospector usually has neither, and there was no more endurance left in the men. Ingleby, however, would, at least, have no difficulty in picking up their trail, and unless they made shelter that night it seemed very probable that some of them would freeze. They found it at the foot of the mountain wall in a thick belt of young firs where the jumper-sledges and two or three axes had been left, and that night they lay in comfort about the fire with a kettle of strong green tea in their midst, and the springy cedar and spruce twigs piled high about them. Two of them, however, were not there, for Sewell had gone back in search of Ingleby.

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It was snowing a little, and there was no moon visible, while, though the rest of the journey down the valley would, by comparison, be easy, now they had the sledges, the men were curiously silent as they lay about the fire. Nobody seemed disposed to sleep, and the kettle had been emptied when one of them glanced round at the rest.

"If he doesn't come in by to-morrow I'm going back," he said.

"I guess it mightn't be much use to-morrow," said a comrade. "If I could get a move on me I'd go to-night, but I'm not sure I can. What d'you say 'he' for, anyway? There's two of them."

The men were dead-weary, too dazed with fatigue almost to think. Nor was there one of them anxious to make the effort, which if successful might drag him from his rest. Thus they were willing to be led away from the point at issue, which was what might have happened to Ingleby.

"Well," said the first speaker, "Sewell's a smart man, and he means well, but I hadn't quite remembered him. When I was broke, and hadn't a dollar's worth of dust to get the truck I had to have from the freighter, Ingleby went bond for me. He don't know a good deal more than he has any use for, like the other man, but he's there when he's wanted. That's the kind he is. I'll give him another half-hour. Then I'm going back for him."

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There was a drowsy murmur of concurrence. Sewell was liked in the Green River valley, and no man doubted his sincerity; but that was, after all, not quite enough, for it is, though somewhat difficult of comprehension, a fact that the dwellers in the wilderness, who see fewer of their fellowmen, have usually a clearer insight into the primitive essentials of human character than the men of the cities. They do not ask too much of it, but on certain points their demand is inexorable, and it is very seldom that a simply meretricious quality goes far with them. Ingleby was not a genius, he blundered in details, and he had few graces; but they believed in him.

The half-hour had almost passed when one of them sharply raised his head, and, though few other men would probably have heard anything, the rest shook themselves to attention. High up on the range above them there was a soft pattering in the snow, which grew louder, until they could hear two men stumbling down the steep hillside. After that there was a snapping of twigs among the firs, and Sewell strode into the red light with his hand on Ingleby's shoulder. The latter's face was grey, and he staggered until somebody seized him and dragged him down beside the fire. Then he blinked at them out of half-closed eyes.

"I got the case," he said.

"That's all right," said a man soothingly as he loosed the straps about his shoulders and lifted the case aside, but Ingleby turned upon him savagely.

"Put it there, — you! I want to see it. It's hers," he said.

His voice was strained and broken, and Sewell did not hear all he said.

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"Get him some tea and flapjacks. I think he's a little off his head," he said.

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## XXIX

### ESMOND'S HANDS ARE TIED

Grace Coulthurst had not long cleared the evening meal away, but she was already waiting Esmond's departure with an impatience which was somewhat difficult to hold in check. He had come across from the outpost while she was occupied with the task, and that in itself would have been sufficient to displease her, but there were also other causes for the strain upon her temper. Miss Coulthurst had not expected to fare luxuriously in the Green River country and had hitherto borne the necessary discomforts exceptionally well; but of late she had been actually hungry, which, in her case, was as unpleasant as it was unusual.

There was still a store of flour and salt-pork in the Gold Commissioner's house, but there was practically nothing else, and the pork was rancid, while Grace had a very rudimentary acquaintance with the art of cookery. As one result of this, she had risen unsatisfied from each untempting meal, and, brought up as she had been, the deprivation had its effect on her physical nature, though she felt the isolation which had succeeded the blockade even more. Of late the company of Ingleby or Sewell had become almost a necessity, while she had naturally not seen either of them since the miners made their protest. Coulthurst had also been a trifle difficult to get on with. He was not addicted to indulgence, but neither was he particularly abstemious, and tea brewed from leaves which had been infused once or twice already was not a beverage he appreciated or one that tended to make him more companionable.

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He lay somewhat wearily in a big deck-chair beside the stove with an unlighted cigar in his hand, while Esmond sat opposite him with an unpleasant look in his face.

"There is nothing to be gained by hiding the fact that I'm a little anxious about the state of

affairs, sir," he said. "The scoundrelly miners are still apparently as far from giving in as ever, and, unpleasant as it is to admit, they have the upper hand."

"It looks like it," said the major drily. "I suppose you haven't thought of making a compromise? Nobody's hurt as yet, and I fancy they would be satisfied if you met them with regard to Tomlinson. You're not bound to send a man up for trial unless it's reasonably evident that he's guilty, and I don't believe Tomlinson did the thing, myself. Couldn't you hold a kind of informal inquiry, and give the boys an opportunity for proving him innocent?"

A vindictive sparkle crept into Esmond's eyes. "And permit a rabble of that kind to teach me my duty? I'm afraid not. Even if I wasn't sure the man was guilty, which I am, the thing would be out of the question."

"You feel warranted in calling all of them—rabble?" asked Grace.

"I do. Every one of them. Their leaders, in particular, belong to that most intolerable class to be found anywhere—the half-taught proletariat, with just enough education to increase their natural unpleasantness and inspire them with a hatred of their superiors. That, however, is not quite the point."

The blood rose to the girl's face, but remembering that the major occasionally displayed some little penetration she contrived to keep silent, though this was by no means easy. Coulthurst, however, nodded.

"I scarcely think it is," he said, with a trace of dryness. "As I pointed out once before, you do not seem to remember that I occasionally had Mr. Sewell and Ingleby here."

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"I'm afraid I didn't—I'm sorry, sir," said Esmond. "Of course, I should have done so. One could almost have fancied that they were here frequently."

Again Grace said nothing, though it cost her a stronger effort, and the major did not appear to notice the younger man's sardonic smile.

"Since you don't seem to care for my suggestion, have you any notions of your own?"

"I haven't, which is partly why I came to you. If I could only find a way of getting word to Victoria and a few more troopers in, it would be easy to bring them to reason. As it is, I have sense enough to realize that nobody would thank me for forcing a contest that could only end in disaster and the subsequent sending up of a battalion of Canadian militia. The miners are twenty to one, you see."

Again Coulthurst nodded. "You are right in one respect," he said. "Personally, I shouldn't care to undertake the thing with less than three or four strong companies, and I'm not sure I could get in then. Well, since a compromise appears out of the question, you can only wait events."

"That is the difficulty. I can't wait too long. We're on full rations still, but stores are getting low and certainly won't last until the thaw sets in. Of course, if affairs had been different, I could have hired enough of the fellows to break out a trail."

Perhaps the major did not intend it, but he looked at Grace, and saw comprehension of his thoughts in her eyes. They were not on full rations, or anything approaching it, at the Gold Commissioner's house, and a few of the comforts Esmond could have spared would have been worth a good deal to them. He was in some respects not an ungenerous man, but though he must, Grace fancied, have seen how meagrely they fared, such a course had evidently never suggested itself to him, and in that fact lay the sting. He rose to go, in another minute or two, but just then there was a knocking at the door, which swung open a moment later, and Grace gasped as she saw Ingleby standing on the threshold with a heavy case in his hands.

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His garments were ragged, and his gauntness showed through them. His face was worn, and darkened by exposure to the frost, but his eyes were steady, and he glanced at the girl with a smile. There was a curious silence for a moment or two until he turned to the major.

"May I come in, sir?" he asked.

Coulthurst regarded him sternly. "You could scarcely expect me to welcome a man in arms against his country."

"No," said Ingleby. "Not as a friend. That would be unreasonable. Still, I have a little explanation to make, and it is a bitter night to keep the door open. With your permission!"

He swung round and closed it, after which he laid down the case, and Grace felt a thrill of appreciation as she watched him. His self-possession appealed to her.

"You have come—alone?" asked the major.

"Of course!" said Ingleby.

Esmond smiled, though there was no good-humour in his eyes, and, as if inadvertently, dropped his hand on his hip. His uniform was raised a trifle there, in a fashion which suggested that a pistol lay beneath it.

