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WILD HONEY

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WILD HONEY

By

FREDERICK NIVEN

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CHAPTER I

By definite aim, guided by what seemed to me obvious fitness, in writing this narrative I devoted a great deal more attention to the other two men in it than to myself. I had no desire whatever that it should be looked upon as a portion of autobiography. I am not the protagonist, but the onlooker, the reporter. I wrote it in the first person just as I would tell it to you if you were sitting here and wanted to know the story. I wrote it to get these other two men, unusual men—I think I may say extraordinary men (mark you, I don't say super-men; it is highly probable some may consider them morons)—into black and white, into print, to record them for those who do feel that one proper study of mankind is man.

I came to Penny's Pit, high in the Dry Belt of British Columbia, where I met them, simply because I was young and wanted to see the West, and did not want to see it only from a car window. I was not, in the accepted sense, an immigrant. I was not a "prospective settler." I was just a wanderer, curiously looking at the world and encountering men I could never have met in my decorous home. As I had no trade, when I had to replenish my pocketbook (being also not a remittance man) I had to join the ranks of the unskilled laborers. Many mixed accents have I heard when employed upon unskilled labor in the old West, that of the born navvy on one side of me and of an English public school on the other, for in an English public school they do not teach any trades.

A young man who would not go to a city and get a job indoors, yet without a trade and without money, and needing some to have for use when I wandered on further, I took the job at Penny's Pit because it was in the open air, and because I wanted money to buy undervests and socks, and to pay my way somewhere else, and for my food when looking at that somewhere else, wherever it might be. Also, I was entirely pleased to be at Penny's Pit itself for a spell, so as to see Penny's Pit, so as to know it instead of just having a glimpse of it in passing by. That explains me at Penny's Pit.

There was what was called an Extra Gang there, employed upon shoveling gravel out of a hillside into dump-cars that took it away to fill in gulches under trestle bridges. The place, for those who like to know where one is on a map, was about half-way between Ashcroft and Kamloops on the main line of the C.P.R.

There and thus it was that I met Hank and Slim, the two queer men of this book—one of whom thought me queer. To those readers who may feel that I am relatively a ghost, a mere sketch, "blocked in" as painters say, and no more, I trust my explanation for that ghostliness is valid. It is of them—Hank and Slim—not of myself, I would write. You can meet the like of me any day, but you cannot so easily meet them. You have to do as I did, discard fine linen, take your home on your back like a snail, and go into the grim and beautiful world for that. I think it is in a way a duty of mine to record them. There is something documentary, I think, about this narrative of railroads in sand, and whiskey, and wild honeysuckle, and untamed wanderers.

If there be such a thing as degrees of truth, then might I say that the truest parts of this true narrative are those that might most easily be considered as flights of imagination. Or otherwise I might say that my aim has been to tell the truth in all, and in these parts that have the quality that one associates with the novel (where one might say, not: "This is true to life," but "This is true to fiction!") I have been especially careful to be accurate and restrained. I have been so careful that perhaps, without departure from fact, I could have made them seem more like fiction still!

Once upon a time novelists used to append a footnote to some amazing part of their novels to say that it was not, like the rest, out of their imagination, but taken from life. Now, in an era of novel readers, one writing of facts has to make assurance that he is not drawing on his imagination or borrowing from fiction!

I did truly hear Hank chanting Shirley's lyric; we did truly have that grimly pathetic, that pathetically humorous scene in the barroom at North Bend; Hank did truly decide one night, in the interests of my happiness, to slay me, leave my body to the coyotes and set my spirit free from a social system that he saw as not for me, and did verily tramp many a mile in pursuit of me afterwards to express regret for that. I did truly, some years later, see his mother and his early home, just as I describe.

I made a great number of notes at the time and from these was able to check my memory. I wrote the book with the notes at my elbow. Raising my eyes, I looked into the past. It was as if I relived it all. Looking down I had these notes on the old sheets of paper, keeping tab on me. And these, I may say, I took at the time with no intention of writing a book about it later, but because it all interested me and I knew the experience would soon be over, all past, only to be remembered. I wanted more than memory. Hank's occasional prophetic jests to me regarding the book I would write did not seem to me

then more than chaff.

I think that is enough to explain how I came into circumstances and places into which I summarily invite my readers, and to give assurance that the story I tell is not a hybrid of fact and fiction but a narration of actual experience.

So we can now get on to Hank and Slim, their lives, and the divulging of what lay under their skins, just in the way, by degrees, I got to know inside them, walking along with them.

CHAPTER II

There was a pang at going, for Penny's Pit, like most experiences, however hard, had its joys. I was working as a navvy there, and the hours of shoveling were ten per day. It was all as long ago as that, though even then the eight-hour day shout was heard at election times. Yes, there was a pang at leaving Penny's Pit. It was the closing of a door. It was passing on. It was the ending of a period that had not been by any means without its pleasures.

There was hard work, but there was refreshing sleep. The reflected sunlight from the gravel of the pit in which we toiled blistered the under parts of our chins, making shoveling a torture; so we wore scarves bunched up around the neck, and these scarves made us hotter. There were mosquitoes too. But the evenings were cool, up on the plateau of that Dry Belt. And there was a something about life there.

Often nowadays when I mention a liking for the beauty of the West some man will chip in with the comment that if I had to work in it I'd soon forget the beauty, taking me for a sort of fair-weather friend of nature. But when I was working in it in the sense meant (not sitting in a pleasant bungalow writing, which doesn't seem like work to some people, but outside with heavy tools) I never lost sight of its beauty. That was the attraction. The dust and heat of the day, the callouses on the hands, or the splinters in them, were merely by the way. At Penny's Pit the air and the scene more than atoned. Above the rasp of the shovels with which we worked astern of the big, rhythmically-coughing steam-shovel, I would hear the murmur of Thompson River lapsing past; and that murmur, somehow, was worth much weary labor to hear. But I do not try to explain these things to those who say: "If you had to work in it you'd soon get fed up with the beauty." The attempt would only lead to argument with the unconvinceable.

Penny's Pit—a tear in a hill, and by the side of that tear two box-cars converted into bunk-houses for us, and a third into kitchen and dining-room with a cubby-hole partitioned off for the cook to sleep in. It had been a home for a spell. Sitting on the butt-end of a tie, with my legs over the gorge, darning socks in the exquisite evenings, I had seen, nightly, two loons come home to a spreading part of the Thompson River below; and every evening, as they settled on the water, they called, and laughed. The call of loons in the West has something in it for me at least, though *chacun son goût* of course, every time I hear it, even beyond the first call of cuckoos in England. In my memory, since then, they have laughed for me at many subsequent hardships.

And talking of the sounds at Penny's Pit, before we start upon our way—for this is but preamble, while we roll our blankets: one wonderful thing I heard there and did not know what it was at the time. None of us knew, looked one to another, marveled and puzzled over it. The sound we heard was as a bell ringing; but such a bell! The notes of it were exquisite, toning right with the clarity of the upland atmosphere. We stopped our work and looked round and up, for the sound seemed simply in air. Nothing that could have been responsible for it was visible. It was as though the mysterious First Cause who had made that scene and that river was, in addition to all else, ventriloquist. The Indians working beside us were awed. I thought of the bell-bird and wondered if it came thither, as well as to the forests of Essequibo, Orinoco and Amazon. Humming-birds fly far north in the basking summers; why not a bell-bird? Not a cloud. Nothing. Just the very quiet sand-hills on all sides, and the very blue sky overhead; and it was not till years later that I had an explanation on coming across an account of a phenomenon seldom known, and only heard in Dry Belts, a sound as of a sweet-toned bell made by electricity in the air.

An interesting life it had been at Penny's Pit. Interesting men they were there too, of types I had never known before. There was one who spread mustard instead of butter on his bread, a man with the brightest eyes I ever saw. There was the buffoon of the camp, who was always mountebanking when the boss was near, having discovered that his fooling amused the boss. "The King's fool!" I heard a man called Hank mutter one day, after a rather obsequious exhibition of clowning followed by the guffaws of that potentate of the gang. There was a little Cockney navvy, who had saved up enough money in England to emigrate, very ignorant and gentle. He asked us one day if we knew "that beautiful song 'Break the news to Mother,'" and told us it brought tears to his eyes when he heard it in a hall in Seattle. Hank, overhearing that announcement, turned his head and looked at him curiously, interested, and as if with pity. That little navvy simply could not pronounce the name of our nearest town, which was Savona's. It used to be called Savona's Ferry in the early days—a ferry across Thompson River being owned then by one called Savona. To-day the maps have it as Savona; but in our time it was in the transition stage of Savona's, though most people dropped out the apostrophe. To the little Cockney it was always Sevenoaks. He tried to say Savona's but Sevenoaks persisted, Savona's beyond him.

There was Slim, an unknown quantity, seldom speaking; generally, when we were not at work, conning the advertisement

pages in the few magazines that littered a corner of our bunk-car. He figured chiefly as "Hank's partner"; and Hank I leave to the last, dropping in here instead the boss of this steam-shovel outfit—"the steam-shovel engineer." One day a stream of leaflets descended on us from the rear platform of a passing train where sat an advance publicity agent for a piano recital to be given in Vancouver, showering these out when he saw houses or converted box-cars, any indication of inhabitants. We picked up the leaflets, and found that they announced the coming to Vancouver of Paderewski. Opposite a column of names of towns, beginning at Calgary and going west by Golden, Kamloops, Ashcroft, Revelstoke, was a column of figures—the reduced special railway rate for return tickets procurable at these places to hear him play.

The boss considered one of these broadsheets a long time.

"I'm damned if I can understand it!" he said at last. "They tell me he hits the piano for a matter of four hours on end. Imagine going from here to Vancouver, about a coupla hundred miles, to hear a man hit the piano for four hours on end! Now that gets me. If he was playing it with his toes, or anything in the nature of a side-show, I could understand. I once seen a man playing a fiddle behind his back. That was something to look at!"

Hank's gaze drifted sadly to me and when the boss moved away he stood looking after him stupefied and then he said: "Well—by—God!" very slowly. He sighed. He looked out over Thompson River, brought his hands together in front of him and fumbled his fingers.

"Well—by—God!" he sighed again. "O the Yahoo!"

It was a word much in the currency—Yahoo—in the West in those days, the derivation, I suppose, from Swift's "Gulliver's Travels." Hank was one of the wildest looking men in the outfit, and as for his clothes, no pawn-broker would have considered them. But this heart-broken murmur of his over the boss's solecism in the matter of musical performance, as you will understand, drew me to him, whetted my interest. I had already heard him mutter "The King's fool!" and drop casually this or that remark that the others had not the knowledge to drop or, had they picked up the knowledge, might have paraded in the hope that you would think they had known better days—which they had not. Hank looked what is called tough, very tough, and when occasion demanded it he had the most appalling flow of profanity; and violent fits of temper too, he had, blazing and gone. But he had periods when his voice was quiet, and words dropped out in his speech that were good to hear, hinting of an extended vocabulary. At such times there was a graciousness in his attitude and movements that made his worn attire ridiculously anomalous.

This Hank came to me one evening as I sat on a bluff above the scene of our labors, listening for the call of a coyote away back in the low range beyond the sand-hills, and broached a subject that greatly interested me. He and his partner Slim were going to leave, going to walk down into the United States. Walk, mark you. Would I care to accompany them?

I was twenty years of age and full of love of seeing. I assuredly would care to go. I had not been long at Penny's Pit, but I had been long enough to know its life, and here was a chance to dip into another. When he said they had not decided whether to take the trail in from Ducks or go in by Salmon Arm, I got that fret that comes of place-names and the word "trail."

We would, of course, he said, have to get our wages first, and they could not be paid to us at Penny's Pit; we would have to go to North Bend, a hundred miles or so west, with our time-checks to collect unless we stayed till the end of the month when the paymaster came past. They were not going to wait, men of impulse, and the impulse already curbed long enough. I calculated my wages due and discovered they would just meet the cost of a ticket to North Bend and back.

"Oh, that's neither here nor there," said Hank. "We won't pay fares. We'll walk a bit from this camp and then steal a ride on the trains."

That settled it. One experience more to have, a way of life other than my average to dip into! That was how the proposal appealed to me. Yes; I would be delighted to accompany them. All right. And then in the dusk my coyote, for whom I had been listening, gave his lonely-sounding yet rejoicing wail across the darkening sand-hills.

CHAPTER III

We had not gone very far from Penny's Pit, grasshoppers clicking round our feet, and the railway ties cracking in the heat, when Slim, of whom I knew no more than I knew of Hank, divulged inherent laziness.

"What's the matter with having a siesta somewhere in the shade?" he suggested.

Shade! There was no shade to speak of. The whole wide scene was ablaze with light to which we puckered our eyes; but he was sure that if we crossed a bench nearby and went over to the river, twisting away from us there, we could find some nook of waterside trees. So we left the track, crossed the bench and there, sure enough, was a fringe of trees in the river's cleft below us.

Down into it we plunged, and there Slim divulged another characteristic. He did not have a siesta. He got down on his heels on the bank where the river made a backward eddy and began examining the little sticks and twigs joggling together in that backwash, while Hank and I rolled cigarettes, and sat down to enjoy the coolness of the water under the shade of the trees.

"Here you are!" said Slim. "Ever seen one of these before?" and he picked from the water a specimen of some species of caddis worm. "Look. See here. Don't he look just like a bit of a twig? And here he is living among a whole raft of little twigs." He jerked a thumb toward the immensity of blue that glittered in chinks of the green over us and—"Queer Fellow!" he remarked.

Retrieving another of the little things from that backwash, with both side by side in his palm, he compared their characteristics, noting similarities and discrepancies, an untutored Fabre and without a microscope.

"They ain't a match, you see," he said. "They're as different as two twigs would be. This fellow has a little sort of a knob, like you see on a twig, but it ain't placed the same as on the other lad. Whatever eats 'em or preys upon 'em wouldn't be sure, seeing one, that it wasn't a twig. They tell me if you break a little bit off one, he grows it again."

With thumb and finger-nail he began to pluck at the tiny soft head that protruded.

"Here, what are you doing?" asked Hank. "No sense in hurting the little son of a gun."

"I wonder how he'd feel if I pulled him out of his case and shoved him in wrong end," said Slim.

"Aw, guess it would kill him. Let him go," said Hank.

Slim laughed and tossed them both back into the water, dried his hands on his seat and squatted down to smoke. A restless fellow! His cigarette half-through, he was inquiring: "Well, how about getting on top and hitting it again?"

"Plenty of time," replied Hank.

"Oh, that's what you always say."

"Now see here, you know why we asked this fellow to come with us," Hank broke out. "We told him it was because we thought he'd like to see the places we figure on hiking through, but you know the real reason. And it would just be as well to let him know before we've fairly started."

Slim laughed; and I felt mystified. Then——

"Sure," said Slim, and grinned at me. "The idea is that three is company where two is liable to be a rough house, at least hus two."

He frequently said *hus* for *us* in a very deliberate way, as though it were the vogue to pronounce it so in some society in which he was proud to be at home.

"We're liable to scrap when we're alone together," he went on, "but we've been so long with each other that we can't somehow separate. Funny thing! We have a hell of a row and decide to part, and each go our different ways. And then a couple of days later I go hiking after him, and he's hiking after me, and we meets grinning, and he says: 'Well, you can't get along without me. Hope you notice my forgiving nature, coming back for you,' or some gall like that, and then we

have a scrap over that gall of his and string along together for a while again," he paused, "till he gets too damn fresh again to stand," he ended.

Hank winked at me.

"Listen to him!" he said. "Well, you'll have opportunity to see which it is that makes the scraps. I hope, now you know, that you'll stay with us and keep the peace."

I nodded.

"Yes," I promised.

"All right. Now if we scrap you just say that's what you're here for, and we'll quit; that's a deal."

I nodded my head again, accepting the rôle.

"All right," said Slim, nodding his.

"Well, Slim, my son," said Hank then, "you said you would like us to be going. Shall we go?"

This he spoke very genially, ultra-genially, with a smile that made his partner look cynically at him a moment before rising and picking up his blanket-roll. At once Hank and I were up shouldering ours, and we climbed to the bench, back into the full blaze of sunlight and thence, at a tangent, across to the track, and once again were jig-jogging in the silly short steps the ties decree, upon our way.

As we walked, Hank talked the history of the region, of the Bonaparte Mine, somewhere away over there to north beyond the heat-quake over the sand and the river; talked of the Cariboo road, winding north under the blue glitter of the Dry Belt sky. He knew a lot about it (how men going into the Cariboo country in the gold rush, penniless, signed promises to work on it a stated period before leaving Victoria and New Westminster, and did so; how a detachment of Royal Engineers from England came out to work upon it in response to a request of the governor of those days to the Home Office), either from listening to old-timers or from reading; I fancy from reading, for he spent much time in the winter, as I discovered later, sitting in public libraries, and he was no great fiction fan. Books of sociology, books of criminology, books of travel: that was the order of his library leanings. These men who had invited me to hike with them to the United States were not just railway workers. I very soon tapped that. All that they were I came to know by degrees.

At a high trestle bridge over a rocky gorge, in the bottom of which ran a diminutive stream, Slim paused and looked down in between the ties.

"Some shade-trees below us," he said.

"Why, man, we've hardly started!" exclaimed Hank.

"Well, that's why. I ain't limbered up."

Hank laughed, and when we were across the trestles, down we fumbled into the bottom of the gorge.

"Gee, it's good not to be working," said Slim, as he sat there leaning against his blanket-roll.

"Working! Huh, you didn't do much," replied Hank. "You shuffled out of every heavy job. I saw you."

"Guess I did," and Slim laughed. "I wouldn't have held it down as long as I did if I hadn't been able to shuffle out a bit."

The labor of getting down into that draw was equal to walking half a mile on the track, I thought, and of climbing up would be equivalent to walking a mile, but Slim liked deep gorges with shade-trees and a whimpling little brook, liked to lie on his back and look up through leaves at chinks of blue sky and blow cigarette smoke.

A far-off rumble sounded as we loafed there. We looked up, and realized how deep the gulch was, for the rumble was of a train passing over, and it seemed like a toy.

"Gee, ain't it cute!" said Slim. "It's like a kid's play train."

"Well, this isn't going to Vancouver," said Hank.

"We ain't going to Vancouver," said Slim.

"Figure of speech," Hank explained.

The intense heat of the hours around noon was over, and so, having munched a lunch that we had got from the Chinese cook at the camp, we washed it down with water from the narrow little brook, climbed the precipitous bank, and trudged on, Hank talking, as we drew near to Ashcroft, of the old six-in-hand mailcoach that started from there into the Cariboo country. Had I seen Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show? Yes. Well, it was just the same sort of coach as the old Black Hills coach he had in his show, the old Deadwood stage. He was interrupted by Slim.

"What about quitting hiking here?" said he. "Your talk about a six-in-hand makes my feet ache."

"We can take the train if you like," said Hank, pleasantly.

That we had not so much as a twenty-five cent piece between us was irrelevant.

We could guess, from the times that the freight-trains had been wont to pass Penny's Pit, when one would be due, west-bound, at Ashcroft; and as we waited for it, sitting on our blanket-rolls, backs against the freight-shed wall there, Hank gave me a few pointers on how to travel without a ticket. He began by drawing in the dust with a finger a design of the under-part of the average freight-car.

"There are the trucks, you see, on which the car rests. Above the trucks, here, are the big springs. Here the brace-rods run under the car fore and aft. Here they run across. If there are two here, close together, though there are not always, you can lay a board on them and lie on the board face down, but you're apt to get cramp in your legs. Your legs dangling, or stretched out behind you, you get your thighs knotted up, and then you're up against it. A good place is here, at the trucks. You creep under and shove your bundle in, between the truck the car sits on, and the car; and then you sit on this rod that runs from side to side, with your back against the truck. If you sit this side of the truck, facing ahead, that's called 'punching the breeze.' If you sit this side, looking back, it's called 'taking it in the neck.' I don't know which to advise. Which would you say, Slim?"

"Oh, I don't know. Any old way does so long as you make it."

Hank took up the thread again.

"There's one advantage," said he, "in taking it in the neck, for when you are looking ahead, punching the breeze, there is an awful tendency to jump forward to try to grab the world as it goes under you. When it's running away from you, instead of rushing at you and passing under, it doesn't have that effect."

I tried to look as though a little thing like that would not upset me.

"Gee!" exclaimed Slim. "Once when I was riding facing, punching the breeze, a rod broke loose in front of me—one of them other brace-rods he was telling you about—and it hit the roadway all the time, and every time it hit it shot up a cinder or a rock, or something. I got the dust and pebbles down inside my shirt and in my pockets, and I was all cut and bleeding from the rocks and all when she stopped, and I rolled off. You know, my inside breast pocket, even," and he tapped his chest, "was plumb full of little stones."

I again tried to look at ease as Slim continued.

"Underneath, the brakemen can't see you except at stops. But bumpers are not too bad. I guess we'll take bumpers this time, to start you, seeing you're green to traveling, if there ain't an empty car we can get inside."

And then off east there was the deep, mellow hoot of the train whistling for curves, and I admit my heart accelerated its beats suddenly.

"We'll just be projecting ourselves up and down," said Hank, "so as not to attract attention with our bindles" (he always called his blanket-roll his bindle instead of bundle). "You sit there with the bindles, and Slim and I will slope along and try to look like residents till it's time to take her."

Blessed "her"! It humanized the train to give it sex! She came in, slowing down beautifully, the piston puff-puffing past, the heat of the locomotive over me in a gust where I sat on the three "bindles" while Hank and Slim were strolling casually and separately back and forth on the station platform.

The locomotive took water; the conductor and brakemen stood chatting in groups with the depot hands. They all seemed to me, of course, while they talked, to be considering Slim, or Hank or me. Then Hank came toward me, stopped and lit a cigarette, stood close by absently staring, as though he were merely some one whose idle diversion was to watch the trains come in; watch the trains go out. Away along the platform, Slim leant against the station-house wall, hands in pockets, near to one of the groups. I saw him give a faint nod to Hank, and wondered what it meant. It meant that he had overheard there was some shunting to be done; and it then began, with all the accompanying bumping and clatter of cars, arm-signaling and easy hanging-on to side ladders and neat dropping off on the part of the train-men. At last all was in order again, cars sidetracked, cars picked up, and the caboose coupled once more at the tail of the long string.

Slim walked back near us, looking on at all this as a child watching men work, and the engine puff, and the "wheels go wound."

"Well, we'll get across the track now," said he, and lifting his bundle he started away smartly as though, the show over, he was off upon his way, and that it led east.

Hank and I followed at once, but as soon as we had passed the caboose we turned and hurried forward upon the far side of the train.

"Now," said Hank, "we couldn't get on before—too many looking. And besides, we didn't know what cars were going to be left here. There's a box-car with the door full open on this side and just a little bit ajar on the other. If she starts before we get that length, run with us. We'll throw our bindles up and then jump. We'll show you how first, and then be ready to grab you and drag you in after us."

And then she started, and we ran.

"Come on—oh, not such a hell of a scramble on the clinkers," hissed Slim.

We came level with the selected car, door wide open on our side.

"In with the bindles!" said Hank and, as we tossed them up he growled: "Now we've got to make it!"

Slim put hands to the floor of the car, pacing along in big strides beside it, and leapt, got a knee up, rolled in. In a second Hank followed, though he had almost to run alongside instead of stride. They looked back anxiously for me, both bending down to grab me but, before the speed was too great, I had performed the necessary gymnastics and was inside. On tiptoe we sneaked into the corner where we had thrown our blanket-rolls and sat down upon them, my heart going rub-a-dub, sat quietly on our bindles, looking from one to the other. There! We were out of Ashcroft. Then Slim rose.

"What's the matter with shutting the doors?" he asked.

"Better just drop the grain-door down on that side we got in at," replied Hank. "She'd never joggle enough to close the sliding door, and they know that, and they know the ones that are open, you bet."

"That's right," agreed Slim, and merely lowered the grain door, which is apt, at any rate, in rough shunting, to spring from its catch and drop down, lowered it and set it at such an angle that no one, at another halt, could, by peering, see more than a limited portion of either end of the car. To the sliding door on the other side, which was open about a foot, he gave a slight thrust so that it was almost closed, showing only an opening of a matter of a couple of inches.

"There!" said he. "She might easily joggle that much. That looks natural."

"How about the end wicket window?" asked Hank.

"We'll shut the one ahead for the draught, anyhow," replied Slim, and did so. "We'd better leave the other open for ease in climbing out when we get there," and to me he explained: "It makes an awful racket sliding open them wickets when a train's stopped. They never fit good, and the wedge they run in is always all grit and dust."

There was something very invigorating in this form of travel, something of the stolen fruits thrill. I take it that that thrill

never utterly fails, for my companions, though old hands at the game, as I was to hear, had a light on their faces, an air of glee, though it was more clear with Slim than with Hank. There was a lurking dourness in Hank.

Slim, of course, must needs, sitting down then, roll a cigarette.

"Here," said Hank, "you might cut that out till we make a few miles anyhow. It isn't so darn simple every time, getting on, as it was that time, and what I say is, when luck is with one there's no sense in queering it." He turned to me. "If a brakeman were to go over the roof," he explained, "not smoking himself, he'd smell us, you know."

Slim laughed and lit his cigarette.

"There you are!" ejaculated Hank. "No will power! Got to be sucking away on a pimp stick all the time. Cig-fiend! Abuse the blessings!" He waved a hand. "It's not just yourself. You might have the three of us ditched, and all to do over again because you can't keep off tobacco for a quarter of an hour."

"There he goes," said Slim, "wanting to be king of this trip. What you want is to get your block knocked off, my friend, like kings got in the French Revolution."

There was a faint smile round his loose mouth as he spoke, but Hank glared.

"You think you could do it?" he asked. "Do you think you could knock my block off? What would I be doing while you were having a try?"

So said I:

"I don't know if this is where I serve or not, for I don't know if this is persiflage and idle repartee, or a storm brewing."

Slim got the drift of my remark, but Hank understood it all. He laughed.

"God!" he broke out. "It is good to hear somebody using English again. Persiflage . . . repartee . . . words I have not heard for fifteen years," and then he fell abrooding, and Slim nipped out his cigarette between thumb and forefinger and put it behind his ear. I was going to know them both more intimately in this kind of travel, I could see, than I had known them in the social intercourse between supper and "hitting the hay" at Penny's Pit.

Now and then the train stopped, and then we had our thrills. At the first stop a train-hand stood just outside the door talking to some one, and before he went away, just casually, without looking inside, stretched up and shoved the door shut.

"Good man," Slim muttered. "I was feeling the draught a bit."

The sound of feet went past on boardwalk to one side, or on cinders to the other. At the second halt somebody clambered on to the bumper at the end at which Slim had closed the wicket. We wondered if it was going to be opened, but next moment the scuffling heels outside had passed. They were evidently only of some man, brakeman likely, crossing from one side of the train to the other, who happened to select our car for the transit. A minute after—doubtless he had been signaling to the engineer—we heard a series of noises beginning far ahead and coming closer, clatter and clash. Then the bumper of our car received a thwack, and the thwacks went on to the rear end. The puffing of the locomotive seemed far off as she got under way. Off we went, then halted abruptly, with a jar, and went backwards.

The shunting of a freight-train is a noisy and jolting proceeding. That punch coming along, car after car, hitting the car one is on, and passing on, is somehow very exhilarating—I don't say it is comfortable—exhilarating it is. I think the thrill comes from the knowledge that just outside are brakemen at work, creating all these tugs and bumps, with wave of arm or lantern, while here are we, unbeknown, joggled jocundly inside.

