

THE BUSH-RANCHER



HAROLD BINDLOSS

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Title: The Bush-Rancher

Date of first publication: 1923

Author: Harold Bindloss (1866-1945)

Date first posted: Feb. 24, 2022

Date last updated: Feb. 24, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220265

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THE BUSH-RANCHER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BUSH-RANCHER
NORTHWEST!
THE MAN FROM THE WILDS
KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK
LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE
THE WILDERNESS MINE
WYNDHAM'S PAL
PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL
THE BUCCANEER FARMER
THE LURE OF THE NORTH
THE GIRL FROM KELLER'S
CARMEN'S MESSENGER
BRANDON OF THE ENGINEERS
JOHNSTONE OF THE BORDER
THE COAST OF ADVENTURE
HARDING OF ALLENWOOD
THE SECRET OF THE REEF
FOR THE ALLISON HONOR
THE LEAGUE OF THE LEOPARD
THE INTRIGUERS
PRESCOTT OF SASKATCHEWAN
RANCHING FOR SYLVIA
THE LONG PORTAGE
VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS
A PRAIRIE COURTSHIP
SYDNEY CARTERET, RANCHER
MASTER OF THE WHEATLANDS
THE GOLD TRAIL
THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY
THE GREATER POWER
THRICE ARMED
LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST
BY RIGHT OF PURCHASE
DELILAH OF THE SNOWS
FOR JACINTA
WINSTON OF THE PRAIRIE
THE DUST OF CONFLICT
ALTON OF SOMASCO
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER

THE BUSH-RANCHER

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "NORTHWEST!" "THE MAN FROM THE WILDS," "KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK," "LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE," "THE WILDERNESS MINE," "PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL," "THE BUCCANEER FARMER," "THE LURE OF THE NORTH," ETC.



TORONTO
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PUBLISHERS

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Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BOB'S TRANQUILLITY	1
II. MAXWELL PRESENTS HIMSELF	9
III. HELEN'S ADVENTURE	19
IV. DREAM PICTURES	29
V. HELEN TRIES HER POWER.	40
VI. MAXWELL TRUSTS HIS LUCK.	51
VII. MAXWELL RELAXES.	61
VIII. HELEN MAKES A PLUNGE	75
IX. THE PLAN WORKS	84
X. BOB DISAPPROVES	93
XI. MAXWELL'S VALISE.	101
XII. THE COFFER GOES	112
XIII. ELLMER'S SPECULATION	123
XIV. THE TIDE TURNS	132
XV. WITH THE STREAM	142
XVI. MAXWELL'S HESITATION	151
XVII. HELEN PONDER.	161
XVIII. THE CALL.	170
XIX. THE BREAKING STRAIN	179
XX. THE RECKONING	193
XXI. HELEN'S ENLIGHTENMENT.	203
XXII. THE FIGHT FOR THE STEPS	213
XXIII. BOB SHOULDERS HIS LOAD	224
XXIV. WILMOT'S GUN	233
XXV. INGLIS TAKES CONTROL	241
XXVI. THE INQUIRY	251
XXVII. HELEN TAKES CHARGE.	263
XXVIII. THE JAIL-BREAKERS	273
XXIX. THE PUZZLE SOLVED	285
XXX. BOB'S LUCK TURNS.	296
XXXI. PIONEERS	306

THE BUSH-RANCHER

The Bush-Rancher

I

BOB'S TRANQUILLITY

BOB CAVERHILL pulled out a small round hone and rubbed his ax. The ax was double bitted, with two curved blades like the axes the Vikings used, and carried a famous Pennsylvania maker's stamp. The hone, shaped something like a watch, was made in an electric furnace at Niagara. Bob was fastidious about his tools and used the best he could get.

He balanced on a narrow plank, notched, six feet from the ground, into a big cedar trunk, and his pose was good. His jacket hung from a broken branch and his thin gray shirt indicated the firm molding of his shoulders and the curve to his waist. Bob had long used the ax, and as a rule the North American chopper is a model of muscular symmetry. His skin was brown, and his quiet watchful glance marked him for a man who lived in the woods. In fact, Bob Caverhill was a pretty good type of the Canadian bush-rancher.

When he thought the ax was sharp, he lighted his pipe, and leaning against the big trunk, looked about. A soft Chinook blew up the valley, and the long fields of timothy grass rolled in waves of changing color. The stiff dark pines did not move, but Bob heard the wind in their saw-edged tops and the ripples on the lake. In the open, the ripples sparkled like polished steel; in the shade, reflections of straight, red trunks and dusky branches trembled on the water. For a background, blue hills and a high, white peak cut the serene sky.

For the most part, all Bob saw was his. His father, when land was cheap, had bought the wooded flats by the lake and Bob was satisfied with his inheritance. Although he was young, tranquillity was the dominant note in his character. In the woods, all goes quietly, and Bob had some grounds for calm satisfaction. Shadow Lake ranch was fertile and carried a good herd of stock. The oat and timothy hay the wide clearing grew fed the cattle when the undergrowth in the woods withered off.

The shiplap house and log barns were good, the orchard gave high-grade packing fruit, and Bob's bank-roll met his needs. Moreover, he loved the woods, and at Shadow Lake the winds from the Pacific drove back the frost. In summer, warm rain and scorching sun ripened the crops and urged the cedars, pines and hemlocks to tremendous growth. The valley was beautiful, but its beauty was marked by something virginal and vaguely austere.

Bob's habit was not to loaf, but for a few minutes he smoked his pipe and mused. The big clearing had cost his father much and for some years the old man had fought stubbornly to drain the muskegs by the lake. At one time it looked as if the fight would break Caverhill, but he had conquered, and deep ditches pierced the alluvial soil that grew bumper crops. Where Caverhill stopped, Bob pushed on, and now he saw the reward of his labor and room for fresh progress.

Behind the drained belt, cornfields, dotted by tall stumps, occupied rising ground. Farther back was a belt of burned brush waiting for the plow, and then the tangled logs and branches in the slashing. By and by Bob would burn the slashing and cut a fresh gap in the forest.

His father had not urged him to carry on the ranch, and had sent him to Toronto University. Caverhill, himself, had come out from Montreal, and since he was a cultivated man and rich enough to buy the large block of land, Bob sometimes wondered why he had left the city. All the same, he did not think his father had romantic grounds for doing so. Caverhill was marked by a sobriety and balance that did not harmonize with romantic exploits, and in North America the keenest ranchers are perhaps the men who forsake the cities for the bush. As a rule, however, their children go back.

Caverhill was obviously satisfied, but Bob thought he found the labor hard and was willing for his son to follow another occupation. Bob imagined his mother was happy at Shadow Lake, although she must go without the cultivated society she had known. When Bob came back for a summer vacation Caverhill died. They had rolled logs into piles for burning all one scorching day, but after supper Caverhill resolved to put a load of oats in the barn. Bob was frankly tired and stopped to help his mother wash the dishes. Caverhill, however, would not own fatigue; all he imagined ought to be done must be done. He was quiet and rather slow, but Bob thought him indomitable. Bob felt indomitable was the proper word, and it was important that he had inherited a number of his father's qualities.

When Bob and his mother went to the barn, the oats were in the mow, but Caverhill lay by the empty sledge. His fork was clenched in a stiff, cold hand, and Bob knew he had carried his last load. Bob did not go back to the university. For Mrs. Caverhill Shadow Lake was home, but she died in six months and Bob was alone.

Well, it was eight years since. He had undertaken a big job and thought he was making good. The ranch prospered and he meant to carry out his father's plans. But for this he was not ambitious, and so far no woman had disturbed his calm. At Toronto he had met a number of fashionable girls, but none had charmed him much; at Shadow Lake he had known his mother and his neighbors' uncultivated wives.

After a time, he looked across the shining lake and frowned. Paddles flashing in the sun fixed his glance and he saw two canoes move round a point. The canoes were not Indian dug-outs but factory-built boats; Bob knew the gleam of varnish. A fishing party was crossing the lake, and he had not much use for city sports. Sometimes they arrived with tents and packers, and carried expensive guns about the bush. The deer they shot were not numerous, but they frightened off the shy animals and broke the calm that broods over the woods.

Bob was not at all a moody recluse. It was rather that he vaguely shrank from the disturbing forces for which the strangers stood. He was happy in his occupation and wanted to be left alone.

The canoes steered for a wooded point on his side of the lake. The paddles beat slackly and Bob thought the people towed a silver spoon for trout. If they landed near the ranch, he must give them supper and on the whole he hoped they would not. The canoes, however, vanished behind the point and he knocked out his pipe. He had stopped for some time and the cedar must come down. Balancing on the narrow plank, he swung his ax and a measured throb rolled across the woods. Bob was a good chopper, and when one can use the ax the rhythmic sweep of arms and tool has an absorbing charm. Moreover, he must concentrate on driving the keen blade into the notch.

After a time, two men and two women came up a path from the lake and stopped near the tree. The first two were young, and Helen Maxwell imagined she had some talent for art. Bob did not see her, and for a few moments she studied him with critical curiosity. His figure was good; she thought the clean lines Greek. She noted his even semicircular swing; his

body rather followed than drove the shining ax. All his movements were measured and the shock of the blade was a staccato beat.

Helen approved his strong neck and the poise of his head, which was partly turned from her. She saw his brown face in profile and admitted that its molding was rather fine. The nose and jaw were prominent; the mouth was firm. In fact, she thought the unconscious woodman rather a handsome fellow. Then her brother advanced.

“Hello, chopper!”

Bob’s arms got slack and the ax struck the plank. He turned, and looking down, saw a young man and an attractive girl. The girl wore a big, shady hat, thin summer clothes, and long boots. Her eyes and hair were black and her skin was burned red. The young man was obviously her brother. They had two companions, but Bob looked at his ax, stuck in the plank.

“Pretty near my foot!” he remarked.

“I’m sorry. Perhaps I ought not to have bothered you, but we had waited _____”

“Oh, well,” said Bob, “chopping’s a risky job and I have hit my foot when nobody shouted. I saw your canoes on the lake, but thought you had made for Hemlock Point.”

Helen Maxwell noted with some amusement that he knitted his brows, as if he would rather the party had stopped at the point. For all that, in the bush hospitality is the rule, and he resumed: “The ranch is mine, and if you’re short of flour or groceries, I expect we can supply you.”

“Thanks,” said Maxwell. “All we want is a spot to camp. We’ll promise to use some care about our fires.”

“Camp where you want. By the pool behind the pines is a pretty good location. Shall I come along and help you put up your tents?”

Maxwell said their Indian packer would pitch the camp and he was satisfied to know they could get wood and fresh water.

“You don’t want to start a fire yet,” said Bob, who looked at the sun. “Supper’s at six o’clock and I’ll expect you at the ranch.”

Helen did not think him a keen host and imagined her brother would refuse, but Maxwell turned to the others and she knew he meant them to agree.

“You’re kind. We’ll arrive at six o’clock,” he said.

Bob let them go and noted carelessly that the others were older than the girl and her brother. Then he frowned and rubbed his ax. To give the party supper and perhaps other meals would not bother his cook; but he did not want them about the ranch. The girl was attractive; he thought the young man keen and cultivated. Bob admitted he was perhaps ridiculous, but he would sooner go without the society of people like that. They stood for much he thought he had done with and was resigned to know could not be his.

When the ax was sharp he resumed his chopping, but his tranquillity was gone. The arrival of the fishing party had given him a jolt. Bob did not like to be jolted and was annoyed, because he knew he really wanted the people to remain. There was the trouble.

II

MAXWELL PRESENTS HIMSELF

AT six o'clock Bob received his guests in a room that went across the wooden house. Helen Maxwell, looking about with some curiosity, noted the big fireplace, built for burning logs, for on the Pacific Coast the cold snaps are short. The walls were plain, dressed lumber, marked by resinous cracks, the roughly boarded floor was torn by nailed boots, and the long table was made by a bush carpenter. For all that, the room was homelike and Helen rather approved its austere simplicity. Perhaps it was strange, but she thought the piano in a corner and the two or three good pictures did not jar.

Outside the hired men joked and laughed. The splash of water indicated that they washed, and Helen had remarked the row of tin basins on a board. The windows commanded a noble view of the lake and woods. A door at the back was open, and the man-cook carried a loaded tray from a lean-to shed. Then Maxwell turned to his host.

"I know you are Mr. Caverhill, and I must present you to Mrs. Duff and my sister Helen. Then, since you don't yet know us, I must present my partner and myself. We are Duff and Maxwell, real-estate agents, Vancouver City. Duff is head of the house, but I stopped your chopping and am accountable for our meeting."

Bob gave Mrs. Duff his hand. "I hope you'll soon know me better, ma'am, and so long as you stay in our neighborhood you will use the ranch _____"

Somebody in the passage laughed and pushed another. Heavy boots rattled on the boards and the hired men came in. They wore loose, colored shirts and overalls, their red faces shone, and their hair was flat and dark with water. One pulled up a clumsy bench, Bob indicated chairs for his guests, the cook threw down the plates, and supper was served.

Helen Maxwell had not visited at a ranch before and thought there was something Homeric about the function. The cooking was rude, but the food was good; the men were big and their soil-stained clothes were thin. One saw the molding of their muscular bodies. At the beginning they were quiet

and ate with frank satisfaction, like hungry animals, but when the food vanished one and another began to talk. Sometimes Caverhill was Boss and sometimes Bob. In England Helen had studied classical art and history, and she thought her host's rule was rather like the rule of the head of an old Greek household before Athenian cultivation spread. Nothing indicated that he was a modern Canadian employer, but she imagined he did rule.

By and by the choppers went off noisily and Helen heard one remark that the girl was "a looker." She saw Bob's twinkle and frankly laughed. Then the cook picked up the dishes and the party went to the veranda. In front was a big arrow-bush and shining humming-birds hovered about the straight branches and snowy flowers. In the background were dark woods, quiet water, and a peak that glimmered blue and white, cutting the yellow sky.

Bob put down cigarettes and tobacco and studied his guests. He was not keen about real-estate agents. On the whole, he thought them a pushing, vulgar, and rather unscrupulous lot, for the bush-rancher is something of an aristocrat, like the desert Bedouin. He rules hard men and his rule is founded on physical pluck and his knowing his job. Yet real-estate agents were useful, and Bob thought Duff a good Ontario type. Moreover, he understood the Vancouver house put up a square deal. He knew some others that did not.

Duff's hair had begun to get white; he was rather fat and quietly humorous, although his jokes were not at all clever. Mrs. Duff was marked by a touch of refinement. Bob had known one or two ladies like her in Toronto. Perhaps it was strange, but Maxwell, although frankly English, was nearer the Canadian land-agent type than Duff. His confidence was marked, his restless glance was keen, and he led the talk. Bob thought Duff stood for sobriety and balance, but Maxwell was the driving force. Then his glance dwelt on Helen.

Although she was very young, he saw she had something of her brother's confidence; he thought her sanguine, quick and generous. Her eyes and hair were black, her skin, where the sun had not touched it, was clear white, and her clothes were fashionable. Bob knew city campers sometimes engaged packers to carry their clothes. Her figure was rather short, but gracefully slender and round. In fact, Bob admitted that she had charm.

"Had you good luck fishing?" he inquired.

"Pretty good," said Duff. "We got some big gray trout, but Miss Maxwell and my partner are the sports. My wife likes the woods and

brought me along. Then Harry not long ago jumped us into a bold speculation, and when he swung the deal across I felt I needed a holiday.”

“In our occupation, modesty like Duff’s is something of a drawback,” Maxwell remarked and laughed. “Although the plan was mine, I could not have made good had not my partner helped. We needed a large sum and I imagine investors put up the money because they knew Tom Duff. I doubt if they would have bet much on me.”

Bob approved his frank laugh. “Are you stopping long?” he asked. “The fishing’s pretty good, and if Mrs. Duff and your sister like, they can use a room at the ranch.”

It looked as if Maxwell hesitated and Bob thought he studied Helen, but he said, “You’re kind. We don’t know yet; we’ll camp until our mail arrives. Our clerks can handle all the business that was doing when we started. Besides, we’re not altogether engaged in a fishing excursion.”

“Ah,” said Bob, “you’re looking about? Well, the back country is Government land and mine is not for sale.”

“Harry’s habit is to look about,” Duff remarked. “Sometimes he sees, and puts over, a lucky scheme; sometimes he does not. Well, I admit the real estate man who’s satisfied to sit at his desk and sell building lots for a commission doesn’t get very far; but when you speculate on back-blocks you need some grit and a big bank-roll.”

Mrs. Duff looked up and Bob imagined she approved her husband’s caution. Maxwell smiled, but his look was boyishly keen.

“We are boring Mr. Caverhill and since we’re inquisitive city tenderfeet we would sooner he talked about the bush. For example, does a ranch pay?”

“If I talk about ranching economy, I’ll bore Mrs. Duff and Miss Maxwell,” Bob rejoined.

Mrs. Duff gave him a smile, and Helen said, “Not at all. I don’t know if it’s remarkable, but the bush interests me. One feels the woods are waiting, perhaps waiting to be used, and now the towns grow fast, their quiet charm must soon be broken. One speculates about the breaking—— But I’m an inquiring tourist and you are a rancher.”

Bob thought her interest sincere and he said, “On the Northern Pacific slope, a bush ranch is not for a time a paying proposition. Anyhow, I imagine you would get richer if you put your money in a bank. Our ranches are not, like the ranches on the plains, open cattle runs. In winter, you must

feed the stock; and clearing ground is a slow, laborious job. Then, at first, you do not get much of a crop. The soil must lie open to rain and sun; you must cultivate out the resin.”

“But if the reward is very small, why do you undertake the labor?”

“Ranching has some advantages. Nobody is your master and all you see is yours. You live in the woods; sometimes, when you’re not occupied, you can fish and shoot. Isn’t it like that in the Old Country? Haven’t you people willing to pay for owning land?”

“Our landlords do not chop big pines and roll about heavy logs.”

“In Canada, we reckon a man’s business is to take a job; but when you stay with the job you do get a reward,” Bob replied. “Although, at first, a bush ranch does not pay, it’s a pretty good investment.” He indicated the tangled belt of chopped trees at the edge of the forest. “See how it works! You begin at the slashing and when you have burned the logs you raise a thin hay crop between the stumps. The oats will feed a few cattle that in summer run loose in the bush. After a few years, the crop gets heavier, you grub out the rotting stumps, and carry a larger bunch of stock. Maybe you buy sheep and plant an orchard. All the time, you’re pushing back the woods and the soil is getting fertile. Then the Government grades a wagon road and homesteaders arrive. Somebody builds a sawmill, another starts a pulp-factory. People want land and ranch produce. You needn’t haul your truck to a market; the market has come to you. You bought cheap, but you can sell for a good price.”

“But you must wait for a number of years; perhaps for a large number.”

“You get a good time and to know you are making progress is some satisfaction. Anyhow, we have got a big virgin country; our part’s to cultivate the wilds.”

Maxwell smiled, but his smile was marked by a touch of scorn. “The country’s wonderfully rich, I imagine, its beauty is hardly equaled, and on the coast the climate’s glorious. You have water power, splendid timber, and mineral veins. Yet you’re satisfied to grow fruit and raise some sheep and cattle. Why, it looks as if you were asleep!”

Bob’s glance was tranquil, but Helen thought Harry exaggerated. Caverhill was sober and perhaps, like Duff, rather slow, but one got a hint of properly-controlled force. Somehow she imagined Bob had not yet used all his powers.

“The plan is mine and I consider it pretty sound,” he said. “What is yours?”

“Mine’s to help along industrial development,” Maxwell replied. “British Columbia can buy beef from Alberta and wheat from Saskatchewan. We ought to use the rivers for manufacturing, and cut mine tunnels. We can get power for the cost of the turbines and refine the metals by electrolysis. We can drive sawmills and pulp-mills without burning fuel. Then the province is Nature’s sanatorium and playground for North America. I’d cut trails for the tourists, run steamers, and build mountain hotels.”

“We haven’t yet got the money,” said Bob. “My notion is, when Canadians start borrowing, the lenders in the Old Country corral the profit.”

He knocked out his pipe and studied Maxwell. The fellow was a land-agent and a land-agent’s business is to talk, but Bob saw his enthusiasm was sincere. Moreover, since business men in the Western cities are an optimistic, adventurous lot, Bob thought Maxwell would go far. The fellow had qualities—— Then he turned to Mrs. Duff.

“I’m afraid we have bored you, ma’am.”

“Not at all, but we have stopped some time and our camp is not yet fixed,” Mrs. Duff replied and went off with Helen and Maxwell.

Bob stopped Duff, who was looking for his hat. He thought Duff a sober Ontario Scot and he liked the type.

“Your partner’s something of a hustler and I expect he’ll soon put all straight at the camp. Won’t you take another smoke?”

Duff sat down again and stretched his legs. “I’ve paddled for ’most six hours, and I’m willing for Harry to pull about our truck. When you’re fresh from an office, to kneel in the bottom of a canoe makes you tired.”

“Has Maxwell joined you long?”

“About two years. I heard him argue against an old-time storekeeper at a Kamloops hotel,” Duff replied. “The storekeeper was not a fool and I thought his line pretty sound, but Maxwell had something to him that carried the boys away. I don’t mean he was plausible; you felt he knew his argument was right. When you deal in real estate a talent like that is useful. I wanted a clerk and Harry admitted he wanted a job.”

“It looks as if he soon made good.”

“Maxwell is now my partner; we have got a new office and two or three extra clerks. Ours is an old-time house; my father put up his shingle when Vancouver was built of sawmill slabs. Our line was the honest broker’s. When a man wanted goods we were ordered to sell, we took our commission and fixed up the deal. When we had not the goods we let him go.”

“The plan’s sound, but I doubt if it’s up-to-date,” said Bob.

“Maxwell is up-to-date,” Duff rejoined. “When he can’t get all a customer wants he persuades him to want what we have got. He can persuade people. There’s his talent.”

“So long as the people you persuade remain satisfied, a talent like that is useful.”

“Our customers haven’t grumbled yet. The boys know Duff’s rule is to put up the goods. That stands, but since Maxwell joined me, the house has gone ahead. In fact, sometimes I feel as if I’d hitched my wagon to a locomotive.”

Bob laughed. “Oh, well, since I don’t speculate, Maxwell won’t hustle me. Anyhow, you’ll come along for breakfast, and if we get rain, you’ll send the ladies to the ranch.”

Duff thanked him and soon afterwards went away.

III

HELEN'S ADVENTURE

FOR some distance below the lake, Shadow River runs noisily between smooth rocks and rows of big dark pines. In places, an angry rapid cuts a white streak through the gloom; in places, the channel widens and soft light touches the revolving pools. Battered driftwood lines the banks and indicates where the savage current reaches when the snow melts on the distant peak.

The river was low one tranquil evening and throbbed quietly in the woods. A varnished canoe slid across a pool, swerved in the eddies and went smoothly down a frothing reach. Helen Maxwell occupied the beam at the middle; Bob, in the stern, used the steering paddle. The sun was low and sometimes a glittering level beam touched a red trunk, but for the most part the woods were dim and their quiet shadow floated on the stream.

Helen tied a trout fly on a length of fine gut. She was keen about fishing and Bob knew where the big trout were. Besides, Maxwell approved her fishing excursions. In fact, he had stated frankly that he wanted to cultivate Bob, and if she could interest the fellow it would help.

Helen did not altogether approve her brother's frankness, but she owed Harry much. She thought his talent for business remarkable, and as a rule she was willing to help. Moreover, to interest Caverhill was not unpleasant. Perhaps it was the contrast from Harry's restlessness, but she had begun to like the bushman's calm. By and by the throb of the river got louder and she saw angry foam ahead. Rocks broke the channel and in places the current was heaped against the stones.

"Isn't the rapid awkward? Can we get down?" she asked.

"If you like, we'll land and walk round, but we can get down."

"Then we'll go on," said Helen. "But what about getting back?"

"When we come back I'll portage the canoe."

"Can you carry a canoe?" Helen inquired and laughed. "Harry tried, but fell down. The canoe fell on him and since he was much annoyed I think he hurt his knees. Somehow I imagined only an Indian could portage a canoe."

“All an Indian can do, a white man can do,” Bob replied.

“Well, one finds out that the bushmen do not boast. You’re a reserved and rather modest lot. Our friends in the cities are not at all reserved and their modesty’s not marked, but I expect you know something about real estate business——”

“I do know something,” Bob admitted with a twinkle. “When your job’s to sell things, you must not be modest; but we won’t talk just now. Sit tight and help me steady the canoe.”

Helen looked ahead and braced herself. In front was a glassy smooth slope of water; one saw it slanted. At the bottom the current piled up in breaking waves, and then dark rocks pierced a turmoil of leaping foam.

The canoe plunged down the slope, smoothly and steadily, like a toboggan on a beaten run, and for a moment Helen held her breath. She felt the savage leap when they struck the wave, and blinding spray beat her face. Then they sped on, but she thought they went like a locomotive, and the canoe swerved and lurched. Rocks and whirlpools rushed back, the speed was frankly daunting, and Helen turned her head. Bob’s pose was very quiet, but his stiff arms indicated that he used the paddle. His mouth was firm and his glance was fixed in front. He concentrated on his steering and his calm was inscrutable. Helen did not know if to hold the canoe straight bothered him; all that was plain was, he meant to shoot the rapid. The picture intrigued Helen, for she felt his resolve was typical.

Then she thought he knew she studied him, for he knit his brows and she looked ahead. For a few moments, rocks and trees rolled by as if they sped upstream. The canoe leaped on angry waves and swung across revolving pools. Then the sense of risk and speed was gone, and they floated into the shadows that trembled on a quiet reach. Nothing broke the surface and Helen turned to Bob.

“The trout are not rising.”

Bob indicated the strong red glow behind the pine-tops.

“The sun’s not down yet and we must wait. When the water’s low, the trout feed for about twenty minutes at the edge of dark. You can’t get one before and they quit afterwards. Looks as if you liked fishing. I suppose you were a sports girl in the Old Country.”

Helen laughed. “I was not at all a sports girl, and until I came to Canada I had not caught a trout. You see, in England trout fishing’s expensive.”

Somehow Bob had not thought her poor. She wore the stamp of high cultivation, and although her brother had taken Duff's pay, he was not the sort of land-agent's clerk Bob had known. Besides, Maxwell was now Duff's partner.

"Then, I expect you like it in Canada."

"I do like Canada. For one thing, I like the woods and mountains. Besides, one gets a sense of freedom I hadn't known at home. In England I was firmly ruled by old-fashioned relations."

"Sometimes Hamilton gives me an Old Country newspaper. I rather thought your people were getting up-to-date," Bob remarked.

"Ah," said Helen, "you don't know England! In Canada, you use a common language and common standards. Something unites you and to some extent you think alike. One, of course, notes individual differences, but you all wear the Canadian stamp."

"That is so," Bob agreed. "I imagine the stamp is North American. Minnesota crosses the political frontier to Ontario; British Columbia runs into Washington State."

"In England, we, so to speak, belong to exclusive clans. The rules of one clan are not another's rules. Some are human and progressive, but mine stood for vanishing traditions. Nobody who was not born in the clan was allowed to join."

"But are not your exclusive people rich?"

"Some are very poor, but since their ancestors were important they must not admit their poverty," Helen replied. "One must pretend, and after a time pretense gets hateful. However, now it's done with, perhaps to talk like this is ridiculous——"

She blushed and stopped, but her glance was hard and Bob thought she did not forget.

"Then, to leave the Old Country didn't cost you much?"

"To join Harry was a splendid adventure, and when he got a post at Duff's I started. His pay was not large and we camped in a shack on the Westminster road. I cooked on a kerosene stove and washed our clothes in a coal-oil can. In England, I lived at a big gloomy house in a cathedral close. The deanery was opposite and dominated us. In fact, I think there was the trouble, because the deanery did not stand for all a cathedral stands for. We must not know people the dean's wife did not approve, and Harry had talents

he was not allowed to use. He must go to Oxford and afterwards to the Bar
_____”

Bob mused and searched the pool for the splash that marks a rising fish. The girl’s humor was touched by bitterness, and he imagined she had rebelled against the rules she hated and paid for her rashness; but he noted her pluck. Although she was cultivated and fastidious, she was willing to join Maxwell when he occupied a two- or three-roomed shack. For a girl like that, it was something of a plunge.

“Your brother’s talents are for business,” he said.

“Our relations did not know business men. All the same, an ancestor was a banker and I think another kept a famous shop. Perhaps this accounts for something. Well, Harry went to Oxford, but by and by he declared he had had enough——”

“Then, your relations sent your brother to Canada?”

“They were willing for him to go,” said Helen and hesitated. “They did not help——”

Bob wondered whether something accounted for her relations’ willingness about which she did not want to speculate. He thought her very stanch, and since she trusted Maxwell it looked as if the fellow had some useful qualities.

“Your brother had not much money?”

“When he landed he had fifty dollars, but as soon as he got a post he sent for me. When I reached Vancouver I had five dollars.”

“You ran some risk. I reckon you were lucky because Maxwell made good.”

Helen’s smile was proud. “I didn’t hesitate; I knew Harry’s pluck, and when you have pluck and trust yourself, to make good is not hard. For one thing, others trust you.”

“I wonder——” Bob remarked thoughtfully. “But I have not had much to do with people. My job’s to chop trees.”

“Does chopping trees satisfy you? When people are building sawmills and smelters; risking much to develop your wonderful country, and themselves getting rich?”

“After all, I think chopping is my proper job.”

For a moment or two Helen hesitated and her color rose. She was young and although her enthusiasm was sincere, Harry had stated that if she interested Caverhill it would help. Perhaps it was strange, but she wanted to interest him.

“Have you tried another job?” she asked.

“Not yet,” said Bob quietly. “So far, I’m satisfied, but in the West the pioneering instinct is pretty keen. We reckon our business is to push back the woods and push on the settlements. If I thought my business was to use the water power on the ranch for manufacturing, perhaps I’d get busy; but I don’t know——”

“You are not ambitious. If the ranch were mine, I’d look for minerals; I’d build a mill and cut the spruce trees for paper-pulp.”

“When your bank-roll’s not very big, starting up a manufacturing plant is an awkward proposition.”

“Sometimes others will help you,” Helen rejoined. “If you can persuade speculators a plan will pay, you can use their money. In fact, I think if you are resolute you can get where you want to go——” Then she stopped and laughed. “But after all I’m not Harry’s tout and I hear a fish splash.”

The light was going, but pale reflections touched the water and Bob steered for a widening ring. Then he saw another, and in a few moments it looked as if a hailstorm beat the pool. A cloud of insects skimmed the current, and where the cloud hovered the surface broke. Helen seized her rod and her hand shook. She had not known trout rise like this, but the water was smooth. She did not see a ripple she could use to hide the line.

“Get going and cast where you like. I’ll watch out,” said Bob.

Helen got up, and although to balance a light canoe is awkward, Bob remarked her confidence and her easy pose. Yet she was very keen; he thought she concentrated on all she did. The flies drifted across the ring that marked where a trout had leaped and the rod-top bent. Bob saw Helen’s body stiffen and heard the reel.

“Oh!” she gasped, “I’ve got hold of something big!”

“Trust the gut and snub him hard,” said Bob. “Maybe you’ve got ten minutes to load up.”

The trout leaped from the river, Helen swayed and the canoe rocked. Bob imagined she fought an instinctive impulse to pull out the heavy fish; but she held down the butt and checked the reel. Bob seized the net and

watched a shining object circle toward the canoe. Then he leaned over cautiously and the fish was in the net.

“Some trout!” he said. “Don’t stop. Get after them again.”

For about ten minutes Helen’s ambition to catch good fish was satisfied. Then the splashes stopped; the dim water rolled by smoothly and all was quiet. Helen put down the rod and began to count the fish at the bottom of the canoe.

“Splendid sport!” she said. “Still, had you not been clever with the net, I might have lost a number.”

“Would that have bothered you very much?” Bob asked with a twinkle.

Helen pondered for a moment or two: sometimes she was naïvely philosophical.

“Well,” she said, “when I go to catch trout, I like to catch trout. You get some satisfaction from doing what you mean to do. Then fishing has a curious charm; perhaps it’s because you must use skill, and perhaps it’s the uncertainty. You must put the fly where the fish expect a fly to go, and it must drop like a fly. But you may get nothing; the water runs on and does not break. You don’t know if a big trout is watching under the ripples and will rise at another cast.”

“Trout and people are like that,” said Bob and laughed. “However, dark is coming and we must make a portage through the bush.”

He paddled to the bank, lifted the canoe upright, and getting underneath, balanced it on his bent shoulders and went off. Helen noted that he went easily, across awkward stones and rocky ledges, but she knew the bushman’s balance is good.

IV

DREAM PICTURES

THE sun was hot, the lake shone like glass, and resinous smells floated about the woods. Breakfast was over and Mrs. Duff occupied a camp-chair in the shade of a big hemlock opposite the double tent. Duff lay in the dry pine needles and languidly studied *The Colonist*. Bob's ax had stopped and all was quiet. One heard the river throb and sometimes in the distance cow-bells clanked.

Duff was rather fat and his slight stoop indicated that he had for long been engaged at an office desk. Although his mood was philosophical, his face was marked by lines and Mrs. Duff imagined some had got deeper recently. Yet Tom was not old and, so far as she knew, all went well with him. Mrs. Duff was a quiet, kind, shrewd woman and trusted her husband. People who knew Tom Duff did trust him.

For long his business methods were conservative and his customers declared the house was safe. If you gave Duff's land to sell, you got a just price; if you bought a town-lot, you got the ground for which you paid. People who bought from others sometimes got stung. Recently, however, Duff had let himself go. Perhaps he was bitten by the rash speculation that rules in Western towns when trade is good, but to some extent Maxwell had carried him away.

Maxwell had gone back to the office, but he expected to rejoin the party soon, and since Mrs. Duff liked the woods Duff was resigned to stay. He felt he needed a holiday. He had borne some strain and the house's business had recently gone fast. In fact, Duff admitted that he did not altogether approve the speed.

In the meantime, Mrs. Duff saw a hired man go to the spot where Bob not long since chopped a tree. The fellow stopped and looked about, as if he were puzzled, and Mrs. Duff smiled. A small, shining object trailed a ripple across the lake and she imagined Caverhill had gone off with Helen in the canoe.

"Do you think Maxwell has noticed Helen's attraction for Caverhill?" she inquired.

“I don’t know; I reckon Harry would not notice a thing like that,” Duff replied carelessly.

“I wonder——” said Mrs. Duff in a thoughtful voice. “Anyhow, Caverhill is attracted.”

“Oh, well, Helen’s a charming girl, but the rancher’s a pretty good sort.”

“He is not Helen’s sort. She has a number of her brother’s qualities. Caverhill’s another type.”

“From the beginning I’ve imagined you didn’t quite approve Maxwell,” Duff remarked.

“I like Maxwell. One feels his charm and his keen enthusiasm. In a way, he’s sincere, but I doubt if he’s fastidious. Then I feel you are not altogether the man you were before Harry joined you. Sometimes you are tired, and sometimes you are moody.”

“It’s possible,” Duff admitted. “I’m an old-timer and perhaps my habit’s to go slow, but Maxwell hits up the pace. Anyhow, he’s stanch. Bristow & Thornbank tried to get him; their proposition was tempting, but he wouldn’t quit. Then he’s surely pushing Duff’s ahead. We have got a smart new office and two or three extra clerks. I hustle from breakfast until I go to bed. The strange thing is, although we handle stacks of money, my bank-roll’s not large. The money we get goes.”

“Maxwell does hit up the pace. Do you think you can stay with it?”

“I’ve got to try,” said Duff and smiled. “The struggle for business is pretty fierce and when your competitors use automobiles you can’t use a buckboard. However, if I can stay with it for five or six years, I’ll be resigned to quit.”

Mrs. Duff was not altogether satisfied, but she wanted to be just. She admitted her doubting Maxwell, in a sense, was instinctive and perhaps not logical.

“When we started on our excursion, do you think Harry meant to stay at Shadow Lake?”

Duff looked up and knitted his brows. “Now I think about it, when we broke camp he rather rushed us off, and although I’d sooner have steered for headwaters, he wanted to portage for the lake. Perhaps he had an object. Paper-pulp sells for a good price and I see indications of a land-boom’s starting. Harry has for some time talked about our speculating on a pulp-mill and a manufacturing town site; he declares two or three big-business men

would help. The spruce timber about the lake is useful for pulp, but if we resolved to start in the Shadow Valley, Caverhill must join. His piece by the river's the keystone block."

"The undertaking is ambitious. Do you think Duff's could carry the load?"

"Sometimes I doubt; sometimes I want to brace up and try. If we could swing it over, I'd be justified to stop. I'm getting old and perhaps I get slack, but I've recently begun to feel effort's hard and I must take a rest. Harry, however, has not yet got after Caverhill."

"I wonder whether Harry sees that Helen might help," Mrs. Duff remarked thoughtfully.

"Not at all," said Duff, frowning. "Anyhow, he doesn't, consciously, want her to meddle, and Helen would refuse. The girl's proud, and if she had grounds for getting mad, I'd sooner not face her."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Duff. "Harry won't arrive for a few days, and we'll talk about it again."

Duff went off and presently sat down in the woods and lighted his pipe. He was sober and people thought him practical. As a rule, he took, mechanically, the prudent line, but for all that sometimes romance called and he was moved by an ambition Mrs. Duff did not know. He wanted to carry out a big-business deal; to show people, particularly his wife, he had qualities. Then he would be satisfied to stop. Although he labored in the city, he loved trees; he vaguely saw himself growing fruit, at Cheemainus, on the Island, for example. Sometimes he saw the pretty ranch-house against a background of apple blossom.

Mrs. Duff stopped by the tent and mused. She knew her husband's virtues, but she knew his drawbacks. Tom, if left alone, would not go very far. Now Maxwell pushed him along she was vaguely disturbed, but after all his rapid progress had some advantages. Tom had built a new house and given her a big car; their friends were people of finer stamp than the small speculators and land-agents she was for long satisfied to know. Mrs. Duff liked fashionable people and to see the newspapers record her parties flattered her.

All the same, the parties were not important, and she did not want Tom, for her sake, to run a risk. The trouble was, she could not weigh the risk and rather thought Tom could not. He was not a speculator. People knew his old-fashioned sobriety and Mrs. Duff thought it, to some extent, accounted for

the house's progress. Maxwell was the driving force, but had not customers trusted Tom, his partner could not have pushed ahead. Mrs. Duff thought Maxwell knew, although he had not planned to use her husband.

Maxwell was not consciously unscrupulous, and in the West his youth and romantic enthusiasm were not drawbacks. Then he was marked by a strange persuasive charm. Mrs. Duff admitted that she was old-fashioned and her rules, perhaps, were getting out of date. She did not see the line she ought to take and her hesitation bothered her.

After a few days Maxwell returned. His look was highly strung, but somehow triumphant; Maxwell's habit was not to use reserve. In the afternoon he and Duff went to the river bank. It was typical that Maxwell walked about and talked and Duff sat in the shade and smoked.

"If you agree and Caverhill is willing, I can put the settlement scheme across," Maxwell said. "But we must get to work now, when all is favorable. Trade's good, British and American investors are looking about, and people are keen on real estate. For three or four days I've interviewed our speculating customers and talked at the hotels. In fact, I didn't stop until I went to bed. Folks were interested——"

"We want solid support," Duff remarked. "Five-hundred-dollar investments won't help much."

"I don't know," said Maxwell. "To get your capital from a number of small speculators is a pretty good plan. A crowd can't meddle; you're not forced to enlighten dissatisfied folk——"

Duff looked up, for he thought Maxwell was franker than he knew.

"My plan's a square and open deal. There's another thing: sometimes a crowd gets rattled. I've known scared stockholders break a sound business scheme. The job's big, and if we resolve to go ahead, I expect to get up against some obstacles. We don't want people who'll throw down their stock and jump to get out."

"Very well. I imagine Alsager would satisfy you?"

Alsager had floated one or two prosperous companies for the exploitation of mining and timber rights. He was an important man and Duff's doubts began to vanish.

"If Alsager came in, I'd risk it. Can you get him?"

For a moment or two Maxwell hesitated, and then said, "I was at Victoria and Alsager gave me an hour or two. Examined the scheme from

the beginning and admitted it ought to go. I don't want to boast, but if you stipulate for his support, I'll engage to persuade him. When I got back to town I looked up Thornbank."

"Thornbank doesn't carry the other's weight," Duff remarked. "Anyhow, your first job is to persuade Caverhill."

"That is so. Since we go to the ranch for supper, I'll try. Alsager agreed that if we mean to carry out the plan, we must get going soon."

"Very well," said Duff. "You can talk to Caverhill."

