

Bindloss Harold

Northwest!



Harold Bindloss

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I JIMMY SIGNS A NOTE

The small room at the Canadian hotel was hot and smelt of cigar-smoke and liquor. Stannard put down his cards, shrugged resignedly, and opened the window. Deering smiled and pulled a pile of paper money across the table. He was strongly built and belonged to a mountaineering club, but he was fat and his American dinner jacket looked uncomfortably tight.

Deering's habit was to smile, and Jimmy Leyland had liked his knowing twinkle. Somehow it hinted that you could not cheat Deering, but if you were his friend you could trust him, and he would see you out. Now, however, Jimmy thought he grinned. Jimmy had reckoned on winning the pool, but Deering had picked up the money he imagined was his.

Jackson wiped a spot of liquor from his white shirt and gave the boy a sympathetic glance. Jackson was thin, dark-skinned and grave, and although he did not talk much about himself, Jimmy understood he was rather an important gentleman in Carolina. Stannard had indicated something like this. Stannard and Jimmy were frankly English, but Jimmy was young and the other's hair was touched by white.

Yet Stannard was athletic, and at Parisian clubs and Swiss hotels men talked about his fencing and his exploits on the rocks. He was not a big man, but now his thin jacket was open, the moulding of his chest and the curve to his black silk belt were Greek. All the same, one rather got a sense of cultivation than strength; Stannard looked thoroughbred, and Jimmy was proud he was his friend.

Jimmy was not cultivated. He was a careless, frank and muscular English lad, but he was not altogether raw, because he knew London and Paris and had for some time enjoyed Stannard's society. His manufacturing relations in Lancashire thought him an extravagant fool, and perhaps had grounds for doing so, for since Jimmy had broken their firm control his prudence was not marked.

"I must brace up. Let's stop for a few minutes," he said and went to the window.

The room was on the second floor, and the window opening on top of the veranda, commanded the valley. Across the terrace in front of the hotel, dark pines rolled down to the river, and the water sparkled in the moon. On the other side a belt of mist floated about the mountain slope and dark rocks went up and melted in the snow. The broken white line ran far North and was lost in the distance. One smelt the sweet resinous scents the soft Chinook wind blew across the wilderness.

Jimmy's glance rested on the river and the vague blue-white field of ice from which the green flood sprang. Now the electric elevators had stopped, the angry current's measured throb rolled across the pines. But for this, all was very quiet, and the other windows opening on the veranda were blank. Jimmy remembered the hotel manager himself had some time since firmly put out the billiard-room lights, when Jimmy was about ten dollars up at pool. He had afterwards won a much larger sum at cards, but his luck had begun to turn.

By and by Stannard came out and jumped on the high top rail. The light from the window touched his face, and his profile, cutting against the dark, was good and firmly lined. His balance on the narrow rail was like a boy's.

"If you carried my weight, you wouldn't get up like that. Two hundred pounds wants some moving," Deering remarked with a noisy laugh.

"I've known you move about an icy slope pretty fast," said Stannard, and taking his hands from the rail, pulled out his watch. "Two o'clock!" he resumed and gave Jimmy a smile. "I rather think

you ought to go to bed. You have not got Deering's steadiness and still are a few dollars up. To stop when your luck is good is a useful plan."

"My legs are steadier than my head," Deering rejoined. "When I played the ten-spot Jimmy saw my game. Cost me five dollars. I reckon I ought to go to bed!"

Jimmy frowned. He was persuaded he was sober, and although Stannard was a very good sort, sometimes his fatherly admonition jarred. Then he had won a good sum from Stannard and must not be shabby. The strange thing was he could not remember how much he had won.

"To stop as soon as my luck turns is not my plan," he said. "I feel I owe you a chance to get your own back."

"Oh, well! If you feel like that, we had better go on; but your fastidiousness may cost you something," Stannard remarked, and Deering hit Jimmy's back.

"You're a sport; I like you! Play up and play straight's your rule."

Jimmy was flattered, although he doubted Deering's soberness. He did play straight, and when he won he did not go off with a walletful of his friends' money. All the same, Jackson's bored look annoyed him, since it rather indicated that he was willing to indulge Jimmy than that he noted his scrupulous fairness. Jimmy resolved to banish the fellow's languor, and when they went back to the card table demanded that they put up the stakes. Jackson agreed resignedly, and they resumed the game.

The room got hotter and the cigar-smoke was thick. Sometimes Stannard went to the ice-pail and mixed a cooling drink. Jimmy meant to use caution, but his luck had turned, and excitement parched his mouth. By and by Stannard, who was dealing, stopped.

"Your play is wild, Jimmy," he remarked. "I think you have had enough."

Jimmy turned to the others. His face was red and his gesture boyishly theatrical.

"I play for sport, not for dollars. I don't want your money, and now you're getting something back, we'll put up the bets again."

"Then, since your wad is nearly gone, somebody must keep the score," said Jackson, and Stannard pulled out his note-book.

Jimmy took another drink and tried to brace up. His luck, like his roll of bills, was obviously gone, but when he was winning the others had not stopped, and he did not want them, so to speak, to let him off. When he lost he could pay. But this was not important, and he must concentrate on his cards. The cards got worse and as a rule the ace he thought one antagonist had was played by another. At length Stannard pushed back his chair from the table.

"Three o'clock and I have had enough," he said, and turned to Jimmy. "Do you know how much you are down?"

Jimmy did not know, but he imagined the sum was large, and when Stannard began to reckon he went to the window. Day was breaking and mist rolled about the pines. The snow was gray and the high rocks were blurred and dark. Jimmy heard the river and the wind in the trees. The cold braced him and he vaguely felt the landscape's austerity. His head was getting steadier, and perhaps it was the contrast, but when he turned and looked about the room he was conscious of something like disgust. Stannard, occupied with his pencil, knitted his brows, and now his graceful carelessness was not marked; Jimmy thought his look hard and calculating. Yet Stannard was his friend and model. He admitted he was highly strung and perhaps his imagination cheated him.

He was not cheated about the others. Now a reaction from the excitement had begun, he saw Deering and Jackson as he had not seen them before. Deering's grin was sottish, the fellow was grossly fat, and he fixed his greedy glance on Stannard's note-book. Jackson, standing behind Stannard, studied the calculations, as if he meant to satisfy himself the sum was correct. Jimmy thought them impatient to know their share and their keenness annoyed him. Then Stannard put up his book.

"It looks as if your resolve to play up was rash," he remarked and stated the sum Jimmy owed. "Can you meet the reckoning?"

"You know I'm broke. You're my banker and must fix it for me."

Stannard nodded. "Very well! What about your bet in the billiard-room?"

"Nothing about it. I made the stroke."

Deering grinned indulgently, and when Jackson shrugged, Jimmy's face got red.

"If they're not satisfied, give them the lot; I don't dispute about things like that," he said haughtily. "Write an acknowledgment for all I owe and I'll sign the note."

Stannard wrote and tore the leaf from his note-book, but he now used a fountain pen. Jimmy took the pen, signed the acknowledgment and went off. When he had gone Deering looked at Stannard and laughed.

"Your touch is light, but if the boy begins to feel your hand he'll kick. Anyhow, I'll take my wad."

Stannard gave him a roll of paper money and turned to Jackson.

"I'll take mine," said Jackson. "In the morning I pull out."

"You stated you meant to stop for a time."

"There's nothing in the game for me, and I don't see what Deering expects to get," said Jackson in a languid voice. "I doubt if you'll keep him long; the boys in his home section, on the coast, reckon he puts up a square deal. Anyhow, you can't have my help."

Stannard gave him a searching glance and Deering straightened his big body. Jackson's glance was quietly scornful.

"A hundred dollars is a useful sum, but my mark's higher, and I play with men. Maybe I'll meet up with some rich tourists at the Banff hotels," he resumed, and giving the others a careless nod, went off.

"A queer fellow, but sometimes his mood is nasty," said Deering. "I felt I'd like to throw him over the rails."

"As a rule, his sort carry a gun," Stannard remarked.

Deering wiped some liquor from the table, picked up Jimmy's glass, which was on the floor, and put away the cards.

"In the morning you had better give the China boy two dollars," he said in a meaning voice, and when he went to the door Stannard put out the light.

II

JIMMY'S APOLOGY

In the morning Jimmy leaned, rather moodily, against the terrace wall. There was no garden, for the hotel occupied a narrow shelf on the hillside, and from the terrace one looked down on the tops of dusky pines. The building was new, and so far the guests were not numerous, but the manager claimed that when the charm of the neighborhood was known, summer tourists and mountaineers would have no use for Banff.

Perhaps his hopefulfulness was justified, for all round the hotel primeval forest met untrodden snow, and at the head of the valley a glacier dropped to a calm green lake. A few miles south was a small flag-station, and sometimes one heard a heavy freight train rumble in the woods. When the distant noise died away all was very quiet but for the throb of falling water.

Jimmy had not enjoyed his breakfast, and when he lighted a cigarette the tobacco did not taste good. He admitted that he had been carried away, and now he was cool he reflected that his rashness had cost him a large sum and he had given Stannard another note. He was young, and had for a year or two indulged his youthful craving for excitement, but he began to doubt if he could keep it up. After all, he had inherited more than he knew from his sternly business-like and rather parsimonious ancestors. Although the Leyland cotton mills were now famous in Lancashire, Jimmy's grandfather had earned day wages at the spinning frame.

Jimmy felt dull and thought a day on the rocks would brace him up. Since his object for the Canadian excursion was to shoot a mountain-sheep and climb a peak in the Rockies, he ought to get into trim. Stannard could play cards all night and start fresh in the morning on an adventure that tried one's nerve and muscle, but Jimmy admitted he could not. When he loafed about hotel rotundas and consumed iced drinks he got soft.

After a time, Laura Stannard crossed the veranda and went along the terrace. Her white dress was fashionable and she wore a big white hat. Her hair and eyes were black, her figure was gracefully slender, and her carriage was good. Jimmy thought her strangely attractive, but did not altogether know if she was his friend, and admitted that he was not Laura's sort. It was not that she was proud. Something about her indicated that her proper background was an old-fashioned English country house; Jimmy felt his was a Lancashire cotton mill. Laura did not live with Stannard, but she joined him and Jimmy in Switzerland not long before they started for Canada. Stannard was jealous about his daughter and had indicated that his friends were not necessarily hers. Jimmy had grounds to think Stannard's caution justified.

