Bindloss Harold

Delilah of the Snows

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Содержание

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I
INGLEBY FEELS THE BIT

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

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

sunset's smoky red. He vaguely felt that it was portentous and emblematical, for that evening the brightness of the West seemed to beckon him.

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

Suddenly his heart beat a trifle faster as a figure appeared in the meadow. It was a girl of about his own age, which did not greatly exceed twenty, who carried herself well, and moved, it seemed to him, with a gracefulness he had never noticed in any other woman. She wore a white hat with red poppies on it, and he noticed that the flowers he had diffidently offered her were still tucked in the belt of the light grey dress. She was walking slowly,

and apparently did not see him in the shadow, so that when she stopped a moment with her hand upon the stile he could, although he felt the presumption of it, look at her steadily.

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

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

displease her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Don't you know?" and Ingleby's laugh had a trace of

bitterness in it. "When it is over they don't want me. Of course, we helped them to win, but that was what I was there for – that, and nothing more – while you played splendidly. You see, one depends so much upon his partner."

"Does he?"

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

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

"Well," she said, in a non-committal fashion, "we certainly won the match, and I think you were wrong to slip away. One

would almost fancy that you are unduly sensitive now and then."

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

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

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

"And you were disappointed when you met them?"

Ingleby made a little expressive gesture. "Chiefly in myself. I thought I was strong enough not to mind being treated as a professional and politely ignored except when I was useful. Then I imagined it would be excellent discipline, and discipline is presumably good for one, as the worthy vicar, who really appears to have ideas, is fond of observing."

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

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

Ingleby laughed frankly, though there was a little flush in his face. "I know I very often talk like a fool – and the difference between you and the others is that you very seldom think it

necessary to remind me of it. That is, of course, one difference. The rest – "

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

duty to put his foot on you."

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

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

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

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

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

Grace looked curiously at him instead of at the pale-tinted honeysuckle whose sweetness hung about them. She was quite

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

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

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

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

better to do that day?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They had reached an oaken door in a mossy wall, and Ingleby

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

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

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

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

Then he turned away, looked back, still bareheaded, and with

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

II
INGLEBY STANDS BY HIS OPINIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"One or two of the others certainly were; but that's not quite the question. Of course, there is no excuse for the closing of Willow Dene, but driving out in wagonettes on Sunday doesn't

quite appeal to me. It's over three miles, too, unfortunately. One has, after all, to consider popular – prejudice – you see."

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

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

"You know my opinions."

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

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

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

plaster off the lower ceilings, and I really think it does."

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

"Where they charge you sixpence."

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

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

Leger shook his head reproachfully. "I'm afraid those effete prejudices are still very strong in you. You play tennis, too. How much does that cost you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leger smiled. "I wonder," he said, "whether that has just dawned on you. Still, I'm not so strong as you are – and there's

Hetty. You'll have to go alone, but you'll leave at least two people behind you who will think of you often."

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

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

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

"You have been marketing?" he said.

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

"Ingleby's going where they do something of that kind, though

I believe they now and then dig up gold and silver, too," said her brother.

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

"Then you are going away?" she asked.

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

Hetty sat silent for several moments.

"Well?" she said at last.

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

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

"I'm afraid Tom is right – though I wish you could come," he said. "When I mentioned it I didn't remember that he isn't very strong and that it must be a very rough country for an Englishwoman. You wouldn't care to live in a log hut forty miles from anywhere, Hetty?"

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

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

with a little smile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Of course, anything I can do – "

Hetty smiled sardonically. "Oh, yes, I know! Still, it's really

very little – or I wouldn't ask you. Just to look after Tom to-morrow. Now, he has in most ways a good deal more sense than you – "

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

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

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

Then, remembering that most young women were subject to

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

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

was scattering leaflets among the crowd.

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

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

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

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

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

Then they wound through dusky woods out of the hot valley, and down the long white road across a sun-baked moor, where the dust whirled behind them in a rolling cloud. However, the men in the foremost vehicle got little of it, and Ingleby felt that the drive would have been pleasant in different circumstances, as he watched the blue hills that rose in the dazzling distance, blurred with heat. Only one white fleecy cloud flecked the sweep of cerulean, and the empty moor lay still under the drowsy silence

of the Sunday afternoon. It seemed to him most unfitting that the harsh voices of his companions, the clatter of hoofs, and the doleful tooting of the cornet, should jar upon it. Then as they dipped into a hollow they came upon other travellers, all heading in the same direction, who hurled somewhat pointed jests at them as they passed; but these did not exactly resemble the men in the wagonettes. Their attire was by no means neat, and they had not in the least the appearance of men about to discharge a duty, while several of them carried heavy sticks.