"Wasn't that a little rash?" he asked. "Can you point out any reason why I shouldn't arrest you?"

"I fancy I can," and Ingleby made a gesture of impatience. "For one thing, if you attempted to lay hands on me or reached for your pistol I should fling you out into the snow. That, of course, isn't in good taste to say in another man's house; but it may save everybody unpleasantness, and, in any case, I'm one of the proletariat from whom too much is not expected."

There was a harshness in his voice and a glow in his eyes which seemed to indicate that he was perfectly willing to make his promise good, while, though his attitude was certainly not all that conventionality demanded, it was, at least, natural in the circumstances, and Grace was not displeased by it. Esmond, perhaps because he recognized the necessity for displaying his superior training, kept his temper, and Coulthurst watched them both, with a little grim smile.

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"I haven't the least intention of indulging in an exhibition of that kind, which would be quite unnecessary," said the police officer. "There is a trooper within call who has a carbine."

"I saw him, though, being a policeman on duty, he naturally did not see me. What would you gain by calling him?"

"I think he and I between us could take you to the outpost."

"You might. I haven't a weapon of any kind with me, but what then? Two of my comrades know where I am, and you would have thirty or forty armed miners inquiring for me before morning. It is, of course, quite plain that you can't afford to force an outbreak of that kind."

Esmond realized that this was true. Ingleby, it was evident, held the cards and was quite aware of it. He wisely said nothing, though his face grew hot, and there was a wicked look in his eyes. Then Ingleby turned to the major again.

"What I have to say is not in the least important, and will not keep you a minute, sir," he said. "Still, there are reasons why I would sooner Captain Esmond didn't hear it."

"I believe he was going when you came in," said Coulthurst reflectively.

The hint was plain enough, and Esmond moved towards the door, while Ingleby, who stood between him and his fur-coat, handed the coat to him. Then as the officer went out he lifted a partly-filled flour-bag in from the veranda, and, when he had closed the door, laid it with the case on the table.

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"Won't you sit down?" Grace said quietly.

Ingleby looked at Coulthurst. "I scarcely think Major Coulthurst would object to anything you suggest, but I am in his hands."

"Sit down—and be hanged to you!" said the major, whose face grew suddenly red. "Do you suppose I enjoy the position you have forced me into?"

Ingleby did as he was bidden. "I came across this case at the settlement, sir, and was told it was for you. From what the storekeeper said I fancied Miss Coulthurst would be pleased to have it, and that you wouldn't mind my bringing it up with me."

"You were at the settlement?" and Coulthurst glanced at him almost incredibly. "Perhaps you know Esmond sent down two or three troopers, and they couldn't face the snow?"

"Yes, sir. You will probably understand why I preferred not to mention it in Captain Esmond's presence."

"The box is proof that you were there—but how the devil you managed it is more than I know. The troopers certainly couldn't."

"They didn't go the right way," said Ingleby drily.

"Then there is another one?" and Coulthurst flashed a sharp glance at him.

"As a very little reflection would show you that there must be, there is no use in running away from the question. Besides, I feel I'm safe in your hands, and, while circumstances continue as they are, Captain Esmond couldn't profit by any conclusions you might come to. Shall I open the case for you, sir?"

The major made a little sign, and Ingleby, crossing to the hearth, picked up the rock-drill, which served as poker, and contrived to prize up the lid with it.

It was a trifling action, but it was characteristic; and Grace noticed that he made use of the thing that was nearest without troubling anybody to find him a more suitable implement. Then he laid out the contents of the box upon the table, and the girl's face softened as she watched him. The little comforts in themselves were worth a good deal to her just then, but the fact that he had thought of her was worth far more. The major, however, appeared a trifle disappointed, and she fancied she knew what he was looking for. Ingleby seemed to know it, too, for there was a suggestion of a smile in his eyes. Leaning one elbow on the table she looked at him with her rounded chin in the palm of one hand.

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"Whichever way you went you must have crossed the range," she said. "That box was heavy. How did you carry it?"

"On my back," said Ingleby. "That is the usual way. We had sold all the horses off to the freighter

for a few dollars quite a while ago. Of course, as I hadn't asked your permission, it was a liberty."

Grace made a little gesture. "What did you go down to the settlement for?"

"Provisions."

"But nobody could carry many of them over the mountains."

"I think I managed forty pounds," said Ingleby incautiously. "Most of the boys had considerably more."

The clear rose colour crept into Grace's cheeks, and she did not trouble to prevent his seeing it. She knew what the simple admission meant, and that it must have cost him toil incredible to make that journey with a double burden. It was for her he had borne it.

"And the box?" she asked.

Ingleby's embarrassment was evident, and she turned to the major with a curious little laugh and a faint ring in her voice.

"Do you understand what Mr. Ingleby has done?" she said. "He has carried that box besides his own load up from the settlement—over the mountains—so that we should not suffer for anything." [Pg 302]

Coulthurst also appeared embarrassed. In fact, his face was distinctly red. "I'm very much obliged to him," he said. "It's devilishly unfortunate you got drawn into that outpost business, Ingleby. Excuse me, Grace, it is—unfortunate. Can't you see how you have placed me? As a man who has served his nation, even though he has been kicked for it, I can't very well——"

He stopped a moment, still a trifle flushed, and then broke into a little laugh. "Well," he said, "you're too strong for me—I'll capitulate. You know the ground I ought to take as well as I do; but it's more than could reasonably be expected of any man, under the circumstances. Still, that storekeeper fellow might have put in something a little more exhilarating than tea."

Ingleby opened the flour-bag with something as nearly approaching a grin on his gaunt face as was compatible with the deferential attitude he had assumed.

"I feel a little diffident about the next proceeding, sir," he said. "In fact, it is a piece of almost intolerable presumption on the part of a man setting constituted authority at defiance, as I'm afraid I am. Still, you see, people must eat and drink, in any case."

He took two carefully wrapped bottles out of the bag, and the major's eyes twinkled, while as he spread out the rest of its contents Grace felt her heart grow very soft towards him. He had, it seemed, thought of everything that could minister to her comfort. Then she saw that he had guessed what she was thinking, and his honesty became apparent.

"The storekeeper had his wife there," he said. "I had a little talk with her."

"It is to be hoped she didn't drink whisky of that kind," said the major, with a chuckle. "You couldn't get anything better in a Montreal club." [Pg 303]

Ingleby laughed. "I fancy some of my comrades have belonged to associations of the kind, and a good many of them have cultivated tastes," he said. "As a matter of fact, they can afford them."

"Will you be good enough to tell me how much those things cost?" asked the major.

"If you insist. In fact, there's an invoice here. Still, after the little kindnesses you have shown me I would much sooner not let you see it."

Coulthurst looked at him sharply, and then, reaching out, laid his hand upon the grocery bill. After that he rose and went into the adjoining room, and when he came back he handed Ingleby a cheque on a Vancouver bank. Grace watched the miner curiously as he did so.

"Now you have relieved your feelings, sir, I can make what use I like of what is my own," he said.

He crossed the room and flung the paper into the fire, then turned with a little smile to the major. It was a bold step, and the boldness of it appealed to the girl. She understood it as an assertion of equality, something he owed to himself, and withal it was done with deference and not aggressively. For a moment Coulthurst gazed at him in astonishment. Then he laughed, and made a little sign of comprehension.

"I'm not sure I've met many young men with nerve enough to do that, but I think you're right," he said. "I was pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Ingleby—and it is, perhaps, not altogether your fault that the present unfortunate circumstances must necessarily lead to a temporary break in it."

Ingleby made him a little grave inclination. "I understand, sir, and there is only one thing I would like to ask," he said. "We may make some suggestions shortly for a compromise, and, in view of Captain Esmond's temperament—and our own—they might be considered more dispassionately if passed through a third party. Would you be willing to receive Sewell here?" [Pg 304]

He was evidently about to go, and Coulthurst held out his hand. "Send him as soon as you can. If your ideas are reasonable, I'll do my utmost with Esmond. This state of affairs can't go on."

Ingleby turned towards the door, but Grace, who was waiting, opened it for him, and let her hand rest in his a moment.

"Walter," she said very softly, "it was exactly what I would have expected from you."

Ingleby did not think it advisable to turn round, but he gripped the little fingers hard as he passed out into the darkness.