When the party went to the veranda after supper, Maxwell pulled out some documents. His rule was to trust his luck and make a plunge, but now he hesitated. For one thing, Caverhill's sober quietness bothered him; he was not like the gambling speculators whose greed Maxwell worked upon. Then Maxwell felt his arguments would go better in a noisy hotel rotunda than at the ranch. Somehow the big house was austere and he knew the quiet pine forest was not his proper background. Moreover, Mrs. Duff and Helen did not go. In fact, he saw Mrs. Duff meant to remain and he doubted if she were his friend. All the same, he turned to his host.

"I want you to weigh a proposition, Mr. Caverhill. Your ranch, in a sense, commands Shadow Valley; the timber you burn off the ground is worth much, and the fall and rapids would supply useful power. In fact, part of the block might be used for a manufacturing settlement, and if you will allow me to state the advantages I think mark my plan——"

Bob looked up with some surprise. "You can go ahead."

For ten minutes Maxwell talked with rather theatrical force, but his arguments were logical, and Mrs. Duff saw he himself was moved by the pictures he drew. She wondered what Caverhill thought, and was rather surprised because his calm, brown face baffled her.

"Your proposition is to buy my ranch?" he said when Maxwell stopped.

"We want the square from the lake and the tail of the rapid to the bottom of the hill. The block's the keystone of the plan. If you are willing to sell, we must try to agree about the proper price."

"I am not willing to sell," said Bob.

For a moment or two all were quiet. Maxwell looked as if he had got a knock, but Mrs. Duff was conscious of some relief. Helen glanced at Bob and her color rose. She was her brother's champion and sympathized with

his ambitions; she thought she hated the obstinate bushman. Then Maxwell braced up.

“The ranch is yours, Mr. Caverhill, but I doubt if your holding up land needed for industrial development is justified. If you keep possession, the block may feed a bunch of cattle; if you let it go, it will soon support three or four hundred workmen. Where you grow oats and orchard-grass we’ll put up factories and build a settlement. Perhaps I’m romantic, but I see the settlement grow; the board houses making room for concrete banks and stores and office blocks. A railroad advancing up the valley from the coast, and a steamer running on the lake. Then we do not urge you to sell us the block. If you would sooner take stock in the company and use some control, it might help.”

“That’s another thing,” said Bob. “I’m not willing to sell out to a bunch of greedy speculators whose object is to get rich by booming building lots. I might take stock in a company floated to use the water power for driving factories——”

He stopped and for a few moments knitted his brows and mused. He liked the quiet woods and was happy at the ranch. Perhaps he liked to rule and know all he saw was his. Yet he was a modern Canadian, and in Canada man’s business is to break the wilderness. The pioneer goes first with the packhorse, carrying ax and saw, but when he has cleared the ground men use locomotives and electric tools.

“To begin with, a proper dam would cost you high,” he resumed. “In order for you to get the money, men whom people know must back the scheme. Who will join?”

“Alsager is willing and Thornbank’s interested.”

“Alsager’s a white man; I don’t know about the other,” said Bob: “Well, you can get to work at your calculations. When you can give me particulars we’ll talk about it again. In the meantime, I don’t promise to negotiate.”

“In the morning I start for Vancouver,” Maxwell replied and a few minutes afterwards his party went off.

Maxwell, however, did not go to the tent. He sat down by the lake and when he lighted his pipe his hand shook. Much depended on his persuading Caverhill, but it looked as if the rancher was keener than he had thought. Then he saw he must, for a time, run some risk. Maxwell, however, was ambitious and had, so far, made good; if he could carry out his plan, he ought to get rich. He resolved to face the risk and push ahead.

HELEN TRIES HER POWER

MAXWELL did not return from his office one evening, and Helen went to the veranda in front of the small frame house. Vancouver was growing fast and big dark pines rolled back from the end of the new street. The other end went across the top of a hill, and one saw descending roofs and the smoke from the sawmill stacks by the water-front. In the background, across the Inlet, were wooded hills and shining snow.

The houses were built of shiplap boards and fronted narrow garden lots. They were decorated by mill-sawn scrolls and tapered pillars, but the model, reproduced all along the street, got monotonous, and Helen thought their neatness dreary. Although she had not long since occupied a primitive shack, the thrill of adventure was gone, and sometimes she thought about the spaciousness and quiet of the big house by the English cathedral. In the Old Country one did not hear one's neighbors' gramophones and sometimes their disputes. Then to cook and clean the house had now not much charm.

Helen wondered why Maxwell did not arrive. His habit was to return for supper, although she knew he was occupied by his plans for the settlement at Shadow Lake. He admitted he saw awkward obstacles, but declared that if Caverhill supported him, he could make the undertaking go and they would soon get rich. In fact, Harry had talked rather much about Caverhill's support. Helen owned she would like to get rich, but she thought she was really keener to help her brother. He was kind and when she rebelled against her English relations' stern control he gave her freedom. Besides, Harry had talents he ought to use.

Then she began to muse about Caverhill. He frankly attracted her, although she doubted if the attraction went very deep. She approved his sober calm; he was a handsome, athletic fellow, and she liked strength and pluck. The big, austere homestead and the quiet woods were his proper background. His rule was primitive, but she thought it just and firm. Helen wondered whether she would be satisfied to live at Shadow Lake, and then she blushed and admitted she was ridiculous. All the same, the picture had some charm.

After the spaciousness and brooding calm at the ranch, the rows of small houses were shabby. Their occupants were not people Helen wanted to know, but unless Harry carried out his plan, she must be resigned. Although Maxwell was now Duff's partner, his share was not large and the house was embarrassed for money. Caverhill's help was important, and Helen wondered whether she could persuade him. Somehow she thought——

She started, for Caverhill came round the corner of a block. He looked about, and seeing Helen, crossed the street.

"Has your brother arrived?" he asked. "Duff was not at the office and a clerk stated Mr. Maxwell had gone."

Helen said she expected Harry and indicated a chair. The veranda was two or three yards long and Bob thought if Maxwell put up mosquito screens it would resemble a rather large meat-safe. The pillars were not as thick as his arm and he felt if he leaned against the boards he might go through the wall. In fact, the house was not the sort of house a girl like Helen ought to occupy, and he doubtfully studied the cracked chair.

"I don't think the chair will let you down, but you mustn't push it about rashly," Helen smiled. "Our furniture has not the solidity one notes at Shadow Lake."

"Oh, well, I carry some weight," said Bob. "In the bush, we're rather a crude lot and I expect our houses reflect our character."

"I didn't think you crude," said Helen. "Perhaps I did feel you were patriarchal——"

Bob looked up as if he were puzzled and she resumed with a smile: "I did not imply that you, yourself, were old; perhaps Homeric is the proper word. At Shadow Lake one can picture the bracing life of the nomad herdsmen in the old spacious days. I liked the ranch. All one sees there is big and strong and somehow dignified."

Bob's heart beat. The women he had known were not numerous and Helen's charm was marked. He approved her fashionable summer clothes, her finely molded slenderness, and her unconscious grace. Then she wore the stamp of cultivation and he knew her keen and enthusiastic. He had not thought a girl like that could stand for the quiet in the woods, but it looked as if Helen might do so. Then he thought she knew he studied her, for a touch of color came to her skin.

"I don't see Harry yet," she remarked.

“Looks as if he’d met somebody who wanted a building lot and went to the fellow’s hotel. I rather wanted to see Maxwell, but no doubt I’ll find him in the morning. Will you come up town for supper? Then we might get an automobile and drive in the park?”

Helen hesitated, although she wanted to go. “I don’t think Harry will be long. Did you state when you would reach the office?”

“All I stated was, I was coming to town. If Maxwell had looked up the company’s folder, he’d have known when the boat arrived.”

Since Helen knew Harry wanted to meet Caverhill, she thought it strange he had not studied the time-table, but she said, “Perhaps you ought to wait and I will give you supper. Ours is spoiling.”

“Why, I’d be delighted!” said Bob.

A few minutes afterwards Helen called him in. The dining-room was very small, and although he thought the furniture pretty it was frail and cheap. In fact, the house was ridiculously like a doll’s house. For Helen to be satisfied was impossible, but she did not grumble. Then the meal was well served and although it was not like the rude feasts at Shadow Lake, Bob noted that the food was good.

“Did you cook these things?” he asked.

“Of course,” said Helen, smiling.

“But I imagined in England your type didn’t cook.”

“When I joined Harry his pay would not meet our bills for board,” Helen replied. “Since crackers and canned meat got monotonous, I bought a kerosene stove and a cookery book and began to experiment. After all, I don’t know if to cook is much harder than to chop big trees.”

Bob thought her experimenting typical. She had undertaken to see Maxwell out; and when Helen undertook a job she tried to make good. He was glad he had stayed. Sometimes the ranch was dreary and to sit opposite Helen across the narrow table had charm. He liked to watch her small firm hands and her graceful movements when she gave him a cup or plate; he liked the amusement that twinkled in her black eyes.

Helen was not altogether amused. She saw Caverhill studied her and sometimes she saw his mouth get tight. She did not know much about him, but all she knew she approved; then she approved his athletic figure, his brown skin, and his steady glance. When supper was over Bob wanted to help her wash and put away the dishes, but Helen firmly refused. For one

thing, she hesitated to risk the intimate, domestic touch his helping would give. Yet, for her brother's sake, something must be risked.

They went to the veranda and Helen gave Bob a cigarette. The sun was near the pine-tops and the snow across the Inlet was getting blue. The water shone like glass and the smoke from the sawmill stacks streaked the calm green sky. A steamer, steering for the Narrows, trailed a broad white wake. They heard her whistle and locomotive bells by the wharf. Helen did not know if she wanted Maxwell to arrive.

"I suppose you meant to talk to Harry about the new settlement," she said. "Are you going to join us?"

"I don't know; I haven't yet got the plans."

"But you're not very keen?"

"That is so," Bob admitted. "Perhaps I'm not logical, for when your brother stated I ought not to hold up land needed for manufacturing I agreed. All the same, I'd sooner not cut up the ranch. You see, my job is not to sell building lots."

"Your talent is constructive; you feel you ought to break fresh soil and make crops grow? Well, some people's business is to make things, but some must sell the goods. For them to trade is useful and proper."

"Why, of course!" said Bob and smiled.

"Yet, like the old Greek herdsmen we talked about, you rather despise the traders? You feel a Canadian's business is to conquer the wilds?"

"In the bush we're not up-to-date and perhaps we're an exclusive lot. Anyhow, the nomad herdsmen didn't stop to conquer the wilds. When the water began to dry up they moved on and pushed another fellow off the springs. They fought for water; we bore wells and build dams. Then, you see, although we grow the fruit and raise the cattle, the merchants, for the most part, get the money. Trade is useful, but sometimes I think the greedy speculations our city men frame-up are the biggest obstacles to Canada's advance."

Helen smiled. Caverhill had tried to play up and she liked his humor, but she saw he was moved. All the same, she was her brother's champion. If she could persuade Caverhill, some of Harry's embarrassments would vanish, and she was willing to try her power.

"My brother means to build a dam at Shadow Lake," she said. "His main object is not to sell house-lots. He wants to put up a pulp-mill and start

useful industries.”

“That’s another thing,” Bob agreed and was quiet.

Since Helen wanted nothing for herself, he approved her urging him. It was not that he weighed her arguments; her friendly smile and her trust accounted for much. Somehow she indicated that she knew he would not refuse.

“Very well,” Helen resumed, and a touch of color came to her skin. “Harry and Duff want to build factories; but, unless you are willing, they cannot start. Don’t you think you ought to agree? I ought not to bother you about it, but Harry must get your help and I am very keen. Somehow I feel you will agree.”

Bob thrilled. He had thought Helen was the girl for him before; now he knew. In some respects, he was primitive and his impulse was to claim her and carry her off, but he was not a fool. She was fastidious, and, if he helped Maxwell, he must not demand a reward. He weighed another thing; if the factories were built, she would not think it lonely in the woods.

“In the morning I will see your brother,” he said. “If I think he can put the scheme across, I may risk the plunge. Now, if you won’t come to the park, I must go.”

Helen gave him her hand and her eyes sparkled. Bob wanted to take her in his arms.

“I like your pluck and Harry will soon persuade you his plan will work,” she said and let him go.

When Bob had gone Helen carried off the dishes and got her dishpan. Although she had so far cheerfully undertaken her household tasks, she began to feel she hated her coarse apron and the greasy water. Her ambition was excited. To build the new settlement would carry Harry far, but Helen blushed and admitted that Harry’s prosperity was not all she thought about. She saw herself mistress at Shadow Lake and the picture was attractive. Yet when she pondered marrying Bob she hesitated.

By and by Maxwell arrived and she noted that he gave her a keen glance.

“I’m glad you didn’t keep supper back,” he said. “When I was leaving the office I got a ’phone call.”

“Did you not know Caverhill was in town?”

“Then Caverhill was here?” said Maxwell, as if he were surprised. “I expected him in the morning. Anyhow, an important customer wanted me to dine at his hotel——” He stopped and resumed with a laugh: “It looks as if Caverhill had got my supper. Did he talk?”

Helen imagined his carelessness was forced, but she understood his curiosity.

“Mr. Caverhill talked about the new settlement. If he thinks your plans are good, he will join you.”

“By George! You have put it over!” said Maxwell and his eyes sparkled. “The fellow’s slow and cautious; I’d begun to doubt if he could be moved. Perhaps I was lucky because Evans called me to the hotel.”

His satisfaction jarred. Helen saw he took it for granted she had persuaded Caverhill and somehow her triumph looked shabby.

“I expect much depends on the plans, and you must talk to Mr. Caverhill at the office,” she said with a touch of sharpness.

Maxwell looked at her rather hard and hesitated. Helen said nothing and went to the veranda.

The moon was rising and a silver track stretched across the Inlet and touched the anchored ships. In the next house a gramophone made a jarring noise and across the street somebody played a fiddle out of tune. Helen frowned and thought about the quiet homestead in the woods. She knew she had meant to persuade Caverhill, but now she had done so she was disturbed. For one thing, she saw her arguments were not important; she had conquered because Caverhill loved her. Then she wondered whether Maxwell had reckoned on something like this. Perhaps she had some grounds to imagine it and she felt humiliated.

After all, she really did not know much about her brother. When she was at the gloomy house by the cathedral, Harry, for the most part, was at a famous school. Now she thought about it, she had tried to be kind because her relations were not. In fact, when Harry returned for holidays their looks got sterner, and Helen wondered whether his house-master’s report accounted for their disapproval. Then she admitted he had not altogether accounted for his leaving the university.

Helen stopped. She must not dwell upon her brother’s supposititious drawbacks. His talents and charm were marked and she owed him much. When her guardians’ harsh control got insupportable, Harry had sent for her and given her freedom.

VI

MAXWELL TRUSTS HIS LUCK

DUFF'S breakfast was on the table, but he had not much appetite and did not want to get out of his easy-chair by a window at his new house. In front were three or four big maples and the shadows of their broad leaves checkered the gravel walk; a noble cedar spread its branches across the lawn. The wooden house was small, but the architect's design was good and although the mill-cut decorations were rather numerous, the front was picturesque.

For long Duff's ambition was to own a house like that, but now he did so, he was not content. Only on Sundays had he leisure to potter about his garden and talk to his wife: he wanted to cut out business and buy a fruit ranch. As a rule, he was at his office about eight o'clock, and after his clerks locked up he was forced to meet people at the hotels. The strain had recently got worse, and although his fishing excursion braced him, a reaction soon began. Duff, however, stuck to his desk, until one evening a friendly customer brought him home in an automobile.

Duff admitted that his head ached and he was strangely languid, but he declared a night's sleep would put all straight. In the morning it cost him something to get up and Mrs. Duff telephoned for a doctor. Now he resigned himself to wait for the doctor and tried to smoke, although the tobacco did not taste good.

"I expect my loafing about is ridiculous and until I open the letters the clerks can't get busy," he grumbled. "All the same, I'm tired and Maxwell hits up the pace. Doesn't look as if it bothered him, but he is young and I carry some weight."

Mrs. Duff imagined her husband's remark justified. Tom's stanch honesty was, no doubt, something of a load, and if speed were important, she rather thought Maxwell would travel light. Yet she was persuaded Maxwell owed much to her husband's help. Harry made the plans, but his plans, although clever, were rather vague; Tom studied things the other neglected and laboriously removed the obstacles.

“I liked it in the woods and wanted to stay another week, but Harry hustled us back,” he resumed. “It was long since I went off for a holiday _____”

“Then, you think it was altogether a holiday excursion?”

“Oh, well. When we started Maxwell may have had an object, and perhaps he quietly steered us for Shadow Lake,” Duff replied. “Anyhow, I ought to have gone to the office. Caverhill’s in town——”

The telephone rang and Mrs. Duff went to another room and shut the door. When she returned she said, “Maxwell wanted to know if you had started and I replied that you could not get down. Then the doctor called. He expects to see you in about ten minutes.”

Duff knew something about his wife’s methods and he looked at her rather hard, but he was languid and let it go. Mrs. Duff had stated that her husband was ill and must not be disturbed. Soon afterwards the doctor arrived and told Duff he must go away for two or three months.

“You have got to stop right now and take a rest,” he said. “When we have braced you up a little, you must quit Vancouver. Go North, for example, on board the Alaska tourist boat and loaf about. If you’re a sport, you might take a gun and a fishing-rod.”

“I expect we are going to start a big job in the woods,” Duff replied. “Suppose I went to the surveyors’ camp?”

“It wouldn’t work,” said the doctor firmly. “If you don’t stop now, you’ll soon stop for good. Start for the North and see the glaciers.”

“We have glaciers in British Columbia and good mountain hotels at Banff.”

“That is so,” said the doctor. “The trouble is, we have got telephones and telegraphs. When you pull out, your clerks must not send you night-letters.”

He went off and Duff forced a smile. “My luck is bad, but perhaps my partner has got his chance. Anyhow, I’m tired and must try to be resigned.”

Maxwell, waiting for Caverhill at the office, smoked his pipe and pondered. Although his habit was not to hesitate, he rather shrank from the plunge he meant to take. So far, he had gone where he wanted to go, but he admitted he had run some risks, and an adventure at Oxford had come near breaking him. Now he contemplated another that, if his nerve were good, ought to mend his fortune, for Maxwell had known poverty.

To sell a ranch for building lots is a profitable transaction and in Western Canada people are willing to speculate. A new settlement calls the adventurous, who know it may soon grow to a thriving town. But in order to start a settlement, trade or manufactures are needed.

There was the trouble. At Shadow Lake the back-blocks for the most part were virgin forest, useful minerals had not been found, and to build a factory costs much. Duff's was not rich, and although Caverhill might agree to take shares for the land he sold, he had stated he would not invest. Maxwell thought he could get money, but the men with whom he negotiated had not yet agreed to give him their support.

Moreover Duff's caution was a drawback. Tom was slow, but he was obstinate, and Maxwell imagined he would not approve his plans. Still, if Tom did not altogether see where the plans led—— Maxwell thought if he were left alone, he could make good, but he must be left alone and he speculated about his clerks.

Miss Bell was a first-class stenographer, but she typed the letters mechanically; Davies and two others concentrated on a baseball club. Willard, however, knew his job, and if Maxwell's operations excited his curiosity, it might be awkward. Maxwell admitted he would rather have a duller clerk.

He pulled out his watch, and picking up the telephone, inquired if Duff were starting soon. When Mrs. Duff replied that her husband was ill, he was sorry for Tom, but he felt that if Duff were forced to remain away until Caverhill left town he would be resigned.

Soon afterwards Willard came in and gave Maxwell an apologetic look.

"I have been with Duff's for some time and don't altogether want to quit, but Jackson wants me to join him and his proposition's pretty good," he said. "Since Mr. Duff is not coming down, perhaps you would state——"

Maxwell hid his satisfaction. "If you are resolved to take Jackson's post, to state you are a first-class clerk will give me some pleasure. But are you resolved?"

"The post carries good pay. I don't want to put it up to you that I don't get enough; besides, I reckon your payroll's as high as the house can stand for."

"That is so," Maxwell agreed. "Very well, I'll go across to Jackson's and tell him I've good grounds to think he'll be satisfied with you."

Willard thanked him, and when the clerk went off Maxwell's relief was keen. One obstacle was removed and perhaps the other would not bother him as much as he had thought. Half an hour afterwards he heard the telephone and Mrs. Duff stated that the doctor was sending her husband away. As soon as possible she would call Maxwell over to make arrangements, but in the meantime they must not disturb Tom.

When Maxwell put down the telephone his eyes sparkled. The obstacle was removed and he could go ahead. For two or three months his partner would not bother him and when Tom returned all would be put straight. Then a clerk opened the door and Caverhill came in.

For a few moments Bob studied the maps on the wall. One represented a survey of virgin country. Thin lines stood for wagon trails and supposititious railroads; circles indicated spots where towns would be built. Another was a map of a real new town, and a perspective drawing beside it depicted rows of pretty wooden houses, offices and churches that had sprung up in a few months.

Bob was a Western Canadian, and now railroads and settlements have pushed back the trapper and placer miner to the North, the pioneer finds a fresh field in industrial developments. The maps interested Bob, but he turned to Maxwell.

"Some time ago I stated I'd consider your plans for using the water-front block at the ranch. I'm ready to do so. You can go ahead."

Maxwell began to talk. To satisfy his customers he can supply the land they want is the real estate agent's business, and Maxwell had a talent for persuasion. He knew when to use one argument and when another would carry weight; sometimes he worked on a speculator's confidence and sometimes on his greed. Now he talked to Bob, he was quietly logical and, on the surface, frank.

On the whole, Bob thought the plan would work, but somehow he hesitated. For one thing, he noted Maxwell's cleverness. All the same, if the other could satisfy him, he had agreed to join.

"The ranch was my father's, and now it's mine I'm accountable for making good his job," he said. "I have no use for cutting up the best block in order to sell town-lots to fools who might afterwards claim we cheated them. My stipulation is, the settlement must go."

"If you start a settlement properly, it, so to speak, goes itself," Maxwell replied. "When you have got a row of houses you want a store. To supply

the store you want a freighter, and, to help him haul his load, a road-grading gang. Then other folks arrive to look for homestead blocks and timber rights, and you must put up a hotel. The thing goes on!”

“In a way, that is so. The thing goes so long as the money that speculators supply does not stop. But after the money does stop the settlement must depend on trade and manufacturers. Well, your plan for a wood-pulp plant is pretty good, but the cost is high and we’d need money. What about Alsager? Has he agreed to join us?”

“He has not agreed,” said Maxwell frankly. “I expect to persuade him and I am negotiating with some others who might put up a good sum. In the meantime, my notion is, for us to build a dam and power-house and sell the mill-site. When we had got the turbines and dynamos we could supply electric current, and to know you can rent cheap power is a useful argument for building a factory.”

Bob knitted his brows. As a rule, a bush-rancher is something of an engineer and cuts new roads and builds log-bridges for the Government. Bob rather thought he could build a dam that would not cost very much.

“Before we get busy the Government people must approve. Have you filed your papers?”

“Not yet; one must state all particulars and measurements. There’s another thing; the Government may give us a road-making grant and I mean to look up the member for your district. His business is to get appropriations for his supporters. When you vote for a fellow, you expect him to give you a job.”

“Looks as if you knew something about our politicians!” Bob remarked.

Maxwell laughed. “Oh, well, your methods are business-like and, by comparison, cheap. In the Old Country, ours are expensive, although I doubt if much of the money goes for graft. Anyhow, I expect we can satisfy the land office and I must try to interest the newspapers. They could help us start a boom.”

“I don’t want a boom; I want steady progress on sound lines,” said Bob. “Well, you can get to work. I’m staying in town for a time and when you have drawn up an agreement I’ll transfer the block you want.”

He went off soon afterwards and Maxwell put up his plans and leaned on his desk. Now the suspense was over, he knew he had borne some strain, and he imagined the strain would get worse. For all that, his luck, so far, was good and he must brace up and go ahead. The trouble was, he was excited

and could not concentrate. Bright sunbeams touched the wall and he thought about the woods. Perhaps he was entitled to celebrate his triumph by a holiday and after hesitating for a minute or two he picked up the telephone and ordered a car.

VII

MAXWELL RELAXES

AT an awkward crossing a street car forced Maxwell's automobile against the sidewalk. In front a transfer wagon blocked the way, and up the hill opposite a straining team hauled a load of lumber from a yard. The hill was Maxwell's line home and he had meant to call for Helen and go for a picnic in the woods, but now he was forced to wait, he weighed another plan.

A fresh breeze blew up the street from the sparkling Inlet, the sun was on the tall office blocks, and Maxwell's mood was buoyant. For some time he had used strenuous effort and borne keen suspense, and now he thought himself entitled to a holiday. Helen had helped him nobly, but Helen was fastidious and when she was with him he could not altogether relax. He resolved to put off their excursion and go for Coral. Coral was frankly not Helen's sort, but she was a sport.

The transfer wagon pulled out, Maxwell started the engine, and when the car rolled ahead recaptured something of the boyish carelessness he had known in England. After all, he was young and the sobriety he had, for the most part, used in Canada was irksome. He liked adventures and as a rule had followed his bent; in fact, an adventure at Oxford accounted for his starting for Montreal.

After a time the car plunged into the woods. Great pines spread their branches across the road; in places a Douglas fir thrust up to the light a trunk like a giant column. Trembling reflections pierced the gloom and sometimes a dazzling beam touched the car. Maxwell smelt the sweet resinous smells and let the engine go. He admitted he was perhaps rash, but in the morning he must get to work and he would be occupied for long.

At length he stopped in front of a small road-house. The house was used by automobilists, but the day was not a holiday and it looked as if nobody were about.

Maxwell pulled back a mosquito guard, and went into the bar. The room was rather dark and smelt of liquor and cigars. When the spring door shut, a man wiping glasses at the counter turned his head. He was a strongly built

fellow and wore a white shirt and new store clothes. His look was quick and resolute, but when he saw Maxwell it got thoughtful.

“Hello!” he said. “You sure started early! Nothing doing in town?”

“The day’s fine and I found I could get a few hours off,” Maxwell replied. “I wondered whether Coral would like a ride in my car. Is she about?”

“She’s cleaning house,” said the other and frankly studied Maxwell. Then he went to a shelf for a bottle. “Take a drink and I’ll go see——”

He went off and Maxwell frowned. After the sweet smell of the pines, the stale cigar smoke jarred. Besides, he knew the bottle was not taken down for ordinary customers and he thought Ellmer’s putting it in front of him significant. In fact, Maxwell admitted he was something of a fool, but he had for some time gone soberly and to be rash for an hour or two was a relief. He took a drink and by and by Ellmer returned.

“When Coral’s fixed she’ll come along,” he said, and leaned against the bar. “The boys allow you make things go in town.”

“People are speculating in real estate,” Maxwell agreed in a careless voice, for he did not mean to satisfy the other’s curiosity. “If you want a good corner lot, we have one or two.”

“I’m not buying yet,” said Ellmer. “By and by I might look around for a hotel site in a new town. Nothing much is doing in the woods and I want to put Coral where she’d get some society. The girl’s smart and if she got a fighting chance——” He stopped and resumed: “Coral has not much use for the boys who jump off to get a drink Saturday evenings. Anyhow, if you spot a cheap frontage at a settlement you think will grow, you can put me wise.”

He began to sweep up the cigar-ends and Maxwell went to the door. Ellmer’s plans for his daughter did not interest him, but the fellow’s frankness was disturbing. For all that, when a girl came out of the house Maxwell’s hesitation vanished. Coral Ellmer was tall and her figure was firmly lined. Her eyes were large and black, her mouth was firm and very red. One got a hint of keenness and resolution. Her hat and clothes were fashionable; in fact, Maxwell imagined she went as far as fashion allowed. Although her beauty was not at all refined, she had beauty.

“Why!” she said, “it’s a long while since you looked us up. I’d ’most forgotten you.”

“To think you could forget me hurts,” Maxwell rejoined. “I wanted to drive over, but we’re occupied at the office.”

“Then, trade’s pretty good? You’re selling suckers lots at some town site that’s going to stay a site?”

“Not at all. We let the other fellows take that line. When you deal at Duff’s you get the goods.”

“The boys allow Duff’s is a pretty good house. I like people who give you a square deal,” said Coral and looked at Maxwell rather hard. Then she went to the car. “She’s a daisy! Is she yours?”

Maxwell thought her remarks indicated that she had inquired about Duff’s. Moreover, Ellmer was curious about the house’s progress. In fact, their curiosity was rather naïve, but for the most part the Canadians Maxwell knew were not subtle. They were blunt and perhaps it was important that they were determined.

“I can’t yet buy a car,” he replied carelessly. “But get in and let’s start.”

“Where are we going?”

“I thought we might load up some lunch at the settlement, and picnic in the woods. We might get supper at Westminster and come back in the evening.”

“No,” said Coral firmly. “No day in the woods for mine! We’ll go to town and you can give me lunch at a restaurant. Then we’ll ride in the park, and since you like it in the woods, we might run out for supper to the Leighton Hotel.”

To drive Coral about Vancouver was not Maxwell’s plan, but he agreed, and when he started the engine she gave him a smile.

“Sometimes I like you, Harry,” she remarked.

Maxwell played up. Coral was a sport, but although she joked and laughed, he imagined she used some reserve. By and by he reached a spot where a tractor had torn the soft dirt-road and he slowed the car. For a short distance the trees were cut back and a small log-house occupied the middle of a clearing. Near the split-rail fence, a muscular young fellow pulled a saw through a big hemlock trunk. When the car rolled up he wiped the sweat from his hot face and waved his hand. A few yards back, a woman and a little girl gathered black raspberries. They stopped for a moment and the woman smiled. In the background a blue-grouse drummed and one heard wood-pigeons.

The picture's quiet charm moved Maxwell. It stood for useful effort and domestic peace. The strain the rancher bore was physical and when he got up in the morning it was gone. He was not forced to face daunting risks. The woods in which he labored were his and so long as the clearing grew he was satisfied. Then it looked as if the woman was happy; Maxwell remarked her serene smile. He turned and saw Coral's look was thoughtful.

"When the real estate boom is over I must buy a ranch," he said.

"You're not a fool and I expect you'll stay with Duff's," Coral rejoined. "Ranching's not your job. I reckon it's not mine."

Maxwell laughed. "Oh, well; but I think you ought to have played up."

"These folks aren't playing," Coral remarked. "Jim's working off his mortgage and when he's home he must chop and saw as long as he can see, but sometimes he gets a railroad job and pulls out for three or four months. His pay goes to clear the mortgage and I guess there's not much left for groceries. Sadie raises chickens and garden truck, watches the young stock and burns the branches in the slashing. Sometimes she and Jim ride over to town in the wagon Saturday evenings; but that's all. Curious thing is, Sadie likes it at the ranch—— Well, the road's pretty good now. Aren't you going to speed up?"

Maxwell let the engine go and fixed his glance ahead. Big red trunks rolled by, the rocking car plunged into belts of gloom and, with glass and metal flashing, leaped across pools of yellow light. Sometimes a startled willow-grouse sprang up from the underbrush, and sometimes a green-and-red woodpecker reflected a sunbeam. Maxwell heard a blue-grouse's call roll across the trees like a muffled drum.

He imagined Coral did not feel the charm of the woods; she was ambitious and the woods stood for loneliness, monotony and labor. Maxwell saw she pondered and he did not altogether approve her thoughtful mood, but since she wanted to go fast he must concentrate on his steering. All the same, he speculated about Coral's attraction; he frankly thought it physical, but he knew other handsome girls who bored him. Coral did not bore him, although she sometimes jarred. Anyhow, he was attracted, and since Coral was not the girl for him, he must use some caution.

When Vancouver was not far off he asked, "Where shall we go first?"

"You can stop on Main Street; I want to see the stores," Coral replied.

They stopped at a jeweler's shop and Maxwell, buying a small present, was rewarded by Coral's delight. Then he was forced to loaf about two or

three drygoods stores and he noted that Coral was a remarkably keen buyer. At one store she began a spirited dispute about some material.

“My bills are good and I want the stuff standard width,” she said. “If I take this lot, I’m going to cut your price three dollars.”

The saleswoman firmly refused and Maxwell, getting embarrassed, gave Coral his wallet. Coral pushed it back and laughed.

“You can’t buy my clothes. You want to *go slow*.”

“I think I’ll go out,” said Maxwell, who saw the saleswoman’s twinkle and knew Coral’s humor sometimes was not refined.

Yet he was rather amused than annoyed. Coral, disputing with the shop people, was an attractive picture. When she was excited, her color was a splendid rose, her mouth got very red and her black eyes snapped. Then she was marked by a strange naïve haughtiness. Her haughtiness did not spring from a sense of social importance, because Coral was not important, but from pluck and confidence. By and by she joined Maxwell and gave him a parcel.

“They brought the department boss, but in about two minutes I had him beat,” she said. “Well, I want some food and then we’ll ride round the park. What about trying the Summerland?”

Maxwell would sooner have gone to another restaurant and omitted the drive in the park. For one thing, Vancouver was not a very large city, and he imagined a number of the young automobilists who used the Summerland knew Coral; but it was not important. Moreover, he knew what Coral wanted to do she did.

They got lunch at the Summerland and drove under the giant firs in the park. Nature had planted the belt of tremendous forest and when the first gold-hunters sailed up the Straits the trees were very old.

In the evening they started for a new hotel automobile parties used. The wooden building was picturesque and the deep veranda commanded a shady lawn cut out of the woods. Behind the veranda Moorish arches opened to the big dining-room; inside were rows of decorated pillars, quiet nooks, and a polished floor.

Since the day was not a holiday, only two or three groups occupied the room. Maxwell ordered supper and presently two people went to a table by an arch. The man turned and when he pulled back a chair for his companion, Maxwell saw they were Helen and Caverhill. He had not reckoned on his

meeting Helen, but the room was spacious and Coral did not know the others.

His luck was not good. Caverhill, motioning to a waiter, stood by Helen's chair. His pose was easy. One noticed the finely drawn lines of his athletic figure, his balance and the tilt of his head. Coral gave him an approving look.

"That fellow's a bushman and a pretty good type. You can see his brown skin and you know a chopper by his shoulders and waist. All the same, he's a boss; I reckon he's got a big ranch in the woods. I like him, but I expect he's took a shine to the other girl."

Maxwell rather thought Coral's remark justified, for when Caverhill sent off the waiter and turned to Helen his look, so to speak, was respectfully protective. Helen gave him a smile and Maxwell noted that a touch of color had come to her skin and her eyes were bright. Her clothes were fashionable, but the fashion was not marked. Helen looked cultivated, rather proud, and somehow thoroughbred.

"The girl's certainly a looker," Coral went on in a critical voice. "Perhaps it's her clothes; she's not built up big and strong like me. A highbrow, I guess, but some fellows like that sort——" She stopped and resumed with surprise: "Why, she knows you!"

Maxwell imagined Helen had not altogether wanted to know him and he saw she did not indicate to Caverhill that he was about. His luck was obviously bad, but he must play up.

"She is my sister," he replied.

"Well!" said Coral and laughed. Then she gave Maxwell a rather keen glance. "I didn't know you'd got a sister, but I'd like to meet her. Shall we go along?"

"When they have got supper we'll join them. You haven't eaten yours," said Maxwell and was satisfied with his argument, for Coral's appetite was good.

After supper he lighted a cigarette and wondered whether Helen would go, but she did not, and at length he got up.

"You wanted to know my sister?"

They crossed the floor, and when Maxwell presented Coral, Helen's smile was polite, but this was all. She felt that so long as she did not let Harry down he must be satisfied. In England she had rebelled against her

guardians' rules, and she admitted that Harry was entitled to use his freedom; but to approve his cultivating a girl like Coral was another thing. She glanced at Bob and to note his calm look was some relief. Had she got a hint of amusement, she would have hated Bob.

She began to talk in a rather languid voice and for a few minutes kept it up, but Coral was quiet and by and by looked at the watch on her wrist.

"We must get going, Harry," she remarked, and giving Helen a level glance, resumed in the slow bush drawl: "So pleased to meet you! Harry must bring you over to see us at the road-house."

Then she smiled at Maxwell and went off with her free swinging walk. Helen turned to Caverhill.

"What is a road-house?"

"In the Old Country, I expect you call it an inn."

"I wonder——" said Helen, rather dryly, and began to talk about something else.

Maxwell started the engine and, when Coral went for her coat, ran back to the bar and ordered a drink. He felt he needed bracing, since he imagined Helen had meant to be nasty and Coral knew. When they started Coral was quiet and her quietness bothered Maxwell, because when annoyed her habit was to talk. In fact, he thought something must be risked.

After a time he met a rancher's wagon at an awkward curve. He slowed the engine and when the wagon rolled by put his arm round Coral. Coral pushed him strongly back, the car swerved, and leaning across in front, she seized the wheel. Maxwell pushed out the clutch and used the brake. The front wheels plunged into the brush, but the car stopped. Coral's face was red and her eyes snapped. Maxwell smiled, rather uneasily.

"You came near to hitting the big hemlock trunk," he said.

"Let go the wheel," said Coral. "Get off the car."

"Now you're ridiculous!" Maxwell exclaimed. "Perhaps you don't know your charm, and after all——"

Coral pulled out the small leather box he had got at the jeweler's.

"It's yours; I've no use for it. Get off the car. If you don't hustle, I'll put you off!"

Maxwell jumped down and she steered the car into the road. Then she let the engine run, and clutching the little box, gave him a haughty glance.

“Your trouble is, you don’t know where to stop. Anyhow, you can’t kiss me.”

“It looks as if I was rash,” Maxwell agreed. “Still I didn’t kiss you, and if my trying was all——”

He saw it was not all, for the red in Coral’s face got dark.

“At the hotel I wanted to meet your sister,” she resumed. “You ought to have taken me right then; but you waited. I reckon you waited for her to go. Well, if I’m not your sister’s sort, you’re not mine.”

She hesitated and then pushed in the clutch. The car rolled forward and Maxwell shouted: “The city’s some distance off and it will soon be dark.”

“You can take a smoke and reckon up where you hit the wrong track. Maybe I’ll send the car——” Coral replied and then the throb of the engine drowned her voice.

Maxwell sat down on a log and tried, rather hard, to be philosophical, but after a few minutes he began to laugh. The thing was humorous and he thought he could account for Coral’s hesitation when she started the car. She had not thrown him back the jewel box.

VIII

HELEN MAKES A PLUNGE

A WEEK or two after her first excursion with Bob, Helen one evening occupied a corner of the veranda at the hotel in the woods. Bob experimented with the car engine and Helen noted the patience and care he used. For example, the tools and the parts he took down were put in a row, and Helen imagined when he started the engine all would be replaced. Moreover, she was satisfied the engine would start.

Perhaps she was not logical, but she admitted that his carefulness rather jarred. Helen herself was keen and optimistic; she liked a bold firm stroke and talent that justified a plunge. Had Harry experimented, he would have thrown down the tools in a heap and joked; but it was not important.

Bob's unconscious pose was good. He was rather lightly built but athletic; his skin was brown and his glance was steady. In fact, he was a handsome fellow and Helen knew his sobriety and control. Then she turned her head and glanced at the forest. The evening was calm and the tops of the great black pines cut the serene sky. One smelt resin and warm, damp soil. Humming-birds sparkled in the slanting beam that touched a flowering bush, but back among the massive trunks the shadows were deep. In the distance cow-bells chimed.

Helen liked the woods. The quiet and hint of mystery called. Besides, the woods now called her to a romantic adventure. Caverhill was occupied in the mornings at Duff's office, but in the afternoons he stopped his car at the little house and carried Helen off. Sometimes they rolled through shadowy bush, and sometimes by dyked hayfields, orchards and sunny homesteads along the Fraser. In the background were high blue mountains, touched by glimmering snow.

Helen was urged by a strange excitement and the excursions had charm. She had not known a companion like Bob before, and he had helped Harry and might yet help much. For all that, now the reckoning had come, she shrank. Bob meant to marry her and she saw her trying to weigh the advantages of the marriage was ominous. She approved and trusted Bob, but

he had not moved her strongly, and if passion were a mark of love, she did not love him.

Perhaps she had paid her debt to Harry, but when she did so she incurred another. Bob, for her sake, had joined the speculation and to refuse him his reward was shabby. There was another thing: to some extent, she and Harry were adventurers, but, if she married Caverhill, she would be an important lady at the new settlement. Although she admitted the argument ought not to weigh, it did weigh.

Helen frowned. When she ought to think for her lover, she thought for herself. Caverhill attracted her and was marked by qualities she approved, although the qualities were not hers. To control a man like that was much, but the thrill she had got when she first knew her power was going, and sometimes she doubted. She must not cheat Bob and she wondered whether she could make good. The rather vague phrase helped her over awkward ground.

By and by Bob came to the bottom of the steps. His look was preoccupied and Helen thought he did not know his hands were greasy and spots of oil were on his clothes. In the bush, one did not bother about things like that.

“I found out the trouble. The car will go,” he said.

“Then, perhaps we ought to start.”

