Bindloss Harold

A Damaged Reputation

Harold Bindloss

A Damaged Reputation

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23164179
A Damaged Reputation:

Содержание

Bindloss Harold
A Damaged Reputation

I.
BROOKE PAUSES TO REFLECT

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

There are few more beautiful valleys than that one among all the ranges of British Columbia, but its wild grandeur made little impression upon Brooke that night. He felt that a crisis in his affairs was at hand, and he must face it boldly or go under once for all, for it was borne in upon him that he had already drifted perilously far. His face, however, grew a trifle grim, and his fingers closed irresolutely on the neck of the bottle, for drifting

was easy in that country, and pleasant, so long as one did not remember.

Even when the great peaks were rolled in tempest cloud, the snow fell but lightly among the Quatomac pines. Bright sunlight shone on them for weeks together, and it was but seldom a cold blast whipped the still, blue lake where the shadows of the cedars that distilled ambrosial essences lay asleep. There were deer and blue grouse in the woods, salmon in the river, and big trout in the lake; and the deleterious whisky purveyed at the nearest settlement was not inordinately dear. It had, however, dawned on Brooke by degrees that there were many things he could not find at Quatomac which men of his upbringing hold necessary.

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

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

Brooke's bronzed face flushed a trifle as he saw his comrade's grin, for it was what had passed between him and Tom Gordon's Bella at the settlement that afternoon which had thrust before

him the question what his life was to be. He had also not surmised that Jimmy or anybody else beyond themselves had been present at that meeting among the pines. Bella was certainly pretty and wholly untaught, while, though he had made no attempts to gain her favor they had not been necessary, since the maid had with disconcerting frankness conferred it upon him. She had, in fact, made it evident that she considered him her property, and Brooke wondered uneasily how far he had tacitly accepted the position. His irresponsive coolness had proved no deterrent; he could neither be brutal, nor continually run away; and there were times when he had almost resigned himself to the prospect of spending the rest of his life with her, though he fancied he realized what the result of that would be. The woman had the waywardness and wildness of the creatures of the forest, and almost as little sensibility, while he was unpleasantly conscious that he was already sinking fast to her level. With a soulless mate, swayed by primitive instincts and passions, and a little further indulgence in bad whisky, it was evident that he might very well sink a good deal further, and Brooke had once had his ideals and aspirations.

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

Jimmy shook out his corn-cob pipe, and apparently ruminated. "Well, I'd 'most have expected it," he said. "The question is, where you're going to, and what you're going to do? You don't get your grub for nothing everywhere, and living's cheap here. It only costs the cartridges, and the deerhides pay the

tea and flour. Besides, you put a pile of dollars into this place, didn't you?"

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

Jimmy nodded with a tranquil concurrence which his comrade might not have been pleased with at another time.

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

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

His aspirations had vanished, and he dwelt, almost, if not quite, content in a state of apathetic resignation which is not wholesome for the educated Englishman.

It was Jimmy who broke the silence.

"What was it you done back there in England? I never asked you before," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

Jimmy nodded. "There are women made that way," he said reflectively. "Still, you wouldn't have to worry 'bout Bella. Once you showed her who was to do the bossing – with a nice handy strap – she'd stick to you good and tight, and 'most scratch the

eyes out of any one who said a word against her husband. Still, I figure she's not quite the kind of woman you would have married in the old country."

That was very evident, and Brooke sat silent while the memories of his life in the land he had left crowded upon him. He also recoiled from the brutality of the one his comrade had pictured him leading with the maid of the bush, though it had seemed less appalling when she stood before him, vigorous and comely, a few hours ago. He had, however, made no advances to her. On that point, at least, his mind was clear, and now he realized clearly what the result of such a match must be. Yet he knew his own loneliness and the maid's pertinacity, and once more it was borne in upon him that to stay where he was would mean disaster. Rising abruptly he flung the bottle out into the night, and then, while Jimmy stared at him with astonishment and indignation, laughed curiously as he heard it crash against a stone.

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

"Well," said Jimmy, resignedly, "I guess I can bring the whisky up inside of me, and you'd get hurt considerable if you tried slinging me into the river. The trouble is, however, I'd be seeing panthers all the way up whenever I brought along a little extra, and I'm most scared of panthers when they aren't there."

Brooke laughed again, for, as he had discovered, men take life

lightly in that country, but just then the soft beat of horse hoofs rose from across the river, and a cry came out of the darkness.

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

They went, rather more than waist-deep in the snow-water which swirled frothing about them, for the ford was perilous, with a big black pool close below; and found a mounted party waiting them on the other side. There was an elderly man who sat very straight in his saddle with his hand on his hip, and Brooke, at least, recognized the bearing of one who had commanded cavalry in the Old Country. There was also a younger man, dismounted and smoking a cigarette, two girls on Cayuse ponies, and an Indian, whose appearance suggested inebriation, holding the bridles of the baggage mules. The men were certainly not ranchers or timber-right prospectors, but now and then of late a fishing party had passed that way into the wilderness.

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

Jimmy grinned, for it was evident that the speaker was an insular Englishman, and quite unacquainted with the customs of that country, wherein no rancher accepts payment for a night's hospitality. Brooke had, however, a certain sense of humor, and

touched his big shapeless hat, which is also never done in Western Canada.

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

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

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

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

to. Then she laughed, and it seemed to him that her voice was in keeping with her appearance, for it reached him through the clamor of the river, soft and musical.

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

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

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

The girl smiled. "One would fancy that the water was a trifle too cold for even a pony of that kind to be anxious to stay in it."

They went on with a plunge and a flounder, and twice Brooke came near being swept off his feet, for the pony seemed bent on taking the shortest way to the other bank, which was, as it happened, not quite the safest one. Still, they came through the river, and Brooke dragged the Cayuse up the bank in time to see the rest disappear into the shanty. Then he boldly held up his hand, and felt a curious little thrill run through him as he swung his companion down.

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

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

"This is almost too much, and I don't know what has come

over me. There was a time when I would have been quite equal to the occasion," he said.

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

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

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

When he entered the shanty Jimmy had supper ready, but he realized, as he had never done since he raised its log walls, the comfortless squalor of the room. The red dust had blown into it, it was littered with discarded clothing, lines and traps, and broken boots, while two candles, which flickered in the draughts, stuck in whisky bottles, furnished uncertain illumination. He had made the unsteady table, and Jimmy had made the chairs, but the result was no great credit to either of them, while nobody who was not very hungry would have considered the meal his comrade laid out inviting. Still, his guests had evidently no fault to find with

it, and during it the girl whose pony he had led once or twice glanced covertly at him.

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

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

There was a trace of a smile in the face of the grey-haired man, but the girl with the brown eyes looked up sharply, and once more Brooke felt his face grow a trifle hot. Men do not as a rule fling whisky bottles into rivers without a cogent reason,

especially in Canada, where liquor is scarce. He was, however, both astonished and annoyed at himself that he should attach the slightest value to this stranger's good opinion.

Then, when the others seconded Jimmy's suggestion, he took a dingy fiddle from its case, and, although there is little a rancher of that country will not do for the pleasure of a chance guest, wondered why he had complied so readily. He played French-Canadian dances, as the inhabitants play them, and though only some of them may be classed as music, became sensible that there was a curious silence of attention.

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

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

The military gentleman stared at him, and even the girl with the brown eyes, who was very reposeful, appeared surprised at this flight of fancy, which nobody would, from his appearance, have expected of Jimmy.

"The Chopping? Oh, yes, of course I understand," she said. "This is the place of all places for it. We have never heard it in such surroundings."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I am far from satisfied with our Siwash guide," he said. "In fact, I am by no means sure that he knows the country, and as

we propose making for the big lake and camping by it, I should prefer to send him back if you could recommend us anybody who would take us there."