For a minute or two Jimmy left the girl alone. He imagined if Laura were willing to talk to him she would let him know. She went to the end of the terrace, and then turning opposite a bench, looked up and smiled. Jimmy advanced and when he joined her leaned against the low wall. Laura studied him quietly and he got embarrassed. Somehow he felt she disapproved; he imagined he did not altogether look as if he had got up after a night's refreshing sleep.

"You got breakfast early," she remarked.

"That is so," Jimmy agreed. "A fellow at my table argues about our slowness in the Old Country and sometimes one would sooner be quiet. Then I thought I'd go off and see if I could reach the ice-fall on the glacier; after the sun gets hot the snow is treacherous. Anyhow, you have come down as soon as me."

"I mean to go on the lake and try to catch a trout."

"Then, I hope you'll let me come. You'll want somebody to row the boat and use the landing-net."

"The hotel guide will row and I doubt if we'll need the landing-net," Laura replied and gave him a level glance. "Besides, I shall return for lunch and I rather think you ought to go for a long climb. When I came out, you looked moody and slack."

Jimmy colored. Although he was embarrassed, to know Laura had bothered to remark his moodiness was flattering; the strange thing was, when she crossed the veranda he had not thought she saw him. Jimmy was raw, but not altogether a fool. He knew Laura did not mean him to go with her to the lake.

"Oh, well," he said. "When one loafes about, one does get slack."

"You are young and ought not to loaf."

"I imagine I'm a little older than you," Jimmy rejoined with a twinkle.

Laura let it go. As a rule, she did not take the obvious line, and although she knew much Jimmy did not, she said, "Are you old enough to play cards with Jackson and Deering?"

"One must pay for all one gets, and, in a sense, I get much from men like that," Jimmy replied. "There's something one likes about Jackson, and Deering's a very good sort."

"Are you ambitious to be Deering's sort?" Laura asked.

Jimmy pondered. It was obvious she knew the men were Stannard's friends, and she, no doubt, knew Stannard was a keen gambler. The ground was awkward and he must use some caution.

"Mr. Stannard's my model," he said.

Laura's glance was inscrutable. Since her mother died she had not lived with Stannard and he puzzled her. Sometimes she was disturbed about him, and sometimes she was jarred. When she joined him for a few weeks he was kind, but he did not ask for her confidence and did not give her his.

"It looks as if my father's attraction for you was strong," she said thoughtfully.

"That is so," Jimmy declared with a touch of enthusiasm Laura saw was sincere. "Mr. Stannard has all the qualities I'd like to cultivate. My habit, so to speak, is to shove along laboriously; he gets where he wants without an effort. On the trains and steamers he gets for nothing things another couldn't buy, and at the hotel the waiters serve him first. People trust him and are keen about his society. He's urbane and polished, but when you go with him on the rocks you note his steely pluck. When I'm stuck and daunted he smiles, and somehow I get up the awkward slab. Besides, he stands for much I wanted but couldn't get until he helped."

"What did you want?"

"Excitement, adventure, and the friendship of clever people; something like that," said Jimmy awkwardly. "To begin with, I'd better tell you about my life in Lancashire, but I expect you're bored –"

Laura was not bored; in fact, her curiosity was excited. Stannard's young friends were numerous, but when he opened his London flat to them she stopped with her aunts. Now she wondered whether it was important he had allowed her to join his Canadian excursion.

"I am not at all bored," she said.

"Very well. My father died long since and I went to my uncle's house. I'd like to draw Ardshaw for you, but I cannot. Inside, it's overcrowded by clumsy Victorian furniture; outside is a desolation of industrial ugliness. Smoky fields, fenced by old colliery ropes, a black canal, and coalpit winding towers. I went to school on board a steam tram, along a road bordered all the way by miners' cottages."

"The picture's not attractive," Laura remarked. "Was your uncle satisfied with his house?"

Jimmy smiled. "I think he was altogether satisfied. The Leylands are a utilitarian lot, and rather like ugliness. Our interests are business, and religion of a stern Puritanical sort. From my relations' point of view, grace and beauty are snares. Besides, Dick Leyland got Ardshaw cheap and I expect this accounts for much. When he went there the Leyland mills were small; my grandfather had not long started on his lucky speculation."

"But after a time you went away to school – a public school?"

"I did not. I imagined it was obvious," said Jimmy with a touch of dryness. "I went to the mill office and sat under a gas-lamp, writing entries in the stock-books, from nine o'clock until six."

Dick Leyland had no use for university cultivation and my aunt was persuaded Oxford was a haunt of profligates. Well, because I was forced, I held out until I was twenty-one. Then I'd had enough and I went to London."

"Were your relations willing for you to go?"

"They were not at all willing, but I inherit a third-part of the Leyland mills. For all that, unless my trustees approve, I cannot, for another two or three years, use control, and the sum I may spend is fixed. Well, perhaps you can picture my launching out in town. I had no rules to go by; I wore the stamp of the cotton mill and a second-class school. For five years I'd earned a small clerk's pay, and now, by contrast, I was rich."

Laura could picture it. The boy's reaction from his uncle's firm and parsimonious guardianship was natural, and she studied him with fresh curiosity. He was tall but rather loosely built, and his look was apologetic, as if he had not yet got a man's strength and confidence. One noted the stamp of the cotton mill. As a rule Jimmy was generous and extravagant; but sometimes he was strangely business-like.

"Were you satisfied with your experiment?" she asked.

"I expect you're tired. If you were not kind, you'd have sent me off."

"Not at all," said Laura. "I like to study people, and your story has a human touch. In a way, it's the revolt of youth."

"Oh, well; I expect one does not often get all one thinks to get. I wanted the cultivation Oxford might have given me; I wanted to know people of your sort, who don't bother about business, but hunt and fish and shoot. Well, I can throw a dry-fly and hold a gun straight; but after all I'm Jimmy Leyland, from the mills in Lancashire."

Laura liked his honesty, but his voice was now not apologetic. She rather thought it proud.

"You met my father in Switzerland?" she said.

"At Chamonix, about a year ago. When I met Mr. Stannard my luck was good. I'd got into the wrong lot; they used me and laughed. Well, your father showed me where I was going and sent the others off. Perhaps you know how he does things like that? He's urban, but very firm. Anyhow, the others went and I've had numerous grounds to trust Mr. Stannard since."

Jimmy lighted a cigarette. Perhaps he ought to go, but Laura's interest was flattering and she had not allowed him to talk like this before. In fact, he rather wondered why she had done so. In the meantime Laura pondered his artless narrative. His liking her father was not strange, for Stannard's charm was strong, but Laura imagined to enjoy his society cost his young friends something. Perhaps it had cost Jimmy something, for he had stated that one must pay for all one got. He was obviously willing to pay, but Laura was puzzled. If his uncle's portrait was accurate, she imagined the sum Jimmy was allowed to spend was not large.

"One ought to have an object and know where one means to go," she remarked. "When you look ahead, are you satisfied?"

"In the meantime, I'll let Mr. Stannard indicate the way," said Jimmy with a smile. "On the whole, I expect Dick Leyland would sooner I didn't meddle at the office, but after a year or two I'll probably go back. You see, Dick has no children and Jim's not married. To carry on Leyland's is my job."

"Who is Jim?"

"Sir James Leyland, knight. In Lancashire we have not much use for titles; the head of the house is Jim and I'm Jimmy. Perhaps the diminutive is important."

"But suppose your uncles did not approve your carrying on the house?"

"Then, I imagine they could, for a time, force me to leave the mills alone. However, although Dick is very like a machine, I've some grounds to think Jim human. All the same, I hardly know him. He's at Bombay; the house transacts much business in India. But I must have bored you and you haven't got breakfast. I suppose you really won't let me row the boat?"

Laura pondered. Her curiosity was not altogether satisfied and she now was willing for Jimmy to join her on the lake. Yet she had refused, and after his frank statement, she had better not agree.

"I have engaged the hotel guide, Miss Grant is going, and the boat is small," she said. "Besides, when one means to catch trout one must concentrate."

Jimmy went off and Laura knitted her brows. She knew Jimmy's habit was not to boast, and if she had understood him properly, he would by and by control the fortunes of the famous manufacturing house. Her father's plan was rather obvious, and the blood came to Laura's skin. She knew something about poverty and admitted that when she married her marriage must be good, but she was not an adventuress. Yet Jimmy was rather a handsome fellow and had some attractive qualities.

III

THE CAYUSE PONY

The afternoon was hot, the little wineberry bushes were soft, and Jimmy lay in a big hemlock's shade. A few yards in front, a falling pine had broken the row of straight red trunks, and in the gap shining snow peaks cut the serene sky. Below, the trees rolled down the hillside, and at the bottom a river sparkled. Rivers, however, were numerous, the bush on the hill-bench Jimmy had crossed was thick, and he frankly did not know where he had come down. If the hotel was in the valley, he need not bother, but he doubted, and was not keen about climbing another mountain spur. In the meantime, he smoked his pipe and mused.

He owed Stannard rather a large sum. They went about to shooting parties at country houses and lodges by Scottish salmon rivers. Visiting with Stannard's sporting friends was expensive and he allowed Jimmy to bear the cost. Jimmy was willing and made Stannard his banker; now and then they reckoned up and Jimmy gave him an acknowledgment for the debt. Although Stannard stated he was poor, his habits were extravagant and somehow he got money.

Yet Jimmy did not think Stannard exploited him. He had found his advice good and Stannard had saved him from some awkward entanglements. In fact, Stannard was his friend, and although his friendship was perhaps expensive, in a year or two Jimmy would be rich. Since his parsimonious uncle had not let him go to a university, his spending a good sum was justified, and to go about with Stannard was a liberal education. Perhaps, for a careless young fellow, Jimmy's argument was strangely commercial, but he was the son of a keen and frugal business man.

Then he began to muse about Laura. Her beauty and refinement attracted him, but he imagined Laura knew his drawbacks, and to imagine Stannard had planned for him to marry her was ridiculous. Stannard was not like that, and when Laura was with him saw that Jimmy did not get much of her society. In fact, had she not come down for breakfast before the other guests, Jimmy imagined he would not have enjoyed a confidential talk with her. All the same, to loaf in the shade and dwell on Laura's charm was soothing.