Darkness fell, after that knocking about, as we went rolling on, swaying round curves, slacking up with buffer impacts and clash of chains, followed by sudden tugs, through the night. I began to feel sleepy, when suddenly a match spurted alight in Hank's hand and he lit a cigarette.

"Well, by gosh!" broke out Slim. "After what you said! And it's time to sleep now, anyhow. Now maybe they'll smell us out and we won't get no sleep, get flung off."

"Oh, there are limits, limits," replied Hank. "We're doing fine. A man must have his two draws before turning in, especially if he's had no supper."

"Well, give us a light off yours," said Slim.

In the glow, as they puffed, I could see the ends of their noses lit up, their cheek bones, and their wild eyes, produced my own "makings," rolled and lit, and the three flicks of fire rose and grew and fell and dwindled. Half an hour later we were calmly rolled in our blankets; shoes off. When I woke there was a faint light outside. Through the open tail-end wicket I saw that so strangely moving first light of day on the end boards of the car that came veering, oscillating, behind us. Hank and Slim, to judge by their blinking, had just come awake at the same time.

I suppose we must all have been brought back from sleep by one of these series of bumps, for we were at a standstill, but next moment moved again with the usual abrupt tug that seemed to wrench us, as well as the car, then stopped again. Slim rose and peered out at a crack in the wall near us. As he tiptoed back, Hank asked in a sleepy voice where we were.

"Can't see the name," answered Slim, "we're right in the depot. I can see what looks like a god-dam cemetery."

"Lytton," said Hank; "that's where we are—Lytton. We've got a little way to go yet."

The locomotive bell clanged, and the smash-smash-smash came along to us. We received one dull impact that jarred us as if we were part of the car, and listened to the whacks go on and die away. We were off once more.

"Say, are you awake?" asked Hank.

"Yes," said I.

"It's named after a relative of the novelist Lytton. The relative was a government man—governor, or deputy-governor, or some damned thing like that. This West has its history, all right." He grunted, and then muttered: "Fetch me my shaving water in time to spruce up for North Bend," and was asleep again next minute, to judge by his breathing.

Long before coming to North Bend we were all awake again, had hauled on our shoes, rolled and roped our blankets, toothbrushes, shaving-tackle, change of socks and so forth, all safely within the bundles.

In the event the disembarking was no more difficult than the boarding of her. She stopped and Slim, at the end wicket that was open, peeped out.

"North Bend all right," he whispered. "Ssh! Listen! Nobody near, I think."

"Go to it," said Hank.

It is a contorting performance to get through these end wickets. They are just high enough from the floor, and of sufficient smallness of height and breadth, to make it difficult, having got one leg out, to wriggle out. One cannot just hang out, head first, and slide, as in a sort of dive, on to the bumpers, and there is nothing to grab on the roof above, so as to allow of one swinging out feet first, sitting on the wicket's edge and then glissading off on to the bumper. One gets out like a distraught frog. Slim went first and then reached in for his blanket-roll, which we passed to him. Then he disappeared, dropped like a cat to the track, and we heard his voice, guardedly:

"All right. Come on."

Out went Hank, twisted, puffing, murmuring blasphemy over the contortions necessary, and then standing on the bumper reached back for his blankets and told me to give him mine also. I handed both rolls to him.

"Catch," he said to Slim, and then he too had vanished.

I wriggled through, and as I was in the midst of my contortions, half in, half out, feeling sympathetic regarding all Hank had said to the wicket, a man strolled past on the station boardwalk, heard the fuss of my scramble and looked round. I met his eyes. He closed the lid of the one nearer to me, and went leisurely on. I can see his face still in memory. Then, somehow, I was out on the bumper. Down on the track stood Hank, looking up.

"Well, that was all right," he whispered to me. "He ain't hostile. Take a peek on that side, and if there's nobody looking just step on to the platform. You've no bindle and they'll think you were just crossing to the depot."

I stepped on to a rung of the end ladder and took a peek. Everybody seemed busy in the depot. I stepped on to the platform, and standing there lit a cigarette, then looked back to tell Hank and Slim all was clear; but they had disappeared, bindles and all. I surmised that they had espied a train-hand on their side and that they had moved away because of him, and paced slowly along the boardwalk, glancing between the cars as I came to the intervening spaces. Between two, further on, I saw Hank standing smoking, no bindle in evidence. He gave me a cheerful nod and a wave of his hand as one saluting an old friend unexpectedly seen.

The locomotive bell rang, the train clashed and tugged and went on. Worlds within worlds, *ad infinitum*, if we only knew! One man travels in a Pullman car, another in a box-car. The train gone, with a final fluttering of old dropped papers in the suction under the caboose, Hank and Slim picked up the blanket-rolls from behind a stack of ties where they had tossed them, came across and joined me.

There were two hotels in North Bend, the guests of each not aware of how the guests of the other lived. One of these hotels, trellised, and the trellis all climbed upon with greenery, was set back beyond a sloping lawn kept emerald by a sprinkler that twisted at the end of a long hose-pipe. The trousers of the men sitting on that kindly-shaded veranda were pressed. Then there was another hotel back among trees, but with no lawn, no sprinkler, no trellis of climbing green, and patronized by men whose trousers were not pressed.

We went to neither hotel. Many are the different worlds within the world. We waited till none observed and then, walking across the track, plunged into what Hank called the jingles, meaning jungles, saying it so in the same tone as Slim's when he said *hus* instead of *us*, as though he knew better but with implication that it was the thing to say jingles, even as bindle for bundle, in some set to which he gave fealty.

In the heart of that patch of jungle we dropped our blankets. Talk of "rest and a world of leaves"! Those who write to their friends in British Columbia, commiserating with them for living in "the cold dark north," or "cold Canada," or what-not in that strain, know not what they say. The cold, dark north indeed! At North Bend we were in the latitude of the Scilly Isles, and in a far less humid part of the world. Humming-birds were darting among the creepers on the trellis of the hotel with the lawn and sprinkler.

That dingle of ours was colored like the plates in "The Swiss Family Robinson" of my boyhood. We were in a dapple of greens and yellows, and iridescent shade. "Rest and a world of leaves and stealing stream." The stream was not far distant, and thence Slim brought water in a can he found near the track and, hanging our pocket-mirrors on twigs of the trees, we shaved.

Wonderful what a shave will do for one! Refreshed thereafter, I smiled to myself over the fun of it all, and wondered what my good people at home would have thought had they known of that night's travel in the box-car and this open-air hospice, this shaving and titivating in the jingle, pocket-mirror hanging on a twig of a tree.

CHAPTER IV

We had just finished shaving when we saw a couple of Indian women on the edge of our bit of jungle, coasting it at a quick walk from east to west. They peered once between the leaves at us when making that detour, and did not so much as glance again. There was something in this transit, I gathered from the manner of Hank and Slim, that was not normal. It did not seem normal to me, though I thought perhaps the semicivilized of a certain order might have a different way of attracting attention from that of the civilized.

Suddenly they appeared again, having made the end of their detour of us out of sight, appeared from the same direction as before and passed round our patch of jungles, east to west, once more, with the same fussy gait as on the first transit. It was rather spooky, or as though we were demented, had an aspect of hallucination.

"If they come again like that I'll think I'm bug-house," said Hank, and laughed.

Slim advanced a step or two, peering after them, a set smile on his face.

"Don't you, now!" cautioned Hank, looking grimly at him, without saying what he was not to do.

"I ain't going to," replied Slim. "I ain't moved that way early in the day; and anyhow it don't look right to me. There's something funny about it. Looks to me as if they was kind of daring us, wanting to make some trouble."

Having completed that semicircle they did not return. Instead, there strolled past, in the same direction as the women had taken, several Indian men, talking quietly among themselves and looking slant-eyed now and then in at us. There are truly all manner of worlds within the world. Here were we within a stone's throw of the railway track, on which at that very moment a comfortable train was spinning not far off, people sitting down to breakfast in it, pondering menu-cards, spreading napkins on their knees, attended by white-coated stewards. Not near us, but after all in the same province, and by that very railway track, were affluent sporting men and mountain-climbers, from all over the world, Himalayas and Alps, up at the Glacier Hotel; and eastward a bit was the Lake Louise Château, not the grand one of to-day to be sure, but even then a place where a hobo would be the last creature in the world expected; and on a bit further east again, the Banff hotel, with Indians only as picturesque and often highly majestic human beings (they are Stoney Indians there), to be photographed at their dances and their fall fair. Worlds within worlds! Even at that hotel close by, the one with the cropped lawn, every guest would "pshaw" aside, as the product of a hectic mind, any talk of "trouble with the Indians."

"Oh, to hell with them!" said Hank, "whatever they are after. Come on, we'll get over to the office and present our time-checks."

Arrived at the office we had other trouble. The man there looked at the date upon the time-checks, and then at us. He must, we decided, have come from the East. He had not the spirit of the West in him. "Sufficient unto a man his own personal job" was not his motto. He glared at us indignantly. To be shrewd and a fool is very tedious; and this fellow was a shrewd fool, hard to suffer gladly, with a leaning toward being autocratic.

"These time-checks," he said, with the air of being specially observant and astute, "have yesterday's date on them. How did you get down here so soon?"

We, of course, knew what he was thinking. The passenger train had not yet come in from east, only the night freight. On the principle that his question was neither here nor there, but might as well be answered, Slim said, in that insouciant way of his:

"We walked."

The man in office, at that, peeped sidelong at him.

"Didn't you know," Slim continued, "that there hasn't been a passenger train down for us to ride in?"

Once he got started with people of that kind (I was to see him thus baiting others who tried to bait him before we parted) he derived considerable enjoyment. One corner of his mouth twisted up slightly, his eyes danced in genial fashion. He did not get angry. He became amused.

"Well," said the man in office, "I'm not going to pay you until the passenger train from east comes in."

"Why not?" asked Slim gently, or ingenuously one might have said, had one not noted the twinkling in his eyes of that controlled hilarity over this inquisitor and little tyrant with the exaggerated view of his duty to his company!

The man met his gaze.

"Because I won't have the money till then," he replied.

"Oh, I see," said Slim, suavely, and the way that he looked was equivalent to calling the man a liar. "Oh, well, that's all right. Don't you worry about not having the money till then. I thought at first, from the way you were going on, that maybe you weren't going to pay till the passenger came in for spite, because of hus coming down—" he paused, leant against the counter and grinned, "on the freight."

"You acknowledge you came down on the freight," said the man in office—shrewdly.

Slim's head went upon one side and he smiled in that delicious manner of his.

"Ain't acknowledging anything," he said. "I'm discussing what started you on the line of talk you adopted. But that's all right, Mr. Clerk, we'll come back after the train is in. See that you have it."

Hank had taken no part in this talk, even with an aside, had left all to Slim to meet and enjoy; but when we got outside he started one of his perorations, a sociological monologue, a lecture upon capital and labor, tyrants, their creatures and their prey. It began with the sheer facts of our case and ended in hectic and general blasphemy, Slim and I listening in rapt attention.

"Well," said Slim, when he came to an end, "we'll go down and set on the depot platform in a piece of shade somewhere till the west-bound comes in."

But a total stranger passing by, who had overheard a part of Hank's harangue—who had stopped, indeed, at a respectful distance to absorb it—stepped over to us.

"Excuse me," he said, "I couldn't but hear what you were saying. I ain't a shark, or anything like it, trying to throw the con into you fellows. I work over at the hotel here. That man in the office you were—er—making comments upon is awful arrogant with you fellows who come in from working on the railroad. He'd be a powerful big man if he got on horseback. It kind of flatters him to hold up paying you. He's got money enough to pay in the safe all the time, unless you been working a year apiece, or something like that, without drawing wages. Where were you working?"

"Penny's Pit."

"That's up the other side of Ashcroft?"

"Yes."

"Well, he has the authority to issue checks for your time-checks, even if he don't have cash."

"Thank you," said Hank. "We'll give him as we said. We'll give him till the west-bound comes in, seeing we said it. Thank you."

The man nodded and walked on.

"Now that's a damned fine fellow," said Hank. "Yes, sir," he nodded at Slim as though he expected him to doubt it. "It does a man good when he's been talked to the way that plug in there talked to us, to have somebody else talk the way that man did. And it's not for anything he can get out of us. He's not looking for anything from us. Thank God for a human being and an honest man."

This may sound an odd remark from one such as Hank, this expression of joy over an honest man, but despite the fact that my friends were not beyond stealing a ride, yes, and robbing a hen-roost in summer-time (as I was to see), or knocking the legs from under some soused citizen crossing a back-lot in town in winter (as I was to hear), kneeing the wind out of him before he could rise, and abstracting from his pocket what coin or paper of the realm he might have, they had a streak of honesty too. With me they were honest from beginning to end of our strange partnership. There is a point of view, indeed, I think, from which one might hazard that their honesty as well as their dishonesty stood in their way

towards worldly success.

"Hell of a lot of Indians prowling around here," remarked Slim as we sat in what "piece of shade" on the platform we could find.

Hank, who had been smoking and brooding and not noticing, said: "Where?" looking left and right.

"Why," said Slim, "there are little groups of them all along through the bushes on the other side where we were. Seem to be waiting for something."

Hank looked up casually, stretching and yawning, rolled another cigarette, ruefully, his tobacco near an end.

"Yes," he said. "Well, to hell with them. Here's our train."

The passenger train came gliding to a standstill. People got out to stretch their legs, walked to and fro; the baggage-truck trundled; the intermittent clip of the hammer of a man testing the wheels sounded. Then "All aboard!" We let it go, its hoots for curves dying away off to west, before we returned to the office; and on arriving there were informed by a clerk that the boss was out. No, no idea when he would be back; hadn't said. We produced our time-checks, but the clerk shook his head. He couldn't do that for us; we must see the boss.

We went outside rather subdued, and there Hank again favored us with a sociological peroration. We wandered aimlessly about, went down to the end of the platform, the sun scorching our necks, and watched the sprinkler play. We walked on and looked at the water-tank, came back and stared at the sprinkler.

"What's the matter with eating?" suggested Slim.

"Only that we don't know if this is a good town," replied Hank.

"And we have no money," said I.

Slim laughed.

"Well, there must be houses where we could get a hand-out for sure," he said. "We might even get a sit-down."

Hank looked at me. I think he wondered if the significance of *hand-out* and *sit-down* had dawned on me and, if it had, what was my opinion. Whether too priggish or too proud, whatever be your view, I was for incontinently annulling partnership if there was to be any of that side of the hobo element introduced, that eleemosynary meniality. Begging as a profession, to be cheerfully resorted to (or even as an adjunct, one of the irons in the fire), I could not view, have never been able to view, with the pleasure of the author of "The Autobiography of a Super Tramp." I was away at the other pole in that matter, adread lest some day I might be forced by bitter necessity to beg, instead of having as part of my creed a determination not to work. I speak here less as moralist than emotionalist! I had rather be a hold-up man than a beggar. In those days, too, when Hank and Slim and I came to North Bend, work was plentiful in the West. Slim had the W. H. Davies outlook, however, saw begging as an amusing profession, was even at times slightly ashamed of working at all, though the more or less earned dollars of Penny's Pit in his pocket (when eventually he got them) gave him, shreds of other views remaining in him, a certain pleasure, I believe. But Hank understood my scruples. When our eyes met I saw something in his that meant he would be on my side if I spoke what was in my mind.

"Well, boys," I said, "we may as well split partnership altogether right now, before we've even commenced this trip of ours back south, if there's to be any of this bumming business. You didn't mention that to me. Stealing a ride on the trains is the only bit of hobo-life I'm going to have anything to do with."

"All right, all right," said Slim.

"I've no objection to not working," I explained, that he might know I could share some of his joys in life. "I like to sit in the shade and meditate. If nobody had to work it would be different, if the meals fell in all our mouths off the trees; but I cannot live on other people's labor. Stealing a ride off a big corporation like a railway is another matter altogether from going to houses cadging a meal."

"All right, all right," said Hank. "I quite understand the point of view and I'd be obliged if you wouldn't say more. For it's true talk, and makes me feel ashamed, and I hate like hell to feel ashamed. I can talk to myself just the way you're

talking."

"Why, man, it's all part of the fun!" exclaimed Slim, and then, throwing back his head slightly: "Oh, all right, have it that way. That's a deal, then, while hus are together."

We saw our man going up to the office and pursued him.

"What do you want?" he snapped at us as we followed him indoors.

"Guess you've forgotten us," said Slim. "Quite a while since we was here. 'Way back this morning."

"Well, I can't attend to you just now."

Then I saw another side of Hank. The man in office was holding the door open for us to depart. Hank had an unlit cigarette in his hand. He lit it, lifting his left leg and striking the match on the inside, blew a column of smoke towards this fellow, who seemed to hate us deeply, so that he had to hold back his head and blink against the volume of it. When he opened his eyes again it was to meet the blaze in Hank's.

"We'll wait inside here, till you're ready," said Hank, and I never heard one speak with such an edge to the voice, and only once before saw such a look in a man's eyes.

The man fluttered a moment, then recovered.

"You can't wait here," said he.

Slim looked around the place.

"Why not?" he asked. "Because there ain't no chairs?"

There was a quick glance between him and Hank and I knew they understood each other. They were going into action. They strolled to the counter, jumped upon it, there seated themselves. The man shut the door with a slam, passed behind the counter. Hank lay back, leisurely blowing smoke.

"Here, let me see your time-checks," came the voice of our vigorous contemner suddenly, as he burst back again into the office from his partitioned-off room.

We surrendered these and he dashed away.

For a moment Slim looked at Hank, a worry showing in his eyes, worried (so he told us later when all was over and they could laugh at the episode) lest we should not have given up our time-checks but kept hold of them by one corner at least while they were examined, till we had our payment checks, at least grasped by a corner, in the other hand! Quaint picture of office dealings as conceived in the mind of Slim; but then he had reason, bedeviled as we were by that man.

In a few minutes there came from the inner room a yelp for the assistant, who replied to the summons at the double. We did not see the man in office again. The assistant completed the transaction, an intermediary, anon presenting a big ledger-like book to us and laying three checks before us with the information:

"You'll have to take these. We haven't the cash here."

As well as giving us our payment-checks he returned to us our time-checks, and I wondered if he should not have retained these, and perhaps was hectored later for not having done so. I have that time-check of mine still. It reads:

"This is to indentify Fred Niven who workt in my gang. . . ."

then the dates and the boss's signature.

"You haven't the cash?" inquired Hank grimly.

"Well, so he says," the assistant replied in a low voice, and thereby became a friend of Slim and Hank.

They felt sorry for him, a poor boob, a poor guy hanging on to a job under a swine like that (thus they discussed him later) just because he thought he must hold down a job instead of realizing that the world was wide, and that the door

into it was not locked anyhow.

"The agent should be able to cash them for you," the youth further informed us, sotto voce.

"Well, so-long, Mr. Man!" called Slim, for the partition to the private room did not reach the ceiling.

There was, of course, no reply.

"To hell with him," growled Hank.

Pathetic fellows in a way. Slim did not know the word "indorse." Hank had once known it—there was no doubt whatever of that, from other words that he did know well.

"We've got to what-do-you-call-it these checks," said Hank when we got out, "back 'em up, or something. Damn it all, what do you call it?"

"Search me," said Slim. "You write your name on the back, anyhow."

We went to the depot where our financial troubles were over. The agent could just do it for us, but couldn't understand, he grumbled, counting the money for us out of his store, how the man in office could not do it. That over——

"I should like to eat," I said.

"I should like to drink," said Hank. "Come on up to the hotel."

We did not go to the one with the revolving sprayer on the lawn. We went to the other.

A long, lean, cadaverous, blue-eyed man was leaning against the side of the door into the saloon portion, watching us coming. He looked at us tenderly, but without speech, as we passed in.

What I expected Hank to say, of course, was: "What will you have?" I did not realize that when he drank, he drank by the bottle. He stepped up to the bar.

"A bottle of whisky," said he.

"A bottle? I'm afraid I can't serve you," replied the bar-man, looking worried.

On the instant, eyes blazing, Hank flung his hand round to his hip.

"Take a look at that, will you?" he snapped.

His intention was to produce his new wad of bills, thinking the barkeeper doubted, by his apparel, if he had the price for a bottle of whisky; but the barkeeper, with another explanation for that movement in his mind, at once ducked down behind the counter.

It seems all very queer to me now, the years having passed and I, instead of shaving in the jungle opposite, having stopped over there for a sentiment and slept in the hotel behind the watered lawn, seems all so foreign to me, indeed, now that I can excuse anyone who has never slept anywhere but in a hotel behind a cropped lawn for thinking this little incident fabricated.

But there is no doubt that the barkeeper thought Hank was about to pull a gun after that glance of rage; though that does not mean, of course, that guns were at all frequently pulled in North Bend. He may have come from some tougher place where guns were nonchalantly pulled, or from some tranquil place where the opinion was that in the West they were always being pulled.

The long, lean gentleman at the door certainly saw it as we saw it, realized that his barkeeper thought a gun was being drawn—for it chanced that he was the proprietor. He came lolling over to us.

"Man, what's the matter with you!" he said to his barkeeper.

Up came the barkeeper then like a jack-in-the-box, and to Hank the proprietor gently explained this odd reception.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen" (he called us "gentlemen") "but I had a message from the Indian agent yesterday, and I have to obey these messages. I ain't even allowed to use my own discretion. It's government order. And the message is to sell no alcohol in bottles to any but residents whom I personally know."

"Oh—I—see," said Hank slowly, greatly mollified.

"Seeing you've been put out this way," went on the proprietor, "let me stand the three of you a drink. Let it be on the house. Or perhaps you would prefer cigars?"

"Well, that's awful good of you," drawled Hank, with the most sentimental gaze upon the long, lean one of the blue eyes.

Slim, to my astonishment, did prefer a cigar, so I followed his example. It was a blazing day and our bellies were empty. They didn't measure the whisky for us in those days. They put the bottle on the bar, but Hank reciprocated the courtesy by taking below the minimum instead of the maximum, which said much for him considering how he could pour that liquor down his throat. I was to see him do so. According to the formality, when he and the proprietor raised their glasses, Slim and I elevated our cigars. We looked at each other. We looked at each other stonily over glasses and cigars, at attention. Then the proprietor and Hank having drunk, Slim said: "Smoke it later," and put the cigar in his vest pocket.

"Now, sir, have one on me," said Hank, the tot imbibed.

"No, thank you," replied the proprietor, and then he called us boys instead of gentlemen. "Now, boys," said he, "I'm a hotel proprietor, but I just hate like hell to sell drink to you. You don't get paid a heap of money; you got to work dam' hard for your money; and I just hate like hell when you boys come in and force me to sell you liquor, and drink it by the bottle at that."

"That's right, too," said Slim. "That's right, too"; but there was a slightly combative look in his eyes, not at all due, I think, even to a suspicion that there might be other considerations than for his welfare influencing the proprietor to speak thus, but because of the lurking thought that he was his own master. He resented the hortatory tone, however gentle it might be.

With Hank it was far otherwise. This paternal-like solicitude made him maudlin in sentimental admiration. The idea did not come to him at all that there might be more in this seemingly tender interest than was superficially apparent. He suspected no *arričre pensée*. Of course he did not see himself. Had he done so, in his knowledge of men, he might well, had he been that hotel proprietor, have thought: "Here's the sort that makes a rough-house when he has a few jolts." It is not beyond possibility that the long, lean gentleman, seeing him, welcomed the excuse of the agent's order, and then pulled out that other stop of paternal-like solicitude, desirous to be rid of such a guest at his house, whether drinking by the bottle or the glass. The thought that we had possibly, diplomatically, tactfully, with "sob-stuff," been got rid of did not dawn, however. Hank looked as though on the verge of tears.

We moved towards the door, the proprietor tapping a hand gently on Hank's shoulder as he went out, and then taking up his old position, leaning against his hotel. We walked quite a way without any speech, and then Hank began a harangue, this time not passing into chasms of blasphemy but into the depths of the maudlin, moved to the core by that hotelkeeper's talk.

When he was in the full flow of it Slim looked sidewise at him, and in that glance was a touch of such pity as I had seen Hank bestow upon the ignorant little navvy at Penny's Pit. Yes, it was maudlin; but I think there must be something rather supercilious and arid in the heart of one who can see him (whether caring to invite him in to afternoon tea or not) only as ridiculous, piffling on so about "that fine fellow, even if he is a hotel proprietor"; and a lack of imagination too, for behind that gratitude what bitterness over other treatment must have lain, what depths of disappointment there must have been in men, and in himself too, perhaps. I think in himself, too.

I thought when I started out with them that I was, chiefly, going to see some new places, dip into another way of life in their company. I had no idea that they were going to bulk so large, such queer characters, against the scene.

CHAPTER V

We had been sidetracked, as Slim phrased it, by the incident of the barroom and Hank's sentiment. Here we were out of the hotel and had forgotten that we wanted to eat.

"Why didn't we go through to the dining-room?" I asked.

They stopped dead; and then it was that Slim said: "That guy sidetracked us." Then:

"Aw, we don't want to eat in hotels, anyway," he went on. "Let's find the store and get flour and bacon and go cook a meal in the jingles."

"Yes, come on," said Hank, suddenly clarified again. "We may as well buy grub for our trip here. We'll jump a freight out, all right, and hold her down between meals. We can be our own hotel. Where's the store, mister?" this to a passer-by, who directed us.

"I got the frying-pan all safe in my roll," said Slim, so that all that remained was the procuring of the food to cook in it and, that purchased, we set out along the track some way and then entering the "jingles," beyond where the Indians lurked, we cooked a meal of flapjacks, fried eggs and bacon, and swilled it down with tea that was like nectar.

That frying-pan astonished me when educed. It was wrapped in a newspaper and looked brand new within, only blackened without. And after the meal, Slim put water to boil in it, and scraped it with a knife and polished it with pieces of paper. He was the fussiest chef imaginable. That frying-pan was a treasured possession. He liked to look at it, did so, the cleaning over, with a fond expression, as housewives may be caught looking at their rows of glittering aluminum pots and pans.

Our little smoke had not gone unobserved. As we puffed our cigars, Slim and I, and Hank a cigarette, over a final cup of tea, Slim gazing dotingly at the frying-pan, we heard a snapping of twigs and an old Indian came past close by, walking slowly, glancing at us.

"Guess he's going to ask us to buy him a bottle and he'll pay us a hundred per cent," said Slim.

But he did not. He merely peered sidelong, at a distance, and went on.

"He didn't seem to think we looked honest enough to act as agents for getting whisky," said Hank.

But that was not what all this furtive spying upon us by the aborigines at North Bend meant.

"We'd better put this fire out and get back to see about trains," said Hank, having again consigned these enigmatic red men to hell.

Dusk fell as we sat on the depot platform, and then we suddenly were informed, without any inquiry, what was afoot among the Indians. As we sat there a young white man came along and gave us good-evening, stood near us, giggling.

"Gosh!" he said. "I'm having a queer time. There's one or two of us got money from the Indians to buy them booze. Two of them have beat it on trains. One went out on a passenger, got a ticket for a little way up the line. Thought it the best way. I'm aiming to keep all I got, but they're watching me mighty close. When a train comes in and I nip round to see if I can jump her, they sneak up and give me away to the shacks [train-men]. They've got it in their heads that if I can't get the booze for them I ain't going to keep the money."