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

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

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

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

Ingleby said nothing further; but it dawned on him, as it had, indeed, done once or twice before, that even a defective system of preserving peace and order might be preferable to none at all. Still, he naturally would not admit his misgivings, and said

nothing until the wagonettes rolled into a little white village gay with flowers and girt about by towering beeches. The windows of an old grey house caught the sunlight and flashed among the trees, and, as the vehicles drew up, a trim groom on a splendid horse swept out through the gate of a clematis-covered lodge.

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

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

III
CONFLICTING CLAIMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Then one would sincerely hope that Major Coulthurst will

get a post at home."

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

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

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

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

This, as it happened, was very little nearer the truth than such statements usually are, when made by a matron who has an

unappreciated daughter's future to provide for; but the lady who heard it understood the reason for her companion's rancour.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Esmond looked up, and, as it happened, Grace Coulthurst and Geoffrey Esmond came slowly towards them across the lawn just then. The young man's gaze was fixed upon the girl, but she was looking away from him, which increased the suggestiveness of his attitude and expression, for both of those who watched them could see his face. Grace was indeed distinctly pretty, and that afternoon the indefinite but unmistakable attribute which the woman who had defended her termed good style was especially noticeable. It was expressed

in the poise of the little head, the erect carriage, and even the fashion in which the light draperies hung in flowing lines about the shapely figure. Then the black-robed lady turned, and looked at Coulthurst steadily.

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

"Could you not trust me?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His companion, however, smiled somewhat curiously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man laughed. "I should almost have fancied it was

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

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

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

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

"Where are you going?" asked Esmond.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That is rot!" he said. "Willow Dene belongs to me, and you are certainly not coming in. I don't feel inclined to explain my reasons for keeping you out of it, and it's quite probable you

wouldn't understand them. Have you brought any responsible person to whom one could talk along with you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coulthurst touched his shoulder, and said something in his

ear, but the young man moved away from him impatiently.

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

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

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

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

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

The men with the post came on again; there was a roar from the crowd, and a crash, as the gate swung open; then as a man with a stick sprang through the gap Esmond's dog-whip came

down upon his face. Next moment somebody had hurled him backwards, and the crowd rolled through the opening.

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

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

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

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

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

"Nobody will interfere with you while you take him away, but the man you have was not the one who struck him down," he

said. "Give him up, and we'll go back quietly."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV
LEGER'S RESPONSIBILITY

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

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

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

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

Ingleby sat down, a trifle limply, and, unconscious of the fact that his own clothes were badly torn, gazed at his companion. Leger's dusty disarray heightened the effect of his pallor, and his hair, dank with perspiration, lay smeared upon his forehead,

while there was a big discoloured bruise upon one cheek. They had come home across the meadow and through the woodland instead of by the road, and neither of them remembered how many hedges and thickets they had scrambled through, since the one thing apparent was the advisability of escaping attention.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ingleby made a little gesture, and once more for almost a minute the heavy silence was intensified by the ticking of his

watch and the sounds in the street below. Both of them listened intently, almost expecting to hear the tramp of heavy feet upon the stairway.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You know who did it?"

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

"You mean?"

"I could plead not guilty, but I couldn't point out the man responsible. You see, I induced him to join the Society, and gave him the American's pamphlets – I believe the more virulent ones. They seemed to make a strong impression on him. One can't well

back out of his responsibility – especially when the adversary is always ready to make the most of the opportunity. Besides, the man has a family."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What shall we do?" she said.

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

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

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

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

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

"That would happen, Tom?" she said.

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

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

Ingleby, moved by an impulse he did not understand, caught and held fast one of her hands. "Hetty," he said, "aren't we old friends? There is nobody I would sooner take with me, but we shall certainly quarrel if you ask me a question of that kind again."

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

"I don't think you want to be unpleasant, Hetty," said Ingleby. "Anyway, you have only about an hour in which to get ready,

because if we're not off by the next train it's quite likely that we shall not have the opportunity for going at all. Get what you want together, and meet us behind the booking office on the main line platform. Tom and I will take the back way to the station."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

leave a trail behind us."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Major Coulthurst fancied he could recognize the man who assaulted you, Mr. Esmond, and I have no doubt we will lay

hands on him in a day or two," said the officer. "If you could identify him, too, it would make the thing more certain, and I would like to read you the description furnished me before we go any farther."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A cap, sir," said the sergeant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

able to recollect the fellow's appearance rather more distinctly."