In the meantime, he was hungry, and he had not bothered to carry his lunch. When he got breakfast he had not much appetite. Since morning he had scrambled about the rocks, and he thought the hotel was some distance off. Getting up with something of an effort, he plunged down hill through the underbrush. At the bottom he stopped and frowned. He ought not to have lost his breath, but he had done so and his heart beat. It looked as if he must cut out strong cigars and iced liquor.

A few yards off a trail went up the valley and slanted sunbeams crossed the narrow opening. Jimmy thought he heard a horse's feet and resolved to wait and ask about the hotel. He was in the shade, but for a short distance the spot commanded the trail.

The beat of horse's feet got louder and a girl rode out from the gap in the dark pine branches. A sunbeam touched her and her hair, and the steel buckle in her soft felt hat shone. She rode astride and wore fringed leggings and a jacket of soft deerskin. Her figure was graceful and she swung easily with the horse's stride. Her hair was like gold and her eyes were deep blue. Jimmy afterwards thought it strange he noted so much, but she, so to speak, sprang from the gloom like a picture on a film, and the picture held him.

He did not know if the girl was beautiful, but in the tangled woods her charm was keen. Her dress harmonized with the moss on the tall red trunks, and the ripening fern. Something primitive and strong marked her easy, confident pose. The horse, an Indian *cayuse*, tossed its head and glanced about nervously, as if its habit was to scent danger in the bush. Jimmy sprang from primitive stock and he knew, half instinctively, the girl's type was his. He must, however, inquire about the hotel, and he pushed through the raspberries by the trail.

The horse, startled by the noise, stopped and tried to turn. The girl pulled the bridle and braced herself back. The cayuse jumped like a cat, plunged forward, and feeling the bit, bucked savagely. Jimmy wondered how long the girl would stick to the saddle, but after a moment or two the cayuse started for the bush. Jimmy thought he knew the trick, for when a cayuse cannot buck off its rider it goes for a tree, and if one keeps one's foot in the stirrup, one risks a broken leg. He jumped for its head and seized the links at the bit.

The girl ordered him to let go, but he did not. He had frightened her horse and must not allow the savage brute to jamb her against a tree. Its ears were pressed back and he saw its teeth, but so long as he stuck to the bit, it could not seize his hand. Then it went round in a semi-circle, the link twisted and pinched his fingers, and he knew he could not hold on. The animal's head went up, Jimmy got a heavy blow and fell across the trail. A few moments afterwards he heard a beat of hoofs, some distance off, and knew the cayuse was gone. The girl, breathing rather hard, leaned against a trunk.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

"I don't know yet," Jimmy gasped. "I'll find out when I get up."

He got up and forced a smile. "Anyhow, nothing's broken. Are you hurt?"

"No," she said. "I'm not hurt, but I'm angry. When you butted in I couldn't use the bridle."

"I'm sorry; I wanted to help. However, it looks as if your horse had run away. Have you far to go?"

"The ranch is three miles off."

"How far's the hotel?"

"If you go by the trail, about eight miles. Perhaps four miles, if you cross the range."

Jimmy studied the thick timber and the steep rocky slopes. Pushing through tangled underbrush has drawbacks, particularly where devil's-club thorns are numerous. Besides, he had got a nasty knock and his leg began to hurt. Then he noted a cotton flour bag with straps attached lying in the trail.

"I think I won't cross the range. I suppose that bag is yours?"

"It is mine. They put our groceries off the train. I reckon the bag weighs about forty pounds. I carried the thing on the front of the saddle; but when you – "

Jimmy nodded. "When I butted in you were forced to let it go! Well, since I frightened your horse, I ought to carry your bag. If I take it to the ranch, do you think your folks would give me supper?"

"It's possible. Can you carry the bag?"

"I'll try," said Jimmy. "Have you some grounds to doubt?"

"Packing a load over a rough trail is not as easy as it looks," the girl rejoined with a twinkle. "Then I expect you're a tourist tenderfoot."

Jimmy liked her smile and he liked her voice. Her Western accent was not marked and her glance was frank. He thought, if he had not meddled, she would have mastered the frightened horse; her strength and pluck were obvious. In the meantime his leg hurt and he could not examine the injury.

"I am a tourist," he agreed. "Since I'm going to your house, perhaps I ought to state that I'm Jimmy Leyland, from Lancashire in the Old Country."

"I am Margaret Jardine."

"Then you're a Scot?"

"My father is a Scot," said Margaret. "I'm Canadian."

"Ah," said Jimmy, "I've heard something like that before and begin to see what it implies. Well, it looks as if you were an independent lot. Is one allowed to state that in the Old Country we are rather proud of you?"

"Since I'd like to make Kelshope before dark, perhaps you had better get going," Margaret remarked.

Jimmy picked up the bag and fastened the deerskin straps, by which it hung from his shoulders like a rucksack. They started, and for a time he kept up with Margaret, but he did not talk. The pack

was heavy, he had not had much breakfast and had gone without his lunch. Besides, his leg was getting very sore. At length he stopped and began to loose the straps.

"Do you mind if I take a smoke?" he asked.

Margaret looked at him rather hard, but said she did not mind, and Jimmy, indicating a cedar log, pulled out his cigarette case.

"Do you smoke?"

"I do not. In the bush, we haven't yet copied the girls at the hotels."

"Now I think about it, the girls who smoked at the Montreal hotel were not numerous," Jimmy remarked. "When I went to the fishing lodge in Scotland, all smoked, but then Stannard's friends are very much up-to-date. The strange thing is, we're thought antiquated in the Old Country – "

He stopped and tried to brace up. What he wanted to state eluded him. He felt cold and the pines across the trail got indistinct.

"You see, in some of our circles we rather feel our duty is to be modern," he resumed with an effort. "I think you're not like that. Canada's a new country, but, in a way, one feels you're really older than we are. We have got artificial; you are flesh and blood – "

"Don't talk!" said Margaret firmly, but Jimmy thought her voice was faint, and for a few moments the tall pines melted altogether.

When he looked up Margaret asked: "Have you got a tobacco pouch?"

Jimmy gave her the pouch and she went off. He was puzzled and rather annoyed, but somehow he could not get on his feet. By and by Margaret came back, carrying the pouch opened like a double cup. Jimmy drank some water and the numbness began to go.

"You're very kind. I expect I'm ridiculous," he said.

"I was not kind. I let you carry the pack, although the cayuse knocked you down."

"Perhaps the knock accounts for something," Jimmy remarked in a languid voice.

He had got a nasty knock, but he imagined Stannard's cigars and Deering's iced drinks were really accountable. In the meantime, he noted that Margaret was wiping his tobacco pouch.

"You mustn't bother," he resumed. "Give me the thing."

"But when it's wet you cannot put in the tobacco."

"I thought you threw away the stuff. I can get another lot at the hotel."

Margaret brushed the tobacco from a flake of bark, and filled the pouch.

"In the woods, one doesn't throw away expensive tobacco."

"Thanks!" said Jimmy. "Some time since, I lived with people like you."

"Poor and frugal people?"

"No," said Jimmy, with a twinkle. "Dick and his wife were rather rich. In fact, in England, I think you begin to use economy when you get rich. Anyhow, it's not important, and you needn't bother about me. As a rule, philosophizing doesn't knock me out. The cayuse kicked pretty hard. Well, suppose we start?"

He got up and when Margaret tried to take the pack he pulled it away.

"The job's mine. I undertook to carry the load."

"But you're tired, and I think you're lame."

"We won't dispute," said Jimmy. "You oughtn't to dispute. Perhaps it's strange, but one feels your word ought to go."

"It looks as if my word did not go."

"Oh, well," said Jimmy, "when you command people, you have got to use some caution. Much depends on whom you command, and in Lancashire we're an obstinate lot. Anyhow, I'll take the bag."

He pushed his arms through the straps and Margaret said nothing. She might have taken the bag from him, but to use force was not dignified and she knew to let her carry the load would jar. When they set off she noted that his face was rather white and his step was not even. He had obviously got a nasty kick, but his pluck was good.

The sun went down behind the woods, the pines got dim and sweet resinous scents floated about the trail. The hum of insects came out of the shadow, and Jimmy was forced to rub the mosquitoes from his neck. To put up his hands was awkward, for the ground was uneven, and he must balance his load. He could not talk, the important thing was to reach the ranch before it got dark, and setting his mouth, he pushed ahead.

At length Margaret stopped at a fence, and when she began to pull down the rails Jimmy leaned against a post. The rails were rudely split, and the zig-zag fence was locked by crossed supports and not fastened by nails. On the other side, where timothy grass and oats had grown, was stubble, dotted by tall stumps and fern. A belt of chopped trees surrounded the clearing, and behind the tangled belt the forest rose like a dark wall. An indistinct log house and barns occupied the other end. An owl swooped noiselessly across the fence, and Jimmy heard the distant howl of a timber wolf.

"Kelshope ranch," said Margaret. "The path goes to the house. I must put up the rails."

Jimmy went through the gap. Perhaps it was soothing quietness, but he felt he liked Kelshope and his curiosity was excited. He knew the big Canadian hotels, the pullmans and observation-cars. So far, money had supplied him, as in London, with much that made life smooth. Now he was to see something of the Canada in which man must labor for all he gets. The strange thing was, he felt this was the Canada he really ought to know.

IV KELSHOPE RANCH

Breakfast was over at Kelshope ranch and Jimmy occupied a log at the edge of the clearing. Although his muscles were sore, he felt strangely fresh and somehow satisfied. At the hotel, as a rule, he had not felt like that. His leg hurt, but his host had doctored the cut with some American liniment, and Jimmy was content to rest in the shade and look about. He thought he saw the whole process of clearing a ranch.

In the background, was virgin forest; pine, spruce and hemlock, locking their dark branches. Then one noted the *slashing*, where chopped trees had fallen in tangled rows, and an inner belt of ashes and blackened stumps. Other stumps, surrounded by fern, checkered the oblong of cultivated soil, and the dew sparkled on the short oat stubble. The oats were not grown for milling; the heads were small and Jardine cut the crop for hay. The garden-lot and house occupied a gentle slope. The walls were built of logs, notched and crossed at the corners; cedar shingles, split by hand on the spot, covered the roof. Behind the house, one saw fruit trees and log barns. Nothing was factory-made, and Jimmy thought all indicated strenuous labor.

A yard or two off, Jardine rubbed his double-bitted axe with a small round hone. He wore a gray shirt, overalls and long boots, and his skin was very brown. He was not a big man, but he looked hard and muscular and his glance was keen.

"Ye need to get the edge good. It pays to keep her sharp," he said and tried the blade with his thumb.