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### **XXX**

#### **SEWELL'S DOWNFALL**

Sewell went to Major Coulthurst's the following night, and remained some time in conference with him. He also went there a day or two later to hear Esmond's answer to the suggestions he had conveyed, and when it was delivered he found himself no nearer a compromise. There was not a man in the valley who would agree to what the police officer demanded; and though Sewell went back with somewhat modified proposals from time to time, affairs dragged on at a deadlock, while each party hoped to starve the other into surrender.

The miners could with difficulty have obtained a temporary and insufficient supply of provisions, but fearing that Esmond would be driven to action, their leaders were dubious about sending any number of their men away again. It was a game of bluff they were playing, and it had dragged out much longer than any of them had anticipated, while all could recognize that it was only by holding command of such a force as would render hopeless any attempt to drive them from their barricade that they could avoid an actual recourse to arms, which must eventually prove disastrous to them.

Finally, after a meeting of all concerned, Sewell was dispatched again with what practically amounted to an ultimatum, and on the evening on which he was to deliver it he and Ingleby and Leger discussed the affair at the bakery. Hetty was not present, for though they were on short rations, she had gone up the valley with one or two little dainties she had contrived to make for Tomlinson. He had been a strong and healthy man, but wounds, complicated by comminuted bones, give trouble in the cold of that country, and the very indifferent food had further militated against his recovery. Sewell stood ready to set out, Ingleby and Leger sat by the hearth, and there was anxiety in the faces of all of them.

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"I'm afraid it's a fool's errand I'm going on," said Sewell. "It is, of course, useless to threaten to seize the outpost when Esmond must realize that we have no intention of doing it. The thing's out of the question. It was all very well to block the troopers out, but if we shot one of them it would bring every policeman in the country, and, if necessary, the whole Canadian militia, down upon our heads."

"It's almost a pity you didn't realize that before," said Leger.

Sewell made a little gesture which might have expressed anything. "Mutual recriminations seldom do much good, and I scarcely think any one would have expected Esmond to hold out as he has done. I met one of the troopers the last time I went to Coulthurst's, and he admitted that they were practically starving. It was a bluff we put up, but we made the mistake of assuming that the opposition had less nerve than we had. After all, it's not a very uncommon one."

"Are you quite sure it was only bluff when you began?" asked Leger quietly.

Sewell started, almost imperceptibly, but Leger saw it, and even Ingleby, who would have believed in him in spite of everything, fancied that there was embarrassment in his face.

"Circumstances alter cases, and I've learnt a little about British official inertia since I've been up here," he said. "It's rather a big contract to dictate terms to the Dominion of Canada when we have failed to make any great impression on one police officer. Anyway, I may as well get on to the commissioner's. Neither of us is, I fancy, in the most amiable temper."

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He went out, and Ingleby looked at Leger, who shook his head.

"He's quite right, Walter. It's too big a thing for us, and we have failed," he said. "If it comes to the worst and Esmond goes down, he'll beat us still."

Ingleby said nothing, though his face grew grim, and Leger continued with a little dry smile, "Sewell will do no good. It's almost a pity we hadn't chosen another man. His heart isn't in the thing."

"You can say that—when you know his record?" and there was a flash of anger in Ingleby's eyes.

"Don't misunderstand me. Sewell will not actually play us false. He is, of course, a much more brilliant man than either of us, and he'll handle our case with his usual ability. Still, that is scarcely enough, and one has to admit that it's a poor one intrinsically. We started with the

mistake of taking it for granted that Esmond could be bluffed."

"I'm not sure that we did. To be correct, I started the thing without thinking of anything. Anyway, you believed as firmly as the rest of us in Sewell and that the men here and at Westerhouse could make a stand that would result in their getting what they wanted."

Leger sat silent a moment or two. "Perhaps I did, though I think I saw the weak points of the scheme clearly. They, however, didn't count for so much then. Nobody, you see, can put a big thing through by working it all out logically beforehand. It appears all difficulties if you look at it that way. One has to take his chances with the faith that attempts the impossible and the fire that carries him through an obstacle before he realizes that it is one. Sewell had the faith and the fire, and the trouble is that he hasn't now. There has been a big change in the man since he came into the Green River country." [Pg 308]

Ingleby could not controvert this, but it was evident to Leger, who watched him closely, that he had still full confidence in Sewell, and was as far as ever from guessing at any reason that might account for the change in him.

"Well," he said slowly, "we can't back down now. What are we to do?"

"Go on. Play the game out to the bitter end. I think you know that as well as I do."

The little sign Ingleby made seemed to imply that there was nothing more to be said.

"Isn't it time Hetty was back?" he asked.

He opened the door, and the cold struck through him like a knife. There was not a breath of wind astir, and the pines cut sharp and black against the luminous blueness of the night without the faintest quiver of a spray, for that afternoon an Arctic frost had descended upon the valley.

"I'll go along and meet her," he said.

It was ten minutes later when he did so. She was plodding somewhat wearily up the climbing trail, a shapeless figure in a big blanket-coat, and she took his arm and leaned upon it. It occurred to him that Hetty had lost some of her brightness, and had been looking a little worn of late; but that was not astonishing, since the scanty food and strain of anxiety were telling upon everybody in the Green River valley. It was also a long way from the bakery to the hut where Tomlinson still lay helpless, and Ingleby felt very compassionate as the girl, who said very little, walked by his side. When at last he opened the door for her she sank into the nearest chair and turned to him with a curiously listless gesture.

"Keep it open—wide," she said.

Ingleby understood her, for the little room was very hot, and the sudden change of temperature from the frost of the Northwest had once or twice painfully affected him. Then as he turned again he heard a faint cry and saw Hetty clutch at the table. In another moment her chair went over with a crash, and he caught her as she fell. [Pg 309]

"No!" said Leger sharply. "Don't try to lift her. Lay her flat."

Ingleby stupidly did as he was bidden, and when Hetty lay at his feet, a pitiful, huddled object with blanched hands and face, beneath the snow-sprinkled coat, he felt an unnerving thrill of apprehension run through him as he looked down at her. Leger, however, kept his head.

"I don't think there's anything to be afraid of, but we must get these things loose about her neck," he said. "Undo that hook while I lift her head a little. It's pressed right into her throat."

Ingleby dropped on one knee, and with clumsy fingers loosed the blanket-cloak. Then he stopped a moment, and glanced at Leger, who had slipped one arm under Hetty. As she lay, her garments were drawn tight about her neck and shoulders.

"Go on!" said Leger sharply. "Get that collar undone. Be quick. The thing is choking her."

Ingleby loosed the collar, though the blood crept to his face as the bodice fell apart from Hetty's white neck. Leger was, however, not contented yet.

"Pull those hooks out, or cut the stuff," he said. "What—are—you stopping for?"

Ingleby got the hooks out, that is, one or two of them, and then he stopped again, while Leger saw the narrow black ribbon pressed into the white flesh upon which his eyes were fixed.

"I don't know what that is, but pull it out," he said. "If you can't get it loose, cut the thing."

Ingleby did as he was bidden, but there was no need to use the knife, for, as Leger moved his arm a little, the ribbon slackened, and a little trumpery locket which, as Ingleby knew, was not even of high-carat gold, slid out and lay on Hetty's breast. As he saw it all the blood in his body seemed to rush into his face. Leger, however, apparently did not notice that. [Pg 310]

"Get me the old jacket yonder. I want it under her shoulders," he said.

Ingleby got it and then stood leaning on the table, while Leger still knelt by his sister's side. His face was set and anxious, but it was evident that he was equal to the occasion, and had not let his apprehensions master him. It was, however, different with Ingleby, for now there was no longer



anything to do he felt that he was quivering.

"I'll run for the American who's looking after Tomlinson," he said.

Leger made a little sign. "No. Don't go. I may want you. She'll come round in a minute or two. This room must have been seventy, and outside it's forty below. Where has your nerve gone?"

Ingleby did not know. It had, however, certainly deserted him, and he felt for once scarcely capable of doing anything as he leaned upon the table. Then Leger, who slipped the locket back beneath the dress, looked up at him.

"She mightn't like to think we had seen it, and, of course, I didn't know what the thing was," he said, and then added, without moving his eyes from Ingleby, "I wonder where she got it?"