“We might stay for half an hour and then make home by dark. Let’s take a walk along the trail. In the morning I must pull out for the ranch.”

Helen went. The woods were dim and the pines in the background got indistinct. But for the distant chime of cow-bells all was strangely calm and for a time Bob was quiet. Then he said, “I meant to pull out when I’d fixed things with your brother, but I stayed two weeks, and now I’m forced to quit, I don’t want to go. Well, I’ve had a glorious holiday. What about you?”

“In summer, the woods are rather glorious. I don’t think I have known a holiday like this before.”

“Very well,” said Bob. “My notion is, we ought to try if we can keep it up. Will you marry me, Helen?”

Helen stopped and for a moment or two faced him quietly. The color left her skin and her look was strained. Then she said, “I don’t know, Bob. I don’t know if I ought.”

Bob used some control. He saw her hesitation was not coquetry, and since she doubted he imagined her doubt was justified. At the beginning her beauty had moved him, but he sensed in her something that outweighed her physical charm. Helen was stanch and proud, and pride like hers shrank from shabbiness; it did not spring from cultivation, it was part of her.

“All the same, I expect you know I loved you,” he remarked.

“That is so,” Helen admitted. “Sometimes I felt I was rash and ought to be firm. But I was lonely and I frankly liked to go about with you. Still it doesn’t carry me very far and perhaps I ought not to have gone.”

“To have you about carries me all the way,” said Bob. “However, if you are satisfied with me, my business is to put you where you want to go. You have got ambition and your blood is red. If you indicate the line, I’ll try to break the trail.”

Helen thrilled. She was ambitious and adventure called. Moreover, she knew Bob’s habit was not to boast. Obstacles did not daunt him; he was stubbornly tenacious. Yet marriage was a great adventure.

“Ah,” she said in a quiet voice, “you don’t know me. I’m romantic, but I haven’t borne much strain and used much effort. I might not help you at the ranch.”

“If that’s all, I’ll risk it,” said Bob and smiled. “You joined Maxwell when his pay was a small clerk’s. You took the plunge and made good. Now you face another plunge, you oughtn’t to hesitate.”

“Harry made good and carried me along. There’s another thing: a girl ought to venture much for her lover, but I don’t altogether know myself and somehow I doubt——”

“I think I see,” said Bob. “Well, I’m surely your lover and that will help. So long as you don’t love another——”

The blood came to Helen’s skin and she gave him a hesitating glance. “I don’t love another, Bob. Nobody has moved me. Perhaps there’s the trouble; but I have not known a man I like as I like you.”

“Then, I think you might risk it,” said Bob and took her in his arms.

Helen’s doubts vanished. She had, rather for his sake than hers, tried to be just, but she was flesh and blood and was willing for her lover to carry her away. Now she had made the plunge, she must brace up and go forward. For all that, when they drove through the woods she was quiet and Bob did

not talk much. The uneven road was getting dark and holes were numerous, but when he pulled Helen's hand under his arm she let it stay.

When they reached Maxwell's house she sent Bob off and lighted the lamp. Her excitement was gone and she was bothered by a dull reaction. The room was very small and the furniture was cheap. Although she had not long since thought herself content, she knew she had rather been resigned. In fact, she felt she hated the little house, because she had unconsciously allowed its shabbiness to influence her. Then she felt she hated her neighbors and their gramophone whose falsetto trill pierced the thin wall.

She mused about Bob. He was sober and kind. One could trust him and she knew he loved her. There was the trouble, because to some extent she had cheated him. At the beginning she had, for her brother's sake, used her charm, but her object was afterwards selfish. She had tried to attract Bob because he could give her much she was forced to go without. Yet it was not altogether because he was rich; Bob had qualities.

Now her half-conscious plan had worked, she was daunted. Bob did not move her as a lover ought to move her, but when she tried to warn him he was obstinate. Helen knew his firmness, and since she had promised to marry him, he would not let her go. It looked as if there was no use in struggling, and if he were satisfied, perhaps her scruples were ridiculous. To ponder Harry's part was some relief.

For long she had been her brother's champion, but she had recently begun to doubt if he were all she thought. Harry had a talent for understanding and leading others where he wanted them to go. He knew she attracted Caverhill, and she wondered whether he had used her to help his plans. For example, when he knew Caverhill would arrive at the house he had remained in town! Helen was humiliated and began to get angry.

There was another thing; at the hotel in the woods Harry had brought a road-house girl to their table. Helen did not know much about Canadian saloons, but she knew Coral's type and imagined she served drinks to loafers at the bar. Although Helen thought herself modern and a champion of freedom, she admitted she had got a nasty knock. To think Harry meant to marry a girl like that hurt, and there was not much comfort in thinking he did not.

By and by she heard his step and looked up. Maxwell saw her mouth was tight and her glance was cold.

“Hello!” he said. “If you have been alone, I’m sorry, but I imagined you were with Caverhill and I had some business——”

“Was the business in town?” Helen inquired, meaningly.

Maxwell smiled. “At the C. P. R. Hotel. My customer’s a jolly fellow and I stayed for some time. I didn’t imagine Caverhill had let you go and I felt I must relax. Bob was at the office two or three hours, and to satisfy his curiosity is something of a strain.”

“After all, Bob’s curiosity is justified; he’s giving you a valuable block of land,” Helen rejoined with a touch of sharpness, for she saw he studied her and thought he had an object for talking about Bob.

“That is so,” Maxwell agreed. “However, Bob goes back in the morning and will not be in town again for a month. But perhaps you know?”

“I have promised to marry Bob when he returns,” said Helen quietly.

The statement was flat. She did not feel the thrill she ought to feel and Harry’s satisfaction jarred. The marriage was something he had wanted and perhaps had worked for. He gave her a keen glance.

“Bob’s a first-rate fellow. I rather think he’s all your husband ought to be and I’m delighted. In fact, I feel your coolness is strange——”

“Oh, well. I doubt if I ought to marry Bob.”

“Now you’re ridiculous,” Maxwell rejoined. “Caverhill has a number of advantages, but when you promised to marry him his luck was remarkably good.”

“I wonder,” said Helen in a dull voice. “Perhaps had you left him alone at the ranch, he would have been happier. Well, I’m tired; I think I won’t stop——”

She went off. All was flat and she was spiritless. Then Harry was not kind; he had not thought much for her. He was satisfied because the marriage was good and Bob was a useful brother-in-law. By and by she tried to banish her moodiness. After all, Bob was kind and very stanch.

IX

THE PLAN WORKS

ALTHOUGH the veranda was in the shadow, the hot sun was on the woods and Helen smelt the pines. She liked the resinous scent and her rocking-chair was easy, but she put down her book and frowned. Sometimes it was lonely at Shadow Lake, and so long as the light was good Bob was not much about. For example, although she had got up at seven o'clock he was gone and he had not come back for lunch. In fact, Helen doubted if he would return for supper.

At the beginning, when Bob was her lover, she had tried to let herself go, but the effort was hard and she thought Bob knew. When she not long since married him she could not conquer her reserve and Bob did not try. Helen did not know if he were hurt, for sometimes Bob was rather inscrutable. He played up and indulged her. In fact, Helen admitted he was all she had thought and she ought to be satisfied, but somehow her satisfaction was not keen.

She looked up the valley. In the background, the ethereal snow-peak shone. Dark woods rolled down to the sparkling lake and the shadow of a cloud trailed across the water. In the foreground, tall, ripe oats bent in the wind, and when the slow ripples moved across the fields the soft yellow got luminous. Then Helen turned her head, and her look got thoughtful.

Down the valley, smoke tossed about the trees and a long plume, fleecy and brown like dirty wool, floated across the sky. In some places, leaping flames pierced the shade and by the river was a high bank of red soil. Farther back, small, indistinct men and oxen moved about the tangled slashing. Sometimes an ax sparkled and where the trunks were piled pale fires burned. Then a fresh smoke cloud rolled up, the veranda shook, and the report of a blasting shot echoed in the woods.

Maxwell's plan had begun to work. His part was in the city, but Bob had control at the lake and Helen approved the speed at which he pushed ahead. She wanted Maxwell's plan to work, although it was rather because she was proud than greedy. When she married Bob she had got, but had not given, much. She felt she and Harry, so to speak, must make good, and for Bob to

get rich by her brother's enterprise would help. It accounted for her approving Bob's industry, but his concentration had some drawbacks. Although Helen had not wanted a passionate lover, she did not want to be left alone.

By and by a neighbor crossed the clearing. Mrs. Grey and her husband occupied a small homestead at the bottom of the mountains. The timber on the ranch was thick and the land Grey had cleared only carried a few head of stock. Helen imagined Mrs. Grey was forced to labor in the fields and she was sorry for the tired woman. When the other came up the steps she fetched an easy-chair.

"Has my husband been around?" Mrs. Grey inquired.

Helen said Grey had not arrived and the other's look indicated some relief.

"Maybe Tom went after the cows, but I reckoned he was going to your house and I wanted to see you before he saw Bob. A relation back East died and Tom has got two thousand dollars."

"I'm glad you have got a useful sum," said Helen. "Still I don't see——"

"The ranch is small and the soil on the low piece is sour," Mrs. Grey resumed. "All the stock and truck we raise won't pay interest on the mortgage and buy groceries, but sometimes Tom hires up with a lumber gang. I was a Toronto girl, and when he goes off and the nights are dark it's lonesome in the bush. Well, if we paid off the mortgage, he could stay home and chop. Two thousand dollars would meet the bill."

"Then oughtn't you to pay the mortgage?"

"I'm willing, but after fighting on for eight years, Tom allows we've had enough. He reckons I'm tired and want help. His plan's to speculate on lots at the new settlement."

"Ah!" said Helen. "Now I do see! You think your husband rash?"

"I sure don't know," Mrs. Grey replied in a thoughtful voice. "If it was a land boomer's deal, I'd talk Tom off; but your husband is running the job."

"For all that, you doubt," Helen remarked.

"It's like this: if we pay the mortgage, things won't be much different, but Tom can stay home and clear fresh ground and we'll push along. Anyhow, the mortgage must be paid soon. Before we put up two thousand dollars I want to know——"

“You admit you know my husband,” said Helen and her look was rather proud.

Mrs. Grey hesitated. She had long faced poverty and undertaken a hired man’s labor. Now she was thin and worn and sometimes daunted. She saw Helen was fresh and keen, and perhaps there was no use in talking. Caverhill’s indulged wife was not forced to cook, and wash the clothes, to pull the big saw, and feed the calves.

“All does not depend on Bob,” she said. “He’s got a partner in the city and sometimes real estate men work off a frame-up. Then I can’t calculate if Bob’s sure he’ll make good. Maybe he goes ahead because he knows he’ll get there; maybe he’s satisfied with a fighting chance. Perhaps you know. Tom and I can’t take chances.”

The trouble was, Helen did not know very much. Sometimes she was rather hurt because Bob did not talk about his plans.

“My husband is not a fool and his partner in town is my brother,” she said. “But if you will state plainly what you want——”

“I want to be sure. Bob is Tom’s friend, and if you put him wise how we are fixed and he isn’t plumb certain he can put the job across, maybe he’ll do something to freeze Tom off.”

Helen was jarred and her color rose. She had not doubted that Bob and Harry could carry out their plans, and she saw it was important others should not doubt. Her part was obviously to give the hesitating woman confidence. Besides, she imagined a frame-up was something like a swindle and the other’s remark had hurt.

“For me to suggest Bob should discourage Mr. Grey is impossible,” she said with a touch of haughtiness. “I cannot imply that I’m not satisfied about my husband’s talents and my brother’s honesty. I am satisfied. Duff’s is an old and respectable house and the business it transacts is sound. My brother is just, and if he were not just, he would not cheat my husband. Then I know Bob would not undertake a job he could not carry out. However, if you think you see a risk, the risk is yours. I must not persuade you.”

“I allow that is so,” Mrs. Grey agreed and got up. “Well, I surely want Tom to stay home and clear the ranch. If the settlement goes, he could get a hired man and I’d get help. Sometimes I’m tired and Tom’s bothered. To know we had a bank-roll back of us would be mighty comforting.”

She went off and Helen’s moodiness vanished. To champion Bob and Harry was rather an attractive part and she thought her arguments good. By

and by she resolved to go and see how Bob got on. Perhaps it was strange, but she imagined he was not keen about her joining him when he was occupied. All the same, her curiosity was excited and she started for the dam.

The red embankment began in a mown hayfield and went for some distance across the tail of a big pool. Below the pool an angry rapid plunged across rocky ledges to a waterfall. The river was low and where the embankment stopped a log stockade obstructed part of the channel. A plank road went along the bank and men pushed wheel-barrows over the boards.

Where the bank met the sloping field other men were occupied at the bottom of a horrible muddy hole. They pulled about big ragged blocks and built the stones into a lumber frame. Some wore leather flaps to guard their hands, but their arms were bare and Helen saw deep scratches on their brown skin. For the most part, they were not professional artizans and laborers; the men owned half-cleared ranches and when their money ran out carried loads for survey parties and cut trails for the Government. As a rule, the bush-rancher must build his house, bridge creeks, move ponderous logs, and drain wet muskegs. Indeed, Helen thought her neighbors, although far from a railroad and market, cheerfully faced obstacles that would daunt an English landlord.

Opposite the waterfall, a chopper gang laboriously cleared the trees from the keystone block. Fires burned in the ruin that marked their advance and the wide belt of tangled trunks and branches was streaked by rolling smoke. Near the dam, steam and dust blew about the concrete-mixer, and the engine's steady throb pierced the turmoil of the fall.

The calm that had long brooded over Shadow Lake was gone. All one saw indicated ruthless utilitarian activity. The frank ugliness of the broken landscape jarred, but Helen knew herself accountable and did not mean to indulge her romantic regret. Progress implied some ugliness, and the keystone block that had carried a herd of cattle would soon carry homes for men. Moreover, the plan was Harry's and to carry it out would justify their not leaving Bob alone. Perhaps it was strange, but Helen felt her marrying Bob must be justified. In the meantime she did not see him and she went along the bank.

At the end of the bank, a log coffer, lined by thick planks, enclosed a deep trench where the foundations for the dam front would go, and a number of men spread the cement and gravel the barrow gang threw down. The gritty stuff had splashed upon their clothes and skin; their smeared red faces

wore a strained savage look. Helen had not before studied men engaged in risky labor. She felt they were primitive and belonged to a ruder age. In fact, she had vaguely thought one now used machines for such work as theirs.

The coffer dam kept the river from the trench, but was not altogether water-tight. Muddy trickles ran from the joints in the planks and at one or two spots a fountain spurted up. The planks throbbed with the beat of the current and Helen saw the thick logs shake. Then she noticed two men on a beam that spanned the trench. One steadied a post between the timbers; the other, swinging a big hammer, struck the end. The beam that supported him was three or four inches wide, but although his body swung with the heavy tool, his balance on the slippery wood was like a dancer's. He was horribly dirty and his torn shirt was covered by cement. When he turned his head Helen saw it was Bob and she mechanically stepped back. It looked as if Bob were not the sober, and to some extent cultivated, fellow she had thought; she got a disturbing hint of another and ruder man.

The others looked up, as if they were not satisfied about the trench, and Helen imagined some planks bent. Bob fixed the post and signaled for another, and Helen saw the planks did bend. The river was breaking in and a man jumped for the beam Bob occupied. Helen thought he meant to help, but his feet got no hold on the slippery wood; he fell back and plunged into the water and cement.

Nobody tried to get out and three or four lifted a fresh post. The water poured down and gravel washed through an opening where a weak plank bulged. Helen did not see all the men did, but she knew there was no use in shouting to Bob, and when the end of a beam he wanted swung up across the top she seized and pushed the timber. Bob and another drove down the beam, the bulging plank got straight, and the water began to stop. Helen saw the risk was gone and she stole off. Somehow she did not want Bob to know she was about.

By and by she noted spots on her white dress and saw she had torn her hand, but it was not important. She was disturbed, and although she could not altogether account for her disturbance, she wanted to get home.

X

BOB DISAPPROVES

IN the evening Bob put up his calculations and went to the veranda. The sun was low, the pines were getting dark, and Helen's white dress cut the dusky background. For a few moments she did not see Bob; she stood by a post and looked across the valley. Her face was outlined against the shadow, and Bob noted her tight mouth. He saw she pondered and he knitted his brows, for he imagined she did not want his help. He felt Helen, so to speak, eluded him. He was her husband, but she was not altogether his.

When he fetched a chair for her she turned and gave him a keen glance. Bob now wore a silk shirt and light summer clothes. His movements were easy and marked by the chopper's balance. Although he was hard and muscular, he did not look like the man who had not long since labored at the dam.

"You were some time in your office," Helen remarked.

"That is so," Bob agreed and felt for his pipe. "I'd rather have come out and joined you, but I was forced to reckon up the pay-bill and order some digging truck."

"But you are now occupied all the time."

"I've got a big job you rather urged me to undertake," said Bob and lighted his pipe. "I expect you want me to put the job across?"

"Of course——" said Helen and stopped, for she saw Bob's twinkle.

Bob was not at all a fool and perhaps at the beginning she had implied that she did not want him to bother her much. For all that, to know he was resigned was another thing.

"I imagined you were not very keen about the new settlement," she resumed.

"Oh, well, I'm a rancher. I reckon I know the woods, but when I get up against smart city men——"

"You are not up against city men. You agreed with Duff's. The house is a first-class, respectable house and transacts the business."

“Looks as if I’d agreed with Duff and some others,” Bob rejoined with a smile. “Duff is a white man; I don’t know about his friends, Thornbank, for example.”

Helen remarked that he did not state Maxwell was a white man. In fact, he did not talk much about Harry and his reserve hurt. She wanted Bob to approve Harry, but she must not antagonize him by beginning a dispute.

“Would not a contractor have cleared the ground and built the dam sooner?” she inquired.

“It’s possible,” Bob said thoughtfully. “We made some calculations and got an estimate. Harry wanted to engage the contractor, and we must get him to put up the power-house and turbines. In the meantime, I reckoned to cut out some expense by using a rancher gang. You see, our bank-roll’s not big. However, if I talk business, you’ll get bored.”

“Not at all. I really want to know—— Did you not float a company?”

“We tried to float a small private company. So far, we have not sold much stock. Harry stated Alsager and two or three sound men of his sort were interested, but they have not come in.”

“If you could give investors confidence, I suppose the stock would go? Then you would get all the money you need?”

“Sure,” said Bob. “To persuade people is your brother’s part and I expect he’ll do so. When your brother argues, one’s forced to agree.”

Helen looked up. She did not think Bob was consciously satirical, but she imagined he doubted Harry, and although she herself had perhaps some grounds to doubt, Bob had not.

“It looks as if Harry must use his talent and where it’s possible we ought to help. Well, in the afternoon Mrs. Grey came over,” she said and narrated her interview with the rancher’s wife.

“Ah,” said Bob, “I didn’t know about Grey’s two thousand dollars. You imply you satisfied Mrs. Grey her husband ought to speculate on some building lots?”

“I stated I must not persuade her and the risk was hers. All the same, I think she means to invest.”

Bob frowned and Helen got angry. She had thought he would approve.

“They’re struggling folks. I hate to think they’re going to bet their wad,” he said.

“But you’re ridiculous,” Helen rejoined. “If you don’t mean to sell the lots, there is no use in your building the dam.”

“I don’t want to take all poor folks like Tom Grey have got.”

“Not if you gave them land that will soon be worth much?”

“The land is not yet worth much,” Bob said dryly.

The blood came to Helen’s skin. It was not that Grey’s speculating was important, but that Bob was not enthusiastic about Harry’s plan. In a sense, if he doubted Harry, he ought to doubt her. Besides, the plan must be carried out, for if her brother entangled Bob in embarrassments, it might look as if she were an unscrupulous adventuress.

“You’re not logical,” she remarked. “When the dam is built and a factory starts people will be eager to get the lots and the price will go up. If you think you cannot build the dam, you ought not to have begun.”

Bob smiled. He had a useful argument, but since he did not want to hurt Helen he let it go.

“I reckon we can build the dam; anyhow, we are going to try. All the same, I see some obstacles. Our bank-roll——”

“Oh!” said Helen, “it’s obvious you have not much talent for business! Don’t you see the important thing is to persuade people they ought to buy the land? Suppose you got the newspapers to talk about the settlement and a number of people built houses? Storekeepers, bakers and freighters would be wanted to supply the workmen. They would build houses, one would support another, and the settlement would go. You would get the money you need to carry you on.”

“Is the argument yours?” Bob asked quietly.

“You imply it’s Harry’s argument? Well, perhaps it is, but the caution you use is extravagant. One must run some risk. Pluck’s the greatest quality and removes all obstacles.”

Bob’s look got rather hard and he knitted his brows.

“I am not a business man; but I doubt if one ought to run a risk at another’s cost. Sometimes it’s possible to boom a settlement, but the foundation for trade is useful industry and the industry we need is not yet started. Well, I allow the builders and storekeepers would support one another, so long as the money they brought held out. Then, if the factory was

not started, they'd be forced to quit, and the men I helped break would curse me for a cheat."

Helen was half persuaded. Bob's proud honesty commanded respect. Yet if she admitted he took the proper line she must admit that Harry did not. There was the trouble, because she must justify her brother.

"Then, if Grey resolves to invest, what are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"I don't know. The thing's awkward. I can't go back on my wife."

"Although you don't approve her rules?" said Helen in a rather scornful voice. "Well, I suppose I ought to be flattered because you don't want to let me down; but it's strange you don't see your stanchness, in a sense, is immoral."

She went off and Bob smoked and mused. As a rule, Helen was not nasty, and since he knew her high spirit, her annoyance did not much bother him. In fact, he rather liked to think her angry, because it indicated that he could move her. For the most part, she agreed with him, but he did not want her to agree. He thought he really wanted Helen to let herself go. Then he began to speculate about her urging him to push on the settlement.

Helen was ambitious, but Bob imagined her ambition was not selfish. She wanted him to get rich and she wanted Maxwell to make good. Bob lighted his pipe and frowned. For Helen to support Maxwell was proper. She declared she owed him much; but her husband had the first claim. It was not that Bob was jealous and antagonistic. When Maxwell was about he felt his charm and saw his useful qualities; the trouble was, when he was not about one wondered whether he had not carried one away. Somehow Bob did not trust Maxwell as he trusted Helen, but he admitted that he had nothing to go on. By and by he got up and went to his office.

Helen had gone to the lake and languidly watched the splashes the trout made break the trembling shadows. All was not in shadow, for a belt of water reflected the green and rose-pink sky. In the distance a loon called and the noise was like hoarse laughter. Then an owl wheeled across the light, shrieked and vanished, and all was quiet but for the splash of the trout.

At the beginning Bob had gone with her in the evening to fish, but since he began the dam he was occupied at his office and the river. Although Helen approved his concentration, sometimes it jarred, and now she was hurt and angry. She had meant to help, and Bob was annoyed.

Helen let it go and began to weigh another thing. She had begun to see Bob was a finer type than her brother, but she must not let Harry down. He stood for much for which she stood. She, so to speak, must carry her brother along; Bob must know they went together.

After a time she got up and went back to the house. All was quiet and a lamp burning in the office indicated that Bob had resumed his calculations. The big room behind the veranda was dreary and the book Helen picked up was dull. She frowned, glanced at the office door and hesitated, and then went off to bed.

XI

MAXWELL'S VALISE

A CLOUD of flies hovered about the oxen, chained in double span to a big fir stump, and sweating men pushed long handspikes into the hole under the cut roots. The stump was four or five feet across and six feet high, and blocked the way for the foundation trench at the dam. A dark stain and a rent indicated that a blasting shot had blown out in the half-rotten wood, and Bob had yoked his oxen to the obstacle.

Standing on a log, he saw the chain was fixed at the proper spot and the men were at their posts; and then for a moment turned his head. The river rolled angrily by the end of the dam and he knew the water rose; a big stone he had not long since noted was covered. It looked as if he must strengthen his coffer and he wanted to get to work; but he must first move the stump and he signaled the teamster.

“Start them up! Lift her, boys!”

The oxen went forward and the chain got tight. The men pulled at the handspikes and the big stump tilted and began to rise from the hole. Then it stopped, the teamster shouted and the powerful animals strained and trampled. The yokes cracked and the chain jarred, but the stump did not move. A man, throwing down his handspike, got on his knees and looked into the hole. Bob jumped from the log.

“She mustn't come back! What has jammed?”

“Looks like a root wasn't cut,” said the other, and Bob seized an ax.

“You have got to hold her, boys,” he said and crawled into the dark hole.

The root was thick, and since he must lie down he could not properly use his ax. Moreover, he doubted if the men and oxen could long hold up the stump and when it rolled back he must not be underneath. All the same, he wanted the gang at the coffer and they must drag out the stump before they went.

The ax sank into the sappy wood; he felt the mass above him tremble and soil fell on his head. Pulling out the blade, he moved his body and made another stroke. A chip leaped up, but the notch was not deep and the stump

began to shake. There was no use in shouting to the teamster; his voice would not carry and the man knew he must keep the chain tight. Another two or three strokes would break the root and Bob got his breath and struck savagely.

He heard a crack and tangled roots brushed across him. The stump was rising, but it stopped and began to sink back. Bob knew he must get out, and turning awkwardly, he pushed between the roots. Soil fell and pinned down his legs and he heard shouts. Then somebody seized his arm and pulled him from the hole. He had not his hat and the soil was in his hair; his overalls were split and his skin was torn, but he jumped for the handspike his helper had dropped.

Men gasped and shouted, the oxen's shoulders heaved, and the stump tilted and rolled a yard or two across level ground. Bob looked up and saw his foreman's face was wet by sweat and his brown hands shook.

"You held her, Jake!" said Bob.

"I thought we were beat," the other replied rather hoarsely. "The team gave back—looked as if she was coming down on you."

"Perhaps I took some chances, but we had to pull her out," said Bob. "Bring the boys. We must run down the logs for the coffer."

They started along the river bank and stopped at a pile of chopped trunks. The logs plunged down the slanted skids, and when all were launched the men jumped on the bark and used their poles to separate and steer the drifting mass. Sometimes a log began to roll and a man jumped to another; sometimes one moved his feet as if he danced and kept his awkward post.

By and by Bob, balancing on a trunk, floated across the pool by the dam. His head was tilted back and his body above his waist was slack. When he used his pole he must steady the log by a gentle swing and a push from his foot. Other logs floated near him, and unless he could steer the timber into the slack, all the current swept past the dam would be lost. He needed the logs. The snow on the peak was melting fast and lake and river rose.

He pushed the logs behind a chain, and after they were in the pond landed on the dam and sat down in the sun. He saw his crawling under the stump was foolhardy and he ought, perhaps, to have let Watson run down the logs. All the same, he liked to handle the big trunks. The job was a man's job, and to labor was rather a relief than a strain. For long he was happy in his occupation at the ranch, but he had got entangled by Maxwell's

development scheme. Well, he meant to make the scheme go, and had Duff kept control, he would not have bothered. Duff, however, was in the North and somehow Maxwell——

The foreman jumped on to the dam. Watson owned a small, half-cleared ranch and Bob trusted the big fellow. For a moment or two Watson hesitated and then said, “The lake’s overflowing into the muskeg and I reckon the water will rise for two or three weeks. You want to carry up the coffer, but our lumber’s running out.”

“That is so; I could use a pile of sawn stuff,” Bob agreed. “The drawback is, cost and transport are high.”

“You don’t want to pay for transport. Burns at Saleter’s Forks has no use for his old mill. She’s rusty and the boiler leaks, but the engine and saw are good, and Burns is keen to sell. If you didn’t want all the boards she’d cut, you could stack the lumber to season until the house-building starts.”

“It looks a useful plan,” said Bob. “Still the company’s capital is not large and I mustn’t bother them at the office for much money.”

“There’s another thing,” Watson remarked with some embarrassment. “The boys know you haven’t got all the tools you ought to have, but they get their pay. Well, they have been talking, and their notion is, if it would help, they’d wait——”

In the woods workmen are sometimes not paid until the job is finished, but Bob was moved.

“You’re a good sort, Jake, and the boys are a fine bunch. All the same, the company must meet the wage payroll bill and perhaps I can buy Burns’s outfit.”

The foreman went off and Bob knocked out his pipe. In the morning a steamer ought to touch at the settlement on the coast and Helen had talked about Maxwell’s coming over for a day or two. If Maxwell arrived, Bob meant to urge their buying the sawmill, but in the meantime he must get to work.

Maxwell did arrive and after supper Bob joined him and Helen on the veranda. For a time Maxwell and Helen joked, but Bob imagined Harry’s carelessness was rather forced and when he was quiet his look was thoughtful.

“I expect you want to know how we get on?” he said at length. “Well, we make progress, but I begin to feel I pull some weight and I don’t know

when Duff will return. In the meantime I can give you a few particulars _____”

He took a small valise from the table and pulled out a bundle of documents. At the bottom was some printed paper, like a pamphlet, but he removed this and putting it back, shut the valise. Then he gave Bob the other papers and lighted a cigarette. Helen remarked that he frowned.

For five or ten minutes all was quiet. Bob was absorbed by the accounts and Maxwell knitted his brows. Their preoccupation disturbed Helen, because she felt that something went on to which she had not a clew. By and by Maxwell stretched his legs and rested his head against the chair as if he were tired.

Maxwell was tired. He was a gambler and had bet higher than his partners knew. His habit was to risk a plunge, and as a rule the plunge was justified; but as his intricate plans developed he was forced to enlarge his bets. If he lost, he could not pay, and sometimes the risk daunted him. His imagination was romantic and he pictured himself sowing. The seed he used was others' money and so far the golden crop had not begun to spring. For all that, he knew it would spring and he must hold on until the harvest. To hold on was hard, but if he could keep Caverhill satisfied and Duff in the North, he and they would get the reward. At length Bob gave him back the papers and Maxwell put the bundle in his valise. Helen thought for him to do so was some relief.

“Has Alsager joined you?” Bob inquired.

“He hasn't yet sent in his application, but I expect to get it. Alsager's a cautious fellow; he likes to wait.”

“What about a factory?”

“Underhill and one or two more are negotiating. Parton's agent came over. They want a site for a shingling mill.”

“The negotiations don't go fast,” Bob remarked.

Maxwell smiled. “One fellow waits for another, but when the first begins to move all will hustle. For example, when the factory goes up, building on the lots will start and somebody will speculate on a lumber mill. Then we want a road for heavy transport and the Government will make a grant, but they will not do so until the need is obvious.”

“In order to get a factory we must have a road, but in order to get the road we must have a factory,” said Bob with some dryness. “Then a sawmill

would help the settlement go, and a growing settlement would persuade somebody to speculate on a mill.”

“It is rather like that,” Maxwell agreed. “One venture starts the next. Our part’s to give somebody a useful push-off.”

“Very well; I’m going to start a mill. I know an old outfit I can patch up and run. The experiment will cost two thousand dollars.”

“I doubt if I can get two thousand dollars,” said Maxwell moodily.

“Our bank-roll ought to stand for it. If I can’t buy the mill, I must buy sawn lumber, and since we haven’t got the road, transport’s expensive.”

“Money *flows* out, Bob; I can’t stop the channels. As soon as I get a useful sum I’m forced to write checks. We have an urgent use for every dollar.”

“I want the mill; I must have proper tools,” Bob said firmly. “For the most part, our money has been used at Vancouver and I don’t altogether see where it goes. We’ll get back all I use at the lake. Besides, your balance sheet indicates——”

Maxwell for a few moments said nothing. Two thousand dollars was not a large sum, but he was horribly embarrassed and did not want to talk about the balance sheet. In order to get his reward, he must hold on for some time yet and when he declared money flowed away he did not exaggerate. All the same, he saw Bob was resolved and to dispute was dangerous. It looked as if he must run another risk.

“Then I expect I must indulge you,” he said quietly. “But I’m tired. Let’s talk about something else.”

He began to banter Helen and she played up, for she saw Harry was highly strung. She did not think Bob saw, but sometimes Bob was not keen. By and by the trees got blurred and thin mist floated about the house. Helen shivered and went off to bed. Bob went to his office, but Maxwell stopped and pondered.

After breakfast in the morning Helen went to Maxwell’s room, to see if her Chinese house-boy had put all straight. When she moved a cloth on a bureau she knocked down Maxwell’s valise. The jar shook the valise open and a number of documents fell on the floor. Helen thought one was the pamphlet Harry had put back, and when she turned it over she saw printed on the front, *Helensville’s advantages*. Underneath was a good picture of the snow-peak and the lake.

At first Helen was annoyed and then her curiosity was excited. Since Harry had used her name, she was entitled to study the pamphlet. The print, however, was small and Maxwell had altered and scored out words. Bright sunbeams shone into the room, dazzling her eyes, and she went to the passage where the light was steady.

When her curiosity was satisfied she frowned. The claims the little book advanced were bold and Helen remarked their cleverness; for example, the statement that sites for a pulp-factory and a sawmill were being cleared and the dam to supply the power had made some progress. The statement was accurate, but the implication that mill and factory would soon be built was not. Other statements did not harmonize with Harry's remarks to Bob. In fact, the thing was rather a plausible than honest advertisement.

Helen wondered what she ought to do about it. She was persuaded Bob would not approve and perhaps he ought to know, but she shrank from enlightening him. Moreover, she shrank from talking to Maxwell. She did not want to dispute with Harry and she imagined they would dispute. Helen saw Maxwell's boldness was typical. Not long since, she might have thought it humorous, but she had, half consciously, begun to use Bob's sterner rules. After all, however, perhaps some exaggeration in an advertisement was allowable. The factory would be built and Harry would make good his claims. In the meantime, her brother and her husband must not jar. Then she heard a step and Bob, going along the passage, gave her a careless glance.

"Hello!" he said. "Got something interesting in your mail? I thought I noted a department store's envelope."

"The advertisement is rather interesting," Helen replied, but when Bob went off she blushed, and pushed the pamphlet angrily into the valise.

Bob, crossing the veranda, saw Helen's letters on the table and rather thought the department store envelope was not opened. He, however, was not interested and Watson wanted him at the dam.

XII

THE COFFER GOES

DUSK was falling, and Bob, turning in his chair, stretched his tired body and began to cut some tobacco. The chair cracked noisily and Bob dropped his tobacco plug. He could not reach the plug, to get up was a bother, and he knew Helen did not approve his cutting tobacco into his hand. Sometimes he thought Helen's fastidiousness exaggerated, and he did not want to go for his pouch.

The soft dusk invaded the veranda, but Helen wore a white dress and her figure was distinct. She faced Bob and he knew she had noticed his cutting the tobacco, but he rather hoped she would not talk. Since the early morning he had been occupied and when he had smoked his pipe he must go back to the dam.

The evening was calm and the throb of the river was ominously loud. After two or three weeks of scorching sun, the snow on the white peak melted fast, the lake was full, and the rising water floated the driftwood other floods had stranded along the bank. The current carried down the battered trunks and branches, and if the stuff jammed against and broke his boom, the coffer dam would go.

"Since you are tired, I didn't bother you to change your clothes for supper," Helen remarked. "But will you not pull off your big rubber boots?"

Bob frowned. For the most part, he tried to use Helen's rules, but he thought he had gone as far as a man whose occupation was strenuous ought to go. Moreover, although Helen was a charming companion, he felt she was content to be his companion, and when he was moody her remoteness annoyed him. Bob thought remoteness the proper word; in a sense, he did not get near Helen, and because he loved her it hurt. Yet he tried to play up and to some extent his resolve to do so accounted for his concentrating on the dam.

"There is not much use in pulling off my boots for five minutes," he replied.

"Then, you are going back to the dam?" said Helen rather sharply. "You are not much at the homestead and when you are about you muse and

smoke.”

“One ought to be logical,” said Bob and forced a smile. “You want me to build the dam, and to build a dam is a big undertaking——”

“Don’t you want to build the dam?”

“Perhaps at the beginning I wasn’t very keen. However, since I have got going I ought to go on.”

“That is all?”

“I don’t know,” said Bob dully. “I’m not a philosopher. When I undertake a job I don’t speculate about my object; I shove ahead. Well, I have started and you ought to be satisfied.”

Helen was not satisfied, and since she had urged Bob to start, she admitted that she was not altogether logical. At the beginning she was willing for him to concentrate on his occupation; now she was not. Yet Helen would not dwell on this and there was another thing. She sensed in Bob an antagonism to her brother of which she thought he was not directly conscious. The antagonism, so to speak, was subconscious and perhaps instinctive. He did not trust Harry. There was the trouble. Harry was her brother and stood for much for which she stood. Helen was proud and sometimes obstinate.

“I know you will go on,” she said. “Still, confidence carries one far, and your confidence is not marked.”

“Oh, well; I don’t altogether see where I go and I’m bothered. In fact, I frankly wish Duff was back.”

“Harry is at the office,” Helen rejoined in a meaning voice. “The new settlement plan is his.”

Bob moodily knocked out his pipe and got up. He had not wanted to dispute.

“That is so,” he agreed. “Your brother is a clever business man, but Duff is boss, and I reckon his support counts for more than you and Harry think. He knows his job and the house’s customers know old Tom. When he states a speculation’s sound, they’re willing to invest.”

“Ah,” said Helen, “you imply that if Harry stated the thing was sound, his word would not go?”

“I did not imply anything like that. I admitted I would sooner Duff was back; that’s all. Still I don’t think you ought to grumble because I stay with

my job. The plan was your brother's and you urged me to agree. If I loaf about the homestead, the dam will not get built."

"Very well," said Helen. "When you go off another time I will not grumble. In fact, since you are content at the dam, you can go when you like."

Bob turned, but the light was gone and all he saw was Helen's white dress. He shrugged with moody resignation and went down the steps. Helen had some time since indicated that she was satisfied with a husband and did not want a lover. Moreover, she had urged him to build the dam, but when he got busy she grumbled. He frankly did not know what she did want.

Helen knew. She wanted Bob to want to stay with her. When she married him she knew she was moved by shabby ambition, but she was sorry for her shabbiness. Bob was a finer type than she had thought and sometimes his justness gave her a strange thrill. For all that, Bob must acknowledge Harry sincere. In fact, Harry's making good must justify her marrying. Bob had given generously, Harry had got much, and in a sense, for Harry to cheat her husband was for her to cheat him. Since she dared not doubt her brother, Bob must not doubt.

At the dam a blast-lamp threw up a pillar of flame. The long bank and the coffer timbers were harshly distinct; moving figures crossed the dazzling beam and melted in the gloomy background. Some pushed wheel-barrows along the planks, and some threw down heavy stones into the coffer. In the coffer, two or three smoky pit-lamps hung from the beams and the dim illumination touched the men who bedded the stones in plastic cement. They labored savagely and Bob noted that jets of water spouted from the cracks. He doubted if the coffer frame would stand, but if his luck were good, he might build up a row of heavy blocks to support the timbers.

The pillar of flame tossed. Sometimes the strong white beam swept the river and he saw the angry flood and vague black pines on the other side. In the corner between the dam and the bank, eddies revolved and a chained boom went obliquely across the angle. The logs rolled about, rose a few inches from the turmoil and sank. Three or four men carrying poles balanced on the wet bark and tried to push off the driftwood the current carried down.

Battered trunks and branches plunged through the pass where the coffer frame stopped, but Bob saw the tangle the boom held up got larger, and if the boom went, the coffer would go. His post was on the boom and he leaped down the bank. The logs rolled and tilted, but Bob was a bushman

and could use his feet. At the middle of the boom he seized a tired man's pole.

"Take a spell and help them load up rock," he said, and when the other went off jumped for a broken trunk.

The trunk went under water, surged up again, and crashed against a tangle of locked branches. Bob got his pole against the boom, set his mouth, and pushed. He must shove out the trunk and in the meantime it was not important that when it went he might go with it. His muscles strained and he felt the veins on his forehead get tight, but his hands went slowly back along the pole until he got the end against his chest. For a moment or two he thought himself beaten, and then the trunk swung out from the tangle and the tangle broke up.

Bob jumped. Dazzling reflections and dark shadows touched the flood and he did not altogether see where he ought to go. White branches and indistinct slabs of bark tossed in the eddy, but Bob was something of a log-driver and a log-driver's balance is like an acrobat's. He reached the boom and steadied himself by his pole until he got his breath.

"That lot's clear," he said. "Maybe we can break the block at the other end."

The man he signaled helped nobly, but Bob did not see who it was. The driftwood shocked and crashed, and a tree they dislodged, rolling its broken branches from the flood, struck the coffer. Bob thought to see the timbers go, but the tree swung round, plunged through the pass, and vanished in the gloom. Then for a time they labored mechanically and Bob heard the river and the shock of smashing wood. Trunks and branches piled against the boom; bright reflections leaped across the turmoil and faded. Bob could not see where to use his pole; he must work by instinct, and although he labored with savage stubbornness he doubted if he could keep it up. Day would not break for long, the water rose steadily, and he was flesh and blood.