"You bet your life they are watching you pretty close," said Slim. "There's one standing no more than a couple of yards away—right here—back against the wall."

"Gee, I didn't notice him. They keep comin' up and askin' if I've got it, and I tell them not yet, but that I'm tryin', that the hotel won't let me have it, but that maybe I'll get next to somebody who can get it for me. They will think I'm trying to see if you can get it for me now."

"Well, I guess they'll see we ain't interested," replied Slim, and he turned his head away, humped a shoulder. I had never seen the expression "cold shoulder" so perfectly exemplified.

So that was what the Indians had been wandering round and round looking at us for: to see if we were the men to whom they had intrusted their dollars.

"Hell with him," said Hank, wearily.

CHAPTER VI

On the occasion of my second immorality in the matter of railway trains, night was the time instead of day. It was a moonless night but cloudless, and all the dome above us, over the rustle of the jungle trees, was splashed with stars, one of those nights when "innumerable" and "uncounted" are poor words to describe the sense of just that—truthful words, yet tame and ineffectual.

The trains having been guarded very keenly by watchful brakemen, we had been forced to remain a night rolled in our blankets in the bush, and then all the next day the watching of the trains was so businesslike that North Bend seemed to have become our home.

"If this goes on," said Slim, "we'd be cheaper paying!"

But there was the feeling that we had been dared, and besides, even though we had left Penny's Pit voluntarily at a time when no railway official was there who could give us either our wages or a pass to North Bend to collect them, we felt that the company owed us our travel at least to North Bend and back to Penny's Pit. So we could not even consider walking down the track in the hope of jumping a train at some grade later on, or at some other station.

"By gosh," said Hank, "we've just got to get out of here."

That was how we all felt. From the edge of the bush we had seen trains come in and go out, east and west, and watched the yard-hands watching. After the departure of one we had even heard a man call across the track to the station agent:

"I guess they've got out. They weren't around at all that time."

We wondered if we were the "they" referred to. Possibly, for the station agent laughed instead of seeming annoyed. We were of the opinion that it was our man in office who had passed the word to look out for us, and suspected that he was probably no favorite with the other employees of the railroad there. But we had, at the same time, an open mind. We might have been mere nonentities, hardly worth troubling over. "They" may have been the gang of men who had received money from the Indians to buy liquor for them, or even men who had been peddling whisky to the Indians and were wanted by the police. There was a sinister feeling about all this. I wanted to be gone.

When a locomotive whistled in the cañons west, coming toward us, on that night of stars and blue, we prepared again for the attempt, lurking in the deeper shadow of a woodpile to which we had crept from the "jingles," tightening our blanket-ropes so that the bundles would not swing against us, or sag, and so destroy our balance had we to leap for a side-ladder.

The rails sang. The depot-buildings were lit up by the headlight of the advancing train. We kept close to our lumberpile so as not to be seen. Even between its chinks the blaze of the headlight momentarily blinded us. We blinked, and then watched the string go past and come to a standstill.

"Not an open car in the whole blame bunch!" growled Hank. "Well, we'll have to ride anywhere; below, if necessary. Don't get killed, my friend."

"No," I said, and felt my heart jump up and down in my chest like an air-bubble.

"Better take bumpers for the sake of the queer fellow," suggested Slim.

Who was the queer fellow? I was the queer fellow this time. Gentle reader, I am not really queer, or not particularly queer, but to Slim anybody was more or less queer, at times, at least. The Deity to him, you will remember, was the Queer Fellow, with capitals.

"Aw! Look at that, will you?" ejaculated Hank.

To our side of the track came a man with a lamp. Beginning at the caboose, he walked the whole length of the train, bent low, flashing his light under the cars. He was not looking at oil-boxes or anything of that kind. He was looking for a hobo sitting on a rod; and so that no one might slip underneath after he had passed, another brakeman stood by the caboose looking ahead.

Slim laughed.

"Oh, I could take a chance on it if that fellow with the lamp was all alone," he said. "I once had to get off every stop and come close to the wheel, curve myself around the axle. Sometimes I was so darn stiff I could hardly get off my perch, but I had to soople up and do it, and quick too. He used to stand on the track till she started. Getting on again was a fright for speed—and soopleness."

The man who had been standing by the caboose departed when the other got the length of the locomotive, and the latter's silhouette we could see against the fanned radiance of the headlight. By the shape of it he was looking our way, probably had his eye on a light away astern of the train that any hobo, making an attempt to board her, would have momentarily eclipsed, thus advising him.

"Well, I guess," said Slim, "you better not try getting under. But do you think you could take her on the fly?"

"Yes," I replied. "I've never been a yard-switchman but I have now and then done a bit of yard-switching work when I was working at a freight-shed and the switchman was bored with his job and I had to get cars shunted."

"Let us go to it, then, when she starts. Let her get going down and then each of us up and at her and grab a side-ladder and haul ourselves up. We can meet on top and then fix up what to do once we're on."

At that moment the locomotive bell clanged and the rattle of couplings that we knew well began, then the preliminary whispers and creakings, and she was going.

"That fellow ahead there must be a yard-man and no braky," said Slim. "He's standing where he was. He can't expect to step on to the caboose there as she goes past him. She'll have too much speed on then for sure."

The train was indeed making speed rapidly.

"Aw, come on!" said Hank, and out we went like soldiers going over the top.

We headed for that train grimly, separating slightly. We were alongside. We were running sidewise, with loose ankles, as we could not look at the ground, our heads turned, hands up ready to grab a side-ladder. I heard the slap of Slim's hand on one and the rattle of clinkers as he leapt, first in the string. Then I heard Hank say: "Damn this bindle," his blanket-roll, I presume, having sagged round as he tried to grab another ladder. He dropped off and I, running, found myself level with him just as I jumped. I caught a ladder; I grabbed a second rung; I wrenched myself up. Below me came a quick breathing.

"Up you go!" panted Hank. "I've got a hold along with you."

Up I clambered.

"Feel round inside," he said, clinging on below me in a hunched attitude, "and see if there's an end-ladder there. If there is——"

"There is," said I.

"Step round in between, then," said he, and as I did so he came erect on the side-ladder.

"I can get on to the bumper," I said.

"For God's sake do," said he. "He'll see me plastered up here on the outside."

I stepped to the bumper, and round came Hank on to the end-ladder I had vacated. We were rattling along then at a good gait, all the creaking and squeaking of wood and iron begun that accompanies freight-car travel, when suddenly and briefly there was a light on us. There were two lights, and we knew what they were.

We had been seen. At the track-side one man crouched like a toad, holding a lamp so that its rays went under the passing train; beside him stood another man, holding his lamp in such a manner as to flick its rays, when the cars passed him, between each.

"Hell!" said Hank. "That fellow standing up waved his lamp ahead in some sign as we passed. Guess she'll stop and

we'll be ordered off before we've properly started"; and there, clinging to the ladder, he plunged into one of his perorations. It began with the yard-switchman and it ended with the president of the company.

But still we were rolling on. We rumbled over a bridge with that hollow drumming sound. His peroration was then reaching the directors of the company, but still we were picking up speed, so at the president he ended, instead of going on to the president's father and mother.

"We're not going to stop," said he. "I'll go and see where Slim is," and he clambered up the ladder to the roof, leaving me alone on the bumper.

Some time later a voice smote down into the noise in which I traveled.

"How are you making out, queer fellow?" it said.

"Hullo, Slim!" I exclaimed. "Hank went to look for you. Did you——"

"Yes, that's right. Come on up."

So I stepped to the bumper of the car ahead, stretched to its end-ladder and went up on top. There sat Hank and Slim side by side on the roof. I took my place beside them with my blanket-roll behind me as a cushion. Talk about exhilaration! I chuckled. I laughed outright. And Slim laughed back.

"All right, heh?" said he, beginning to roll a cigarette.

"Here, man!" exploded Hank. "Cut that out. They'll see the light if they're looking out of the caboose's raised part."

"I'll step down on a bumper to smoke," replied Slim, as one might say he would go along to the smoking car. "That's all right. I'm only getting it ready."

The cigarette rolled he stuck it behind his ear and we looked up at the night.

"Gee, what a lot of stars," said Slim.

"Only right above," remarked Hank. "There's a mist going across ahead."

Slim yawned, lay back and, to my astonishment, fell asleep while we rolled on through darkness and scent, scents of pine and fir, and now and then other odors, just a flick and gone, a minty smell once, another time a whiff of wild rose.

We roared through a black cañon. Then suddenly the rocky roar fell away behind and all was bright, bright as day almost. The light on Slim's eyelids woke him abruptly from his doze. And there we sat staring. We had come out of gulch into valley; we were coasting its southern side, and the north side was all in conflagration. I have never seen a forest fire like it. The crackle, although the valley must have been a mile wide, was very clear to our ears through the rattle of the train. Before that spectacle the long string of cars was dwarfed, Lilliputian, and we on its roof.

Flames of every color spurted skywards, in the midst of an oily glare that coiled above the range—coiled, seethed, went up in streaming banners. Fresh spurts of flames from trees suddenly turned into blazing torches, and fresh volleys of sparks from burning trees that fell gave added irregularity to the display, individual spectacles among the general display. More, to add to the effect, the heat cast up red and yellow cinders by the thousands and held them aloft, in abeyance. They danced up and down there, in the colored coiling smoke, above the blazing range, like innumerable, monstrous fire-flies. Every now and then a wind—what wind there was being from northwest—would flick out a lot of these poised cinders and they would come across the valley like leisurely shooting stars. They fell on the roof of the train. They came down, feathery, round us.

"Here, by gosh!" said Hank suddenly. "Looking at it, I forgot. We'll be seen from the caboose for sure. The whole place is lit up. If the shacks have looked along the train-top, instead of only at the fire, we've been seen already. Let's get down. I'll go ahead; you go down with him."

So Hank, stooping low, oscillated ahead and went down from sight while Slim and I descended at our end of the car on which we had watched that display. Hardly had we come down the ladder and stepped to the bumper than we passed into another cañon and left the superb conflagration behind.

This was the order of our going then: Hank was ahead, on a ladder or a bumper. Slim stood with his back to the gable of the car we had been sitting on, facing me. I stood on the bumper of the car behind the one on the roof of which we had been as in a grandstand looking at that fire; the one on which I had climbed at the beginning.

Soon we were laughing joyously, the reason for our mirth being the comical stationary dance we executed there. For, as we went up a grade, Slim's car would draw ahead, placing us far apart, mine dragged after his by the couplings. We would take a bend and he would drift to one side, I to the other, each perfectly erect. The bend taken, and the string of cars straightening out again, we would come jig-a-jigging, dancing back, face to face. Then the train would go down a grade, the couplings would swing loose, car pursue car, the bumper of mine clash on his, and there we would be almost nose to nose. Then a curve, and away we would go bobbing separate. So we laughed; at the end of one spasm of such rigid dancing (for of course we kept straight as pokers), put back our heads and whooped with joy.

Always something is happening, however. A few minutes later I saw a flick of light on the gable of Slim's car, high up, over his head. It did not descend to him, just flicked there and passed; and over us, from my car to his, went a man's legs, compass-like; and then a flick of light showed, for Slim's gaze, on the gable of my car.

"Did he see you, do you think?" I asked.

"We'll soon know," replied Slim. Then—"Here he comes," for he had seen the flick of light on the top of my car again.

He assuredly came. He crouched down above Slim and held his lamp over us.

"Hold up your faces," he said. "I want to have a look at you."

There is something very unpleasant in having a light held to one's face by a man whom one can't see, a mere shadowy bulk and with a very combative voice too. He held the lamp low, almost touching Slim's shoulder with it, while Slim blinked up at him. Then he stepped over to my car, held the lamp to me, and growled: "Look up, will you?" I looked up at that lamp, looked in, blinking, at the wick, looked up toward the man, wondering what he was like. Then he stepped back to Slim's car and sat down on the edge, dangling his legs over.

We wondered what was to follow, for he said nothing for a while. At last he spoke.

"How many of you are there on this train?" he inquired.

"Search me," replied Slim.

"You got any partnership with a fellow riding ahead?"

"I wouldn't know till I saw him."

"Man riding behind, is he in your party?"

"How do I know when I can't see him?"

"Oh, you're fresh, are you?" the brakeman said.

"You bet you. I'm feeling pretty good," Slim responded.

"You are, are you! Do you know I could boot you on the head and put you off this train?" the brakeman asked.

We had each to balance ourselves by holding, with thumb and finger, bolt ends in the car gables. Slim, then, loosened hold with his right hand and raised it up near his head at the ready.

"And if you tried," said he, "I guess you'd come down with me."

"Oh, you do." The man swung his foot near to Slim's hand.

"You bet your life," said Slim, and he held his hand open, ready to grab the foot if it actually kicked instead of feinting.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Up the line a little piece," said Slim, which is the correct reply to that inquiry, evidence of being *au fait* with the life.

"Have you any dough?"

"What's dough?" asked Slim.

"Dough is oof. Got any oof?"

"What's oof?" asked Slim.

"Oof is spondulicks. Got any?"

"I don't understand your language," said Slim.

"Oh, you don't, don't you?" and the leg swung unpleasantly.

"Here, quit that!" exclaimed Slim. "Now! I'm telling you." For the swung foot caused him to put his head on one side and slightly lose balance. He pressed his back hard against the gable of the car, got a fresh grip with finger and thumb of his left hand upon a bolt nut and his right hand very obviously ready to grab the brakeman's trousers' end if there was another swing that might overbalance him.

"Spondulicks mean money," explained the brakeman.

"O-oh!" drawled Slim. "Money! What would I do with money?"

"Well," said the man, "if you won't pay you can work your passage." He held the light down to my face again. "You got any objections to working your way?" he asked.

"None whatever," I said.

"All right. There's a car ahead here we've got to get something out of at a little jerk-water halt-place we're coming to. There won't be anybody there at this hour to do the job. So when we stop you get off and stand by to help unload when I open her."

"All right," said I.

"All right," said Slim, grudgingly.

The man stood up and waved his lamp. The train slowed, stopped. We clambered down.

"Are you there?" called the brakeman.

"Yes."

"Two cars ahead," said he.

We fumbled along in the dark.

"I don't see no sign of a house," said Slim.

Then the man waved his lamp. The train had stopped upon a down grade. At once she started and got up speed immediately.

"Aw, the son of a gun! Here, come on!" said Slim and, dashing ahead, began running by the side of the train.

"What?"

"We're not going to be ditched that way if we can help it. I'm for on again. Grab a ladder."

I ran in the darkness to get up speed for the leap. It was not as easy there as at North Bend, for the car was, this time, passing to right of me and it was very dark, and the permanent way was narrow, with a shelving side. I jumped, however, caught a rung of a ladder. Then my hand slipped, for the ladder was wet with dew. Slim was stumbling ahead of me, and I heard him jump, and fall. Flashed through my head the thought that he might be under a wheel. Suddenly he spoke. I heard him scramble, and was almost atop of him, running, as though trying to play leapfrog in the dark.

"No use," he said. "We can't make it. She's away."

She was indeed away. The caboose slipped by us. We heard the wheels go click-click rapidly over the meeting places of the rail lengths. The tail light glimmered away; and then we heard a voice.

It was Hank's. He was indulging in a declamation. It began on the subject of brakemen and it ended with the Deity. When he was done Slim sighed.

"Well, are you through?" he asked.

"Oh, you're there. I thought they'd ditched me alone."

CHAPTER VII

It is astounding how little light is provided by the flame of one match outdoors. There we stood in the darkness, the stars being almost blotted out because of a smoke-haze drifting over from northwest, and struck match after match to discover where we were. We seemed unattached from the world. We were in another world, a world of darkness, sound, an impression of imminent space. Where were we? Our voices echoed from cliffs to left, and from right there came to us a deep sullen roar that mounted from great depth.

"We're somewhere in the Fraser Cañon, I think," said Hank.

An occasional star twinkled through the veil and was lost.

"Well, the best thing, I suppose," he went on, "is to keep hitting it east."

And in that faint acrid odor of the smoke-drift, that added to the strangeness of it all, we fumbled along on the ties till the roar on our right was dulled.

"There's a bluff, or something, here," observed Hank, "between us and the river."

He struck a match and moved off the track, swore twice at inequalities he encountered, and then said: "Here's some kind of a shack," and struck another match. "It's a tool-house."

We groped after him, and found that the place was just big enough for the three of us to stretch out our blankets, which we did by the aid of more occasional matches. We drew our shoes off and, with our jackets for pillows, fell asleep.

Voices woke me to daylight. There was a face looking in at the little slit that served as a window. Hank, who slept center, was sitting bolt upright, his hair maniacally rumpled, glaring at the face that peered in at us. What exchange of repartee there had been before my awakening I do not know. The astounding statement I heard as I opened my eyes was from the man without—an old man, with a short white beard.

"That's an awful way to speak to an old man," said he. And then in a fawning voice: "I'm the old umbrella-mender."

I thought to myself: "In the name of all that's wonderful, what is the old umbrella-mender doing up here on a shelf blasted on the edge of the Fraser Cañon, miles from umbrellas?"

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Hank.

Slim yawned.

"Well, I hope you enjoy your walk," he said, pleasantly, without sitting up, and the face went from the slit.

We heard heels on clinkers and stones, then dull on the railway ties, receding westward.

"Huh!" snorted Hank. "Coming and wakening people like that!"

"An umbrella-mender," said I. "But he can't have any umbrellas to mend around here."

"Oh, I suppose it's a visible means of support," replied Hank. "He'll have some long walks between umbrella towns—Revelstoke, Kamloops, Vancouver—but it's a visible means of support, anyway. Did you ever hear of the man arrested for vagrancy who was asked what his calling was, and said he was a preparer and peddler of smoked glasses for observing eclipses, which forced upon him long periods of leisure?"

I smiled to the one side and Slim chuckled to the other.

"Gee," said Slim, "I'll tell you a true one. I dropped off the cars once at a jerk-water, one-horse town in Oregon, one of them grain-trucking places, head-trucker is mayor and magistrate and the whole works. I was that stiff I just rolled out and could hardly stand; and there was a little sawed-off cuss rolled out from the next car in the same shape as me. We was sure easy prey for the bull, so he just took us along with him. The mayor, magistrate, chief of police and head of the truckers, was in bed it seems. Well, John Long [another name for policeman] took us to his house and knocked, and the Whole Works looked out of a window one story up—it was a two-story house. He says: 'I'm in bed. What the hell is it

now?' The policeman says: 'It's two bums just come off the train. What'll I give them?'—'I can't see them. What are they like?' asks the Whole Works.—'There's a long, thin drink of a fellow,' says the policeman (that was me), 'and there's a little stub of a sawed-off cuss' (that was the other guy).—'Oh, to hell,' says the Boss of the Truckers. 'Give the long drink a fortnight and the little runt a week.'"

Hank, still sitting up, turned and looked down upon Slim and chortled.

"It's the truth I'm telling you," declared Slim. "I could tell you some other of my experiences, too, in some of them quaint little Oregon towns. There was Judge Casey, now, and he was the Boss of the Truckers in——"

"Oh, we'll have that some other time," said Hank. "It is hardly the place and moment, this, for stories out of your book of criminology. That dam' umbrella-mender! Coming and staring in here at people asleep! And waking us up! What the hell kind of manners was that?"

Slim yawned ponderously and sat up. We drew on our shoes and went out to see where we were. And where we were was, as Hank had surmised, by the side of the Fraser Cañon, very high up. A buttress of rock at that place thrust out of the cañon wall, and the tool-house was on the inner side of that rocky protuberance, where there was a slight slope of grass. We strolled back along the track westward to discover at just what sort of place we had been ditched, seeing, away ahead, before we stopped, the old umbrella-mender going round a corner of cliff, a dilapidated figure in that austere scene of rock and forest above him, precipices below, and the turbulent gray-green and white flow of silty and foaming Fraser River.

Slim found the marks of his feet and mine where we had plunged along beside the train trying to snatch hold of a ladder and "make her" again. A nice place to be ditched: To north that forest going up steeply, broken here and there with sheer cliffs; to south the cañon, the descent to it varying from precipice to slopes of seventy-five degrees. On a little spit of sand below, dwarfed to the value of a fly, was a man shoveling sand into a rocker, washing for gold, Chinaman belike.

"Yes, a darn' nice place to ditch hus!" said Slim. "Gee, it's a great morning. How about eating?"

So we strolled back to light a fire of chips beside the tool-house and have our breakfast, getting water to mix the batter for the flapjacks from a diminutive trickle that crossed the track in a sluice-box.

Over breakfast Hank suggested that we had had enough of railway travel for the time being, and ought to walk.

"There's heaps of time," he said. "We don't need to do more than ten miles a day unless we want to."

"We don't have to do five," said Slim. "We got all the summer before us, and the Indian Summer too. A person might want to stop and watch the dragon-flies."

In some companies this might easily have been received with derision. I glanced at Hank to see how he took it, and he did so as though the remark were casual, commonplace, as though he too were of those who do not live by bread alone.

"I wish it was always summer," said he—"summer, a pair of shoes that don't nip anywhere and five dollars in my pocket. That's good enough for me. And the beauty of this continent is that you can beat your way into all kinds of weather and scenery. I don't care for cities much."

"I only go to cities in winter," said Slim. "I ain't at all stuck on shoplifting and knocking the legs from under drunk old gentlemen going home late across lots at night."

I suppose my face registered some reaction to that remark, by the way Hank grinned at me.

"One old geezer like that once in Seattle," went on Slim, "I followed about three miles, and then he went across a vacant lot. I ran on my tiptoes after him, knocked the legs from him, and put my knee three times in his wind, then went through him before he could get his breath to holler. Well, it was worth it. That old soak had enough small change in his pocket, and him staggering home from a bat, to keep me comfortable in Seattle till the spring come."

More elucidation regarding the society I was in! And I was slightly astonished over the evidence that one who admired dragon-flies could rob old soaks going home across town lots. That seemed to me contradictory. I had forgotten Cellini's autobiography. But I am always making that mistake, a mistake in the nature of linking art and morality, always taking it for granted that your lover of the ćsthetic will be a decent sort; imagining, as foregone conclusion, that he in whose heart

it is to pause and watch the dragon-flies would let even an old soak go unscathed.

"How about getting on?" said Hank, abruptly.

"Gosh," said Slim, in the mood for more retrospective divulgement, "I wish I had never left Mrs. Princep."

"Oh, to hell with Mrs. Princep," said Hank.

Slim cast him a sidelong glare.

"He wants you to ask him who she was," Hank added, to me.

"It's what I was to her," said Slim. "I was her Fancy Boy. I would have stayed with her, too, if I could have foreseen into the future all this getting ditched on the side of a mountain, and hitting the ties in the heat. I was younger then. She took a fancy to me and gave me a job at the hotel. I was a kind of chore-boy and arrant-boy."

"He was an arrant boy, all right," interjected Hank.

Slim evidently missed that.

"It was a dirty business," commented Hank.

Slim laughed.

"Old Princep never found out anything about it," he said. "I laugh sometimes when I remember the time he went into a little storeroom and the door slammed on him, and he got locked in and hollered. Mrs. Princep heard all right, but she and me took the opportunity—" and he told us the story.

Hank listened to it all, though I presume he had heard it before, and then he gave one of those laughs that is best described as a couple of shakes to the midriff and a grin.

I had read in books, about such people, that many of them spent much time in libraries in winter, so I said to Slim:

"Have you ever read 'The Golden Ass,' by any chance?"

"The Golden What?" said he.

"'The Golden Ass,'" said I.

"No," said he.

"Oh, I just wondered," I said. "Your story of Mrs. Princep reminded me of it. There are a lot of incidents of that sort in 'The Golden Ass.'"

"Now there's an interesting thing," said Hank. "You make me think. You know that we fellows—or us fellows; I forget which it is now, hearing such a lot of punk grammar—carry on a bit of the life of these kind of books. The people going past in the Pullman cars don't know anything about it. There is a sort of whiff in our life of that kind of classics, yes, and that ballad—I forget who wrote it, if I ever knew—about:

> "'Back and side go bare, go bare;
> Both foot and hand go cold;
> But, belly, God send thee good ale enough
> Whether it be new or old.'"

I checked on my face the look of: "How do you know about all this?" but he must have seen it before I'd thought to check it. I fear I have not a mask of a face. I wish I had. He looked me in the eyes, and then looked away into distance, and his face became gloomy in the extreme.

Slim glanced at him and appeared to be worried.

"Here," he said, "come on. Let's hit the ties, ten miles a day or five."

He rose and doused out the embers of our breakfast fire beside the old tool-house.

But Hank was fallen into a melancholy. Not a word as we went on had he to say, eventually lagged behind, and when we glanced over our shoulders we saw him walking with head down-cast, an expression of blent woe and rage on his face, one hand pluck-plucking at the nails of the other in a way that, as I was to note, accompanied these periods when the Black Dog was upon him.

"We'll leave him be," said Slim to me, after a glance back. "It'll last a spell and then he'll be so genial you wouldn't know him for the same man."

At bends of the track we lost sight of him entirely and Slim and I, without speech, went on till suddenly an anthill caught Slim's eye and deflected him. Down he had to get upon his heels to watch.

"Say, come here and look at this," said he. "Here's two of them taking a big beetle to the anthill, packing it home on the hoof too. The darned thing's alive. See, there's two of them in the front, each of them got a hold of one of his what-you-may-call-'ems—antennć, or something. And, say, look at this little fellow going ahead to pick out a way for them! Look at this little squad here clearing the way too; and they got a boss organizing them! 'No, I'll be damned if I'll come,' says the beetle. See him backing up. Gee, there's one got on his back and jabbing at him on the head. Say, now, if he ain't like one of them plugs that sits on the top of an elephant in the hookah—no, hoodah, I mean. Wait a bit till I show you something."

Off he went, taking slow strides and gazing at the ground, zigzagging about in the track-side bush. At length it seemed he had discovered what he sought; for he took a sheet of newspaper from his pocket, laid it on the ground, and gently kicked some earth on to it, then came, carrying the paper gingerly outheld, back to me.

"Ever seen this?" he asked, putting the paper down, and I saw that there were ants on it also.

He kicked some earth from the edge of the big anthill on to the sheet.

"Now, there you are!" he said. "There's red ants and black ants all on the one paper. You watch and see the scrap when they meet," and he perched upon his heels once more, elbows on knees, over the newspaper battlefield.

For that is what it was in a moment or two. Had Slim's life been otherwise, had he known a different home, had he not run away and started afresh as Mrs. Princep's "arrant boy," might he not perhaps (you remember how, when we started out, one of the first things he did was to call for a rest in shade, but how, instead of resting, he had to be observing the caddis worms) have been another Fabre, or another Beebe? The sight of one ant with but two remaining legs cooled my interest over this battlefield, and I stood up.

"How about putting a foot on the paper, Slim," I said, "and finishing it?"

"Gee, that's so," he agreed. "I guess some of them must be in considerable pain, though they're still staying with it, though maybe in the heat of combat some of them don't know they're shy three-quarters of their legs."

It was at this point that Hank, trudging lonely after us, came level on the track, turned aside, walked to where we stood, and with his last step put his foot on the battlefield and rubbing vigorously left and right with shoe-sole made an end.

"To hell with that!" he said. "There's enough suffering in the world without making more, even if it's only ants."

"That's right," said Slim.

Hank looked from one to the other and beamed upon us, nad'vely, childishly almost.