Ingleby said nothing, though he knew. He had bought her the little trinket in England long ago, but it seemed to him that Hetty might not like her brother to know it. Apart from that, he was scarcely sensible of anything clearly, for he was overwhelmed by a horrible confusion, and he looked down at Leger vacantly until a little shiver seemed to run through the girl.

"Now see if you can find the coffee," said his comrade sharply. "There is a little somewhere. We have nothing else to give her."

Ingleby waited another moment until he saw a faint tinge of colour creep into Hetty's face, and then he moved towards the box of stores, dazed from relief. He was busy for a moment or two, and when he turned again Hetty was lying in the low hide-chair with her brother's arm about her and the blanket-coat clutched closely to her neck. Leger flashed a swift glance at him and pointed towards the door.

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"I think it would be better if you got out of this," he said.

Ingleby also thought so and went forthwith. He felt that he could not meet Hetty's eyes just then, and he wanted to be alone and get rid of the almost insufferable confusion that afflicted him. He had never made love to Hetty. They had been comrades, almost as brother and sister to each other; but she had worn his locket hidden on her breast, which was, he surmised, considerably more than a sister would have done. Brotherly tenderness could also, he realized, scarcely account for the uneasiness he had felt and the relief that had replaced it; but it appeared quite out of the question—in fact, a thought to shrink from—that he could be in love with two women. It was as unpleasant to contemplate the probability of two women being in love with him. He could find no solution of the problem as he swung along beneath the solemn pines, and when he reached his black and silent shanty his brain was still in a whirl. One thing alone was clear to him, and that was that Hetty was alive and apparently recovering.

In the meanwhile Sewell found that Coulthurst, who, it seemed, had gone across to the outpost, had not yet come home. Grace told him so standing in the doorway, with the sweeping lines of her figure cut in black against the light, and though she could see the admiration in his face he could not see her curious little smile. Miss Coulthurst had decided that the struggle between the miners and their rulers had continued long enough, and it was time she made some attempt to put an end to it.

"Still, I really think you might come in," she said. "He will be back before very long."

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Sewell came in, and sat down opposite her across the hearth, and Grace glanced covertly at her little watch which hung upon the wall. Major Coulthurst was punctuality in itself, and she realized that she had about twenty minutes in which to do a good deal. Ingleby's devotion to her—and it was, perhaps, significant that she felt that was the best description of it—was evident; but there were points on which he was as unyielding and impervious to suggestion as a rock; while Sewell, with his more delicately balanced nature and wider grasp of comprehension, was, in her hands, at least, as malleable clay.

"How long is this very unpleasant state of affairs to continue, Mr. Sewell?" she asked. "You promised me we should have quietness this winter."

Sewell made a little deprecatory gesture. "Circumstances were too strong for me, but I have done what I could. Unpleasant as things are, they might be worse—considerably."

"It is a little difficult to see how they could be."

She had straightened herself a little, and sat looking at him with a certain quiet and half-scornful imperiousness which she knew became her, and yet was not altogether affected. Sewell, the democrat, understood exactly what she meant, and knew that it was not the loneliness or physical discomfort the blockade entailed that she was thinking of. It was the humbling of the pride of the ruling caste to which she belonged, and the bold denial of its prerogative of authority, that she felt the most. It was curious that he could understand this and sympathize with her as Ingleby, who only saw and did the obvious thing, could not have done.

"Well," he said, "I think this winter might have seen an undreamt-of overturning of constituted authority and the setting up of what you were once pleased to call a visionary Utopia. My comrades were almost ready to undertake it a little while ago. In fact, they only wanted somebody to show them how."

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Grace laughed a careless, silvery laugh, which would have been wasted on Ingleby. There was no

scorn in it now, only amusement, but Sewell nodded comprehendingly as he looked up at her.

"Your friends would naturally never believe it, but I almost think the inauguration of the Utopia would have been possible," he said. "At least, we could have cleared the ground for it."

"There are," said Grace suggestively, "men enough in this valley to make about one company."

"And between here and the Arctic sea enough to make such a small army-corps of marchers and marksmen as no country has ever enrolled beneath its banner. A very little spark in the right place will kindle a great blaze, you know; but I only want to show you that the thing might have happened. I scarcely think you need expect it now."

Grace looked at him with a curious intensity. "Then," she said, "you were afraid?"

"No," answered Sewell slowly. "I was not sure I was strong enough to control the forces I could set in motion, or that the result of unloosing them would be—Utopia. It seemed too big a risk. That was one reason—you can, perhaps, guess the other. After all, one has to admit that there are certain advantages attached to the direction of affairs by the more highly trained divisions of society."

"To which," said Grace, with a soft laugh, "you, of course, belong. What made—you—a democrat?"

Sewell made a little gesture. "Ah," he said, "that is a different story, and one I hardly care to go into, but perhaps the instincts one is born with can't be entirely rooted out. I am, at least, not the iconoclast I was when I came into the valley. That, however, really isn't very astonishing. I now have a good deal to lose."

He looked at her steadily with grave deference, but as like to like, and the girl recognized this and what his words implied. She was, however, playing a game then, and another swift glance at her watch showed her that she had little time in which to finish it. [Pg 314]

"And so, for fear you should lose it, you did not strike the spark? Well, I think that was wise. It would certainly have cost you one thing which you seem to value," she said.

This was vague, but it seemed to Sewell that there could be only one meaning to it. What he had feared to lose was not yet beyond his reach. He did not know that there were in the girl qualities which would have made her a successful Pompadour. Just then her craving for influence was irresistible; but she swept away from the topic with a swift smile expressive only of the indifference which of all the feelings that she could show he most shrank from.

"Still, to be practical, how could the blaze have spread?" she said. "It would have smouldered out in one snow-bound valley, and in the spring there would have been a very inglorious downfall to the strictly limited Utopia."

Sewell was nettled. There was, though it was seldom apparent, vanity in him, as both Hetty and Grace had guessed. Her blame he could have borne, but there was a sting in her smile. That she should think him a visionary schemer led away by his imagination, and without the faculty of execution, hurt him.

"The blaze would have leapt the snowy barriers," he said. "In fact, that was all arranged. Then it would have flashed from range to range across to the Yukon. One tolerably big bonfire has been waiting some time ready for lighting. I had only to send the message. I think you know why I didn't."

Grace saw his eyes, and understood the look in them. It was suggestive of passionate admiration. She also knew that a word would dispel it, perhaps forever, but she was lost in the game now, and what the man might think of her afterwards did not matter. [Pg 315]

"Then there is a road out—beside the one you made to the settlement? It must be to Westerhouse?" she said.

"Yes," answered Sewell simply. "I have been there."

Grace had just five minutes left, and a task before her which, under ordinary circumstances, she could scarcely have expected to accomplish; but she had to deal with a man who was, after all, of her own caste, a man with a deep vein of vanity in him, who was also in love with her. The latter fact had been apparent for some little while, and she let him see now that she recognized it, while during the next few minutes she used every attribute with which Nature had endowed her, as well as art of a very delicate description. In fact, Grace had never until then exactly realized her own capabilities.

Neither Sewell nor she could afterwards remember all that she said, and in fact she said very little, though that little was suggestive; there was no great need for a girl with her patrician beauty to waste words unduly when she had her eyes. In any case, Sewell was as wax beneath her hands, and when she had finished with him she knew that the mountain barrier between the Green River country and Westerhouse was not impassable, and how the one gorge ran that traversed it. If Sewell fancied she appreciated the passion which had led him to do so much for her, that was his affair. There was, however, a curious glow in his eyes when he rose as the major came in. [Pg 316]

## XXXI

### BROKEN IDOLS

Coulthurst sat with a big hand clenched on the table and a grim look in his face when Sewell left him, nor did he turn his head until Grace, who came softly out of the inner room, sat down close by him.

"You can't come to terms, father?" she said.

"We can't," and there was an ominous sparkle in Coulthurst's eyes. "I'm not sure that I wish to now. In fact, I've borne quite as much as I'm willing to put up with from both of them, and there's some reason, after all, in Esmond's plan. He'll give them another week, and then we'll cut our way in."

"It's not your affair," and Grace started visibly. "You are the Gold Commissioner."

Coulthurst smiled. "I am also entitled to the rank of major, and that, after all, means a good deal."

