

HER
MOUNTAIN LOVER

BY

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I

A MEETING IN THE LOW COUNTRY

THE young miner uttered a shout of protest

“Say, now, doc, don’t do that. What could I do in London? Why, they’d sure eat me up there. I can’t even count their durn money. I won’t do it. That’s askin’ too much of a pardner.”

The Chicago member of the firm smiled. “Jim, you’re taking on too much worry. They’re a slow-going lot over there. You’ll have plenty of time to count your change while they’re getting out o’ their chairs. The question is, have we a good property or not?”

“Property’s all right, but—”

“Do we need money, or don’t we?”

“Yes. But suppose I don’t—”

“You’ve *got to*. That mine properly handled is worth live hundred thousand dollars, and the thing for you to do is to interest some English ‘sport’ who has money to throw at the cats, and get him to take a half-interest and help us develop the property.”

“But see here, doc. I was raised in the hills. I’m no water-dog. I can’t paddle a stone-boat. It makes me seasick to see a girl shake a table-cloth. I can’t go over there in a boat.”

“You can’t walk.”

“A Pullman’s good enough for me. I guess I’ll put off goin’ to Europe till I can go by train.” The young fellow left his chair, and began pacing the office floor. “See here, doc; I don’t want to gigg back—I’m a sure-nough pardner. Say the word, and I’ll jump a cayuse and back him clear to the Yukon valley; but this going to England in a boat makes my fur bristle; it does for sure.”

The doctor, turning in his noiseless swivel chair, followed his partner with amused glance. “Jim, the thing is settled. It wouldn’t do to send a ‘slick one’ on such business; he’d queer the whole show. No; you’re the man. The tone of your voice carries conviction. You got me to go into a hole when no one else could win a nickel out o’ my pocket with the best dirt in the pan. My going is out of the question. It wouldn’t do to leave Maidie and the babes, and, besides, I’ve got to hold on to my practice here till you make a raise. You remember I’ve kept the thing going now for two years.”

The younger man’s handsome face grew tender. “That’s the God’s truth, doc. It’s time I made a break. The stuff is in there all right, all right, and we’ve got to have help to get it out. I see all that.” He put both hands in his pockets and asked: “When had I better start?”

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“It’s between us—strictly?”

“Why, sure thing.”

“Double your price. Good morning.”

Jim gave out a yell which scared a mother eagle from her nest high on the shoulder of Lizard Mountain.

Cuyler turned and came back. “See here, Jim. Before letting anybody else in, see me, will you? I may have a scheme.”

“All right,” replied Jim, and wired the doctor: “Things are bilun’. Come on.”

Three days later he received a letter from the doctor in answer to his telegram:

Your wire only confirmed me. I’ve said nothing further to Twombly, who is too much interested in Bessie to care whether school keeps or not. But don’t you worry, old man; he’s overdoing the thing. She’s getting a little weary of him, and Mrs. Ramsdell tells me very privately that your pulling out was a good move. It taught the girl a lesson. She’s wild to get started West, and I notice Twombly has to just about drag her out to play tennis. If she knew just how you feel about the London girl she’d be happier. I told her to mind her own business and be a good little girl and I’d take her out to see you. We’ll leave here Sunday night on the Santa Fé. We’ll probably lay over a day at the Springs, and be with you Wed. night We can let Twombly in on a quarter-interest or not, just as you think best. If you’ve turned up the actual ore of the Ella Grace vein, we don’t need any outside aid. So long.

Yours, Doc.

XV

ON THE GRIZZLY BEAR TRAIL

JIM, imperturbable and serene, met the party at the station. He had gone back to his rightful character, and looked very handsome in a loose blue shirt, broad white hat, and dark trousers belted at the waist

“Howdy, folks, howdy!” he said in general greeting, and shook hands all around without hurry or embarrassment “Glad to see you all safe. I’ve herded the peaks all the week fer ye. They’re all here.”

“Oh, Mr. Matteson, how cool you look!” said Bessie. “And oh, isn’t it wonderful here!”

Mrs. Ramsdell was gasping, also. “It is like the Alps. No wonder you grew enthusiastic about it.”

“By Jove!” called Twombly, “it’s more like the Andes. You know, I’d no idea it was to be like this.”

“Where is the mine? Can we see it from here?” asked Bessie, eagerly.