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

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

The other man professed himself pleased, and before Brooke retired to his couch in the stable the matter was arranged. He did not, however, fall asleep for several hours, which was a distinctly unusual thing with him, and then the face of the brown-eyed girl followed him into his dreams. Its reposefulness had impressed him the more because of the hint of strength and pride behind it, and again he saw her sitting fearlessly on the plunging horse in the midst of the river with the moon round and full behind her.

II.
BROOKE TAKES THE TRAIL

The sun had not cleared the dark firs upon the steep hillside, though the snow on the peaks across the valley glowed with saffron light, when Brooke came upon the girl with the brown eyes sitting on a cedar trunk beside the river, and she looked up with a smile when he stopped beside her. There was nobody else about, for the rest of the party had apparently not risen yet, and Jimmy had set out to catch a trout for breakfast. Save for the song of the river all the pine-shrouded hollow was very still.

"I was wondering if I might ask what you thought of this country?" said Brooke. "It is, of course, the usual question."

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

Brooke made a little deprecatory gesture. "It's a mistake I've been led into before, and I'm not sure you would consider it a compliment if I told you that I scarcely supposed you belonged to Canada. It also reminds me of a friend of mine who had spent a few months in Spain, and took some pains to teach a man, who, though he was not aware of it, had lived fifteen years in Cuba, Castilian. Still, perhaps you will tell me what you thought

of England."

The girl did not invite him, but she drew her skirt a trifle aside, and Brooke sat down upon the log beside her. She looked even daintier, and appealed to his fancy more, in the searching morning light than she had done when the moon shone down on her, which he was not altogether prepared for. Her eyes were clear and steady in spite of the faint smile in them, and there was no uncertainty of coloring on cheek or forehead, which had been tinted a delicate warm brown by wind and sun.

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

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

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

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

"Of course!" said the girl. "That is, beyond the ash poles – but how could you know?"

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

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

Brooke smiled a little, though it had not escaped his attention that she seemed to take his comprehension for granted.

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

A little sardonic twinkle flickered in the girl's eyes. "Oh," she said, "I know. The distinction between those who work and those who idle is marked in your country. It even seems to be considered a desirable thing for a man to fritter his time away, so long as he does it gracefully. Still, there is room for all one's activities, and the big thoughts that lead to big schemes here. How far does your ranch go?"

"To the lake," said Brooke, who understood the purport of the question. "There are four hundred acres of it, and I have, I don't mind telling you, been here rather more than two years."

The girl glanced at the very small gap in the forest, and again the man guessed her thoughts.

"And that is all you have cleared?"

"Yes," said Brooke, with a little smile. "One can lounge very

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

For a moment a curious expression, which Brooke could attach no meaning to, crept into his companion's face, but though there was a faint flush in her cheeks it grew suddenly reposeful again.

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

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

The girl regarded him gravely a moment with the faint warmth still showing in her sun-tanned cheeks, and then looked away towards the sliding water. She said nothing whatever, although there was a good deal to be deduced from the man's speech. Then she rose as Major Hume came out of the house.

They left the ranch that day, and for a week Brooke led them

through dark fir forests, and waited on them in their camps. He would also have stayed with them longer could he have found a reasonable excuse, but, as it happened, a most exemplary Siwash whom he knew appeared, and offered his services, when they reached the lonely mountain-girt lake. Then he said farewell to Major Hume, and was plodding down the homeward trail with his packs slung about him, when he met the girl coming up from the lake. She carried a cluster of the crimson wine-berries in her hand, and stopped abruptly when she saw him. She and her younger companions had been fishing that afternoon, and though Brooke could not see the latter amidst the serried trunks, their voices broke sharply through the stillness of the evening. It was significant that both he and the girl stood still without speaking until the voices grew less distinct.

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

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

"You seem in a hurry to go."

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

There was sympathy in his companion's eyes, for she had seen his comfortless dwelling, and guessed tolerably correctly what manner of life he led. It would, she realized, have been easier

for him had he been born a bushman, for there was no doubt in her mind that he was one who had been accustomed to luxury in England.

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

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

The girl fancied she understood him, for she had seen broken men who had lost heart in the struggle sink to the Indian's level, and ask no more than the subsistence they could gain with rod and gun. That was, perhaps, enough for an Indian, but it seemed to her a flinging of his birthright away in the case of a white man. Her face was quietly grave, and Brooke felt a little thrill run through him as he looked at her.

She stood, slender and very shapely, with unconscious pride in her pose, in front of the great cylindrical trunk of a cedar whose grey bark forced up every line of her white-clad figure, and he realized, when he met the big grave eyes, that he had pulled himself upon the edge of a precipice a week ago. He had let himself drift recklessly during the last two years, but it was plain to him now that he would have gone down once for all had he mated with Bella.

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

Brooke smiled drily. "I am going to look for mine. Whether

I shall find it I do not know, but I am, at least, glad I have seen you. Otherwise, I might have settled down at the ranch again."

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

"It is a trifle difficult to explain. Still, you see, your gracious kindliness reminded me of a good deal that once was mine, and after the past week I could never go back to the old life at the ranch. No doubt there comes to every one who attempts to console himself with them, a time when the husks and sty grow nauseating. I do not know why I should tell you this, and scarcely think I would have done so had there been any probability of our ever meeting again."

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

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

Brooke made her a little deferential inclination, as the dainty fingers rested a moment in his hard palm; then he swung off his big shapeless hat and turned away, but the girl stood still, looking after him, until the lonely, plodding figure faded into the shadows of the pines, while it was with a little thrill of sympathy she went back to camp, for she realized it was a very great compliment the man had paid her. He was, it seemed, turning his back on his possessions, and going away, because she had awakened in him the latent sense of responsibility. She was, however, also a little afraid, for no one could foresee what the result of his decision

would be, and she felt that to help in diverting the course of another's life was no light thing.

In the meanwhile, Brooke held on up the hillside with long, swinging strides, crashing through barberry thickets and trampling the breast-high fern, until he stopped and made his camp on the edge of the snow-scarped slopes when the soft darkness fell. His road was rough, and in places perilous, but there was a relief in vigorous action now the decision was made, and the old apathy fell from him as he climbed towards the peaks above. It was, however, several days later when he reached the ranch, and came upon Jimmy sprawling his ungainly length outside it, basking in the sun. Still, the latter took his corn-cob pipe from his lips, and became attentive when he saw his face. This, he realized, was not altogether the same man who had left him a little while ago.

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

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

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

"The trouble is that they're so blamed hard to stick to when you've got them," said Jimmy, reflectively. "Now, you don't want dollars here."

"If I had two thousand of them I'd stay, and make something of the ranch, rocky as it is."

"It couldn't be done with less, and I guess you're sensible. I'm quite happy slouching round here, but there's a kind of difference between you and me. That girl with the big eyes has been putting notions into you?"

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

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

"Canada's quite a big country," said Jimmy, reflectively. "You could put England into its vest pocket without knowing it was there. I guess it will be a long while before you see her again, and if you meet her in the cities she's not going to remember you. You'd find her quite a different kind of young woman there. When are you going?"

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

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

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

He flung himself down in his straw-filled bunk, dressed as he

was, for he had floundered through tangled forest since the dawn crept into the sky; and the shadows of the cedars lay long and black upon the river when he opened his eyes again. Jimmy was busy at the little stove, and in another few minutes the simple meal, crudely served but barbaric in its profusion, was upon the table. Neither of the men said very much during it, and then Jimmy silently helped his comrade to gird his packs about him. The sun had gone, and the valley was dim and very still when they stood in the doorway.