At length he gave his pole to a fresh man and he and another crossed the boom to the dam and lay on the slanted stones. The water ran from his overalls, but the night was hot and to let himself go slack for a few minutes was a keen relief. By and by he saw the man who had joined him was Grey.

"Hello, Tom!" he said. "You didn't hire up with the gang."

Grey smiled. "I won't bother you to book my time. When Gillow told us the flood was making trouble for you, Pete and I reckoned we would come along."

“Thanks! My neighbors are pretty stanch.”

“Oh, well, Pete has a stake in the new settlement and so have I. I bet two thousand dollars on your making good.”

“You mean, you banked your legacy in building lots?”

“Sure,” said Grey. “Sadie kind of hesitated. She wanted to pay off the mortgage, but when she’d talked to Mrs. Caverhill she thought we might risk the speculation.”

“Then, you put all your money on the building lots?” said Bob in a quiet voice.

“All the wad! Your wife reckoned you were keen about the plan and meant to make it go.”

Bob frowned and wondered whether Grey exaggerated Helen’s statement. He would sooner she had not persuaded Mrs. Grey, but there was now no use in daunting the fellow.

“The plan has some advantages. All the same, we haven’t put it over yet.”

“So long as you are satisfied it ought to go, I’ll take my chance,” said Grey. “I might have paid off the mortgage and I’d certainly like to feel I was not in debt, but to have done with my creditor wouldn’t help very much. The timber’s big, and I couldn’t hire up a chopper gang and run a proper bunch of stock. Since I bought the piece we’ve tried to cut the grocery bill and live on flour and pork. Sadie works like a hired man and I hate to see her tired. Well, if I can sell my lots for a good price when the settlement goes ahead, the trouble’s gone. I can hire up help and see Sadie’s fixed right. Say, to know my bank-roll will stand for proper tools and stock is going to be great!”

Bob was quiet. He knew something about the stern struggle a small rancher must make, and Grey’s optimistic trust bothered him. Helen had persuaded Mrs. Grey to invest all they had and Bob felt himself accountable. After a few minutes he got up.

“They want us at the boom,” he said. “Let’s go back.”

At the top of the coffer he stopped and called to Watson in the pit.

“Watch out, Jake. If the logs pile up against the frame, don’t bother about beams and wedges. Get from under!”

The foreman nodded and Bob went down the bank and along the rocking boom. He was needed, for the water rose and the eddy swung fresh trunks against the mass the boom held up. For some hours he and his helpers sweated, strained, and hoped for daybreak; and then, when the trees on the bank were blacker and their saw-edged tops began to cut the sky, a giant log circled in the eddy and plunged into the tangle. The boom bent under the fresh load and the tight chains rang. The dawn was cold and the men shivered. Their exhausted bodies ached and their brains were dull.

Bob leaped upon the locked tangle. He reached the big log, somebody joined him, and bracing himself savagely, he used his pole. The log stopped and began to move the other way through the jam. Bob's pole slipped and he was in the water. He felt the eddy pull him down, under the driftwood, and then somebody seized his arm. The other steered him across the eddy and he knew they were in the outflowing stream. The log was in front and he seized a trailing root.

The trunk struck the coffer and timbers crashed. Then it rolled, bumped and forged ahead. Bob heard a savage uproar, but the log dragged him on and plunged through the pass. On the other side he let go and swam for the bank. Grey crawled out from the water beside him and they saw logs and beams and branches drive down-stream.

"We made it!" Grey gasped. "Well, I guess we were lucky. If she had broken before we went——"

"You pulled me out," said Bob.

"I sure don't know. All I do know is, you came off the log. Anyhow, to see you on the bank is some relief. We want you to build the settlement."

"I'm going to try, but the job's awkward," Bob replied. "For one thing, I expect the coffer's gone."

The coffer was gone, but when he reached the dam the men were on the top. All were exhausted and knew that for a time they were beaten.

"When the water runs down I'll send for you," said Bob, and somebody put out the blast-lamp.

The men went off and Bob started for the ranch. The dawn was cold and in the dim light all was bleak and dreary. Yet he knew he must brace up. His job was to build the settlement. Duff's had engaged to do so, but the men trusted him.

XIII

ELLMER'S SPECULATION

MAXWELL threw down his pencil, pushed some calculations across the table, and looked about. When he joined Duff the office was old-fashioned and shabby; now they used two rooms in an ambitious building, and the furniture was new and the decoration rather extravagant. Stained glass and polished cedar and maple struck a note of prosperity. Maxwell had a talent for suggestion and meant the handsome furniture to indicate that the house went ahead. Some of the expensive decoration was recent, and when Maxwell speculated about Duff's remarks he smiled.

For all that his look was disturbed. He had returned from the bank and although he had used clever persuasion the B. N. A. manager was firm. Moreover, Maxwell's calculations indicated that the fellow's caution was justified. Maxwell wanted money, but was forced to admit that the security he offered was not very good.

For a few moments he hesitated, and then pushed round his chair and went to a cupboard. He felt he needed bracing before he got to work. For some time he had been satisfied to take a few drinks in the evening when he met his customers at the hotels, but after Duff went and the strain got heavy he kept liquor at the office. Although Maxwell had some grounds to know indulgence was rash, he faced something like a crisis and he drained his glass. Then he went back and resting his arms on the table, knitted his brows.

He had used much money and needed a large sum. The tide, so to speak, had for long run out, but it would turn and, if he could hold on, carry him smoothly where he wanted to go. All the same, to hold on was hard. Duff's and Caverhill's plan was to start industries that would support the new settlement, but it was not Maxwell's plan. In fact, he knew it would not work. The settlement must rather start and support the industries. Perhaps his argument was not economically sound, but in the West, plans like that did work, and in order to give speculators confidence and excite their greed he had used expensive advertisements. In fact, if Duff knew his extravagance, Maxwell imagined he would get a nasty jar.

Duff, however, was in the North and before he returned Maxwell hoped to get all back. People were interested and began to inquire about Helensville. A number had bought lots and, if Maxwell could carry on, others would buy and the boom for which he worked would begin. Then, when prices went up, the company could build the factories. Maxwell saw he must carry on. To stop would break Duff's and might break Caverhill. When he started he had not seen all the risks, but he was not consciously a cheat. He believed he could boom the new settlement. By and by a telephone rang and a clerk pushed back a sliding window.

"Mr. Ellmer wants to know if you're about."

Maxwell hesitated, and then said, "Tell him to come over."

The clerk shut the window and Maxwell got another drink. Although he did not want to see Ellmer, he dared not refuse. As a rule, the fellow was friendly, but sometimes he was truculent and Maxwell knew him very shrewd. Then Ellmer had talked about building a hotel at the settlement and Maxwell was bothered about Coral.

When Coral put him off the car he was rather amused than annoyed. He liked her pluck and when he went back to the road-house she said nothing about their dispute. Perhaps it was strange, but although he had known a number of cultivated girls, none had moved him as Coral moved him. Her beauty was not refined, but she was beautiful. Then, although she liked flattery and her banter sometimes was bold, she knew where to stop. Coral frankly used her charm, but she was not the rather adventurous coquette Maxwell at the beginning had thought.

Coral's reserve intrigued him and sometimes he wondered whether it was temperamental or calculated. Anyhow, her charm was strong; he liked to go about with Coral, but to marry a girl from a road-house was another thing. Maxwell knitted his brows and tried to recapture the part he had played one evening two or three days since.

To begin with, he was annoyed because Coral had gone off with a young fellow who arrived in a big expensive car, and he took a number of drinks with Ellmer. Maxwell thought he himself was sober, but when the big car started for the city and he found Coral in the shadowy road, he was not calm. Her hat and clothes were white, and her firmly lined figure cut the background of dark pine branches. Although the light was going, he noted that her eyes were very black and her skin was white and red. Maxwell recaptured the attractive picture and admitted that it fired his blood.

He rather imagined he warned Coral that she ought not to go about with a loafing philanderer like Thurston. Coral laughed and inquired if Maxwell himself were not something of the other's sort. Maxwell declared he was not and Coral rejoined that she had grounds to doubt. Anyhow, the dispute began something like that; and then Coral gave Maxwell a look that carried him away. He seized her and tried to put his arm round her waist, but she pushed him back and declared she kept her kisses for the man she married.

Maxwell did not remember his reply. There was the trouble, because he did kiss Coral. Since she relented, it looked as if he had employed a useful argument, but all he knew was, when they returned to the road-house his arm was round Coral's waist. Now he was rather disturbed about it. Moreover, although he did not want to marry Coral, he imagined to see her marry another would hurt. He ought to let it go and occupy himself with the letters on his desk, but Ellmer would soon arrive.

After a few minutes Ellmer came in, and gave Maxwell a meaning smile.

"I've known a drink or two help business, but unless you're going to set them up, you want to open the window."

"Will you take a drink?" Maxwell inquired.

The other's ironical glance bothered him. The fellow kept a small road-house but he had abilities. Maxwell had persuaded others, but he imagined he had not moved the saloon-keeper.

"I guess not. In the morning tanking's an awkward habit and sometimes it's risky at night. If I was up against a job like yours, I'd cut out liquor."

Maxwell's face got red. It looked as if the fellow knew something about his embarrassments, and his manner indicated that he thought himself entitled to be frank.

"Oh, well, perhaps your remarks ought to carry some weight," Maxwell rejoined.

Ellmer smiled. "When you get mad, you don't want to talk. I certainly sell liquor like you sell real estate; but the stuff I put up is sound. Anyhow, my ambition's not to serve drinks across a road-house bar. I want to run a smart hotel and I reckon to locate at your settlement. What about a frontage on your Main Street?"

"Our surveys are not yet finished and all the blocks are not pegged off," said Maxwell, who did not want Ellmer at Helensville. "Besides, you're my friend and I wouldn't like you to be disappointed," he resumed. "We expect

to make the town go, but we have not got started and you might be forced to wait for customers.”

“I reckon Helensville’s chances are pretty good; I’ve been there,” said Ellmer coolly. “I met up with Caverhill and I’m willing to bet he’ll put his part of the scheme across. You have got to put yours across and to sell some blocks where frontage costs most might help. Well, I want to buy, and if I can get a site I like, you’ll get my check.”

He turned and began to study a map on the wall. Maxwell frowned. He saw Ellmer knew his embarrassments and thought he had meant to indicate something like this. All the same, the fellow trusted Caverhill and was willing to invest, and Maxwell dared not refuse money. Then Ellmer indicated a spot on the map.

“I’ll locate at the corner and can use three sites. My aim’s to run a livery stable, and when you grade up the coast trail, I’ll buy an automobile and a gasolene tractor. The other lot’s a speculation. What’s your price?”

Maxwell told him and added: “Until the blocks are properly marked off, we cannot record the transfer at the land office.”

They disputed about the price and then Ellmer said, “I’ll give you my check for a receipt and an agreement to deliver; I guess you have used the plan. Now it’s fixed, I can talk up Helensville. At a road-house the boys do talk and some know what I say goes.”

He sat down and Maxwell gave him a cigar. For a few moments they smoked quietly, and then Ellmer looked up.

“When are you going to marry Coral?”

Maxwell got a nasty knock. Moreover he began to see why Ellmer had waited.

“Then Coral expects me to marry her?” he said, as carelessly as possible.

“That is so. I expect it. Don’t you know you fixed it Saturday evening?”

Maxwell did not know. There was the trouble. He glanced at Ellmer and saw the fellow’s black eyes sparkled. His mouth was tight and his look was truculent. Well, Maxwell must get money and Ellmer was willing to pay a useful sum. Then the road-house was something of a country club; the young automobilists talked to the landlord and as a rule their talk was business talk. A rumor started at the road-house would go far and Maxwell’s carrying out his plans depended on others’ imagining the plans were sound.

Ellmer could help; but, if he wanted, he could embarrass Maxwell and it looked as if he knew his power.

“I rather thought Coral hesitated,” Maxwell replied. “My drawbacks are pretty obvious and perhaps account for something. Not long since I was Duff’s clerk, and although I’m now his partner, my share is not large. All the same, we expect the Helensville scheme to push Duff’s ahead, and if Coral is not daunted——”

“She is willing,” said Ellmer dryly.

“Very well. Before I marry, I feel I ought to make good, and I must concentrate on the venture the house has undertaken. Until I see if all goes as we expect, perhaps I ought not to urge Coral——”

“Coral won’t urge you,” said Ellmer, and his glance was hard. “I reckon she might have got a man like Caverhill, but since she’s satisfied—— Well, when the town site boom begins we’ll talk about the wedding. Send over your agreement for the lots I want and you’ll get a check.”

He went off and Maxwell clenched his fist. He doubted if he had cheated Ellmer and he had sensed a hint of scorn that hurt. It looked as if he must pay for his philandering, but the payment was not yet. Then his moodiness began to vanish. He would get a useful sum and had put off the reckoning. His habit was to trust his luck and as a rule his luck was good. Besides, after all, Coral really was an attractive girl.

XIV

THE TIDE TURNS

SUMMER was going, but the sun was hot and a cloud of flies followed Caverhill's horses. The trail went up-hill and the light wagon jolted in the holes. Bob was going to the steamboat landing for supplies and Helen occupied the other end of the spring seat. The red dust the wheels threw up powdered her hot skin and the jarring springs shook her about. She held on by the rail and, when the team went slowly, studied Bob.

Bob's brown face was thin and his look was rather stern. At the beginning Helen had remarked his tranquillity, but the tranquillity was gone. Harry had urged her to excite her lover's ambition, and, to some extent, because she liked to use her power, she had done so. Now she began to sense in her husband qualities she had not thought were his and sometimes it looked as if her experiment were rash. Bob went where she had wanted him to go, but his efforts to push ahead absorbed him and he left her alone. Although Helen admitted she ought to be resigned, she was not. Moreover, Bob's plans for the settlement were not Harry's plans.

After a time, she turned her head and looked about. Tall, black pines rolled down the hill and their trunks were like rows of columns. On the other side, rocks and gravel dropped to a lake, shining like a mirror in the dusky woods. In the background, snow, touched by faint blue shadow, cut the sky. When the beat of horses' feet got slow Helen heard a woodpecker tap a hollow tree, but this was all and only the track of wheels indicated that man had broken the brooding calm.

The woodpecker, flashing luminous red and green, flew across the trail and vanished, but when the team had nearly climbed the hill the measured tap began again. Helen thought the noise strangely distinct.

"Is it another woodpecker? Oh, perhaps, a blue-grouse?" she asked.

"I expect it's an ax," said Bob. "I don't know who's chopping, but we'll soon find out."

He urged the horses across the top of the hill and when they plunged down the incline Helen saw another team some distance in front. People moved about a wagon and a twinkling flash indicated that somebody used an

ax. Then a pine lurched away from the dark-green mass and was lost in a cloud of dust.

A few minutes afterwards Bob pulled up. Blue smoke floated across the trail and two or three women were occupied by a fire. A group of tired and dusty children lay in the brushwood by a creek, and two men pulled a big saw across a trunk. The wagon was loaded with shiplap boards and Helen noted the smell of fresh-sawn wood and the folded tent on top. The ground about the wagon was soft and water sparkled in the channels the wheels had cut. When Bob stopped, a man went to the other horses.

“Don’t bother,” said Bob. “Your team’s used up and I can get past. Where are you for?”

“Helensville. Can we get there by dark?”

Bob started and Helen saw he did not know Harry had called the settlement for her, but he said to the man, “I doubt if you can make it and you had better camp by Stony Creek. Your load’s pretty big and before you haul the stuff across you want to put a number of small logs in the mud.”

“Looks like that,” the other agreed. “Cording up the blamed muskegs we’ve hit since we left the landing makes me tired. If I’d known the Government gang hadn’t got busy, I’d have waited for the boys behind to fix the trail.”

“Then another lot has arrived?”

“Sure. Most a steamboat load. One gang shipped a tractor and we allowed we ought to get going before she pulled out.”

“But did you imagine the Government had begun to grade the road?”

“That is so. When we put our stuff on board we inquired if we could haul a proper load to Helensville.”

“What are you going to do at the settlement?”

“I’m a pretty good carpenter and expect to hit a building job. Jake’s notion is to keep a store.”

Bob started the horses and Helen saw he frowned.

“It’s strange!” he said. “So far as I know, the Provincial Government has not yet engaged to make a road.”

“Harry is satisfied the Government will do so,” Helen rejoined.

“Your brother’s hopeful,” Bob remarked, rather dryly. “In the meantime, his customers are trying to haul building lumber and household fixings over a very bad mountain trail. I expect some are not at all satisfied and it looks as if a number must wait for a job. There’s another thing. Did Harry inquire if he might call the settlement for you?”

“He did not,” said Helen and blushed, for she knew Maxwell had not meant her to see the pamphlet advertisement. “Are you annoyed about it, Bob?”

“I don’t know,” Bob replied. “I don’t want my wife to stand for a land-boom speculation; but after all, my object is to start a manufacturing settlement. Anyhow, since the settlement is Helensville, it has got to prosper.”

“Sometimes you’re rather nice, Bob,” Helen remarked and smiled.

On the next hill they met a wagon carrying battered furniture. A woman lay on some flour bags and Helen thought she slept; two or three children trailed behind the wheels. Farther on, a string of packhorses blocked the trail, and some distance behind a man pushed a wheelbarrow. One could not see much of his body across the load. Then a row of men carrying heavy packs plodded in the dust. They breathed hard and their skin was wet by sweat. For the most part, their clothes were shabby, and the faces of some were pinched. Helen saw broken boots, and stockings made from slit flour bags, but the men’s eyes were fixed in front and they labored stubbornly forward. She was moved by the strangers’ pluck.

“They’re poor people, Bob,” she said.

“A wagon and team cost something, but I expect these folk invested all their wad. In the West, the boys are pioneers and reckon what flesh and blood can do they can do. They mean to make good and I must help. Duff’s has got their money, but the keystone block was mine and I’m accountable.”

“Do you think you really are accountable? After all, the people speculated. The risk is theirs.”

“It looks as if they speculated on my partner’s statements,” said Bob. “They bought small blocks of bush land for a high price, because they believed the bush land would soon carry a town. They bought a chance to trade and follow their occupation, and they must get the chance. I’m not much of an economist, but I don’t take folks’ money for goods I can’t put up.”

Helen liked his honesty; she rather liked his fixed grave look. She knew Bob, in a sense, was something of an aristocrat.

“You are just,” she said. “Still, to some extent, I rather think pride accounts for your resolve.”

“It’s possible,” said Bob and smiled. “My job’s not to peddle town-lots, but to make things grow. Anyhow, sit tight and hold fast. We must give the gang in front the trail.”

They had reached the top of a hill and Helen saw a cloud of dust roll up the incline. Slanted sunbeams touched the tossing cloud and in the luminous haze bright steel flashed. Behind the sparkling metal a vague high mass lurched about. The rattle of heavy wheels and a harsh measured throb echoed in the rocks, and Helen knew a tractor pulled a load up the slope.

For a few moments the dust got thin and the tractor and a trailer wagon, carrying a big stack of boards, were distinct. In the woods, the noisy machine’s utilitarian ugliness jarred, and when Bob turned his horses Helen saw his mouth was tight.

He steered the frightened animals round stumps and holes, and Helen felt Bob and his beautiful, spirited horses belonged to the woods. The tractor did not, but the machine had driven the team from the trail. Helen wondered whether its doing so was ominous.

The noise stopped and the dust rolled away. Men jumped from the trailer and went into the bush. Axes sparkled and a small pine fell. Then men were strangely quick, for a few moments after the tree fell one dragged branches across the trail and another pulled a short log in front of the machine. Then an uproar began. Broken branches, stones and mud leaped about the tractor, and the wheels of Bob’s wagon sank in boggy soil.

When he was level with the tractor a horrible smell floated about the trail. The engine roared and the measured stroke of axes faintly pierced the din. Men pushed brush and small split logs under the churning wheels. The red dust was on their greasy clothes; their faces were wet by sweat. They gasped and swore and labored savagely. One stopped and waved to Bob.

“Say, have you got much road like this?”

“You’ll hit two or three more soft spots,” Bob replied, and tried to hold his plunging team.

“Then I want the fellow who allowed we’d find a useful trail. When I get on his track I’ll take a club along!”

Bob frowned. “The trail is pretty mean. To lighten off some lumber might pay.”

“I guess not. There’s another load at the wharf and we engaged to dump this lot at Helensville in the morning. If we have to cord up your muskegs all the way, the stuff is going through.”

Bob let his team go and Helen, looking back, saw the tractor climb out of the hole. Then she looked at Bob and knew him annoyed.

“Will they get to the lake?” she asked.

“Certainly,” said Bob. “If you knew the type, you wouldn’t doubt. Sometimes the boys are rash, but when they rashly undertake an awkward job they stay with it.”

Helen knew the others’ rule was Bob’s rule, although he was not rash. Harry was rash, but so far all he had undertaken he splendidly carried out. Yet sometimes she wondered—— Helen frowned, and feeling herself shabby for wondering, resumed:

“If people arrived like this, the town site would soon be occupied.”

“I expect they waited for the *Maud* to carry them along the coast and the next lot won’t arrive until she comes back in two or three weeks. All the same, it looks as if Harry had started something of a boom.”

“Suppose he sells all the keystone block?”

“Then we stop!” said Bob. “We want manufactures to carry the settlement. To sell a fresh lot of sites would be like printing paper currency when you haven’t got the gold the bills stand for.”

“But you have got the land. And if people give you money for the bills, you have got the money.”

“The argument’s plausible, but I don’t know—— Suppose you use the money to advertise that your bills are good? I imagine Harry’s using some.”

“I think you do not trust Harry as you ought to trust your partner,” Helen rejoined.

Bob said nothing. As a rule, when she began to dispute he was quiet, and she looked about. The sun was getting low. In places, a level beam touched a straight red trunk, but for the most part the rocks and woods were dim. Yet far along the trail smears of dust marked the settlers’ advance. The tide Maxwell had waited for had begun to run and Helen knew she had helped

him call the strangers to the wilds. Yet, now they had arrived, she was vaguely disturbed.

When Bob stopped at the steamboat landing dusk had fallen, but flaring blast-lamps drove back the dark. A wooden steamer was tied to the piles and the smoke from her stack rolled about the wharf. Winches rattled, wire-rope clanged; sawn lumber, bales and boxes plunged down the gangway. Men dragged about the cargo, searched for their goods, and disputed angrily. Lights burned in all the windows of the small hotel and where the dark woods met the beach tents shone like paper lanterns. The landlord, however, had kept Bob a room and when Helen and he had got some food they went to the wharf.

“It’s the beginning of a new age, Bob. I don’t think you approve,” she said.

Bob smiled, but his smile was thoughtful. “My approval’s not important; for a time I’ve got to help. All the same, I’m a pioneer, and a pioneer is an individualist.”

“You imply that you take your own line and don’t go with the crowd?”

“Something like that,” Bob agreed. “The pioneer uses the ax and packhorse; this crowd must coöperate to use expensive machines. For example, the tractor we met makes one journey where I must make six; but when you use tractors you want another gang to grade the road. The pioneer pushes on, alone, and breaks the trail.”

“But do not the coöperators and their machines catch him up?”

“That is so,” said Bob. “They occupy the ground we clear. When they arrive we load the packhorse and push ahead again.”

“It looks dreary. Women are not nomadic; they like a fixed habitation,” Helen remarked and began to muse.

WITH THE STREAM

DUFF'S office was quiet and the clerks were gone, but the last to go had brought the evening mail from the postoffice. Maxwell turned over the envelopes and then reached for a glass in an open drawer. He drained the glass and, resting his arms on the table, leaned forward wearily.

He had not had much lunch, and unless he again put off business he ought to have transacted in the morning, he must go without supper. Now he thought about it, he had not for two or three weeks bothered about food. Sometimes he plunged into a quick-lunch counter and sometimes he braced himself by a drink. Well, he needed bracing and liquor helped him to bear the strain, but when the strain got slacker he must stop.

For a few moments he balanced his paper-knife and hesitated. Perhaps he was ridiculous, but he rather shrank from opening the envelopes. He knew Duff's hand, and another envelope was from a member of the provincial parliament. Maxwell was not a politician and he doubted the member's willingness to give the help he asked.

A street car rolled noisily by and he heard locomotive bells at the wharf. A steamer whistled and the long trembling blast echoed in the tall office blocks. Then all was quiet and Maxwell wanted to put up his feet and go to sleep, but a pile of documents occupied the table and he must soon meet a customer at the C. P. R. Hotel.

At length the tide had turned and, if he could keep afloat, would carry him far. The trouble was, he was tired and the stream went faster than he had thought. He wanted money and he wanted time. If one had pluck, to start a real estate boom was not hard; to keep the boom going was another thing. Maxwell had persuaded speculators the settlement would go, people bought the Main Street frontages, and some gave him money for options, and back lots he was not yet ready to transfer. They did not run much risk, because so long as the boom continued they could sell their claims.

Maxwell, however, ran a risk. The money he got melted in extravagant hospitality and expensive advertisement. Then the road to Helensville he had talked about was not made; he had taken it for granted the Government

would bear most of the cost. Moreover, he was bothered about his partner's return. If Duff arrived before they were ready for him, he would get a nasty knock.

For all that, Maxwell imagined he could presently cut down expenses, and the member of parliament might get him a grant for the road. Then he hoped to persuade an important gentleman to build a mill, and Bob need not know all the persuasion cost. Bob was not an accountant and, if Maxwell's luck were good, when Duff knew, the extravagance would be justified.

He cut Duff's envelope and his strained look relaxed. Tom was not coming back yet. He had met an American engineer at Seward and thought he would make an excursion along the Alaskan coast to examine a new mineral claim. The speculation looked good, and if Maxwell thought their bank-roll would stand for it, Duff might risk a small sum.

Maxwell knew the bank-roll would not stand for it, but he did not want to disturb Duff, and if the mine interested Tom, he might stay in Alaska for some time. He let it go and opened the letter from the member of the provincial parliament.

The member used some caution. He stated that he had weighed the claims Maxwell urged. The Government admitted its duty was to encourage the development of manufacturing settlements, and where a wagon road was obviously needed a grant was made. For all that, taxes were high, and public funds must not be used for speculators' experiments. When Maxwell could satisfy the department that factories were being started, the member would see what he could do.

Maxwell put down the letter and smiled, a dreary smile. In order to get a road, he must build the settlement, but the settlement would not progress much until the road was made. It looked as if he must undertake the work, and to start would banish the settlers', and perhaps the Government's, doubts. After all, to build a corduroy track across a few muskegs was not expensive and Maxwell resolved to send off a chopper gang.

Then he heard steps and turned his revolving chair, for a woman opened the door. Maxwell did not see her face, because the light was concentrated on his desk, but her figure was tall and when she advanced he knew her walk.

"Coral!" he said and began to get up.

She stopped him, and pulling off her cloak, turned the opposite chair.

"I can stay for a few minutes," she said.

Maxwell saw her cloak was silk and her clothes were fashionable. It looked as if Coral were dressed for a ball. The thin, dark material harmonized with her black hair and eyes; in the soft light her finely molded arms and shoulders shone. Maxwell brushed the papers off his desk.

“You’re altogether beautiful!” he said.

She gave him a curious smile. “Then, you didn’t know?”

“In a way, of course, I did know,” Maxwell replied, with a touch of embarrassment. “But somehow to-night——”

“You like my clothes? Well, maybe my notion about pretty clothes was a road-house girl’s notion, and when I studied up your sister I went to another store; but there’s nothing to that. If you have the money, you can buy smart clothes.”

Maxwell saw Coral enjoyed her triumph. As a rule, she was frank, but now he thought her frankness proud. It was not for nothing she talked about the road-house.

“One can’t buy beauty like yours,” he remarked. “But why didn’t you ’phone you were in town? I’d have met you——”

“You reckon I ought not to come to your office?” said Coral and laughed. “Shucks! I’m the girl who put you off the car not long since.”

“I had not then engaged to marry you,” said Maxwell thoughtfully.

“Looks as if you’d forgotten you did engage,” Coral rejoined in a quiet voice.

Maxwell frowned. He had not meant to marry Coral and when he went to the road-house he knew himself a fool. For all that, her physical charm was marked and Maxwell’s habit was not to hesitate; he trusted his luck and went ahead. The trouble was, Coral and Ellmer had led him farther than he had thought to go. Yet her beauty moved him and he was flesh and blood.

“If you knew all I’m up against, you wouldn’t talk like that,” he said. “I’m not rich and I expect you don’t want a poor husband. Well, I mean to get rich, but the risk I must run is daunting and sometimes I’m scared. All is strain and effort, and now I think the tide has turned, the strain gets worse. Unless I fight hard, I must go under, and if I go under, I expect it’s for good. In fact, you see, I dare not yet think about marrying.”

“That accounts for your leaving me alone?”

“It’s all that accounts for it,” Maxwell declared.

“Well,” said Coral quietly, “I knew how you were fixed.”

“You knew?” Maxwell exclaimed and looked at her hard.

“Sure! At a road-house people talk and the automobile boys talk business; I’m not a fool, and Pop is pretty keen. You took steep chances on the Helensville scheme and the scheme near broke you. When you were nearly broke, I got busy. Pop bought some lots and began to talk up the settlement. Pop doesn’t talk much, but when he starts, folks listen.”

Maxwell admitted that when Ellmer bought the lots his money was almost gone and his getting a good sum marked the turning-point. Coral was not cultivated, but she was clever and very stanch.

“Your help was worth much,” he said, with a touch of emotion. “I was nearly broke.”

Coral turned her head and Maxwell thought the blood came to her skin. Then she looked up.

“But now your luck has turned, you have no use for a road-house girl? Well, if you don’t want me, I will let you go.”

Maxwell’s doubts vanished. Coral’s sparkling black eyes, her proud look, and her beautiful shining arms accounted for much, but not for all. Although he felt the call of flesh and blood, he knew her keen and brave and generous. Moreover, he knew his shabbiness.

“You’re ridiculous,” he declared. “I do want you, more than anything I have wanted yet. But, for your sake, I mustn’t leave my office and loaf about the road-house.”

“I want straight talk, Harry; white man’s talk.”

Maxwell leaned forward and seized her hands. “There’s no use in talking, Coral. I won’t try.”

She hesitated, but he pulled her to her feet and took her in his arms. Coral’s arms went round his neck, and although he had not meant to make the plunge, he knew he was not rash. Coral was his, and when he faced risk and trouble she would not flinch. The road-house girl was not his sort: she was a better sort. By and by she gently pushed him back.

“I mustn’t stay. Pop is at the hotel and we are going to the show at the opera house. Now you see why I wear these clothes.”

“It’s not at all important. You have a number of grounds for wearing pretty clothes,” Maxwell remarked and smiled. “Well, your father mustn’t

wait and I am going with you to the play. I suppose Mr. Ellmer knows where you are?"

"He doesn't know," said Coral rather proudly. "Looks as if you don't know Pop."

Maxwell was satisfied. To think the truculent saloon-keeper approved Coral's going to the office had rather bothered him. Then Coral indicated the documents.

"I reckon you ought to stay with your job!"

"That is so. I ought to meet an important gentleman at his hotel. All the same, I'm going to the play. Well, I must call the fellow on the 'phone."

"You can go to-night. Another time you mustn't," said Coral firmly and waited until Maxwell used the telephone. Then she indicated the liquor, which he had forgotten.

"Where do you keep that stuff?"

"In the cupboard," said Maxwell with a touch of awkwardness.

"Put it there! Lock the cupboard!"

Maxwell laughed, but Coral gave him a steady look.

"It's not a joke, and I want the key. I have no use for a tanker, and if you mean to make good at Helensville, you have got to cut out drinks."

Maxwell gave Coral the key and held her cloak. She blushed and turned impulsively and kissed him. "You're all I want, Harry, but I do want you, and I'm jealous——"

Then she put her hand on his arm. "Well, let's start——"

XVI

MAXWELL'S HESITATION

BOB, stopping on the veranda steps, saw the mounted mail-carrier pull down the fence rails across the clearing.

“Since I started in the morning, something or another has held me up and now I must wait for the letters!” he remarked.

Helen said nothing. Bob was tired and moody. The sawmill he had bought did not run properly and he did not make much progress at the dam. Then she knew he was bothered because Duff did not return, and since it implied that he did not trust Maxwell, his uneasiness hurt. In fact, when he not long since stated he had called Maxwell to the ranch she resolved to go back with her brother for a holiday.

In the meantime she looked about. Some distance from the clearing, a belt of ashes, dotted by half-burned log piles, marked the end of the town site. Behind the burned belt were tents in uneven rows, and the white skeletons of houses the builders had not yet covered by shiplap boards. Some houses, however, were finished and Helen thought them ugly and mean. She frankly hated the store with a big black-and-white signboard across its front. The square front was carried up above the roof, so that the shabbily ambitious building looked larger than it was.

The settlement had begun to grow, but Helen admitted its growth was not beautiful and sometimes she rather sympathized with Bob. Yet, although she knew he hated to see the quiet woods disturbed, he labored with savage energy for the springing town. Well, Bob was not logical, and perhaps she was not.

When the mail-carrier pulled some letters from his bag, Bob tore open an envelope. He turned to the man and his look was rather grim.

“Has the *Maud* brought a big load?”

“She was not full up,” said the other. “I guess the rush is tailing off. All the same, she carried some passengers and a big stack of sawn posts and boards. Fellow called Ellmer’s for putting up a hotel. The steamboat mate allowed he runs an automobilists’ road-house back of Vancouver.”

Bob studied Helen. Maxwell had presented a Miss Ellmer, and Bob had thought her the sort of girl to attract city sports. Nothing indicated that Helen remembered, but Bob had begun to know his wife.

“Since we have a settlement, I expect we must reckon on somebody’s starting a saloon, but I imagine the fellow, whom I met, won’t make trouble,” he said and turned to the mail-carrier. “The cook will put you up some hash.”

The man went off and Helen mused. She remembered Miss Ellmer and knew Bob did so. For him to say nothing about it was perhaps the proper line, but she was annoyed.

“Harry’s not on board the *Maud*. He states he’s occupied and can’t get off,” Bob resumed.

“Ah!” said Helen. “Then I can’t go back with the steamer.”

“Are you keen to go?”

Helen wanted to go, but not altogether because she wanted Maxwell’s society. Bob and she had jarred and she was jealous of the thought he gave the dam. If she left him for a time, she could weigh things calmly and the strain she had recently felt might vanish on her return. Besides, she was disturbed about Maxwell.

“My room at the hotel is engaged,” she said.

“Then you must come along with me. I am going to Vancouver by the boat.”

“But you didn’t mean to go!”

Bob smiled, but his smile was rather stern. “Oh, well! Since Harry won’t come to the ranch, I must go to town.”

“Do you imply he would not come, if it were possible?”

“It looks like that,” said Bob rather dryly.

“After all, Harry is not your servant. I expect you ordered him to start.”

“He’s my partner; but since he states he can’t get off I must indulge him. Why are you annoyed?”

“Oh,” said Helen, “the line you take is altogether wrong! When Harry wanted you to join him you ought not to have agreed. You doubted his plan; you doubted Harry, and when you don’t trust your partner his efforts go for

nothing. You're not generous, Bob. To carry out an ambitious plan one needs enthusiasm, but you're cold."

"I'm forced to use some caution. After all, I sold the keystone block and my job's not to frame-up a real estate boom. A number of poor folks bet all they had on the settlement's going ahead and I must see they're not exploited——"

"Perhaps you ought to stop," said Helen with ominous quietness. "You imply that if you do not protect the people who bought the block, Harry might exploit their trustfulness. Harry is my brother; it's important, because I expect his drawbacks are mine. He's optimistic and doesn't use caution like yours. Well, I do not; I hate people who calculate. If you think he runs a risk and lets others pay, I do something like that. Perhaps when you married me you were rash."

Bob fought for control. He loved his wife and although her coldness hurt, he had tried to indulge her. He had joined Maxwell's speculation because she urged it, but he had gone as far as he meant to go. The Helensville settlers must get a square deal.

"I doubt if I was rash, and so far to meet the bill has not cost me much," he said. "Anyhow, we are married and there's no use in disputing."

Helen thought Bob did not know where to stop. At the beginning he had struck the proper note, but when he resumed his philosophical coolness jarred.

"Oh, well! Perhaps it's not important," she rejoined. "If one wants to interest you, one must talk about the dam!"

Bob went down the steps and Helen went off to pack her clothes, because she was resolved to join Maxwell. She reflected with rather dreary humor that for her to stay away would not embarrass Bob. For one thing, she had not meddled with his rude housekeeping and the man who kept the supplies and cooked for the ranch hands was clever. In fact, if the fellow went, Bob himself could cook. All she had really done was to criticize. Helen began to see that Bob had given much, but she had not. Well, when she came back she must try to take another line.

Two days afterward, Maxwell leaned against a post on the Vancouver wharf. At the end of the wharf the big, white Victoria boat waited for the Pacific express. Steam blew from her escape pipe and her winches rattled. A snorting yard locomotive pushed some freight cars off the main track; another locomotive, of the powerful mountain type, was coupled to a row of

cars in a siding. Maxwell heard the pumps throb and imagined the train would start for the Rockies as soon as the line was clear.

Then a plume of smoke rolled about the pines at the Narrows and an old wooden steamer came round the point. Maxwell knew the *Maud* and wondered whether Caverhill was on board. He did not want to see Bob and imagined he would not leave the dam, but he did not know and since the suspense was keen he had gone to the wharf. Maxwell was frankly disturbed. He had sold a large number of lots, but the money he got went and for two or three weeks he had not transacted much fresh business. Although he expected the demand to revive, he was embarrassed, and if his partners meddled, it might be awkward. Duff was in the wilds and would not bother him, but Caverhill might arrive in a few minutes.

Maxwell pictured Caverhill's anger if he found out the entanglements in which he was involved. Bob was ridiculously scrupulous and obstinate. All the same, Maxwell hardly thought Bob was on board, and if he were not, he would go to the hotel and order a long drink.

The *Maud* steamed up to the wharf, and when the ropes were thrown Helen waved from the rail. A few moments afterwards Maxwell saw Bob and with something of an effort went to the gangway. Helen gave him her hand, but said nothing, for a whistle echoed in the tall lumber stacks and the Pacific express rolled along the water-front. When the noise began to die away Bob pulled a letter from his pocket, and Maxwell, who knew the letter form, got a knock. He had thought he had satisfied Jordan, but if the fellow had grumbled to Caverhill—— Bob, however, turned and indicated a man who crossed the wharf.

“Hello!” he said. “Isn't that Alsager going for the Victoria boat?”

“I think not. If Alsager had been in town, he would have looked me up,” said Maxwell, who did not want Bob to meet the other. “But look out for the yard engine.”

Bob moved a foot or two, his glance fixed on the man.

“He's very like Alsager.”

The yard engine rolled by noisily and the steamer's whistle screamed. Then another bell began to toll and Maxwell saw the big freight locomotive cross the switches. The long train was starting and Bob was between the rails, but it looked as if he did not see the engine, and Helen faced the other way. Maxwell's heart beat and his skin got wet by sweat. Bob must not meet Alsager, and Maxwell was horribly disturbed about the letter from Jordan. In

fact, if Bob knew much about the transaction, it would break their partnership.

He saw the high front of the locomotive a few yards behind Bob's back, and imagined the boiler cut the engineer's view. Thick black smoke and steam blew across the track, the jolting cars swung over the switches and the train gathered speed, but Bob was occupied watching Alsager, and the yard engine and the steamer's winches almost drowned the locomotive's snorts.

Maxwell clenched his hands and hesitated, and then a swift reaction began. He shivered with horror, braced himself, and jumped. Seizing Bob's arm, he pulled him strongly back. Bob staggered and lost his balance. It looked as if they must fall under the wheels, but Maxwell did not let go. After his hesitation, to let Bob be killed was unthinkable. He must drag him clear. His foot struck the outside rail. Another effort would throw him and Bob backwards out of danger; and then he got a heavy blow——

A few moments afterwards somebody pulled him up and he saw people run to the spot. A man had seized Helen and Maxwell thought she fought. The big freight cars rolled on and Bob lay by the jarring wheels. It looked as if he were dead; and then for a minute or two Maxwell knew nothing more.

By and by he pushed away the man who supported him and saw Helen knelt on the dusty planks. He could not see Bob, because people pushed about, but Alsager and two or three railroad men tried to keep off the crowd.

"Stand back! You mustn't move him until we get the doctor," Alsager shouted. "Has that fellow gone to the 'phone?"

"You can't go to your partner," the man who had picked up Maxwell remarked and pushed him to a truck. "Sit right down. Don't you know your head's cut?"

Maxwell did not know, but when he dully touched his head he saw his hand was wet with blood.