“Now, doc, I reckon you’d better corral this herd of tenderfeet and get ’em off” the platform,” said Jim. “The ’bus is waitin’ to take you all to a hotel; and I—”

“A hotel!” cried Bessie. “Oh, I thought we were going to camp

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out in the woods.”

“Time enough for that,” put in the doctor. “I want to see one square meal at the Occidental before getting down to beans and bacon. That buffet-car lunch was a hollow mockery.”

Jim bundled them all into the ’bus without ceremony, and they were at the hotel before Bessie had time to exclaim twice. No sooner were they in their rooms than the women began again to cry out and exult over the splendor of the mountains. They ran out upon the piazza to watch the light as it climbed the highest slopes and lighted them into unspeakable glory, second only to the clouds themselves. The women stood with clasped hands, but not in silence.

“Isn’t it heavenly! Oh, if I could only paint it before it goes!” Bessie murmured in a sort of awe.

“I begin to understand why Willard always runs away to the mountains when he has a moment’s leisure,” said Mrs. Ramsdell. “I came to Denver with him once, but declined to go farther. I had no conception of this.”

“Wasn’t he fine?” Bessie said musingly.

“Who, dear?”

“Why—Jim, of course.”

“Oh, yes, indeed! He looks at home out here, and has quite forgotten his London trip, I hope. I like his rugged strength.”

“So do I,” replied Bessie. “But I never can forgive him for running away without saying good-by to me.”

“Well, you know I never blamed him very much. You certainly flirted unconscionably with Mr. Twombly that night.”

“Well, suppose I did? There was that London affair to be explained, and Mr. Matteson didn’t appear to think it worth while to refer to it at all.”

“Perhaps it was a painful subject.”

“You said that before,” said Bessie, pouting. “I don’t like it. I don’t see why it should be painful. If he didn’t encourage her, then his conscience is clear.”

Ramsdell came out on the piazza, smiling and rubbing his hands as if he were the proprietor of the view and anxious to sell it

“Well, girls, what do you think of this? Up to the advance notice?”

“Oh, it is beyond anything!”

“Wait till you tread the Grizzly Bear trail; then you’ll shout.”

“We will not wait. We are going to shout now,” replied Bessie. “There can’t be anything finer than this. It is impossible.”

“Where is Jim?” asked Mrs. Ramsdell.

“Gone up the trail.”

Bessie’s face lengthened. “Why did he run away again?”

“To get out of danger, I reckon.”

“Danger! What danger?”

“I don’t know; but I think he was tempted to kill Twombly. But, girls, I’ve got great news—” he lowered his voice.

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“What is it?”

“The Ella Grace has struck a wonderful vein of free-milling ore and doubled the value of our claim. We don’t need Twombly at all.”

“Oh, goody, goody!” Bessie began to dance. “I knew I’d bring good luck”

“But, Willard,” said Mrs. Ramsdell, “I don’t see—why that should—”

“Because, my dear, the Ella Grace and the Concordia are now on the same vein, and we are in exact line. We thought we had the same vein as the Concordia, but we didn’t know it. Now we are certain, and Jim has an offer from the Concordia people of half a million for a half-interest.”

The women stared in silence for a moment; then Bessie said:

“A half-million! And half of that is Jim’s?”

“Now will you be good!” exclaimed the doctor. “I guess Twombly’s nose is awry. But let me tell you this, my girl: you’ve got to eat humble hoe-cake with Jim.”

“Well, I don’t think I *shall*. Let him take his gold and go to England and get that ‘society woman’ if he wishes. I won’t put a straw in his way.”

“If you put a balsam-fir in his way he’d jump it, I reckon,” laughed the doctor, in boyish glee. “But come, supper is waiting below. We must eat to live if we live to eat. All the world is ours to-night. Tomorrow we will go to see our golden mountain.”

Twombly came down to supper looking very well cared for indeed; but Bessie was thinking of Jim, and of how graceful and big and *natural* looked. He fitted into the landscape, while Twombly grew more and more unpleasantly artificial by contrast, and his attentions at the moment were wearisome. She was bitterly disappointed in Jim. If he had only shown some constraint; but he did not. On the contrary, he was perfectly at his ease, and his eyes looked into hers like those of a casual acquaintance. He did not seem to notice what she wore or—or—anything. He didn’t seem to care what any one thought or felt.