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

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

Then he went out into the deepening shadows, and floundering waist-deep through the ford, plodded up the climbing trail with his face towards the snow. It grew a trifle grim, however, when he looked back once from a bare hill shoulder, and saw a feeble light blink out far down in the hollow. Jimmy, he knew, was lying, pipe in hand, beside the stove, and, after all, the lonely ranch had been a home to him.

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

As he gazed, the fleecy mist that rolled up from the river

blotted out the light, and the man felt the deep stillness and loneliness as he had not done since he first came there. That sudden eclipse of Jimmy's light seemed very significant just then, for he knew it would never burn again as a beacon for him. The last red gleam had also faded off the snow, and, with a jerk at the pack straps that galled his shoulders, he set his lips, and swung away into the darkness of the coming night.

III.
THE NARROW WAY

The big engine was running slowly, which did not happen often, and Brooke, who leaned on the planer table, was thankful for the respite. A belt slid round above him, and on either side were turning wheels, while he had in front of him a long vista of sliding logs, whirring saws, and toiling men. The air was heavy with gritty dust, and a sweet resinous smell, while here and there a blaze of sunshine streamed into the great open-sided building. Something had gone wrong with the big engine, and its sonorous panting, which reverberated across the still, blue inlet, had slackened a trifle. There was not, as a result of this, power enough to drive all the machines in the mill, and Brooke was waiting until the engineer should set matters right.

It was very hot in the big shed. In fact, the cedar shingles on the roof were crackling overhead; and Brooke's thin jean garments were soaked with perspiration. The dust the planer threw off had also worked its way through them, and adhered in smeary patches to his dripping face, while his hair and eyebrows might have been rubbed with flour. That fine powder was, however, not the worst, for he was also covered with prismatic grains of wood, whose sharp angles caused him an intolerable irritation when his garments rasped across his flesh. His hands were raw

and bleeding, there was a cramp in one shoulder, and an ache, which now and then grew excruciating, down all the opposite side of him.

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

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

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

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

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

"A month."

"Well," said the engineer, "she broke the last man up in considerably less time than that. Weak in the chest he was, and when we were driving her lively he used to cough up blood. He had to let up sudden one day, and he's in the hospital now. Say, can't you strike somebody for a softer job?"

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

The engineer made a little gesture of comprehension as he passed on, for the attitude the Englishman had adopted is not uncommon in the Dominion of Canada, or the country where toil is at least as arduous to the south of it. Men who demand, and not infrequently obtain, the full value of their labor, are proud of their manhood there, and there was an innate resoluteness in Brooke, which had never been wholly awakened in England.

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

He flung up another heavy piece, reckless of the splinters in his hand, made no pause to wipe the rust from his smarting eyes, and peering at the spinning cutters blindly thrust upon the end of the board, and wondered vaguely whether this was what man was made for, or how long flesh and blood could be expected to stand the strain. The board went off the table with a crash, and it was time for the next, while Brooke, who bent sideways with a distressful crick in his waist, once more faced the sawdust stream with lowered head. It ceased only for a second or two, while he stooped from the table to the lumber that slid by gravitation to his feet, and he knew that to let that stream overtake him and pile up would proclaim his incapacity and defeat. So long as he was there he must keep pace with it, whatever tax it laid upon his jaded body.

He did it for an hour, flagging all the while, for it was a task no man could have successfully undertaken unless he had done such work before, and Brooke's head was aching under a tension which had grown unendurable that afternoon. Then the screaming millers closed upon a knot in the wood, and, half-dazed as he was, he thrust upon the board savagely, instead of easing it. There was a crash, a big piece of steel flew across the table, and the hum of the machine ceased suddenly. Brooke laughed grimly, and sat down gasping. He had done his best, and now he was not altogether sorry that he was beaten.

He was still sitting there when a dusty man in store clothes, with a lean, intent face, came along and glanced at the planer

before he looked at him.

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

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

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

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

"Then we'll fix it so it will suit everybody. I'll give you your pay order up to now, and you'll be glad I ran you out by-and-by. There are no chances saw-milling unless you're owner, and it's quite likely somebody's got a better use for you."

Brooke understood this as a compliment, and took his order, after which he had a spirited altercation with the clerk, who desired him to wait for payment until it was six o'clock, which he would not do. Then he went back to his little cubicle, which, with its flimsy partitions one could hear his neighbor snoring through, resembled a cell in a hive of bees, in the big boarding-house, and slept heavily until he was awakened by the clangor of the half-past six supper bell. He descended, and, devouring his share of the meal in ten minutes, which is about the usual time in that country, strolled leisurely into the great general room, which had a big stove in the middle and a bar down one side of it. He already loathed the comfortless place, from the hideous oleographs on the bare wood walls down to the uncleanly sawdust on the floor.

He sat down, and two men, whose acquaintance he had made during his stay there, lounged across to him. Trade was slack in the province then, and both wore very threadbare jean. There was also a significant moodiness in their gaunt faces which suggested that they had felt the pinch of adversity.

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

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

One of the men laughed softly. "Then it was only the square thing. Since we've been here that planer has broke up two or three men. Held out a month, didn't you? What were you at before that?"

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

The other man smiled again. "So have we! Half the deadbeats in this country are landholders, too. Two men couldn't get away with many of the big trees on our lot in a lifetime, and one has to light out and earn something to put the winter through. This month Jake and I have made 'bout twenty dollars between us. I guess your trouble's want of capital – same as ours. One can't do a great deal with a hundred dollars. Still, you'd have had more than that when you came in?"

"I had," said Brooke, drily. "I put six thousand into the land, or rather the land-agent's bank, besides what I spent on clearing a little of it, and when I've paid my board and for the clothes I

bought, I'll have about four dollars now."

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

"Rock. One might have drained a swamp."

The men smiled. "Well," said the first of them, "that's not always easy. A man's not a steam navvy – but the game's an old one. It was the Indian Spring folks played it off on you?"

"No. It was Devine."

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

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

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

"That's going to be quite a big contract," said one of the men. "It's best to lie low and wait for another fool when you've been taken in. Besides, there's many a worse man in his own line than Devine. There was one fellow up at Jamieson's when the rush was on. He could talk the shoes off a mule – and he was an Englishman. Whatever any man wanted, fruit-land, mineral-

land, sawing lumber, and gold outcrop, he'd got. Picked it out on the survey map and sold it him. For 'most a month he rolled the dollars in, and then the circus began. The folks who'd made the deals went up to see their land, and most of them found it belonged to another man. You see, if three of them wanted maple bush, that's generally good soil and light to clear, and he'd only one piece of it, he sold the same lot to all of them. They went back with clubs, but that man knew when to light out, and he didn't wait for them."

Brooke sat silent awhile. He knew that the story was not a very unlikely one, for while, in view of the simplicity of the Canadian land tenure legislation, there is no reason why any man should be swindled, as a matter of fact, a good many are. He was also irritated that he had allowed himself to indulge in what he realized must have appeared a puerile threat. This was, of course, of no moment in itself, but he felt that it showed how he was losing hold of the nice discretion he had, at least, affected in England. Still, he meant exactly what he had said.

During the greater portion of two years he had attempted a hopeless task, and then, discovering his folly, resigned himself, and drifted idly, perilously near the brink of the long declivity which Englishmen of good upbringing not infrequently descend with astonishing swiftness in that country, and for that, rightly or wrongly, he blamed the man who had robbed him. Then the awakening had come, and he saw that while there were many careers open to a man with six thousand dollars, or even half

of them, there was only strenuous physical toil for the man with none. He had attempted it, but proficiency in even the more brutal forms of labor cannot be attained in a day, and he now looked back on a year of hardship and effort which had left an indelible mark on him.