"I expect that is so," Jimmy agreed. "Did you, yourself, clear the ranch?"

"I chopped every tree, burned the slashing, and put up the house and barns. Noo I'm getting things in trim and run a small bunch of stock."

Jimmy thought it a tremendous undertaking; the logs stacked ready to burn were two or three feet across the butt.

"How long were you occupied?" he asked.

"Twelve years," said Jardine, rather drily. "When the country doon the Fraser began to open up I sold my other ranch, bought two or three building lots in a new town, and started for the bush. I liked this location and I stopped."

"But can you get your stuff to a market?"

"Cows can walk, but when ye clear a bush ranch ye dinna bother much about selling truck. Ye sit tight until the Government cuts a wagon trail, or maybe a railroad's built, and the settlements spring up."

"And then you expect to sell for a good price all the stuff you grow?"

Jardine smiled. "Then I expect to sell the ranch and push on again. The old-time bushman has no use for game-wardens, city sports, store-keepers and real-estate boomers – "

He stopped and his look got scornful. Jimmy found out afterwards that the pioneer hates the business man and Jardine sprang from Scottish Border stock. Perhaps he had inherited his pride and independence from salmon-poaching ancestors. What he wanted he labored for; to traffic was not his plan.

"Weel," he resumed, "I'd better get busy. After dinner I'll drive ye to the hotel."

He went off, and although Jimmy had expected to lunch at the hotel he was satisfied to wait. He mused about his host. Jardine was not young, but he carried himself well and Jimmy had known young men who did not move like him; then the ranch indicated his talent for labor. Yet muscular strength was obviously not all one needed; to front and remove daunting obstacles, one must have pluck and imagination. The job was a man's job, but, in a sense, the qualities it demanded were primitive, and

Jimmy began to see why the ranch attracted him. His grandfather had labored in another's mill; the house of Leyland's was founded on stubborn effort and stern frugality.

Jimmy began to wonder where Jardine fed his cattle, because he saw none in the clearing, but by and by a distant clash of bells rolled across the trees. Jimmy had heard the noise before; when he went to sleep and again at daybreak, a faint, elusive chime had broken the quietness that brooded over Kelshope ranch. It was the clash of cow-bells, ringing as the stock pushed through the underbrush. When he heard a sharper note he got up and, for his leg hurt, went cautiously into the woods.

By and by he stopped in the tall fern. Not far off Margaret, holding out a bunch of corn, occupied the middle of an opening in which little red wineberries grew. Her pose was graceful, she did not wear a hat, and the sun was on her hair. Her neck was very white, and then her skin was delicate pink that deepened to brown. Her dress was dull blue and the yellow corn forced up the soft color.

"Oh, Bright; oh, Buck!" she called, and Jimmy thought her voice musical like the chiming bells.

Where the sunbeams pierced the shade long horns gleamed, the bells rang louder, and a big brown ox looked out, fixed its quiet eyes on the girl, and vanished noiselessly. Margaret did not move at all. She was still as the trees in the background, and Jimmy approved her quietness. He got a hint of balance, strength and calm.

"Oh, Bright!" she called, and a brawny red-and-white animal pushed out from the fern, shook its massive head, and advanced to smell the corn.

Jimmy now saw Margaret carried a rope in her other hand, but she let the ox eat the corn and stroked its white forehead before she threw the rope round its horns. Although she was very quick, her movements were gentle and the animal stood still. Then she looked up and smiled.

"You can come out, Mr. Leyland."

"You knew I was in the fern?"

"Sure," said Margaret. "I was born in the woods. All the same, you were quiet. I reckon you can be quiet. In the bush, that's something."

"You imply that I was quiet, for a tenderfoot?"

"Why, yes," Margaret agreed, smiling. "As a rule, a man from the cities can't keep still. He must talk and move about. You didn't feel you ought to come and help?"

Jimmy wondered whether she knew he had wanted to study her, but thought she did not. Anyhow, he was satisfied she, so to speak, had not posed for him.

"Not at all," he said. "I saw you knew your job, and I reflected that the ox did not know me. But shall I hold him until you catch the other?"

"Buck will follow his mate," Margaret replied, and when they started a cow-bell clashed and Buck stole out of the shade.

Jimmy thought stole the proper word. He had expected to hear branches crack and underbrush rustle, but the powerful oxen moved almost silently through the wood.

"Now I see why you give them bells," he remarked. "But doesn't the jangling bother the animals?"

"They like the bells. At night I think they toss their heads to hear the chime. Then they know the bells are useful. Sometimes when all is quiet the cattle scatter, but when the timber wolves are about or a cinnamon bear comes down the rocks the herd rolls up. Bush cattle are clever. Now Bright feels the rope, he's resigned to go to work."

"You know the woods. Have you always lived at a ranch?"

"For a time I was at Toronto," Margaret replied. "When I was needed at Kelshope, I came back."

Jimmy felt she baffled him. Margaret had not stated her occupation at Toronto, but he had remarked that her English was better than the English one used at the cotton mills. After all, he was not entitled to satisfy his curiosity.

"One can understand Mr. Jardine's needing you," he said. "I expect a bush rancher is forced to hustle."

"A bush rancher must hustle all the time," Margaret agreed. "Still, work one likes goes easily. Have you tried?"

"I have tried work I did not like and admit I've had enough," Jimmy said, and laughed. "When I started for Canada, my notion was I'd be content to play about."

Margaret nodded. "We know your sort. You are not, like our tourists, merchants and manufacturers. You have no use for business. All you think about is sport, and your sport's extravagant. You stop at our big hotels, and when you go off to hunt and fish you hire a gang of packers to carry your camp truck."

"I doubt if I really am that sort," Jimmy rejoined. "After all, my people are pretty keen business men, and I begin to see that to cultivate the habits of the other lot is harder than I thought. In fact, I rather think I'd like to own a ranch."

"For a game?" said Margaret and laughed, a frank laugh. "You must cut it out, Mr. Leyland. One can't play at ranching, and you don't know all the bushman is up against."

"It's possible," Jimmy admitted. "Well, I expect I am a loafer, but I did not altogether joke about the ranch. The strange thing is, after a time loafing gets monotonous."

Margaret stopped him. "I must get busy and you ought not to walk about. Sit down in the shade and I'll give you the *Colonist*."

Jimmy sat down, but declared he did not want the newspaper. He thought he would study ranching, particularly Margaret's part of the job. She put a heavy wooden yoke on the oxen's necks, fastened a rope to the hook, and drove the animals to a belt of burned slashing where big charred logs lay about. Jardine hitched the rope to a log and the team hauled it slowly to a pile. Jimmy wondered how two people would get the heavy trunk on top, but when Margaret led the oxen round the pile and urged them ahead, the log went up in a loop of the rope. For all that, Jardine was forced to use a handspike and Jimmy saw that to build a log-pile demanded strength and skill.

Resting in the shade, he felt the picture's quiet charm. The oxen's movements were slow and rhythmical; Jardine's muscular figure, bent, got tense, and relaxed; the girl, finely posed, guided the plodding animals. Behind were stiff, dark branches and rows of straight red trunks. A woodpecker tapped a hollow tree, and in the distance cow-bells chimed. The dominant note was effort, but the effort was smooth and measured. One felt that all went as it ought to go, and Jimmy thought about the big shining flywheel that spun with a steady throb at the Leyland cotton mill. Then his head began to nod and his eyes shut, and when he looked up Margaret called him to dinner.

After dinner Jardine got out his Clover-leaf wagon and drove Jimmy to the hotel. When they arrived Jimmy took him to his room on the first floor, and meeting Stannard on the stairs, was rather moved to note his relief. Stannard declared that he and some others had searched the woods since daybreak and were about to start for the ranch. By and by Deering joined them and made an iced drink. Jardine, with tranquil enjoyment, drained his long glass, and lighting a cigar, began to talk about hunting in the bush. His clothes were old and his hat was battered, but his calm was marked and Jimmy thought he studied the others with quiet curiosity. After a time they went off, and Jardine gave Jimmy a thoughtful smile.

"Your friends are polite and Mr. Deering can mix a drink better than a bar-keep."

"Is that all?" Jimmy inquired.

Jardine's eyes twinkled. "Weel, if I was wanting somebody to see me out, maybe I'd trust the big fellow."

Jimmy thought his remark strange. Stannard was a cultivated gentleman and Deering was frankly a gambler. Yet Jimmy had grounds to imagine the old rancher was not a fool. He was puzzled and rather annoyed, but Jardine said he must not stay and Jimmy let him go.

V

JIMMY HOLDS FAST

The sun had sunk behind the range, and the sky was green. In places the high white peaks were touched by fading pink; the snow that rolled down to the timber-line was blue. Mist floated about the pines by the river, but did not reach the hotel terrace, and the evening was warm. Looking down at the dark valley, one got a sense of space and height.

At the end of the terrace, a small table carried a coffee service, and Laura occupied a basket chair. She smoked a cigarette and her look was thoughtful. Jimmy, sitting opposite, liked her fashionable dinner dress. He had met Laura in Switzerland, but he felt as if he had not known her until she went with Stannard to the Canadian hotel. In fact, he imagined she had very recently begun to allow him to know her. Stannard had gone off a few minutes since, and Deering was playing pool with a young American.

"Since you came back from the ranch I've thought you preoccupied," Laura remarked.

"I expect you thought me dull," said Jimmy with an apologetic smile. "Well, for some days I've been pondering things, and I'm not much used to the exercise. In a way, you're accountable. You inquired not long since if I knew where I went?"

"Then you got some illumination at the ranch?"

"You're keen. I got disturbed."

"Does to stop at a ranch disturb one?" Laura asked in a careless voice.

"I expect it depends on your temperament," Jimmy replied and knitted his brows. "Kelshope is a model ranch; you feel all goes as it ought to go. When you leave things alone, they don't go like that. At Jardine's you get a sense of plan and effort. The old fellow and his daughter are keenly occupied, and their occupation, so to speak, is fruitful. The trouble is, mine is not."

Laura saw that when he, some time since, apologized for his loafing, her remarks had carried weight. Jimmy had begun to ponder where he went, and she wondered whether he would see he ought to return to the cotton mill. Still she did not mean to talk about this.

"You stopped Miss Jardine's horse?" she said.

"I did not stop the horse. I tried, but that's another thing. If I had not meddled, I expect Miss Jardine would have conquered the nervous brute and I would not have got a nasty kick."