“Jim will be down in the morning,” the doctor was saying, “and we’ll all go up to the mine and take dinner. He had to go home to set a ham a-b’ilin’ and wash up the table-linen. He’s profoundly titivated at the idea of having a couple of women to dinner.”

“He didn’t look it,” replied Mrs. Ramsdell. “He seemed very much in his element.”

“I don’t think he cares in the least about our coming,” said Bessie.

“If he did he wouldn’t show it,” replied the doctor.

After supper they all went out and strolled up a side street to a little knoll which commanded a view of the valley and the town, and there sat to watch the sun go down. For the most part they sat in silence, while the gloom deepened over the river and the lesser peaks grew cold, like torches blown out one by one.

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The valley was nearly circular in shape, and had been formed, apparently, by the coming together of two swift streams. "These first cliffs are three thousand feet in almost sheer rise, while the true rim of the cañon or valley, that dove-gray amphitheater, is five thousand feet higher than where we sit; and lastly, that peak, old Lizard Head, is seven thousand feet above us." The doctor gave these figures with a sort of proprietary gusto. "This is the Wagon Wheel, and that is the Gap. The Rio Grande enters the Gap and stops. When the Rio Grande stops it is for cause. There is no other outlet, save by burro-trail."

"What is a burro-trail?" asked Bessie.

"You'll know to-morrow. And put on your divided skirts. Jim will put you on a man's saddle; it isn't safe to ride the Grizzly Bear trail woman wise."

The women looked at each other slyly, as if to say, "Well, now the trail is upon us."

Suddenly, during a pause in their conversation, a faint crackling, rattling noise was heard, and a far-off halloo. These sounds seemed above them on the almost perpendicular wall of the mountain.

"What is that?" both women inquired.

The doctor listened. "Sounds like a burro-train." He listened again. "That's what it is—a burro-train on the North Star trail."

The women rose and looked upward. "Willard," said Mrs. Ramsdell, "you don't mean to tell me that there is a living creature up there—a four-footed one?"

"I suspect there are about twenty," he replied, scanning the cliff. "There they come!" he exclaimed, pointing to a jutting shoulder of the cliff. "See them!" Round a lofty point the train of patient little animals crept, their sharp hoofs tossing the pebbles in their path.

"Why, they look like lambs!"

"How little they are!" exclaimed Bessie.

"They are about a third of a mile above us," laughed the doctor. "See the man! He's little, too. It's a long way up to them."

Thenceforth the sunset was forgotten, and the women watched the descending train with breathless anxiety.

"Oh, the poor little things! Suppose one of them should fall!"

"Why do they weave back and forth that way?" asked Bessie.

"No other way to get down. That's the way the trail runs on steep slopes. They couldn't come head on."

"A trail! Is *that* a trail?"

"That's a trail."

"Is the trail to our mine like that?"

"Yes, only worse."

Mrs. Ramsdell fetched a deep sigh. "Well, I guess I don't care to see the mine, thank you."

The doctor changed his tune. "Oh, it is by no means as dangerous as it looks," he hastened to say.

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"I'm not afraid," said Bessie; "only I do think it mean to load those little things and then hurry them down such steep places. Oh, see them go round that rock! Why, they're right on the edge of it. Oh, dear! They'll surely fall."

"Don't worry," the doctor said reassuringly. "You couldn't throw one of those little chaps from the trail. They go over that rock twice a day all the year round, and never slip a cog."

"This is all immensely foreign to my notion of America," put in Twombly. "If that driver were dressed in a conical hat and wore a gay sash, I could imagine myself in Spain. I'd forgotten that your miners use these little asses."

"We borrowed most of our packing ideas from Mexico, and these burros come from the Mexican settlements to the south of us."

At last, moving like some smoothly geared articulated machines, the little beasts came past. Their heads were low, their ears flapped rhythmically, and their little feet made a pattering noise. They bore their burdens without apparent effort, and yet each carried, the doctor said, one hundred and fifty pounds of ore.

Not till they had passed did the women give another thought to the mighty pageantry of flushing, fading, passing color; and as it was growing dark and cool, they began to walk slowly back toward their hotel, cloyed with color and the grandiose, glad of the commonplace walls and furniture of their rooms.

Meanwhile Jim, on his way up the trail, was thinking of the change in Bessie. The sight of her had shaken all his firm resolutions, and started him dreaming of a home, and a wife to light and warm the home. Maybe the doctor was right. "I'll find out," he said, in answer to his doubts.