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

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

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

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

V
THE NEW COUNTRY

It was a still evening, and Major Coulthurst and Mrs. Esmond paced slowly side by side up and down the terrace at Holtcar Grange. The house looked westward, and the last of the sunshine rested lovingly upon its weathered front, where steep tiled roof and flaking stone that had silvery veins in it were mellowed to pale warm tints by age. Beyond it, orchid house, fernery, and vinery flashed amidst the trees; while the great cool lawn, shaven to the likeness of emerald velvet, glowing borders, and even the immaculate gravel that crunched beneath the major's feet conveyed the same suggestion to him. It was evident that there was no need of economy at Holtcar Grange, and Coulthurst, who had faced the world long enough to recognize the disadvantages of an empty purse, sighed as he remembered the last budget the post had brought him.

He had served his nation sturdily, according to his lights, which, however, were not especially brilliant, wherever work was hardest and worst paid; while now, when it was almost time to rest, he was going out again to the wilderness on the farthest confines of a new country, where even those who serve the Government live primitively. He longed to stay in England and take his ease, but funds were even lower than they usually were

with him. Still, he shrank from exposing his daughter to the discomforts he was at last commencing to find it hard to bear, and she had but to speak a word and remain, with all that any young woman could reasonably look for, the mistress of Holtcar Grange. Though he roused himself with an effort he felt that his conversation was even less brilliant than usual and that his companion noticed it. It was certain that she smiled when she surprised him glancing somewhat anxiously across the lawn.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Esmond laughed, "You might have expressed it more happily, though it is perhaps only natural that there was a day or

two when I would not have found fault with you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

him.

"I am disappointed," she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the meanwhile there were at least three people who would have found no fault with Major Coulthurst's description of Western Canada. Having discovered somewhat to their

astonishment that the population of Quebec and Montreal was already quite sufficient, and that strangers without means were not greatly desired in either city, these three had, in accordance with Ingleby's previous purpose, started West again, and on the fifth day sat spiritlessly in a Colonist car as, with whistle screaming, the long train rolled into sight of a little desolate station on the Albertan prairie.

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

Hetty Leger, however, sat languidly still, where the hot draught that blew in through an open window scattered the dust upon her. Her face was damp, and unpleasantly gritty, for the water in the tank had long run out. Her head ached, as did every bone in her body, for Colonist cars are not fitted as the Pullmans are, and she had with indifferent success for four nights essayed to sleep on a maple shelf which pulled out from the roof above when one wanted it. She had certainly hired a mattress, but its inch or two of thickness had scarcely disguised the hardness of the polished wood beneath it; and although the cost of it and the little green curtain had made a serious inroad on the few

dollars left in her scanty purse they had not solved the problem of dressing; while the atmosphere of a close-packed Colonist car when the big lamps are lighted in hot weather is a thing to shudder at. It is also, in view of the fact that most of the passengers dispense with curtains, somewhat embarrassing to rise in the morning and wait amidst a group of half-dressed men and women for a place in the cupboard at the rear of the car where ablutions may at least be attempted when there is any water in the tank.

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

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

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

Beside it rose two desolate frame houses, a crude structure of galvanized iron, and a towering water tank, but that was all, and beyond them the gleaming rails ran straight to the rim of the empty wilderness. Nothing moved on its interminable levels; the

dingy sky seemed suffused with heat, and along the track a smell that was stronger than the reek of creosote rose from the baked and fissured earth. The withered grass was of the same tint as the earth save where the clay on the bank of a *coulée* showed a harsh red, and the vast stretch of dusty prairie seemed steeped in the one dreary grey. This, she reflected with a sinking heart, was the land of promise to which she had journeyed five thousand miles to find a home; but, though the track was suggestively littered with empty provision cans, there was as yet very little sign of the milk and honey.

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

bitterly. She felt insignificant and lonely in that great empty land, and its desolation crushed her spirits.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

better of him. He, however, only laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How much have we left?" she asked.