"Oh, well," said Laura. "Sometimes to meddle is rash, but your object was good."

Then Stannard came to the veranda steps and looked about the terrace.

"Hello, Jimmy! Deering has beaten Frank and we must arrange about our excursion tomorrow."

Jimmy frowned and hesitated. When he had talked to Laura before, Stannard had called him away, but he thought she did not mean him to stay and he went off. When he had gone Laura mused.

She knew Stannard was jealous for her. He did not allow her to join him when his young friends were about, and she did not want to do so. For the most part she lived with her mother's relations, who did not approve of Stannard and were not satisfied about her going to Canada.

To some extent Laura imagined their doubts were justified. She knew Stannard had squandered much of her mother's fortune, and now that her trustees guarded the small sum she had inherited, he was poor. Yet he belonged to good clubs and went to race meeting and shooting parties. It looked as if sport and gambling paid, and Laura saw what this implied. Yet her father was kind and when she was with him he indulged her.

She had remarked his calling Jimmy away. As a rule, his touch was very light, and she wondered whether he had meant to incite the young fellow by a hint of disapproval; but perhaps it was not his object and she speculated about Jimmy. He was now not the raw lad she had known in Switzerland,

although he was losing something that at the beginning had attracted her. She thought he ought not to stay with Stannard and particularly with Deering, and she had tried to indicate the proper line for him to take. Well, suppose he resolved to go back to Lancashire? Laura knew her charm and imagined, if she were willing, she might go with Jimmy. Although he could not yet use his fortune, he was rich, and after a time would control the famous manufacturing house. Besides, he was marked by some qualities she liked. Laura got up with an impatient shrug, and blushed. She would not think about it yet. She was poor, but she was not an adventuress.

In the morning, Stannard, Deering and Jimmy started for the rocks. Their object was to follow the range and look for a line to the top of a peak they meant to climb another day. They lunched on the mountain, and in the afternoon stopped at the side of a gully that ran down to the glacier. The back of the gully was smooth, and the pitch was steep, but hardly steep enough to bother an athletic man. In places, banks of small gravel rested, although it looked as if a disturbing foot would send down the stones.

Some distance above the spot, the top of another pitch cut a background of broken rocks, streaked by veins of snow. The sun was on the rocks and some shone like polished steel, but the gully was in shadow and Jimmy had felt the gloom daunting. Deering pulled out his cigar-case. His face was red, his shirt was open and his sunburned neck was like a bull's.

"My load's two hundred pounds, and we have shoved along pretty fast since lunch," he said. "Anyhow, I'm going to stop and take a smoke."

"To lean against a slippery rock won't rest you much," Stannard remarked. "We'll get on to the shelf at the top of the slab."

"Then, somebody's got to boost me up," Deering declared, and when Stannard went to help, put his boot on the other's head and crushed his soft hat down to his ears.

Next moment he was on the shelf and shouted with laughter. Sometimes Deering's humor was boyishly rude, but his friends were not cheated, and Jimmy thought the big man keen and resolute. Stannard went up lightly, as if it did not bother him. He was cool and, by contrast with Deering, looked fastidiously refined. Jimmy imagined he had an object for leaving the gully. Stannard knew the mountains; in fact, he knew all a sporting gentleman ought to know and Jimmy was satisfied with his guide.

"Since you reckon we ought to get from under, why'd you fix on this line down?" Deering inquired.

"The line's good, but we were longer than I thought, and the sun has been for some time on the snow."

"Sure," said Deering. "The blamed trough looks like a rubbish shoot."

Jimmy had trusted Stannard's judgment, but now he saw a light; for one thing, the back of the gully was smooth. The mountain fronted rather north of west, and so long as the frost at the summit held, the party did not run much risk, but when the thaw began snow and broken rocks might roll down. When Deering had nearly smoked his cigar he looked up.

"Something's coming!"

Jimmy heard a rumble and a crash. A big stone leaped down the gully, struck a rock and vanished. A bank of gravel began to slip away, and then a gray and white mass swept across the top of the pitch. Snow and stones poured down tumultuously, and when the avalanche was gone confused echoes rolled about the rocks.

"That fixes it," said Deering. "I'm going the other way. Had we shoved along a little faster, we might have made it, but I was soft, and couldn't hit up the pace." He laughed his boisterous laugh and resumed: "The trouble is, I played cards with Jimmy when I ought to have gone to bed. Well, since we didn't bring a rope, what are you going to do about it?"

"If we can reach the top, I think we can get down along the edge," Stannard replied.

After something of a struggle, they got up, and for a time to follow the top of the gully was not hard. Then they stopped on an awkward pitch where a big bulging stone, jammed in a crack, cut their view.

"I'll try the stone, but perhaps you had better traverse out across the face and look for another line," Deering said to Stannard.

Jimmy went with Deering, and when they reached the stone saw a broken shelf three or four yards below. On one side, the rocks dropped straight to the gully; in front, the slope beyond the shelf was steep. For a few moments Deering studied the ground.

"A rope would be useful, but if we can reach the shelf, we ought to get down," he said. "I'll try to make it. Lie across the stone and give me your hands."

Jimmy nodded. At an awkward spot the second man helps the leader, who afterwards steadies him. The rock was rough and a small knob and the deep crack promised some support. Still, caution was indicated, because the shelf, on which one must drop, was inclined and narrow. Jimmy lay across the stone and Deering, slipping over the edge, seized his hands. He was a big fellow and Jimmy thought the stone moved, but he heard Deering's boots scrape the rock and the strain on his arms was less.

Then he heard another noise, and snow and rocks and a broken pine rolled down the gully. The avalanche vanished, the uproar sank, and Deering gasped, "Hold fast!"

The load on Jimmy's arms got insupportable. He imagined the noise had startled Deering and his foot had slipped from the knob. It looked as if he must hold the fellow until he found the crack. Jimmy meant to try, although the stone rocked, and he knew he could not long bear the horrible strain. If Deering fell, he would not stop at the shelf; he might not stop for three or four hundred feet. Jimmy set his mouth and tried to brace his knees against the rock. The stone was moving, and if it moved much, Deering would pull him over. Yet in a moment or two Deering might get his boot in the crack, and to let him fall was unthinkable.

Jimmy held on until Deering shouted and let go. He had obviously found some support, and Jimmy tried to get back, but could not. His chest was across the edge, and the stone rocked. He was slipping off, and saw, half-consciously, that since he must fall, he must not fall down the rock front. Pushing himself from the edge, he plunged into the gully, struck the rock some way down, and knew no more. Deering, on the shelf, saw him reach the bottom, roll for a distance and stop. He lay face downwards, with his arms spread out.

A few moments afterwards Stannard reached the spot and looked down. Deering's big chest heaved, his mouth was slack, and his face was white. When he indicated Jimmy his hand shook.

"I pulled him over," he said in a hoarse voice.

Stannard gave him a keen, rather scornful glance. "Traverse across the front for about twenty yards and you'll see a good line down. When you get down, start for the hotel and bring the two guides, our rope, a blanket and two poles. Send somebody to telegraph for a doctor."

"Not at all! I'm going to Jimmy. I pulled the kid over."

Stannard frowned. "You are going to the hotel. For one thing, I doubt if you could reach Jimmy; you're badly jarred and your nerve's gone. Then, unless you get help, we can't carry Jimmy out."

"You mustn't leave him in the gully," Deering rejoined. "Suppose a fresh lot of stones comes along?"

"Go for help," said Stannard, pulling out his watch. "Come back up the gully. If you have a flask, give it to me. I'm going down."

"But if there's another snow-slide, you and Jimmy will get smashed. Besides, the job is mine."

"The snow and stones come down the middle and they'll stop by and by. Don't talk. Start!"

Deering hesitated. He was big and muscular, but he admitted that on the rocks Stannard was the better man. Moreover, to know he was accountable for Jimmy's plunge had shaken him, and he saw Stannard was very cool.

"Take the flask," he said and went off at a reckless speed.

VI DEERING OWNS A DEBT

Jimmy saw a pale star, and veins of snow streaking high shadowy rocks. He thought when he looked up not long before, the sun was on the mountain, but perhaps it was not. His brain was dull and he was numbed by cold. He shivered and shut his eyes, but after a few minutes he smelt cigar-smoke and looked about again. Although it was getting dark, he saw somebody sitting in the gloom at the bottom of the rocks.

"Where's Deering?" he asked. "Did I let him go?"

"You did not. Take a drink," the other replied and pushed a flask into Jimmy's hand.

Jimmy drank, gasped, and tried to get up, but found he could not move.

"Where is Deering?" he insisted.

"I expect he's crossing the glacier with the guides from the hotel," said the man, who took the flask from him, and Jimmy knew Stannard's voice.

"Then where am I?"

"You are in the gully. You held on to Deering until he got support for his foot. Then you slipped off the big stone. Something like that, anyhow. Do you feel pain at any particular spot?"

"I don't know if one spot hurts worse than another. All hurt; I doubt if I can get up."

"You mustn't try," said Stannard firmly. "When Deering arrives we'll help you up."

Jimmy pondered. Since the evening was very cold, he thought it strange Stannard had pulled off his coat. Then he saw somebody had put over him a coat that was not his.

"Why have you given me your clothes?" he asked.

"For one thing, I didn't fall about forty feet."

"If I had fallen forty feet, I'd have got smashed. It's obvious!"

"Perhaps you hit the side of the gully and rolled down, but it's not important. When one gets a jolt like yours the shock's as bad as the local injury. Are you cold?"

"I'm horribly cold, but although I heard stones not long since I don't think I got hit."

"The stones run down the middle and I pulled you against the rock."

"You're a good sort," Jimmy remarked. "Deering's a good sort. To know he's not hurt is some relief."

Stannard said nothing and Jimmy asked for a cigarette. Stannard gave him a cigarette and a light, but after a few moments he let it drop.

"The tobacco's not good," he said, dully, and began to muse.

He was strangely slack and his body was numb. Perhaps to feel no local pain was ominous; he knew a man who fell on the rocks and had not afterwards used his legs. To be wheeled about for all one's life was horrible. When a doctor arrived he would know his luck, and in the meantime he dared not dwell on things like that. He studied the rocks. Stannard had obviously come down by the slanting crack; Jimmy thought he himself could not have done so. Then Stannard, risking his getting hit by rebounding stones, had remained with him for some hours. When Jimmy helped Deering the sun shone, and now the stars were out. The gully was high on the mountain and after the sun went the cold was keen, but Stannard had given him his coat. Stannard was like that.