At breakfast next morning Mrs. Ramsdell flatly refused to consider mounting a man's saddle.

"Very well," replied her husband; "then you must walk all the bad places, and that means nearly three miles. I'd advise stout shoes in any case; the road is rough."

"I'm not afraid," said Bessie. "Everybody rides that way out here."

"I don't care; that doesn't help me any," Mrs. Ramsdell replied.

Once outside the hotel, they found Jim busy with a little herd of saddle-horses. He was going from one to the other, examining stirrups and straining at the cinches. He wore a loose blue shirt with a small red-brown tie, and his trousers were tucked into a sort of tan-colored boot with side laces, the modern miner's boot. He looked extremely alert and very handsome and masterful as he moved deftly about his work.

"Good morning, Mr. Matteson. Which is my pony?" called Bessie.

"Right here," he replied, patting a small roan mare dozing with lax lips. "Safe as a clock."

As Jim took charge of the company his thought returned to the

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make-believe packtrain he had organized and directed for Mary, and it seemed to him at the moment too absurd to have even been a dream. It was of another world. He shook himself clear of the recollection, and his voice was clear and jovial as he said:

“Doctor, you take the bay, and put Mrs. Ramsdell on the sorrel. Twombly, you jump that pinto, and bring up the rear.”

“Aren’t you going to ride?” asked Bessie.

“No; I’m going to walk and look after the rest of you tenderfeet,” he replied. “All ready, now.” He put down his hand, and she put her foot into it readily enough; but her heart filled with a sudden timidity as she felt the power in his hand and arm.

The moment she touched the saddle she flushed. “Oh, I forgot! It’s a man’s saddle; I must get on differently. Look the other way, please.”

Jim smiled, and did as he was bid. When he faced her again she was seated astride, very self-conscious and flushed, but determined.

Jim looked at her as though nothing unusual had been said. “Now are you all right? Can you stand in your stirrups?” She rose on tiptoe. “That’s about right. Now take the reins in your left hand. I’ll lead the old mare, so you needn’t bother to rein. Just take it as easy as you can.” He had time now to look at the others. “Are you all set, doc? Line up, boys!”

As the horses fell into line, Bessie turned a radiant face to the doctor. “Oh, isn’t this fine!”

“Have all the joy you can now,” he malevolently replied. “We may be obliged to blindfold you both before we round Hell’s Corner.”

“No, sir,” cried Mrs. Ramsdell; “I go to my destruction with my eyes open.”

“As you prefer,” the doctor replied, as if yielding a point. For the first half-hour they kept the broad wagon-road, and Bessie exclaimed: “Oh, this is splendid! I like trailing.”

Jim smiled up at her. “When you get back to this road again you’ll know what a mountain trail is.”

“I want to know. I want you to teach me,” she replied. Her eyes fell before Jim’s searching glance.

A little farther on he halted the train and came alongside her pony to tighten the cinch. “We hit the trail now,” he said.

The doctor dismounted, and tugged at the main cinch of his own saddle. Twombly was left to take care of himself, but he seemed to be getting on very well.

“Do you see that line across that black slide?” asked Jim of Bessie.

“Away up there? Yes.”

“We cross there.”

“Oh, no; it can’t be possible!”

“All ready? Forward, march!” called Jim, and his voice rang out

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with such determination as men voice when going into battle. He intended Bessie to feel the solemnity of entering upon the Grizzly Bear trail. He led the way into an obscure, narrow path which left the road and angled away among some small pines and shrubs. It ran for some minutes to the right, then turned abruptly to the left, and climbed again. As she rose, a sort of exaltation seized upon the girl, and she grew pale with a pallor that was beautiful to see.

"Oh, this is wonderful!" she exclaimed in a voice heard only by Jim. "Now I understand your love for the high country."

He looked back at her with a smile which she could not interpret "Wait till we put the clouds below us," he replied.

The hills she had considered mountains sank low, dwarfed by the kingly peaks that rose beyond them. The town looked like a handful of a child's building-blocks. The air grew perceptibly cooler and crisper. Immense snow-fields flashed into view, lying like capes of ermine on the northern side of looming peaks. Faint clouds began to come into being far to the south, and still the pathway climbed.

Just as Bessie was getting used to the doubling of the trail, they came out upon an open space, the track of an avalanche, it seemed.