It had been a season when there was little industrial enterprise, and he had no friends, while the dollars he gained were earned for the most part by the strain of overtaxed muscles and bleeding hands. He had toiled up to his waist in snow-water at the mines, swung the shovel under the lashing deluge driving a Government road over a big divide, hung from dizzy railroad trestles holding with fingers bruised by the hammer the spikes the craftsmen drove, and been taught all there is to learn about exposure and fatigue. He had braced himself to bear it, though he had lived softly in England, but each time he crawled into draughty tent or reeking shanty, wet through, with aching limbs, at night, he remembered the man who had robbed him.

It was, perhaps, not altogether astonishing that under such conditions the wrong done him should assume undue proportions, and that when a slipping hammer laid his knuckles bare he should charge the smart to Devine, and long for the reckoning. The man who had condemned him to this life of toil had, he told himself, grown rich by theft, and he dwelt upon his injury until the memory of it possessed him. It was not, however, the physical hardship that troubled him most, but the thought of the opportunities he had lost, for since he had seen the girl with

the brown eyes they had assumed their due value. Devine had not only taken his dollars, but had driven him out from the society of those who had been his equals, and made him one who could scarcely hope to meet a woman of refinement on friendly terms again. Coarse fare and a life of brutal toil were all that seemed left to him. There were, he knew, men in that country who had commenced with a very few dollars, and acquired a competence, but they were not young Englishmen brought up as he had been.

"You are the only man I've ever heard say anything good about any one in the land business, and it does not amount to much at that," he said. "Devine has been successful so far, but even gentlemen of his talents are liable to make a mistake occasionally, and if ever he makes a big one, it will probably go hardly with him. That, at least, is one consolation."

Another man who had been standing near the bar sauntered towards them, cigar in hand. He was dressed in store clothing, and his hands were, as Brooke noticed, not those of a workman, though they seemed wiry and capable. He had penetrating dark eyes, and the Western business man's lean, intent face, while Brooke would have guessed his age at a little over thirty.

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

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

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

companions.

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

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

"Got no notion where to strike next?"

"No."

The stranger, who did not seem at all repulsed by his abruptness, looked at him reflectively.

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

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

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

The stranger laughed. "I wouldn't worry. We're not particular in this country. Go up, and show him the card if you feel like it. I've been in a tight place myself once or twice, and we'll take it as an introduction. A good many people know me – you are Mr. Brooke?"

Brooke admitted it, and after a few minutes' conversation, the stranger, who informed him that he had come there in the hope of meeting a man who did not seem likely to put in an appearance now, moved away.

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

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

Brooke decided that it would be advisable to take the risk, and when he had settled with his host and a storekeeper, found he had about six dollars left. When he went out, one of the ranchers looked at the other. He was the one who had spoken least, and a quiet, observant man, from Ontario.

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

"No," said his companion.

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

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

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

IV.
SAXTON MAKES AN OFFER

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

"I'm sorry I can't take you, but I've two more men than I've any particular use for already," he said at last. "I can't give you a place to spread your blankets in to-night either, because the freighter didn't bring up all our tents. Still, you might make Beasley's Hotel, and strike Saxton's prospectors, if you head back over the divide. He has a few men up there opening up a silver lead."

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

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

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

blew the drips from the great branches into his face.

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

Then, attracted solely by the sombre clustering of the cedars, which promised to keep off at least a little of the rain, he turned up the valley with a shiver, and finally unrolled his one wet blanket under a big tree. There was an angle among its roots, which ran along the ground, and, scooping a hollow in the withered sprays, he crawled into it, and lay down with his back to the trunk. The roar of the river seemed louder now, and he could hear a timber wolf howling far off on the hillside. He was very cold and hungry, but his weariness blunted the sense of physical

discomfort, though as yet his activity of mind remained, and he asked himself what he had gained by leaving the ranch, and could find no answer.

Still, even then, he would not regret that he had broken away, for there was in him an inherent obstinacy, and he would have struggled on at the ranch had not the absence of funds precluded it, and consideration shown him that it would be merely throwing his toil away. Life, it seemed, had very little to offer him, but now he had made the decision he would adhere to it, though he had arrived at the resolution in cold blood, for it was his reason only which had responded to the girl's influence, and as yet what was spiritual in him remained untouched. He would not live as the Indians do, or sink into a sot. There were vague possibilities before him which, though this appeared most unlikely, might prove themselves facts, and the place he had been born to in England might yet be his. That was why he would not sell his birthright for a mess of stringy venison, and the deleterious whisky sold at the settlement, which seemed to him a most unfair price. Still, he went no further, even when he thought of the girl, which he did with dispassionate admiration.

Worn-out as he was, he slept, and awakened in the grey dawn almost unfit to rise. There was a distressful pain in his hip-joints, which those who sleep in the open are acquainted with, and at the first few steps he took his face went awry, but his physical nature demanded warmth and food, and there was only one way of obtaining it before the life went out of him. Whatever effort it

cost him, he must reach the mine. He set out for it, limping, while the sharp gravel rolled under his bleeding feet as he floundered up the climbing trail. It seemed to lead upwards for ever between endless colonnades of towering trunks, and when at last pine and cedar had been left behind, there was slippery rock smoothed by sliding snow to be clambered over.

Still, reeling and gasping, he held on, and it was afternoon, and he had eaten nothing for close on thirty hours, when a filmy trail of smoke that drifted faintly blue athwart the climbing pines beneath him caught his eye. He braced himself for the effort to reach it, and went down with loose, uneven strides, smashing through sal-sal and barberry when he reached the bush again. The fern met above his head, there were mazes of fallen trunks to be scrambled through, and he tore the soaken jean that clung about him to rags in his haste. Still, he had learned to travel straight in the bush, and at last he staggered into sight of the mine.

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

"You seem considerably used up," he said.

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

It occurred to him that the man's voice ought to be familiar,

but it was a few moments before he recognized him as the one who had sent him on the useless journey after the Surveyor.

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

Brooke went with him to the shanty, where he fell against a chair, and found it difficult to straighten himself when he picked it up. Saxton, so far as he could remember, asked no questions, but smiled at him reassuringly while he explained, somewhat incoherently, what had brought him there, until a man appeared with a big tray. Then Brooke ate strenuously.

"Some folks have a notion that one can kill himself by getting through too much at once when he's 'most starved," said Saxton. "I never found it work out that way in this country."

"Were you ever almost starved?" said Brooke, who felt the life coming back to him, with no great show of interest.

"Oh, yes," said Saxton, drily. "Twice, at least. I was three days without food the last time. One has to take his chances in the ranges, and you don't pick up dollars without trouble anywhere. Still, we'll talk of that afterwards. Had enough?"

Brooke said he fancied he had, and Saxton hammered upon the iron roof of the shanty until a man appeared.

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

Brooke went with the man, vacantly, and in another few minutes found himself lying in dry blankets on a couch of springy twigs. He was sensible that it was delightfully warm, but he could

not remember how he got there, and was wondering why the rain no longer lashed his face, when sleep came to him.

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

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

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

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

Brooke was a trifle astonished, for this certainly expressed his thoughts, but he was in no way disconcerted, and he laughed.

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

"Still, you felt it? Well, you were considerably used up when

you came in, and, as I sent you to the Surveyor, who didn't seem to have any use for you, I felt myself responsible. That appears sufficient?"

Now, Brooke had mixed with men of a good many different stations, and he was observant, and, as might have been expected, by no means diffident.

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

Saxton laughed. "Take a cigar. That's the kind of talk I like. We'll come to the point right away."

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

"You have a kind of grievance against Devine?"

"I have. According to my notion of ethics, he owes me six thousand dollars, and I shall not be quite content until I get them out of him, although that may never happen. I feel just now that it would please me especially to make him smart as well, which I quite realize, is unnecessary folly."