"I expect you sent Deering to the hotel?" Jimmy resumed after a time.

"Yes; I was firm. Deering wanted to go down to you; but I doubted if he could get down and the important thing was to fetch help. You must be moved as soon as possible."

Jimmy nodded; Deering was the man he had thought. All the same, Stannard's was the finer type. Jimmy had long known his pluck, but he had other qualities. When one must front a crisis he

was cool; he saw and carried out the proper plan. But Jimmy's brain was very dull, and Stannard's figure melted and the rocks got indistinct.

After a time, he heard a noise. A shout echoed in the gully, nailed boots rattled on stones and it looked as if men were coming up. Deering, breathless and gasping, arrived before the others and motioned to Stannard.

"Not much grounds to be disturbed, I think," said Stannard in a quiet voice. "He was talking sensibly not long since."

Deering came to Jimmy and touched his arm. "You're not broke up, partner? You haven't got it against me that I pulled you off the rocks?"

"Certainly not! I slipped off," Jimmy declared. "Anyhow, you're my friend."

"Sure thing," said Deering quietly. "Take a drink of hot soup. We'll soon pack you out." He put a vacuum flask in Jimmy's hand and turned to the others. "Let's get busy, boys."

Jimmy did not know much about their journey down the gully and across the glacier, but at length he was vaguely conscious of bright lights and the tramp of feet along an echoing passage. People gently moved him about; he felt he was in a soft, warm bed, and with languid satisfaction he went to sleep.

When the others saw Jimmy was asleep they went off quietly, but at the end of the passage Deering stopped Stannard.

"Let's get a drink," he said. "For four or five hours I've hustled some and I need a pick-me-up."

Stannard gave him a keen glance. Deering had hustled. To carry Jimmy down the rocks and across the glacier, in the dark, was a strenuous undertaking, and where strength was needed the big man had nobly used his. Yet Stannard imagined the strain that had bothered him was not physical.

"Oh, well," he said, "I'll go to the bar with you. Waiting for you in the gully was not a soothing job."

"You knew I'd get back," Deering rejoined. "If I'd had to haul out the cook and bell-boys I'd have brought help."

"I didn't know how long you'd be and speed was important."

"You're a blamed cool fellow," Deering remarked. "If you had not taken control, I expect we'd have jolted Jimmy off the stretcher, and maybe have gone through the snow-bridge the guide didn't spot. Then you stayed with him, pulled him out of the way of the snow-slides, and kept him warm. I expect you saved his life."

"To some extent, perhaps that is so," Stannard agreed. "That somebody must pull Jimmy against the rock was obvious. All the same, I knew the stones wouldn't bother us after it got cold."

Deering was puzzled. Stannard's habit was not to boast, but it looked as if he were willing to admit he had saved Jimmy's life. Deering speculated about his object.

"Well," he said, "I own I was badly rattled. You see, if the kid had not held fast, I'd have gone right down the rock face and don't know where I'd have stopped. Perhaps it's strange, but I remembered I'd got five hundred dollars of his and the thing bothered me. To know I'd played a straight game didn't comfort me much."

"You're a sentimentalist," Stannard rejoined with a smile. "I don't know that a crooked game was indicated. But let's get our drinks."

They went to the bar and when Deering picked up his glass he said, "Good luck to the kid and a quick recovery!" He drained the glass and looked at Stannard hard. "When Jimmy needs a help out, I'm his man."

Stannard said nothing, but lighted a cigarette.

In the morning a young doctor arrived from Calgary and was some time in Jimmy's room.

"I reckon your luck was pretty good," he remarked. "After three or four days you can get up and go about – " He paused and added meaningly: "But you want to go slow."

Jimmy's face was white, but the blood came to his skin.

"I'd begun to think something like that," he said in a languid voice.

The doctor nodded. "Since you could stand for the knock you got, your body's pretty sound, but I get a hint of strain and the cure's moral. You want to cut out hard drinks, strong cigars, and playing cards all night."

"Do the symptoms indicate that I do play cards all night?"

"I own I was helped by inquiries about your habits," said the doctor, smiling. "If you like a game, try pool, with boys like yourself, and bet fifty cents. I don't know about your bank-roll, but your heart and nerve won't stand for hundred-dollar pots when your antagonists are men."

"One antagonist risked his life to save mine," Jimmy declared, with an angry flush, for he thought he saw where the other's remarks led.

"I understand that is so," the doctor agreed. "My job's not to talk about your friends, but to give you good advice. Cut out unhealthy excitement and go steady. If you like it, go up on the rocks. Mountaineering's dangerous, but sometimes one runs worse risks."

He went off and by and by Deering came in.

"The doctor allows you are making pretty good progress. The man who means to put you out must use a gun," he said with a jolly laugh. "Anyhow, we were bothered and when we got the bulletin we rushed the bar for drinks."

"My friends are stanch."

"Oh, shucks!" said Deering. "You're the sort whose friends are stanch. Say, your holding on until I pulled you over was great!"

"You didn't pull me over. The stone rocked and I came off."

"One mustn't dispute with a sick man," Deering remarked. "All the same I want to state I owe you much, and I pay my debts. I'd like you to get that."

Jimmy smiled. "If it's some comfort, I'm willing to be your creditor. I know you'd meet my bill."

"Sure thing," said Deering, who did not smile. "When you send your bill along, I'll try to make good. That's all; I guess we'll let it go."

"Very well. I don't see how you were able to stick to the slab."

"My foot slipped from the knob, but for a few moments you held me up, and bracing my knee against the stone, I swung across for the crack. Then I was on the shelf and you went over my head. That's all I knew, until Stannard joined me and took control."

"He sent you off?"

Deering nodded. "I wasn't keen to go, but he saw help was wanted, and he thought about wiring for a doctor. When I got back with the boys, our plan was to rush you down to the hotel, but it wasn't Stannard's. I allow we were rattled; he was cool. We must go slow and not jolt you; at awkward spots somebody must look for the smoothest line. Crossing the glacier, he went ahead with the lantern and located a soft snow-bridge the guide was going to cross."

"Stannard is like that," said Jimmy. "His coolness is very fine."

Deering agreed, but Jimmy thought he hesitated before he resumed: "In some ways, the fellow's the standard type of highbrow Englishman. He's urbane and won't dispute; he smiles and lets you down. He wears the proper clothes and uses the proper talk. If you're his friend, he's charming; but that's not all the man. Stannard doesn't plunge; he calculates. He knows just where he wants to go and gets there. I guess if I was an obstacle, I'd pull out of his way. The man's fine, like tempered steel, and about as hard – Well, the doctor stated you wanted quiet and I'll quit talking."

He went away and Jimmy mused. Deering talked much, but Jimmy imagined he sometimes had an object. Although he frankly approved Stannard, Jimmy felt he struck a warning note. Since Jimmy owed much to Stannard's coolness, he was rather annoyed; but the talk had tired him and he went to sleep.

VII

AN INSURABLE INTEREST

The sun was hot and Jimmy loafed in an easy chair at the shady end of the terrace. Laura occupied a chair opposite; the small table between them carried some new books, and flowers and fruit from the Pacific coast. In the background, a shining white peak cut the serene sky.

Three or four young men and women were on the veranda steps not far off. A few minutes since they had bantered Jimmy, but when Laura arrived they went. Jimmy rather thought she had meant them to go and he gave her a smile.

"I expect you have inherited some of Mr. Stannard's talents," he remarked.

"For example?"

Jimmy indicated the rather noisy group. "It looks as if you knew my head ached and I couldn't stand for Stevens' jokes. When you joined me he and his friends went off. Your father arranges things like that, without much obvious effort."

"I knew the doctor stated you must not be bothered," Laura admitted. "Besides, I engaged to go fishing with Stevens and some others, and before I get back expect I'll have enough."

"Is Dillon going?"

"Frank planned the excursion," said Laura and Jimmy was satisfied.

Dillon was a young American whom Jimmy rather liked, but to think Laura liked Frank annoyed him. Now, however, she had admitted that his society had not much charm.

"Anyhow, you're very kind," he remarked, and indicated the fruit and flowers. "These things don't grow in the mountains."

"The station is not far off and to send a telegram is not much bother."

"To send up things from Vancouver is expensive."

"Sometimes you talk like a cotton manufacturer," Laura rejoined.

Jimmy colored but gave her a steady glance. "It's possible. My people are manufacturers; my grandfather was a workman. Not long since, I meant to cultivate out all that marked me as belonging to the cotton mill. Now I don't know – Perhaps I inherited something useful from my grandfather; but in the meantime it's not important. You *are* kind."

"Oh, well," said Laura. "You were moody and the doctor declared you had got a very nasty jolt."

"I was thoughtful. To some extent you're accountable. When one is forced to loaf one has time to ponder, and when you inquired if I knew where I went –"

He stopped, for a guide, carrying fishing rods and landing nets, went down the steps and Stannard came out of the hotel.

"Your party's waiting for you," Stannard remarked to Laura, who got up and gave Jimmy a smile.

"Get well and then ponder," she said and joined the others.

Jimmy frowned. The others, of course, ought not to wait for Laura, but Stannard had sent her off like that before. All the same, he was her father and Jimmy owned he must not dispute his rule. When the party had gone, Stannard sat down opposite Jimmy and lighted a cigarette.

"I'm glad to note you make good progress."

"In a day or two I'll go about as usual. In fact, if the others go fishing to-morrow, I'll try to join them. I think I could reach the lake."

"Some caution's necessary," Stannard remarked. "You got a very nasty shake and ran worse risks than you knew. When you stopped in the bank of gravel your luck was remarkably good; I did not expect you to stop until you reached the glacier. Then, had I not had a thick coat that helped to keep you warm, you might not have survived the shock. Afterwards much depended on Deering's

speed and his getting men who knew the rocks. Indeed, when we started I hardly thought we could carry you down in useful time."

Jimmy was puzzled, because he did not think Stannard meant to imply that his help was important. The risk Jimmy had run, however, was obvious, and Stannard's talking about it led him to dwell on something he had recently weighed.

"Since I was forced to stay in bed I've tried to reckon up and find out where I am," he said. "You are my banker. How does the account stand?"

"I imagine Laura's advice was good; wait until you get better," Stannard said carelessly.

"When I start to go about, I'll be occupied by something else. How much do I owe?"