"This is an awfully interesting bit of country we're passing through," said he. "Have you been noticing the little bits of the old Cariboo trail winding along on the other side of the cańon? They are wiped out every here and there with slides. Queer to think that men used to come along there once upon a time like ants."

He moved back to the track and as we trudged on side by side he talked about that old history, and not in an informative schoolmasterish way at all, but as if we too probably knew it. He talked of the forty-niners who became fifty-niners up here, many of them coming in overland all the way, of these a few deflecting to Rock Creek, where we were yet to go, many a mile to south.

"Some of them," said he, "thought they could treat the Indians up here the same way they treated the poor Monos and other tribes down there. It didn't work. They used to stop and wash the sand down here before they went on, and maybe you know the way the Indians let them realize they were not to be hunted like cougars. They used to kill up one or two miners once in a while and throw them in the river, and away they would go bumpety-bump on to one of the bars where these fellows were washing gold. It is an awful turbulent and tricky river. I saw a man fall in once. You'd have thought his name would be Dennis in all the boil, but do you know he was out almost before he knew he was in. He just went down, squirt, on the top of one of those rushes, and whirled around into a backwash and grabbed a rock. He was hardly wet!"

"I remember," said Slim. "I seen that with you. A close call. Do you remember next day, when he was telling that plug who hadn't been there about it, and the plug says to him: 'I'd have liked to have seen you do it. Jump in again and let's see.'—'No, siree!' says the fellow. 'Once is enough.'"

The place-name of Kanaka upon a board on the way ("Kanaka—1 Mile") started Hank again on bits of the life of the land that later would become history. There is nothing like a place-name for retaining the story of the past—place-names and philology fascinating studies.

It was close to Kanaka that we saw by the track-side a low, grimy shack—in the general sense of that word (not using it in the hobo-slang sense of brakeman!)—a low, grimy log-cabin, door open for air, but without a mosquito-door. It was the hum of flies inside, as we passed, that made me look in. The impression conveyed in that brief glance was of a *crčche*. Four babies lying on blankets on the floor, I thought I saw. Hank said he was sure it was five.

"Well, by gum, it looked to me like thousands," said Slim, "and flies buzzing all over them."

There was an Indian, or a half-breed, woman in a patch of miserable garden alongside who looked as though in the last stages of consumption; and as we walked on we met two little papooses coming pottering along. We three smiled at them, and they looked up with the most winsome smiles imaginable. I was going to put my hand on the head of one in passing, and then I didn't, let it be just a friendly gesture over it. I had noticed its hair and scalp.

"What was that bandage on the neck of one of them for?" asked Slim after we had walked on.

"Didn't you see the sores?" said Hank. "Poor little sons of guns. Syph', I expect."

"Did you ever hear," said Slim, "about the progress of the world—civilization and syphilization?"

It took a lot of tramping for one half to forget that cabin where the flies buzzed.

Suddenly Hank and Slim stopped abruptly together. There was unanimity in that halt, although no word had been spoken. It was the hooting behind us of a locomotive that had given them the same notion at the same moment.

"Gosh, I don't know!" said Slim. "My feet are getting kind of hot. Them ties are burning hot, I bet you." He stopped and felt one. "Yes, it's as hot as if it had been in a fire."

That mellow roar of the engine sounded again, whistling before another of the many curves thereaway.

"If she's a freight coming," said Hank, "and at all heavy, she'll lose way coming up that grade we've just mounted."

"That's so," agreed Slim.

He looked at the track. We were obviously on a level stretch. A little way back we had passed one of those boards showing the grades. We could still see it; it was painted white. The further arm had a considerable cant to it. The one on our side was straight.

"Here, let's go back and meet her," said Hank. "We might jump her on the fly if we got down the grade a little bit."

We turned and posted back, but even as we did so the great round front of the locomotive appeared at the far end of that long straight grade. We posted on. The steam was going up from her stack in steady gusts. She advanced in that gorgeously stately and terrible way of these big engines, the cowcatcher a fanning *A* under the front circle of her boiler.

"We got to shake a leg," said Slim.

We shook a leg. The front of the boiler had the appearance of enlarging in diameter. The fanning *A* of the cowcatcher became massive.

"She's coming up the grade pretty good," said Slim.

The engineer favored us with a short blast of the whistle, and Hank and Slim laughed.

"He's telling us he's seen us," said Slim. "Guess he knows what we're hurrying to meet him for, savveys we ain't really going west."

In answer to that brief blast we stepped to the side of the track.

"Come on," said Slim, settling his blankets on his shoulder, with a flick to the rope, and from quick walk we passed into run.

We were laughing as we ran, with the sheer *joie de vivre* of it. The puffs of the locomotive came swiftly; a couple, indeed, sounded rather panting, but the ones immediately following were again swift. The locomotive had arrived at the top of the grade before we had.

Elbow on cab window, the engineer leant over and with a laugh shook his head at us; but we ran on, down grade, spaced ourselves out, whirled round and then began running with her. There was rather a steep edge to the embankment just at that place to add to our difficulties.

The quarter-mile string of freight-cars (it seemed about that length) was not slowing down. It was gaining speed, it went screaming and roaring past.

"Can't make it," Hank growled, and stood still, the first in the line.

"No?" I inquired.

I looked back towards Slim, who had taken the tail-end. He puckered his lips and shook his head. We stood aside, and looking towards the locomotive, there was the engineer craning out to see if we had succeeded. When he saw us standing there pat he stretched up a hand and gave us a Roman salutation, with a modern waggle to the end of it.

The string of cars complained and screamed on, flat cars, high closed box-cars, open cars, one coming along with the inevitable sprung door going thud-thud-thud, then a swirl, a gust, a rattle of chains, and the caboose went by, the conductor sitting on a little stool on the small rear platform—a big fat man, hat on back of head, cooling himself in the draught.

But we had no peroration of rage from Hank.

"Well, it don't amount to a damn," he said. "I guess we weren't particularly anxious for a lift, anyhow."

CHAPTER VIII

We ignored, thereafter, till we came to Lytton, all trains, strolling on easily, with generous rests on the way whenever a copse of specially kindly trees invited. At Lytton we turned into one of the narrow draws, or gulches, south of the track. An Indian trail coasted its westward brim. We camped in the bottoms there.

On the last mile of our trudge Slim had sung to me a lugubrious ditty of a dying hobo whose dream of heaven was of a place where, to rime with "socks,"

". . . little streams of alcohol
Come trickling down the rocks."

That was the highwater-mark of it, the only gleam, so you may understand my private doubt if the N.Y.Y.T. (standing for New York Whitey, a celebrated hobo prematurely gray), who was said by Slim to have written it, and to have been a College Guy, was really the perpetrator.

"Harvard, I believe, not Yale," he said. "Yes, I guess Harvard."

The finale of it was:

"'Tell my boy down on Clark Street,
Next time his face you view,
That I've taken the great eternal freight
And I'm going to ride her through.'

"He bowed his head, he heaved a sigh,
He never spoke again.
His comrade left him lying there
And took the guts of an eastbound train."

Slim informed me that Josiah Flint had wanted to get that song and had failed.

After supper we went out for a stroll, a loaf along the depot platform, before turning in, and sat down for a time near the water-tank. Odd what a fascination water-tanks have for hoboes. Perhaps it is but evidence toward the view that all must have a center somewhere. Any water-tank is a sort of clubhouse for them. In the dim light from a lamp near there we could decipher the "monikers" of other tramps who had passed that way—Swansea Slim, and Chicago Kid, and Ginger George. One had written, below his moniker, the legend: "Crow's Nest Pass or Bust."

"Guess he bust," remarked Hank. "Oh, well, better be cheerful, better guess he made it. But how would he go? Bit of a job beating the boats down Arrow Lakes, if he went that way."

I told of a man I knew who had beaten his way on the Slocan Lake boat by going on to the main deck instead of the passenger deck and, when he saw a ship's officer, grabbing a truck and running it from one end of the deck to the other, then hiding behind some merchandise and, when the trip came to an end, jumping ashore first to help with the gangplank and then rushing away off the wharf, the landing officer shouting after him: "Come back, there! Where are you going?"

While they were chuckling over that story a sound, a faint hiss, made us turn our heads. Two Indian women were on the other side of the tank in silhouette against the haze of a lamp across the road, and their walk, as they moved to and fro for us to observe them, was markedly different from that of the women who had tramped round our camp at North Bend. As we turned our heads, our attention attracted by their hiss, they posed, these two silhouettes, backs to the wind with skirts outblown.

Slim gave a little answering hiss.

"Quit!" said Hank.

"Sure," answered Slim. "I don't mean it."

"They might think you did."

"I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole," said Slim, "especially after seeing them kids down at the cañon. They was sure an object lesson."

We turned our backs on them with definiteness, and they departed; and a little while later we left the neighborhood of the tank and struck off across the track for our camp in the draw, as do worthy burghers pass home from their clubs.

Just before leaving Penny's Pit I had received a letter from home in which the kindly hope was expressed that, in my various peregrinations, my trunk and suitcases (which I had actually left, months before, in the care of a friend in Vancouver as excess baggage) were wearing well. I happened to recall that part of the letter as we sat round a small fire in the gulch, sleepily thinking of turning in, and I smiled to myself.

"What's the joke?" asked Hank.

So I communicated it.

"I was just recalling a remark in a letter from my folks," said I. "They hoped my trunk and grips were standing the strain of all my moving around."

That set us talking of possessions, and I found that neither of my companions envied millionaires. To Slim a millionaire had too much to attend to, too much to "fuss over."

"It's all very well thinking if you are a millionaire you could do nothing, but you got to keep track of your investments. It ain't all up and down the sunny side of Easy Street for millionaires. And we got all a millionaire has got."

I opened my eyes.

"Sure!" he said. "We got cigars," and he laughed. "Maybe we do get them off the sidewalk instead of out of the tobacco store, but we got them; and Hank there gets whisky, which he prefers to champagne, I guess. And neither of us is addicted to women, but if we was you seen how we could have gotten one down at the water-tank."

This was Slim in his most parasitical attitude, with but very faint laughter by way of discount.

Hank sat and surveyed him a while thoughtfully over that summing up, then remarked that it was a cinch the millionaire couldn't take his belongings with him where he was going, his yacht, his town-house, his country-house.

"No, nor the apartment where he keeps his fancy woman," Slim interjected.

Hank wagged his head at him and winked at me. Then——

"We have only our blanket-rolls," said he.

"Well, you don't even take that with you where you're going," said Slim. "Not that you'll need them. You'll have more call for an electric fan!"

But Hank had gone into a muse. I do believe he was thinking of the long journey of man's spirit, a streak of what is called Celtic temperament in him. There he sat, gone into a muse, slowly plucking his finger-nails.

Slim slept late in the morning. How a man could lie in blankets till nine, with the sun full on him, wakening and yawning and turning over for another nap, beat me. The open-air sluggard has surely a specially strong streak of laziness in him. Laziness, I think, was at the back of Slim's life, though not of Hank's.

They were just discussing the advisability of doing a little shopping in Lytton when the hoot of the west-bound passenger-train sounded, drawing near. They looked at each other.

"See if we can make it," said Slim.

"All right," said Hank. "Now look here," and he turned to me, "here is where you go alone. There is no use trying the blind-baggage with all these people around at the far end of the station. We've got to go under."

My heart at that went rub-a-dub.

"Remember what I told you about the guts of a train," he went on. "Better punch the breeze. Slim will look after himself under a car. I'll come in with you, punching the breeze, just across from you."

In roared the train and we hurried down to the track, my heart trying to get up toward my throat, it seemed. Slim got down on his knees.

"I'll go on the same car with you," he said, "but ahead, and take it in the neck."

He thrust his bundle in front of him and crawled in under the first axle forward. I dived down and crept rearward, got under the axle, came to the truck, looked up for the brace-rod on which I was to perch. As I did so, congratulating myself on having got so far, a voice said:

"Full up, partner."

There was a man, his back to the truck, his stern on the rod, and his knees drawn up so that his shoe-heels caught under it.

I gasped. Behind me was Hank, wondering why I backed.

"Full here," I said, turning on all fours.

"Oh! Some one there? Is there anybody on the other side?"

We peered to see.

"No," hissed the man on the rod.

It was a moment of jeopardy. Trains did not stop long at Lytton. Next moment we might hear the locomotive bell clang, and that might be a parting knell for us.

"You get on the other side," said Hank. "I'll beat it ahead and balance Slim." Then the bell gave a clang. "Oh, my God! Here, quit; get out of this," he said.

He was able to turn about but I, having once more, in response to his advice, whirled round to the truck, thought it speedier to come scuffling out backwards, dragging my bundle after me. We got under the body of the coach, beyond the axle, but though the locomotive bell had clanged the tug had not come to the train. Nor did it come. We heard the engine puff off ahead alone.

"It's not started," said Hank. "The loco' has uncoupled and gone ahead for something. It's not for water, for the tank isn't that end—unless she's coming back on—" he left the rest unspoken. "Here's somebody coming. Don't budge till they pass. We'll make it yet. You go across there and balance that stranger on the rod, and I'll skidoo in front by Slim."

"Come out of that," said a voice, quietly.

We came out, and there was the conductor. He looked at us, thoughtfully.

"I don't want to see a man killed on my train," said he, and, specially addressing me: "Why don't you do the right thing and get inside?" He stooped and peered under. "Here, out of that!" he said.

The man astern he evidently did not notice. But Slim, seeing we were observed, had dropped off his perch and was crawling out under the nearer of the forward axles, entirely obvious. Just as he appeared under the body of the car there came a slight jar to the train. The locomotive had returned, and the conductor at that dashed off to give an order on the station side. The bell clanged again. She was off.

"What went wrong?" asked Slim; and Hank and I told him of the man already perched where I went. He was irritable on asking the question, but the explanation made him laugh.

"But say," he said, turning to me, "why didn't you respond when he asked you why you didn't do the right thing? I heard him say that, didn't I?"

"Well," I began, "the game is to get along without paying——"

"Oh, he didn't mean the right thing that way; paying full fare. He meant get inside and slip him a quarter. A quarter is all

right for a long ride on cushions inside! He knows a man is no spotter who is taking chances of breaking his neck underneath, and making no bluff at that either, quite safe to invite inside for a ride."

"Never mind; no matter," said Hank, and then he laughed too. "Comic when you think of it, slipping in like that underneath and hearing a man say, 'Full up, partner!'"

Candidly, I did not regret that the perch was occupied; my heart was just getting back into its normal place again, down from my throat.

"Never mind," said Hank again. "For a first attempt you did fine."

"He did, indeed," said Slim. "I believe he's done it before. I seen the way he went under. He went in like a gopher hunting cover."

Very mollifying to hear that, considering how I felt.

Thus it was, the passenger-train being off without us, that they did their shopping in Lytton after all; and, as "bindles" branded one, they suggested to me to stay with the blankets while they walked down to the stores. So I stayed and committed to paper the song about hand-outs growing on bushes in heaven, and various words of hobo-slang and quaint phrases and their possible derivations (such as *gat* for revolver instead of the ordinary man's *six-gun* or just gun; derivation, perhaps: *gattling-gun*), and notes of stories they had told me.

As I wrote, sitting in the bottom of that gulch, there came to my ears a faint frou-frou of a sound, and I looked up. A string of Indians rode past on the edge of the crest. A great picture. Even in our reach-me-down garments from the stores the Indian cannot lose his picturesque quality. A white man sitting in that dip, writing on a pad, they had already noted, their heads turned toward me, but as I glanced up they looked away. In the Guildhall Library in London, some years later, looking over a portfolio of Edward Curtis's photographs of Indians, I was reminded of that day at Lytton when I noted down hobo songs and jargon, and vagabond stories, and wrote letters all on my lonesome, save for the grasshoppers, in the pleasant air while my two companions were gone a-shopping.

Slim returned alone, wearing a fine new hat of black felt, and carrying a parcel that contained underwear, socks and soap.

"The queer fellow," he said to me, Hank being the queer fellow this time, "is still down in the burg. He's drinking and slobbering over friends and the pleasure of getting in touch with humanity. I tried to get him away and he told me to go to hell."

A long time Hank was away, and while Slim and I sat there waiting for him a wind rose, a sudden wild wind out of the south, besoming sand and dust ahead of it in clouds. We enjoyed it. This was the sort of thing we three had in common, the enjoyment of dragon-flies and roaring silty rivers, and shallow opal ones, and miraculous windstorms as if out of nothing. But when it passed, and it simply came and went, brief and wild, Slim's hat was gray instead of black. He took it off and carefully, very carefully, flicked it with his kerchief, then desisted.

"I don't want to take the new nap off it," he explained, and so seriously that I did not suggest that he had a good deal of dust to get off before reaching the nap.

"Hank's staying an awful while," he remarked a few minutes later. "How about going down and seeing if we can find out when a train leaves?"

"All right," I said.

We went down to the depot where I mailed the letters I had been writing; and then Slim walked into the agent's office and, holding the door open, a thumb under his belt, head canted back, smiling, simply inquired thus:

"Mr. Agent!" The agent looked up. "When does a train pull out?"

The agent, sitting at a table, gave him a quick scrutiny.

"East or west?" he asked.

"East," replied Slim.

The agent told us the hour.

"Thank you, Mr. Agent," said Slim, and shut the door.

"Are we going out on a passenger, then?" I asked.

"That ain't no passenger he told us the time of," Slim drawled, looking at me aslant with a glance that was a blend of scorn and pity.

"But——"

"Oh, he knew what I meant. Didn't you see the look on his face?"

As we came back along the platform, Hank appeared from down hill, very florid, very happy, but with wild eyes. Up to the camp we went together and then, when we were seated, he gazed at Slim's hat.

"You better brush your hat off," said he.

"It's all right."

"Man, it's gray!" said Hank.

He pulled a bottle of whisky from his hip-pocket, opened it by the easy expedient of tapping its neck on a stone on the slope behind him, and offered it to me. I shook my head. He offered it to Slim, who shook his. Then he drank himself, daintily, but deeply, from the ragged-edged neck.

"Your hat is gray, man," he said again. "It looks as if you had fished it out of a refuse-bucket at the back of a third-rate hotel."

Slim took it off, examined it.

"My hat is all right," he said.

Hank quaffed again, just opened his throat and poured as it were a filler.

"It might be if a person could see it," he said. "I can't see it for grit; and you only bought the dam' thing an hour ago."

"You quit about my hat," said Slim.

"Here, give me your dam' hat and I'll brush it for you," and Hank grabbed for it.

Slim sat back and put the hat on.

"You quit about my hat," he said. "I ain't going to brush it, I tell you. I don't want to take the nap off."

"What's the matter, man? You might as well say you'd never brush your teeth in case you rubbed the enamel off! That hat of yours——"

"I ain't going to do it, I tell you."

"Child, child!" exclaimed Hank, and drank again. He turned to me. "Isn't he an infant?" Then he looked back at Slim and suddenly roared with laughter. "I never heard anything so dam' funny as taking the nap off—off that," he looked at the hat and laughed again.

Then he quieted down and had a new thought.

"How a man of intelligence can bum around the country with an infant like you, I'm darned if I can understand," he said.

"Who is the man of intelligence what bums around with me?" asked Slim.

Bleary-eyed, Hank considered that, then winked at me.

"That was pretty clever, wasn't it?" he said. "We got to admit that was unexpectedly clever from an infant who says he don't want to take a ton of grit off his hat in case he ruffles the nap when getting it off."

"Aw, quit your kiddin' about the hat. You're drunk."

"Me drunk! Drunk or sober, my lad, I——"

"You what?"

I realized from the look of both that here was an occasion when I, according to contract, must intervene.

"Now," said I, "cut it out. I don't allow you two children to scrap, you remember."

"That's the boy!" said Hank. "Now if there's one thing I am, it is a man of honor. Promise is a promise. We promised that, Slim. If he said quit, we quit."

"All right; quit then."

On the point of saying more, Hank suddenly bowed and said nothing. Then he reached for the bottle at his feet, but Slim took it, put the ragged edge cannily to his mouth, drained it, and tossed it away.

"I thought you said you didn't want any!" blazed Hank.

"Neither I did," replied Slim, "but I don't like to throw the stuff away, and you've had enough. I only drank that so's you wouldn't have more."

"Ah-ha!" said Hank, rising. "When does that train pull out?"

Slim told him.

"I'll be back," he said.

"Where are you going?" asked Slim.

"To visit my friend MacGinty," replied Hank, and lurched away.

"Well, come back in time and don't get into a scrap down there. I ain't got no court-plaster to patch you."

Hank pivoted, and waggled a hand.

"I'll be there," said he.

And he was there. When the train whistled, drawing near, Slim and I strolled down to the depot, carrying our own and Hank's blankets, in the hope of meeting him on the platform. No, no Hank. We sat down on the edge of the hill where we could see the beginning of Lytton. No Hank on the road. The train shunted to and fro, and still no Hank.

"Ah, well, we can't make it," said Slim. "I expect he's got into a scrap by now, maybe locked up. He begins by thinking how sociable everybody is when he's boozed, and then he gets the notion it would be a kindness to slay them."

The train shunted back and forth. The shunting over, it stood there with an aspect of waiting the word to go, the brakemen strolling up and down chatting to the freight handlers, the conductor standing at the agent's door, a great big fellow who looked as if he was propping up the building instead of propping himself on it, throwing remarks over his shoulder to the agent within.

And then——

"Well, what—do—you—know?" exclaimed Slim.

There was Hank coming up hill. One might have been pardoned for imagining it was for him the train waited. He came staggering, staggering speedily, every stagger negotiated to cover the ground. He staggered on to the platform. He balanced there and looked at the train blocking his way to our camp. He balanced again; and producing a very large cigar lit it, carefully blew out the match and discarded it with a flourish. His arrival had attracted attention. The various

groups looked at him. He peered, as through haze, at his observers, and shot his flannel, for one can't say linen.

In front of him was a car, not exactly a flat-car but an open car with a bulwark round it of maybe two feet or so in height, stacked with sawn timber. He stepped to it, mounted to it. We thought he was going to cross over to us, but he was only getting aboard, us forgotten, his blankets forgotten, only the fact that he had said he'd be back in time to catch the train remembered. He was as proud as a turkey at having remembered, and caught it. Short lengths of the timber were below, above some longer lengths protruded. He bent and went under the long ones, sat back, cigar in mouth, thumb in waistcoat at the armpit, and just then the conductor came abruptly away from propping the agent's door-jamb, nodded to the engineer, and the bell clanged. The hiss of escaping steam that had been shrill while the train stood there had an abrupt end. She was off.

"Well, by God," said Slim, "there's a lesson in how to board a train when you're beating your way. Get stewed to the gills, and then just step on, smoking a cigar, and nobody seems to notice. Come on."

We dashed down on our side, tossed the blanket rolls up and in beside Hank, one of them bowling him over on his side, and grabbing hold climbed in upon him helter-skelter. And nobody seemed to have seen us either. The train was off, speed up. It was the funniest thing. I sat there and laughed.

Last time I passed through Lytton I looked out of the Pullman window to see the draw up which we camped. There is a fence now on that side; the trail on the lip of the crest is almost obliterated.

CHAPTER IX

And now Hank lifted up his voice and sang to the rhythmic roll of the wheels, sang a dismal song of, it seemed, uncountable verses, to each of them appended, in a sad wail: "Move on! Move on!" The ditty reeked of police and criminals, sordid, macabre. Of it I took no record then or later, and can only recall:

"Oh, quit now your yegging,
There's nothing in begging.
Move on! Move on!"

I tried to put him out of my mind even though in such close proximity to him, not in the mood then for objective curiosity, and sick of that dismal doggerel. Slim, too, was satiated, to judge by a heave he gave to his shoulders and a turning away of his head from the songster. He reclined, back to the side bulwark of the car, not to the short timber ends, and gazed up at the sky through chinks between the longer pieces that protruded over the short ones. His mind was far off. He may have been thinking of Mrs. Princep, or of dragon-flies shuttling back and forth among the bulrushes by some secluded pool he wot of. I often wondered what they were thinking when they sat, or trudged, obviously in deep reverie.

After a long easy travel we halted and Hank, who had ceased singing and slumbered heavily, came awake, looked round him.

"This is a darn stupid place to select to travel," he remarked. "If there was a collision or anything what chance would we have here? A man would be safer on the rods in below."

"Maybe, but not soused," said Slim to me, not to him.

"A dam' novice's place," Hank went on. "A ring-tail's idea of a good place, a betwixt and between, half-hobo, half gay-cat."

"Guess that's what we are," said Slim, again speaking to me. "We do work once in a while."

Hank sat blinking. The smell of him was like that of a lamp.

"Who selected this perch anyhow?" he demanded.

Slim nudged me and winked.

"Doesn't remember getting on," he muttered.

Then Hank beamed genially upon me.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Well, that's all right. I guess for a novice like you, Slim was wise to choose this, instead of in below. When I said the rods were safer I meant for one who had done it before. This is safer in a sense, of course, but it ain't safer if there's a collision. By gosh, I knew a man once who was riding the rods and the train ran away, locomotive out of control, somehow. She got on an awful lick for speed, down grade, took a bend at such a whirl that several cars sprung loose, snapped right off the trucks. The car he was under did that. He was riding with his back against the truck, sitting on the cross-rod. Judge of his surprise, as you might say, when the car above heeled over, and there was a rending, and away she went in a gulch. At last the string stopped. All the trucks were on the rails, but half the cars had snapped away and gone biff down into that cañon. Here was my hobo friend sitting on a rod with sky over him where there should have been car floor, and not a scratch. He just naturally got off, about as dazed and astounded as you'd want to see."

And then he caroled high and quavering:

"Oh, quit now your yegging,
There's nothing in begging.
Move on! Move on!"

"Ssh!" cautioned Slim, and none too soon, for a few moments later, while Hank was still scowling at him for that

reprimand, feet crunched on the cinders, halted. Men were talking just beside us, not on the station-platform side, and I heard one mutter: "Awful smell of booze around here." One of them even stretched up and laid a hand on the low bulwark of our car. We looked, as if fascinated by them, at the ends of the fingers. Then they were removed, the train rolled on, and our next trepidation, or titillation, according to how we accepted the hazards of such travel—I rather tense, Slim faintly smiling, Hank not counting here, comatose—was occasioned by the appearance of a brakeman atop the big box-car that was astern of us.

He stooped, turned his back to us. We saw his legs come down the end-ladder, but he did not come to the foot; he whirled round instead, made a leap across to the protruding planks and went hammering away forward over our heads.

Slim grinned to me and cowered in more closely to the short planks.

"It's a pity there ain't more of these long timbers," he whispered to me, "so as to hide us in here altogether. Here he comes back!"

There was the thump of the brakeman alighting on the timbers from the car ahead. Followed the tattoo of his heels above us again and out shot his foot on to a rung of the ladder of the car astern; then we saw the shoe-soles go mounting up and away.

"Well, that's all right," said Slim. "Didn't see us."

Dusk came as we waggled on and our little cave became protectingly shadowy—but with the dusk also came chill. We did not undo our blankets, merely turned up coat-collars, humped shoulders, and reclined there, our backs to our bundles, dozed, slept in snatches, woke to shuntings, heard feet hammer over and paid no heed, were wakened once from complete slumber by the rush of steam as a west-bound train passed us. We were at a standstill then, the west-bound just starting, and the fireman had a view of us at close range, an arc light illumining us at the moment he passed. He just caught sight of us and lowered his head as though to see how many we were in there.