Two wharf-hands brought a stretcher and a car lurched across the tracks. A man jumped down and by and by the movement of the crowd indicated that they put Bob on the stretcher. Then Helen, Alsager, and a man carrying a small bag came to Maxwell. Helen's face was very white and her lips were pale.

"You saved Bob," she said in a faint voice. "Are you much hurt?"

"Then Bob's not killed?" said Maxwell and looked the other way.

“He’s certainly not killed,” the doctor replied. “The locomotive knocked him off the track, but some bones are broken—— However, I want to see your head.”

“If I’d jumped a moment sooner——” Maxwell resumed.

“Perhaps you were lucky because you didn’t jump a moment later,” Alsager remarked. “Anyhow, the doctor’s waiting and must go with Caverhill.”

The doctor examined Maxwell’s cut and stated that it would not long bother him. Then he went back to the stretcher, Helen vanished, and a few moments afterwards an ambulance arrived. When the ambulance was gone a man took Maxwell’s arm and put him in a car. Although Maxwell’s head hurt, he was dully conscious of relief. Bob was not killed, but it looked as if he would not for some time meddle with Duff’s business.

XVII

HELEN PONDERS

FOR a time the noisy elevators had stopped and all was quiet at the big hotel. Helen's room was near the flat roof. She liked the sense of height and spaciousness, and when she came in she pulled a chair to the window. The night was cold but the keen air was bracing, and now the worst strain was over her brain and body were tired. She wanted to rest and indulge her poignant satisfaction.

Bob was going to get better, although the doctor thought his recovery might be long. Helen had returned from the private hospital and rather languidly pictured the quiet room, the watchful nurse, and Bob on the narrow bed, his skin almost as white as the linen. He could not move his body, but at length he was conscious and when Helen stole into the room he turned his head and smiled.

Helen's pity carried her away. She had, not long since, with some pride in her husband's strength and balance, watched him swing the ax; now it looked as if he were altogether broken. For all that, when he very feebly felt for her hand pity was lost in another emotion and her color came and went. Bob was hurt and needed her; although he had some grounds to think she did not love him much, he gave her all his trust. Helen kissed him and turned her head. She was ashamed, but she must not disturb Bob and she tried for calm.

After a time Bob went to sleep and the nurse sent her away. She went unwillingly, jealous of the woman who could help where she could not, but now she was alone her heart beat with a strange sense of triumph. Bob was going to get better and he was her lover yet. All the same, when she recaptured his trustful look and the touch of his slack hand she began to cry.

Presently Helen rubbed her eyes and looked about. To look down from the window was like looking down the face of a cliff; the street was like a canyon and big electric lights marked the bottom by spots of light. The trolley cars had stopped, but one heard locomotive bells and rolling wheels by the wharf. The moon was on the Inlet and ships' masts and funnels cut the silver reflections. Behind the dim woods on the other side, the hills were

white, for the snow crept down the rocks. When Helen first knew Bob the snowline went back and up.

She mused about her meeting Bob at Shadow Lake, and admitted that she was something of an adventuress. Yet she had not altogether married Bob because he was rich. She liked his strength and his athletic figure. Sometimes Helen was romantic and she had studied art. She thought she sensed in Bob something austere aristocratic that marked the old Greeks, although he was rather Spartan than Athenian. Then the bold speculation Maxwell planned had called. Helen was ambitious, she wanted to help, and she made the plunge.

Now she saw that to jar with Bob for Harry's sake was ridiculous. Bob was a finer type than Harry; in fact, Helen wondered whether she had disputed with her husband because she herself had begun to doubt her brother. Yet when Bob did not see the freight train Harry jumped in front of the locomotive. Helen had long known his pluck, but she was puzzled.

For one thing, the man Bob saw was Alsager, but Harry declared it was not, although he knew Alsager better than Bob. Then she imagined Harry faced the train and perhaps his not shouting was strange. He went to Bob's help, but he did not go until the locomotive had almost reached the spot. Harry admitted something like this, and when he did so Alsager remarked that he was lucky because he did not go a moment later.

On the surface the remark was stupid and perhaps cruel, but Helen did not think Alsager cruel. In fact, he was kind, and Bob owed much to his coolness. Helen did not see a light and resolved she would not dwell on things like that. After all, Harry did pull Bob from the track. She was very tired and she must try to sleep. Since Bob was knocked down she had not slept at all. Getting up languidly, she went to bed.

When Helen telephoned that the doctor expected Bob to recover Maxwell was at his office. His clerks had gone and after he put down the telephone he pushed away the papers with which he was occupied and leaned slackly on the table. His hands shook and he felt his skin get wet. The relief the message gave him was keen and not altogether selfish, although Helen stated it might be long before Bob got about.

Since the accident at the wharf Maxwell had carried a heavy load; in a sense, he had carried two loads. Although to think Bob might die was horrible, Maxwell had feared his quick recovery. Well, Bob was not going to die, but he would not for some time bother him. Maxwell had got the time

he wanted, and when Bob was able to reach the office he rather thought the crisis he now faced would be over.

He let it go and tried moodily to recapture his part in the accident. He knew the risk he ran did not altogether account for his hesitating to jump on the track. The traditions of his house took physical pluck for granted and at a famous school he was a leader at athletic games. He was not afraid. For a moment or two he was willing for Caverhill to go under the wheels. Maxwell shivered. The thing was frankly horrible, but he had meant to let Bob go. His treachery shocked and puzzled him; he had not thought himself a brute.

At Oxford he was rash, but his rashness was not shabby and he had paid for his faults. When he planned to build Helensville, to some extent, his object was good. He had not thought to cheat his partners; yet he had cheated and but for the accident at the wharf he must have faced the reckoning. Perhaps the strange thing was, now he rather thought he had put off the reckoning for good, it was not important. He had got a horrible jar, and he tried to ponder where he had gone and where he went.

Maxwell's temperament was not criminal. He was generous and sometimes thought for others. His talents and charm were marked, but he was not scrupulous. A risk did not daunt him; he was an optimist and sometimes his bold imagination carried him away. The object he meant to get was all he saw.

Now his nerve was broken. He was afraid for, and of, himself. He needed support and must not use Helen's. Helen imagined he had saved Bob's life, but although he had perhaps done so, he was accountable for Bob's getting hurt. He could not cheat Helen and he dared not enlighten her. Well, it looked as if Coral trusted him, and she was the girl to stick to her lover and see him out. Moreover her beauty called.

Maxwell got up and went mechanically to the cupboard in which he kept his liquor. He felt in his pocket and then stopped and smiled. Coral had carried off the key and her doing so was typical. He resolved he would go to the road-house and in the morning he went.

When Maxwell arrived, Ellmer polished glasses behind the bar. His white shirt-sleeves were neatly fastened back and the cloth he used was spotless. Maxwell remarked that the row of glasses shone. All Ellmer did was properly done; he stood for efficiency.

“Hello! Has the knock you got at the wharf laid you off?” he said.

“I wasn’t wanted for an hour or two. Then it’s some time since I could get over and I wanted to see Coral,” Maxwell replied. “In fact, I wanted to see if we could fix the wedding.”

“You reckoned you had to wait,” Ellmer remarked in a thoughtful voice.

“That is so, but it looks as if I might wait for long. Duff is staying in the North and Caverhill’s knocked out.”

“Caverhill’s a useful man. We want him at the settlement. I haven’t seen you since the accident, but *The Colonist* stated when the locomotive was right behind Caverhill you jumped across the rails and pulled him off the track. Well, I knew you’d got some gall; but why didn’t you jump *before*?”

Maxwell smiled, but his smile was forced, for he thought Ellmer studied him.

“For one thing, Caverhill thought he knew a man going to the Victoria boat and I tried to see the fellow. Then the yard engine was on the next track and I imagined the freight locomotive’s bell was hers. Anyhow, the important thing is, I did jump, and my head’s not better yet. But I mustn’t stay long and I want to see Coral.”

For a moment Ellmer knitted his brows. Then he said, “Maybe you’ll find her in the front room.”

Maxwell went to the front room and when he opened the door Coral noted his moody look.

“Does your head hurt much, Harry? Or is Mr. Caverhill worse?” she asked.

“The cut doesn’t bother me and Caverhill is getting better,” Maxwell replied. “We won’t talk about the accident yet. You promised to marry me and I want the wedding soon.”

Coral’s color came and went, but she gave Maxwell a steady glance.

“You reckoned before you married you ought to get all the settlement business fixed.”

“That is so. I expect I was something of a fool. The job’s harder than I thought and since Caverhill is knocked out I am alone. Then I got a very nasty jolt and my nerve is gone. I want somebody to steady me and I know your pluck.”

Sometimes Coral had doubted Maxwell, but she saw he was sincere and she was moved by his sincerity. For all that, she said, “You have your sister.”

“Helen has got her husband, who is badly hurt.”

“Why, yes. So long as Caverhill’s sick, you don’t count for much. That’s proper,” Coral agreed.

“Sometimes the rule’s broken; but you would stick to your husband and I want you to stick to me. Although I’m not hurt, I’m anxious and my partners have left me to carry a big load. Perhaps I have not the pluck I thought, because I begin to be afraid and the strain gets hard. Anyhow, I need your help.”

“You’re bothered about the settlement? Well, I’d surely like you to make good, but in a sense it doesn’t count for much,” said Coral and resumed in a thoughtful voice: “What about Mrs. Caverhill? Does she want you to marry me?”

“I don’t know. All she now thinks about is Bob. When she knows you she will approve.”

Coral hesitated and the blood came to her skin. “You’re going to risk something, Harry, and maybe I risk much. I’m not at all like your sister. Sometimes I doubt if I am the girl for you.”

“You’re the girl I want,” Maxwell said in a quiet voice. “I am not like Helen, but this goes for nothing. We are flesh and blood and you are a better sort than I am. At the beginning I didn’t know you; now I know you’re proud and straight and stanch. Perhaps you have not much grounds to trust me, but if you will risk it, I’ll try not to let you down.”

“Ah,” said Coral, “when you talk like that I don’t want to bother about the risk!” She laughed, a soft, triumphant laugh, and went to her lover. “I’ll marry you when you like.”

XVIII

THE CALL

BOB'S recovery was long. He had got a dangerous shock, and although his broken bones began to mend, his body was slack and his brain was dull. Perhaps his languidness was a natural reaction from the strain of anxious thought and stubborn labor, but his progress was slow, and for the most part, the news Helen allowed him to get from the settlement did not help.

At length, one morning, he occupied a couch by the window of his room at the hotel. Maxwell, in an easy-chair, studied some documents and smoked a cigarette. Bob's pipe had gone out; the tobacco did not taste good. The window commanded the Inlet and on the other side white hills shone in the sun. A boisterous north wind ruffled the water, and although the radiator was not far off, Bob shivered. On the British Columbian coast, winter is not as a rule hard, but sometimes the cold snaps are keen.

Bob imagined the snow was deep at Helensville; he had known the frost nearly Arctic for a week or two. Watson and his gang were no doubt up against it, and Bob thought he was needed, but the doctor declared he must not go. Although Watson was a useful man, he was not boss and Bob found resignation hard. Then, looking down between the tall office blocks, he saw the *Maud* at the wharf. Smoke rolled from her funnel; the firemen were getting busy and when steam was up the boat would start. Bob resolutely turned his head and looked at Maxwell.

"Your not knowing Alsager on the wharf was strange," he remarked.

"Oh, well, he went the other way. Then you see I imagined he would have looked me up; he agreed to do so."

"The fellow has let us down," said Bob. "Something has scared him off; you declared he was keen. Anyhow, I've no use for Thornbank's proposition. I don't like the man."

"Thornbank is greedy, but perhaps you're prejudiced. At all events, if we can satisfy him, he'll invest the money we need."

“When he’s satisfied, the settlement will be his. In a sense, I’m trustee for the folks who bought the lots. I’m not going to give the chances they ought to get to the Thornbank gang. What about the Willaston combine? You stated they might negotiate.”

For a few moments Maxwell was quiet. To know Bob refused to deal with Thornbank was some relief, because his terms were harder than Harry had admitted and his proposition was not firm. Moreover, caution was indicated, because Bob did not know all Maxwell knew and must not be enlightened yet. Maxwell frankly hated the part he was forced to play. He wanted to be honest, but he had begun to cheat and had got entangled.

“I like your fastidiousness, but it’s rather an obstacle,” he said. “In fact, I expect your stipulations decided Alsager to leave us alone. You will have nothing to do with Thornbank, and although you may be justified, his help would be useful. Then I imagine your fresh stipulations will frighten off Willaston. These people don’t use your point of view. They’re speculators and their object is to get something they can sell for a good price.”

“We won’t talk about my fastidiousness,” Bob rejoined. “What does Willaston want?”

Maxwell got up and went to the table for a cigarette. So far Willaston had not stated his requirements. He had talked, rather vaguely, about his buying a factory site if he could get land and power cheap, but this was all. The trouble was, now Bob was getting better he might send for Willaston. In fact, Bob’s stopping at Vancouver was horribly awkward; he might soon come to the office. Then Maxwell, lighting his cigarette by the window, saw the *Maud* and pulled an envelope from his pocket.

“Perhaps I had better see Willaston and try to get particulars. In the meantime, I don’t know if I ought to give you this letter. The hand is like your foreman’s, and I thought about letting Helen open the envelope. The doctor warned us you must not be disturbed.”

“Shucks!” said Bob, in an angry voice. “I’m disturbed about the settlement all the time. Give me the note.”

He tore the envelope and frowned. Watson, as he had imagined, was in trouble. Heavy rain and snow had embarrassed him; some of his helpers had returned to their homesteads and the fresh men he had engaged grumbled about the labor and demanded higher pay. Then the frost had stopped his mixing concrete, and some heavy blocks that framed a sluice gate were not properly fixed. Watson imagined the floods the melting ice would release

might carry away the gate, but he could not strengthen it until the thaw began. Bob saw he was wanted and he resolved to go.

“I don’t expect Helen for some time,” he said. “When she arrives the *Maud* will be off. Get me a cab.”

Maxwell’s heart beat. He had imagined Watson’s letter was a call for Bob, but he pretended surprise.

“You mustn’t be rash. A nasty sea is running and the boat will roll about. The journey from the landing is awkward and I expect the snow is deep. You have not gone downstairs yet.”

“I’m going downstairs in five minutes. Watson wants me. If you don’t mean to get a cab, I’ll call the bell boy.”

“Oh, well. You’re an obstinate fellow and I suppose there’s no use in arguing,” said Maxwell with a resigned shrug. “For all that, when Helen arrives I will not be on board the *Maud*.”

“Don’t argue. Get a cab. Helen can’t make you accountable and you can state I went because I was forced. I’ll send a letter back by the boat. The elevator’s coming up. Why don’t you start?”

Maxwell started, but when he reached the hotel steps there was not a cab about. Running past three or four blocks to a corner, he saw a cab some distance off and tried to signal the driver. Then Helen came from a shop and Maxwell put down his hand, for he did not want to excite his sister’s curiosity. It, however, looked as if the man had seen his signal, for he drove along the street and Maxwell jumped up. At the hotel he ran for the elevator, because he imagined if he did not get Bob off in two or three minutes, Helen would see he did not go.

Bob was at the rails on the landing and carried a small bag. His pose was rather slack and his face was pinched, but his skin had a touch of color and his eyes twinkled.

“I feel like I felt when I was a boy and tried to cut out school,” he said, and called the page. “Nobody’s coming. Start her off!”

The lift went down and Maxwell looked about the rotunda. Helen had not arrived, but when they were on the steps he saw her at the corner of the block. Bob looked the other way and Maxwell helped him in and told the man to drive up the street. The cab started and Bob pulled out his watch.

“I don’t suppose the boat sails just yet, but the fellow’s not going to the wharf.”

“That is so,” Maxwell agreed. “If we had taken the shortest line, you’d have met Helen.”

“Well, perhaps my stealing off is shabby, but it looks as if you were my willing accomplice,” Bob remarked with a smile. “Anyhow, you see I ought to go.”

Maxwell saw he had not used much caution, but he laughed. “I tried to persuade you to stay, but I admit your taking control at the dam has some advantages. You know if you can stand for the effort; I do not.”

They reached the wharf, and when the *Maud’s* smoke melted behind the pines at Beaver Point Maxwell rather unwillingly returned to the hotel. He must enlighten Helen about Bob’s adventure and he did not like his job.

In the afternoon the wind went West and the air got warm, but the sea ran high and at dusk the old steamer brought up in a narrow inlet. Dark pines tossed along the beach and the wind in the branches was louder than the surf, but Bob slept like a log in his heaving bunk. At daybreak he got up, and without much effort, walked the deck. For long he had not got up for breakfast and at the hotel he was satisfied to walk about his room. He reflected dryly that to obey one’s doctor is not always the proper plan.

By and by the *Maud* put to sea and steamed slowly across the steep white combers. Spray swept her decks and the violent rolling began to bother Bob. To hold on behind the pilot-house hurt his side, and when he went to the small and very dirty cabin to keep on his chair hurt his back. His muscles were softer than he had thought and he wondered whether he ought not to have remained at the hotel.

At dusk he went to the rails in front of the pilot-house and looked about. Heavy rain blew across the angry sea and the rocks and trees ahead were indistinct. A mile or two off, a foaming streak marked a savage tide-race, but Bob knew the point behind the turmoil sheltered the landing. In half an hour the *Maud* would tie up at the wharf and he could start for Helensville. He knew he must start as soon as he got off the boat. The stormy evening was ominously warm and the snow melted fast. The floods would break the ice and hurl the floes against the dam. If the sluice went, the bank might go.

The white seas were now on the *Maud’s* quarter. Her smoke blew across the foaming belt ahead and she steered wildly. In the pilot-house a dark figure swung to and fro at the wheel and sometimes the captain beat the glass and signaled with his hand.

“When we hit the race you want to get a good hold,” he said to Bob. “If she takes a sheer across the tide, she’ll wash off some deck-load. I’d have brought up behind the island to wait for slack water, but you allowed we must dump the stuff to-night.”

Bob looked at the heavy lumber, stacked high above the rail. When the steamer rolled the load groaned and strained against the chains. He thought they might lose some, but speed was important. Watson needed lumber and Bob must reach the settlement.

“Let her go,” he said. “The truck is mine and I will stand for the risk.”

The *Maud* went ahead and presently plunged into the race. While her stern was yet in slack water her bow was in the tide and the helmsman could not bring her round. In the race, the seas were like walls, straight from trough to top, until the top curled and broke. Then the trough was filled by the cataract and another sea leaped from the turmoil. For a hundred yards she sheered across the current and the combers crashed on board. The stacked lumber melted in the flood that surged about the deck, and Bob saw the ends of boards, a derrick boom and the forecastle like islands in the foam.

The spray beat his face and water broke against his legs. To hold on was hard, he was weak and felt his skin get wet by sweat. A comber leaped on board and the steamer rolled as if she would roll over, but he saw she was coming round. Her bows went up, the water ran off the deck and for the most part the load was not gone. The helmsman was getting control and the seas would soon break astern and carry her into the channel.

Then she plunged, as she had not yet plunged, and Bob’s feet went from under him. His muscles were slack and his hands slipped from the rail. Lurching across the inclined bridge, he struck a stanchion, got his arm round the bar and somehow held fast. For a few moments he swung to and fro, and then the rolling stopped and he knew the boat had reached slack water behind the point.

Bob got down the ladder, but his side hurt and he was faint, and when he seized a chair in the cabin he began to cough. The coughing shook him, and putting his handkerchief to his mouth, he saw the linen was stained by blood. He clenched his fist and by a savage effort stopped the cough. For a minute or two he leaned slackly against the table, and then he heard the whistle and went for his bag.

XIX

THE BREAKING STRAIN

MELTING snow covered the little wharf, and the wet slickers of the men who pulled about the ropes reflected the steamer's lights. In the background, the hotel windows shone against the woods and Bob made for the door. To cross the slippery logs hurt, but to find he could walk was some relief. When he hit the stanchion he had got a nasty knock.

The floor of the hotel dining-room was wet and torn by spiked boots. A trestle table was pushed back to the wall, and the hard wooden chairs by the stove were occupied. The occupants were settlers from Helensville and waited for goods they expected the *Maud* to bring. One or two gave Bob a nod and others touched their neighbors, but, for the most part, he thought their looks antagonistic. Although his face was pinched and he moved slackly, nobody got up and he pulled a box to the stove.

"Had the ice broken when you started, boys?" he inquired.

"She was cracking, as if she was ready to go," said one. "When she gets away she'll let down an ugly flood. Your crowd at the dam were hustling some."

"Then, Watson has kept the gang going?"

"I guess he was bothered and some laid off," another replied. "Wanted extra pay and allowed they didn't hire up because they liked to get drowned."

"Our pay's standard."

"The boys claimed the job was not and Helensville wasn't up to sample. A number of us think that is so," the first man rejoined, and turning from Bob, lighted his pipe.

For a few minutes Bob was quiet. It looked as if the others did not want to talk and he was tired. His side hurt and the spot that had struck the stanchion was particularly sore. When the locomotive hurled him across the track he had broken two or three ribs, and he wondered whether he had hit a half-knit bone. When he took a long breath something pricked and he

coughed. All the same, he was wanted at the dam and he went to the bar and got a drink.

“What’s the matter with the boys?” he said to the landlord. “They’re quiet and some don’t look friendly. I guess they know who I am?”

“They know you; there’s the trouble,” the other replied. “These fellows aren’t bushmen; in the main, they’re a city crowd, and when they started for Helensville they meant to get rich quick. Now the settlement’s going slow, they reckon they got stung.”

“I think I see,” said Bob, in a rather stern voice. “Well, Helensville has got to go ahead, but in the meantime I must get there and I doubt if I could ride. Do you know who has a wagon?”

“The trail’s pretty mean and the boys are using packhorses. I reckon a wagon wouldn’t get through; but Jim White came in with a jumper sledge and talked about starting back soon as the steamboat gang unloaded his goods.”

Some time afterward a man arrived and went to the bar.

“I’ve got my truck and don’t want a room,” he said.

“If you’re not all loaded up, Jim, you might take Mr. Caverhill,” the landlord remarked.

“Pleased to meet you,” said the other and gave Bob a keen glance. “I’m hauling up a load, and where the trail’s extra bad you’ll have to walk. You been sick. Can you make it?”

“I’ll try,” said Bob.

“Well, they sure want you at the dam,” White remarked dryly and went off.

Some time afterwards he brought his team to the door and indicated a hole between some boxes on his sledge.

“Get on board, Mr. Caverhill. We’ll ride as far’s we can.”

Bob got into the hole and White started his team. The sledge was a clumsy jumper of the pattern the bush-ranchers sometimes use in the fields. Parallel wooden runners carried a few cross boards, and hooks in front held the traces. As a rule, oxen haul a jumper, but White had two good horses.

After a few minutes the lights at the wharf faded and the rattle of the *Maud’s* winches was drowned by the wind in the pines. Rain beat upon the

load, steam floated about the shadowy horses, and indistinct branches tossed in the gloom. For a time, Bob's slickers turned the rain and the hollow in the load was warm. Although he heard wet snow splash about the runners, it looked as if the bottom crust were not altogether melted, for the dull beat of the horses' feet indicated that they pushed on. Bob imagined he went to sleep, for although he did not hear the team stop he presently saw the sledge was not moving. In front were vague dark trees and somebody stumbled about the trail. Bob got up and shivered.

"Can you light the lantern?" White shouted.

Bob struck a number of matches, but he got a light, and advancing cautiously, held up the lantern. The pale beam touched a slanted bank of mud and stones and snow, and he knew the trail had gone down the hill.

"A blamed awkward spot. I guess she's twenty yards across," said White. "Well, if we mean to get over, we must lighten off. Can you help me pack the load to the other side?"

"I'd sooner pay somebody to go for the goods you leave."

White shook his head. "We can't fix it like that. The big sack's sugar and Inglis, the storekeeper, wants his groceries. If they're spoiled by rain, he can't get a fresh lot until the *Maud* comes up next trip."

"Very well," said Bob. "I must make the settlement, but I can't move the big bags. I'll help you up and try the lighter stuff."

They got the sugar on White's back and he vanished in the dark. Bob pulled a cotton flour bag from the pile and after a stern effort hove it to his shoulders. The bag weighed seventy pounds and for a bushman was not a heavy load, but Bob had not long since got up from a sick bed. Yet he was wanted at the dam, and since the teamster would not leave the goods, he must help.

He could not carry the lantern and the gap in the broken trail was very dark. Sharp stones stuck out from the snow and sometimes his boots sank in muddy soil. A branch he stepped on snapped and the effort to keep his balance shook him hard. Then he plunged into a hole and the load came near to pulling him over. To breathe fast hurt horribly, but he set his mouth and labored on.

A bank of stones he disturbed rolled noisily down the hill, and then he slipped and floundered in soft wet snow, until the ground in front got steep and he knew he had reached the end of the break. Somehow he staggered up the bank and dropped the bag. Then, although body and brain shrank from

the effort, he went back for another. The second journey was worse than the first, but he brought a bag across and sat down in the snow.

In the meantime, White had picked up the lantern and urged his frightened horses on to the dangerous slope. The light touched the plunging animals and their wet skin shone; then the faint beam flickered another way and they melted in the rain. Bob heard traces rattle and iron shoes clash. White shouted savagely, and after a time the misty light pierced the gloom and the horses' heads tossed against luminous floating steam. The teamster had somehow got across and Bob helped to put up the load.

"You can cool off," said White. "If we don't hit another piece like this, maybe we'll make Helensville by daybreak."

Bob got on the sledge and rested his head against the sticky sugar sack. Maxwell had talked about Government help for making the road, and Bob knew a grading gang had got to work, but so far as he could see, the work would not satisfy a surveyor and he wondered who had paid. In the meantime it was not important. He was exhausted and he went to sleep.

He rather thought he helped White at another awkward spot, but he did not know much about it. Afterwards the sledge jolted horribly and threw him against the bags. The rain had got through his slicker, but the cold and the shaking did not disturb him much. When at length he was altogether awake, the team had stopped and the light was good. It looked as if day had broken some time ago, and although rain fell men splashed about in the mud and snow between new frame houses. Bob saw he had reached Helensville, and getting up awkwardly, he started for a building farther along the street.

The frame of the building was large and a sign indicated it was a hotel, but only the lower timbers were covered by boards. Bob pushed round a glass revolving door and went into a big room roofed by a tarpaulin. When he pulled a chair to the stove Ellmer advanced. His shirt was white and his clothes were fastidiously neat.

"Hello!" said Bob. "You're going ahead. I didn't know you had arrived."

Ellmer gave him a keen glance. "My shingle's up and I'm watching out the carpenters do things right, but I go back on the *Maud*. You look pretty sick; I don't see why Maxwell let you start."

"Now I think about it, Maxwell declared I ought not to go, but I'm wanted. Have you got something to brace me up?"

"I'll fix you," said Ellmer and guided Bob to a chair in another room. "Take a rest for a few minutes," he resumed and went off.

When he returned he carried a glass of hot liquor and a bowl. Bob drained the glass and looked doubtfully at the bowl.

“I don’t know that I want to eat.”

“You’re going to eat,” said Ellmer. “Get to it; I’ll wait.”

Bob did not want to dispute and he picked up a spoon. He did not know what the stuff was, but it was hot and he thought he tasted eggs. After a few minutes he put back the bowl and pulled out his wallet. Ellmer smiled and shook his head.

“You’re my guest, Mr. Caverhill. I reckon you’re for the dam and if you don’t come in at noon, I’ll send your lunch.”

When Bob reached the dam the rain was heavier. Mist rolled about the pines, and indistinct dark branches tossed. The ice behind the bank worked and cracked. Culverts spouted and Bob awkwardly made for the main sluice. A number of wet and muddy men tried to shore up the gate with heavy beams, but Bob saw they were slack and spiritless. He motioned to the nearest.

“Where is Watson?”

“The boss!” somebody shouted, and Watson ran along the bank.

“The ice will soon go,” said Bob. “Can’t you open the gate?”

“I’m scared to open her,” Watson replied. “We couldn’t cement in the frame for the frost, but I reckoned to heave up the blocks and fix them right when the river ran down. Maybe the culverts and cut-out will take the flood water; maybe they won’t.”

Bob studied the heaving ice and pulled out his watch. “We’ll heave up the blocks now. If our luck is good, we ought to put them back, properly grouted in good concrete, by dark. Start your cement-mixer and rush up all the useful men you’ve got.”

“Looks like taking some chances,” Watson replied in a thoughtful voice. “If the ice breaks before we’re through, the shores won’t hold the gate and the flood will wash a big hole in the dam. But we *might* fix the blocks. We’ll try it.”

He blew a whistle. Men came from a shack on the river bank and another gang from a trench behind the dam. Wet soil stuck to their long boots and slickers. They stopped in the rain and looked at Bob drearily.

“You have been up against it, boys, but I guess you can stand for another fight,” he said. “If you win, you can lie off two days on the company’s time. If you lose, the settlement will get a bad set-back and I don’t know when we’ll restart the job. Well, we mustn’t lose. I guess we can move the gate backing and then cement her up solid before the flood comes along.”

“We’ve most had enough,” said one. “If the flood hits the dam when half the blocks are out, she’ll sure break the gate, and you’ll have no stone facing to stand the scour. When she cuts into the dirt bank something’s coming to the settlement.”

“That is so,” said Bob. “I expect some houses will go down river. But we’re going to make all fast before the flood does hit us. Let’s start!”

They got to work; for the most part, rather sullenly. A number had for long labored in the snow and mud and others doubted if all went well for the settlement. Bob admitted they had grounds to doubt, but he must give them confidence and he wondered whether he could hold on until dark.

Logs and heavy beams were wedged against the gate, and then a gang went to the derrick. The windlass groaned, the long boom swung, and the ponderous blocks of the concrete facing were slowly lifted out. Bob, however, was not satisfied to superintend. Sometimes he helped at the windlass handles and sometimes at the guys that controlled the traveling boom. The blocks were muddy, chains slipped and handspikes broke, but speed was indicated, for the ice crackled with a noise like rifle shots and broke along the dam as the water rose. This was all, however, and Bob began to hope they might finish the job before the flood came down.

At noon he went to the engine-house and ate a little of the food Ellmer sent. The shack was warm and his clothes began to steam; the engine had not stopped and its measured throb was soothing. Wheels rolled and he heard the cement splash in the mixing tank. Bob tried the cement and saw it would harden fast. In two or three hours it would hold the properly bedded blocks and the frame would stand. They might perhaps open the gate.

Bob did not want to get up and face the rain and cold. His head ached, his side hurt, and he was horribly tired and slack. All the same, he must get up. If the dam went, it would be long before a factory was built; moreover, the flood might sweep Helensville. He was disturbed about the settlement. Somehow he did not trust Maxwell, but he was not an accountant and only a few days since had got out of bed. Well, he was a workman and the boys would follow him. Although to get up cost him much, he went back to the dam.

When they lowered the last few stones the light was going. The wind was strong and the flame of the roaring blast-lamp slanted. Dazzling reflections played about the dam and faded in the rain. The derrick swung a massive block across the ice and Bob joined the men at the windlass. The chain tackle groaned, the gear-wheels clanked, and he heard the big wooden tripod strain. By and by the block began to come down and the clank got sharp.

“She’s getting away,” said Watson. “Snub her with the brake. Let the pawls engage.”

A man pulled a lever, but the noisy gears did not stop and the chain went out. The suspended block had not yet reached the proper spot, and if it fell, would go through the ice.

“Pawl-rods jammed!” said the man at the lever. “Looks like some grit was underneath.”

Bob seized the end of the windlass handle. Two men were braced against the bar and at the other side, across the chain barrel, bent dark figures strained. The men had hoisted the heavy stone, but they had reckoned on the pawls’ carrying the load when they swung it to its place. Now they were exhausted by the effort, the pawls would not engage and they must bear the weight. The handles had begun to turn the other way, but if, for a few moments, the chain did not run fast, they might yet drop the block where it ought to go. If they weakened, the spinning handles would break their bones.

“Stiffen up!” Bob shouted hoarsely. “You have got to hold her!”

Gasping and straining, they clung to the bars and the long boom moved. The stone was not above the ice; it began to cross the dam, and if it traveled a few yards farther, it would reach its socket. For all that, the strain was horrible. The exhausted men braced their legs and drove their boots into the mud. Their hands slipped on the wet iron, and the bars they tried to stop went slowly round. Bob fought for breath and coughed. His chest hurt, as if somebody stabbed him, and he imagined blood was in his mouth.

“Ease up!” somebody shouted. “We can swing her home!”

Bob let go the handle and dropped in the mud. A man trod on him, but he did not know, and when the others stepped back from the windlass one said, “Go for a lantern! The boss is knocked out!”

They got a light and crowded round. Bob’s wet face was white and pinched; his eyes were shut and a red stain crossed his chin. Then Watson

pushed back the group.

“Run to the saloon for liquor. Fetch some cement bags and two pike-poles.”

A man brought the poles and pushed the ends through the bags. Others lifted Bob to the rude stretcher and they started down the bank. Ellmer met them in front of the hotel, and taking the lantern, thoughtfully studied Bob.

“He’s very sick. Put him in my room. I’ve got to start for town and maybe I can send up Mrs. Caverhill and a doctor on board a gasoline launch.”

They carried Bob into the hotel, pulled off his wet clothes and put him to bed. Some time afterwards, when the others were gone, he opened his eyes and looked about.

“Hello, Ellmer!” he said languidly. “Do you know if Watson fixed the block?”

“He fixed the lot, but you’re not to bother,” Ellmer replied.

Bob turned his head. The tarpaulin roof flapped and rain beat the thin walls, but there was another noise, like the roar of an angry fall.

“Do you hear water?” he asked in a faint, anxious voice.

“Sure,” said Ellmer soothingly. “Watson has opened the sluice and is running down the dam. So far, nothing’s broke and he thinks the job will stand.”

“Then I won’t bother,” Bob remarked and shut his eyes.

XX

THE RECKONING

SOON after the *Maud* arrived in Vancouver, Helen and a doctor started for the North on board a gasoline launch, and although the boat was swept by angry seas, reached the steamboat landing. The doctor declared Bob had broken again a bone that was not properly knit and the muscular effort he used at the dam accounted for the injury the sharp end had done. Moreover, when he reached the dam he was ill and exhausted and he must pay for his rashness. He imagined Bob would not for a long time resume his work, but by and by Helen might perhaps take him to California.

Sometimes when all was quiet and Helen watched by her husband's bed she speculated about his starting for the settlement. Harry ought not to have given Bob the foreman's letter and he ought not to have let him go. He declared he had tried to dissuade Bob and Helen thought it possible. She knew Bob's obstinacy, but she doubted if he could have got on board the steamer unless Harry helped. In fact, it looked as if Harry were willing for Bob to go.

In the meantime, however, she must concentrate on nursing Bob, who began to make some progress. At length the doctor returned and stated they might go South. Helen thought the strange thing was, Bob agreed and was willing to loaf about a tourists' hotel in California. Bob was very slack and languid. It looked as if he were satisfied to leave the settlement alone and Helen sensed a puzzling reserve.

Bob's slackness and philosophical calm disturbed her. Although at the beginning she thought she had not wanted his love, when the locomotive struck him down she had got enlightenment. The trouble was, she had forced Bob to indulge her, and now she thought him resigned. Then she was conscious that something, so to speak, stood in the way of a full and generous understanding.

Helen mused about it unhappily and sometimes thought Maxwell the obstacle. Harry and Bob were temperamentally antagonistic and the settlement scheme had perhaps exaggerated their antagonism. Harry's rules were not Bob's rules; she thought Bob's better, but she must not disown her

brother to whom she owed much. Besides, her pride was not yet conquered; after all, in a sense, she was Harry's sort. At length, when Bob declared he must get to work, to start for Vancouver was some relief.

At Vancouver they went to Duff's house. Duff had returned from the North and in the evening took Bob to his smoking-room. Since his arrival, Helen and Mrs. Duff had not left Bob alone with his host, but when supper was over the men knew they must talk. For all that, Bob thought Duff was not keen to start. Duff had lost some flesh and his skin was brown. His holiday had braced him, but his glance was nervous and he was obviously disturbed. Bob was tired and, although he got stronger, his languidness was not gone.

"To see you getting about again is some comfort," Duff remarked and lighted his pipe. "When your letter arrived I felt as if I'd thrown off a load."

"To feel I can get about is comforting," Bob agreed with a smile. "All the same, you haven't carried your load very far. You stopped in the North longer than we reckoned; but although Harry stated you went to examine a mineral claim I don't know much about your exploits."

"Oh, well. I suppose I must put you wise," said Duff, and Bob imagined his willingness to talk about his adventures indicated that he would sooner put off talking about Helensville.

"On the panhandle coast it rained most all the time and we went up the Bering Sea on board a summer tourist boat," Duff resumed. "We got off at Seward, and although Seward is not a remarkably attractive spot, it did not rain and there are paying deep-lode mines in the neighborhood. Then I met up with an American engineer. A mining company at Fairbanks had turned him down; he was keen about prospecting and I thought he knew his job. Anyhow, he got me interested, and when the boat came back Mrs. Duff agreed to wait for me at Seward and Marshall and I started for the wilds. But I expect you know something about this?"

Bob laughed. "I didn't imagine you'd get bitten by the gold bug. As a rule, you use some caution, Tom. Anyhow, I don't expect you struck paydirt!"

"Marshall was not playing me. The man is straight and he staked as much as I staked. I think it was all his wad, for the excursion cost us pretty high. We hired a gasoline boat and started across Kotzebue Sound, made a food cache where we landed and sent off the boat. She was to come back for us and, if we were not at the beach, dump fresh supplies and return after a

fixed time. When she'd gone we loaded up two Aleut packers and pushed inland."

"Pretty rough country, was it not?" said Bob.

"Our line was across soft muskeg, willow belts, and winding creeks, and the mosquitoes were fierce. I expect one could not push across for some time after the surface thaw, but we went in the fall and Marshall knew the ground. Although we were longer than we reckoned, he hit the spot for which he steered."

"And then you found the gold would not pay for washing?"

"The gold is not wash-gold," Duff rejoined quietly. "Marshall struck the reef where he calculated, and although I'm not a miner, I saw the indications were good. In fact, I agreed to share the cost of experimental development, and perhaps I was lucky because I ran the risk. I expect soon to have some use for all the money I can get——"

Duff stopped and his look was moody. He hesitated, knocked out his pipe, and went on: "In Alaska to strike gold is not hard; to develop a reef claim is another thing. In the tundra and muskeg belt, transport's most impossible, and in order to pay for mining the ore must carry heavy metal. I don't know about ours yet, and in the meantime we'll let it go.

"The lode outcropped and we had powder, and Marshall wanted to prove the vein. For two or three weeks, it was something like Indian summer, although the nights were cold. I was keen and perhaps we stayed longer than we ought, for winter was on us before we knew. One night heavy snow fell and the tent poles broke. In the blizzard we couldn't hoist the canvas and at daybreak we started for the coast. I can't tell you much about the journey; I hate to remember it.

"Speed was important. We had given the boat's skipper a date and the beach was open. If it blew hard or ice packed on the coast, he couldn't stop; besides, our food was running out. Sometimes a blizzard held us up and the snow was deep. My wet boots galled my feet, and although we threw away the prospecting tools, we carried an awkward load. It looked as if we couldn't keep our date with the captain, but we shoved on as fast as possible.

"We made the beach one evening when we were nearly played out and numbed by cold. The snow went down to the tide-line, but in places rocks pushed through. The water was dark, and the boat was gone. Perhaps the blizzards had scared the captain, but I like to know he's not yet paid.

Marshall reckoned we must stay for the winter; I reckoned we might stay for good——”

Duff paused and for a few moments looked straight in front. Bob thought he saw the desolate white wilds and the lead-colored sea beat the frozen beach. But Duff was not the man to brood over past trouble, and Bob wondered whether he had other grounds for his strange, fixed look.

“Well,” he resumed, “the food cache was not broken, and we had a good tent and an alcohol stove. Somehow we stood for the snow and frost, and after a time a steam whaler, running from a gale, brought up behind the cape. The captain took us on board, but our luck was not very good. The auxiliary engine made trouble and when we cleared the Aleutians we ran up against a Pacific gale. She would not face the sea, and for days she drifted about, hove-to, in blinding fog. Until we saw Vancouver Island, the wind was ahead and it was long before we landed at Portland, Oregon. In the summer Marshall goes back to the lode. I don’t yet know if I will go——”

Bob looked up with some surprise, but for a few moments Duff occupied himself with his pipe. Then he said:

“I think that’s all and I have accounted for my remaining in the North. I felt I must account for it, because had I got back to the office when I calculated, I might perhaps have put things straight.”

“Ah,” said Bob, “I imagined something bothered you! You imply we must expect trouble about the settlement?”

“Trouble is surely coming to us. I am *scared*, Bob.”

“Then Maxwell has plunged into some fresh extravagance when we were both away?”