For a few minutes Stannard studied his note-book, and when he replied Jimmy set his mouth. He knew he had been extravagant, but his extravagance was worse than he had thought.

"Until I get my inheritance, it's impossible for me to pay you," he said with some embarrassment. "I, so to speak, have pawned my allowance for a long time in advance."

"Something like that is obvious."

"Very well! What am I going to do about it?"

"My plan was to wait until you did get your inheritance; but I see some disadvantages," said Stannard in a thoughtful voice.

"The trouble is, I might not inherit," Jimmy agreed. "One must front things, and climbing's a risky hobby. We mean to shoot a mountain sheep and I understand the big-horn keep the high rocks. Then we have undertaken to get up a very awkward peak. Well, suppose I did not come back?"

"You don't expect a fresh accident! Haven't you had enough? However, if your gloomy forebodings were justified, I expect your relations would meet my claim."

"After all, mountaineering accidents are numerous, and you don't know Dick Leyland. You have got a bundle of acknowledgments, but the notes are not stamped and Dick hates gambling. It's possible he'd dispute my debts and he's a remarkably keen business man."

"If that is so, it might be awkward," Stannard agreed. "But what about the other trustee?"

"Sir James is in India; I expect he'd support Dick. During their lifetime my share is a third of the house's profit, but, unless they're satisfied, I cannot for some time use much control. In fact, they have power to fix my allowance."

Stannard's look was thoughtful, as if he had not known; but since Laura knew, Jimmy wondered why she had not enlightened her father.

"Very well," said Stannard. "My plan might not work. Have you another?"

The other plan was obvious. Jimmy was surprised because Stannard did not see it.

"You trusted me and I mustn't let you down," he said with a friendly smile. "If we insure my life, you'll guard against all risk."

"My interest is insurable – " Stannard remarked and stopped. Then he resumed in a careless voice: "Your caution's ridiculous, but if you are resolved, I suppose I must agree. In order to satisfy you, we'll look up an insurance office at Vancouver."

Somehow Jimmy was jarred. Stannard's remark about his insurable interest indicated that he had weighed the plan before, and Jimmy thought his pause significant. Then, although he had agreed as if he wanted to indulge Jimmy, his agreement was prompt. For all that, the plan was Jimmy's and Stannard's approval was justified.

Then Deering came along the terrace and said to Stannard, "Hello! I thought you had gone to write some letters, and Jimmy's look is strangely sober. Have you been weighing something important?"

The glance Stannard gave Jimmy was careless, but Jimmy thought he meant Deering was not to know.

"Sometimes Jimmy's rash, but sometimes he's keener than one thinks. Anyhow, he's obstinate and we were disputing about a suggestion of his I did not at first approve. I wrote the letters I meant to write. Sit down and take a smoke."

Deering sat down and they talked about the peaks they had planned to climb.

A week or two afterwards, Stannard and Jimmy went to Vancouver, and when he had seen the insurance company's doctor Jimmy walked about the streets. He liked Vancouver. When one fronted an opening in the rows of ambitious office blocks, one saw the broad Inlet and anchored ships. Across the shining water, mountains rolled back to the snow in the North; on the other side, streets of new wooden houses pushed out to meet the dark pine forest. The city's surroundings were beautiful, but Jimmy felt that beauty was not its peculiar charm.

At Montreal, for example, one got a hint of cultivation, and to some extent of leisure, built on long-established prosperity. Notre Dame was rather like Notre Dame at Paris and St. James's was a glorious cathedral. Quiet green squares checkered the city, and the streets at the bottom of the mountain were bordered by fine shade trees. Vancouver was frankly raw and new; one felt it had not yet reached its proper growth. All was bustle and keen activity; the clang of locomotive bells and the rattle of steamboat winches echoed about the streets. Huge sawmills and stacks of lumber occupied the water-front. Giant trunks carried electric wires across the high roofs, and, until Jimmy saw the firs in Stanley Park, he had not thought logs like that grew.

Then he thought the citizens typically Western. Their look was keen and optimistic; they pushed and jostled along the sidewalks. Jimmy saw an opera house and numerous pool-rooms, but in the daytime nobody seemed to loaf. All struck a throbbing note of strenuous business. Jimmy studied the wharfs and mills and railroad yard, but for the most part he stopped opposite the land-agents' windows.

The large maps of freshly-opened country called. Up there in the wilds, hard men drove back the forest and broke virgin soil. Their job was a man's job and Jimmy pictured the struggle. He had loafed and indulged his youthful love for pleasure, but the satisfaction he had got was gone. After all, he had inherited some constructive talent, and he vaguely realized that his business was to build and not to squander. Then Laura and the doctor had worked on him. Laura had bidden him study where he went; the other hinted that he went too fast.

At one office he saw a map of the country behind the hotel and he picked out the valley in which was Kelshope ranch. There was not another homestead for some distance and a notice stated that the land was cheap. Jimmy pondered for a few minutes and then went in.

The agent stated his willingness to supply land of whatever sort Jimmy needed, but he thought, for an ambitious young man, the proper investment was a city building lot. In fact, he had a number of useful lots on a first-class frontage. Jimmy studied the map and remarked that the town had not got there yet. The agent declared the town would get there soon, and to wait until the streets were graded and prices went up was a fool's plan. Jimmy stated he would not speculate; if the price were suitable, he might buy land in the Kelshope valley on the other map.

The agent said the valley was not altogether in his hands. Kelshope was in Alberta, but for a split commission he could negotiate a sale with the Calgary broker. If one bought a block and paid a small deposit, he imagined a good sum might stand on mortgage. Jimmy replied that he would think about it and went off. It was not for nothing he had studied business methods at the Leyland mill.

In the evening he and Stannard occupied a bench in the hotel rotunda. Cigar-smoke floated about the pillars; the revolving glass doors went steadily round, and noisy groups pushed in and out, but Stannard had got a quiet corner and by and by Jimmy asked: "Have you agreed with the insurance office?"

"They have not sent the agreement. I expect to get it."

"Then, I'd like you to go back in the morning and insure for a larger sum. I'll give you a note for five hundred pounds."

"I haven't five hundred pounds," said Stannard with surprise. "Why do you want the sum?"

"I'm going to buy a ranch near Jardine's," Jimmy replied. "The agent wants a deposit and I must buy tools. Can you help?"

Stannard looked at him hard and hesitated, but he saw Jimmy was resolved.

"I might get the money in three or four weeks. It will cost you something."

"That's understood," Jimmy agreed. "I don't, of course, expect the sum for which you'll hold my note. Will you get to work?"

"I rather think your plan ridiculous."

"You thought another plan of mine ridiculous, but you helped me carry it out," Jimmy said quietly.

Stannard looked up with a frown, for Deering crossed the floor.

"I've trailed you!" he shouted. "There's not much use in your stealing off."

"I didn't know you had business to transact in Vancouver," Stannard rejoined.

"Dillon had some business and brought me along," said Deering with a noisy laugh. "Looks as if my job was to guide adventurous youth."

Jimmy smiled, for he imagined the young men Deering guided paid expensive fees. He did not know if Deering's occupation was altogether gambling, but he did gamble and his habit was to win. Yet Jimmy liked the fellow.

"Jimmy's mood is rashly adventurous; he wants to buy a ranch," Stannard resumed. "I understand he has interviewed a plausible land-agent."

"All land-agents are plausible," said Deering. "Tell us about the speculation, Jimmy."

Jimmy did so. Stannard's ironical amusement had hurt, and he tried to justify his experiment.

"Looks like a joke; but I don't know," said Deering. "If you can stand for holding down a bush block until the neighborhood develops, you ought to sell for a good price. All the same, the job is dreary. Have you got the money?"

"I was trying to persuade Stannard to finance me. He doesn't approve, but thinks he could get the sum."

"That plan's expensive," Deering observed. "What deposit does the agent want?"

Jimmy told him and he pondered. Stannard said nothing, but Jimmy thought him annoyed by Deering's meddling. Moreover, Jimmy thought Deering knew. After a few moments Deering looked up.

"If you mean to buy the block, I'll lend you the deposit and you can pay me current interest. I expect the agent will take a long-date mortgage for the rest, but you ought to ask your trustees in England for the money."

"Have you got the sum?" Stannard inquired.

"Sure," said Deering, with a jolly laugh. "Dillon and I met up with two or three sporting lumber men who have just put over a big deal. My luck was pretty good, and I'd have stuffed my wallet had not a sort of Puritan vigilante blown in. He got after the hotel boss, who stated his was not a red light house."

Jimmy studied the others, and although Stannard smiled, was somehow conscious of a puzzling antagonism. On the whole, he liked Deering's plan; he did not think Dick Leyland would agree, but Sir Jim might do so.

"Thank you, but Stannard's my banker," he replied. "All the same, in the morning I'll write to my trustees."

"Oh, well," said Deering. "If you want the money, I'm your man. But let's get a drink."

VIII

JIMMY GETS TO WORK

On the evening Jimmy returned from Vancouver he went to the dining-room as soon as the bell rang and waited by Stannard's table. The table occupied a corner by a window, and commanded the room and a noble view of rocks and distant snow. Other guests had wanted the corner, but Stannard had got it for his party. Although he was not rich, Stannard's habit was to get things like that.

The room was spacious and paneled with cedar and maple. Slender wooden pillars supported the decorated beams, the tables were furnished with good china and nickel. The windows were open and the keen smell of the pines floated in.

After a few moments Jimmy heard Deering's laugh and Stannard's party crossed the floor. Frank Dillon talked to Laura, whom Jimmy had not seen since he returned; Frank was rather a handsome, athletic young fellow. Laura wore a fashionable black dinner dress and her skin, by contrast, was very white. Her movements were languidly graceful, and Jimmy got a sense of high cultivation. He was young and to know he belonged to Laura's party flattered him. Yet he was half embarrassed, because he waited for other guests and did not know if Laura would like his friends. When she gave Jimmy her hand Stannard indicated two extra chairs.

"Hallo!" he said. "I must see the head waiter. This table's ours."

"Two friends of mine are coming," Jimmy replied and turned to Laura apologetically. "Perhaps I ought to have told you, but I wrote to Jardine from Vancouver and when I returned and got his letter you were not about."

"Was it not Miss Jardine you helped when her horse ran away?"

"I doubt if I did help much, but after the horse knocked me down I went to the homestead and Jardine was kind. Now I want to talk to him; he's a good rancher."