"He seen us," said Slim. "Guess he'll try to pass the word to the conductor on this train."

We also were off next moment, though uncertain whether we were or not, watching that train going in the opposite direction, till we felt the actual tug to our car. Night had utterly come before we were discovered; and the preliminary to that was a lamp and illumined trousers coming down the ladder of the box-car. This time the legs did not stride across. They came all the way down, and the lamp was held in to light our cave by a young brakeman standing there. And this was his salutation:

"By gosh! That's where the smell of whisky comes from!"

Hank was asleep, breathing heavily, and the young man looked from him to us.

"Have you got the bottle with you?" he asked.

"I wish I had," said Slim. "I'd 'a' had a pull at it to keep warm."

"Yes, I guess it's kind of cold there. Has he got a bottle?"

Hank woke at the sound of the last word.

"Bottle?" he said. "Bottle? Well, pass it, pass it," and he waved a hand, then peered at the light and the brakeman.

"Pretty well tanked up," commented the brakeman. "What's the idea of you being so full and your partners both dead sober?"

"They're on the water-wagon," explained Hank, affably.

"Well, I'm not. Fork it out and let me have a peg."

"I ain't got any left. I ain't even got the bottle left to smell."

"You sure smell yourself. We can blame near smell you back in the caboose. We thought there might be booze in this bonded-sealed box-car behind here, and some of it got bust out."

"My friend," said Hank, "if I had a bottle you should have a drink."

"Well," said the trainman, "what are you going to do about it, seeing I'm your friend? And where are you going?"

"Up the line a little piece," said Slim.

"How about paying a trifle?"

Hank's face fell gloomy and his eyes blazed. Slim settled his head down into his shoulders and looked vindictive. The brakeman turned to me.

"What do you say?" he inquired. "Who's got the oof?"

I produced some change from my pocket and held forth a quarter.

"Seventy-five cents for the bunch," said the brakeman. "All right. Your quarter's paid. Now you."

Slim turned and sneered at me, then produced a quarter and handed it over.

"Now—" he looked at Hank who had closed his eyes again. "I'll see him later."

Hank opened his eyes.

"Oh, go to hell," he said.

"We'll see about that later," the brakeman replied, and went away caboose-wards.

"You ought not to have given him that quarter," said Slim. "It ain't fit and proper. You broke down the rules, and I'd to go and give him one."

"We've traveled some distance for twenty-five cents," I pointed out.

"That's true, too."

The gray, and the faint primrose of dawn showed before the brakeman revisited us.

"Where did you get on?" he asked.

"Lytton," replied Slim. "Didn't you see the queer fellow there climb aboard?"

"No."

Slim told vividly how he had done it, and the brakeman laughed over the description. Police and criminals, brakeman and hoboes, doubtless, often have such interchange of chatter.

"Where are you going?" the brakeman asked then. "I seem to know your faces." He nodded to me. "I've seen you before."

"I expect," said I, "you've seen me in the gang at the top of the grade, where the freights go west pretty slowly, this side of Savona's. I was working there."

"Oh, you were with that extra gang and steam-shovel outfit, were you? Yes, I guess that's where I saw you as I went past. Gee, that's a long crawl up for a heavy train. The number of times going west we have to back down and take her up in two parts! Well, you going back to work there?"

"We intend dropping off at Savona's for me to get my mail," I told him.

"You're all working men, then?" he inquired.

"More—or—less," said Hank slowly.

"So you're awake now! Want me to go to hell any more? How do you feel?"

"Punk."

The brakeman put up his head and laughed.

"Well, I'll see you later," he remarked, and left us again.

We were rolling on more and more definitely into Dry Belt country and after passing Ashcroft the trainman came back and sat on the bulwark of the car, one leg dangling, talking mere gossip of that division of the line—did we know So-and-so, or So-and-so? At least he had further evidence that we had been working at Penny's Pit in our mentioning names of bosses and others there.

The steam-shovel of our old camp loomed past, a gaunt thing, standing up motionless and aslant in that queer dawn light. Sometimes inanimate objects seem to have a faint personality, entity. That shovel seemed to have that. I had a brief pang of homesickness for the box-car beside it, the bunks, the tie-butts on which we used to sit in the evening, the smell of new bread, of hash and apricots.

Slim and the brakeman chattered affably, and while they chattered, the lamp paling before the rapidly growing light of day, the conductor appeared on the roof of the car behind and looked amazed at sight of us; stared at the trainman; at us. He was smoking a cigar, as also was the brakeman.

"Now," said Hank, "you need not look so damned astonished, as if he hadn't told you. I bet that cigar you're smoking and the one he's smoking we paid for. Bet you he dropped off and bought them from the night-man in the hotel across the way at Ashcroft."

The conductor looked as one furious, but a twinkle showed in his eye. That was mere histrionic fury and the trainman turned away to hide a grin.

"What the devil do you mean talking to me like that?" blazed the conductor. "Get off this train right now!"

We rose.

"Will you stop her first?" asked Hank, glaring.

"Can't you jump?"

I looked over the side. We were going very slowly.

"Get off!" said the conductor. "Do you want me to boot you off?"

It was hard to tell whether that big, comfortable-looking man was joking or serious, and the brakeman, glancing from us to him, seemed then as puzzled as we to decide.

Slim's jaw went out. He stood, not erect, but slightly bent. He had a wildish look then, like some animal prepared to spring.

"I can make it," I said, and picking up my blankets slung them to my shoulder.

At that motion, the conductor sprang to me, grabbed my other shoulder.

"Here, my son," he said, "I don't want anybody killed on my train. She's stopping. I've given the signal. You said you wanted to get off at Savona's."

So the trainman had told him we were there, and communicated all he knew about us, doubtless, part of the gossip of that freight-train waggling along meeting the dawn in the Dry Belt.

The sullen and savage aspect went from Hank's face; that melting look appeared in his eyes.

"You're all right, you are," he said. "You're all right. I hope you won't be offended, but will you allow me to give you another quarter for cigars? My friends have already subscribed. You're a good fellow."

The conductor's eyes puckered and he studied Hank, saying nothing, making no response to that offer. The train came to a standstill.

"There you are. Now skidoo. Shake a leg," he said.

We tossed our blankets to earth and went over the side, Slim and I first, Hank, lurching and uncertain, following. He half fell to the track-side, where we grabbed and steadied him.

"I'm all right," he assured us.

The conductor was back again, up on the roof of the big box-car, where, before coming down to us he had obviously signaled for a halt. He signaled again, and away the train went. Stepping to the edge of the car, he looked down at us, the brakeman up there beside him, both monumental looking against the glowing east.

"That was a fine human being," said Hank. "Did you notice, when you were going to show him how you could drop off a moving train, the fatherly way he grabbed you and the way he said he didn't want a nice young lad like you killed on his train?"

Slim winked at me. I had not, actually, been called "a nice young lad." His harangue upon the basic kindness of humanity continued till the train had gone. The going revealed to us a farmhouse across the track, the early morning light on it, but no smoke rising from its chimney. A white hen scuttled from an outhouse and made the sound announcing that she had been delivered of an egg.

"Om-elettes!" said Hank, with a gulp in the middle, his potations having affected his larynx.

He lurched across the track, crawled under the fence, and marched into the outhouse whence the hen had come bragging.

"You object to begging. I hope you don't object to stealing," said Slim to me. He was still hurt over having had to pay for his ride on the freight-train, that being against his principles.

"I don't object to stealing from a hen," said I, and laughed.

"The hen ain't yours."

"I know. But I think I'd rather steal than beg, anyhow. Yes, I would!"

"Well, well, that's all right. Hus fellows, some people say, are criminals in the embro."

Hank came back from the outhouse. He shook his fist at the elated hen.

"You're a dam' liar!" he said. "You ain't laid an egg. Or if you have I can't find it. There's only a china one in there!"

CHAPTER X

A blue velvet night at Salmon Arm, and we resting there, after another tramp, and another train-beating, that time blatantly on the blind-baggage, in no hurry to be gone, waiting for the moon. Here we were to say farewell to the railway. We sat beside the track, and the scattered houses of Salmon Arm—a very small place then, compared with what it is to-day—began to show lights in their windows.

Hank was again sociable.

"Well," he said, "it's a great night. We've got all time before us. It will be nice hiking through the woods there when the moon comes up and lets us see our way. You know, if a person wanted to he could walk from here to Cape Horn." He paused. "And it wouldn't have taken so darn long, he would find, after he got there."

"There's something in Emerson to that effect," I said, "that if one really wants to go anywhere one can go, if one's determined."

"Who's Emerson?" Slim asked.

"Did Emerson say that?" said Hank. "I didn't know. I've never read Emerson."

"Oh, a writing guy! Yes, I know," said Slim. "I know where I heard of him. That's the guy, wasn't it, what gave the hand-outs to that there Nature writer?"

In the dusk I could see the expression on Hank's face. It was such as shows on the face of one curious to discover just exactly what some precocious child may mean by a remark it has made, the remark known to be sense if only one could understand.

"Do you mean Thoreau?" asked Hank.

"That's his name. He was sure a bum! I read this here article on him in a Sunday paper. He used to go and set out in the woodpile, at a little bit of a shack he had in the woods, and watch the woodchucks, and write down their little ways. But the editors were shy on that kind of dope, and come meal-times he used to pike over to this here Emerson and, so the article said, throw the con into him for a sit-down."

Hank looked at me. I caught the twinkle in his eye, and he made a wheezy noise of interior hilarity, his diaphragm shaking.

"Don't you think," he said to me, "that he was more in the nature of a protégé than a bum?"

"Oh, maybe, whatever a protégé is, even if the story's true," said Slim. "And maybe this here Emerson was interested enough to hear how he'd been making out with the woodchucks to think it was worth the price of a meal to hear it."

Hank chuckled again; and then there was a lull in our talk. The red glow of our cigarettes rose and fell. From over at the lake came the contented pipe of ducks. A rig creaked, and bumped over stones, down the mountain road behind us, the road we were to travel on when the moon should swim up.

Somebody came out on the hotel veranda, dragged a chair, tilted it, and put heels on rail. Once again, I thought, sitting there with these fellows, how many worlds there are within the world, and how true it is that one half does not know how the other half lives—and what it thinks about it. There are all kinds of lives going on, as once I saw in a deep, clear little pothole of a lake, looking down into it from an overhanging rock, the fish swimming in schools, or in layers. There was one near the surface, another a foot or two below, amber and gold glints, and away below again I could glimpse a third. One man sits in the Pullman, reading a magazine or looking at the view, as may be; another is beneath his feet, perched on a brace-rod, his kerchief tied over his hat and under his chin, roaring a song to himself, perhaps, or trying to keep his heart in place, again as may be.

The man on the veranda gave a hail to another man passing:

"Good-night, Tom."

"Good-night."

"Haven't seen you for a day or two."

"Oh, I've been up at the Notch."

"You've been up at the Hill, have you?"

"I wondered," said Hank, in a meditative voice, "I wondered whether they would call it the Notch or the Hill. They couldn't say Notch Hill. So some of them say the Notch, and some of them say the Hill, do they? Notch Hill. Quaint hill to look at, with that *V* chipped right in the top of it. Good enough name, Notch Hill, specially in a lumber district like this."

He turned and tapped me on the knee.

"My friend," he said, "you have told me that you are wandering around in this country looking for some place to settle. I ask you, could you make friends—real friends—with the kind of fresh, familiar hoosiers who call Notch Hill, the Notch or the Hill; and North Bend, the Bend; and Salmon Arm, the Arm?" He paused. "Or the Salmon!" he exploded.

The slightly lit oval of Slim's face in the darkness came forward, and I could see dimly in his eyes a certain look. Hank was for him, at that moment, the queer fellow.

"You know what I mean," said Hank.

"I know what you mean," said I.

"I don't see how you could hold it down," said he. "You're a damned sight nearer to us than you are to the settlers, if you don't mind my saying so. Not that I would suggest to you to become an out and out hobo, but there is something to be said for the gay-cat; a kind of half-and-half. There is another side of us besides the criminal in the making that the professors write about. That's why I prefer cowpunchers to lumberjacks, and lumberjacks to miners. Miners, as a class, are dead. I don't mean prospectors, you know. I don't mean mining engineers, either. There's something in prospecting, wandering around through the woods and over mountains. I mean sheer miners, that just go underground and then come up into the bunkhouse. The country's too good for them. Lumberjacks get a lot of boosting in fiction. But you'll see, you'll see, down in this country we're going through, where we get most treated like human beings, hiking through with our blankets, for there's some cowpunchers still left in the Boundary Country. They work for half the wages that the miners get, and why do they do it? Because they like to be out in the weather. Do you know what I mean? I can hardly express it. It is not just weather to them, in the way a tree is just standing lumber to a lumberjack, and roof-props to a miner. They like it. They like it enough to do it all for forty-five a month, when they could be getting ninety underground. You know what I mean?"

"I know, I know."

Again there was a cessation of talk for a while, and suddenly in that deep blue night under the stars, from where parallelograms of light in windows indicated houses between us and the occasional plash of the lake, there came the music of a piano.

We listened entranced, even Slim, although what was played was no cake-walk, no cheap mock-sentiment song. Somebody was playing music over there, and it went into my heart where the shuttling of dragon-flies goes, and the sound of creeks. When it ended——

"By gosh, that was fine!" exclaimed Slim. "I think all kinds of queer thoughts when I listen to music like that."

"What thoughts?" asked Hank.

"Oh, I couldn't never explain."

I thought of: "Away with it. It tells me of what I am not, and never can be," wondered if such were Hank's thoughts, or if the music played up for him, as for me, chiefly visions of soaring trees and rising peaks in an almost unbearable ecstasy.

Again the music came from the lit windows, and when it was over I glanced at Hank. He was sitting there humped, glooming before him, his hands joined and the fingers of one pluck-plucking at the nails of the other. I could not surmise what it had conjured up for him. With a little laugh he flung aside his black mood.

"When you write your book about all this—" he began.

I stared. I had said nothing about writing a book.

"—and come to this part," he went on, "you will write: 'One serene evening, while we were sitting by the side of the C.P.R. railroad track, we heard the strains of music. It was so well played that we realized it could be played by no stolid spouse of such Yahoos as call Notch Hill, the Notch, and Salmon Arm, the Arm—or the Salmon! We realized that the light in the window shining for us, whence emanated these dulcet strains, must be in a house of ill-repute.'" Then he looked at me. "How's that?" he asked.

I was interested more in the view than in the manner.

"Do you really think so?" I asked.

"Well, my God, man," he said, "do you think any wives of any of these respectable Yahoos could play like that?"

"Maybe it is a man playin'," said Slim, as by way of dialectics.

And then, in the roll of the world, the light of the moon tipped the hills behind us. We turned our heads and looked up at it. We watched it rise, mountain-crest trees silhouetted against its disk.

"Don't she move quick!" said Slim.

"Kind of both quick and slow," said Hank. "Depends on how you consider it."

She came clear of the crest and there was an odd optical illusion at the end. Just before the lower circumference of the moon, and that fragment of mountain crest against her, parted company, the illusion was that she drew up with her a tiny space of that fragment, five tall pines stenciled on her dazzling silver. There, she was clear, swimming up, and the little section of crest with its five pines dropped back again, as into a slot, in place.

"Well," said Slim, rising, lifting his blankets and slinging them to his shoulder.

"I suppose so," said Hank, dropped his cigarette-end and, putting his heel on it, swung his roll to his shoulder.

We moved off. The road swept away uphill, to east and south of the valley. We came to a cat, tortoise-shell, I presume, by the light and dark splashes on it, sitting in the middle of the road. It rose and erected its tail at us, but did not advance, turned and undulated and dipped through a fence into a clearing, and looking after it we noted, at the clearing's end, moonlight on a frame house.

Uphill we went trudging, and then ahead there were innumerable sparks, as of fire-flies, that grew larger. Then there was a snapping sound and an odor, half sweet, half acrid. In a clear field cut out of the forest old tree stumps had been set alight and were spluttering, sizzling. We passed on to where the brush on each side stood thick and suddenly Hank and Slim duetted a whoop and dashed on. Something in front of us was crossing the road in an unwieldy fashion.

"Cut a branch!" I heard Slim say.

"I'm getting one," Hank replied.

Then there were two sickening thuds, and a queer little grunt, a beseeching little grunt. I hurried after them, and as I did so again there was that frightened, beseeching sound, in a small voice, almost as of a human voice. Immediately came another dull thwack. When I made up on them Hank stood over the porcupine that they had killed.

"By God, I'll never do it again!" he announced. "The way they call out like that—oh, rotten, horrible!"

"She's dead all right now," said Slim.

Hank got out his pocketknife and as Slim prodded the slain porcupine over with sticks he commenced to cut her up.

"Watch the quills," cautioned Slim.

"There!" said Hank. "I'll never do it again, though. One remembers that little moan such a long time after."

He was wrapping up portions of the meat in a newspaper he had unfolded from his pocket. Slim prodded the carcass into the bush at the roadside, and we went on under the dark eaves of the thronging trees, pools of moonlight, in all manner of irregular inlay, lying on the forest floor. Then we saw ahead, to right, what looked at first like a lake but, as we advanced, seemed too marked, exact, aligned, at its edges, to be one. It was a field, a field cleared out of the timber, and a tributary road led to its gate. We looked along that brief avenue. There was a gaunt barn, very black against the silver of the field, its doors on both sides open, so that there was a low square of the field's silver in the midst of its blackness.

"Come on," said Slim. "You never know what's in them places."

He was a born pryer, would pry into the little sticks in the backwash of a creek, into anthills, into deserted shacks, find things there, too, that other people might pass over unseen. We followed him along the avenue, opened the gate, stepped over a narrow irrigating ditch, in the bottom of which a trickle of water flickered to the moon.

Slim went first into the gaunt barn, and wandered round with a match in his cupped hands, peering.

"Sack of spuds here," he said. "Gee, and an old can to boil them in."

"Is the can clean?" asked Hank.

"Sure!" And Slim was off, away back to the ditch to fill it.

"Are you going to cook them here?" inquired Hank after him.

"Yep," called Slim over his shoulder. "There's chips lying around outside there for a fire."

"All right," said Hank.

So he and I gathered chips and had a fire alight in the center of the barn by the time Slim returned with the water. Some potatoes were scraped and put in the tin, set on the fire. Slim walked up and down, eager and jocund. Hank got out the frying-pan and a little tin of salt.

"Suppose," said I, "the owner of the barn sees the light from the fire and comes in?"

"Yes, just suppose!" replied Slim, turning in his slow walk.

The gall of them! But it was a great meal, potatoes and porcupine chops, washed down with tea.

"Well," said Hank, when we had finished, "we were within the law so far as the porcupine goes. I suppose you know," he added to me, "that it is illegal to shoot a porcupine. A porcupine can only be killed the way we did it; that's the provincial law; for it is the only animal in the woods that a man stranded without a rifle or ammunition can get."

Then, after a pause——

"Well," said Hank, "this isn't getting to Chicago."

Slim did not ask if he was going there, realized this time that the remark was "figure of speech" due to his partner feeling in whimsical mood after the unexpected banquet. He rose and doused out the fire. We moved from the barn.

"Gosh, I've overeaten myself. I'm stalled," said Slim.

At the gate we turned and looked back at the black building standing in the silver field. Then Hank began to laugh.

"Damned impudent, when you consider it," he said, "damned impudent, walking into a man's barn and cooking his spuds right in the middle of it. Damned impudent! Now that I think of it, we might have brought some of them with us."

"Oh, that's all right," said Slim. "I got some. I got enough for us all to-morrow in an old flour sack I saved here. Knew it would come in handy for something."

Back on the wagon-road we hiked leisurely on for an hour, full of potatoes and porcupine, over the piebald floor of these quiet woods under the moon; and then, back a little way from the road, rolled in our blankets for the night.

CHAPTER XI

We pulled very well going over the hills to Enderby. Slim divulged something of his past, how he was a Bristol boy, how his father (whose unfulfilled desire had been to be a ship's captain) must needs apprentice his son to sea, an example of a highly vicarious way, this, of being what one wanted to be! The line to which the boy was apprenticed was of grain clippers plying round the Horn to Oregon. On his second arrival on the west coast of America Slim, not caring for a seafaring life, deserted, only to be ignominiously taken aboard by the police officers. On the next visit he was prepared with a civilian suit, got ashore on leave on a promise to return and, in the first corner handy, discarded both his promise and his telltale apprentice's blue suit with the brass buttons, and left the sea for good. He drifted to and fro in the west, working a little, begging, asked for a job in a certain hotel in a certain little town and so became the Fancy Boy of Mrs. Princep, who apparently had polyandrous tendencies, wearied of that eventually and left her as he had left the ship.

Hank was considerably less communicative regarding his past; had dropped, so far, little more than that he came from "the Old Country." I gathered that his past was deeper than Slim's.

Slim, being started, I asked him, in a lull, for the story of Judge Casey.

"You were going to tell us about Judge Casey and were interrupted."

"Oh, Judge Casey!" he exploded, and laughed. "Fancy you remembering that! I'd forgotten that I was going to tell you. He was one of these Whole Works of a grain town in Oregon. I came up before him in a string one morning. It was the swiftest business you ever saw. Next case.—What's the charge?—Drunk and disorderly.—Is that right?—Yes.—Guilty.—Where did you have your liquor?—Smith's Saloon.—Three weeks. It was about as swift as that. Just before it came to my turn I noticed he was called Judge Casey, and I remembered seeing a shingle reading *Prop. Mike Casey* over the door of a hotel I never went near. I was in Smith's saloon with the rest of the fellows what made the rough-house. 'Where did you get your liquor?' says he to me.—'Casey's Saloon,' says I.—'Young man,' he says, 'it's sad to see a young man like you here. I'll let you off, for another chance.'"

When we came downhill into the Okanagan Valley, Hank announced that there was a hot spring "back a bit in the bush" and asked if I would care to see it. I replied that I would, but Slim stared.

"Why, man," he said, "you told me about that spring once and said it was just near to Sicamous."

"So it is, but here's the railway track. We could walk back that way and have a look at it."

"Oh, no! Not on your life. All that way! Why, it must be thirty miles, easy."

"Well, we've got all life before us. What's the hurry?"

The further announcement that to be sure it was not a specially big or remarkable spring made me side with Slim.

"If I'd thought of it before," declared Hank, "I'd have suggested staying with the main line to Sicamous and coming in that way. What about it? Last call to go and find the hot spring."

"Not now," said I. "It's too far off our way."

And Slim answered not in speech, but by turning to south and legging away very definitely. Hank laughed, and we fell in step on our last lap to Enderby.

We were resting in the amber dusk on the edge of a little place in the north end of the Okanagan Valley, going down toward Vernon, to taste that odd feeling of the proximity of homes and feel ourselves brief residents, watching lights spring up in the windows, hearing the voices of people talking on the verandas, Hank bemoaning the fact that we were nearly out of tobacco, when a man passing the log on which we sat turned and explained that he had overheard the complaint. He knew, said he, what it was to be out of tobacco, told us he was the local storekeeper and would be pleased, though it was Sunday and his store shut, to walk over and supply us. "Not for the money, you understand," he added, "but because I know what it is to be out of tobacco."

He had a very English accent—his not what is called the "cultured non-accent"—a very accentuated English voice to the verge of la-di-da; a finely built, hefty, big fellow too he was. In that haunting dusk we accompanied him across vacant

lots to a long, log building that the half-light of the hour made fantastic.

He opened the door, passed in, and lit a hanging lamp. A wonderfully assorted stock he had, and a large stock, from pencils to plows, boxes of candies to high saddles. We bought both pipe and cigarette tobacco, though as a matter of fact we usually smoked pipe tobacco in cigarette papers. I asked if he would mind, though he had been good enough to come over only to supply us with tobacco, letting me purchase a writing-pad as well; for the notes I had made at Lytton of this world into which I dipped, and the letters I had written there, had used up my last pad.

"Not at all," and he turned round, selected one or two pads from a shelf, flipped them on to the counter.

And then he leant hip on counter and talked a while, explaining in that la-di-da voice that all his capital was in the store and if he could recover it he would be off and away.

"Back to England?" asked Slim, smiling.

No, no. He didn't think so. Try New Zealand perhaps. He envied us moving along, seeing things. He wanted to see Auckland. He wanted to see the Grand Cańon of the Colorado though, before he left the American continent. Had we ever seen that? He wanted to see Rhodesia. He would like to see the falls of Zambesi. But one required money to travel and see the world, he commented, and then he paused and looked at Slim who was grinning at that pronouncement which struck him as ingenuous.

"By Jove," said the Englishman, "I don't know. I think your way is not too bad; just your blankets and a frying-pan, what? It must be good in its way."

He cast some more aspersion on the place he lived in, said again he'd like to sell out and go and see Rhodesia; and then we left him and hiked on to find a camp-place for the night, Hank very well pleased with him. He was one of that type of roving Englishman who reminds me of a Phil May joke under a picture of a tipsy coster and his wife (the coster obviously *loquitur*): "I'll do anything in reason, but I won't go home." Rhodesia, New Zealand, a peep at the Grand Cańon, "fed up" with the Okanagan and his store there, but no suggestion of going back to England!

He sticks in my mind, somehow. I hope he saw the Grand Cańon, New Zealand, Rhodesia, the falls of Zambesi. Maybe he did, and maybe, too, the queer lure of British Columbia called him back again; for many who revile it, as he did, go away only to remember it poignantly and return. To remember its winters even, the blue shadows on the snow and the jingle of sleigh-bells; to remember the ecstatic dual-season period, when summer is already in the valleys, saskatoon bushes in full bloom, pale new leaves on the birch-trees, sift of gold among the tamaracks and, a couple of thousand feet above, winter still, the upper ranges sparkling white with snow against a blue sky; to remember blazing summers, drenched in sunlight, that bloom upon the forested hills in late afternoon, the smell of sagebrush in the dry belts, the smell of balsam elsewhere, and such placid amber twilights (with a deep-voiced owl going *boom-boom*) as that through which we strolled across the stump-dotted lots with him to procure the tobacco for our evening smoke by the fire before rolling up in our blankets under the stars: that is heart-clutching remembrance indeed, when one is far away.

All very comfortable we went, swinging at length into Vernon where our first vision was of a very handsome young man, arrayed in the most gorgeous fringed chaps, buckskin coat, fringed gauntlets, and riding a peppy horse on a silver-mounted saddle. By his side rode a young lady, of whose means of support Hank and Slim had no doubt whatever; and possibly they were correct.

"Remittance man," said Hank. "If I had to be born again, I'd be born a remittance man and ride a silver saddle with the prettiest lady from the red-light area. The Okanagan Indians are the best-dressed Indians you'll see around B.C., and I believe it's the remittance men that they get their duds from. These young fellows, you know, get a check every quarter day and out they go and buy swell chaps, and silver saddles, and then they have a whale of a time and waken up some morning to find the money gone. What to do? Sell the truck they bought? Well, who wants it? It's not in the line of honest-to-God punchers; it's too swell. The new bunch that has come in here to grow apples instead of raising horses and steers have no use for it. Happy thought. The Indians. So they sell the stuff to the Indians, and pull in their horns and live the simple life till next quarter day—and then do it all again."

"Did you make that up after seeing that fellow?" asked Slim.

"No. It's been growing upon me by observation. Every time I come down this valley I feel more sure of it, just getting

impressions, passing through, sizing 'em up."