“The extravagance is not fresh,” said Duff. “When I got back and saw the business Harry handled, I was rattled. He’d sold ’most all the keystone block and had got a very large sum, but the money was not at the bank. He’d graded roads, feasted investors, and bribed important folks. In fact, he’d stopped at nothing to boom the settlement. So far as I could see, the house was awkwardly entangled, but when I got after Maxwell he smiled. Perhaps I was slack and trustful, for I let him put me off. He declared all went right; you know Harry’s persuasive powers, but when he started for Victoria, a few days ago, I got an accountant. I don’t yet know all, but our liabilities scare me and the money’s gone. The factory’s not started and the Helensville folk claim the scheme was a frame-up.”

Bob struck a match and gave Duff a light. He did so for an experiment and was relieved to find he could guide the match. Yet he had got a nasty knock.

“To some extent, I think your customers are justified,” he said. “From the beginning Harry’s plan was bluff. Unless the factory was built, he had nothing to sell; he persuaded folks to pay for goods he could not put up.”

“Not altogether. I’ve known a reckless bluff make good. In fact, I admit, for a few days I was near leaving Harry alone. I thought he might put the job across and save us. If you can satisfy people a new settlement will go ahead, it does go ahead.”

Bob smiled, a rather dreary smile. “I have heard something like that before, but the argument’s not sound. You’re a real estate man and I guess you know some settlements are started for the money the settlers bring and spend. When the money’s gone the settlement goes broke——”

He mused for a few moments. He was sorry for Duff and saw it was important he had not left Maxwell alone. In Duff’s occupation scruples were sometimes a drawback, but the house’s customers had grounds to call Duff “Honest Tom.” Then Duff turned to Bob and his face got red.

“I’m treasurer and accountable. I’ve let you and others down; there’s where the thing hurts worst. People trusted Duff’s and, until Maxwell joined me, nobody had a just pick on us. Well, I’ve got the house I built, and perhaps my share in Marshall’s lode is worth something. The lot won’t go far, but so far as it does go, all’s my creditors!”

Bob had tried for calm, but Duff’s distress moved him and his anger against Maxwell was hot.

“We’re not broke yet. My wad’s not gone and I’ve got the ranch: But where is the d—— thief who cheated us both?”

“Harry’s at Victoria. He stated he might hire a gasoline boat and cross the strait to the landing. Maybe he reckons to bluff the settlers, but I doubt. Last mail I got some savage letters. Since Duff’s put up their shingle nobody sent us letters like that before.”

“If our customers are dissatisfied, we’ll go to the settlement,” said Bob in a stern voice. “Since we let Maxwell fool us, we must meet the bill. All’s not lost and when I have seen your accountant we may find a plan. But I don’t want Mrs. Duff to talk to Helen yet. Helen trusts her brother and I’m afraid she’s going to get hurt——”

He stopped, for he heard somebody in the passage. Mrs. Duff opened the door and Helen came in.

“You have left us alone for some time and Bob is tired,” she said. “You can talk about business in the morning.”

“Do you know we did talk about business?” Duff inquired.

“I imagine it’s very possible, since the settlement occupies all Bob’s thought,” said Helen, with a rather dreary smile.

Mrs. Duff looked at her husband, and Bob thought she knew much, but had not given Helen her confidence. Duff put up his pipe.

“Perhaps I have bored Bob and he is tired. I myself am not very fresh and feel I want a holiday. I think we’ll all start for Helensville; the *Maud* goes in a day or two.”

“Oh, well,” said Helen. “I had hoped Bob would wait a little before he got to work, but if he’s resolved to go, there’s no use in talking.”

HELEN'S ENLIGHTENMENT

THE evening was dark and rain fell. The street was uneven, the rocking car plunged into holes and water splashed about the wheels. The driver frankly swore. To steer a big automobile over the trail from the landing was a strenuous job and he was tired.

Helen, balancing against the jolts, looked about with keen curiosity and some pride. The settlement was not the settlement she had left. The stumps were gone and rows of wooden houses bordered Main Street. She admitted that the buildings the headlamps picked out were not beautiful, but behind the shiplap walls domestic fires burned. Where Bob's steers had wandered in the bush, men and women lived. Then, although the road to the landing was not good, to make a road over which an automobile could travel was something of an exploit.

It was as if Harry had stretched a magician's wand across the woods and Helensville had sprung up. In a sense, the thing was magical. He called, and men who had not known him before came from mines and stores and offices and got to work. The town, so to speak, grew in the night, and now it was there; rather ugly, perhaps, but substantial. Helensville would stand and one did not know where its growth would stop. Well, Helen had known Harry's talent, and she hoped Bob at length was satisfied.

Bob, however, was ominously quiet. He noted that for the most part the houses were dark, and a pool-room the car rolled by was empty. At one spot behind the town bright reflections trembled across the trees. Bob touched Duff.

"A blast-lamp," he said meaningly. "Something's doing!"

The car stopped in front of Ellmer's hotel. The building was finished and its top floor was high above the small frame houses. A wide veranda with railing and posts went along the front. Lights shone from the windows, but when the party got down Bob noticed that nobody was about. His plan was to stop at the hotel and go to the ranch in the morning. Ellmer met him in the passage. His mouth was tight and he gave Bob a keen glance.

"We want you, Mr. Caverhill."

"I imagined something like that," said Bob. "Where are the boys?"

"They've got a meeting; I understand Grey takes the floor," Ellmer replied, and stopping, looked at Helen.

"Oh, well," said Bob in a careless voice, "I expect supper's ready and the meal we got at the landing wasn't good."

A few minutes afterward a smart waitress served supper in the big dining-room. Bob and Duff knew her doing so indicated that Ellmer's control was firm, for at a bush settlement hotel one does not get supper after the fixed time. Ellmer stopped, as if to see all was properly served, and presently turned to Duff.

"I s'pose you calculated to meet your partner?"

"I did not," said Duff rather sharply. "Maxwell was at Victoria; he didn't know if he'd get across."

"He came on board a boat the new company's running along the coast."

"Then, Harry is somewhere about?" said Helen.

"Sure. He went to the boys' meeting," Ellmer replied and turned to Bob. "I didn't want him to go."

Helen weighed his remark and was puzzled. The landlord's look was rather grim. His voice was sharp and she thought him somehow truculent, but he called the waitress.

"Where's Coral?"

"I don't know. She was around not long ago," said the girl, and Ellmer studied the table.

"Well, I think you have got all you want," he remarked and went off.

Supper was not a cheerful function. Nobody talked much, and although Helen was frankly tired, she did not think fatigue accounted for the others' moodiness. She herself rather wanted to talk. For a bush hotel the dining-room was spacious; the food was good and properly served. When she drove along the street she had noted two or three smart new stores. Helensville obviously went ahead and, in a sense, the settlement's progress was Harry's triumph. Bob ought to admit it, but he was sternly quiet and his quietness annoyed her.

By and by a noise began in the street. People shouted and Helen thought a number beat tin pans. Then the notes of a cornet, badly played, pierced the

swelling turmoil, and Duff looked at Bob, who jumped up and went to the door. When the others reached the veranda the noise indicated that a crowd pushed along the street. For the most part, the street was dark, but at some spots a beam from a window touched rows of indistinct figures. One heard steps in the mud, the cornet shrieked cracked notes, and the tin pans rattled. For a minute or two it looked as if the people brought somebody in triumph to the hotel; and then Helen knew the shouts and noise were derisive.

Near the hotel a big lamp burned in a grocery window, and at length Helen saw the crowd. A man and a woman went in front and their advance was obviously not a triumphant march. The woman's hat was battered, as if the top were torn from the brim; the man's was gone. He went unsteadily, and when he tried to stop, the woman pulled him forward. She held his arm and sometimes he stumbled against her. The others jeered. It looked as if they might not have let the man go but for his companion.

At the bottom of the hotel steps he stopped and the light touched his face. His black hair was wet and untidy and a bruise marked his forehead. Helen seized the veranda rails for support. She saw the man was Maxwell and he was not sober.

Maxwell turned and faced the jeering crowd.

"You're a noble lot and your instincts are a sheep's. Where one jumps you all jump and your leader's the noisiest fool in the crowd. You'd follow him over a cliff; but you can't be led along the proper road."

"Cut it out! We know you; you make us tired!" one replied, and the woman pushed Maxwell.

"Quit talking! You can't fool the boys again. Get up!" she said; and when Maxwell, stumbling awkwardly, went up the steps she leaned against a post.

Her face was white, but her glance was hard and scornful. Helen saw it was the girl Harry had brought to her table at the hotel in the woods. The crowd hesitated at the bottom of the steps, and Coral, letting go the post, stood firm and straight.

"Better go home, boys, and weigh up to-night's job," she said. "Maybe, before you fixed your meeting, you had a chance to make good at Helensville. Now you have not. You turned down the man who might have seen you out."

Maxwell started to go down the steps. "Lemme talk! These people haven't much use for your arguments——"

“You go right in!” said Coral firmly. “When you get tanking, you talk too much.”

Somebody shouted humorous approval. Coral pushed Maxwell back and turned.

“I don’t hear your boss. Looks as if he doesn’t wear a bell, but maybe he’s modest,” she said, and a man pushed through the crowd.

“I’m where I’m wanted, but you take your man away. You have grit and for your sake we let the wastrel who’s got our money go. Well, I guess we’re a trustful lot, but we don’t fall for him another time.”

Bob motioned to Coral and went to the railing.

“Is it you, Somers? Do you claim when you invested you got a crooked deal?”

“I surely claim it, Bob. I thought I knew you and you reckoned to push the settlement ahead. You got my money, but perhaps I’m lucky I got my transfer recorded at the land office, because your partner sold another man my block.”

“Ah,” said Bob quietly, and resumed: “Do you know about another deal like that?”

“I know about a number; but you want to talk to Grey. Maxwell broke him and when he’s through at the meeting——”

“Then, the meeting’s not over?”

“Not yet. Maxwell tried to bluff us. His nerve is pretty good, but the boys had had enough and some wanted to ride him round the settlement on a rail. Anyhow my notion is, you better ship him out before Grey’s gang come along.”

“Thanks,” said Bob. “In the meantime, I’d sooner you took your crowd off. When the boys are cool I’ll talk to all who claim they got stung; but nobody’s now coming up these steps.”

“You can bet on that,” said Ellmer grimly.

The crowd growled and pushed about. It looked as if some were unwilling to let Maxwell go, but for the most part Bob imagined the men were not keen to force an entrance into the house. Moreover, the landlord and his barkeeper resolutely commanded the top of the steps. After a few moments the crowd began to melt and Bob pushed Maxwell into the dining-room. The others followed and Ellmer locked the door.

Maxwell leaned against the wall and smiled. His smile was ironical, and although his legs were unsteady, it looked as if liquor had not altogether bemused his brain. Coral held his arm and the glance she gave the others was defiant. Helen's color was high and her eyes sparkled.

"Are you not going to present your companion, Harry?"

"I imagine I did something like that before, and I doubt if you forget," Maxwell replied. "Since Coral's your sister-in-law you ought to be polite. We were married when you and Bob went South."

For a moment Helen turned her head. Then she looked up and studied Coral with haughty calm.

"Now I think about it, I did meet you. You talked about a road-house. I suppose you are the landlord's daughter?"

"That is so," Ellmer remarked dryly. "My trouble is, Coral's your brother's wife. Anyhow, it's got to be reckoned on."

Helen went to a bench. Her humiliation was keen and she had borne the fatigue of an awkward journey.

"Ellmer's a logical fellow," Maxwell observed. "When Coral married me I think my luck was better than hers, but we were married and p'raps our relations ought to stand by us. The Helensville people don't think I ought to stay, and when the meeting's over I expect another lot will look me up. What are we going to do about it?"

"You're going to pull out," said Ellmer and turned to Bob. "Somers didn't want trouble and the boys he brought along are a pretty good lot, but Grey's savage and Wilmot's poison mean. I reckon something's coming to us when their gang arrives. Anyhow, I don't want my house wrecked and they'd get after Maxwell if he went to the ranch."

"Maxwell's going on board the *Maud*," said Bob. "Can you trust the fellow who drove the car?"

"You've got it! I can trust all my lot," Ellmer agreed. "We'll start the car for the ranch, and then Jake will take the dam road and hit the landing trail, back of the settlement——" He turned to Coral. "Harry's got to go."

"I'm going," said Coral, and facing Helen gave her a strange smile. "Looks as if you are willing to turn down your brother, but I stick to my husband. Maybe he's not all I reckoned, but he's all I've got and I mean to see him out."

Helen said nothing. Coral's stanchness moved her and she was ashamed. Her husband was finer than she had thought, but, in a sense, she had not stuck to Bob. Then Maxwell took Coral's hand and awkwardly braced up.

"Your pluck's splendid and perhaps I'll yet make good. Had my partners played up like you, I'd have made them rich, but Bob's fastidiousness beat me and Duff's afraid."

"I'm surely afraid and I have some grounds," Duff rejoined. "You couldn't put across your bluff and Bob and I must pay."

Maxwell laughed. "Your weak nerve broke you, and I was broke for a ridiculously small sum I couldn't get when you came back. If you had stayed away another six months, I'd have carried Helensville where I meant, but I couldn't carry Bob and you. However, if you think I ought, I'll stay and meet the bill."

"Quit talking. You're not going to stay," said Coral firmly and Maxwell with rather uneven steps crossed the floor.

For a moment or two Helen hesitated. Then she got up, and going after the others, kissed Maxwell. Coral pushed him to a door opening to the back of the house and Ellmer went out behind them. When he came back a car engine began to throb.

"Maybe they'll make it. The *Maud* goes out at daybreak," he remarked.

Wheels rolled in loose gravel and the rattling throb sank to a steady note. Then the noise began to die away and rain beat the windows.

XXII

THE FIGHT FOR THE STEPS

ELLMER pulled out his watch and went to the door. After a few moments he came back and sat down by the stove.

“Nothing’s doing yet,” he said. “The night’s quiet and the rain’s stopped, but if the boys heard the car, they’d reckon Caverhill was going to the ranch. All the same, the new road’s soft with the wet and Jake can’t hit up the pace until he’s across the divide.”

Bob nodded. The new road was a bank of soil and gravel, loosely thrown up by a horse scoop. If the settlers found out Maxwell had started for the landing and resolved to bring him back, Bob rather thought a few men on horseback, pushing across the old trail, could reach the high ground before the car.

“I don’t see how Maxwell bit these fellows,” Ellmer resumed. “When your transfer’s recorded at the land office, your title is good.”

“That is so,” Duff agreed, with a rather dreary smile. “All the same, Harry had some grounds for stating real estate speculators are like sheep; if one imagines he has got a snap, all rush off to buy. When the boom started Maxwell took the money and gave acknowledgments. For example, he’d sell you an option, for which you paid some money down, and you were entitled to complete the deal in a time agreed. He’d give another fellow an engagement to transfer a Main Street frontage when the surveyors had properly measured up the ground. So long as people imagined the town went ahead, you could sell the agreement.”

“Do you imply Maxwell sold one customer lots another had bought?”

“We have three claims for a particularly useful corner lot,” said Duff dryly.

Helen said nothing. She dared not look at Bob. Where she ought to trust her husband she had supported her brother, whom she now knew for a cheat. Moreover, Harry had married the road-house girl. Perhaps she was ridiculous, but she admitted his marrying Coral hurt almost as much as his

dishonesty. Yet Coral was stanch to her husband, and she herself was not. In the meantime, Bob's quietness disturbed her.

By and by Ellmer turned his head. "Looks as if the Wilmot gang was coming along. Old man Inglis is a magistrate, but he's not in town, and Grant, the constable, is at the landing."

He went to the door and the others heard the beat of feet in the mud. The men did not shout and their silence was ominous. Ellmer turned to Bob.

"I doubt if Harry has made the high ground yet. If the boys got horses, they might cut his track."

"Since they're coming here, I imagine they don't know he has lit out," said Bob. "I rather think we'll state he's gone."

Helen gave Bob a puzzled glance. "You don't mean to help the ruffians?"

"Not at all," said Bob, with a smile. "We mean to keep the fellows occupied as long as possible. Sometimes when you're willing for folks to doubt you, to state the truth is the proper plan. But you and Mrs. Duff must steal off and make for the Inglis store."

Helen's eyes sparkled and her color rose.

"I will not steal off. After all, Harry is my brother, and when he went to the meeting Coral was not afraid——"

Bob looked at Mrs. Duff. Her color was gone, but her look indicated that she meant to stay, and he shrugged resignedly.

"You can't force the ladies out and you can't go to the grocery," Ellmer remarked and called his barkeeper.

"Get a club, Pete. In this country they don't stand for gun-play, but the boys are not coming in."

The barkeeper nodded and picked up a stove iron. He was a dark-skinned, muscular fellow, and had served drinks at turbulent mining camps and kept a pool-room where loggers from the woods sometimes disputed about their bets. Ellmer balanced another iron and then turned to Mrs. Duff. His look was cool and commanding.

"We have no use for you and Mrs. Caverhill. Get into the back room. Get there now!"

Helen glanced at Bob and saw he would support the landlord. His brows were knit and his mouth was firm. She thought if he were forced to fight, for him to do so would be some relief. Then Mrs. Duff touched her and they went off.

“I think I’ll break a chair,” said Bob and pulled the rails and seat from the curved hardwood bar. He threw the other leg to Duff and then indicated the bench along the wall. “We’ll jam the thing against the posts on the steps.”

They dragged out the heavy bench and when they had fixed it across the stairs the crowd stopped at the bottom. The light from the veranda windows was good and Bob studied the men. Their look was grim and he thought their mood savage. Two or three in front carried crowbars and Bob saw sticks and shovels. A sharp-edged shovel is a dangerous tool. The men were the men who had suffered most for trusting Maxwell, and Bob knew he could not persuade them to go away. In the meantime, however, he did not want them to go. The mud and broken corduroy that might stop Maxwell’s car would not stop a bold horseman.

“You can’t come up, boys,” said Ellmer. “What do you want?”

“We want Maxwell,” one replied, and Grey advanced.

“Is Caverhill about?”

Bob went to the railing. “I like to be where I’m wanted. What’s the trouble?”

“If you don’t know, we’ll put you wise. When we bought our lots Maxwell stated a pulp-factory and a sawmill were going to be built. The plans were drawn, all was fixed, and he reckoned the settlement was going right ahead. Well, you got our money. Where’s your factory?”

“We have got a sawmill of a sort,” said Bob.

“Oh, shucks! She wouldn’t cut a load of boards in a week,” said a man who pushed Grey back. “You got to stand for your partner’s engagements, Caverhill, but before we talk about that we’re going to reckon up with him. Maxwell took my wad and transferred me a piece of bush land another fellow claims. I’ve got a row of blamed big trees I can’t chop off, and a wagonful of hardware nobody wants. Maxwell allowed the town would be at my piece before my store was up and I’d sell my nails and fixings fast as I could break the kegs.”

Bob studied the fellow. Wilmot was thin and keen, and somehow stealthy, like a rat. He talked with a passion Bob thought venomous, although he admitted some passion was justified.

“I’ll try to make good Maxwell’s promises, but you must give me a show. To straighten out the tangle will take some time.”

“Then, you better get going, but we want Maxwell now. Put the d—— thief out to us.”

Bob leaned against the railing and knitted his brows as if he weighed the demand. The window behind him was open and Helen and Mrs. Duff had stolen back into the room. Helen saw Bob’s face in profile and knew he played a part. Perhaps his coolness cost him something, but she thought it fine. He meant to occupy the others until Harry’s car was some distance off.

“That’s the stuff, Wilmot!” somebody shouted. “We sure want Maxwell and the fat hog, Duff.”

Duff advanced and smiled. “I’m thinner than I was, boys, and before we get all fixed I expect to be thinner yet. Anyway, I’m pleased to meet you, and if you wait until we get to work——”

“Take him off, Bob,” said Grey. “Maybe Maxwell fooled you, but it looks as if you were willing. Anyhow, Mrs. Caverhill allowed you were satisfied, and I let my mortgage run and banked my legacy on Helensville. Now I’m broke; nobody will buy my lots and I can’t strike a job. We’re not looking for trouble with you just now, but you get from under and put Maxwell out.”

“I *can’t*,” Bob said, smiling. “Maxwell started for the ranch some time since.”

“He’s not at the ranch!” Wilmot shouted.

Bob pulled out his watch. Although he had delayed the men for a few minutes, he imagined Maxwell had not got very far along the soft road to the landing.

“Then, I don’t know where he is, but he’s not at the hotel.”

“Let’s get busy and pull the thief out!” Wilmot shouted to the crowd and then turned to Ellmer. “Shift that bench and stand clear! We don’t *want* to wreck your house.”

“You’re not going to wreck my house,” said Ellmer grimly. “Something’s coming to the man who tries, and you won’t find Maxwell.”

He's gone all right."

Mrs. Duff, at the window, tried to draw Helen away, but Helen pushed her back. Although she was anxious for Bob, the picture the open window commanded fixed her glance. In front, stern faces were turned to the veranda; farther back, indistinct figures pushed in the gloom, and the shuffle of feet and impatient growls indicated an angry mob.

So far, the men had used some control and Helen admitted their anger was justified. Harry had cheated; but she was glad strangers, and not Bob, had forced the reckoning. Yet Bob and Duff must pay, and Helen thought their part generous. Bob for her sake, and Duff for Bob's, meant to help the man whose debts they must carry to escape his proper punishment. And the man was her brother. Helen was sorry for Grey, but she felt she hated Wilmot. The thin-faced fellow was Bob's real antagonist. His was not rather stupid, honest rage; she thought him cunning and moved by revengeful passion.

"Don't talk. Come on!" Wilmot shouted. "Roll in behind me. I'm going up!"

The pushing mob advanced up the steps, but when Wilmot climbed the bench rail Bob seized his waist. Then he straightened his back and, lifting the other, flung him against his followers. Wilmot fell under their feet and one or two went down, but others began to crawl across the bench. Bob pulled off his jacket, split by the muscular effort, and reached for his bar. Ellmer jumped down the steps and a savage struggle began.

The bench was an awkward obstacle. The men who tried to climb the back could not use their hands, but Bob could use his chair-leg and his reach was long. Ellmer's stove iron was heavy, and although a few men got over they did not make their footing good. Duff and the barkeeper commanded the steps above.

After a minute or two the turmoil stopped, as if all agreed to get their breath. Bob's face was smeared by blood, his shirt was torn, and his chest heaved. Duff leaned against a post and gasped. Ellmer, on a higher step, quietly studied the crowd; the barkeeper's hand was at his pocket. Then Wilmot, carrying an ax, again pushed to the front.

"Give me room to swing," he said, and the big ax shone.

Bob struck at the fellow's arm, but the ax came down and the bench rail broke. Then somebody inside the house shouted, a locked door crashed, and

Helen faced a fresh angry crowd. Nobody, however, bothered about her and Mrs. Duff. The men searched the rooms and ran up the stairs.

Bob heard the noise and imagined the crowd had broken in by a back door, but he rather thought the men he tried to stop did not know. He struck at one's head, and then Wilmot swung his ax as if he meant to cut him down. The barkeeper's hand went up, a sharp report pierced the turmoil, and Wilmot fell against the rails.

"He got it through his arm, but I've five more shells," the barkeeper remarked. "If I've got to shoot again, I'll stop somebody for good. Quit fooling and let's talk. Maxwell's surely gone."

The leaders hesitated and for a few moments the barkeeper, balancing his heavy pistol, dominated the mob. Then the revolving door behind him swung round and men began to push out on the veranda.

"Maxwell's beat it," one shouted. "He's not in the house."

"Must have got off in the car; she's not about and Jake's gone," another remarked.

"That's so; he went a while since," said Ellmer coolly. "Put up your gun, Pete, and throw the ax over the rails, Grey. You don't want to make trouble for nothing and Caverhill is willing to talk."

Wilmot got up. His face was white, but his eyes shone with fury and his lips were drawn back.

"Are you going to let Caverhill talk?" he shouted in a hoarse, cracked voice. "He's played you for trustful suckers and he stole my wad. His partner's lit out, but he has not."

"You've made all the trouble we have any use for," one remarked and threw the ax into the street "Now, Mr. Caverhill! Maxwell certainly played us and you're accountable. What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know yet," said Bob and stopped, for Wilmot advanced. His arm hung slack and his mouth was crooked with pain, but it looked as if he did not bother about his hurt.

"You shipped Maxwell out and held us up while he got off. I reckon the boys like you to fool them, but you can't fool me. I'm dead broke and your partner's got my wad. If I don't get my money back, I'll kill you!"

"Beat it and get your arm fixed!" said another, and pushed Wilmot down the steps. Then he turned and shouted: "Hello!"

A number of men, advancing in compact order, pushed through the crowd and when they stopped Bob knew the most part were his workmen at the dam. Some carried pick-handles and some carried mining drills.

“When we knew the Wilmot gang had got busy we reckoned we would come along,” the leader said. “Do you want us, boss?”

“I rather think not,” said Bob, with a smile, and turned to his recent antagonists. “It looks as if you had not got a square deal, and if my partner has cheated you, I must stand for it. We don’t yet know where we are, but if you will fix a committee, Mr. Duff and I will meet you when you like. Better make Grey your president. I’ve no use for Wilmot.”

“I want to remark you’re lucky because Maxwell pulled out, boys,” said Ellmer dryly. “When you start rough-housing, you don’t know where the trouble will stop. We all want our money back, but to get it back we must push Helensville ahead and clubbing folks won’t help. Anyhow, I reckon Mr. Caverhill will find a useful plan, and, if you come in quiet, so long as the liquor holds out, I’ll set up the drinks.”

XXIII

BOB SHOULDERS HIS LOAD

ACCOUNT books, maps and documents covered the table under the lamp at the ranch. But for the rain that beat the windows all was quiet in the big room, and Bob, in an easy-chair, rested his head on his bent arm. His pose was slack and his look was tired. Helen and Mrs. Duff occupied a couch. Duff at the table, studied a document.

The furniture was dull hardwood. The walls were plain cedar and one saw the roof-beams. Two or three black-bear skins emphasized the spaciousness of the floor and the great rough-stone fireplace was like the fireplace at an old baronial hall. In the cavernous hollow heaped cordwood snapped.

For the most part, Helen had left the room alone. The decorations one used in England would jar in a room like that, and she approved its rude austerity. At the ranch all was big and somehow dignified. Moreover, Bob was content and she felt he harmonized with his house.

Helen admitted that, in a sense, Bob was big, and although sometimes he was humorous, he was austere. For one thing, he was sternly just; he gave and demanded a square deal. The settlers' committee had recently gone and Helen imagined the men knew Bob would not disown his debts. In fact, his resolve disturbed her, because the debts were not really his.

She had supported Harry and declared his rules were her rules; but Harry had cheated and Bob bore his punishment. She wanted to confess herself a fool and yet she shrank. Although she had thought her pride was broken, she was horribly ashamed. By and by Duff put back the paper he studied.

"When we agreed we would see the boys out we were rash. Their claims are pretty numerous and our money's gone."

"It looks as if we were rash; but I don't know," said Bob. "The ranch is mine and it's in the neighborhood of a rising settlement."

"I doubt if all the boys have got a legal claim. Anyhow, they could not force you to sell the ranch."

“All the same, I am forced to sell,” Bob said quietly; and when Helen saw his stern look she blushed.

Bob loved his ranch; to let it go would hurt, but she knew he would not shrink.

“There’s another thing; Helensville is not a rising settlement,” Duff resumed.

“Helensville will rise,” said Bob. “It’s advantages are marked and the site is good. Maxwell’s judgment was sound, although his plan was not.”

“What is your plan?”

“To begin with, I will, if possible, mortgage the ranch, and if a number of the boys want to quit, we’ll take their lots for transfer value and hold the land. I reckon some will decide to remain.”

“You are pretty keen,” Duff remarked with a smile. “Our buying ought to persuade the doubters not to go.”

“Then we’ll subsidize somebody to put up a mill. Give him a free site, and power at cut rates. If it didn’t break us, we might take some stock. Something like that. For a start, I’ll see Alsager.”

“Maxwell declared Alsager let him down.”

“I wonder—— But we’ll let it go,” Bob said dryly and gave Helen an apologetic glance. “In the meantime, Harry has let us down and I’m puzzled. His plan was built on bluff, but since he’s not at all a fool, the strange thing is, he didn’t see he could not put the bluff across.”

“At the beginning, he did not see,” Duff replied in a thoughtful voice. “He is young and ambitious, and when he started I think he was honest. He knew his talents and trusted his luck. All the same, the job was bigger than he thought and when he got going he couldn’t stop. He must get there and he pushed ahead, into hopeless entanglement. Then I reckon he went *loco*, like a corralled steer. All he knew was, he must break the entanglements.”

Helen turned and her glance was gentle. “Thank you, Mr. Duff! For long I was Harry’s proud champion, and now I’m his apologist it hurts. I think you knew him; he was not consciously dishonest, but for a time, perhaps, his luck was too good. He had marked talent and got things easily. He was carried away and imagined he could get all he wanted to get. Yet, although his object, as a rule, was good, he was not scrupulous. He was not broken by outside forces; his temperament broke him.” She looked at Bob and

resumed: "Harry was a gambler and bet high; I think his temperament is mine."

Bob looked straight in front and knitted his brows.

"Your brother got bitten by the mania for speculation that's the curse of this country. In the West, we're a rashly optimistic lot, and although we put over some daunting jobs, we rather owe it to the construction gangs than the company-floaters. Well I'm not a philosopher, but I'm persuaded when you try to get rich quick you run a dangerous risk. Anyhow, the risk ought to be yours, and if you lose you must be able to meet the bill."

"Somebody must pay!" said Helen with a dreary smile. "After all, Harry may be forced to do so. Perhaps I'm ridiculous, but I hate to know he married the road-house girl."

Mrs. Duff turned and her glance was hard. "I am sorry for Coral. The girl has pluck and loves your brother. If he, after all, makes good, his wife will be accountable."

"Ah," said Helen, "I knew from the beginning you were antagonistic, but now I must admit you had some grounds."

"I wasn't kind," said Mrs. Duff. "We all got a nasty knock, and sometimes when I'm hurt I like to hurt my friends. But Harry's gone and I must try to banish my antagonism. I hope he will make good and, if his wife is the girl I think, it's very possible."

She got up and turned to Duff. They went off and Bob went to his desk. After a time, Helen crossed the floor and touched him gently.

"If you hated me, I would not think it strange."

Bob turned his head, but after a moment or two his glance went back to the calculations on his desk. The figures bothered him and he must concentrate on the sum. Moreover, Helen sometimes exaggerated.

"I certainly don't hate you, and if I did, I would not be logical. The settlement scheme was Harry's. You had nothing to do with it!"

"You are horribly logical," Helen rejoined.

"It's possible. I imagined you had not much use for romantic sentiment."

Helen blushed. In some respects, Bob was dull. He had indulged her coldness and tried for resignation, but he had not seen that since his accident she did not want him to be resigned.

“Perhaps that was so, Bob, and after all you are a very good sort,” she said. “Harry cheated you, although I think you, like Mrs. Duff, were not altogether deceived. You doubted Harry, but I urged you and, for my sake, you were willing to speculate. In a way, I cheated you, but you don’t disown me.”

Bob put down his pencil and frowned. The calculations demanded careful thought and he was rather annoyed by Helen’s theatrical mood. She was obviously highly strung, but he bore some strain and calm was indicated.

“I expect I ought not to have speculated, but you talk extravagantly and there’s no use in our disputing.”

“Do you think I like disputing, Bob?”

“Sometimes it looks like that, but I’ll try to banish your doubts. Although Harry used me and let me down, you are not accountable. You, very properly, wanted to help your brother and didn’t see where he led us. In fact, I rather think he did not see. Anyhow, the thing’s done with!”

“And all you want is to get on with your job?”

“I must get on with it,” said Bob rather grimly. “I’m not grumbling, but I’ve got to carry a big load.”

“The load my brother left for you?”

“There’s no use in forcing me to admit it,” Bob rejoined. “I have got the load. That’s important; the other thing is not.”

Helen turned her head. She was sorry for Bob and had meant to sympathize and confess her shabbiness, but he did not want her sympathy. The difficulties he faced absorbed him; he wanted to be left alone.

“Oh, well,” she said in a dreary voice, “I know you don’t like to be bothered. Your keenness to get to work is, of course, logical, but sometimes logic’s not a first-rate guide.”

She went off and joined Mrs. Duff in another room, and a few minutes afterward Bob threw the papers into his desk. He was vaguely conscious that he had not taken the proper line, but to talk about Maxwell’s crookedness would not help. His part was, if possible, to put things straight and to do so was hard. Moreover, he had tried to indulge Helen and, if she was not content, he could not see what she did want. Perhaps to talk to Duff for a few minutes would soothe him and he went to the veranda.

The rain had stopped, Duff smoked his pipe, and when Bob joined him they walked up and down the boards.

“You are getting the boys; that’s something,” Duff remarked. “Not long since Grey was an awkward antagonist, but he’s cooling off and the moderate lot will go with him. The boys begin to see you mean to treat them right. All the same, there’s another gang and Wilmot is boss. You want to watch out for him; he’s venomous.”

“A number of the boys got badly stung,” said Bob. “If they don’t trust us and run an obstinate opposition, I must stand for it.”

Duff stopped in front of the room his wife and Helen occupied.

“Wilmot won’t run the sort of opposition you expect. The fellow’s a dangerous crank. He can’t chop, he can’t dig, and now he’s broke nobody has much use for him.”

“If that is so, I’ll engage him at the dam.”

Duff smiled. “If you think you could hire up Wilmot, you don’t know your man! In a way, I imagine he’s honest; he reckons his business is to make you pay for Maxwell’s robbing him. A man like that is not fastidious; so long as he gets you, he’ll be satisfied. If he can’t see another plan, he might pull a gun in the dark.”

Bob’s control went. He was tired and felt his load was all he could carry.

“Very well,” he said in a stern voice, “I doubt if I’m fastidious. Anyhow, if Wilmot bothers me, I’ll smash the brute. I haven’t much use for carrying guns, but I am a good shot——”

He stopped, forced a laugh, and resumed: “Shucks! I’m not playing for a film and the night is cold. Let’s go in. I want to know——”

They started for the door and Mrs. Duff, in the neighboring room, looked at Helen.

“Tom didn’t notice he was in front of the window and the window isn’t shut. It’s possible he exaggerates, but he has gone about the settlement and talked to the boys. Perhaps Bob ought to use some caution.”

“I think he will do so,” said Helen with a disturbed look. “Sometimes Bob is obstinate and he hates to be theatrical, but he’s not a fool.”

WILMOT'S GUN

ELLMER was engaged at his desk, but by and by he put down his pen and looked thoughtfully about. His accounts bothered him and indicated that his venture was rash. For a new settlement, the hotel was ambitious and the room was large, but the floor was roughly boarded and the walls were thin and cracked. A bench went along one side and the chairs were plain bent-wood. Sometimes Ellmer speculated about a floor of inlaid blocks, paneling and upholstered furniture; but he admitted he must wait and might wait for long.

Yet he was not daunted. Ellmer was stubborn and knew something about the building of bush settlements. Although water power, milling lumber and useful minerals helped, the real driving force was confidence. If the settlers believed the town would go ahead, it went. Maxwell, in a sense, had not cheated Ellmer. Ellmer knew Harry's drawbacks, but he knew his talent and pluck. If the fellow had played a straight game and cut out drinking, he might have put his plan across. Harry, however, had not played straight and liquor had broken him.

Ellmer tried to be philosophical. It was done with and he rather thought Coral would see her husband after all made good. In the meantime, Ellmer resolved to support Caverhill. Although Caverhill had not Harry's talent, he had talent of a sort and he meant to put things straight. Maxwell, however, had left him some awkward entanglements and a number of the boys made him accountable for his partner's crookedness. Perhaps Caverhill was accountable, but since he admitted it and tried to make good, the boys must leave him alone.

Turning his head, Ellmer studied a group by the stove. The men's clothes were shabby and their long boots were broken. None had a useful occupation; they loafed about the corners of the blocks and grumbled about their luck. Ellmer admitted their luck was not good and they had got stung, but to intrigue against Caverhill would not help. He imagined they could account for the trouble the workmen at the flume made for Bob. In fact, Ellmer did not like the gang's loafing around his stove.

Wilmot's feet were on the wood-box and he tilted back his chair against a post. His thin face was pinched, his nose and jaw were sharply pointed, and his forehead sloped. His look was malignant and he talked in a low voice. When he lifted his pipe his ragged sleeve fell back and Ellmer noted the dirty bandage on his arm. Although Ellmer did not think him drunk, he had used some liquor. Sometimes the others nodded, as if they agreed; sometimes Ellmer thought they disputed, but the room was big and the stove was at the other end.

"That's fixed," said Wilmot presently in a loud voice. "C'm on. Let's get a drink."

The party crossed the floor and Ellmer resumed his occupation. He thought Wilmot plotted something and his mood was dangerous, but if he followed the gang, the boys would not talk. After a time he heard a noise and went to the bar-room door. Wilmot was at the counter and tried to reach across. Pete, the barkeeper, leaned against a shelf and quietly polished a glass. A nicked lamp hung from a beam and the rows of bottles shone.

"What's the trouble?" Ellmer inquired.

"The crowd's broke. Jim wants drinks for the lot for two-bits."

Ellmer smiled. "Nothing's doing, boys!"

"Money's all right," said one. "Wilmot's gonna get a pile."

"Trust killed the cat," Ellmer remarked. "I reckon you have had enough and had better light out."

"Set them up," said another. "In a day or two we'll meet the bill."

"That won't go," said Ellmer, who saw two or three were drunker than he had thought. "Where do you reckon to get the wad?"

"We're certainly not going to steal it," the other rejoined. "Your relation got busy first, and all the money he left around Helensville don't amount to much. Caverhill will put up the wad."

Wilmot gave the fellow a savage glance. "Quit talking. Do you want to put him wise?" He turned to Ellmer. "You got our money when we had some, and we're not broke for good."

"If you were the sort we want at Helensville, you could have drinks on me; but you're not the sort and I want to see you go."

Wilmot leaned forward over the counter and tried to reach the shelf. "I want that bottle, Pete. Shove it right across. I got a pick on you."

“You’ve got my mark,” Pete rejoined and indicated the bandage on the other’s arm. “Anyhow, you can’t have the bottle.”

“When you put your mark on me, I’d got an ax and was jammed up in a crowd,” Wilmot shouted and put his hand in his pocket. “Now I got a gun. Your boss belongs to the frame-up gang. I don’t know about you yet, but gimme the bottle. Be quick!”

Pete glanced at Ellmer and was quick. Seizing the top of the counter, he jumped across and jammed Wilmot’s arm against his side. Wilmot was light and shaken by passion; Pete was muscular and cool. He swung his antagonist off his feet and carried him to the door. When he threw Wilmot into the street he pulled his white shirt straight and smiled.

“If somebody else has a pick on me, he can get going, but I don’t *want* trouble. Maybe you better light out, boys.”

The others hesitated. They knew the barkeeper’s quality, and Ellmer’s grim calm was ominous. After a moment or two they went, and Ellmer, returning to his desk, wrote a note.

The Wilmot gang have something on you. I don’t know much yet, but Wilmot’s carrying a gun and you want to watch out.

Then he rang for Pete and gave him the envelope.

“You might take the letter to Mr. Caverhill. I’ll tend the bar.”

Pete went off and at the ranch was shown into Bob’s office. Bob was occupied with some calculations, for although the dam was finished he was building a flume and leveling a factory site. When he had studied the note, Pete narrated the dispute in the bar.

“The boys are certainly after you and they’ve got a plan, but I don’t know where they’ll start,” he said.

“I think I know,” Bob remarked and frowned.

A number of his rancher workmen had gone back to their homesteads, and the fresh men he had engaged were not satisfied. Some were frankly grumbling loafers, but nobody at Helensville was optimistic and Bob admitted that where he carried his flume across the rocks the job was risky. Moreover, since the days were short and speed was important, he did not stop at dark. If Wilmot worked on the dissatisfied men, it was possible they would refuse to build the flume unless he gave them extra pay.

“Thank you, Pete,” he said. “I will watch out.”

The barkeeper went off and for a time Bob resumed his calculations. Then he pulled out his watch and put on his long boots and slicker. Ellmer's note disturbed him and his habit was to go to the flume in the evening. Opening a drawer in a bureau, he took out a revolver and noted that three or four chambers were loaded. Bob had not much use for a pistol, and although the revolver was rather out of date he had not bothered to buy an automatic. In fact, he imagined his carrying the weapon was ridiculous.

The night was calm and the sky was cloudy, but sometimes for a few minutes the moon shone and silver beams touched the pines. Then the pale illumination faded and the big trunks and stiff branches melted in the gloom. For all that, the black, saw-edged tops cut the sky and vaguely marked the winding trail. Bob's boots rattled in the gravel and sometimes he plunged into a pool, but all was quiet and, absorbed by moody thought, he pushed on.