The Canadian nodded, and shook the ash from his cigar. "Exactly," he said. "A man with sense keeps his eye on the dollars, and leaves out the sentiment. It's quite apt to get in his way and trip him up. Well, suppose I could give you a chance of getting those dollars back?"

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

"No, sir," said Saxton, drily. "I'm here to make dollars. That has been my object since I struck out for myself at fourteen, and

I've piled quite a few of them together. I'd have had more only that wherever I plan a nice little venture in mines or land up and down this province, I run up against Devine. That's quite straight, isn't it?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and bitter man. The woman he believed in had used him very badly, and the first man he trusted in Canada had plundered him. Brooke was, unfortunately, young when he was called upon to face the double treachery, and had generalized too freely from too limited premises. He felt that in all society there must be a conflict between the men who had all to gain and those who had anything worth keeping, and sentiment, it seemed, was out of place in that struggle.

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

The Canadian laughed. "I'll take my chances. Nobody can bring up any very low-down game against me. Well, are you open to consider my offer?"

"You haven't exactly made one yet."

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

"Is that likely?"

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

Brooke's face flushed just a trifle, and again he sat silent a moment or two. Then he laughed somewhat curiously.

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

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

Brooke realized that it was a clever man he was dealing with, but in his present state of mind the somewhat vague arrangement commended itself to him. He was, he decided, warranted in getting his six thousand dollars back by any means that were open to him. More he did not want, for he still retained in a slight degree the notions instilled into him in England, which had, however, since he was seldom able to indulge in them, not tended to make him happier.

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

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

"It is," said Brooke, who, in spite of the fashion in which he had expressed himself during the last few minutes, felt a slight warmth in his face. Though he could not afford to be particular, there was one aspect of the arrangement which did not commend

itself to him.

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

V.
BARBARA RENEWS AN ACQUAINTANCE

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

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

The young man who sat beside her laughed. "There must be, or you never would have admitted it," he said. "Still, I'm not sure you would find many folks who would believe you here."

"One has to be candid occasionally," and Barbara made a little gesture of weariness. "There is still another hour of it, but, I sincerely hope, not another cornet solo. What comes next? We were a little late, and nobody provided me with a programme. They are inconsistent. Milly, I notice, has several."

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

"A violin solo," he said. "I think they mean Schumann, but it's not altogether astonishing that they've spelt it wrong. A man

called Brooke is put down for it."

"Brooke!" said Barbara, a trifle sharply. "Where does he come from? Do you know him?"

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

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

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

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

for her acquaintances were people of position in that province, and yet she had a very clear recollection of a certain rancher Brooke who played the violin.

"I once met a man of that name in the bush," she said, with almost overdone indifference. "Still, he is scarcely likely to be the same one."

Her companion started another topic, and neither of them listened to the orchestra, though the girl was a trifle irritated at herself for wishing that the overture had been shorter. At last, when the second violins were not more than a note behind the rest, the music stopped, and Barbara sat very still with eyes fixed on the stage while the usual little stir and rustle of draperies ran round the building. Then there was silence for a moment, and she was sensible of a curious little thrill as a man who held a violin came forward into the blaze of light. He wore conventional evening-dress in place of the fringed deerskin she had last seen him in, and she decided that it became his somewhat spare, symmetrical figure almost as well. The years he had spent swinging axe and pounding drill had toughened and suppled it, and yet left him free from the coarsening stamp of toil, which is, however, not as a rule a necessary accompaniment of strenuous labor in that country. Standing still a moment quietly at his ease, straight-limbed, sinewy, with a little smile in his frost-bronzed face, he was certainly a personable man, and for no very apparent reason she was pleased to notice that two of her companions were regarding him with evident approbation.

"I think one could call him quite good-looking," said the girl beside her. "He has been in this country a while, but I wouldn't call him a Canadian. Not from this side of the Rockies, anyway."

"Why?" asked Barbara, mainly to discover how far her companion's thoughts coincided with her own.

"Well," said the other girl, reflectively, "it seems to me he takes it too easily. If he had been one of us he'd have either been grim and serious or worrying with the strings. We're most desperately in earnest, but they do things as though they didn't count in the Old Country. Now he has got the A right off without the least fussing, as if he couldn't help doing it."

The explanation was rather suggestive than definite, but Barbara was satisfied with it. She was usually a reposeful young woman herself, and the man's graceful tranquillity, which was of a kind not to be met with every day in that country, appealed to her. Then he drew the bow across the strings, and she sat very still to listen. It was not music that a good many of his audience were accustomed to, but scarcely a dress rustled or a programme fluttered until he took the fiddle from his shoulder. Then, while the plaudits rang through the building, his eyes met Barbara's. Leaning forward a trifle in her chair, she saw the sudden intentness of his face, but he gazed at her steadily for a moment without sign of recognition. Then she smiled graciously, for that was what she had expected of him, and again felt a faint thrill of content, for his eyes were fixed on her when as the tumult of applause increased he made a little inclination.

He was not permitted to retire, and when he put the fiddle to his shoulder again she knew why he played the nocturne she had heard in the bush. It was also, she felt, in a fashion significant that it had now, in place of the roar of a snow-fed river, the chords of a grand piano for accompaniment, though the latter, it seemed to her, made an indifferent substitute. The bronze-faced man in deerskin had fitted the surroundings in which she had seen him, and they had been close comrades in the wilderness for a week. It could, she knew, scarcely be the same in the city, but she saw that he was, at least, equally at home there. It was only their relative positions that had changed, for the guide was the person of importance in the primeval bush, and the fact that he had waited without a sign until she smiled showed that he had not failed to recognize it. When at last he moved away she turned to the man at her side.

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

The young man did not express any of the astonishment he certainly felt, but proceeded to do her bidding, though it afforded him no particular pleasure, for there was a certain imperiousness about Barbara Heathcote which was not without its effect. Brooke was putting away his fiddle when he came upon him.

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

"Miss Heathcote?" said Brooke, for it had happened, not unnaturally, that he had never heard the girl's full name. Her companions, of whom he had not felt warranted in inquiring it, had called her Barbara in the bush, and he had addressed her without prefix.

"Yes," said the other, who was once more a trifle astonished. "Miss Barbara Heathcote."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Isn't the reason obvious?"

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

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

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

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

"No," said Barbara, sharply, with a very faint flush of color in her face, "I was not. You ought to know that, too. Explanations are occasionally odious, and almost always difficult, but both Major Hume and his daughter invited you to their house if you were ever in England."

"The Major may have felt himself tolerably safe in making that offer," said Brooke, reflectively. "You see, I am naturally acquainted with my fellow Briton's idiosyncrasies."

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

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

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

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

The girl turned to her programme, for now she had induced him to abandon his reticence his candor was almost disconcerting.

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

Brooke nodded and glanced at the hand he laid on his knee, which, as the girl saw, was still ingrained and hard.

"Road-making for one thing," he said. "Chopping trees, quarrying rock, and following other useful occupations of the kind. They are, one presumes, healthy and necessary, but I did not find any of them especially remunerative."

"And now?"

Brooke's face, as she did not fail to notice, hardened suddenly, and he felt an unpleasant embarrassment as he met her eyes. He had decided that he was fully warranted in taking any steps likely to lead to the recovery of the dollars he had been robbed of, but he was sensible that the only ones he had found convenient would scarcely commend themselves to his companion. There was also no ignoring the fact that he would very much have preferred her approbation.

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

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

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

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

The girl had a question on her lips, but she did not consider it advisable to ask it just then.

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

"Not very often. You see the only apparent use of the trees on my possessions was to keep me busy two years attempting to destroy them, and of late I have chiefly had to do with minerals."

"With minerals?" said the girl, quickly, and then, as he volunteered no answer, swiftly asked the question she had wished

to put before. "Whose was the estate in England?"