Ingleby laughed, somewhat ruefully. "Eight dollars, I believe.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI
HALL SEWELL

The afternoon was clear and cool, but bright sunlight filled a glade among the towering pines which creep close up to the western outskirts of Vancouver City. They are very old and great of girth, and though here and there a path or carriage drive has been hewn through the strip of primeval wilderness the municipal authorities have been wise enough to attempt no improvement upon what nature has done for them, and Stanley Park remains a pleasance whose equal very few cities possess. It is scented ambrosially with the odours of balsam and cedar; deep silence fills the dim avenues between the colonnades of towering trunks; and from every opening one looks out upon blue water and coldly gleaming snow.

On the afternoon in question the stillness was rudely broken by a murmur of voices, unmodulated and sharp with an intonation which sounds especially out of place in the wilderness, though it is heard there often enough, from the redwoods of Oregon to where Alaskan pines spring from ten feet of snow. A crowd of people were scattered about the glade, and while some were dressed in "store clothes" and a few in coarse blue jean the eyes of all were turned towards the stump of a great cedar, sawn off a man's height above the ground, which formed a natural

platform for a speaker whose address had astonished most of them. Ingleby and Leger lay a little apart from the rest, where the sunlight fell faintly warm upon the withered needles, while Hetty was seated near them upon a fallen fir, displeasure in her eyes and her lips set together. Her eyebrows also seemed unusually straight, as they often did when she was angry, and that gave to her delicately pretty face a curious appearance of severity one would scarcely have expected to find there. She was dressed tastefully, for she earned a sufficiency as a boarding-house waitress.

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

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

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

"Well," she said, "I'm vexed with you and Tom, as well as with that man. I wish he hadn't come now when we are nice and

comfortable and you are both earning good wages – at least when the steamers come in."

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

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

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

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

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

a cleverer man than himself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Above him?" said Ingleby.

Hetty looked at him curiously. "Yes. You know what everybody means by that, and it's generally a girl of that kind that

men with your notions fall in love with. It's because you want so much more than is good for you that you have such notions."

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

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

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

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

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

There was a little growl of disgust as well as sardonic laughter,

and while one or two angry men moved towards the speaker the man with the dark eyes stood up suddenly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What did I get for my pains?" said Sewell. "That's what the question comes to, and I'll tell you frankly, since, until we or our

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

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

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

The crowd was a Canadian one, good-humouredly tolerant, respectful of constituted authority, and, what was more to the purpose, reasonably contented with their lot. They were also,

as usual, somewhat deficient in the quick enthusiasm which is common across the frontier. Had ample time been afforded him the orator might have got hold of them and impressed upon them a due comprehension of their wrongs, but a good many of them were by no means sure that they had very much to complain of as yet. Still, there were angry expostulations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He sprang down from the stump, the crowd melted away, and

Hetty laughed as she glanced at her companions.

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

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

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

"This Province," he said drily, "is a tolerably big one, and from what I've heard they may want a man of his kind in the Northern ranges presently. It isn't the supinely contented who face the frost and snow there, and the Crown mining regulations don't seem to appeal to the men who stake their lives on finding a little gold. They appear to be even less pleased with those who administer them."

VII
HETTY BEARS THE COST

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

There was, however, nothing that he could do for a minute or two, and he leaned against a tier of silk bales with a bundle of dispatch labels and a slip of paper in his hand, while Leger sat upon the truck behind him. He had, though it was no longer exactly his business, been carrying sugar bags upon his back most of that afternoon, partly to lessen the labour of Leger who had

not his physique, and now the white crystals glittered in his hair and clung, smeared with dust, to his perspiring face. His sleeves were rolled back to the elbow, showing his brown arms, which had grown hard and corded since he came to Canada; while his coarse blue shirt, which was open at the neck and belted tight at the waist, displayed as more conventional attire would not have done the symmetry of a well set-up figure.

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

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

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

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

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

Leger moved away, and Ingleby was endeavouring to scrape some of the sugar off his person when a man, whom he recognized as one of the leading citizens of Vancouver, and several ladies, came down the steamer's gangway. Then he started and felt his heart throb as his glance rested on one of

them, who, as it happened, looked up just then. It was evident that she saw him, and he was unpleasantly sensible that his face was growing hot. There was, he would have admitted at any other time, no reason for this, but in the meanwhile it was distinctly disconcerting that Grace Coulthurst should come upon him in his present guise, smeared with dust and half-melted sugar. Then he occupied himself with his cargo slip, for it was in the circumstances scarcely to be expected that she would vouchsafe him any recognition.