Grace mastered her apprehension, for she realized the major's point of view and indeed concurred with it.

"There is no other way than the one you are thinking of?" she asked.

"There are two," said Coulthurst drily. "We can sit still and starve, or march out and leave the valley in the possession of the miners while we try to break through the snow. Neither of them, however, commends itself to Esmond or me."

"Of course!" said Grace, with a little flush in her face, which, however, faded suddenly. "But suppose one or two of the troopers were killed while you forced the barricade?"

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"Then," said Coulthurst, "our friends Ingleby and Sewell would certainly be hung."

The major's terseness was more convincing than a great deal of argument, and Grace saw what she must do. The pride of station was strong in her, so strong, in fact, that she would never have come down to Ingleby's level. It was only because he had shown that he could force his way to hers—at least, as it was likely to be regarded in that country—that she had listened to him. When the grapple became imminent that pride alone would have driven her to take part with constituted authority instead of what she considered the democratic rabble. Then there was the peril to her father and to Ingleby. He must be saved—against himself, if it should be necessary.

"There are troopers at Westerhouse across the mountains?" she asked.

"I believe there is a strong detachment and a very capable officer."

Grace sat silent a moment before she spoke again. "Father," she said, "I want you to make a bargain with Reggie Esmond for me. On two conditions I am willing to tell you how he can bring those troopers in. You are to be the Gold Commissioner and peacemaker, but nothing else. As there will be two police officers, they will not want you as major. Then there must be an indemnity for Mr. Sewell and Ingleby."

Coulthurst gazed at her in blank astonishment. "You are quite serious? You mean what you say?"

"Of course! I can tell you—on those two conditions—how to bring the Westerhouse troopers in."

Coulthurst banged his hand down on the table. "Then I think there will be an end of the trouble—and the affair could be arranged to meet your views. But however did you find the way into the Westerhouse country?"

Grace looked at him steadily, though there was a little more colour than usual in her face. "That does not concern Reggie Esmond or you. Hadn't you better go over and see him?"

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It was getting late, but Coulthurst went straightway; and as the result of it Esmond and two troopers set out with a hand-sled early next morning for a certain peak that overhung a gorge through the barrier-range that cut off the Westerhouse country. He could not pass up the valley, but that was no great matter since the peak could be seen leagues away. It was a long journey, and he had intended going no farther than the gorge with the troopers, but he was not destined to get even there.

On the second day they came on a tree lying across their path with its branches interlocked among the shattered limbs of a neighbor so that the great trunk was sharply tilted, an obstacle which is frequently to be met with in that country. As the undergrowth all round was tall and thick, Esmond and one trooper swung themselves upon the log to see if they could find an opening, and made their way along it until they came to a branch where the trunk was high above the ground. The trooper crept round it, and then, as Esmond came after him, there was a crash and a shout, and the trooper who had stayed below saw his officer vanish amidst the rattling twigs. It was several minutes before they could reach him, and then he was lying, with a grey face, and with one leg changed in its usual contour and significantly limp. He looked up with a grin of pain when the first trooper bent over him.

"Gone at the thigh-bone. I felt it snap," he said. "Simpkin will get me home on the sled, but you'll go on, Grieve, and tell Captain Slavin how we are fixed. He will come in with every man available."

"I guess I'd better see you safe back, sir," said the trooper.

Esmond stared at him fiercely, though his face was awry with pain.

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"You'll go on," he said.

Then he winced, and, moving a little, fell over with his face in the snow, and, because the boughs he had fallen among were thick, it was two hours before the troopers got him out and on the sled. It was not altogether astonishing that they managed to compound the fracture during the operation. After that Grieve pushed on alone, and he was, as it happened, from the wild bush of Northern Ontario, which, though the trees and rocks are smaller, is a very similar country. In the meanwhile Simpkin headed back for the valley with the sled, and it was not his fault that three nights of bitter frost overtook him on the way. Indeed, if he had not been an exceptionally resolute man, inured to fatigue, it is very probable that Esmond would have frozen before they reached the outpost. On the morning after they got there a trooper appeared before the miners' barricade without his carbine and hailed the men on guard.

"Have you brought along the American who fixed up Jackson's foot when he smashed his toes, boys?" he asked.

The man who had nursed Tomlinson climbed up on the log. "I'm here," he said. "Is anybody wanting me?"

"I guess Captain Esmond does," said the trooper. "He fell off a log two or three days ago, and his leg-bone has come right through. The corporal can't get it back inside him. If you can see your way to do anything, we'd be much obliged to you."

"Did Captain Esmond send you?"

"No, sir," said the trooper, "he didn't. He's way too sick to worry about anything."

The American smiled at Ingleby, who stood beneath him. "It's very probable! A compound fracture of the femur is apt to prove rather serious at this temperature, especially if our friend the corporal has been trying to reduce it. We don't owe the man anything, but I guess I'd better go along."

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"Of course!" said Ingleby simply, and in another minute the doctor was on his way to the outpost with the trooper.

It was evening when he came back with news of Esmond's condition, which, it appeared, was serious, and Sewell forthwith set out for the Gold Commissioner's dwelling. He did not see Grace at all, and Coulthurst granted him only a two minutes' interview.

"It is quite out of the question that I should worry Captain Esmond now," he said. "Unless you are prepared to make an unconditional surrender, which I should strongly recommend, there is nothing I can do for you."

"That," replied Sewell, "is about the last thing we should think of doing."

He came back, and related what had passed to Leger and Ingleby. The latter looked thoughtful when he heard him.

"One could almost fancy by the change in his attitude that the major had something up his sleeve," he said.

"The game thing occurred to me, though I don't see what it could be. The accident to Esmond has probably upset him. Anyway, we have our own course to consider now."

"Since Esmond's not likely to worry us for awhile, we had better send all the men we can spare down for provisions, for one thing," said Leger.

It was decided on, and still Ingleby looked grave.

"That's all right as far as it goes, but it's only a side issue, after all," he said. "This state of things can't continue indefinitely, and Tomlinson doesn't seem to be getting much better, or we could have simplified the affair by getting him out of the valley. The winter's wearing through, and if nothing is done before the thaw comes we'll be in the troopers' hands. In the meanwhile there's an unpleasant probability of the freighter or somebody else finding his way in now we've broken out a trail. Have you thought about asking the boys at Westerhouse to join us?"

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"No," said Sewell, with a momentary trace of embarrassment. "There are a good many reasons why it wouldn't be convenient."

"I should like to hear one or two of them," said Leger bluntly.

Sewell managed to think of several reasons, but none of them appeared altogether satisfactory when his comrades considered them. It was, however, evident that he was determined on not sending to Westerhouse, and they had to be content, though Leger looked very grave when the conference broke up.

"One could almost have fancied that Sewell had lost his nerve, and if I could send Hetty out of the valley it would be a big weight off my mind," he said.

The same thought had occurred to Ingleby, and it troubled him again that night as he kept his watch behind the tree, for he could not altogether understand the tense anxiety he felt about Hetty. She had scarcely been out of his thoughts since the night she fainted at the bakery, which, considering that he was in love with Grace Coulthurst, appeared an almost unnatural thing. There was no doubt that he was in love with the commissioner's daughter, he assured himself. All his hopes and projects for the future were built upon the fact; but he was commencing to realize vaguely that she appealed, for the most part, to his intellect, while he felt for Hetty a curious, unreasoning tenderness which was quite apart from admiration of her or her qualities. He puzzled over it that night, sitting still while the men slept about him under the stars, and then gave it up as beyond solution when one of them relieved him.

In the meanwhile Trooper Grieve had found the gorge through the barrier-range, and was pushing on through dim fir forests and over snowy hillsides for Westerhouse. Esmond lay half-insensible in the outpost, for fever and dangerous inflammation had supervened; but nobody told the American where the lieutenant was going when he fell from the tree or anything about Trooper Grieve. There was thus no apparent change in the state of affairs until one night, when every man who could be spared was away at the settlement, a stranger worn with travel was brought in by two miners. Sewell was standing with the others about the fire behind the tree, and Ingleby saw the colour sink from his face when it was told them that the stranger was from Westerhouse.

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"You have got to do something right away," said the visitor. "Slavin's coming in with every trooper he can raise. He went round the way the trooper came, and I pushed on by the trail Sewell told us of to get in ahead of him. A few of the boys are coming along behind me."