Not long after he started, Helen went to the office. Bob had stated he would be occupied for some time, but although the lamp burned he was not about, and Helen, going to the table, saw Ellmer's note. She wondered whether the note accounted for his going off, and then a loose window rattled as if jarred by a distant noise.

Helen went to the veranda and looked about. The moon shone behind the pine-tops and the reflections of the blast-lamps at the flume trembled upon a bank of cloud. In the distance, the river throbbed, but nothing disturbed the brooding calm. Then Helen saw she had brought Ellmer's note from the office and she went back and put the paper in Bob's desk. The quietness bothered her and she joined Mrs. Duff in another room. Duff had returned to Vancouver, but his wife had agreed to stay for some time.

"Did you hear a noise a few minutes ago?" Helen asked, and, when Mrs. Duff said she had not, resumed in a thoughtful voice: "The window shook, sometimes it does shake, but the night is calm. Then the jar was sharp, as if a gun had gone off in the woods."

"Perhaps a little draught shook the glass," Mrs. Duff suggested soothingly. "People don't go shooting at night. At all events, I heard nothing."

Helen was not much comforted, but she did not know if she had heard a shot. All she knew was, the window rattled, and to send a man to search the woods was perhaps ridiculous. She began to talk about something else and when Mrs. Duff went to bed she got a book. The effort to interest herself was hard and she put away the book and brooded until at length she heard a step. Somebody was coming along the trail and her heart beat, for she

thought the step was Bob's. When she opened the door she saw his look was stern.

"Hello!" he said. "I didn't want you to wait, and I must go to the office. You ought to go to bed."

Helen resolved to say nothing about the supposititious shot.

"You are tired, Bob. Would you like some coffee?"

"I think not, although you're kind," said Bob and smiled, a rather moody smile. "If I can start a factory, I'm willing to stand for getting tired, but sometimes I doubt. The fresh hands at the flume are a blamed obstinate lot, and it looks as if some folks mean to baffle me. Well, since I want to beat them, I must get to work."

He pulled off his muddy boots and slicker and Helen saw he was resolved to go to the office.

"You ought to think of yourself and not bother about the settlement," she said and let him go.

INGLIS TAKES CONTROL

IN the morning, soon after daybreak, a teamster loaded his wagon behind the Inglis grocery. Inglis himself wheeled boxes and bags of flour from a log storehouse. He was short, rather fat, and wore thick spectacles. As a rule, his movements were methodically slow, and when he talked his voice was thoughtful. Some people thought him dull, but his store was the best at Helensville and he had recently been appointed magistrate. Grant, an old sealing captain, was constable, and for the most part his duty was to drive the settlers' hogs from the garden lots.

At the small settlements the officers of the law are to some extent chosen by popular suffrage, and the Helensville citizens liked Inglis because he did not make trouble. They liked Captain Jake because he was urbane and, when the hogs did not bother him, he would chop cordwood for his neighbors and plant their vegetables. In the bush, an old sailor is a useful man. Some thought the appointments rather a joke, but they did not yet know Inglis and Grant.

"I guess you got all Caverhill's truck," Inglis remarked. "Bill will help you dump the bags and load up potatoes at the ranch."

Bill climbed the wheel and the teamster started his horses. The morning was cold and although the trail was rough the animals trotted fast. The wagon rocked and the men jolted about on the spring seat, until Bill was thrown against the rail.

"Can't you hold them, Tom? I haven't got a rubber back," he gasped.

"They're fresh and a high-fed fresh horse is a blamed fool," said Tom and used the whip. "Maybe to run them up the hill will help them go steady, but if you see an old newspaper, you want to jump. A while back, we met *The Colonist* blowing in the wind——"

The near horse snorted, plunged and stopped. Then it pushed against the other, the wagon swerved, and the pole went across the trail. It looked as if the horses were now resolved not to go ahead, and Tom, bracing his feet against a board, pulled the reins. Bill leaned over the seat-rail and thought he saw a white object in the bushes a few yards from the wheels.

“Something’s got the brutes scared,” he said. “Let them go the way they want; I’ll jump off.”

He got down and looked about. The trail went up-hill round a curve and Bill somehow felt the spot was lonely. He heard the wind in the trees, and when the dark branches moved big drops fell into a shallow pool. At one end of the pool was a curious red stain, and the soil was disturbed, as if somebody had pulled a heavy object across the trail.

Bill felt he must brace up, but when he followed the track into the brush he stopped. The white patch he had remarked was the lining of a coat and the coat was pulled back over a man’s head. The man’s body was in the dead fern and Bill thought his quietness ominous.

“Hitch your horses so’s they can’t see and c’mon quick!” he shouted, in a hoarse voice.

Tom arrived and with some hesitation pulled the coat straight. The man’s face was turned from him, but Tom touched his neck and shivered, for his skin was cold.

“All in, I reckon,” he said quietly. “Wonder who it is.”

Bill got down on his knees and after a few moments turned to the other.

“Wilmot! Somebody’s plugged him. Put him out first shot, a while since.”

“Don’t talk,” said the teamster. “Get hold. We’ve got to take him to the settlement. Caverhill’s truck must wait.”

Five minutes afterward they climbed back into the wagon. They had not known they were hot, but their faces were wet by sweat and Bill’s hands shook. Tom started his horses and until they were near the settlement they did not talk.

“We’ll ride round to the back store,” the teamster remarked. “Old man Inglis and Captain Jake must get busy, but I reckon they don’t want a crowd round yet.”

They stopped at the log storehouse fronting the quiet bush, and when Inglis arrived carried in their load. Inglis shut the door and after a few minutes said, “Maybe I’ll want some help and I’ll swear you for constables. Then Bill will go for Captain Jake, and since Learmont claims he’s a doctor, you can send him along, but don’t put the boys wise. Tom will pull out Caverhill’s goods; I want the wagon.”

The others went with him to his office and when they were sworn for constables Inglis lighted his pipe. He did not know much about a magistrate's duties and frankly wished another had got his post. For all that, a Canadian citizen was shot and the man who shot him must be punished. Moreover, the settlers' mood was angry, and unless they were satisfied even justice would be done, some might start a riot.

When the mob broke into the hotel Inglis was at Victoria and on his return he had pondered the situation and resolved not to meddle. Wilmot had forced the bartender to shoot, but was not much hurt and since an inquiry might lead to turmoil Inglis thought the proper plan was to leave it alone. Now, however, he must carry out the law, although to begin with he must arrest the man he trusted to mend the settlement's fortunes. To imagine Caverhill had shot Wilmot was ridiculous, but Inglis admitted it looked like that.

By and by he went to the hotel and for a few minutes talked to Ellmer. Then he sent for the wagon and ordered the teamster to start for the ranch.

When the horses swung round the last curve in the homestead trail breakfast was over. Bob had not yet gone off and sat by the fire. Helen and Mrs. Duff were by the window.

"I hear wheels," said Helen. "Perhaps Inglis is sending the supplies he ought to have sent last night. I expect his man is coming."

"Tom's coming pretty fast; it doesn't look as if he'd put up much of a load," Bob remarked and going to the window, resumed: "He's brought Inglis and Captain Jake. I wonder what they want."

Helen and he went to the veranda and when the others came up the steps Bob inquired: "Have you had breakfast?"

"Why, yes," said Inglis and looking over his thick spectacles, gave him an embarrassed glance. "I'm sorry, Caverhill, but we want you."

"I don't get the joke," Bob rejoined with a laugh.

"It is not at all a joke," said Inglis in a quiet voice. "Wilmot was shot and killed some time after he started for your ranch last night."

Bob's face got red and he clenched his fist. "You're not *loco*, Inglis! You don't imagine I shot the fellow?"

"I'm a magistrate and my duty's to hold you until we find out something."

“Let’s go to the office,” said Bob with an effort for control. “But we don’t need you, Helen. I expect I can satisfy Inglis.”

Helen went along the passage, and opening the office door, ran to Bob’s desk, for she wondered whether he had forgotten Ellmer’s note. She opened the desk, but the note was not where she had thought and when she began to move some papers her hands shook. In the meantime, Inglis heard the door shut and put himself in front of Bob.

“Stop Mrs. Caverhill, Jake,” he said, and Grant jumped into the office.

The constable was old and rather fat, but sometimes he moved fast. He saw Helen take something from the desk and he seized her arm.

“You mustn’t tear that paper, Mrs. Caverhill.”

Helen twisted her body and got her arm loose. Her face was white, but her eyes shone and she tore the note across. Then the constable got a firmer hold, and bending her head, she tried to carry the pieces to her mouth.

“Hold on, Caverhill; you mustn’t meddle,” said Inglis, but Bob pushed him back, plunged into the office, and threw Grant against the wall.

Helen, shaken by the struggle, dropped the note. She stooped in order to pick it up, but Inglis had come in behind Bob and put his foot on the paper.

“Sorry, Mrs. Caverhill, but you must leave that note alone!”

The blood came to Helen’s skin and she faced Inglis haughtily. She was anxious for Bob but her traditions were English. For the storekeeper to command her was not to be borne.

“Move your foot!” she said. “The note’s my husband’s.”

“That’s not so,” said Inglis in a quiet voice. “I reckon it’s the Government of Canada’s.”

Helen’s color vanished. For a moment she had forgotten the grocer was a magistrate. Her face went white and she turned to Bob.

“Oh!” she said, “I have not helped——”

“It’s not important; he’d have got the note, anyhow,” said Bob and forced a smile. “Let’s get on with it, Inglis.”

Inglis picked up the torn pieces, put them together carefully, and nodded. Then he looked about the room and indicated a pistol on a bureau.

“Get that gun, Jake!”

The constable picked up the pistol, bent down the barrel and turned the cylinder.

“A five-shot. She carries three loaded shells. The barrel’s *clean*.”

“Your gun, Mr. Caverhill?” said Inglis and resumed in an apologetic voice: “My job’s new and maybe I’m not starting as I ought. I wrote a warrant; I don’t quite know the proper form, but reckon it will stand. Wait a moment——”

He pulled out the document, and when he began to read Helen leaned against the table. Her pose was slack and she trembled, but she gave Bob a smile, as if to indicate that she knew the charge ridiculous. Bob stood very straight and clenched his hands.

“That’s fixed,” Inglis remarked. “Now I guess you know you’re not forced to talk? If you make a statement, it might be used against you when I call the court.”

“I do know——” Bob replied with some dryness, and when he paused Helen gave him an anxious glance.

Her heart beat and she breathed fast. The suspense tormented her. For Bob to shoot Wilmot because he was his antagonist was impossible; but perhaps the fellow had waylaid Bob and, drawing his pistol first, had forced him to shoot.

“You must use my statement as you think you ought,” Bob resumed, and although he looked at Inglis, Helen knew he spoke to her. “The note you have got was sent to me and the pistol is mine, but I did not use the gun and I have not met Wilmot for three or four days. That’s all.”

“Very well,” said Inglis. “My duty’s to take you along and hold you until I find out if I have grounds to send you up for trial. Jake, you go see if the team’s all right.”

Grant went off and Inglis went to the passage and rather noisily shut the office door. Helen let go the table and put her arms round Bob.

“My dear! Oh, my dear!” she said. “It’s horrible, and perhaps if I had not meddled——”

“You meant to help, and I left the note about,” Bob replied in a quiet voice, although he was strongly moved.

Helen clung to him, as if she dared not let him go; she sobbed and her slender body shook. He remembered that when he was ill she was very kind

and gentle, but somehow he got a hint of reserve. The strange thing was, he felt as if she wanted him to break her reserve. Sometimes he tried, but he was weak and dull, and when he got better the settlement absorbed him. Now he knew Helen was altogether his and he thrilled triumphantly.

“You mustn’t bother,” he said. “I’d face a worse trouble to know you cared like that. Inglis is forced to carry out the law, but I expect he knows he hasn’t got the proper man. Brace up. In a day or two I’ll be back.”

He kissed Helen and held her against his breast. She shook and her breath was hard to get.

“Oh, Bob——!” she gasped and stopped, for harness rattled and a horse stamped. Then Inglis beat on the door.

“Don’t you want to take some clothes along, Mr. Caverhill?”

Bob gently pushed Helen back and the color drained from her face, for Inglis’s remark was ominous.

“I was shabby and very hard, Bob,” she said with an effort for calm. “I didn’t know all I’d got and that my luck was better than I deserved. Then, when I began to find out, I saw you doubted Harry, and he is my brother. But now I do know all, dear, and when you come back——”

The door opened noisily and Inglis said, “When you have got your clothes we’ll start.”

Helen brought the clothes and went with Bob to the veranda. His look was very stern, but Helen, not bothering about the constable, put her arms round his neck and pulled down his head. Bob’s arms went round her, strained, and got slack. Then he picked up his valise and got in the wagon. The teamster started the horses and Helen, leaning against the railing for support, tried to smile. After a few minutes the wagon went round a curve in the trail, the beat of hoofs died away and Bob was gone. Helen turned, and went slowly into the house.

THE INQUIRY

THE big dining-room at the hotel was crowded and people stood about the veranda. Although the windows were open, the room smelled of hot iron, tobacco and damp clothes, but sometimes one smelled the pines and heard the rain. Inglis occupied the clerk's desk and studied the crowd. He was short and rather fat and his clothes were the clothes small settlement stores supply.

For the most part, the men's faces indicated curiosity. Some, however, were sympathetic and some frankly hostile. Helensville had not made the progress its founders promised, the settlers' money had melted and a number had not yet got the lots they bought. They admitted they did not know if Caverhill himself were accountable, but he belonged to the frame-up gang.

Bob and Constable Grant occupied chairs in front of the desk; Helen was a yard or two back, and Ellmer leaned against the neighboring wall. Helen felt that so far he rather than the magistrate dominated the crowd, and to know he was Bob's friend was some comfort. Bob looked straight in front and his face was inscrutable.

"Quit talking, boys," said the constable, and Inglis read aloud from a large document. Then he pushed down his spectacles and coughed.

"That commission's my authority and all it states goes. Since we haven't yet got a court-house I'm using the hotel, and until we put through our business the bar will be shut."

"We haven't yet got a pulp-mill," somebody remarked and two or three laughed. "We sure want the mill, but I don't know that we're keen about a magistrate who runs a soda fountain and wants to cut out man's-size liquor."

"My bar is shut and is going to stay shut," said Ellmer dryly. "The gentleman who's kicking hates to pay for his drinks."

Inglis motioned to him to be quiet and calmly faced the crowd.

"I do run a soda fountain and a grocery. My occupation's to supply useful goods; but now I stand for the people of British Columbia. You want to get that," he said with a touch of dignity.

“Well, a neighbor of ours was shot. Maybe he was broke and not important, but the law takes count of great and small. If you pull a gun on a Canadian citizen, you must answer for it to the Dominion. Wilmot was picked up in the bush with a bullet in his chest, and my business is to inquire who used the gun and, if I can find out, send the man for trial. I’m going to do it, boys, and it won’t weigh if the man’s my friend or not. In the bush, we haven’t got lawyers and maybe I’m cutting out some legal forms, but the court is open. You can see if the deal is square. And now we’ll go ahead _____”

The crowd was quiet. Nobody had yet known the storekeeper talk like that, but they vaguely saw he did stand for something greater than himself and them. He nodded and Bill narrated his finding Wilmot in the wood. Then Inglis called for Alec Learmont and a young man advanced.

“You claim to be a doctor, Learmont?”

“I do not. All the same, for some time I studied surgery.”

“Why did you quit?”

“Perhaps it doesn’t interest you, but the hospital committee thought I ought to quit.”

“Very well,” said Inglis. “We have not a proper doctor and you examined Wilmot. Are you satisfied the bullet you took out killed him?”

“I am satisfied Wilmot did not live five minutes after he was hit.”

“How long do you calculate that was before you saw the body?”

“Maybe twelve hours. Certainly some time.”

Inglis nodded. “Looks as if Wilmot was shot when he started for the ranch in the evening.” He turned to Ellmer. “Wilmot was at your house and made some trouble?”

“Sure! The gang wanted drinks but didn’t want to pay.”

“That was all?”

“When a tanker wants a drink bad and can’t get it, he gets mad.”

Inglis put two or three small pieces of paper on his desk. “You sent Mr. Caverhill a note. You stated the Wilmot gang was after him and he must watch out. Why did you write the note?”

“The boys had used some liquor,” said Ellmer, frowning. “When my barkeep put Wilmot out they were riled. They couldn’t get after me, but I

reckoned they might go for Caverhill.”

“Why did you reckon they might go for Caverhill?”

“Caverhill was Maxwell’s partner and the boys thought they’d got stung. They’re a dud lot, their money was gone, and nobody would hire them up. I calculated they might try to make Caverhill pay.”

Inglis indicated that Ellmer was to sit down, and said, “I want Jim Smith.”

A man advanced and gave Bob a malignant glance.

“I’m a dud all right, but when I located at Helensville I had five hundred dollars and turned down a useful job. The Caverhill gang and Ellmer got my wad.”

“Cut it out!” said Inglis. “You and Wilmot were at the hotel bar. What was the trouble?”

“The barkeep wouldn’t serve us and we got mad. Wilmot was maddest and pretty drunk. He allowed Caverhill would stand for all the liquor Pete put up.”

Bob turned his head and gave the fellow a grim smile. “If Pete had trusted you, he’d have got stung. The liquor I’d have seen you got is in Shadow Lake.”

“If you want to talk, we’ll hear you afterwards,” Inglis remarked. “Go on, Smith. Do you know why Wilmot imagined Caverhill would pay?”

“I certainly know. Caverhill’s lot worked a frame-up on us and somebody had to pay. Duff’s at Vancouver and Maxwell’s lit out. Ellmer helped him get off, and policeman Jake let them alone. When your friend’s a magistrate——”

“Quit it,” said Inglis sternly. “Maxwell was not my friend.”

“Let him talk!” shouted somebody at the back of the room. “Maxwell worked the frame-up and when he beat it you and Jake sat tight. Now you get Bob Caverhill who wants to put things straight!”

Helen colored and turned her head, because she knew the remark was justified. Harry had indulged his selfish ambition; he had not thought about the others’ risk and when the reckoning came he stole away. Bob had stayed and with splendid pluck was carrying the load his partner threw down. The contrast was poignant, but Helen wanted to concentrate on the argument and she tried for calm.

“If you claim Maxwell cheated you, the civil courts will weigh your claim,” said Inglis in a quiet voice. “Maxwell didn’t shoot a man. I don’t know yet if Caverhill did and I want to find out. I’m not a lawyer, boys, but the Government you elected has called me for a magistrate, and all good citizens will help me use the power I’ve got. Anyhow, I don’t stand for back talk.”

A number indicated agreement and Inglis turned to Smith.

“You calculated to bluff Caverhill?”

“It was not a bluff,” said Smith. “We had Caverhill *cinched*. Wilmot fixed things so’s he could stop the boys at the flume. He allowed when he put it like that to Caverhill, Bob would come in.”

Another man stood up. “I want to state the blasted crooks made trouble at the flume. They got some slobs to join them and calculated they could hold up the job, but they didn’t get the rancher gang. Why, I reckon we’d have put the wastrels in the dam!”

“Yet you admit they had some support?”

“That is so,” said the other and sat down.

Smith smiled, a malicious smile. “It certainly is so. Wilmot knew the support was pretty good. He started for the ranch to put the screw on Caverhill; but he *didn’t get there*.”

“When did he start for the ranch?”

For a few moments after Smith replied Inglis pondered and Helen waited with keen suspense. Inglis was keener than she had thought and she knew he was disturbed. He liked Bob, but he knew his duty and was just. She admitted that all Inglis had so far found out indicated that Bob had shot his unscrupulous antagonist. Wilmot had some grounds to want revenge and imagined he could extort money. Had Bob shot the fellow, Helen would almost have thought the shooting justified; but Bob declared he had not and all he said went.

She glanced at Bob. His look was calm and rather inscrutable. The crowd was very quiet. One heard the rain and the wind in the pines behind the hotel. Then Grant threw some cordwood into the red stove and Inglis called for the barkeeper.

“You carried Ellmer’s note to Caverhill. What did he reply?”

“He said he’d watch out.”

“That was all?”

“That was all,” said Pete and went back quietly, but Helen imagined he was conscious of some relief.

Inglis called the policeman. “You searched the ground about the spot where Bill found Wilmot.”

“That is so,” said Grant. “I saw a track in the mud and gravel, as if Wilmot was standing in the trail when he was hit and somebody had pulled him three or four yards into the bushes; Bill allowed his jacket was over his head. Then I found an empty pistol shell. The fouling on the brass was fresh and the smell of powder pretty strong. The shell wasn’t used very long before I picked it up.”

Inglis took a cartridge and a pistol from the desk. He turned the cylinder and pushed in the cartridge.

“Fits the gun,” he remarked. “What happened when you went to the ranch?”

Grant narrated Helen’s stealing into the office and tearing the note. His look was sober and his voice was quiet. Inglis called Ellmer and gave him the torn paper.

“Is this the note you sent Caverhill?”

“Looks like it,” Ellmer admitted. “I guess you know my hand.”

“Very well. Go on, constable.”

Grant narrated his finding a pistol on a bureau at the ranch and Bob’s admitting it was his. Then he took the pistol Inglis gave him and declared it was the revolver. Three chambers were loaded, but the barrel was clean. When he stopped Ellmer got up.

“Caverhill has not a lawyer and I claim you ought to send the pistol round. Maybe we got somebody who knows all about guns.”

Inglis agreed and when a man stated he had helped at a gunsmith’s store, gave him the pistol.

“The Connecticut factory’s famous and a number of these guns are sold. Some people use the old revolver.”

“You imply the pattern’s common?”

“Sure! There’s nothing to Caverhill’s owning a gun like that. If I went round the settlement, I expect I’d find two or three,” said the witness, and

turned to the crowd. "Who has got an old-time——? Own up, boys!"

"I got one," said a man some distance off. "All the same, I can fix it where I was when Wilmot went to the ranch."

Two or three laughed and Inglis said to the gunsmith: "A shot would leave some fouling, but Jake states the barrel was clean. Can you tell if it was recently cleaned?"

"I doubt it. I'd expect to find fresh oil about the rifling grooves and cylinder and maybe some powderstain not quite rubbed off. There is none. My notion is, the pistol has not been used for some time."

"Very well," said Inglis and for a few moments knitted his brows.

People moved to relax cramped muscles, and one heard heavy boots scrape the floor, but nobody talked and curious glances were fixed on Bob. Bob looked straight in front and frowned. At the beginning he had imagined a short inquiry would satisfy Inglis. Now he doubted, although he was rather angry than alarmed. The flume must be built and all got ready for the mill, but he was a prisoner and his workmen loafed about the court. The people were fools to bother him; he was trying to help and did not know another who could save the settlement. Then Inglis began to talk.

"My business is not to fix up a case for the police, Mr. Caverhill, and if you imagine you can convince me I ought to let you go, you're entitled to try. But since you haven't got a lawyer you want to use some caution, and if you go on the stand, you must answer all I ask."

Bob got up and looked about the room. His glance was scornful and Helen was disturbed because she knew Bob's pride. If he thought the others doubted him, he would not argue. He would be frank and she thought his frankness would not help. She wanted to signal him, but he did not look at her.

"After I got Ellmer's note I started for the flume," he said.

"How long after?"

"I reckon it was about twenty minutes," said Bob, and Helen wondered whether he saw he had admitted it was possible for him to meet Wilmot.

"Did you carry your pistol?"

"I did," said Bob. "For a time I kept the wagon trail and then I took a path I'd chopped through the brush. I met nobody and heard nothing. At the

flume I tried to settle a dispute and stayed about an hour. The boys to whom I talked are in court. Perhaps they'll state when I arrived and when I left."

One or two did so and on the whole agreed.

"When I had put things straight I started for home," Bob resumed. "I met nobody on the trail. At the ranch I went to my office, put the pistol on the bureau, and got busy with some plans. After about an hour I went to bed _____"

He stopped and people began to stretch their legs and move their bodies. A number were obviously not satisfied with his narrative, and he saw his friends thought he ought not to have gone on the stand. Helen's head was bent, but she looked up and gave him a proud glance. He felt that although she might have urged him to take another line, she approved the line he took.

Helen did approve. Bob's frankness and scorn for the risk he ran were rather fine, but she was anxious. The risk was worse than he perhaps thought and sometimes to indulge one's pride was rash. Then the crowd began to whisper and Inglis beat on his desk.

"So far as I could fix it, you have got a square deal, Caverhill, and I expect your neighbors agree I wouldn't be justified to let you go. My duty is to send you for trial at the proper court and in half an hour you'll start for Whitewood. That's all. The court is closed and Mr. Ellmer can resume his business."

For the most part, the men went out quietly, but a few stopped and sympathized with Bob until Inglis sent them off. Grant went for a wagon, and Helen, sitting by Bob, held his arm. Somehow she could not talk and he was quiet.

Half an hour afterward she and Mrs. Duff went to the hotel veranda. The sidewalk in front was crowded and when a wagon stopped at the steps Bob got in. Grant, balancing a shotgun, occupied the back rail. Bob gave Helen a smile and then looked straight in front. The teamster used the whip, the horses plunged and the wagon rolled away. Helen's skin burned and for a few moments she trembled with anger. Then she got very cold, and seizing Mrs. Duff's arm, she started for the ranch.

Ellmer went to the bar and at the door heard a bottle crash. Pushing through the crowd, he saw Pete wipe a pool of liquor from the boards.

"Club whisky! We don't get rich like that; but it's the first time I've known you break my glass," he said.

“The boys were pushing and crowded me. Guess I got rattled,” Pete replied.

XXVII

HELEN TAKES CHARGE

HELEN, mounted on the best horse at the ranch, rode along the muddy street. She wore expensive furs, Bob's recent gift, and two big bushmen rode behind her like grooms, but her face was pinched and she looked drearily about.

The street was torn by wheels and in places a rude plank sidewalk went along the front of the small frame houses. The houses were not beautiful and, although new, wore the stamp of poverty. None was painted and the unseasoned boards were cracked. One or two, more ambitious than the others, were not finished, and it looked as if the tall skeleton frames stood for vanished hopes. Helen thought it was so; the rash experiment had broken the builders.

Between the blocks were vacant lots. Some were covered by giant logs. The branches were gone and the trunks were black, as if somebody had begun to burn the slashing and then had stopped. Others were covered by ashes, domestic rubbish and old meat cans. In the background, tall rampikes stood like pillars, and their charred surface, wet by rain, shone in the dull light.

Groups of men loafed moodily about the corners of the blocks, and a few women, who had heard the beat of horses' feet, went to the doors. Some gave Helen a sympathetic look; one or two noted her expensive clothes and frowned, but for the most part she thought them slack and spiritless. In front of the hotel Helen got down and called a ranch hand to hold her horse. Ellmer was not about, but a servant stated he would soon return and Helen leaned against the veranda railing. She shrank from waiting in the room Inglis had used for his court.

For a few minutes Ellmer did not arrive and Helen mused. She felt the settlement was dying; the optimistic confidence that had given it life and power to grow was gone. Unless she could help, Helensville would perish, like other settlements whose ruins were hidden by the woods of the Pacific slope. She must try to help, but she knew her plan was rash and in the meantime she let it go.

She felt she hated Helensville. The settlement had broken Harry and now it was breaking Bob. All the same, she resolved to use some effort and she tried to be just. At the beginning, Harry's object was good, but she had begun to see his temperament accounted for much. Although he had talent, his weaknesses were marked. He had indulged his bold imagination, but he was not the stuff to bear a heavy strain. Yet, if the settlement, after all, went ahead, its progress, in a sense, would justify Harry's rash experiment. Besides, it would justify Helen.

Helen blushed, for she knew when she married Bob, her ambition, like her brother's was unscrupulous. Bob was very just. He claimed nothing that was not his and she had thought to cheat him. She knew herself a shabby adventuress. All she had got Bob gave her and he had given much, but she had not wanted his trust and love. She had wanted money and, for sometimes she was romantic, she wanted to rule at the big ranch.

The ranch was romantic. In the woods modern business methods did not go. Bob was boss because his strength and pluck entitled him to command. All he asked from others he himself did and where a risk must be faced he went first. His men knew his qualities and trusted him. In fact, Bob was rather like the chief of an old Highland clan.

Helen admitted that she had ruled like a chief's wife. Her word went and, for her husband's sake, his men were stanchly hers. She rode a good horse, her furs were the best a famous house could supply, and two splendid athletic bushmen were her grooms. She owed Bob all and she meant to pay. Not long since she was her brother's champion; now she was her husband's.

Ellmer came up the steps and gave Helen a thoughtful glance. Mrs. Caverhill was a "looker" and he thought he knew good clothes. Then he had noted the ranch hands waiting by her horse.

"Perhaps you can give me a minute or two," she said. "I imagine you know my husband did not shoot Wilmot?"

"Sure! I don't yet know who did shoot Wilmot, but it wasn't Mr. Caverhill."

"Thank you," said Helen. "Do you think the people at the settlement agree?"

Ellmer saw her calm was forced, but he knew her pluck. She had an object for her inquiry, and on the whole he thought to keep things back would not help.

“Your husband got a fair show and you saw how the trial went! My notion is, the boys argue like this: Bob would not kill Wilmot unless he was forced, but perhaps he was forced. Wilmot was savage and pretty drunk. He’d lost all his wad and reckoned he could get some money from Bob. Bob was keen about clearing the factory site and building the flume, but the workmen made trouble. He wouldn’t stand for Wilmot’s bluff that he’d hold up the job. Wilmot got mad and tried to pull his gun; Bob did pull his——”

“It looks plausible,” Helen remarked. “Do you think the jury at the proper trial would argue like the others?”

“Do you really want to know, Mrs. Caverhill?”

“I must know,” said Helen quietly.

“Very well! If Bob allowed he shot Wilmot because Wilmot was going to shoot him, the argument would carry weight; but I guess Bob won’t use it. In my home town across the frontier, he’d get off anyhow. In British Columbia, I doubt. He’s up against British tradition and your folks haven’t much use for romantic justice. They go by the law and the law won’t stand for gun-pulling.”

“Ah,” said Helen in a trembling voice, “I imagined something like that! But suppose the trial were put off? Do you think we could find out who did use the gun?”

“I’m going to try,” said Ellmer grimly. “But since the trial might be soon, we must find out quick.”

Helen gave him a searching glance. “Whitewood is not an important settlement?”

“A small place, Mrs. Caverhill; two or three stores, a hotel, and a row of log houses, but Whitewood is old and they have got a jail. When the Caribou diggings played out, miners located in the valley. They got some gold and broke a trail by Shadow Lake to the coast. It’s long since and the gold is gone, but there are some ranches in the neighborhood and a pretty good trail goes to the railroad. Inglis doesn’t yet know where the police will fix Bob’s trial.”

“I suppose Grant took Bob to Whitewood by the old miners’ trail? It goes round by the foot of the mountain, does it not?”

Ellmer was puzzled, but he imagined Helen had a plan, and he replied: “Jake was bothered to make it with his wagon. The trail’s not much used and is broken in places. He reckoned he’d have got through sooner if he’d hired

saddle horses and pushed across the Gap. The bench country's stony and the timber isn't thick. A Whitewood man who rode across started at sun-up and was at my house in the evening."

"Thank you," said Helen. "Since speed's important, I must try the Gap, but I will start in the dark."

Ellmer looked hard at her and knitted his brows. "I'm not your sort, Mrs. Caverhill, and I guess you didn't like Coral's marrying your brother; but I'm Bob's friend. You can trust me."

"I meant to trust you, and since the evening Coral resolved to go with Harry I have wondered whether I was not unjust," Helen replied and looked about. Then she advanced a few steps and began to talk in a low voice.

"You've got it!" said Ellmer. "Although I see some drawbacks, the plan might work. Well, I can't go with you; Inglis is not a fool and we mustn't put him wise. All the same, I'll get you a man who knows the hills and I might fix it to run Bob across to Idaho—I've got some useful friends at the frontier. We want time and when Bob is across we can look for the proper man. But you haven't seen the boys."

Helen's eyes sparkled and she gave him her hand. "I expected your help and I'm now going to persuade the boys. When I have done so we'll talk about it again."

Ellmer let her go. He thought he saw why she wore her handsome furs, and when she got on the splendid horse and rode along the street in front of the big ranch hands he admitted that for Mrs. Caverhill to carry away her husband's workmen ought not to be hard. He noted her fine balance and stamp of pride; her beauty and her courage moved him.

"She's all a looker and something of a queen," he said.

At the factory site Helen stopped her horse and signaled the foreman.

"I want you to call Mr. Caverhill's friends, Watson; the ranchers who have been with him from the beginning, not the other lot."

Watson was surprised, but he remarked a note of command in Helen's voice and he went off and returned with a number of men. Helen did not get down. She had something of Maxwell's talent for persuading people and knew where a touch of theatricalness helped. She soothed the impatient horse and then, sitting very straight and quiet, faced the men. The ranch hands, two or three yards in front of her, were like statues, and the dark woods were a proper background for the group.

“I expect you agree that my husband gave you a square deal?” she said. “Your pay and food were good, and where the work was dangerous he let you do nothing he did not do.”

“That is so. Bob Caverhill’s the sort of boss we like,” one declared.

“Very well! I expect you know if he goes to prison, the settlement will go down?”

“It looks like that,” another agreed. “If Wilmot hadn’t butted in, I guess Bob would have made good. We know Bob; he’s not a quitter.”

“Ah,” said Helen, “I doubt if you do yet know Bob! For example, you don’t know he mortgaged the ranch and homestead, in order to get the money he needed for the settlement.”

“We didn’t know,” one admitted and turned to the others. “Say, he’s a great fellow, Caverhill!”

Helen saw she had moved them and she resumed: “Do you think it possible for my husband to shoot Wilmot?”

They hesitated and one said, “We reckon if he did shoot Wilmot, the fellow ought to have got shot.”

His frankness disturbed Helen. Ellmer had stated Bob’s friends and the jury who tried him would argue like that, but romantic justice was not the rule in Canada. Well, Bob must not be tried.

“But Bob did not shoot him. He declared he did not, and his word goes.”

“That is so,” said Watson. “I’ve known Bob for a long time and I’d bet my wad on all he states.”

“Thank you,” said Helen and hesitated, for to take the line she meant to take was hard. Yet she saw she must not shrink. Although the men trusted Bob, they had not much grounds to trust her.

“Perhaps you have just claims against my brother; but my husband is nearer than my brother, and for Bob to feel he is accountable hurts worst. In a sense, he is accountable, because he allowed his partner to cheat him. Well, he was resolved to put all straight, and you agree, if Wilmot had not meddled, he might have done so, but another could not. I, however, want you to be satisfied he had nothing to do with shooting Wilmot. It’s important _____”

“The boys are satisfied,” Watson remarked soothingly.

“It’s very important,” Helen resumed. “Since Bob had nothing to do with the shooting, we must put off the trial and find the proper man. If the police let Bob go, he will save the settlement.”

“But you can’t put off the trial,” said one.

“If you are stanch, as I think you, and your nerve is good, it’s not impossible, and I mean to try. I am going to break Bob’s prison and friends will then help him across the frontier. I want six good men. Who goes with me?”

For a few moments they looked at Helen with surprise. The plan was bold, for in British Columbia to break a prison is a rash exploit. Moreover, one or two had doubted if she much loved Caverhill. Then they began to talk in low voices and Helen waited. Her heart beat, but she gently soothed her impatient horse, until Watson looked up.

“They’re all willing, Mrs. Caverhill!”

“I want six,” said Helen. “Bob’s ranch boys are going and I don’t know about horses. When it gets dark send six men to the homestead as quietly as possible, Mr. Watson.”

“The boys will be there.”

“Thank you all,” said Helen in a trembling voice, and motioning to the ranch hands, turned her horse.

XXVIII

THE JAIL-BREAKERS

A COLD wind wailed in the pine-tops, dark branches tossed and big drops fell. Torn clouds rolled across the sky and hid the moon. The uneven trail was wet, and Helen, stealing through the gloom, heard the Whitewood creek brawl in the woods. In front a row of small houses faintly cut the dark background.

Helen was tired. To push through the timber on the broken hill benches was a strenuous undertaking, and she had crossed treacherous rocks where she had not thought a horse could go. Sometimes she was forced to get down, and her long boots were muddy and her clothes were torn. Moreover, if her plan worked, she must face another long and awkward ride.

But fatigue was easier to bear than the suspense she had known when she waited in the woods for dark. All was flat and dreary, cold rain fell, and the fire Watson lighted would not burn. The men were sternly quiet and Helen dared not urge them to push on, because it was obvious they must not reach Whitewood until the settlers had gone to bed. Now she had arrived, the adventure frankly daunted her.

All she heard was the turmoil of the creek, and the moon was gone. The houses were mysterious blocks, vaguely outlined against the gloom, but at the other end of the street a dim light burned in a window. Watson had sent two men in front; two or three guarded the horses in the bush, and four were with Helen. The foreman waited for a signal that his party might advance.

The moon shone out and silver light touched the wet street, the high sidewalk and the houses' fronts. A dark figure cut the pale illumination, waved an arm and melted in the gloom on the other side.

"Get on with it," said Watson, and the men went forward.

They were in the dark and moved noiselessly. A bushman lifts his feet high and treads like a cat. Helen was light and a graceful dancer, but her boots disturbed the gravel and when she stumbled in muddy holes she thought the noise she made carried far. Watson, however, said nothing and the men pushed on.

By and by Watson motioned and two stopped. They carried rifles and their part was to command the street; the two in front, if necessary, would block the other end. Since it was obvious the party must rather depend on speed and silence than on force, Helen imagined the rifles, so to speak, were stage properties; but she did not know. If the settlers were disturbed, they might get axes and shotguns and try to seize the party. She dared not think about it, and she concentrated on following Watson as quietly as possible.

A dog began to bark and the foreman stopped. Near the other end of the street a noise indicated that somebody opened a door. Helen heard steps on the plank sidewalk and imagined the man came from the house where the light burned. He called to the dog, the door shut and all was quiet. Then the moon went behind a cloud and Watson cautiously advanced.

The row of small houses was not continuous. Garden lots broke the line and some of the gaps were wide. Helen saw indistinct pines and naked fruit tree branches. The settlement's straggling had drawbacks, because it forced the party to push on for some distance from the horses, and Helen imagined her going embarrassed the men. In fact, Watson had grumbled, but she was resolute. For her to wait by the horses and let others set Bob free was unthinkable. Yet she admitted that the undertaking looked ridiculous. The prison-breakers' tools were an ax and a mining drill.

The undertaking was not altogether ridiculous. For the most part, the occupants of the small bush settlements are an orderly, industrious lot, and the constable's post is given, rather like a pension, to a deserving citizen who begins to get too old for strenuous labor. Moreover, when the Provincial Government makes an appropriation for a school or jail, the settlers put up the building and the architect is the village carpenter.

By and by a man in front of Watson stopped and Helen saw a small house in some trees across the street.

"We've got there!" the man remarked in a low voice. "Policeman Tom lives on top. The jail's on the ground floor at the back."

"When you're fixed we'll get busy," said Watson. "Come across with us, Mrs. Caverhill, and stand against the wall. Stand still."

The others put on masks, cut from cotton flour bags. Helen wore a small fur cap and a long slicker, and looked like a man. The party crossed the street and stopped in front of the house. Watson gently shook the door and indicated a spot.

"Bolt's there. Get going, Sandy!"

Sandy forced the point of a miner's drill into the crack and pulled at the bar. The door groaned and rattled, but did not break, and Sandy stopped.

"I can't move her."

Watson seized the drill and bent his muscular body. Steel clashed on iron, thick timber cracked, and Helen, for a moment, turned her head and looked about. Opposite the house was an orchard and the moon was behind a cloud. So far as she could see, the noise had not disturbed the settlers. Then she thought she heard steps in the house, and Watson said, "Get to it. She's going!"

The door went back against the wall and Helen saw a short staircase like a ladder. A man carrying a lamp and a shotgun came down the steps. He wore a rubber coat, but his feet and legs were bare. He was not young and his dull look indicated that he was not yet properly awake. Then Watson threw his rolled-up slicker and the light went out. The lamp crashed and the gun rattled on the stairs. A noise in the dark indicated a struggle, and somebody pulled Helen into the house and shut the broken door. She trembled and waited, until after a few moments a man lighted a lantern.

The policeman was on the floor. Watson's slicker was round his head and his bare legs stuck out ridiculously from his rubber coat. He gasped and wriggled, but two big choppers held him down.

"Where's your keys?" Watson inquired.

The policeman said nothing. Although he was not young, his pluck was good, for he kicked savagely and a chopper fell against the wall. The fellow looked at the struggling policeman with angry surprise and set his mouth tight, as if he knew he must not swear. Watson jumped forward and put his knee on the captive's chest.