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

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

Ingleby's heart was throbbing a good deal faster than usual, but he held himself in hand. Miss Coulthurst was apparently pleased

to see him, but there was an indefinite something in her serene graciousness which put a check on him. It was, he felt, perhaps only because she was patrician to her finger-tips that she had so frankly greeted him. A girl with less natural distinction could, he fancied, scarcely have afforded to be equally gracious to a wharf-labourer.

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

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

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

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

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

She stopped a moment, and then looked at him reflectively.

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

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

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

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

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

Ingleby laughed, though it was pleasant to be told that she remembered anything he had said. "I really fancy I have learned

a little sense in Canada, and I am not going to inflict my crude notions upon you again. Still, there is a question I should like to ask. Did Mr. Esmond of Holtcar – recover?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She swept away with a soft swish of dainty garments, and Ingleby, whose face grew curiously intent as he watched her, climbed the slanting gangway to the deck of the liner when she disappeared. From there he could see the white tops of the ranges gleaming ethereally as they stretched back mountain behind mountain towards the lonely North. The Green River country lay far beyond them, and there were leagues of tangled forest, and thundering rivers, to be crossed; but that day the untrodden snow he gazed upon seemed to beckon him, and a sudden longing to set out upon the long trail grew almost irresistible. There was gold in the wilderness, and with enough of it a man might aspire to anything, even the hand of a Crown Commissioner's daughter.

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

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

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

"It's not there, anyway. I fancied you had made the lot up.

Somebody has put those cases in."

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

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

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

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

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

"Nothing!" said the traffic manager. "If there's anything

wrong with your sorting you'll probably hear about it in a week or so."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They went out together, and when Ingleby was about to speak Leger checked him with a gesture. "I think I know what you mean to say – but there's another question to consider," he said. "Trade's slack in the city just now, and taking it all round I fancy that man's advice is good. If we can induce Hetty to stay here we'll try the new mining country."

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

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

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

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

The two men looked at each other, and Leger protested.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ingleby felt his face grow hot. "Hetty," he said simply, "you ought to know that isn't so. If you must come we shall be glad

to have you, and if you find the life a hard one you must try to forgive me. If I had known what I was doing I might have spared you this."

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

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

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

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

VIII
ON THE TRAIL

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

A blackened kettle, a spider – as a frying-pan is usually termed in that country – and a few plates of indurated fibre lay about the fire, for the last meal of the day was over, and it had been as frugal as any one who had not undertaken twelve hours' toil in that vivifying air would probably have found it unappetizing. Where resinous wood was plentiful Ingleby could make a fire, but he could not catch a trout or shoot a deer. Indeed, a man unaccustomed to the bush usually finds it astonishingly difficult even to see one, and provisions were worth a ransom in the

auriferous wilderness into which they were pushing their way. They had spent several weeks in it now, travelling, where the trail was unusually good, eight to twelve miles a day, though there were occasions when they made less than half the distance with infinite difficulty, and Hetty alone knew what that journey had cost her.

The white peaks that gleamed ethereally high up in the blue, crystal lakes, and the endless ranks of climbing pines, scarcely appealed to her as she floundered through tangled undergrowth and ten-foot fern, or stumbled amidst the boulders beside thundering rivers. She had lain awake shivering, with the ill-packed fir twigs galling her weary body, high up on great hill shoulders, and fared Spartanly on a morsel of unsavoury salt pork and a handful of flour, while Ingleby set his lips now and then when he saw the little forced smile in her jaded face. It was no great consolation to reflect that other women in that country had borne as much and more.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing in particular," and Hetty glanced reflectively at the

fire. "Still, I don't think you would be content with any girl likely to look at you, and most of us would like to have a good deal more than we ever get."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then for a few seconds man and startled horse apparently went round and round scattering fir needles and rattling gravel, until

the half-broken cayuse yielded and Ingleby stood still, gasping, with his hand on the bridle, while a girl who did not seem very much concerned looked down on him from the saddle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I asked you a question," he said.

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

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

light. Then Grace Coulthurst laughed.

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

Major Coulthurst turned suddenly in his saddle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Major Coulthurst is human, anyway, but the other fellow's insolence made me long to pull him off his horse," he said. "Is

there, after all, any essential difference between an officer of the Northwest Police and a mineral claim prospector?"

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

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

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

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

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

"I can't say I understand you."

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

both lost our temper."

"At Willow Dene?"

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

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

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

"Miss Coulthurst," said Ingleby.

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

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