"Now don't be scared," called Jim. "Whatever happens, hang to your saddle—and nothing will happen. We've got to cross this slide."

The trail led nearly athwart the loose bed of shale which hung but insecurely on the slope. To Bessie each step of her horse seemed to threaten disaster. Below, for hundreds of feet, the slide ran so steep that it seemed a touch would set it in motion, carrying everything before it.

The girl clung to the pommel of her saddle and looked straight ahead, finding comfort and security in the sight of Jim's powerful and confident figure. It seemed to her that danger thickened at every step; but Jim called back cheerily: "Don't be scared. It's all right. It looks worse than it is."

Something in his face and voice made her very happy, and she smiled with a brave little contortion of the lips, which moved him deeply.

When they reached the firm trail beyond the slide, he halted and came back to her side.

"How do you like it—so far?"

"I don't like 'slides.' Are we over the worst of it?"

A scream from Mrs. Ramsdell prevented his answer. The doctor, walking beside her horse, had crowded him off the path, and he was sliding slowly down the rattling shale.

"Hang on!" shouted Jim. "He'll come up again."

The horse realized the situation, and, struggling bravely, soon regained the path. When they reached firm footing, Mrs. Ramsdell turned a white, accusing face upon her husband.

"Willard, I am going to walk."

"I wouldn't, my dear. You're over the worst of it," he replied, and

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persuaded her to remain in the saddle while they began to climb again.

"Where are we going?" called Bessie. "I can't keep direction, for the life of me."

"We turn right under that ledge," said Jim, pointing to a huge jutting cliff. "Right where you see that man the trail rounds the elbow."

"How small he looks! He's no bigger than a pin. Is that the very top?"

"Oh, no; but the trail is comparatively level after we reach that. It's a long way to the mine yet."

The mounting was now so rapid that Bessie was forced to cling to the saddle with both hands, while the mare toiled terribly, lunging upward for a few rods, and stopping on the turns to rest. These moments gave time for a word or two, and each moment Jim grew distinctly more lover-like. He was indeed powerfully moved by the eager, wonder-filled face of the girl, who looked like some adorable child, with her hair blowing about her flushed cheeks.

"Isn't it nice to think the little burros don't have to carry their sacks of ore up these awful trails?"

Jim did not tell her that they carried lumber and sawmills, grindstones and stoves, and big plates of boiler-iron, and boxes and barrels. He left her in unpaired ignorance.

At last they reached the big rock, and Jim again halted and came back to say, "You'd better get off and rest," and putting his arm around her, took her from the pony and set her on her feet, all in so matter-of-fact a way that she could not cry out or even refer to it.

"Perhaps he thinks that is the way to help ladies off," she thought.

"Now we are going to cover a piece of trail that will make you nervous; but you'll be all right if you stay right by your horse. You can walk if you feel like it; but it's just as safe on the horse, and a mighty sight easier. What do you say?"

"I'll do as you think best," she replied; "but I thought you said the trail was level?"

"It is; but it's a little rough underfoot, and almighty mean to look at."

"If you lead my horse I won't be scared," she said, with a smile which made him very tender of her. He turned to Mrs. Ramsdell. "I'd advise you to walk, unless you feel all right in the head."

Mrs. Ramsdell stared with round and frightened eyes.

"Why, please?"

"The ticklish part of the trail is to come," said the doctor.

"I thought you said the worst was over."

"Reckon you'd better ride ahead, doc, and let her walk just ahead of me, so I can keep an eye on her."

The women looked at each other in a wordless communication of terror. Then Mrs. Ramsdell faced her husband. "Willard, what have you got us into? I'm going back."

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Bessie deserted her. "Oh, no. Let's go on. I'm not afraid."

"That's the talk," said Jim.

Twombly, who was sticking to his saddle to the dismay of his horse, called out: "Bravo! Let us proceed."

The doctor was disturbed. "You mustn't turn back now, when the very finest scenery is coming. My dear, be a brave lady."

"Scenery is of no value to a lady with a broken neck," replied Mrs. Ramsdell. "If I go on I shall walk."

The doctor helped his wife to the ground, and then rode by, leaving her horse to follow just ahead of Twombly. He was a little disgusted with her unreasonable terror.

"Line up! Line up!" called Jim, and the horses began to move. "Fall in just ahead of me," he said to Mrs. Ramsdell, "and look straight ahead. I'll take care of you."