Brooke did not look at her, and she fancied he was not sorry that the necessity of affecting a show of interest in the music meanwhile made continuous conversation difficult. His eyes were then turned upon a performer on the stage.

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

Barbara watched him covertly, and once more noticed the slight hardening of his lips, and the very faint deepening of the bronze in his cheeks. It was only just perceptible, but though the sun and wind had darkened its tinting, Brooke had a clear English complexion, and the blood showed through his skin. His companion remembered the old house in the English valley, with its trim gardens and great sweep of velvet lawn, where he had admitted that he had once been long ago. The statement she had fancied at the time was purposely vague, and she wondered now if he had meant that he had lived there, for Barbara possessed the not unusual feminine capacity for putting two and two together. She, however, naturally showed nothing of this.

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

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

He glanced suggestively round the big, brilliantly-lighted

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

"You mean the music?" she said.

"No. The music, to tell the truth, is by no means very good. It is you who have taken me back to the Old Country. Imagination will do a great deal, but it needs a fillip, and something tangible to build upon."

Barbara laughed softly.

"I fancy the C. P. R. and an Allan liner would be a much more reliable means of transportation. You will presumably take that route some day?"

"I scarcely think it likely. They have, in the Western idiom, no use for poor men yonder."

"Still, men get rich now and then in this country."

The man's face grew momentarily a trifle grim. "It would apparently be difficult to accomplish it by serving as assistant survey, and the means employed by some of them might, if they went back to the old life, tend to prevent them feeling very comfortable. I" – and he paused for a second – "fancy that I shall stay in Canada."

Barbara was a trifle puzzled, and said nothing further for a space, until when the singer who occupied the stage just then was dismissed, the man turned to her.

"How long is a chance acquaintance warranted in presuming

on a favor shown him in this country?"

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

Brooke understood that she wished to hear, and when he could accomplish it without attracting too much attention, pictured for her benefit his life in the bush. He also did it humorously, but effectively, without any trace of the self-commiseration she watched for, and her fancy dwelt upon the hardships he lightly sketched. She knew how the toilers lived and worked in the bush, and had seen their reeking shanties and rain-swept camps. Labor is accounted honorable in that land, but it is none the less very frequently brutal as well as strenuous, and she could fancy how this man, who, she felt certain, had been accustomed to live softly in England, must have shrunk from some of his tasks, and picture to herself what he felt when he came back at night to herd close-packed with comrades whose thoughts and his must always be far apart. That many possibly better men had certainly borne with as hard a lot longer, after all, made no great difference to the facts. She also recognized that there was a vein of pathos in the story, as she remembered that he had told her it was scarcely likely he would ever go back to England again. That naturally suggested a good deal to her, for she held him blameless, though she knew it was not the regularity of their conduct at home which sent a good many of his countrymen out to Canada.

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

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

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

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

"Was the man very amusing?" she said.

"No," said Barbara, reflectively. "I scarcely think he was. I gave him permission to call upon us, and never told him where we lived."

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

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

"Then one would fancy that to meet a young man of his appearance who didn't know all about you would be something quite new," said her companion, drily.

Barbara flushed ever so slightly, but her companion noticed it. She was quite aware that if she was made much of in that city it was, in part, at least, due to the fact that she was the niece of a

well-known man, and had considerable possessions.

VI.
AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY

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

On the night in question he stood in the doorway of one of the sheds with Brooke, for whom the Surveyor had no more work just then, beside him. Brooke wore long boots and a big rubber coat, on whose dripping surface the light of the lantern Saxton held flickered. Here and there a man was dimly visible beside the mules, but beyond them impenetrable darkness closed in.

"It's a wicked kind of night," said Saxton, who, Brooke fancied, nevertheless, appeared quite content with it. "You know what you've got to do?"

"Yes," said Brooke, a trifle drily, "you have given me tolerably complete instructions once or twice already. The ore is to be delivered to Allonby at the Dayspring mine not later than to-morrow night, and I'm to be contented with his verbal acknowledgment. The getting it across the river will, I fancy, be the difficulty, especially as I'm to send half the teamsters back before we reach it."

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

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

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

Brooke said nothing further, but went out into the rain, calling to one of the teamsters, and the mules were got under way. The trail that led to the Elktail mine sloped steep as a roof just there, and was slippery with rain and mire, but the mules went down it as no other loaded beasts could have done, feeling their way foot by foot, or glissading on all four hoofs for yards together. The men made little attempt to guide them, for a mule is opinionated by nature, and when it cannot find its own way up or down any

ascent it is seldom worth while for its driver to endeavor to show it one.

When they reached the level, or rather the depth of the hollow, for of level, in the usual sense of the word, there is none in that country, Brooke, who was then cumbered with no bridle, turned and looked round. The lights of the Elktail had faded among the pines, and there was only black darkness about him. Here and there he could discern the ghostly outline of a towering trunk a little more solid than the night it rose against, and he could hear the men and beasts floundering and splashing in front of him. A deep reverberating sound rose out of the obscurity beneath, and he knew it to be the roar of a torrent in a deep-sunk gully, while now and then a diminishing rattle suggested that a hundredweight or so of water-loosened gravel had slipped down into the chasm from the perilous trail.

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

"It's a tolerably good road now, and Saxton wants you at the mine," he said.

One of the teamsters who were remaining laughed ironically. "I'm blamed if I ever heard the dip down to the long ford called

a good trail before!"

"Well," said one of the others, "what in the name of thunder are you going that way for?"

Brooke, who was standing close by, fancied that a man who had not spoken kicked his loquacious comrade viciously.

"Tom never does know where he's going. It's the mule that does the thinking for both of them," he said.

There was a little hoarse laughter, and those who were going back vanished into the deluge, while Brooke, who took a bridle now, went on with two men again. It was darker than ever, for great fir branches met overhead just there, but they at least kept off a little of the rain, and he groped onward, splashing in the mire, until the roar of a river throbbed across the forest as the night was wearing through. Then the leading teamster pulled up his mules.

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

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

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

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

away, but he was too wet to concern himself about the question then.

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

They went on, down what appeared to be the side of a bottomless gully, with the stones and soil slipping away from under them, while half-seen trees flitted up out of the obscurity. Then they reached the bed of a stream, and proceeded along it, splashing and stumbling amidst the boulders. In the meanwhile the roar of the river was growing steadily louder, and when they stopped again they could hear the clamor of the invisible flood close in front of them. It came out of the rain and darkness, hoarse and terrifying, but while the wind drove the deluge into his face Brooke could see nothing beyond dim, dripping trees.

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

Brooke had no diffidence about taking the last place in the line. Though he was in charge of the pack train, it was evident that the men knew a good deal more about that ford than he did, and he had no particular desire to make himself responsible for a disaster. Then there was a scrambling and splashing, and he found himself suddenly waist-deep in the river. He was, however, tolerably accustomed to a ford, and though the mule he led objected strenuously to entering the water, it proceeded with that beast's usual sagacity once it was in. He endeavored to keep its

head a trifle up-stream, and as close behind his two companions as he could, but apart from that he left the beast to the guidance of its own acumen, for he knew that it is seldom the sagacious mule takes any risk that can be avoided.

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

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

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

"I'm 'most afraid we're too far down-stream," he said. "Anyway, we can't stay here. Head the beasts up a little."

His voice reached the others brokenly through the roar of the

torrent, and with a pull at the bridle Brooke turned his face upstream. He could hear the rest splashing in front of him until his mule lost his footing, and he sank suddenly up to the breast. Then there was a shout, and a struggling beast swept down on him with the swing of an eddy. Brooke went down, head under, and one of the teamsters appeared to be shouting instructions to him when he came up again. He had not the faintest notion of what they were, and swung round with the eddy until he was driven violently against a boulder. There was a mule close beside him, and he contrived to grasp the bridle, and found to his astonishment that he could now stand upright without difficulty. Exactly where the others were, or where the opposite side of the river lay, he did not at the moment know; but the mule appeared to be floundering on with a definite purpose, and he went with it, until they scrambled up the bank, and he found two other men and one beast already there.