There was a murmur of astonishment and consternation, and then a somewhat impressive silence, which Leger broke.

"You mean that one of the Green River troopers reached Westerhouse?" he said.

"That's just what I do mean. Your man sent him."

Leger looked hard at Sewell, who stood back a little in the shadow now.

"It isn't quite clear how he found the way, but, after all, we needn't worry about that in the meanwhile," he said. "You are still our acknowledged leader, Mr. Sewell. Hadn't you better ask him a question or two? We want to understand the thing."

Sewell stood still for almost a minute, and the men, who were tensely impatient, wondered at it and the hardness of Leger's voice. Then he sat down on a branch where the wood-smoke drifted between them and him.

"Try to tell us as clearly as you can what happened," he said.

"Well," said the stranger, "one of the Green River troopers came in badly played out, and when he asked us where the outpost was we took him along. After what you'd told us we guessed it meant trouble for you. It was dark then, and one of us crawled round to the little back window; but a trooper came round the house, and we lit out kind of quietly for the bush. Then a trooper started out on the trail as hard as he could hit it, and 'bout half an hour later Slavin came out in front of the outpost. 'I'm going away by and by—for my health—but I've sent to Clatterton Creek for two or three more policemen, and if you start any blame circus while I'm away, I'll see the boys who made it are sorry for themselves,' he said."

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"The boys took it quietly?" asked Ingleby.

"Yes," said the stranger. "That's what they did. You see, the folks in Victoria had moved on Eshelby, and the new man was doing what he could for us within reason. Anyway, we hadn't heard from you, and the boys weren't going to make trouble for nothing when Slavin was there."

Again Leger glanced at Sewell, who said nothing, and then made a little sign to the speaker. "Nobody would expect it of them," he said. "Get on."

"Well," said the stranger, "when Slavin and his troopers lit out quietly 'bout an hour after, we got our packs made and came on after them. That is, a few of us who hadn't struck any dirt that was worth the washing. We were willing to take a hand in if we were wanted, because we heard of Hall Sewell before he came to Westerhouse. If he was in a tight place, we figured we'd stand behind him. He'd often done what he could for men like us."

Sewell made no sign, but leaned back, a shadowy figure, against the tree, and there was something in his silence that set Ingleby's nerves on edge.

"We kept 'most a league behind Slavin, and we had to get a move on at that," continued the speaker. "He wasn't wasting time. Then when we'd got through the range he broke off to the north, and we figured that was the way the trooper came. We let him go, and came right on by the trail Sewell told us of."

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"How many are there of you?" asked Leger.

"Eight. They're 'most as cleaned out of grub and money as I am. We'd have sent you a hundred if

you'd wanted them soon after Sewell came."

Ingleby laughed harshly, a jarring, hopeless laugh, and there was a murmur from the men.

"Our hand's played out. The contract was too big for us," said one of them. "What d'you figure on doing—now—Mr. Sewell?"

Sewell rose slowly, as though it cost him an effort, and, face to face with them, stood where the firelight fell upon him. The bronze had faded from his cheeks, and his glance was vacillating.

"Nothing in the meanwhile, boys," he said. "In fact, there is nothing we can do but try to extort some trifling concession from Slavin before we surrender to-morrow."

He stopped a moment, and looked at them with steady eyes. "If we had Westerhouse behind us I would have asked you to make a fight for it. It would at least have been an easy way out of the tangle for one of us—but it would only mean useless bloodshed as it is. I can't get you into further trouble, boys."

His voice had been growing hoarser, and there was an uncomfortable silence when he stopped. This was not what the men had expected, and everybody seemed to feel that there was something wrong. Then Ingleby looked at Leger with a little bitter smile.

"Well," he said, "we have made our protest, and, as any one else would have foreseen, have found it useless. Established order is too strong for us. I never felt of quite so little account as I do to-night."

Leger nodded sympathetically. "That," he said, "isn't, after all, of any particular consequence—and I scarcely think it was quite our fault. Why didn't Sewell send over to Westerhouse?"

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"I don't know," said Ingleby. "It doesn't matter now."

"Have you asked yourself how the trooper found his way across the range?"

Ingleby turned round on him suddenly. "What do you mean by that?"

"If you can't find an answer, I think you should ask Sewell. It seems to me you are entitled to know."

Ingleby met his eyes for a moment, and then the blood rushed to his face as he rose. He said nothing, but he saw Sewell leave the fire, and, turning abruptly, he moved on behind him up the little trail to the bakery, though he made no effort to overtake him. It was very dark beneath the pines, and he felt that he must see the man he had believed in. It seemed a very long while before he reached the bakery and, going in quietly, saw Hetty regarding Sewell with a flash of scornful anger in her eyes.

"Oh," she said, "it's perfectly plain to me! The girl tricked you. I knew she would."

Then she started as she saw Ingleby in the doorway, though the flush in her cheeks grew deeper and the little vindictive glow in her eyes plainer still.

"You heard me, Walter? Well, he knows she did. Look at him," she said.

"If you will go away for about five minutes, Hetty, I shall be much obliged to you," said Ingleby quietly. "Mr. Sewell has something to say to me."

Hetty swung round and swept out of the room, and, when the door closed behind her, Sewell sat down at the table, and Ingleby stood in front of him. His face was grim, and his lips were tightly set.

"Well?" he said at length.

Sewell made a little gesture. "I can't admit that Hetty was quite correct in one respect," he said. "It was my mad impulsiveness misled me."

"I want to be quite clear," said Ingleby in a low, even voice. "You told Miss Coulthurst the way to the Westerhouse Gully?"

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"I did. If I were not sure that you knew it already, I would never have admitted it to you."

A little grey patch showed in Ingleby's cheek, and the pain in his face was unmistakable, while Sewell clenched one hand on the table as he looked at him.

"Walter," he said, "what is Miss Coulthurst to you?"

"I don't know," said Ingleby, with a very bitter laugh. "I am not sure that she is anything whatever to me. I, however, asked her to marry me not so very long ago, and she led me to believe that when circumstances were more propitious she might do so."

Sewell seemed to gasp, and his hand closed more tightly on the table; but he said nothing, and Ingleby spoke again.

"I would," he said, "have believed in you, in spite of everything—but there is nothing to be gained by reproaching you. Hetty was right, as usual, and you never belonged to us, you know. There is, however, something to be done, since it seems to me that it would be better to keep out of the affair the girl who was apparently willing to look with favour on both of us. You must be out of

the valley before daylight to-morrow."

Sewell stood up slowly and took a carefully folded packet from his pocket. "I will be gone in half an hour," he said. "Take care of these. They are the leaves that were under the bandage on Probyn's body, and may go a little way towards clearing Tomlinson. I will not offer to shake hands with you, Walter; but I would like you to believe that I was sincere enough when I came into the valley. If it is any consolation to you, my punishment will be heavy. My name will be a byword after what I have done, and the work I once believed in must be left to clean-handed men."

Ingleby took the packet. "I could have forgiven you for stealing Miss Coulthurst's favour from me—since I scarcely think it was ever mine—but, just now, at least, I can't forgive the rest," he said.

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Sewell made no answer, and when he went out Ingleby sat down limply at the table and, with his chin in his hand, gazed at the fire. For the time even his physical strength seemed to have gone out of him. All his faith had been given one man and one woman, and now it was clear that both had betrayed him, and through him the miners who had placed their confidence in him. He did not know how long he sat there, but he started suddenly as he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder and saw Hetty standing beside him.

"I am so sorry, Walter. Is it very hard?" she said.

Ingleby took her hand and held it.

"I believe you are sorry," he said. "After all, old friends are best. I have been a colossal idiot, Hetty, and it does hurt a little to have the recognition of a fact of that kind suddenly forced on one. Still, I must go back to the boys now. There are several little points that must be decided before to-morrow."

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## XXXII

### HIS APPOINTED STATION

A faint light was creeping across the snow when Ingleby rose from his bed of cedar twigs, behind the log, and stood up shivering. It was very cold, and most of his companions were still sleeping, though there were more of them than there had been the night before. During the darkness a handful of strangers had come limping in, and one of them had told him a somewhat astonishing story about Trooper Probyn. He could grasp the significance of it, but that was all, for though the rapid was partly ice-bound now, one white sluice of water still frothed about the tree, and the sound it made seemed to keep his thoughts from crystallizing. He was, however, glad of the distraction.