Bessie fixed her eyes on the doctor's pony and rode resolutely on. As he reached the big rock the pony seemed to be walking calmly out into space to his destruction; but just on the verge, while outlined on the sky like a figure on a monument, he turned on his hoofs as if on a pivot, and disappeared. A moment later the girl found herself gazing over her horse's head into an abyss a thousand feet deep. Her scalp lifted in a spasm of mortal terror; she clutched her steed by the mane, and bowed her head. As she did so a vast report broke from an unseen mine and went crashing away from cliff to cliff with portentous rumbling as of certain doom. For a moment the girl believed she had fallen from the cliff; then she became aware of the calm movement of her horse, which neither started nor hastened her step at the monstrous crash.

Jim was saying, "Go on! There is no danger if you walk straight." He had one hand under Mrs. Ramsdell's shoulder, and was steadying her. She seemed about to faint.

The trail was indeed fearsome. It appeared to be nothing but a seam in a prodigious wall of rock three thousand feet in height. A stratum of slate had been picked out and crushed with hammers to make a pack-trail which was wide enough, where they stood, for safe passage, but appeared to narrow in the distance to a path as dangerous as a half-inch cable swung above Niagara. Far down below, the Grizzly Bear was roaring, and around old Lizard Head the thunder-clouds were developing with enormous power and celerity.

Jim looked back at Bessie. "It's all right I won't get you into danger. Come on."

Mrs. Ramsdell tottered forward, encouraged by her husband and by Jim, until she reached a broader portion of the ledge, when she regained a little of her confidence.

"Keep your eyes high! Don't look down!" called Jim, and Bessie lifted her head. A sudden exaltation seized upon her. The rolling clouds on the high peaks, the roaring of the savage stream far below,

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the sound of the wind on the opposite wall of the cañon, the stupendous heights and depths, moved her so profoundly that she forgot her fears and rode forward with hands clutched in the hair of her loyal mount. Whenever she felt sick with terror of the abyss, she fixed her eyes on Jim's tall form, and was made brave by admiration of his grace and power.

Twombly rode along, exclaiming at intervals: "By Jove, now, this is impressive! It's like the Andes. How high are we now?" he called to Jim.

"Less than ten thousand feet," replied Jim. "The trail is perfectly level now for two miles," he explained to Bessie.

As she gained in confidence, the girl began to look up and down and to measure the immensity of the mountain wall, round which the trail ran like a girdle.

Suddenly a piercing, peculiar whistle sounded, followed instantly by a terrific crash of thunder, out of which Jim's voice rose: "Turn out, doc!"

"All right," called the doctor.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Ramsdell, whose fright returned in full flood. "Was it a mine exploding?"

"A burro-train. We must reach a 'turnout' before they do."

Across a side cañon and round a sharp point, a drove of laden burros crawled in single file. It was precisely as if they were walking an invisible tight-rope. They slid across the face of the mountain like a string of beads on an oiled wire.

At the head of the side cañon a widening of the roadway permitted the two trains to pass, and there the doctor drew up. Riding his horse to the very edge of the cliff, he dismounted, and came back to meet his wife. "Come, my dear; there isn't a particle of danger."

Jim came back to Bessie's aid. "You'd better get off, I reckon. It's a tight squeeze, and sometimes those little jackasses get to crowding."

After helping her to alight, he led her horse close to the doctor's beast, and then, taking the girl by the arm, stood beside her and very close to her, with the horses crowded to the edge of the rock.

Bessie looked up at him archly, expecting to meet his glance, but he was looking away at the oncoming burros with an anxious wrinkle on his brow. As the little beasts caught sight of the women they began to weave about and point their ears with concern.

"Whoo-oosh!" yelled the driver. "Go on there, you fools!"

"Don't crowd 'em!" shouted Jim. "Give 'em time. Don't you see the women here? Give 'em time."

Bessie realized that it was not quite so safe as Jim had tried to make her feel it to be.

"Don't take hold of the horse," he commanded. "Take hold of me. Don't get scared if they crowd us a little."

The leader of the train, with bright eyes fixed on Mrs. Ramsdell's skirt, sidled by; but the second beast paused, and those behind

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pressed on.

“Whoo-oosh! There, go on!” yelled the driver.

“Don’t hurry ’em, you idiot! Give ’em a chance,” called Jim again. “Stand close, doc. Keep quiet, everybody. They’ll pass in a minute.”