In Vernon we bought more flour, bacon, salt, tea, sugar, and not baking powder but cream of tartar and bicarbonate of soda; this not part of Slim's fussiness, but Hank's. He had no use for ready-made baking powders. He believed in mixing his own, always carefully measuring the amount of soda and cream of tartar. A can of maple sirup, which was sheer luxury, completed our weight of provisions; and then we were off upon our further ways, southeast.

Hardly had we started than Hank paused in the dust of the road and gazed at Slim as a man who has had what is called a brain-wave. Then he looked over Slim, or perhaps at his hat.

Slim took the hat off carefully and examined it, puffed little breaths all over it to get rid of at least some of the grit upon it. He could not yet bring himself to brushing it with sleeve or handkerchief. But Hank, as a matter of fact, was not thinking about the hat. He was pondering something else altogether; but while he pondered Slim still considered the hat, and I considered them both apropos of the hat and apropos of Slim not wishing to take the nap off it.

"Here, sit down. I want to think over something before we go on this way," said Hank, and moved under a wayside tree, the last in that stretch, for ahead the road ribboned through a tract much like that of the English down country.

Sitting there while Hank thought over some proposal, my thoughts went somewhat in this vein: It has to be remembered that these men (or I might as well say we, for I was one of them) have not many possessions. We go about like snails with our home on our back. But much as those with homes admire the rooms of these homes, the chosen furnishings, that standard lamp with the simplicity and sufficiency of art blent with its utility; that print on the wall and the way, just right, that it is framed; these antique candlesticks, that luster pot; so do we love our possessions! We all feel, I mused, something of that kind. Slim felt so about his hat; it was a treasured possession. The flare of the brim pleased his sense of line. He wished to keep the brim undented, even as he wished to retain the nap. Hank had bought some new handkerchiefs at Lytton, and one of them he did not use, kept it in his breast-pocket with corner protruding. It was blue hemmed with white spots; and he was as happy for a while with that peeping hem as Joseph Hergesheimer over the "dripping fringe" of a Spanish shawl.

I had the same feeling about my possessions. In my blanket-roll I had a volume of poems. It had a very pleasing binding; and sometimes when we were sitting having a smoke-up about noon, and I admired the cloud of rustling green over us, and the chinks of the sky, I would think also as it were of my stately standard lamp, my new tasseled cushions, my lovely yacht, my antique candlesticks, my blue-hemmed kerchief, the flare of my hat and the precious nap of it. I would think, that is to say, of the binding of my little volume of poems in my blanket, and of the charming end-papers it had.

As I was musing thus, under that tree in Okanagan, Slim took off his hat again, examined it, and carefully flicked it. The downfall had begun. One of these days he would be brushing it with his sleeve. A little later, in evening camps, he would not hang it aside on the twig of a tree and wrap a kerchief over his head as he stretched out. He would lie back with the hat on his face and not bother at all if he dented the brim; and eventually it would come to an end, as all things come to an end, and another hat would have to be bought.

"Yes, I'll put it to you, anyhow," said Hank. "I have a notion. How would it be if we canoed down Okanagan Lake? Vernon's quite a size of a place and there must be enough coal-oil cans lying around at the back of houses and hotels, in the bush, and one place and another, to make a tin canoe."

"Gee," said Slim, "it would need to be some size to hold the three of hus."

"Well, we could do it with my soldering iron. You remember that little canoe I made for us to go fishing?"

"Yep," said Slim, "but when we got in the water we was darn near swamping her."

"That was only because of her smallness. She floated like a duck!"

"Sure, sure."

A bird flew over us with a passing cry. Interesting men these half-hoboes, who were proving themselves only half-hoboes, too, by starting out away from the railway on a hike such as we planned, and further proving it, at the very commencement of the hike, by having a "brain-wave" such as this. As well as having affinities with the tramps they must have had affinities with the Samuel Hearnes and the David Thompsons, the old explorers.

"There ain't much shade going down in a canoe," objected Slim, thinking it over. "And the places ashore to camp at ain't as good as the places we'd get if we struck away back in the hills."

"That's so, too. That's an argument. Oh, we'll walk," said Hank.

But he evidently was not entirely satisfied for a while, not sure if he had taken the right turning, as it were, walked with his head down and plucking at the edges of his second-finger nails in that way he had. Then——

"We're better back in the hills!" he broke out, and stopped plucking his fingers.

"I thought that was decided," said Slim.

Hank paid no heed to that.

"Yes, better going this way," he said. "There are little settlements springing up along Okanagan Lake, and we might get evil-eyed if we went ashore. For God knows we don't look like summer vacation tourists, having a pleasure trip, who might develop into suckers to buy a piece of land."

At the top of a rise he paused to point out the direction in which Lord Aberdeen's ranch lay, and to tell me, chuckling, how an acquaintance of his had taken a fifteen cent imitation diamond ring to somebody up there once, in the absence of the Aberdeens, and spun some story to the effect that he was sure it was one of Lady Aberdeen's rings which he had found on the road, and had been given a reward of five dollars.

"Phoney-men," he said, "phoney-men. That's what they call these fellows. They come drifting along to even such out-of-the-way places as this. They've a lot of irons in the fire. Anything, so long as it is easy and dishonest."

He marched on, thinking upon that.

"And after all," he said, pondering his own last words, "'easy and dishonest' would fit a lot more than phoney-men. Some of these company promoters have just the same idea, only they pull it off to more purpose, and policemen touch their hats to them instead of giving them the get-off-the-earth look."

A little way further on, up a slope and along its ridge, we came to a stretch where wild honeysuckle coiled among the bushes and scented the air. The roadside bush had been clipped there by a farmer into the semblance of a hedge, and Hank had to ask me if I knew the Devon lanes, while Slim, smiling ecstatically, plucked long streamers of the honeysuckle, twined them in garlands round his hat, with the nap and the dust together on it. Not content with that, even, he wound a string around his neck so that it hung over his chest. I looked at him, and what was in my mind was that he was doing very much what bank-holiday trippers do, also Samoans and Marquesans with blossoms at their fętes. Seeing me observing him, he launched me a sharp response of a stare, was suddenly shy (though shyness was an odd thing for Slim) and took the garland from his neck, then perked up his head and showed me the under side of his chin. He was not going to take the chaplet of honeysuckle from his hat, whatever I thought; that was his air.

Clouds were beginning to sail overhead, their shadows stretching on the flats, and leaping the dimples of the land, and by late afternoon there came a cloudburst. There was a farm nearby, down a slope of green fields to left; and nowhere in sight (for we could see for miles) was there any big pine, or cedar, with friendly eaves. There were only copses of ruffing aspens and birches, their leaves speedily all asop and aglitter and dripping. So we went down to the farm, stood at bay before its dogs, and asked the farmer if we might sleep in one of his outhouses. This, I realized by their manner, was a concession to me. Neither Hank nor Slim cared to ask favors of humanity. They took what they wanted; and when what they wanted had to be asked for, might not be taken, they went without it.

The farmer, at first dubious of eye, thawed when he heard we had been working up on the main line (which was true, as you know), and that our objective, which was more or less in the air, was the new mining excitement at Republics, as they called it (Republic, I see by the maps to-day), in Washington Territory, now State.

"All I ask of you is that you don't smoke in there," he said, "for if you set fire to that hay," and he shook his head, "the whole barn would go up. There's a cow to one end, and you'll be liable to have a pack-rat or two running over you in the night, but I guess you boys don't worry about them."

We thanked him and went down to the barn, where a cow stood in a corner leisurely champing and blowing through her

nostrils. She looked round at our entry and blew again. We hung up our jackets to dry, and our blankets, and sat in our shirt-sleeves, the door half open, looking out at the rain, and ate the remains of bread and cheese that we had brought with us from Vernon. First day out from anywhere there is always bread and cheese before one comes to the flapjacks and bacon.

Having eaten, Slim rolled a cigarette, Hank watching him with lowered brows. He produced a matchbox and gazed in his partner's eyes, combative. He drew forth a match.

"By God, if you do," said Hank, "there's going to be a hell of a riot. We passed our word to that farmer up there."

He had passed his word. Well, there is honor, you see, even among men who will steal a ride from the railway company and steal an egg from a hen that is the property of someone else!

"All right," said Slim, and put the cigarette behind his ear.

And then one of these exquisite things happened. The late afternoon of deluge did not drift into a dark twilight of rain. The rain suddenly stopped; that patter and hiss and silver leap of the drops an inch high from the ground suddenly stopped.

We went to the door and looked out, and glory was over the Okanagan, a washed blue sky above, away on the horizon clouds hull down, and a distant rainbow. There was a great sound of trickling and running waters draining down to a creek, and a light everywhere, opalescent. We went out and, perched upon our toes, half sitting on our heels, elbows on knees in the way one learns in wet camps, smoked our cigarettes, whiffed the odor of hay and wet honeysuckle, and had the pleasure of the farmer, passing by, nodding approval to us and saying, in friendly fashion: "Well, boys, she was some shower!"

Then came, after the glory, the twilight and the stars and, with considerable literalness there, we "hit the hay." There Hank retrograded, could not sleep somehow, sat up and lit a cigarette.

"Well, by God!" muttered Slim.

"Oh, I'm being very careful," said Hank.

"You remind me," said Slim, sleepily, "smoking in here after all that spiel about passing your word, of the plug what was on the water wagon. He got past a saloon and was so tickled with himself he turns around, and says he: 'Well done, resolution! We'll have one on that,' and back he goes to the bar to treat himself."

There was no answer except the red glow of Hank's cigarette, rising and increasing as he puffed. But after only a draw or two he nipped it out, lay down, and we were soon asleep.

We were up very early in the morning, intending to hike some way before we cooked breakfast. So early were we that dawn had hardly come. No smoke rose from the farm; a dog growled, but immediately after we heard the tug of a chain. Another inside the house rumbled. We walked up the farm-road slowly, wondering if the farmer might look out of a window, dallied in our going.

"Oh, to hell with him," said Slim in advance.

"No, no," said Hank. "If he looks out we can wish him good-morning."

We went slowly past. At that moment a little haze of smoke rose from the stovepipe.

"He's up," said Hank.

Then the farmer's face showed at the window, and, as he saw us, a moment later at the door.

"Well, you're off," he said. "Did you sleep all right?"

There was none of that dubious, calculating look in his eyes then. He seemed rather a kind old fellow.

"Fine and dandy," replied Slim, in a voice that sounded almost impudent. "Thank you for the hay."

"Yes, thank you, sir," said Hank. "We were just hanging around to see if you were up, to thank you."

"Thank you very much," I said.

"Oh, you're welcome, you're welcome. I'm sorry I could not do better for you. To tell you the truth, since the bad winter in Grand Forks when fellows came hiking out this way, dead broke, we ain't—well, maybe we feel as hospitable as in the old days, but we been kind of leery, and I haven't beds inside for all three of you, anyhow. Now that I seen you in the morning, of course——"

"That's all right," said Hank. "Good-by."

"Good-by."

We got to the gate and closed it after us.

"The damned old hayseed didn't even ask us to wait and have a bowl of porridge," said Slim.

Hank gave a little chuckle in his chest.

"He could see us last night just as clearly as he saw us this morning," he said. "It wasn't near dark when we arrived. Yet I don't blame him for not asking us in to dry ourselves. The truth of the matter is we look like hell. Say, Slim, if I was alone in a house and saw you coming down the road I'd bar the door and let the dog off the chain. I would, sure thing!"

Slim, the draggled flowers still round his new hat (the crown of which he had punched up high when the rain came on, instead of leaving dented, so that no water might gather upon it), considered Hank from his toes to his head and then down again.

"The same to you," said he, "and many of them. You look to me as if you should be in the pen instead of hitting the roads."

And all smiling, we hitched our blanket-rolls and hit the trail in the freshness of that morning.

CHAPTER XII

We went on through what Hank, the notion persisting in his head that I would one day write a book about it all, informed me I would refer to as "a smiling region of pleasant farms, arbored among orchards." When we met a rig upon the way the driver would nod, but frequently when we came near a farm a man who had been visible from a distance in a field would have apparently evaporated, and there would be nothing left beside the house except a dog or two.

At one house we saw the man, who had been working with a hoe before it, deliberately go indoors the moment, looking up, he saw us approaching; and as we passed, three dogs, no less, came out to us, giving tongue, and no one called them back. I was last in the string and to save my calves had to whirl about. The dog and I put up a bluff or two on each other, but eventually I had to let him have it. My first thwack caught him full on the nose. He leapt back, tucked his tail down and, head in air, fled screaming behind the house. Hearing the note in his voice, the other dogs imitated it, drew back, and retreated after him.

But at another farm came the antidote when an elderly man, seeing us, walked out from among his aligned fruit trees—it was the finest-looking farm, as a matter of fact, that we passed—to fold his arms upon the top of his snake fence and talk. In an even voice he told us he envied us going by with all our belongings on our backs, that he was tied to the damn place, that he couldn't make any money out of it, even though he worked from early morning to late night. As we walked on Hank advanced the opinion that he couldn't possibly see how the old galoot was up against it like that, with such a nice house and such a good-looking place, and voiced the belief that farmers groused everywhere.

Another farmer with whom we talked on the way, leaning on his fence, also spoke envy of us. He too was tied to his ranch, he said, wished he could shoulder a roll of blankets and beat it, go his way with no responsibilities—and no mortgages. At that, Slim suddenly became loquacious, extolled the joys of hiking through America, and spoke with feeling of a district he knew south of the line where the farmers raised tomatoes, which he called "tomats."

"Why," he said, "you can go hiking along by the mile, just reaching out for a tomat and eating them as you go. I've seen as many as twenty of hus fellows just walking along making a meal of them as we went. I like tomats."

The farmer had been told by Hank, at the beginning of our chat, that we were railway workers going to the Great Northern after working on the C.P.R., and at Slim's disclosure he stared, froze, drew away. The manner in which he departed kept Hank smiling to himself for half a mile.

"When it dawned on him that you were a bit of a bum, Slim—" he began, and laughed, picturing that *volte-face*.

"Well, we ain't got any mortgages to worry about," said Slim.

No; they assuredly had no mortgages to worry over. Slim gave no evidence of worrying about the future; and Hank, when he gloomed, I gathered, was looking back, not forward. It was the past, I had come to suspect, that worried him.

Then we left the "pleasant orchard homes" and came to where cattle were dotted on rolling slopes.

"Good thing we got a fence here between us and these steers," observed Slim. "They're the only things I'm scared of, hiking."

And then came an encounter that I could hardly consider flattering. Coming towards us along the road at a steady gait was a man in shirt-sleeves, his jacket, held by the collar, flung over one shoulder. As soon as he came level with us, what he did was to sit down by the side of the road and begin to talk a language that was half English, half something else, full of hobo jargon, some of the words entirely strange to me, and some that I knew from glossary talks with Hank and Slim as we hit the ties to Lytton after being ditched, or yarned of the hobo world at our camps in the jingles.

This man informed us that he had come in from the Boundary Country. He asked if he could "eat" in Vernon, and in my innocency, neither Hank nor Slim answering, I replied:

"Why, yes. It is quite a big place. There are several hotels."

He looked at me very oddly. Hank plucked his fingers. Slim smiled. The man was clearly sure he had been right in his sizing up of Hank and Slim as fellows, definitely, of some branch of his fraternity; but *que diable allait-il faire dans cette galčre* was in the google of his eyes at me before, incurious to know, he ignored me, dismissed me. My response to

his question had betrayed me, cancelling the evidence of my clothes.

Slim gave him back a little of his patter to set him at ease, and he told them then, looking from the one to the other (but never to me again) that he had sure had a scare near Rock Creek. Opening the door of what he took to be just a barn there, late at night, expecting to find hay whereon to sleep, "for you see I ain't packing my blankets," he found a whole pack of coyotes inside and had slammed the door upon them. The place, a "cowpuncher plug" had told him next day, was the old slaughter-house. It was rather battered, with a plank out here and there where the coyotes could enter. He had been forced to sleep in the open.

"Don't you find it a bit chilly," I asked, "without a blanket?"

He turned and looked at me, then back at Hank and Slim before answering. I think I was "the queer fellow" to him.

"Oh, you see I never wear my jacket during the day," he explained. "When I lie down I put it over my shoulders, loose, and I have a fire. I make out."

To Hank, then, he addressed himself specially, telling of a trail he had taken after talking to some Indians near Penticton, "put wise to it" by them. He gave us a full description of how to find it at our end, wished us good luck, rose, slung his jacket over his shoulder, and went on his way immediately at the same steady gait with which he had come pounding toward us. Looking after him, I noticed it was a very short step he took, and stiff-legged, a gait learned walking the railway ties.

"He's a bit out of his latitude," remarked Hank.

"So are we," said Slim.

"Oh, I don't know," said Hank. "I'm not so sure about that," and he looked very gloomy, his Black Dog upon him again.

He left us, put on a spurt, got ahead about half a mile, and kept that distance for a long time, to be alone, but we made up on him later and found him in entirely changed mood, utterly charming, sitting on a knoll by the roadside.

He beamed on us when we arrived.

"Having a great time watching a fellow break a horse," said he. "Here he comes."

On the farther stretch of road below the knoll, a long, lean young man was riding a very lively horse; and riding alongside of him, the boss of his outfit, we surmised, saying a word occasionally, and backing his horse when the lively one veered and sidled toward possible collisions. Assuredly that young man could ride, "like a centaur," remarked Hank, watching him—said it at the right moment too, just after the horse, giving up an attempt to bolt, stood swaying his neck left and right and dancing with his hind legs, every motion passing into the man, making his body sway in time to it, and ending with a sway of his head, man and horse as one.

"I take it," said Hank, "it is one of these careful breakings they are up to. Just a little while each day." Then he laughed. "There used to be a fellow came through the Nicola country, horse-breaking, going from ranch to ranch north, then turning round and coming back. Any horses that were too much for the outfits were left for him to tackle. He broke them all right, one after another, but often it seemed he only broke them so that he could ride them. If he took a long jump and went as far as the Cariboo, by the time he got back to the people in the Boundary they would ask him to break their horses over again. Folks are pretty lenient in the West anyhow, and the job lasted as long as he did. There's no man can go on breaking bad horses year in, year out."

He made a gesture with his lean hand toward the men below us.

"That boss-fellow," he said, "who's just directing proceedings down there, he's probably had his day of it and got all ruptured. There they go riding back, enough for the day, I reckon."

Away along the road went the two horsemen, the lean one in leather chaps, the stout one in breeches and leggings, both wearing the light, striped calico jackets specially affected by their order in the months of blazing summer.

That exhibition over, we trudged on, the road lying straight ahead of us, ending in what seemed, by a trick of the light, such a background as one sees at the Wild West Shows, a flat upright board of a mountain, painted, it seemed, with

representations of benches of sand and dingles of trees, smeared across with blue, and notched along the top. At the base of this range, which showed to be what it was as we drew near, actual, and no vivid limning, disclosing contours, flatness destroyed by proximity, there was a typical old-time ranch-house, one of those with the broad lean-to roof against one side.

According to the directions, our trail went into the mountains somewhere near here—"just near the end of the long straight piece of road"; but, as we could see the lower benches all conflictingly criss-crossed with cattle tracks, we turned aside to left, to the ranch, to obtain accurate information. At one end of the lean-to a stove had been placed for summer cooking, and a man who looked as if he had stepped out of a Remington drawing—an old man, thin, gray, lined and gnarled—looked at us, with one eye. He had but the one eye, and troubled not to have a glass eye in the blank socket, the lid wrinkled down over it.

"How-do, boys," said he.

"How-do," replied Hank. "We just looked in to ask if you could tell us where the trail goes back into the mountains from here?"

"Going over the old Indian trail, are you? Yes, I can sure tell you. Now, see here," he stretched a gaunt arm, "here, at the end of this road I guess you come along, turn to the right and keep on a little ways, pretty near to where you see a house; frame house, not logs. There's a little bit of a log shack down there, but it ain't what I mean. You'll see the one I mean, just built, brand new; just a shell as you might say, no rooms in it yet. Well, just before you come to it keep your eyes lifting and there's a blaze on a pine to your left. That's where you go in, and then follow the blazes."

"Thank you."

"You're sure welcome. Here, before you go, have some biscuits."

He opened the oven and drawing out a pan cupped his hands together and scooped up and presented us with a heap.

We went our way. Hank and Slim had no opinion worth recording at all of those biscuits. When they cooled sufficiently to sample, Slim began to throw his away.

"Here, here," objected Hank, "the old galoot might come along and see them and be hurt." He turned to me. "But aren't you glad you're not a cowpuncher on that ranch, coming home at night to eat these biscuits?"

We found the blaze on the tree. From it we saw a blaze upon another, but as we trudged up the slopes, from blaze to blaze, somewhat as ships go out to sea guided by the lighthouses, we came to the conclusion that there was something wrong. We stopped.

"There," said Hank, waving a hand westward, "is clearly enough the notch through which we've got to go. Can't see it from here, though, because of the trees, and too close in under, now, right here. But that's where it is. If this darned trail doesn't take a snake again back that way soon, it's wrong."

The trail did not snake back, or at least the blazes did not snake back, for there was no trail.

"Darn this!" exclaimed Hank. "We'll go back and ask the old fellow again."

So we cut back down the slopes and through the scrub to ask him.

"Why, man," said he to Hank, "where's your sense of direction?"

Hank looked morose and his eyes blazed.

"It's my sense of direction brought me back," he snapped. "We went in where you told us, and we followed the blazes but they clearly led wrong."

"Oh, you were following the boundary mark we put in there. We were thinking of fencing a bit to have a home pasture eventually. You might have seen that went wrong."

"That's what we saw!" said Hank.

"O Lord, O Lord!" exclaimed the old man. "You want to know what you're about. A person that don't know his way around might get lost up in them almighty hills."

"It's a pity," said Hank, "that when you were making your boundary blazes on the trees you made the first of them visible from the tree where a person picks up the trail."

"You'll see the other blazes to the right a bit. They ain't near as bright as our blazes."

"All right," said Hank, and wheeled away.

"I'd a damned good mind," said Slim, as we came out on to the road, "to bung one of his biscuits in his face."

"If it hadn't been for him being older than me," said Hank, "I would have told him more about blazing those trees. They ought to have left a gap between the first blaze of the trail and the first blaze of their boundary, so that people wouldn't be led wrong at the start. And they might, while they were at it, have taken a clip of the ax over the next blaze of the trail proper, to make it show up, used their imagination, thought about other people, considered that some stranger might come along looking for the trail and follow up their boundary blazes as we did."

We got back to the place, found a very dull weather-stained old blaze on another tree, and away up the slopes another, hardly discernible, for the woods are thick in there and it was on into late afternoon by then, with hints of dusk in them.

"Well, we know where the trail is, anyway," said Hank. "We might as well go back and camp for the night in that shell-house, as he called it."

Outside the house we made a fire and cooked supper, Hank in very bad mood over the loss of time, though why a man whose view, as a rule, was that we had all summer and all time before us, should be thus annoyed is difficult to explain unless on the theory that perhaps he was very human, "all too human."

Slim, of course, while the bacon was sizzling, had to go and rummage in the shell of a house. The men who were building it had evidently brought a newspaper along to read at lunch-time, and the advertisement pages were lying there. They were treasure-trove to Slim. Here is again the sort of thing I spoke of a little way back when talking of the ćsthetic standard lamp, the yacht with all its fixings to delight the owner's eye, possessions. For while the bacon sizzled and the frogs raised their little gurgling song in a marshy place where a small stream, after passing the house, fanned out, Slim sat on a stump, hunched in delight, lost in the advertisement pages for those selecting a place for summer vacation, pondered the advertisement of a voyage to Bermuda, with its drawing of a palm tree, a bit of sand, and people in bathing costumes; of Alaska, a totem pole and a mountain peak wedged with glacier; Atlantic City, a gull flying over a wave; the "Go to the Orient" one, a string of camels against stippled space and the Sphinx.

"Come on, for God's sake, and eat," called Hank.

Slim folded the page up very carefully and put it in his breast-pocket. Night came, and we went into the house. The floors had not been put in, but walls and windows were all apparently in order.

"Going to be quite a nice home," said Slim. "Guess we could undress and be real comfortable here to-night. Might stop over a day and have a boil-up, wash our clothes, to-morrow."

Whatever was to happen on the morrow we did, at any rate, undress and stretch out comfortably; but in a few minutes the mosquitoes began to prey upon us.

"Here," said Slim, "tell you what, we didn't douse our cooking fire out there. We could fling some of the embers in here and make a smudge. Guess the mosquitoes have got in while the men were working. Maybe they left the door open a lot."

He and I rose accordingly, hauled on trousers and shoes, tossed in some of the embers still aglow and made a smudge with some handfuls of leaves gathered from outside. The smoke filled the place and coiled out of the door. Among Slim's discoveries had been a stub of candle, and with this alight he announced that the mosquitoes were going out ahead of the smoke in flocks. Then we tossed out the last of the smudge, closed the door, and lay down again.

But in half an hour the mosquitoes were at us again, violent, virulent. We all rose then, and made another smudge, once more the little pests going out ahead of the smoke in droves.

"Surely that's finished them," said Hank.

We felt dog-tired, lay down coughing in the smoke, but very soon again the mosquitoes were singing upon us. That time we put the blankets over our heads, cocooned ourselves in them, and at last fell asleep, weary and stung, the last sound in our ears that *Zzzz*!

I awoke to a scene much like that in the old tool-house on the main line when the antique umbrella-mender peered in. Hank was sitting bold upright with tousled locks, pouring forth profanity. He was staring at the window, but there was no one looking in. What he was staring at was one of the panes, which was broken. He talked to it peevishly. That was where the mosquitoes had found entrance the night before. Slim sat up and laughed, and his laughter infuriated Hank after the miserable night. He wanted to know what he was laughing at, and if it wouldn't make a saint swear.

"You came in here anyhow ahead of us, while it was still light enough to see there was a pane of glass out," he said.

"Well, I didn't see. I was looking for——"

"Oh, yes, you didn't see! You were looking for scraps. You remind me of these down-and-out bums you see raking around in swill-tubs."

Slim whirled upon him, one hand clenched.

"Here's my job," said I. "'Little children, love one another.'"

That made Hank laugh, but Slim turned away, hauling on his trousers.

"All very well," he grumbled, "this notion of you keeping us from scrapping. If he doesn't want a scrap, why . . ." his voice mumbled off, ". . . down-and-out bum . . . swill-tubs."

He was hurt. He went out.

And though, when we followed him later, we found that he had not even started to gather wood for the fire for the preparation of breakfast, Hank did not say anything vituperative.

Hank and I made a fire and cooked breakfast, while Slim sat apart consoling himself for affront by looking at the totem pole under the glacier, the palm trees above the sand, the cone of Fuji-Yama over the words: "Why not go West to the East?"

"Come on, you King of the Hoboes!" said Hank, genially. "Come and eat your breakfast."

CHAPTER XIII

Playing laundrymen, for we decided to wash some clothes, there being one or two large cans beside the house suitable for the purpose, took up a great part of the forenoon. The warm sun and the air of these parts dried them in next to no time, but still, the day being so far advanced when we were finished, and a long hike being ahead of us, by all accounts, to a good camp-place, we did not eat again there. With only some remains of breakfast to serve as a snack luncheon on the way, we set off again to the blazed tree by the road.