A man who flung down an armful of fuel stopped and shook two or three of his comrades, who got up and stretched themselves before they set about preparing their morning meal. The pines had grown sharper in outline by the time it was finished, and the snow beneath them had changed in hue and was now a flat, lifeless white; and, though most of the men had risen, the stillness was more impressive than ever. Ingleby had grown accustomed to the roar of the river and could have heard the slightest sound through its pulsations; but there was nothing for him to hear beyond the sharp crackle of the fire and the restless movements of one or two of his companions. The rest were expectantly watching the man upon the log; but he stood motionless, with his face turned steadfastly down the valley. Ingleby, however, felt the tension less than he might have done under different circumstances. The game was up, and he had no doubt that the law he had defied would crush him for his contumacy; but that, after all, seemed of no great moment then. His faith was shattered, his hopes were gone, and it only remained for him to exculpate his comrades as far as he could and face his downfall befittingly. He took out his pipe and lighted it, but the tobacco seemed tasteless, and he let it go out again, and sat listening until the man upon the log raised a warning hand, and a faint tramp of feet came out of the silence. There was a rhythm in it, and he knew that Slavin had come in with the troopers from Westerhouse. The men also heard it, and Ingleby stood up as they glanced at him.

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"I'm afraid you have gained very little by listening to Sewell or me, boys, but it might save confusion if you still leave me to do what I can for you," he said. "The police will be here in two or three minutes, and somebody must speak to them."

There was a little murmur from the men, which suggested sympathy with and confidence in him. Then one of them, who was an American, waved his hand.

"Mr. Ingleby will go right ahead, and he'll find us behind him whatever he does," he said. "It isn't his fault this thing didn't quite pan out as we had figured. He's here just where he's wanted, to see it out with us, and, anyway, it's a big, cold bluff he and the rest of us—a handful of placer miners of no account—have put up on the British Empire. We're beat, but the man who wants anything has got to show he means to have it, and they'll listen to the others because we shut our fist."

Again there was a murmur, harsh but expressive, and the man upon the log looked down.

"They're taking front among the firs," he said. "There's a stranger, who must be Slavin, with them. I guess they'll be wanting you."

He sprang down, and Ingleby climbed up on the log. There was a suggestive jingle and clatter among the trees, where dusty shapes flitted in the shadows; but two men were moving forward across the open strip of snow where the light was clearer, and Ingleby recognized one of them as Coulthurst. The other was a stranger who wore a somewhat ragged fur-coat over his uniform. They stopped near the barricade, and Coulthurst looked at Ingleby. The latter stood erect and very still, with the smoke of the fire rising in a pale blue column behind him.

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"I presume you are there to speak for your comrades?" said the major.

"Your surmise is quite correct," said Ingleby.

Coulthurst turned towards his companion. "This is Captain Slavin, in charge of the police detachment at Westerhouse. He has come in with enough of his men to make any attempt to oppose him likely to result in disaster to yourselves. Captain Esmond being quite incapable of duty, this affair is in his hands."

Ingleby raised his shapeless hat, and wondered if this had been intended as a hint that he had no longer Esmond's rancour to fear; but the police officer, who looked at him sharply, made no sign of noticing the salute.

"Well," he said, "what does Captain Slavin want?"

"In the first place, the unconditional surrender of Sewell, Leger, and yourself."

"That can be counted on, so far as Leger and I are concerned. Sewell is no longer in the valley. What comes next?"

"The dispersing of the men you have with you."

"Which implies the arrest of Tomlinson?" asked Ingleby.

"It does, naturally."

"Well," said Ingleby, "we have heard your demands, and now we would like to know what you have to offer."

"That," said Coulthurst, "is simply answered. Nothing whatever. I may, however, say that, as usual in an affair of the kind, proceedings will only be taken against the recognized leaders—yourself, Sewell, and Leger—and that Captain Slavin intends to hold an inquiry on the spot into the death of Trooper Probyn."

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Slavin, at whom he glanced, made a little gesture of concurrence.

"Major Coulthurst is correct," he said. "You have, however, to understand that the inquiry is in no way a concession. I have, as it happens, some information bearing on the case which has not come into Captain Esmond's possession. That is all. Now, what are you going to do?"

Ingleby spent little time in consideration. The attitude of the two officers was just what he had expected it would be. They could make no concession; but Coulthurst had nevertheless conveyed the impression that they would by no means proceed to extremities.

"In ten minutes Leger and I will give ourselves up, and you will not find a man behind the tree," he said. "That is, on condition that you wait with your men among the firs yonder until the time is up."

Slavin made a sign of comprehension, and when he moved back with Coulthurst, Ingleby turned to the miners.

"It's all fixed now, boys," he said. "Leger and I decided last night to give ourselves up. You couldn't have prevented us, and all we wanted for Tomlinson was a straight inquiry on the spot. Now, I want you to slip away quietly, and hang your rifles up where you keep them. You have to remember that the police don't know who held up the outpost, and have nothing definite against anybody but myself and Leger."

The men went reluctantly, and when the ten minutes had expired Ingleby and Leger climbed down from the log. Two troopers accompanied them to the outpost, where, when Ingleby had spoken a few words to Slavin, they were left to their reflections for several hours. Then there was a tramp of feet outside, and a trooper led them into the adjoining room where Coulthurst and Slavin sat. The door was open, and the corporal and a cluster of miners stood just outside. A carbine lay upon the table in front of Slavin, who turned to the miners as Ingleby came in.

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"I want you to understand that this is not a trial, boys," he said. "It's an inquiry into the death of Trooper Probyn, and I expect the truth from you. I have seen Prospector Tomlinson, and I'll now ask the corporal to give us his account of what happened the night Probyn disappeared."

There was a little movement among the miners, and one or two of them glanced significantly at Ingleby. Slavin, it seemed, had already gained their confidence, and they felt that if Tomlinson was sent down for trial it would be because he was guilty. Then the corporal told his story briefly,



and admitted that Ingleby had differed from him concerning the locality in which one of the shots had apparently been fired. After that several of the miners narrated how they had assisted to draw Probyn from the river, and the discovery of the bullet-wound in him.

Slavin, who listened to them quietly, nodded and signed to Ingleby. "You didn't agree with the corporal that the shots were fired in the same place?"

"No, sir," said Ingleby. "One of them, I feel certain, came from quite an opposite direction. The corporal was busy at the time, or he would have recognized it."

"The men who have just spoken were correct in their account of what Sewell did when Trooper Probyn had been taken out of the water?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did Sewell remove anything from the body?"

"He did," and Ingleby took a little packet from his pocket and opened it. "These leaves. They had evidently been placed upon the wound. He said Probyn could not have placed them there himself, and they were what the Indians often used to stanch a flow of blood."

Slavin glanced at the desiccated fragments, and turned to the miners. "Have any of you heard of the Indians using a plant for that purpose?"

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"I guess I have," said one. "One of them tried to fix up a partner of mine, who'd cut himself chopping, with the thing. It didn't seem to work on a white man."

Slavin nodded. "I believe there is such a plant," he said. "Now, so far as we have gone, circumstances seem to point to Probyn having been shot by a man who afterwards tried to save him. He used a plant that only the Indians seem to believe in. Come right in, Corporal. Do you recognize this carbine?"

A trace of astonishment crept into the corporal's face as he took up the weapon.

"Yes, sir," he said. "It's Probyn's. Am I quite sure? I know the number, and that dint under the barrel. He fell and struck it on a rock one day when I was with him."

"Well," said Slavin, who took out a little book, "that's all I want from you. Now, boys, this inquiry is in my hands; but I don't know of any reason I shouldn't read you a little statement that was made on oath to me by a prospector who brought this carbine into Westerhouse Gully.

"'I was working on a bench-claim back under the range when an Indian came along,' he said. 'He had a carbine with him. Offered to sell it me for tea and flour, as he was lighting out of the country. This is just what he told me. He was hired to take two troopers from Green River across the range, and was waiting for them just after sundown. He'd heard a black bear moving round—a black bear doesn't worry much about the noise he makes—and when something came smashing through a thicket he loosed off at it. It was getting kind of dark, and when he clawed into the thicket he found he'd got the trooper, who, as the trail was steep there, had left his horse. Did what he could to save him, but the man died, and the Indian got scared that the folks he pitched the tale to wouldn't believe him. That was why he dragged the trooper under a big rock by the river and put some stones and branches on him. Somehow the horse got away from him, though he fired at it. He didn't want that horse walking round making trouble. I gave him the flour and tea, and kept the trooper's carbine.'"