Twombly had dismounted, and stood beside his horse also, and the three men formed a buffer between the burros and the women and horses.

“No cause to worry,” said Jim to Bessie. “I won’t take you where I run any chance of losing you,” and something in his glance made her forget where she stood. Twombly was as if he had never been.

Twice Jim laid his hand on a crowding, shuffling beast and held him from the two women, and at last the jam gave way. The little stream of gray and brown mules passed on, and the way was clear.

Mrs. Ramsdell was sick with terror, but a knowledge that it was now as easy to go forward as to turn back nerved her to complete the journey. It was a tremendously dramatic half-hour. The sunlight failed suddenly as a heavy storm-cloud swept westward of Lizard Head, and pealing thunder broke like monstrous cannons from the heights. The scene that had been so radiant with beauty became suddenly cold, gloomy, and inimitably threatening.

At last they swept round the corner of the ledge into a wooded, grassy, flowery country, where the trail was a smooth purple path winding among aspens and dwarf oaks.

“Oh, how lovely!” cried Bessie, and Mrs. Ramsdell, drawing a deep sigh of relief, was able to smile faintly.

Far ahead of them rose a great peak, seemingly at the head of the grassy valley, which led upward at an easy grade. On this peak vivid sunlight lay warm and golden. All along the trail flowers waved—gentians, asters, Indian paint-brush, sweet-williams. The slopes were radiant with bloom, and the wind in the aspens was as gentle as a baby’s breath. A few moments later the sunlight came racing down the gulch, and the world was again dazzling with light and odorous with bloom.

“There,” called the doctor, triumphantly, “isn’t this worth while?”

Mrs. Ramsdell could not instantly throw off her terror, but Bessie was radiant with delight. She asked Jim to pick some flowers for her, and he obediently did so, and she stuck some in the band of his hat, and the action seemed to them both to be very significant. Jim was finding the trail more beautiful than ever before in his life. It was very much worth while, this playing guide to a pretty girl.

“An hour’s climb, and we’re at the mine,” said he. “That is the Concordia. The Ella Grace is over the ridge to the left. We are between.”

THE cabin stood where a poet or a fastidious trailer would have set it, on a wooded terrace well toward the head of the cañon, and about fifty feet above the stream. From the door, range after range of peaks, each more than fourteen thousand feet above the sea, billowed away,

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gleaming with green and gold and garnet, mingled with snow, over which the clouds dropped purple shadows.

“Oh, how beautiful!” exclaimed Bessie. “I thought mountains were either bare or snowy. These are lovely.”

Mrs. Ramsdell, having come safely through deadly perils, was also disposed to enjoy the scene to the full.

“I never expect to see it again,” she said, after admitting the beauty of the view.

“Oh, I like it! May I come again?” Bessie asked of Jim.

“Why, sure. Every day, if you like.”

“And I want to climb one of these peaks. That one—how high is it?”

“Nearly fifteen thousand feet—about as high as the Alps,” replied the doctor.

Bessie stopped suddenly in the midst of her dancing, and laid her hand on her breast “What’s the matter with me, doctor? My throat hurts me, and so does my head.”

“That’s the rare air,” laughed the doctor. “Better not get too ambitious. Put off the climb for a day or two.”

“Oh, the poor horses! Did they feel this way carrying us up? And you, Mr. Matteson, it must have been hard on you.”

Jim smiled, and the doctor said: “This is his country; he’s used to it.”

“Well, now, folks,” said Jim, heartily, “make yourselves at home while I see what my Chinaman is doing about dinner. Doc, you might take the girls over to the mine.”

“No, no!” cried Mrs. Ramsdell. “*You* must show us the mine. It wouldn’t be right for anybody else to do so. Don’t you think so, Bessie?”

“Oh, please do, Mr. Matteson; never mind dinner. No, I’ll tell you, aunty; let’s help him get dinner, and then we’ll all go to the mine.”

Jim reluctantly permitted them to enter the cabin, which was built of the fine, straight boles of the aspen, and was cozily set on the sunny side of a grove of stocky pines. It presented indubitable signs of having been recently swept and garnished. A smiling Chinaman was clattering busily about on the bare floor of the kitchen lean-to, which Jim had hastily constructed after his return. Savory smells issued from various pots and tins, and the women looked at each other with sly grimaces of amusement while surveying the housekeeping methods and utensils.