"Then, ranching really interests you?"

"Jimmy has bought a ranch and I'm going to stay with him," said Deering with a noisy laugh. "Perhaps to hunt and live the simple life will help me keep down my weight."

Laura gave Jimmy a keen glance and he thought she frowned. "You a rancher? It's ridiculous! But Deering likes to joke."

"It is not at all a joke," Deering rejoined. "Jimmy has bought a ranch, and Stannard and I disputed who should lend him the money. As a rule, one's friends don't dispute about that sort of privilege; but one trusts Jimmy. Perhaps his trusting you accounts for it."

"I suppose Miss Jardine comes with her father?" Laura remarked.

Jimmy agreed and looked at Stannard, who had picked up the bill of fare.

"We must wait for your friends," he said carelessly, but Jimmy thought him annoyed.

Then Jimmy turned and saw Margaret and Jardine. The rancher's clothes were obviously bought at a small settlement store, but his figure was good and his glance was keen and cool; somehow Jimmy imagined him ironically amused. Margaret's blue dress was not fashionable, but she carried herself like an Indian and was marked by something of the Indian's calm. In the sunset, her hair was red, her eyes were blue, and her skin was brown. When Jimmy advanced to meet her she gave him a frank smile. He presented her to Laura and noted Dillon's admiring glance.

Stannard called a waiter and when dinner was served began to talk. Laura supported him, but Jimmy rather thought her support too obvious. This was strange, because Laura was clever and knew where to stop. Now it looked as if she did not. The Jardines were his friends, but nothing indicated that for them to dine at a fashionable hotel was embarrassing. He imagined Margaret studied Laura, and sometimes Laura's glance rested on the other for a moment and was gone. When Deering had

satisfied his appetite, however, he firmly took the lead and Jimmy let him do so. Sometimes Deering's humor was rude, but it was kind.

When they went to the terrace others joined them and soon a party surrounded Stannard's table. After a time the people moved their chairs about and Jimmy saw Jardine was with Deering and Dillon had joined Margaret. He fancied Laura had remarked this, but she lighted a cigarette and gave him a friendly smile.

"Your friends don't want you just now. When you started for Vancouver, I think you ought to have told me about your ranching experiment."

"I didn't know," said Jimmy in an apologetic voice. "I saw a map in a land-agent's window and something called. I hesitated for a few minutes and then went in."

"Then, you didn't go to Vancouver in order to buy a ranch?"

"Not at all – " said Jimmy and stopped, because he did not want to state why he did go. "Of course, it looks like a rash plunge," he resumed. "Still I doubt if it really is rash and I imagined you would approve."

Laura smiled. "I don't know much about ranching."

"Not long ago you declared I ought to have an occupation."

"Then, you felt you must get to work because I thought you ought?" said Laura and gave Jimmy a gentle glance.

Jimmy's heart beat, but he knitted his brows. He was sincere and Laura was not altogether accountable for his resolve.

"Well," he said in a thoughtful voice, "I was getting slack and loafing along the easy way, until you pulled me up. I owe you much for that. You forced me to ponder and I began to see loafing was dangerous. One must have an object and I looked about – "

He stopped, with some embarrassment, and Laura saw he was moved. Jimmy did owe her something, for she had meddled at a moment when he was vaguely dissatisfied and looking for a lead. At the beginning, she was not selfish; she wanted him to stop and ponder, but he had started off again and was not going where she wanted him to go.

"You imply you have found an object?" she remarked. "After all, one's object ought to be worth while, and to chop trees on a ranch will not carry you far. Perhaps your proper occupation is at the cotton mill."

"I think not; anyhow, not yet. Until I'm twenty-five, Dick Leyland has control. Dick is a good mill manager, but his school is the old school. He holds down our work-people and they grumble; the machinery's crowded and some is not safe; the operatives have not the space and light that makes work easier. Then the office is dark and cold. One can't persuade Dick that harshness and parsimony no longer pay. Well, when I go back I must have power to put things straight. The house is famous, my father built its fortune, and after all I'm its head."

Laura mused. She was poor, and hating poverty, had begun to weigh Jimmy's advantages. To marry the head of the famous house was a sound ambition, and she thought if she used her charm, Jimmy would marry her. He was young and in some respects argued like a boy; Laura was young, but she argued like a calculating woman. Yet she hesitated.

"But you have some power," she said and smiled. "Besides, you're obstinate."

"It's possible. All the same, I haven't tried my power and don't trust myself. Dick and I would jar, and when I couldn't move him I expect I'd get savage and turn down the job. When I have done some useful work, for example, cleared a ranch, got confidence and know my strength, I'll go back and try to take my proper part."

"Does one get the qualities you feel you want at a bush ranch?"

"Jardine has got a number. At Kelshope all is properly planned and stubbornly carried out. His labor's rewarded, and the important thing is, he is satisfied. I'm not, and I admit I haven't much ground to be satisfied."

"Oh, well," said Laura. "In a few days we start on our excursion to Puget Sound. I think you agreed to join us."

Jimmy knitted his brows. He wanted to join the party, but saw some obstacles.

"We talked about it. If I agreed, of course, I'll go."

"Because you agreed?"

"Not altogether. I'd like to go."

"Then why do you hesitate? We want you to join us."

"For one thing, I really don't think I did agree. Anyhow, you'll have Dillon. His home's on Puget Sound and I expect he's going."

"Frank is rather a good sort, but sometimes he bores one," Laura remarked carelessly. "Besides, after a time he's going to some friends in Colorado."

Jimmy's heart beat. Although he was not yet Laura's lover, her charm was strong. Still he ought to get to work, and if he went to Puget Sound with Laura, he might not afterwards bother about the ranch. Well, perhaps the ranch was not important; if he wanted, he could, no doubt, sell the land.

The clash of a locomotive bell, softened by the distance, echoed across the bush. A freight train had started from the water tank for the long climb to the pass and Jimmy felt the faint notes carried a message. Canada was a land of bells. At Montreal the locomotive bells rang all night; their tolling rolled across wide belts of wheat, and broke the silence that broods over the rocks. When all was quiet in the bush, the cow-bells rang sweet chimes. Perhaps Jimmy was romantic, but he felt the bells stood for useful effort, and now they called. The strange thing was, he thought he heard pine branches crack and Margaret's voice. "Oh, Buck! Oh, Bright!"

"I'm sorry, but I can't go," he said. "I have bought the ranch and must get to work."

Laura gave him a keen glance and got a jar. He frowned and his mouth was tight. She had thought she could move Jimmy, but now she doubted, and because she was proud she dared not try.

"Oh, well," she said, "we have talked for some time, and Deering has left Jardine."

She sent Jimmy off and looked about. Dillon talked to Margaret, and although Laura imagined a smile would detach him from the group, she did not smile. After all, if Frank joined her, Jimmy might occupy the chair he left. Laura crossed the terrace and joined a young Canadian.

Jimmy sat down by the rancher and inquired: "Do you know the land I bought?"

"The soil is pretty good, but the timber's thick and until ye work oot the turpentine, ye'll no' get much crop. Ye'll need to chop and burn off the trees, grub the stumps, and then plow for oats and timothy. For some years, the oats will no' grow milling heads; ye cut them for hay."

"Looks like a long job. Suppose I wanted to sell the block after a time?"

"It depends," said Jardine dryly. "Ye might get your money back."

"You imply it depends on the labor one uses?" Jimmy remarked. "Well, I know nothing about chopping and I haven't pulled a crosscut saw. Do you think I can make good?"

Jardine looked about the terrace and his eyes twinkled. He noted the men's dinner jackets and the women's fashionable clothes. People talked and laughed and smoked.

"I'm thinking your friends would not make good. Ye canna play at ranching."

"My object's not to play," said Jimmy in a quiet voice. "Anyhow, before you start to work you must get proper tools. Suppose you tell me what I need?"

Jardine did so and added: "Proper tools and stock are a sound investment, but ye canna get them cheap. Can ye put up the money?"

"I must borrow some," Jimmy admitted, and thought Jardine studied Stannard, who talked to two or three young men not far off.

"Then, maybe ye had better borrow from Mr. Deering."

Jardine had said something like this before, but Jimmy let it go and the rancher indicated Margaret. Dillon leaned against a post opposite the girl and a group of young men and women occupied the surrounding chairs. A touch of color had come to Margaret's skin; her look was alert

and happy. Jimmy had known her undertake a man's job at the ranch, but on the hotel veranda she was not at all exotic.

"I must thank ye, Mr. Leyland. Sometimes it's lonesome at the ranch," Jardine remarked.

Jimmy said he hoped his guests would stay for some days, but Jardine refused.

"At Kelshope work's aye waiting and we'll start the morn. If ye come back wi' us, we'll look ower the block ye bought, and I might advise ye about layin' 't oot. In the meantime, we'll reckon up the tools and stock ye'll need – "

They began to talk about the ranch, and Stannard joined Laura, who sent off her companion.

"What do you think about Jimmy's experiment?" Stannard asked.

Laura studied him. On the whole, his look was careless, but she doubted.

"I don't know. Do you think him rash?"

Stannard shrugged. "My notion is, the thing's a rather expensive caprice, but after all, Jimmy's rich. He's easily moved and perhaps his bush friends have persuaded him."

"It's possible," Laura agreed. "All the same, Jimmy's keen. He really means to ranch."

"You have some grounds to know him keen?"

Laura's grounds were good and she wondered whether Stannard knew. Her father was clever and she saw his look was thoughtful.

"For one thing, he declares he cannot go with us to Puget Sound," she said.

"You imply he would sooner start for the bush with the Jardines?" Stannard suggested with a smile.

"After all, it's not important, and I expect Jimmy will go where he wants," said Laura, and went up the veranda steps.

She thought she had baffled Stannard, but she was hurt. At the beginning, she knew her advice to Jimmy was good. When he was going the wrong way she had stopped him. Now, however, it looked as if her power was gone. She could see herself Jimmy's guide in Lancashire, but to guide him in the lonely bush was another thing.

IX

THE QUIET WOODS

A warm Chinook wind, blowing from the Pacific, carried the smell of the pines. The dark branches tossed and a languid murmur, like distant surf, rolled up the valley. Jimmy had pulled off his coat and his gray workman's shirt was open at the neck, for he liked to feel the breeze on his hot skin. He was splitting cedar for roof shingles, but had stopped in order to sharpen his ax. Since he had not yet cut his leg, he thought his luck was good.

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