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

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

Brooke did not quite understand why, since the ore was valuable, this fact should afford the teamster the consolation it apparently did, but he was not in a mood to consider that point just then, and all his attention was occupied when they proceeded

again. The trail that climbed the rise was wet and steep, and seemed to consist largely of boulders, into which he blundered with unpleasant frequency. It was but little better when they once more plunged into the forest, for the way was scarcely two feet wide, and wound round and through thickets of thorn and fern which, when he brushed against it, further saturated him. He was wet enough already, but the water which remained any time in his clothing got slowly warm. It also dipped into splashy hollows and climbed loose gravel banks, while once a hoarse shout from the leader, which changed to a howl of pain, was followed by a stoppage. The man had stumbled into a clump of the horrible Devil's club thorn, than which nothing that grows anywhere is more unpleasant when it gets a good hold on human flesh.

He was cut loose, and his objurgations mingled with the soft splashing from the branches as they blundered on until a faint grey light filtered down, and the firs they passed beneath grew into definite form. It had also become unpleasantly chilly, and a thin, clammy mist rose like steam from every hollow. Then the trees grew thinner as they climbed steadily, until at last Brooke could see the black hill shoulders rise out of the trails of mist, and the leader pulled up his mules.

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

Brooke, who knew where to find the resinous knots, was glad to help, and soon a great fire blazed upon a shelf of rock. The mules were tethered and forage given them, and the men lay

steaming about the blaze until the breakfast of flapjacks, canned stuff, and green tea was ready. It was despatched in ten minutes, and rolling his half-dried blanket about him, Brooke lay down to sleep. He had a strip of very damp rock for mattress, and a bag of ore for pillow, but he had grown accustomed to a hard bed in the bush, and had scarcely laid his head down when slumber came to him. Food and sleep, he had discovered, were things to be appreciated, for it was not always that he was able to obtain very much of either. His stay in the Canadian cities had been brief, and the night he had spent with the brown-eyed girl at the opera-house had already drifted back into the past.

It was raining when he awakened, and they once more took the trail, while during what was left of the day they plodded among the boulders beside frothing streams, crept through shadowy forests, and climbed over treacherous slopes of gravel and slippery rock outcrop round the great hill shoulders above. Everywhere the cold gleam of snow met the eye, save when the mists that clung in ragged wisps about the climbing pines rolled together and blotted all the vista out. The smell of fir and balsam filled every hollow, and the song of the rivers rang through a dead stillness that even to Brooke, who was accustomed to it, was curiously impressive.

There was no sign of man anywhere, save for the smear of trampled mire or hoof-scattered gravel, and no sound that was made by any creature of the forest in all the primeval solitude. For no very evident reason, tracts of that wild country remain

a desolation of grand and almost overwhelming beauty, and in such places even the bushman speaks softly, or plods on faster, as though anxious to escape from them, in wondering silence. The teamsters, however, appeared by no means displeased at the solitude, and Brooke was not in a condition to be receptive of more than physical impressions. His long boots were full of water, his clothes were soaked, the sliding gravel had galled his feet, and his limbs ached. The beasts were also flagging, for their loads were heavy, and the patter of their hoofs rose with a slower beat through the rain, while the teamsters said nothing save when they urged them on.

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

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

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

The teamster grinned. "He has it 'bout once a fortnight – when the pack beasts from the settlement come in. It lasts two days,

in the usual way, and on the third one every boy about the mine looks out for him."

Brooke asked no more questions, though he hoped that several days had elapsed since the supplies from the settlement had come up, and in another few minutes they plodded into sight of the mine. The workings appeared to consist of a heap of débris and a big windlass, but here and there a crazy log hut stood amidst the pines which crowded in serried ranks upon the narrow strip of clearing. The door of the largest shanty stood open, and the shadowy figure of a man appeared in it.

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

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

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

VII.
ALLONBY'S ILLUSION

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

"You will pass your glass across when you are ready, Mr. Brooke," he said, and the latter noticed his clean English intonation. "The night is young yet, that bottle is by no means the last in the shanty, and it is, I think, six months since I have been favored with any intelligent company. I have, of course, the boys, but with due respect to the democratic sentiments of this colony they are – the boys, and the fact that they are a good deal more use to the country than I am does not affect the question."

Brooke smiled a little. His host was attired somewhat curiously

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

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

Allonby nodded. "You are no doubt perfectly right," he said. "I had, however, gone a little too far when I made the discovery, and by that time the result of any further progress had become a matter of indifference to me. In any case, a man who has played his part with credit among his equals where life has a good deal to offer one and intellect is appreciated, must drown recollection now and then when he drags out his days in a lonely exile that can have only one end. I am quite aware that it is not particularly good form for me to commiserate myself, but it should be evident that there is nobody else here to do it for me."

Brooke had already found his host's maudlin moralizings becoming monotonous, but he also felt in a half-contemptuous

fashion sorry for the man. He was, it seemed to him, in spite of his proclivities, in the restricted sense of the word, almost a gentleman.

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

Allonby laughed. "Most men put that question differently in this country. They talk straight, as they term it, and apparently consider brutality to be the soul of candor. Yes, I came from England, because something happened which prevented me feeling any great desire to spend any further time there. What it was does not, of course, matter. I came out with a sheaf of certificates and several medals to exploit the mineral riches of Western Canada, and found that mineralogical science is not greatly appreciated here."

He rose, and taking down a battered walnut case, shook out a little bundle of greasy papers with a trembling hand. Then a faint gleam crept into his eyes as he opened a little box in which Brooke saw several big round pieces of gold. The dulness of the unpolished metal made the inscriptions on them more legible, and he knew enough about such matters to realize that no man of mean talent could have won those trophies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But does the Dayspring belong to Saxton?"

Allonby emptied his glass at a gulp. "As much as I do, and he believes he has bought me soul and body. The price was not a big one – a very few dollars every month, and enough whisky to keep me here. If that failed me, I should go away, though I do not know where to, for I cannot use the axe. He is, however, now quite willing to part with the Dayspring, which has done little more than pay expenses."

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

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

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

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

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

Allonby leaned forward in his chair, and his face grew suddenly eager. "I suppose you couldn't raise eight thousand dollars to buy the mine with?"

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

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

Brooke looked at him curiously for a moment or two. It was

evident that the man was in earnest, for his gaunt face was wholly intent, and his fingers were trembling.

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

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

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

Allonby rose shakily, and leaned upon the table with his fingers trembling.

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

and day, and starved myself – did everything that would save a dollar from the rapidly-melting pile – and at last we struck the vein again, and struck it rich."

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

"You can imagine what that meant!" he continued. "After what had happened in England I could never go back a poor man, but a good deal is forgiven the one who comes home rich. Then, while I tried to keep my head, we came to the fault where the ore vein suddenly ran out. It broke off as though cut through with a knife, and went down, as the men who knew no better said, to the centre of the earth. Now a fault is a very curious thing, but one can deduce a good deal when he has studied them, and a big snow-slide had laid bare an interesting slice of the foundations of this country in the valley opposite. It took me a month to construct my theory, and that was little when you consider the factors I had to reckon with – ages of crushing pressure, denudation by grinding ice and sliding snow, and Titanic upheavals thousands of years ago. The result was from one point of view contemptible. With about four thousand dollars I could strike the vein again."

"Of course you tried to raise them?"