"Nobody wants to hurt you, but if you shout, we'll sock it to you good," he said. "Guess I can hold him, Sandy. Get your drill and open Caverhill's door."

He and another tied up the policeman, and Sandy braced the drill against a door along the short passage and used the post for a fulcrum. The lock broke, Sandy put his shoulder to the boards, and Watson brought the light. The door swung back and Bob quietly advanced. He had put on some clothes and his look was calm.

"Get your boots," said Watson. "The policeman's tied up. So far, our luck's been pretty good, but we want to pull out."

Bob faced the group and smiled. Helen had thought to run forward, but his strange coolness baffled her.

“You have taken some chances and I thank you, boys,” he said. “All the same, I’m not going.”

“You’re not going?” said Watson in an angry voice. “Why, a horse is waiting and Ellmer has fixed it to help you across the frontier.”

Bob shook his head. “I can’t go, Jake. You ought to see——”

“I sure don’t see,” Watson declared. “Perhaps Mrs. Caverhill will persuade you. Don’t you know your wife?”

Bob had not known Helen. The light was not good and she wore a man’s coat, but when she advanced hesitatingly he jumped forward and took her in his arms.

“Maybe we can risk waiting for a minute or two,” said Watson, who put down the light and pushed the others from the room.

Bob kissed Helen and fetching a chair for her, leaned against the wall. A thick wooden shutter covered the window and all was quiet outside. For a moment or two they did not talk, but Bob was strongly moved. Helen had come to set him free, and when Inglis took him from the ranch he knew her reserve was altogether gone. In fact, he had begun to think it went when he was ill, but her trust in Maxwell was not yet broken and when he got better he was absorbed by business cares. Perhaps but for Maxwell she would have been satisfied with him before. Now, however, his part was to think for Helen.

“You and the boys are very rash,” he said. “Although I’ve longed for you, and I’d like you to stay, if it was only for a few minutes, I’m forced to send you off.”

“Oh, Bob, you mustn’t be obstinate!” Helen replied in a trembling voice. “A horse and a man who knows the mountains are waiting. Ellmer’s friends at Hope will help you to cross the frontier, and at Spokane——”

“But I can’t go to Spokane,” Bob said quietly.

“You must go,” Helen urged. “I know, and your friends know, you did not shoot Wilmot, but some people doubt and the risk you run is worse than you think. Besides, Ellmer and I mean to find the proper man. Ellmer’s persuaded we can find him, and if we put off the trial——”

“No,” said Bob firmly. “I hate to dispute about it. Your pluck and nerve are very fine; I want to indulge you and I want my freedom, but if I ran away, my going would satisfy the police I was the proper man. Then I doubt if I could cross the mountains to Hope, and a horse could not. Anyhow, if I did get across the frontier, I dare not come back and Helensville would go down.”

“You mustn’t think about Helensville.”

“I am forced to think. Helensville is called for you; your brother founded the settlement, and since I was his partner, I must carry out his agreements. For your sake and my sake, I want to make good. I can’t loaf about the United States and let the folks who trusted me go broke.”

“Ah,” said Helen, “you’re very noble, Bob, but I’d sooner you were selfish. When we find out who did shoot Wilmot, you could come back from America.”

“You might not find out for long and it looks as if I must stand my trial. The police have not much to go on; I think the court will let me off.”

Helen’s face got white and she trembled. “The jury would not know you, Bob. You must not run the dreadful risk.”

Bob crossed the floor and sitting on the table, put his arm round Helen.

“I don’t see another plan and you must not exaggerate. The jury will not be my antagonists, and if they have grounds to think I shot Wilmot, the grounds, to some extent, will indicate that I was forced to shoot. The boys who take the stand will state that Wilmot was drunk and carried a pistol, meant to extort money, and had another time declared he’d kill me——”

He stopped for a moment and resumed with forced calm: “My case is pretty good, and if the court decides the shot was mine, the worst I expect is, I might be sent for a time to a penitentiary.”

Helen shivered and seized his hand, as if she dared not let him go. “Oh, my dear! You are very brave, but you are flesh and blood. The humiliation would break you. But, for my sake, you must come away. Helensville is not important; money’s not important. When I married you I was poor and to be poor again would not hurt. Start for the frontier and when you get across I will join you. You will find an occupation and in America our luck will turn.”

“The plan won’t work,” said Bob with gentle firmness. “I might perhaps cheat the American police, because to get after a Canadian offender is not

their business, but all the time you'd be anxious. I'd know I was disgraced and done for, and at Helensville they'd hate us for a cruel frame-up. You didn't marry a lurking gunman and I must stand my trial. The chances are even I get off——”

Watson came to the door. “Are you ready, boss? We must start.”

“I am not going. Mrs. Caverhill will put you wise about it. I want you to thank the boys.”

Watson shrugged resignedly and Bob gently lifted Helen to her feet. She put her arms round him and said in a broken voice, “Oh, my dear! My dear!”

Then she turned and went out slackly after the foreman. For a moment or two Bob leaned against the table. He had borne all he could bear. He heard Watson go along the passage and timber crack when somebody opened the door. Then the men's boots rattled on the gravel, the cautious steps got farther off, and died away.

Bob braced up, and going to the passage, put the light on the stairs and pulled the coat from the policeman's head. The other gave him a surprised glance.

“You're not gone?”

“I don't know if I am going,” Bob replied, and smiled. “For a jailer you're a pretty good sort. I don't want to leave you, and if I did light out, you'd get fired.”

“Quit guying and let me up.”

“To begin with, I think I'll shut the door. Whitewood folk sleep pretty hard, but somebody might see the light. If you shout, you'll force me to choke you.”

The other struggled, but the rope was good and Bob shut the door and resumed: “My friends have got horses and in a minute or two they'll hit the trail for the woods. I want you to weigh this, and then we'll go ahead. At Whitewood a policeman's job is soft and I expect you want to hold yours.”

Although the policeman said nothing, his look was thoughtful and Bob imagined he agreed.

“Very well! If you're forced to own you let your prisoner go, you won't hold your job for long, and I don't see that you'd get much by putting the Whitewood boys on my friends' track. It looks as if nobody knew what they were about. Do you want folks to know?”

“So long as you don’t beat it after the other lot——” said the policeman, and hesitated.

“If you take the proper line, I’m willing to stay,” said Bob. “There’s another thing. Since the boys found I wouldn’t go, they won’t come back.”

“You can let me up,” the other replied. “I won’t talk.”

Bob untied him and he held up the light.

“What are we going to do about the door?”

“It’s awkward,” Bob admitted. “Still, if you can get me a saw and a few screws in the morning, I think I could put all straight.”

“Nothing’s doing,” the policeman remarked. “The boys aren’t particularly humorous, but somebody might see the joke.”

“Oh, well, the door’s not much battered; the fastenings are torn out,” said Bob. “Perhaps you can fix it before folks get up. I’m going back to bed.”

He got into the bunk against the wall and for a time pictured Helen’s climbing the mountain trail. He was moved by keen emotion and sometimes he clenched his hands, but the strain he had borne was heavy and a reaction began. By and by the disturbing picture melted and he went to sleep.

XXIX

THE PUZZLE SOLVED

HELEN'S return to Shadow Lake was dreary. The hope that had buoyed her when she started was gone and she was worn by fatigue. In places she was forced to walk and let Watson drag her horse up precipitous stony slopes; in places the ranch hands used their axes to break a trail. It rained and her clothes were wet, but for the most part she was hardly conscious of the cold and the muscular strain. Her exploit had gone for nothing, she was beaten, and she dared not speculate about the consequences of Bob's obstinacy. She took no thought for herself, and pushing on with mechanical effort, did not notice the dangers Watson steered her past.

When they went down by the edge of a deep gully her horse stumbled and the stones its feet disturbed plunged into the chasm. For a moment Helen thought the horse was going down, and then Watson seized the bridle. He pulled her to firm ground and faced her angrily.

"I agreed to see you safe back at the ranch, Mrs. Caverhill, and there's another thing. When you called the boys they came along, but you're not pining for folks to know we went to break the jail, and we want to make the settlement before Inglis wonders where we are. Well, if I must watch out for you, we can't hit up the pace."

"Have I kept you back much?" Helen asked.

"You have got me scared, ma'am. You take chances you didn't ought to take. I reckoned you were going down the gulch."

Helen's face got red, but she smiled.

"Did you imagine I was *willing* to go down the gulch? I was not; I was brooding and didn't see where I went. However, I must try not to frighten you again."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Caverhill," said Watson, and his look was rather embarrassed. "You want to brace up. The police haven't got much on Bob and I reckon the jury will let him off. All the same, we must beat Inglis to it and get through quick."

Helen started her horse and said nothing. When she reached the settlement she went to the hotel and Ellmer took her to his office. Sometimes she thought it strange, but she trusted the saloon-keeper and reckoned on his help. When she had narrated her adventures he pondered.

“I don’t know but Bob’s staying might count for a lot,” he said. “In the meantime Inglis is at Victoria. The mail arrived soon after you pulled out and he started for the landing. I guess he doesn’t know the boys and you left the settlement, and if nobody spotted the gang, I expect Bob will persuade the Whitewood policeman not to talk. Anyhow, if the trial comes off, we’ll put Watson on the stand to state he broke the jail but Bob wouldn’t go. The argument is: if he was guilty, he’d certainly have quit.”

“We cannot stop the trial,” said Helen, in a dreary voice.

“It’s not yet fixed,” Ellmer rejoined. “Duff has got busy in town and I understand he’s engaged an American detective. I’m studying up the boys. The man we want is in the settlement and somehow I feel we can hit his trail.”

For a few moments Helen brooded and Ellmer noticed her tired and daunted look. Her face was pinched and her glance was dull. Then she got up languidly.

“You are kind. At the beginning I’m sorry I was not,” she said. “Well, we must hope, and try to be confident; but confidence is hard.”

Ellmer let her go and in the evening Pete came to his desk.

“You want to get another barkeep; I’m going to quit.”

“Is that so?” said Ellmer and gave him a careless glance. “Well, you’re a useful man and I only once knew you break my bottles. Why do you want to quit?”

Pete’s look was inscrutable. As a rule, he was very sober, and when he smiled his smile was grim.

“There’s nothing to serving drinks at a dead-beat settlement and I don’t like it in the woods. I want a job that leads somewhere and I been reckoning up a proposition I got last mail.”

“When d’you think of going?”

“At sun-up,” said Pete coolly. “A steamboat’s coming across with some truck for Caverhill, and if I pull out at daybreak I can get on board. Since I ought to put you wise before, you can keep the pay I haven’t drawn.”

Ellmer pondered. He knew Pete, and if the fellow had grounds for going, on the whole he imagined he himself ought not to meddle. Nothing, however, indicated that Pete was keen to start. He leaned against the desk as if he were bored. Then Ellmer pulled out some paper money.

“That’s yours and I wish you luck. You are a good bartender and I think you’re a white man. It means something, Pete. Don’t forget it!”

“Thank you, boss,” said the other in a quiet voice. “I’d like to stay with you, but when I weigh up things I see I better quit.”

He went off to get his clothes and Ellmer went to the bar. His look was thoughtful, but he felt he had taken the proper line. In the morning he engaged a bankrupt settler to carry out Pete’s duties and resolved to say nothing to Mrs. Caverhill. To know Inglis was at Victoria was some satisfaction.

For nearly two weeks Helen waited in tormenting suspense. She did not know if Bob’s trial was yet fixed, the American detective had not arrived and it looked as if Ellmer had not found a clue. She could not sleep and there was no use in trying to occupy herself about the homestead. Moreover, the ranch was mortgaged and Bob could not pay the debt. Then, after the magistrate’s inquiry, to hope was hard. British law was sternly just and although Bob had not shot Wilmot, Helen admitted it looked as if he had done so.

Bob’s honesty was perhaps the worst obstacle. If he were willing to plead he had used a pistol because Wilmot had first drawn his, the argument would carry weight; but he was not willing. He declared he had not met the fellow, and he would stick to his statement. Helen dared not speculate about the consequences.

At length a man on horseback arrived one evening from the coast. The *Maud* was at the landing and Inglis and Duff had started for the settlement. The road was now graded at awkward spots, but sometimes storms washed out the corduroy timbering and Duff’s car was bogged. Its driver had given the mounted man the mail and stated that he expected to get the car on to firm ground before very long.

Helen wondered whether Duff had some news for her or if he had brought the detective, but she must wait until he arrived and she tried for calm. The evening was cold and she occupied a chair by the big stone fireplace. She had not lighted the lamp and reflections from the snapping pine logs trembled about the spacious room and touched Bob’s shining guns.

Helen heard the wind in the pines and the measured throb of the waterfall. The noise jarred and she felt she hated the river. The savage cataract had tempted Harry to make his rash experiment. He had thought to get cheap power from the current and she had persuaded Bob to help.

But she dared not dwell on things like that. She had for some time known she loved her husband and she loved the quiet woods, the cornfields and the homestead that were no longer his. Now all must go. In order to make good Harry's reckless promises Bob had pawned his inheritance. His reward was a prison, and she had supported her brother and broken her husband. It was unthinkable; but she had done so.

Then Helen heard steps in the passage and got up languidly. It looked as if Duff had arrived and perhaps he brought some comforting news. She went to the lamp, but her hand shook and when Ellmer came in she let the match fall.

"Give me the box," he said and got a light.

Then he motioned Helen back to her chair and smiled. "You want to steady up, Mrs. Caverhill. Your nerve's pretty good, but sometimes to get a thing you dare not hope for——"

The color came to Helen's skin and vanished. She seized the chair for support.

"Don't philosophize. What about my husband?"

"Bob's all right! We have got old man Inglis beat!"

Helen turned her head and fought for calm. After a moment or two she looked up and saw Ellmer's smile was triumphant.

"Bob's soon coming back. If you get that, we'll wait a while. It's all that counts."

"But I must know——" said Helen in a trembling voice. "You dare not cheat me. Yet somehow I doubt——"

Ellmer nodded sympathetically. "Sure! You're all rattled. Sit quiet and let me talk. Well, I got my mail half an hour ago, and I sent a message to the grocery that will bring Inglis across as soon as the car gets through. Duff's in the car, but we have not much use for his detective. When Inglis puts the police wise, they won't hold Bob long."

"Then, you have found out who did shoot Wilmot! Who was it?"

"Pete," said Ellmer quietly.

Helen tried to brace up. After the horror she had faced, the reaction was poignant, and to concentrate on the puzzle was some relief.

“Your barkeeper? Perhaps it’s strange, but nobody thought——”

“I had a sort of notion the shot was Pete’s.”

“But you let him go!”

“That’s right. Sometimes you must take chances,” said Ellmer coolly. “So long as Pete was in Canada, he was subject to British law, but I doubt if you’ve got a lawyer who could make him talk. All the same, I bet on his being willing to put me wise when he crossed the frontier. Pete’s a bad man to get up against, but he’s white——”

He stopped and resumed: “Now we’ll fix Inglis! I hear the car!”

The car stopped and Inglis and Duff came in. Helen gave Duff her hand and then turned to the magistrate, whose look was apologetic.

“I got a message from Mr. Ellmer calling me to your house,” he said. “Then I thought you ought to know the arrangements for your husband’s trial——”

“If Mr. Caverhill is willing, the police are going to cut out the trial,” Ellmer remarked. “I called you to the ranch because I didn’t want to let you down. When you sent up Caverhill you were surely not smart, but on the whole I reckon you meant to be just.”

Inglis’s face got red, but he turned to Helen and somehow his look was dignified.

“I am not your husband’s antagonist, Mrs. Caverhill. He was a good customer and perhaps my main support; but, you see, I am a magistrate.”

“I do see,” said Helen and smiled. “For a time I think I hated you, but that is done with, and I admit you did try to be just. Mr. Ellmer, however, is waiting——”

“We’ll go ahead,” said Ellmer and pulled out an envelope. “I want to show Inglis he’d better stop the trial. I got a letter and a sworn statement from my barkeep, Pete Sanderson. The letter was written at a town in Montana and goes:

“‘I want you to put old man Inglis wise about Wilmot’s getting shot. Sorry I couldn’t stop him sending Caverhill up, but I had to get across the frontier before I talked. Now I guess I’m pretty safe, because I go out on the first train and I won’t state where she’s bound——’”

Ellmer put up the letter. "Pete is pretty safe. To put the police on a Canadian gunman's track is not an American notary's business, and if you want to seize a man in the United States for trouble he made in Canada, you have got to satisfy an American court. Then, if you got your warrant for his arrest, I don't reckon a Montana sheriff would bother much about the job."

He stopped for a moment and pulled out a sealed document. "Pete sends a statement sworn in the presence of a United States notary and two witnesses. He declares:

"On the evening of —— I carried a note from Mr. Ellmer, of the Helensville hotel, British Columbia, to the Caverhill ranch at Shadow Lake. The note warned Caverhill that Wilmot was after him. Wilmot, some time sooner, had made trouble at the bar. He was mad, but not altogether drunk, and stated he was going to get money from Caverhill. I threw Wilmot into the street and, because I'd cut his arm with a bullet another time, I took my old revolver. The trail from the Caverhill ranch was dark, and when I was coming back Wilmot jumped from the brush. I reckoned he had heard my steps and thought them Caverhill's.

"Wilmot carried a pistol and shouted for me to stop. I didn't think I could get his gun, so I hit him pretty hard and knocked him against a pine. Said I wasn't the man he wanted and I'd put Caverhill wise. He knew my voice and went plumb mad. Stormed about my helping Maxwell beat it with his money. Well, I didn't want to shoot, but when his gun went off I used mine and Wilmot dropped. I saw he was all in and dragged him to the brush. Then I got his gun and mine and threw them in the river. You'll find them in the pool by the big rock. Afterwards I went back to the hotel and said nothing. I reckoned to pull out would put folks on my trail, but when Caverhill was sent up I resolved to start for the frontier. I claim I was forced to shoot. Caverhill knows nothing about it."

"That's all," said Ellmer. "The statement's properly witnessed and stamped by the notary. I guess it ought to go."

Inglis studied the document and then gave Ellmer a searching glance.

"The thing's now plain. Did you see it *before*?"

"Well," said Ellmer dryly, "I had a notion. I knew you'd get nothing from Pete, but I thought I could bet on his playing straight. I reckon he has beaten you, and if you did bring him back, the court would allow the shooting was justified."

“It’s possible,” Inglis admitted in a thoughtful voice. “Extradition’s a long and awkward business; but that’s for others. I want the document for the officers at Victoria.”

“You can have copies,” said Ellmer, smiling. “Until Caverhill is back at Shadow Lake I keep the stamped paper. If you’re ready, we’ll start for the hotel and you can send your report off by the *Maud*.”

Inglis turned to Helen. “When my letter reaches Victoria I expect the police will instruct me to release Mr. Caverhill; but if they are forced to carry on the trial, his getting off is certain. In the meantime, I want you to know that to find your husband had nothing to do with the shooting gives me very keen satisfaction.”

“I do know,” said Helen, and when she gave him her hand he and Ellmer went off.

XXX

BOB'S LUCK TURNS

CORDWOOD snapped noisily in the rusty stove at Whitewood jail. A tin lamp hung from a beam and the light touched the jailer's lined face. He studied his cards and pondered; Bob rested his arms on the table and looked moodily about.

Streaks of resin marked the cracks in the logs and black drops fell from the joint where the stovepipe went through the room. The floor was rough, split lumber, and a rude bunk occupied a wall. But for the bars across the window, the house was very much a standard pattern bushman's house, and in some respects Bob admitted he had no grounds to grumble.

He had received Helen's letter narrating the barkeeper's confession and he imagined the statement would satisfy the police, but he did not yet know what they meant to do about it. The suspense bothered him, because so long as he was in jail he could not carry out his plans for Helensville and speed was important. Unless he were released soon, the settlement must go down. Sometimes calm was hard, but to storm would not help. One wore oneself out like that, and when the police did let him go he must get to work.

He weighed another thing. In a sense, the magistrate's inquiry was a public humiliation. Some people thought he had killed Wilmot because the fellow was an obstacle, and some thought him a cheat. His vindication ought to be public and he was entitled to claim an open trial. Yet to do so might imply fresh delay.

Then Bob's glance rested on his jailer and he smiled. He liked old Gordon. His skin was very brown but his hair was going white and Bob imagined he got his post because the Whitewood folk wanted to give him a soft job. They had played cards for two hours and Gordon was down twenty cents.

"I doubt if I can make it. When I forgot the ten-spot you had me beat," he said. "Well, my wad's all bills and I'll give you half my plug."

He pulled out the tobacco and Bob opened his knife. When Gordon lost he paid, and Bob indulged the fellow and resolved to send him a box of cigars by and by. Gordon began to cut the plug and stopped.

“Maybe you didn’t ought to have a big knife like that. I got a book of rules somewheres around.”

“If you take my knife, I can’t get a smoke,” said Bob. “Then I expect your bosses at Victoria know the rules don’t go in the bush. For example, your playing cards with your prisoner!”

“Oh, well,” said Gordon, “I certainly like a game and sometimes I’m two-bits up. Then a deck of cards is not a weapon——”

He turned his head and Bob looked up, for a noise began in the street. Water splashed and gravel rattled.

“Horses!” said the jailer. “Strangers I guess, but nothing’s doing at Whitewood, and I wonder—— Maybe your friends have come back. I’ll get my gun!”

“Then I wouldn’t carry a light to the door,” Bob rejoined and laughed, although his heart beat. He imagined the strangers had started from Helensville and he now heard wheels.

Gordon fastened the door and went off. Bob put the cards in the wood-box and heard a wagon stop. Somebody beat on the door and Gordon from a window challenged the party. The voices were indistinct, but steps on the stairs indicated that Gordon was satisfied and meant to admit the others. After a few moments he opened Bob’s door, and Helen, Ellmer, and Inglis came in. Gordon glanced at the table and when he saw Bob had removed the cards gave him a grateful look. Helen’s eyes sparkled and she held up a document.

“I think Mr. Ellmer and Mr. Inglis were not keen about my joining them, but I was firm,” she said. “I have brought you something I would not let another carry.”

She advanced with a light step, and Bob, putting his arm round her, took the order for his release.

“You wanted to open my prison; I like to know you did so,” he said and gave Ellmer a smile. “I expect you helped my wife. This order lets me go now, Inglis?”

“You can go when you like,” Inglis replied and gave the document to Gordon. “We have engaged rooms at the hotel and in the morning we start for the settlement.”

Bob fetched a chair for Helen and got on to the ledge of his bunk.

“We have another chair and the table. I’m sorry that’s all, but to some extent Inglis is accountable for my rude hospitality,” he said. “Well, for a few minutes we must talk, and to begin with I don’t know if I want a room at the hotel. In fact, I might be resigned to remain at Whitewood.”

Helen gave him a surprised glance, but Ellmer smiled. Bob fixed his eyes on Inglis.

“I expect you have been interviewed by the chief of police?”

“The police did call me to Victoria,” Inglis admitted with some embarrassment. “I reckoned for them to release you would put all straight.”

“Then, your imagination wasn’t very keen. I was engaged at an important job and when you arrested me the job was held up.”

“The men have cleared the factory site,” Helen remarked. “I gave Watson all the money I had, but he declared the gang wouldn’t stop because their pay ran out.”

“Thank you, my dear! The boys are fine,” said Bob, and looking at Inglis, resumed: “To clear the ground for the factory and build the flume wasn’t all I wanted to do. I wanted to give people confidence, to persuade them Helensville would go ahead, but when the police put me in jail my usefulness was gone. Do you imagine business men would risk their money on a speculation promoted by a fellow charged with killing a troublesome antagonist? Now your plan’s to send me off quietly. You want to cover your mistake. But I’m a Canadian citizen and entitled to a public trial. Suppose I will not go?”

“Your argument is pretty sound,” said Ellmer in a thoughtful voice. “All the same, you want to weigh things. I reckon you can push Helensville ahead, but you must get to work, and if you claim a trial, you force the police to put up a good fight. Then maybe they’d put off the trial until they filed their extradition claim and got after Pete. I doubt if they would get him, but in the meantime you must stay in prison and nothing’s doing at the settlement.”

“That is so,” Inglis agreed. “I’ll be frank and admit I reckon the Victoria bosses don’t want a trial. Courts are not held in the bush and we don’t want to carry a crowd of witnesses to the cities in order to let you go. Then my notion is, the police are not very keen about extraditing Pete; his defense is pretty good. Very well! You want folks to know you had nothing to do with the shooting? The newspapers will fix it for you. The story’s romantic and when it’s printed folks will talk about you from the Rockies to the coast.”

“At the hotels, evenings!” said Bob. “I’m not remarkably anxious for bar-room notoriety.”

“We must get it right,” said Ellmer. “You imply the police are willing for us to use Pete’s statement?”

“You hold the statement,” Inglis rejoined with some dryness. “If you give it the newspapers, I don’t know that the police are entitled to meddle. Anyhow, they won’t meddle.”

“Maybe his plan is good, Caverhill,” Ellmer remarked and smiled. “If you say so, I’ll pull out for town and Duff will help me get somebody to write up a moving tale. I guess we could fix it so’s to give the settlement a useful push ahead.”

Helen turned and gave Bob a gentle glance. “Perhaps you ought to agree. We don’t know the line a clever lawyer might take at the trial and to wait in suspense would be very hard.”

“Oh, well,” said Bob, “you have borne much, and although I’m not satisfied, I must get busy again.”

He got up and gave Gordon his hand and the party started for the Whitewood hotel.

Not long after Bob returned to Shadow Lake, Duff and another gentleman arrived one evening at the homestead. Bob, meeting them on the steps, gave the gentleman a surprised glance. Duff smiled.

“Mr. Alsager looked me up, and when he knew I was starting for Helensville resolved to come along.”

Helen gave them supper and urged Alsager to stay at the ranch. She thought she liked Alsager; he was urbane and cultivated and she knew his importance. After supper Bob took his guests to the office and gave them cigars.

“Before Duff brought me to your house I talked to Mr. Ellmer and went round the settlement,” Alsager remarked. “The location’s good. I see a chance for industrial development in the valley, and Helensville occupies the keystone block. In fact, Maxwell’s judgment was sound. For all that, you want capital, and unless you can interest large investors you won’t go very far. Well, I might help.”

“At the beginning Maxwell reckoned on your joining us,” said Bob. “Since he claimed you let us down, I don’t see why you want to come in now.”

Alsager smiled. “Maxwell made a proposition. I was interested, but I resolved to hold the proposition over. When I speculate I bet on the location, the business chances, and the man who runs the undertaking. Well, I studied your partner and soon knew him for a crook.” He paused and resumed in a meaning voice: “For one thing, when the locomotive knocked you out I was on the wharf.”

“Ah!” said Bob, with some sharpness. “Maxwell declared it was not you!”

“Perhaps you can see his object? Anyhow, when I got to the steamer a crowd blocked the gangway and I walked about. You watched the gangway and perhaps did not see me turn back. Maxwell faced the train. He jumped and tried to pull you off the rails; but before he did jump he hesitated.”

Bob’s look got very stern. He gave Alsager a searching glance and then nodded, as if he were satisfied.

“I think I see! Duff had gone North, but I was about and the fellow wanted to be left alone. All the same, Maxwell is my wife’s brother and we must let it go for good. In the meantime, perhaps your thinking me a crook wouldn’t be remarkable.”

“You have enlightened me on that point; Maxwell did not want you about! Then a few days ago *The Colonist* printed a rather romantic narrative.”

Bob colored. “Although I agreed to the newspapers’ getting the story, I’m not accountable for the shape it took. In fact, when I saw *The Colonist* I was very mad.”

“I imagined something like that,” Alsager remarked with a twinkle. “You, however, don’t dispute the statements.”

“Did *you* put the people wise about my mortgaging the ranch and so forth, Tom?” Bob asked Duff sternly.

Duff laughed. “Not at all. My object, like yours, was to indicate that you had nothing to do with Wilmot’s getting shot. To talk about your mortgaging the ranch was Ellmer’s notion, but the newspaper man approved. In fact, he declared the story was great. However, when I saw their narrative in print I did not get mad. After all, I’m a real-estate agent, and I thought the story would help the settlement. The boys rather like theatrical romance.”

“Now we can go ahead,” Alsager remarked. “I want a useful factory site and I have the support of two or three big-business men. We are willing to

speculate on a pulp-mill and perhaps some other developments, but we are not keen about helping you carry a bankrupt settlement. To begin with, if you will frankly state your embarrassments——”

Bob did so, and for a time Alsager smoked and calculated. Then he put up his notebook.

“If all goes as you expect, I think the mill will pay and we can give Helensville a good push-off. For all that, I see some obstacles and our agreement must cover the risk. Well, my proposition is——”

On the whole Bob was satisfied, but Duff disputed about particulars. At length Alsager nodded and lighted his pipe.

“That’s fixed! When we go back to town we’ll draft the agreement and record the sale.”

“I think the agreement’s just,” Duff remarked and gave Bob a smile. “You pulled a big load and I came near owning we were beat; but it’s done with. We’re going to make good.”

A few minutes afterwards Bob went to look for Helen and narrated all he thought she ought to know. Helen’s eyes sparkled and her glance was proud.

“Oh, Bob, our luck has turned and you have conquered!” she said. “For your sake and mine, I wanted you to conquer. If you were beaten, I’d have felt I had cheated you.”

“Sometimes you’re ridiculous,” said Bob and kissed her.

Helen looked up and gave him an embarrassed smile. “Perhaps I was ridiculous, not long ago, but Harry is my brother. Well, he is gone, and I begin to hope he may be a useful man. But I have got you and you are all I want.”

PIONEERS

FLAGS blew out in the light wind, tossed in the sun, and drooped. On the roof of Ellmer's hotel the crosses and the silver stars shone side by side; the staff at Inglis's store carried one flag and when it languidly unrolled one saw the gray beaver on the broad red field. In the street the Helensville band played the *Maple Leaf*, rather out of tune, until the musicians stopped to get their breath and the throb of the rapids rolled across the pines.

Two or three cars waited opposite the hotel and when a group came down the steps the shouts from the crowd drowned the band. Helen and Mrs. Duff went in front and smiled, but Helen's color was high and her glance was proud. Bob's look was embarrassed and to put the ladies in the first car was some relief. Then he turned, as if to wait for the others, but Ellmer pushed him and Duff in. Alsager, Inglis and two city gentlemen got in the next, and cars and band started for the new factory.

Branches of pine and cedar covered the veranda posts, but the houses were quiet and the stores were shut. The Helensville folk were in the street and followed the automobiles. Sometimes Helen turned, and studying the crowd, recaptured her journey to the landing when the settlement was new. She saw tired men and women labor over the broken trail and the tractor bogged in the muskeg. Fatigue did not daunt the strangers; they pushed on with high hope and did not know the risk they ran. Then Helen blushed, for she remembered that Maxwell knew. The people had since borne much and for a time hope was nearly gone, but they sprang from stubborn pioneering stock, and although the fight was hard they had conquered.

Yet Bob was accountable for their doing so and the triumph was really his. He had given all that he had, and when he gave, thought to get nothing back. He had planned and labored, borne the doubts of men he helped, and gone to prison. Bob was not romantic, but he was very stanch. All he undertook to do he did, and he had carried out Harry's rash experiment. For Helensville to honor him was very proper.

The cars stopped at a clearing. The logs were gone, the brush was burned, and at one spot between rows of posts a concrete square marked the

sawmill engine bed. At the other side was the pulp-factory frame, a towering skeleton of lumber and steel. From the staff at the top swung a rolled-up flag. Groups of workmen occupied the high cross-beams and chain tackles carried a heavy girder. In the background one saw the concrete power-house, and a big pipe, braced by iron standards to the rock. The crowd filled the clearing, the cars stopped, and Inglis helped Helen up the steps to a platform on the front of the frame.

“The stringers and plates are up and the boys are waiting for the king-brace to tie the block,” he said. “Well, I stand for the Helensville citizens, and they sent me to state that now we are going to fix the last beam they reckon the job is yours.”

He gave Helen a thin line, and for a moment she looked about. She saw rows of faces turned to the platform. Nobody moved and but for the turmoil of the river all was very quiet. Helen’s heart beat. In a sense, it was strange, but the people had chosen her to finish her husband’s work. Then she saw him smile and she pulled the line.

An engine snorted, chains rattled, and the big girder slowly rose. A foreman signaled and Helen pulled the line again. The girder tilted, swung round smoothly and dropped a foot or two. Then hammers rang on steel and stopped, and somebody said, “She’s fixed. All’s fast!”

The crowd swayed, rows of heads were tilted back, the band began to play the *Maple Leaf*, and at the top of the towering frame the flag blew out. Helen was highly strung and when she saw the red folds snap and get straight keen emotion carried her away. The beaver, carrying the cut branch, stood for useful effort, but above the beaver the crosses shone. The settlement had not sprung up. It had cost sweat and tears and heartbreak, and now it stood for something, for which the crosses stood, that was greater than industry. Her eyes were wet, but when the crowd cheered she thrilled and smiled.

Then a whistle pierced the shouts, and in the main street electric lights on tall standards shone a strange pale blue in the sun. Store windows glimmered, and then the lights went out and Helen faced the citizens.

“All is fast; the tie is fixed,” she said in a quiet voice that carried far. “The work we not long since hardly hoped to carry out will soon be finished and will stand. Perhaps you ought to have got another to fix the last brace, but I have done so for my husband, and if I have not earned your trust, you know him——”

“Sure we do! We like Bob,” said one, and the crowd began to cheer. “’Rah for Caverhill!”

Helen waited and resumed: “I have found out that to get one must give, and Helensville has cost much. Some have paid by splendid effort and some by bitter strain, but all have paid, and now the happy reckoning is come. Happy or not, I think the reckoning does come and we must own our debts. To-day I am moved, as you are moved, because we share the triumph of those who get their just reward. I wish you good luck and the prosperity you have fairly won!”

They cheered, but the cheer was not noisy, for some were puzzled and some thought they saw a light. Mrs. Caverhill had helped pay for Helensville; the settlement had broken her brother. Then Alsager went to the platform.

“Mr. Inglis states you are willing to hear me and you want to know the company’s plans. Well, the directors have bet high on Helensville’s prospering, and since we don’t like to lose, we have got to help you push ahead. When we have started up the factory, we expect——”

For two or three minutes he talked about the company’s plans for founding fresh industries; and then paused and smiled. “I believe we’re going far and our part in the city is to get the money that supplies the motive power. Help like that is useful and we claim some reward; but before we butted in others had got to work. Well, I want you to think about the start.”

Alsager turned and giving Helen a level glance, resumed: “Progress implies imagination, boys, and in the beginning a man studied the Shadow valley. He saw woods and water, oats and timothy grass, a bunch of cattle and two or three homesteads. A pretty picture! On the surface, so to speak, that was all there was to it; but the man had talent and saw much others did not. He saw the water drive turbines, and factories grow along the bank. In the background was a settlement; rows of little shiplap houses, stores, and a hotel; the settlement you know.

“But the picture, like dream pictures, changed. The little houses, the ugly rubbish dumps, the rough plank sidewalks melted; and churches, schools, banks and office blocks got distinct. The city by the river was shining concrete and steel. The man was moved and got busy. I think we owe him something, for if he did not do all he meant to do he cleared the ground for us.

“When you undertake a big scheme, imagination isn’t all you want. You want constructive talent and grit that doesn’t flinch. Well, when the dream was going and the cold morning broke, another man took control. I don’t know if he saw all the first saw, but he saw the obstacles and he cut the rocks that stopped advance. You know him, boys; his motto’s a square deal, his word goes, and he was willing to stand for his partners. Looked as if it would break him, but you can’t break a man like that. He used up his bank-roll, he mortgaged his ranch, he pawned all he had. He meant to see you out and now I reckon you’ll agree Bob Caverhill made good!”

When the cheers died away Bob went to the platform. His face was red and he hesitated, but his glance was calm.

“I want to thank you for the honor to my wife, but maybe your getting her to fix the top beam was justified,” he said. “She believed in Helensville, and if I helped, I helped because she thought I ought. For all that, I did not build the settlement. You have got to organize effort, and sometimes I planned and sometimes, when I was forced, I bossed, but maybe the best I did was when I punched the drill. My friend who helped when all looked dark talked about a concrete city by the water-front, and if you believe in Helensville like that, you can put her there. But imagination’s not my talent and Mr. Alsager carries me back to the beginning, when I saw the boys who did build Helensville hit the broken trail.

“They carried all they’d got; the tools they meant to use, a few bills in their wallets. They were tired, but they didn’t stop; they shoved along in the dust and they have not stopped yet. One needs imagination to state where they will go. Well, the locomotive follows the packhorse and white men use a number of expensive tools, but, so long as Canada calls for pioneers, the ax and the saw go first.”

The crowd stormed the platform and somebody brought a door. Bob, unwilling and embarrassed, was carried in front of a cheering mob to the feast in the shade of the woods, but Helen, following with Ellmer, sometimes turned her head. The men who carried Bob in triumph had not long since wanted to carry Maxwell, in derision, on a rail. At the feast she gracefully played the leading lady’s part, but her emotions were mixed and at length to steal away with Bob was a relief.

In the evening they went to the homestead veranda. The green and red sunset shone behind the pines, but the light began to go and trails of fire and falling colored stars marked the rockets at Helensville. Mrs. Duff and her

husband had not returned and the ranch hands were at the settlement. By and by Bob unfolded a paper and lighted the lamp.

“When we camped for a week’s fishing, you liked it in the valley by the peak?”

Helen had liked the camp. For one thing, the excursion marked the turning of Bob’s luck. When they started for the woods the strain they had long borne was gone. At length Bob could relax and Helen knew he knew her love and trust were his. Moreover the spot was beautiful. A stream came down from the snow and filled a calm green lake; the mountains cut the cold winds, and only the soft Chinook touched the peaceful hollow.

“If there is a lovelier spot than Shadow Lake, I think it’s the valley by the peak,” she said. “I was happy at our camp. Sometimes I recapture the shining snow and the fresh green of the maples among the dark pines. I would like to go back.”

“Where maples grow, the soil is good,” Bob remarked with a smile and gave Helen the paper he had unfolded.

Helen saw two drawings. One was the plan of a house. The other was the elevation, and noting the deep veranda, the sawn scrolls and tapered posts, she thought it attractive.

“The architect is clever. The rooms are spacious and well planned. But whose is the house?”

“It will be ours if you are willing for me to build it in the peak valley.”

“Oh, Bob!” said Helen. “You don’t mean to stay at the lake?”

“If you would sooner stay, we will stay.”

For a few moments Helen said nothing. Alsager’s picture of the concrete city had some charm for her. She thought refinement would follow industrial progress, she liked cultivated friends and saw herself ruling a transformed Helensville. Then she was ambitious for Bob, and she imagined the tide that had begun to flow would carry him far. For all that, she had before indulged her ambition and knew the punishment she had borne was just.

“You are not rash,” she said. “I expect you have weighed things?”

“I want you to help me weigh things,” Bob replied. “The ranch is mortgaged, but I can sell for a larger sum than I borrowed, and my shares in the development company will soon be worth much. In fact, it looks as if I might get rich, but we’ll let this go. Not long since I got entangled by a

business speculation. Perhaps my luck was good, because I was able to put all straight, but sometimes I was scared, and I own I've had enough. You see, the job was not my job. That's important."

Helen saw its importance. Although Bob had saved Helensville, he had rather done so by stubborn courage and honesty that commanded others' confidence than by talent for business. Then he was, unconsciously, something of a pastoral aristocrat. He was keen to labor, but he hated to traffic. Well, her part was plain. Bob must follow his bent and she must play up.

"My dear," she said, "I am willing for you to sell the ranch. If you are satisfied, I shall be happy at our new homestead."

Bob kissed her. "I knew your pluck, but I don't want you to pay for my satisfaction."

"Ah," said Helen, "I have paid for my past selfishness, and to leave the settlement will not cost me much. Besides, where you go I want to go."

Two or three months afterward, Bob, one morning, stopped Helen's horse at the top of a steep hill. He carried a bright ax and his overalls were torn. Behind was Shadow Valley, and a row of loaded packhorses, guided by muscular choppers, labored up the hill. In front, thin mist rolled back from the pines clothing a deep hollow and the white peak cut the sky. Bob swung his ax and a small tree that blocked the way fell. Helen thought his clearing her path was somehow significant.

"We are crossing the height of land," he said. "If you turn, you can see the smoke of the settlement; the dark trail is from the stack at the new sawmill."

Helen knew when they went down a few yards she would for long be cut off from all for which the settlement stood, but she did not turn. She had borne much at Helensville and was content to follow her husband into the quiet woods.

"I'd sooner look in front. We go forward, Bob," she said and resumed with a smile: "Like you, I hear the call, 'Pioneers! Oh, Pioneers!'"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Bush-Rancher* by Harold Bindloss]