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Slavin closed the book, and looked at the men. "Now," he said, "who would you say killed that trooper?"

"The Indian, sure!" said somebody, and there was a murmur of concurrence from the rest.

"Well," said Slavin drily, "I believe he did. Anyway, no proceedings will be taken against anybody in this valley. Tell the boys to light out, Corporal."

The miners went away contented. They understood, and appreciated, men of Slavin's kind. Then the latter turned, and looked reflectively at Leger and Ingleby.

"It's quite a good thing you had sense enough to keep the boys off their rifles," he said. "If there had been any shooting, you would have found yourselves unpleasantly fixed."

His face was quietly grave, but there was the faintest suggestion of a twinkle in Coulthurst's eyes.

"I, at least, saw no weapons among them," he said.

"Well," said Slavin, "that simplifies the thing. Still, you see, you can't go holding up police outposts and heaving troopers about with impunity. Where's the man who set you up to it?"

"I almost think it was the drift of circumstances rather than Mr. Sewell that was to blame," said Leger. "Anyway, I expect he is a considerable distance from the valley by this time. In fact, it's scarcely likely that you could overtake him, and there's nothing to show which trail he has taken."

It occurred to Ingleby that it was somewhat astonishing that such a capable officer as Slavin appeared to be had allowed so much time to pass before he asked the question. That, however,

was Slavin's business.

"Well," said the latter, "if I had a little more to go upon, I might make quite a serious thing out of this. As it is, all I'm very sure about is that you and your partner conspired to prevent the troopers getting at Tomlinson; but as Tomlinson didn't kill Probyn, that doesn't count for so much, after all. Still, we have no use for you up here just now, and you have two days in which to clear out of the valley. Tomlinson will get his ticket, too, when he's able to take the trail."

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"That would mean the sequestration of our claims," said Ingleby.

"Exactly. You're not compelled to go. Stay right here if you'd sooner, and take your chances of any charge I may be able to work up against you."

Ingleby looked at Leger, who made a little sign.

"I think we'd better go," he said. "Still, while I have no regret for anything I have done, I should like to thank Major Coulthurst for what is, from his point of view, a clemency we scarcely expected."

Slavin smiled somewhat drily. "You don't want to make any mistake. The major has done what he considers most advisable—just that, and nothing else. Now, before you light out take a hint from me. Canada's quite a big country, but the law of the Empire it belongs to is even a bigger thing. You have come off pretty well this time—but don't try it again."

Ingleby made Coulthurst a little grave inclination. "In spite of Captain Slavin's explanation, I feel we owe you a good deal, sir," he said. "Still, I think he's right in one respect. We attempted too big a thing. Henceforward we'll go to work, little by little, in a different way. We have taken the wrong one, but the hope that led us into it is just as strong as ever."

Coulthurst smiled a little.

"Long before it's realized you and I will be dead. If I ever come across you again under different circumstances it will be a pleasure," he said.

Ingleby turned and went out, taking Leger with him, but he left the latter among the pines and swung into the trail that led past the Gold Commissioner's dwelling. He did not know whether he wished to see Grace or not, but, as it happened, she came out on the veranda as he passed and stopped him with a little sign.

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"You are going away, Walter?" she asked.

"Yes," said Ingleby. "In all probability I shall never come back."

The girl's cheeks were flushed, and there was a curious strained look in her eyes.

"You seem," she said, "quite willing to go."

Ingleby looked at her gravely. "It hurts me less than I expected it would have done. Still, even if I had been permitted, why should I wish to stay? I am poor again, and it is very likely shall always be so. There are barriers between you and me which can never be got over."

"You didn't believe that once."

"No," said Ingleby. "Still, I am wiser now, and what I may have to suffer is no more than my desert for believing that any man is warranted in trying to thrust himself above the station he was meant to occupy. That, however, isn't, after all, very much to the purpose."

"I suppose," and there was a tremor in the girl's voice, "you blame me for all that has happened?"

Ingleby's eyes were still fixed upon her with disconcerting steadiness. "It is not my part to reproach you, but I know what you did. You have wrecked the life of my best friend, and turned into a traitor a man whose work and words brought hope to thousands. Sewell will never lift his head again."

He spoke slowly, and a trifle hoarsely, but there was a hardness and resolution in his voice which struck a chill through the girl.

"What did he tell you, Walter?" she said.

"Very little. In fact, only that he had told you the way to Westerhouse; but that was quite enough. I do not know whether you told him that you loved him or not; but it is quite plain to me that you made him think so. Men of his kind do not betray those who believe in them without a reason."

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"Walter," said the girl, very softly, "I wonder if—you—ever really loved me?"

Ingleby winced, but there was still no wavering in his eyes. "I do not know," he said. "You are the most beautiful woman I ever met, and I believed I did. Most likely your beauty and all that you stood for dazzled me, and I lost my head. It may have been that—I do not know—for if I had really loved you I should, perhaps, have forgiven you everything."

"And that is too much for you?"

Ingleby stood silent a moment. "If you had loved me, you would never have betrayed me. I am afraid it is."

Grace looked at him steadily, with the colour in her cheeks, and her voice was a little tremulous.

"Perhaps I wouldn't—like you, I do not know." Then she held out her hand. "Don't think too hardly of me. Good-bye, Walter."

Ingleby touched her fingers, for he dared not trust himself further, and swinging his shapeless hat off abruptly turned away, while Grace stood very still until the shadows of the pines closed about him. That was the last she ever saw of him.

It was half an hour later when he walked quietly into the bakery, and came upon Hetty getting her few belongings together.

"I have come back—to the people and the place I belong to. You will not turn me out?" he said.

Hetty's eyes shone softly. "We have been waiting for you, Walter—we knew you would come. Still, I'm not sure you can ever get quite back to where you were before."

Ingleby saw her meaning, for he remembered the locket; and it seemed that Hetty knew what he was thinking, for a little colour crept into her face. [Pg 338]

"Well," he said, "I will be patient, and try very hard."

Then he heard footsteps, and, going out, met Leger at the door. The latter turned and came down the trail with him.

"We are taking the trail to-morrow. Are you coming with us?" he said.

"Of course!" said Ingleby, looking at him in blank astonishment.

"In that case there is something to be said—and it is difficult, but Hetty is my sister, after all. Do you know who gave her that locket?"

"I did," said Ingleby, "a long while ago, but I never fancied that she had kept it. Tom, I do not know what your sister thinks of me, but she can't think more hardly of me than I do. Still, there may be one or two other colossal idiots of my description."

"It's quite likely," said Leger drily. "That, however, isn't very much to the point, is it?"

Ingleby stood silent a moment. "Tom," he said, "as you found out, it's difficult—and I don't understand the thing myself. Perhaps Miss Coulthurst dazzled me, and I've been off my balance ever since I came into this valley, but I know now that if I ever marry anybody it will be Hetty. That's a very indifferent compliment to your sister. She will probably be a very long while forgiving me, but I may, perhaps, at last persuade her to believe in me again. Now, are you going to turn me away?"

"No," said Leger. "After that I fancy we can face together what comes."

It was early next morning when they left the valley with an escort of twenty miners to help them across the divide, and Hetty stood by Ingleby's side when they turned for a moment to look back from among the climbing pines. Then, as they turned again, Ingleby met the girl's clear eyes. [Pg 339]

"It may be a long while, Hetty, but I think I shall get quite back, after all," he said. "It was in ever wanting to go away that I was horribly wrong."

## THE END

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Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter VII, "he realized his responsibility" was changed to "he realized his responsibility".

In Chapter XIV, a missing quotation mark was added after "you must come no farther."

In Chapter XVI, "the botttom of everything" was changed to "the bottom of everything".

In Chapter XVII, "the corporal; who dropped his bridle" was changed to "the corporal, who dropped his bridle".

In Chapter XXXII, a quotation mark was deleted after "came down the trail with him."

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