To commence with there was no trail to speak of, or one might say that there were several faint trails. These, later, would converge where the pass narrowed, and make definitely one, people going into such places, or coming out of them having, as Hank commented, a tendency to "spraddle out," the lie of the land not forcing each to tread in another's footsteps.

On leaving our camp at the half-finished house, Hank had not put his ax ("my little Washington," he used to call it) into his roll, intending to refresh the old weather-fuzzed blazes. So at each of the preliminary cuts we paused while, with a clip of the little Washington, he made them clear again.

Before long the way became very precipitous, so precipitous that there was a long tilted stretch where we were more going up an irregular rocky stairway than climbing by a trail. We were mounting, in fact, in what, after a deluge of rain in the heights, must have been a creek-bed. Hank's language, as we climbed there, I have never known the match of except when crossing the Atlantic on a cattle boat. It was appalling. It brought gusts of vice and shades of the penitentiary into these serene woods. I turned and stared at him once and he grinned.

"Now you're doing something," said he, "as arduous as all that stuff you read about explorers doing. It may not last as long, thank God, or be as far 'off the map' as they say; but that's all the difference."

Then he gloomed, drew a veil as it were between us and set his face again to the climb, pouring forth once more, out of his profound vocabulary of deprecation, anathema upon it. At last we came to the summit, and there was a very definite trail about a foot broad, hard underfoot as a pavement, twisting on through a narrow notch, a cañon to one side, to the other a bare, lateral, protruding rib of the mountain.

Slim took off his hat and wiped it inside, remarking that sweat got through hats and stained the band in front before a person knew, then put it on the back of his head. Lagging behind he suddenly called us back; and, wondering what he wanted, we returned. He was standing over a little pool of rain-water, beaming at a multitude of tiny blue butterflies (we had seen them, Hank and I, in passing, but had not delayed to admire) the size of one's small finger-nail, that fluttered over the pool and rested in the softer earth at its edge.

"Look at them!" he said. "And see there. Mosquitoes, too, up here. Look! By God, I seen that mosquito sitting there having a drink of water, I guess."

Hank, despite his desire to get through before dusk to the promised good camp-place, of which the blanketless hobo had told us, did not say: "Was that all you called us back for?" He just looked and nodded, observed the unexpected mosquito even, to Slim's satisfaction, and then walked on.

It felt cold up there, standing still, after the heat of the climb. A chill wind ran through this defile, ran unevenly. The sound of it rose and fell so that at times one might imagine a railway train passing by somewhere near in a rock-cut, a sound one often hears in such places. Slim must have heard it that way too, for——

"Oh, listen, listen!" he exclaimed, grinning. "We'll catch her on the fly!"

We held smartly on, on either side of us such a tangle of scrub that it would have been impossible to push through without a brush-hook or an ax. The trail went twining through that belt of chaparral (though that word for such scrub one only hears used so far north by men who have been at the other end of the Rockies, south), that close scrub, jungle, between rock rib on one side and cañon on the other. Then it dipped down slightly into a dark forest where the sound of the wind was less harsh. All the way along there I was haunted by Shelley's "When leaves fall, and cold winds come," trying to picture how it would look in winter.

A strange smell hung in the air as we walked between these walls of close growth, and at intervals behind us, and a little

way to the side in the bush, a twig would snap.

"Cougar following us, I expect," said Slim. "There's all kinds of game from here clean across to the Kettle River headwaters."

When we got through that underbrush into an oasis of high trees with no second growth below them we halted and looked back, waiting. But no cougar disclosed itself behind, prying after us.

Here the trail was a ribbon of old cones and fallen needles. It made an *S* up a knoll, that knoll topped by a stately group of firs, and from there we had a glimpse of the valley beyond—millions of treetops, and in the midst of them what looked like a dropped sliver of lead, a cloud then passing over the sun.

"That's where we camp," said Hank.

"We got to hit the trail, then," said Slim. "It's a long way."

"Yes," agreed Hank, "it's a long way in spite of all you hear about distances being deceptive."

It was, in fact, night already when we came down the last slope to the gleam of that little lake and the chatter of frogs, and a further sound as of some one rhythmically drawing heavy sighs.

"Mud-turtle!" exclaimed Slim; and we groped about for wood to start our fire.

As the light of it flickered up we saw, ahead, an old pole corral, very weather-stained, between the trail and the lake. The water we could not see from our camp-place, because of its border of tall rushes; and the only way to get through these rushes was on a fallen tree that thrust out jetty-fashion.

It might have been a happy enough camp had not Hank astounded us after supper by educing, we knew not whence, like a conjuring trick, and with an air of great cunning, a whisky bottle. He thrust the blade of his knife, half opened, into the cork and adroitly drew it with that substitute for a corkscrew, proffered the bottle to Slim, who shook his head; to me, and I shook mine. I needed no whisky. I was feeling in the pink of condition, all aglow, happily tired, and the tea that we had drunk had seemed the most delectable tea of my life.

Hank partook of that whisky as though it were some light French wine, and within five or ten minutes he was singing, singing with his eyes riveted upon my face, a ditty with a chorus something to the effect of:

"Break the news to mother,
She knows how dear I love her . . ."

(Why are these things always so bad in the rimes?)

"Kiss the dear, sweet lips for me
And break the news to her."

Having sung it with considerable tremolo, gazing at me hard all the while, a look of disappointment showed on his face.

"Doesn't it make you homesick?" he asked, as if annoyed at my imperfect reaction.

"Not *home*sick!" I replied.

"I'll sing it again," he said; "with more feeling," he added.

Taking another swig from the bottle, he did so. It was the kind of singing that people resident in little villages close to London can hear going past, townwards, from a returning char-ŕ-banc of trippers and, hearing, wish the holiday-makers were home and the quiet of the rural night come. In these surroundings of old forest there was something horrible about it.

Slim looked disgust upon him.

"Come on, Slim, don't be uppish!" he said. "Have a jolt."

"When did you buy that bottle?" asked Slim.

"I bought it in Vernon when we were doing our shopping. And by the way: I told a man in the hotel that we were figuring on going in this way if we could get directions, and the dam' fool said we would find snow up here still, mightn't be able to make it. Now if you tell people you are going anywhere, half of the dam' fools will say you can't do it, that you'll find impassable snow. Wouldn't it make you tired? Wouldn't people make you tired? They don't go to places themselves; they don't know the way; but they say: 'Oh, you won't be able to make it. You'll find snow blocking the way up there!' Snow! Snow my elbow! Blue butterflies, mosquitoes. Didn't we, Slim, my lad? That's what we found."

He took another swig.

"Here, come on, you," he said to me. "You're going to have a drink. Damn it, I'll shove it down your throat."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," I said.

"Oh, all right," he growled sulkily, and promptly had another himself, which left the bottle about half drained.

"A fine traveling companion you'll be to-morrow," remarked Slim.

"I'll be all right," declared Hank. "It doesn't affect me." Then very solemnly he informed us: "You know how I am with liquor is like this—I can take it or leave it. I'm no slave to it. I know when I've had enough. I can take it or leave it."

Slim opened his mouth to speak, then closed it and said nothing.

"Last call, last hope!" said Hank. "Anybody want a snort?"

Neither of us replied.

"You'd better keep some for the morning," Slim advised. "You'll need it. Hair of the dog that bit you."

He kicked the fire into a blaze and took those folded sheets of newspaper with the pictures of travel from his pocket, as for the antidote of art; but though the leaping flames illumined them, they cast so much heat that he put the pages back in his pocket and withdrew some way from the fire.

Hank had another drink, head flung back, sat a while with wild, bright, disturbed eyes, then got his ax and felt the edge with a thumb, looking across the fire at me.

"You know," he said, kindly, "the way I size you up, you're not made for this world. There's something about you that would always just prevent you becoming a bum like us, but at the same time you're not commercial enough for this world; it's too much in the hands of money-grubbers. Mammon! Mammon! You could only nod to Mammon, not much impressed. You could never bow to him," and he hiccuped.

He peered at me. He had something of that appearance, distraught, fey, that lurks on the faces of fortune-telling gypsies.

"You could be happy if the world was different," he went on. "But I'm damned if I can see how, with your tastes, you will ever be happy, the world being run, the way it is, chiefly by sons of guns. You'll always be worried, bothered. You know it would be a kindness for me to slam this ax into your head and polish you off right here. This is a golden opportunity. Nobody would ever know. Slim would never blab. I've got things over Slim, and Slim's got things over me, that you know nothing about."

"Aw, shut up!" said Slim in the background. "You're talking through your hat."

Hank looked shrewdly at him and teeheed.

"Talking about hats," he said, and laughed gayly. "You'll—take—the—nap—off it!"

Slim paid no heed to that, and Hank returned to his sudden plan for putting all at ease for me.

"We could shove you into some cleft here—that cañon back a bit" (the cañon, as a matter of fact, was a long way back)—"the coyotes would pick you clean before anybody could come past to smell you; yes, before you smelt. These hills are lousy with coyotes. I think for every reason it would be a kindness to do it."

He did not rise, but came slithering round the fire towards me on his hams, just as he had been sitting, and then raised an arm, holding the ax over my head.

Slim moved an inch or two closer. I saw his right hand move slightly, fingers spread. It was a motion somewhat like that I had seen when he loosened hold on one of the nuts on the end of the box-car, lest he might have to grab the intimidating brakeman's leg.

Though aware of this motion I kept my eyes, however, riveted on Hank's. I did not watch his hand, but his eyes, as I had learned to do in single-stick play in school. His elbow gave an extra jerk upwards, but his eyes told me that it was a feint. Then he dropped the ax, slithered back to his side of the fire.

Slim stretched out and confiscated that little Washington.

"Well, I'm going to turn in," said he.

He unfolded his blankets, used the ax to drive a stake into the ground and on top of that hung his hat. Then he thrust the ax well under the loose earth beside him.

Hank, with lurching movements, unrolled his bindle. By his gestures he might have been all alone. The impression conveyed was that he was unaware of us across the fire from him, falling about and getting his bed prepared. For a while I sat with my blanket-roll as a cushion in the small of my back, looking in the fire and smoking; or looking beyond into the forest and seeing tree-trunks up and down which the light of our fire rose and waned as the flames leaped and subsided; then Slim being stretched out beside me, Hank rolled up on his side of the fire, I turned in also.

Suddenly up got Hank dragging his blankets, slipping on their trailed ends, grunting at them. He flopped down on our side by Slim, and at once curled up. Slim put a hand out for the ax, and laid it between himself and me, palming a heap of pine needles over it so that we would not get cut if we threw a hand out in our sleep.

I slept, but not very well, woke often, with a sense of disgust in the pit of my stomach at the smell of harsh whisky among the odor of balsam. Coyotes yelped and whimpered. There might have been only two or three running back and forth, or there might have been dozens, each answering each, that woke me. There was, later, another sound, a babbling scream, that wakened Slim also. He turned his head.

"Lynx," he said.

Hank breathed heavily, stertorously.

Slim glanced backwards to see that his hat still hung safely on the stake, pulled the blanket round his neck again, gave a deep sigh and closed his eyes.

When I awoke once more I was not aware of my surroundings, wondered where I was. I seemed to be looking through a long tunnel at the end of which were lights. A moment later I realized where I was, what it all was. I was lying on my back looking up at the stars between trees—such stars for magnitude!

There was a very gentle lip-lap of water from the lake. The frogs had stopped warbling. A wind sighed in the treetops, and what jumped into my head, unsought, was Whitman's:

> "The night in silence under many a star,
> . . . and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know . . ."

Whose voice I know! I fell asleep again and, up first in the morning, went down to fill the cans with water at the lake and came upon an odor that reminded me immediately of going into Bostock and Wombwell's menagerie as a boy. I went out through the rushes on to the end of that fallen tree I mentioned, and there simply stood silent, staring, the place was so secluded, self-sufficient, serene. I was clear through beyond the reeds, balancing on the log, and looked all round at that sheet of water bordered by the brightness of the rushes, and behind them browns and reds of the climbing forest.

Having dipped the cans I went back, put some dry wood on the red core of the fire from which white ash was falling, and hung the cans in place. Then I strolled away again a little distance from the camp, just looking round, and again whiffed that smell as of a menagerie.

"What are you standing there sniffing for?" came Slim's voice.

He was putting on his shoes, blankets flung aside. The laces tied, he followed me.

"A bear!" he said. "A bear! Well, we can't get his steaks for breakfast. We ain't got a rifle. Wonder where he is? Might get a look at him."

Hank then, wakened, came after us.

"See the bear tracks," he said, "all round the camp."

"Bear tracks?" said Slim. "Oh, yes, sure. We've just been smelling him."

We walked along the edge of the rushes to the lake's further end, where a creek poured in, and there the odor was very strong. It was a shallow creek and Slim crossed dry-shod, stepping upon protruding bowlders, looking up and down. Then he pointed.

"I bet you that's where he was."

We followed him. Certainly on the other bank there was a large circle where the grass was pressed down. Slim stooped and felt it.

"Warm!" he said. "Yes, it's warm. That ain't the warmth of the sun on it yet."

We strolled back to the camp, observing as we went the large bear pads, very clear in the damper parts.

Hank was extremely anxious to attend to breakfast that morning, I think as evidence of contrition; but unfortunately Slim, very happy over having smelt a bear and felt the place where it had been lying, wanted to do everything. They nearly came to loggerheads over their eagerness, for it ended in Slim saying he could flip a better flapjack than Hank anyhow.

"I'm not so sure," said Hank.

"I can spin 'em up in the air as high as the first branch of that there fir tree!" boasted Slim.

"Maybe you can," replied Hank, "but I could do more than that. I could catch it in the pan when it came down."

"Well, that's what I mean," said Slim.

Hank chuckled.

"You'd slice an edge off it when you caught it," he vowed. Then he looked up at the tree. The first branch was very high. "Well," he went on, "I don't say I could throw her as high as that, but I could flip her up so that she'd turn six times and catch her without flaking a bit off, easy as the cup and ball game. And I can give her a flip you can hardly see, all done by a turn of the wrist, gentlemen, and the flapjack looks as if it just rises of itself and balances on its edge and turns around, slowly," and raised a hand to accentuate the last word.

He turned to me.

"I can!" he said. "I'll show you. I've never shown you. Come on, I'll make the—all right, you mix the dough if you like, Slim. I'll flip them."

And in a little while——

"Now!" said he, when he had a flapjack easily aslide in the pan, "all done by a turn of the wrist, gentlemen. Watch this."

He gave a flip. The thing was ridiculous. Up rose the flapjack and, I declare, seemed almost to balance on its edge a moment, then down it went, about face. A fragment of soft dough just whitened the side of the pan, but Slim did not crow over that; the reverse, indeed.

"Oh, that don't matter," he said. "That was fine. You hadn't it near browned on the top side when you flipped it. Next time you'll do it absolutely neat."

And Hank did, too. Breakfast over——

"What were you thinking about that time you woke and raised yourself a moment to peer round and up?" asked Hank.

"I didn't know you were awake," I said.

"No, I know you didn't."

I told him the truth.

"I was thinking," said I, "about poetry, how some poems of the open air don't stand being read in the open air at all—or at least how I once took a volume of Swinburne with me to the west coast of Argyllshire, opposite Jura, and found the verses about the sea simply swamped out by the sea, though they had sounded wonderful in town. I was really started on that vein of thought by the way a couple of lines from Whitman jumped into my head when I saw the stars on wakening and heard this little lake plashing behind here."

And I quoted, for somehow I felt sufficiently at home with these men to do so:

> "'The night in silence under many a star,
> . . . and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know . . .'

I don't remember any more textually," I said.

It was true I did not, though I could have quoted more in a haphazard sort of way but thought it better not, for Hank was in a cheerful enough mood and might have been plunged into gloom by Whitman's joyous chant of death. And anyhow, it was not of death it had sighed, specially, to me in the small hours. "Whose voice I know" came nearer than "vast and well-veil'd death."

"Give us some more poetry," implored Hank.

It just happened that what came into my head, I don't know why, was Shirley's:

> "The glories of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things;
> There is no armor against fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings:
> Sceptre and Crown
> Must tumble down,
> And in the dust be equal made
> With the poor crooked scythe and spade."

Hank sat smiling as I quoted that, shaking his head slowly left and right, face radiant. Slim lit a cigarette.

"I'll give you a pome now," he said.

> "'When I was a little fellow I started for the West,
> But I only got as far out as Cheyenne,
> When I met a husky burly who was rather roughly dressed,
> And he flagged me with a big lump and a can.
>
> "'When I seen that can of coffee, how my heart did jump with joy,
> It was covered o'er so nicely with rich cream.
> And I asked myself this question, can my eyes have played me false,
> Is this but a cruel, hungry dream?'"

"To hell with that!" said Hank, peremptorily. "What comes after 'Sceptre and Crown must tumble down'?"

> "And in the dust be equal made
> With the poor crooked scythe and spade,"

I replied.

"Go on," he begged.

I went on. Then he rose and rolled his blankets.

"Can I trust you with this ax?" asked Slim, rolling his bundle.

"Oh, my little Washington! Yes."

Hank stuck it under his rope, picked up the bottle of whisky.

"Anybody want this?" he inquired.

"No."

He drained it, then sent it twinkling in air over the bulrushes into that small lake where Eternity dwelt.

"Now once more before we start," and he looked at me.

"What?"

"'The glories . . .' Go on."

He stood listening attentively, and then off he went at a great pace as if to be alone. We did not see him, indeed, all morning; came a long while later to a long open *V* stretch among the timber, a stretch of rolling grass-land, the trail rising and dipping across it into the belt of woods beyond, and still no Hank was in sight, only a coyote, padding along ahead of us on the trail. At the top of a crest it paused. Then we saw Hank taking the rise beyond and dipping to the other side. The coyote padded away down the intervening dip and anon appeared on the rise where Hank had been.

"Darn funny," remarked Slim, "the way them animals will follow you; and they'll never attack. I had a cougar do that with me for three miles. I fooled him once. When I got over a rise I waited. Up he comes and sees me and whirls around and goes back down. I wondered if he'd beat it right away, and just when I was wondering I sees his ears come back up like that," and he held up two fingers, then folded them down. "That was the way he went. He was wondering if I had gone on. But he quit following me after that."

Suddenly, however, as we followed the coyote that followed Hank this day, it looked over its shoulder, saw us, and away it went up hill in a queer up-ended lope, with motions as of a rocking-horse. As we came near the end of that open space we heard a voice upraised. It was of Hank, sitting on a fallen tree at the beginning of the next belt of woods, chanting:

"The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things. . . ."

I don't know if it can be done nowadays, the country getting more settled up, the game more shy, the fish more wary possibly, but we fished little mountain trout out of a stream in the middle of that next belt of timber with no more than a bent pin on the end of a piece of string. That night they were a change from the everlasting bacon in our camp which we made beside the stream, having fished there all afternoon. In the evening we returned again to talk of poetry by a question from Slim.

"What was the name of the plug," he asked, "what wrote the pome you said to us first—about the silent night and the stars?"

"Walt Whitman."

"Oh, I know, plug with a soft hat and long beard like Moses. I once met a poet with a hat like that and a beard, but he had a thin face. Down in California. Joaquin Miller. He was *good*. Touched him for a quarter, and he gave it me too."

Hank inclined his head sidewise toward him, looking in my eyes, the lid of one of his just twitching a faint wink.

The creek in which we had fished seemed to change its note at dusk, due, perhaps, only to the cessation of insect life,

chirr of grasshoppers, hum of flies, hardly noticeable by day as particularly loud. The vox-humana stop was out now and again. Voices called in it, it seemed, on a note of which it was impossible to say whether sad or glad; and next moment it was but a rumbling stream again, rumbling invisible in a slit of utter darkness.

I think Slim must have felt something of the vastness of the night. He looked over his shoulder once or twice at that darkness in which the stream ran, took a green stick and prodded the fire up into a blaze.

"That plug we met—what said he come over here alone—the queer fellow with the jacket on his shoulder, shy his blankets," he said, "do you believe he came through here alone? I believe he came through with some Indian woman."

Why "woman," especially, baffled me. A white man scared to take an unknown trail alone might feel more secure with a buck who knew the way.

"Do you believe he did?" he pressed the question upon Hank.

"Oh, he might," said Hank.

"Yah, he might, if he didn't know what it was like before he started. I wouldn't like to do it, knowing what it's like."

"Not without a rifle," agreed Hank, "in case you stepped on a bear somewhere."

"Oh, 'tain't the bear!" said Slim, and looked round again.

By some lull of the wind, or other cause, there was that sound as of vox-humana, that sound as of voices talking in the hurrying water.

CHAPTER XIV

We went on at a very easy gait through that lovely country of alternate woods and rolling grass lands, fishing the palm-long cut-throat trout for our meals, and all at ease as a happy family, Hank very solicitous lest I get stung by a rattlesnake; always, when we came to any sunned slope of rocks, halting till I made up on him, or hastening after me to say: "Look out for rattlers in this bit. Don't forget we're in rattler country now."

They had an eye for scenery. Nay, more. They had some sense for more than scenery, feeling for the individual quality of the land, Nature, and implications to the heart out of such things as a clear stream twisting in the midst of dipping hills, fringed with trees. They liked to lie in the grass and listen to the winds sigh over; but I did not interrupt their reveries with a couplet that came to my mind one day, lying so:

"When she would lie in fields and look
Along the ground through the blown grass."

It is a very pleasant occupation. But alas, men have so sophisticated their lives that those to whom it means much to do so have to pay a price. And, born in sophistication, most curb what longings to live with the real old world are in their hearts. A summer vacation suffices, or has to suffice, as their cases may be.

I verily believe that, to these two friends of mine, living with the weathers, the winds, the stillness of pine woods, the ruffling of aspens, was a passion and a necessity. They were hoboes—with a difference. They were not really in hobodom. They looked on at it. They escaped from it in such passages as this, on which they had asked me to accompany them, away from railways and monikered water-tanks. Here, more than elsewhere, Hank's "There's no hurry. There's lots of time," was our refrain on the way. I had no indication that they ever worried, as I did, over what would be done when we had spent all our money on the flour and bacon (later we were to have an addition of rice); but it was all good training for the literary life that I was to take up later, in which, for most of us, it is one long wonder, just behind the joy, how the bills are to be paid. And yet we continue, for love of it, as these my companions would continue not only for laziness, but for love of seeing the world and living with the weather, quitting jobs, rolling their blankets.

Roll and go was in their blood, a sickness in the pit of the stomach, a nostalgia under the heart. Up here in the forests they told me fewer stories of prison, of dope-fiends, of shoplifters and footpads, of that queer contact of police and criminal that makes them seem, though on the surface sworn enemies, like a sort of bickering friends, living in the same world. I was less often taking out my notebook to enter in it, at their dictation, some tramp-song of N.Y.Y.T. or another, or to add to my glossary of their jargon another word or two they dropped or remembered.

Yet it was there, apropos of something that had been said, that Hank told me he had just recalled another "little thing" for my notes. It was a verbatim report of a trial scene, when two hoboes were brought before a magistrate on a charge of being drunk and disorderly and having no visible means of support. Thus it went:

"'Well, it was like this, yer honor. Me and de mug took a hike up de drag, and de mug struck a plug, and de plug gave de mug six bits. We takes a chase round a block and gets a mickey of de demon, which put us on our way rejoicing, when the bull come along and glued us, and they trun us in on wheels.'

"'Oh, it was like that, was it?' said the magistrate. 'Sixty days.'

"But to hell with that," Hank ended. "Tell us a story."

It seemed then that we would never get on. They could sit and listen to stories by the hour. Sometimes my memory broke down in the midst of a yarn I was telling, and I would apologize, and I feel no shame in saying I was touched by the eager friendliness with which Slim said, on such an occasion:

"Go on, go on. You're doing fine; ain't he, Hank?"

"You bet you," he said. "Go on."

"Miss that bit," said Slim, "if you don't remember all the ins and outs of it. Maybe it'll come to your mind later."

If it was some important part of the story, explanatory of how the plot unraveled that I had forgotten, they would perhaps

ask me later if I remembered, or suggest some solution, something to fill the hiatus.

The quarrel of Alan Breck and David Balfour in the heather delighted them; the quarrel of Alan Breck and Robin Aig over the playing of the pipes they understood also. Alan's and David's puzzle of how to cross the estuary of the Forth intensely appealed to them, and what they called "throwing the con" into the girl at Limekilns, so as to get a boat for the passage, set them chuckling.

"This here Alan Breck," said Slim, afterwards, thinking over the story, "was some con man, among other things."

In abeyance, for the time being, were their stories of crime, drug addicts they had seen, penitentiary riff-raff prisoned for rape and such crimes. Simpler stories, tales less horrible, they drew from me as we loafed along on this old Indian trail, and rested long by it, as they liked to listen to stories sitting or reclined at ease.

Then one day, as we hiked, we heard laughter, sweet laughter followed by a crashing of brush, and out of a strip of woods came riding a group of Indians, all young, men and girls, the advance portion of a hunting party to judge by the rifles hanging at the young men's saddles. They nodded and smiled to us, riding by.

They set Hank haranguing against the people of ready-made views, second-hand prejudices, stereotyped error.

"Did you hear the girls laughing as they came near? Pretty laughs they had, too. And there are folks who'll tell you the Indian never laughs. Some people——"

He was off in the full flow of a tirade, his subject-matter sound to my mind, his expression frightful. He was not a superior person (another way, perhaps, in which he was not normal!) but he was at "outs" with the average world.

I remembered reading, in De Quincey (but did not interrupt with that), an expression of his pleasure over a paragraph in a travel book of his time, by a Mr. Weld, who had been in Lower Canada, a paragraph telling of his delight, lying in the grass near an encampment of aborigines, in "the sweet laughter of the Indian women."

All the way down to Ellis Creek we kept meeting the Indians thereafter. Two young bucks passed us wearing, to our astonishment, white shirts with starched fronts.

"They maybe teach them starching at the Mission," suggested Slim, "and they've got the starch bug. That there Bishop Whipple I guess you've heard of. I was reading about him in a paper where it said his wife got the Indian women to make this here crochet, not for the sake of the work, but so's they would wash themselves clean so's to keep the cotton white. She was throwing the con into them with this here crochet. It was a dodge, but it worked all right. She pointed out to them how nice it was to see it all clean all the time, instead of getting it black as your hat and then washing it after. But them Indians just now looked clean enough."

We came obliquely down on to a flat and there, riding toward us, all alone, was a magnificent old Indian, broad-shouldered, erect. "What is the good of being a king if one does not look like a king?" seems to be the view of these chiefs. He looked it. A fine horse, a fine saddle, fringed leggings, necklaces of bright beads on his chest, head back, sedately he came riding along, and as we drew level he smiled down on us, paternal. Then as he took stock of us the slit of a mouth elongated in a smile more definite; the mouth corners twisted; there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"If I'm not mistaken," said Hank, when the old man was out of earshot, "I know what made him smile that way. He was thinking that we were the right kind of white men, just hiking through his country and enjoying it, camping by the creeks, pottering along, instead of building damned houses and planting rows of fruit trees."

And I should not be surprised if that was what the old fellow was thinking.

Some years later, happening to come to Penticton, which is not far from where we were then, though our trail did not go to Penticton but to Ellis Creek some distance east and south, I stepped into a real estate agent's office to ask if he would be good enough to tell me how to find it from there. He told me there was no such trail. I tried, nevertheless, to describe it, he listening with an unblinking stare till I mentioned, as an aid to identification, that little rush-bordered lake and the old, secluded corral. I was done for then.