Allonby made a grimace. "For six long years. The men who had lent me money laughed at me, and worked the poor ore back along the incline instead of boring. Somebody has been working it – for about five cents on the dollar – ever since, and

when I told them what they were letting slip all of them smiled compassionately. I am of course – though once it was different – a broken man, with a brain clouded by whisky, only fit to run a played-out mine. How could I be expected to find any man a fortune?"

His brain, it was evident, was slightly affected by alcohol then, but there was no mistaking the genuineness of his bitterness. It was too deep to be maudlin or tinged with self-commiseration now. The little hopeless gesture of resignation he made was also very eloquent, and while the rain splashed upon the roof Brooke sat silent regarding him curiously. The dim light and the flickering radiance from the fire were still on one side of his face, forcing it up with all its gauntness of outline, but the weakness had gone out of it, and for once it was strong and almost stern. Then a little sardonic smile crept into it.

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

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

Brooke would much rather have retired to sleep, but the man's earnestness had its effect on him, and he rose and went out into

the rain with him. Allonby came near falling down the shaft when they stood at its head, but Brooke got him into the ore hoist and sent him down, after which he descended the running chain he had locked fast hand over hand. The level, as he had been told, was close to the surface, and while Allonby walked unsteadily in front of him with a blinking candle in his hat, they followed it into the face of the hill. Twice his companion stumbled over a piece of the timbering, and the light went out, while Brooke wondered uneasily if there was another sinking anywhere ahead as he lighted it again. He knew a little about mining, since he had on one or two occasions earned a few dollars assisting in the driving of an adit.

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

"Look at it!" he said, thickly. "Until we struck the ore where you see the extra timbering, I counted the dollars every yard of it cost me as I would drops of my life's blood. I worked while the men slept, and lived like a Chinaman. There was a fortune within my grasp if those dollars would hold out until I reached it – and fortune meant England, and I once more the man I had been. Then – we came to that."

He swung round and pointed with a wide, dramatic gesture which Brooke fancied he would not have used in his prosperous days, to a bare face of rock. It was of different nature to the sides

of the tunnel, and had evidently come down from above. Brooke understood. The strata his companion had been working in had suddenly broken off and gone down, only he knew where. He sat down on a big fallen fragment, and there was silence for a space, emphasized by the drip of water in the blackness of the mine. Brooke was very drowsy, but the scene, with its loneliness and the haggard face of his companion showing pale and drawn in the candle-light, had a curious effect on him, and in the meanwhile compelled him to wakefulness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You needn't be particularly careful. I shall come down here head-foremost one of these nights, and nobody will be any the worse off," he said. "I lost my last chance when that vein worked out."

Then Brooke went up into the darkness, and with some difficulty hove his companion to the surface. They went back to the shanty together, and as Allonby incontinently fell asleep in his chair, Brooke retired to the bunk set apart for him. Still, tired as he was, it was some little time before he slept, for what he had seen had made its impression. The shanty was very still, save for the snapping of the fire, and the broken-down outcast, who held

the key of a fortune the men of that province were too shrewd to believe in, slept uneasily, with head hung forward, in his chair. Brooke could see him dimly by the dying light of the fire, and felt very far from sure that it was a delusion he labored under.

When he awakened next morning Allonby was already about, and looked at him curiously when he endeavored to reopen the subject.

"It is not considerate to refer next morning to anything a man with my shortcomings may have said the night before," he said. "I think you should recognize that fact."

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

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

"Nothing," said Brooke. "I shall, as I think I told you, be worth about thirty dollars when the month is out. What is the name of the man Saxton wishes to sell the mine to?"

"Devine," said Allonby, and went out to fling a vitriolic reproof at a miner who was doing something he did not approve of about the windlass, while Brooke, who saw no more of him, departed when he had made his breakfast.

VIII.
A BOLD VENTURE

It was a hot morning shortly after Brooke's return to the Elktail mine, and Saxton sat in his galvanized shanty with his feet on a chair and a cigar in his hand. The door stood open and let a stream of sunlight and balsamic odors of the forest in. He wore soil-stained jean, and seemed very damp, for he had just come out of the mine. Thomas P. Saxton was what is termed a rustler in that country, a man of unlimited assurance and activity, troubled by no particular scruples and keen to seize on any chances that might result in the acquisition of even a very few dollars. He was also, like most of his countrymen, eminently adaptable, and the fact that he occasionally knew very little about the task he took in hand seldom acted as a deterrent. It was characteristic that during the past hour he had been endeavoring to show his foreman how to run a new rock-drilling machine which he had never seen in operation until that time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Industrial speculations in this province remind me of a game we have in England. Perhaps you have seen it," he said, reflectively. "You bet a shilling or half-a-crown that when you

lift up a thimble you will find a pea you have seen a man place under it. It is not very often that you accomplish it. Still, in that case – there is – a pea."

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

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

"The point is that we're playing it off on Devine, the man who robbed you, and has once or twice put his foot on me. I was considerably flattened when I crawled from under. He's a big man and he puts it down heavy."

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

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

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

"You mean that Allonby may be?"

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

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

Brooke sat silent a space. He had discovered by this time that it is not advisable to expect any excess of probity in a mining deal, and that it is the speculator, and not the men who face the perils of the wilderness (which are many, prospecting), who usually takes the profit. A handful or two of dollars for them, and a big bank balance for the trickster stock manipulator appeared to be the rules of the game. Still, nobody can expect to acquire riches without risk or labor, and it seemed no great wrong to him that the men with the dollars should lose a few of them occasionally. Granting that, he did not, however, feel it warranted him in taking any active part in fleecing them.

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

Saxton shook his head reproachfully. "Those notions of yours

are going to get in your way, and it's unfortunate, because we have taken hold of a big thing," he said. "I'm an irresponsible planter of wild-cat mining schemes, you're nobody, and between us we're going to best Devine, the biggest man in his line in the province, and a clever one. Still, that's one reason why the notion gets hold of me. When you come in ahead of the little man there's nothing to be got out of him, and Devine's good for quite a pile when we can put the screw on."

Again Brooke was sensible of a certain tempered admiration for his comrade's hardihood, for it seemed to him that the project he had mooted might very well involve them both in disaster.

"You expect to accomplish it?" he said.

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

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

"On the title. By jumping it. Devine takes too many chances now and then, and if one could put his fingers on a little information I have a notion the Canopus wouldn't be his. I guess you know that unless you do this, that, and the other, after recording your correct frontage on the lead or vein, you can't hold a mine on a patent from the Crown. Suppose you have got possession, and it's found that there was anything wrong with the

papers you or your prospectors filed, the minerals go back to the Crown again, and the man who's first to drive his stakes in can re-locate them. It's done now and then."

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

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

Saxton nodded. "Then you will have to get into the mine, though I don't quite know how we are going to fix it yet," he said. "Anyway, we've talked enough for one day already, and you have to go down to the settlement to see about getting those new drills up."

Brooke set out for the settlement, and slept at a ranch on the way, where he left his horse which had fallen lame, for it was a two days' journey, while it was late in the afternoon when he sat down to rest where the trail crossed a bridge. The latter was a somewhat rudimentary log structure put together with the axe and saw alone, of a width that would just allow one of the light wagons in use in that country to cross over it, and, as the bottom of the hollow the river swirled through was level there, an ungainly piece of trestle work carried the road up to it. There was

a long, white rapid not far away, and the roar of it rang in deep vibrations among the rocks above. Brooke, who had walked a long way, found the pulsating sound soothing, while the fragrance the dusky cedars distilled had its usual drowsy effect on him, and as he watched the glancing water slide by his eyes grew heavy.

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

He shook himself to attention, and looking about him saw a

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

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

stopped altogether, and one attempted to stand upright while Brooke sprang to his feet.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.