The bunks were swung up against the wall. The chairs (which were made of long slabs, with a shorter slab for support) were freshly scoured, and a big table, also of slabs, filled the center of the room and supported some heavy crockery and tinware.

“Isn’t it all delightfully primitive?” said Mrs. Ramsdell. “I’m glad I lived to see it Who made the chairs?”

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Jim looked a little self-conscious. "I did. Like 'em?"

"I think they are wonderful. How did you ever think of leaning two sticks together like that?"

The doctor interposed. "Come, now, I can't have Jim take undue credit. These are the regulation miners' chairs. They are not original with Jim. Nobody knows who invented them."

Twombly, whom they had for the moment quite forgotten, appeared at the door with a silver-mounted fishing-rod in his hands. "Do you know, I believe I'll try for a fish."

"All right," said Jim, cordially. "This is free fishing. No Black Moor restrictions here. Fish in the ripples if you want a trout. Mountain trout are not dead-water fish."

As Twombly spoke, Jim's mind filled with the scenes in the camp trip to the Black Moor and the little crawling stream wherein Twombly had angled while he prepared dinner with Mary looking on; and now, with Bessie's voice mingling with the roar of his river, Mary seemed as artificial and far off as England herself, deep sunk in a dim country crowded with unaccountable and irritating figures—a land of worry and of doubt.

He had sense enough to perceive the vast difference between Bessie's girlish chatter and the half-satiric, half-mournful charm of Mary's speech with him. Bessie was a girl; Mary was something singularly outside womankind as he conceived it. At the moment she seemed a diseased, unnatural being.

Bessie noticed his sudden abstraction. "What are you thinking of, Mr. Miner?"

He looked up with a sudden smile. "I was thinking what I could do with my quarter of the million."

"Oh, let us help you! We can be of service there, can't we, aunty?"

"I don't think Jim will lack advisers on that score," Mrs. Ramsdell replied. "We are prepared to devote a good deal of time to helping you spend money," she added, turning toward Jim.

Jim shook off his abstraction, and said: "Well, now, you women-folks, *shoo* out o' here. John and I don't want any of your help"; and spreading his arms, he drove them out "Go set on a bench and watch the peaks go by," he added.

The women laughingly obeyed, and while the doctor unsaddled the horses and picketed them on the sunny slope, Mrs. Ramsdell drew Bessie aside and opened up an intimate conversation:

"He *is* fine! He's finer than ever out here, for he's a part of this life. He seems very glad to have you here, and quite takes possession of you. It was beautiful, his care of you on the trail coming up. I could see that, if I *was* scared nearly out of my wits. He took care of us all. Even Willard depended on him."

"He didn't seem to watch over Mr. Twombly," said Bessie, with a malicious glitter of her eyes.

Mrs. Ramsdell smiled. "That is true. He did leave Twombly to

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a sudden pull.

“I love you, Jim.”

“That settles the whole proposition,” he said, and gave her a squeeze that made her gasp. “And now we must hurry, for the sun has left us, and you’ll be getting chilled again.”

As they stood facing each other, she put her arms about his neck again, and asked:

“Do you love me, Jim? Do you love me better than you do that London woman?”

He took her wrists in both his strong hands, and looked at her very soberly.

“Now, see here, little girl; you mustn’t worry about that woman. It’s like this: I went down into the low country and among queer people, and I had a queer dream: A woman was good to me, and I liked her. I reckon I liked her mighty well, but I wasn’t her kind, and she wasn’t my kind, and we said good-by. And I broke away and came back where I belonged; and the girl I really wanted for my wife was slicker than ever, and I just calculated on getting her. But she had switched off, and was being nice to another chap—”

“It was your fault.”

“And so I said, ‘Well, Jim, you’re due to chew the bitter cud. You’ve trailed up somebody else’s deer.’ So I climbed higher. But the girl was only foolin’, after all, it seemed; and, now we understand each other, let’s let bygones go by, and see if we can’t dig out a whole lot of comfort right here in the mountains. Now, what do you say?”

“I wish the other girl hadn’t been dreamed,” she said wistfully.

“So do I, now,” he replied. “But dreams don’t last long after sunrise.”

He looked at her with a curious smile. “You know what I’m going to do?” He stooped suddenly and kissed her. “There—you’re mine now. Let us go home and tell the folks what has happened to us.”