"There are no corrals in this country!" he snapped. "This is a prosperous fruit-growing valley. You never saw a corral near here!"

And I had just been describing one to him. In response to my look of amazement over that, he added: "No corrals! And never were!"

So there was nothing for me to do but bow and retire. Thus wags the world away. No corrals in the Okanagan!

At Ellis Creek we turned downstream, watched some more Indians take a ford. They crossed, from the south side, to the middle of an island, rode down the island, continued the crossing from the west end of it, into a further ford, much shallower than the first. One of these was an elderly and fat woman, an assorted array of pots and kettles hanging from her saddle-horn; and she had a tump-line across her forehead. After she had gone past we looked round to see what it upheld. On her back was a papoose, which we had not expected because of the lady's apparent age, though of course Grandma everywhere may be seen proudly with her own offspring's latest addition to the world. The child was not just bundled in a shawl, but in one of the old-time flat cradles gayly patterned with yellow, white and blue beads. It was wide awake, looking out at us, from under a projecting semi-circular hood, with big black eyes.

An hour later we were on the wagon-road that twined down into Boundary Country.

CHAPTER XV

We hit the road. We went upon our way, turning the kaleidoscope, as it were, which gave us many colored pleasures: Shallow brooks to cross, a hundred yards or so up one a man shoveling sand and gravel out of its bed, as if his life depended upon it (perhaps it did), into a long, canted sluice-box on the bank, two blue dragon-flies shuttling to and fro over his hat. He did not see us. He did not hear us passing for the noise of his own shoveling and the brawl of the water. Beside another, the framework of an Indian sweat-lodge on a smooth bank that made a little promontory, the creek swirling round in a big *U*, a baggy Indian woman placing stones on a deerskin in the water, a lissome Indian girl turning from watching her to gaze at us, an Okanagan beauty. "Come on," said Hank. On a flat beyond the elbow of that creek Indians stooping and working among a network of irrigation ditches. A string of pack-horses coming loping toward us along a straight stretch, where the trees stood so symmetrical on either hand that it looked like an avenue leading to some old English home. A deserted shack by the roadside, where Slim went prying and peering and then called us in. There was nothing inside but a rough cupboard nailed to the wall. He had the door of it open and was smiling into the interior.

"What have you found this time?" asked Hank.

"Look at them bones!" said Slim, in delight.

The cupboard had two shelves in it, and on these were stacked, ever so neatly, white, clean-picked bones.

"Know what that is?" said Slim, turning to me. "Them's pack-rats, that is. Pack-rats cached them bones there. Interesting sons of guns, ain't they? Now I wonder what they did that for?"

"Pooh, you can smell 'em in the place!" said Hank.

We passed out of the dusky daylight of the low, log shack and went on.

Away down in the Boundary Country, when we were crossing what was probably town site—as a hotel and livery-stable stood by the road, and we could spy a roof or two back among the trees—we overheard a conversation. A man was standing with hands loosely behind his back, looking up at the hotel gable.

"Yes," he was saying to another who was with him, "what I want up there is a gutter, or rone, so as to carry the rain along, put it on the slope and have a pipe here to run the water down."

Hank plucked his fingers as we walked, then halted.

"There's a chance to make what they call an honest penny," said he.

"All right," said Slim. "I'll give you a hand."

"I'll go back and see him," said Hank.

He retraced his steps and fell into conversation with the two men. Their discussion over, the three disappeared behind the hotel, and shortly after that one of them, with Hank, reappeared, walking across what presumably was a town lot of the town to be, a cleared space dotted with the usual stumps, and weed-grown. Hank's suit, in the intense light, reflected rays at the worn places. He went across that patch of stumps in a blue incandescence.

Standing there and watching him, I saw him as an odd blend of the debauched and pathetic. The two disappeared, then reappeared again; and Hank, leaving his companion—who was dressed in a gray tweed that did not shine—made a tangent across to us, clicking grasshoppers rising before him.

"It's all right," he said. "We figure that there are enough old coal-oil cans lying around to make the rones for him. We better get busy."

"What's he giving you?" asked Slim.

"Oh, I told him it might be a day's job, so he said we'd call it ten dollars."

We began collecting the old cans, carrying them back into a gravelly patch among the bush where we piled them. Hank unrolled his bundle, produced a soldering-iron, pliers and shears from an inner sack that so far he had never opened (it

might have been to him as an Indian's sacred medicine bag), and cut a length out of one can, hammered it up at either end and at the sides, making of it a small trough.

This he laid in the bottom of a little pit that he scooped out of the gravel; and over that pit he lit a fire of a wood that flamed well; and upon the fire we dropped the coal-oil cans and other cans that we had gathered. One by one they snapped, the solder on them melting, dripping down; and as can by can opened out we tossed it aside. I looked on at these simple operations, and helped in them, with great interest; and with very great interest saw, when anon the fire was kicked away, a beautiful bar of shining solder in the tin trough at the bottom of the pit.

"We'll leave that to cool," said Hank, considered for a moment or two over the cans and then, holding them with pincers, they being still hot, cut them in strips with his heavy shears.

"You better stay here with the bindles," said Slim to me after a load of these strips was ready; and he and Hank marched away with an armful each, Hank taking also the soldering copper and pliers, whereas a professional plumber would have taken only one of these and have had to return for the other.

Later on, Slim came back, fairly exuding odor of whisky, to say that everything was going on fine, and with a specimen length of tin in his hand as a pattern for the cutting out of more.

"Guess that will do," he said at last, and away he went with another armful, strolling back some time later to say: "He's got enough strips of tin there to finish the job."

The sun went over. The grasshoppers ricocheted. The shadows lengthened. That misty bloom of afternoon was on the steep forests that curved round us to west, above the curve of a river roaring there.

"We'd better go over to the creek and get a camp-place," said Slim. "He said he'd come and find the camp by the smoke when he was through."

The sabbath calm of late afternoon fell, every day a sabbath at that hour, by such tranquil slopes of forest as we sat looking at. Slim leisurely cut the rashers of bacon and laid them in the pan, pestled away at the dough with a peeled green stick. And then Hank came home through the bushes to us, genially drunk and with ten dollars.

"Well, I got the money," he said.

He held the notes in his hand, a five dollar bill and five one dollar bills.

"I guess, as the master mechanic, I take six, and there's three for you, Slim, and one to you," he said.

"Aw, put them in your pocket," replied Slim. "You'll need them. Did he give you more, and you spent the rest on drinks, or what happened? Have you been blowing in some of the money you got left for working in that gravel pit?"

"No, no. Let me explain. He came out to have a look when I got the first gable done, and as I had to come off the ladder anyway he said we might as well have a drink, you remember. That's when you had one with us, before I figured you'd better come and cut more lengths of tin. That's one. Then I got the front done (just after you handed me up that piece I'd soldered together, and then beat it) and he ambled out then to have a look and gave me another drink. That's two."

"And so you kept popping up and down," said Slim.

"No, no. Fair do with the fellow! I had to come down once again when I was fixing the tin pipe I made to bring the water down from where the rones met. And that other fellow we saw with him came along then for a drink, and invited me in. That's," he paused, "five," he said.

"How do you make that?"

"Well, I stood one back to him and the proprietor stood him and me one."

"Oh! It's a marvel you didn't fall off the ladder."

"And then, when I got through finally, the whole population and the dogs came to look at the job, and the proprietor was going to pay me outside, but he was shy some of the money. 'Come in,' he said, 'till I get it'; so I went in, and after he'd paid me he said I might as well have a deoch-an-doris."

He beamed genially upon us, having explained the process thus, sitting down cross-legged at the fire.

"Nice to come home and find the meals cooking instead of having to make them," he remarked.

He looked round, very pleased with himself, and then launched another "brain-wave." He would work till he had the price of a couple of horses and a wagon. He would go round the country, all over the West, from the Cariboo to Mexico, a tinker, something new in the West. Slim would drive the team and melt out the solder from old cans for bars. Others would be sure to imitate him, but he would be the first of the traveling tinkers of the West in grand style; and when he wanted to booze Slim would have charge of the bottle and allow him only a certain amount.

"I would have my job all right," said Slim.

"Don't you fancy the scheme?"

"Oh, it's a good scheme, the tinkering, not the dry-nursing you with a bottle."

"Well, what do you say to it, trying to get on to it, bring it to fruition?" he ended with a jocose and accentuating voice.

Slim bent his head a moment and looked up in that manner as of trying to see his own eyebrows.

"If we could make the price of the horses and wagon we might try it," he agreed.

"Wouldn't it be a hell of a thing," said Hank, "if we had about the price for the horses and the wagon and then happened to fall off the water-wagon and spent it all on a big drunk? God, aye, God, aye!" and he began to sing:

"'It was at a western water-tank
One cold December day,
Within an empty box-car
A poor dying hobo lay.

"'His comrade sat beside him
With sad and drooping head,
And patiently he listened
To what his dying comrade said.'"

"Oh, to hell with that. Kind of mixed up on the *comrade*. What was the other thing—'sceptre and crown must tumble down'?"

He felt for his tobacco-sack, rolled a cigarette.

"Here, have some tea," said Slim, and thrust the can across to him.

But Hank wanted to talk about what good fellows they were in the Boundary Country, how it was all very well to despise them and call them Yahoos, yet how they were fine hospitable people and full of humanity. He let that theme go; and then, his mind reverting to the work he had completed all out of old tin cans——

"All the same, I made a nice job of that," he said proudly, "a nice job. Say, Slim, do you remember that little place in Nevada where there was a white woman doing all the laundry work, and I fixed up her pots and things? Do you know, I have often wondered if that boiler I mended for her stood the wear and tear. I was honest with her. I told her I'd tackle it, but I wasn't sure if my tinkering would last a heap long time. By gosh, there's something for us to do now! There would be an objective!"

"What?" asked Slim. "What do you mean?"

"After we see Republics walk on down into Nevada to see if that boiler held. What do you say?"

"Oh, we'll see."

"Well, Slim, I hand it to you. You can make flapjacks all right. I'm enjoying this supper."

CHAPTER XVI

It was a public holiday when we trudged into Rock Creek; and everybody there, so far as we could see, was celebrating it by getting drunk, except the Chinamen, the barkeepers, and a young man who won the horse-race down the street just as we entered, the street being at that time, whatever it is now, simply the wagon-road passing through.

So drunk and so tough did everybody seem, and this being a mining center, and miners, as Hank explained, absolutely hating men who may be suspected of not working every day for a living (and further, nobody knowing, Hank commented, what a bunch of miners in liquor might do, unable to carry it like gentlemen), that we turned aside to the back of the houses to pass there and so evade them.

What a sight it was there! In the scrub were lying men incapacitated by their potations for either taking part in the sports or observing them. There might have been a battle and these the dead. The whooping and hallooing over in the street might have been of the charge in which they had fallen, continuing on its way.

We circumvented Rock Creek and then looked back upon it. There was a barkeeper in shirt-sleeves and white apron standing at a door, looking out, his clients doddering back and forth in "the street" like ninepins in an alley, a moot point whether they would regain equilibrium or fall, join the recumbent.

It was there I had a little exhibition showing Slim's finesse with drunkards, his capacity for diagnosing just at what stage they were. I understood better then how he could raise the wind, in periods of financial stress in cities, with a homing toper for his prey. He had studied drunkards professionally. A very large man, a very drunken man, combatively drunk, at our end of the street—from which we had almost passed after our circling in the back-blocks—suddenly saw us and advanced. What he said was unintelligible at first, his enunciation of such a kind that his mouth might have been full of gravel. All that I caught accurately was "strangers . . . what the hell . . . doing . . ."

Slim turned back to meet him, disregarding Hank's: "Come on, come on!" He stood a few feet off from the great hulk of a man and smiled at him, while the latter peered through a mist of his own making, and among his tangled talk we caught next: "What the hell . . . want?" Slim, he standing half turned from us, was still smiling I could see, a jack-easy figure, blankets on back, their rope over his left shoulder, and a thumb under the rope, right hand thrust under belt.

"Well, you got a pretty good jag on," he informed the man.

"What you say . . . jag on?"

"Yes, pretty good load on, all right," said Slim. "Whoa, boy, you'll be over!"

"Come on, come on!" urged Hank, and moved back a step or two after his partner, stretching out a hand as though to pluck him by the elbow.

"I can fight him!" exclaimed the great man, with a more clear delivery. "Knock the stuffing out of him!"

"Sure!" agreed Slim, amiably. "Any day. Knock the stuffing out of me. Go to it"; and he chuckled with mirth.

The man's hand went back and forth, and a hefty fist he had. But Slim did not even dodge. He just swayed back from the waist, keeping his feet in position, and the blow went past him. Such force was behind that lunge that the man would have followed it upon his face, had not Slim grabbed him by a shoulder and thrust him erect again. Having thus done he stepped aside lithely, on the instant, before he could be grappled, and laughed in delight, then presented himself four-square in front of the combative holiday-maker.

"There!" he said, as he did so. "That's a better chance for you. Have a whack at me now."

As the invited blow was delivered Slim abruptly stooped in a squatting position, hands on knees, and that blow went over him in thin air; but up he bobbed, and as he did so he pushed the man, who had again lurched forward after that smash upon space, erect with a quick motion.

"Don't like it," said Hank quietly to me. "The fellow might have a gat in his pocket. You never know. Or some of his friends might come along. We're liable to get lynched. Come on," he said once more to Slim.

"Got to be going," said Slim.

In response to that the heavyweight let drive at him, but more warily this time, only teetered at the end of that blow upon nothing, and might have recovered had Slim not grabbed him dexterously by the lapel and pulled him forward. Much as he had saved him before, he now completed his discomfiture. Crash went the man upon his chin. Slim slipped right hand under belt again, a favorite attitude of his, and beamed down upon him.

"Well, so-long," said Slim and, wheeling, fell in step with us, for at once Hank moved on.

Slim continued to smile happily, while utter incoherences of talk followed us from the prone hulk.

We walked on to the Chinamen's store and entered. A different atmosphere immediately enfolded us, not out of that side of China that is starvation and leprosy, for that was a clean and tidy interior, but allied to the other side, of suave antiquity, placidity, the beauty of fine ginger-jars, the sayings of Lao-Tsü. Such was the impression in that transition.

A Chinaman behind the counter inclined his head to us, Hank responding with a smile, and a nod, and the request for rice. The rice used always to come in mats in those days, and there was a whole stack of them at the rear of the store. Rice, tea, sugar, flour, bacon: we set in a new supply, Slim strolling to and fro, looking round, observing, curious, sniffing the Oriental scents, wondering what they were of. He caught my eye, and with a sidewise inclination of his head mutely signed to me to come over to him.

"Have a look at this cashier-plug at the end," he spoke quietly, "entering things in a book. Take a peek at the way the book's made. Awful cute. Every page is a double page, thin paper, see? You don't cut 'em open. See that one beside him writing a letter backwards, according to our notion of what's fore and aft."

We disposed of our purchases under our blanket-ropes, and Hank and I paid each our third of the costs to Slim. We stepped to the door. An elderly Chinaman, wearing large spectacles, he who had been writing a letter backwards "according to our notion of what's fore and aft," looked up to see if we would nod on going out. We turned toward him.

"Good-by," said Hank.

"Good-by," and a stately bow.

They still wore the cue then, their old attire of round silk caps and wide-sleeved blue coats. It had been like a visit to China on a magic carpet.

"Gee, that's an interesting store," remarked Slim when we came out. Then he looked back along the street. "What's this going on?" he said. "Say, we could cache our bindles somewhere—they'd be safe with the Chinks here—and go along and have a look."

We moved back into the store, a swift transition from smell of balsam to that of spices again.

"Say, John," said Slim, suddenly "fresh" (though he did not mean to be) after his recent subdued air before the Spirit of the East in contrast to the Occidental hubbub, "can we leave our bindles here a little while? We come back."

"Yes, you leave them there. I take care of them."

"That's better," said Hank, as we came out. "There's no use attracting attention to ourselves by packing bindles in a mining burg when they're all drunk."

The belligerent hulk was still lying by the roadway when we returned, snoring heavily. Even from there we could see others in a like state among the bush, but we passed on to where a crowd clustered, bindleless, citizens of Rock Creek for the time being.

The crowd gathered round two great blocks of granite; and suddenly on to these stepped four men, two to each. The imminent event was a rock-drilling contest, and those were the days before the air-drill. A stack of drills of various lengths had already been laid against each block of granite; and then a man with a walrus mustache, bleary eyes, and a heavy gold albert, climbed to a knoll by the road and hiccuped.

"Ladies and gen'lmen," he said, "now have drilling contest. Tom So-and-so and Jack So-and-so 'll swing the hammer,

Bill So-and-so and Tommy So-and-so holding the drills. Are you ready? Go to it!"

They went to it, first with a short drill. Between every clip of the hammer the drill-holder gave the drill an adroit twist. When it got so low in the hole that he had no more gripping room, up went one hand, tossing the drill out, while the other hand dropped into the hole the next drill in length.

"I bet you," whispered Hank in my ear, "they don't work like this underground every day."

"Ah!" said somebody in the crowd as one of the drill-holders got a tap on the knuckles and the blood ran.

Up in air shot a drill and down went another into the hole. Up went the rival contestants' drill.

"Gee, trying to kill some of us out here, throwing that drill about that way!" a voice whooped, and there was a laugh in the crowd.

I felt a little tapping against my ribs, looked round to see what it was. It was Slim nudging me with an elbow, and having thus attracted my attention his eyes glanced in a certain direction, and then the lids drooped.

I looked. He was wanting me to observe, and I knew by his face that he did not think her amusing, a woman who must have been very old, and of whose profession there could be no question. There were great salt-cellars over her exposed collar-bones, the powder lying there in flakes. She had hair the color of fire under a bizarre hat. She looked like a painted corpse. Frill-fralls about her fluttered in the thin breezes that passed. She was standing there in the group that watched the rock-drilling contest, but by the look in her eyes she gave not one jot for rock-drilling contests or anything else in the world.

Hank, catching my eye when I looked away from her, made a motion of his head suggesting we should go. We edged out of the crowd just as the man with the walrus mustache whooped announcement of the time, minutes and seconds (whatever they were), the winners had taken to get the last and longest drill down into their granite block. The other sledge-hammer clipped on alone at furious speed a few seconds longer, and then came the voice chanting the time of the losers.

Incurious regarding such records, and rather bored, I think, even by looking on at such laborious play of these fanatics of toil, Hank and Slim did not care to see more. They were out of their sphere here and felt it, for these men do not merely hope they may never come to beggary; they go further. They do not merely despise the man who is averse to toil; they hate him. I felt a trifle gauche too, wandering around there in the odor of sweat and whisky, and was entirely complaisant when Hank suggested that we should get back to the jungles and camp.

"I seen a place along there," said Slim, "when we were at the Chink's, where there's an awful lot of chipmunks. We might camp near there. I once camped long enough at a place where they was thick to tame one, had him eating out of my hand. Say, it gives me the grews watching them plugs work like that."

"Man, they're playing," said Hank. "And yet I'm not so sure. Guess there's a prize of some kind offered. These darn' people never do anything for the fun of it."

He halted.

"Think I'll get a bottle before I go," said he.

"Oh, come on!" said Slim.

Hank fell in step between us; and just as we moved away from the crowd he mumbled in a low voice:

"Take a look over on the left there."

I looked, and then——

"I know. I've seen her," I replied.

"My God!" he said. "Say, would you——"

"No!" said Slim.

We returned to the Chinese store for our blankets.

CHAPTER XVII

Full of rice and bacon we continued on our way, in our world within the world, onlookers, passing by, at the life of fruit-ranchers, cattle-ranchers, miners in their worlds.

The miners scowled at us on sight when we encountered them on the road, what we were clearly obvious to them. Up in the farming communities we had not so markedly been hated. We were kenspeckle. It is unpleasant to be hated on sight; gives one a sense of injustice. And when we were sneered at I felt indignant, wished to stand pat and say: "Why this gratuitous hauteur? These two friends of mine, though you like not the look of them, have their own daring even and valor. Surely you would not so utterly loathe them as you do had you seen the aplomb with which this one, the shorter one, boarded his special car (of a freight-train) at Lytton, three sheets in the wind; and this lean one, he with the air of the bedraggled debonair, can retain his *savoir faire* when holding on to the nut on a bolt-end of a box-car gable, rocking through the gorges, while a brakeman's foot sways to and fro beside his ear. Know that these vagrom bodies have a something about them that multitudes of respectable persons don't possess at all, the place in them that might hold it simply a blank." But of course one never does halt to make such speeches to anybody; these are in the category of unindited addresses for our own solace.

At a little hotel beside a bend of the creek called Rock Creek, beyond the place called Rock Creek, an antiquated Chinese cook came out of the door and saw us.

"Hullo, 'bo!" he hailed.

Even this Chinaman knew at a glance! A "'bo" was less objectionable to a cowpuncher than to a miner, Hank had told me, and further on I had evidence, when we met two cowpunchers in chaps, wearing their striped summer cotton jackets, riding along the road at a quick step. I suppose they had been delivering a drove of cattle somewhere and were returning home to one of these long green valleys that opened their vistas here and there. They greeted us in a very friendly fashion, easing our hearts thereby after the black looks of the mining men, with a passing hail of: "How-do, buddy! Rain coming up." Buddy, mark you, which means partner.

Hank, whose special interest was history, as Slim's was natural history, had to turn aside to consider various stretches of Rock Creek where bowlder lay against bowlder, not a grain of gravel between them, these being places, he said, raked and washed for gold dust by the forty-niners of California who came in overland, lured by the Cariboo excitement of '59 and '60, and tried all likely creeks on the way for their color.

The dilapidated old slaughter-house we saw, of which the man who carried his jacket by day, that it might be an additional warmth to him in lieu of blankets at night, had told us.

We were slightly subdued with the knowledge that soon we were to part. At Midway they would leave me, going on into the United States, and I would continue to Nelson where, by that time, I knew, a considerable batch of mail must be awaiting me. What actually happened to me at Nelson I may as well tell here, in an aside, for this is not a book of my solitary wanderings but of my brief wanderings, that yet seemed long, so closely were we thrown together, with these two.

On arriving at Nelson I worked for a month. At the end of that time fortune blew up to me a man who had come all the way from Montreal to MacLeod on a harvester's return ticket, thence paid his fare (or beaten his way, for all I knew) to Nelson. He was not a harvester, had only availed himself of the cheap harvester's ticket to get out West and had no intention of returning to the East. He offered me his ticket for twenty-five dollars. Such opportunities do not come every day; so I withdrew my month's wages, bought the ticket, paid my fare to MacLeod, stopped off there a day or two and then passed on "upon velvet, inside," wondering what Slim would think of that—twenty-five dollars from MacLeod to Montreal, almost the width of the continent. Back in the East, I verified, by chance, stories of Hank's past that, before our parting, he dropped.

But this is enough of aside. We are still in the Boundary Country, hiking along, subdued slightly by thoughts of the imminent parting. There had been times when I wished to fly from them, have a hot bath, thought of the carbolic soap, the sane, cleansing smell of it, that I would use in that ablution. Their contacts with the underworld, their lore of crimes, depravity, lechery and all hellery left one aghast at times, though their own contact with prisons seemed to be only through the charge of drunkenness, disorderly behavior, or vagrancy. But there was the other side. We had had some

great days together. Horace, under his vines and fig-trees, rejoicing in the simple ways of his Sabine farm (where he felt not the lack of far-fetched Lucrine oysters), and we three vagabonds turning into the jungles, had contacts also. I would be both glad and sorry to leave them. More than once, when we sat in a noon camp among trees by the main line, there had gone past men of sinister aspect, clearly of that world, and they had sat still as Indians looking out between the leaves till they had passed, not desirous to talk to them. They were lone-hand hoboes, or gay-cats. What either would do if the other slipped one day, trying to "catch her on the fly," and went under the wheels, I cannot imagine; but whatever he would do I am sure, despite their bickerings, that it would be the sincerest action of his life, from a nigh broken heart. Slim, with his capacity for insouciance before affronts of men and life, would look easier, perhaps, in such an event. For Hank, I should think, it would be as if all his world crumbled, and I fear one of the evidences of his regret would be still more bottles, their necks tapped against a stone and left jagged, with no intention to cork them, only to drain them and forget, in what was more craziness than drunkenness.

Sufficient unto the day, however!

At Midway there intruded again the shadow of prison, penitentiary. Hank and I were sitting on a log on the flats before that little town, over toward the river. Slim was wandering about at a distance, stalking a grasshopper that was acting, it seemed to him, in a way unusual for grasshoppers.

Suddenly, in a burst of emotion, Hank poured out to me the story of his past, the core of it, told me abruptly the thing I had wondered over but had not inquired about, told me of the beginning of this life for him. Any one curious about humanity must wonder often on meeting people what lies behind, what started them on such and such a course, what tendencies, or what seeming accident, what preparation there was.

Well, there were two crimes—or let me put it this way: there was a heartlessness and there was a crime; a girl in the first, a sum of money in the second. As it happened, when I went back East I managed to verify the truth of this intimate confession of Hank as he sat on the flats of Midway. What I cannot quite understand is why, after the side-slip with the girl, the larceny need have followed. He was actually more casual in his view of the larceny. I think what he plucked his fingers over was the girl. And I think the cause of the Rake's Progress manner of his life after that affair was greatly temperamental. Hank had evidently been overdeeply inculcated with the view that if one goes wrong one is a waster for keeps, that the birds come home to roost; he practically went out and clucked to them to come home to roost. There was a streak of gloom in the man.

He even told me his real name, and where his people lived in the Old Country. I suggested that, when I returned there, as I intended to do later, I might call upon them, tactfully say I had met him and please them with the news that he was doing well.

"You'll have your horses and wagon by then, I hope," I said, "so it won't be just a kindly lie!"

He thought that over, and then said he would rather not. It was fifteen years since he had left them, "and in fifteen years, you know," he said, "wounds heal." I doubted if he had found it so. "Better not open the wound again. They perhaps believe I am dead by now, as I never sent any word."

And then, after some further thought, he said: "I tell you what you could do, though, if you ever do go there. You could have a look at the house, and at them, and send me a report of how they look."

I agreed, and asked him where I should send the letter to be called for, what town he would most likely visit from time to time. Thinking over that he changed his mind.

"No, no," he said. "Let it be. But say, if you see them, not a word about me, lie or truth. Promise!"

So I promised. Some years after I saw the house, verified the name of the occupants, saw his mother, of comfortable exterior, a not unkindly-looking elderly lady by any means, pensively gentle, I should think, by her manner; and I do not think it was only my knowledge of the facts that made me see a sorrow in the back of her eyes. I felt dazed, and aloof from my own affairs all that day, and for days to come, after having seen her in her surroundings, this picture and this, as Shakespeare has it, in my mind—the old lady there in that house beyond the three shallow steps and the slender pillars on either side the door, and Hank flipping a flapjack thousands of miles away in some jingles. Sad, hidden stories there are in some of our lives.

And that is practically all I am going to tell about that, except to say that in the matter of the girl it was, I fear, "a dirty business" (though there may have been two sides to it, and he may have stressed his own ignominy in the telling), an affair a shade more dishonorable than Slim's Mrs. Princep story, from one point of view overbalancing all the remaining tattered shreds of what was fine in the man. That was the finger-plucking. That was the recurring gloom. That was the Black Dog. That was the bottles. It has been said: "We think we remember, but really we forget." As much truth would it be to say: We think we forget, but really we remember.

While we were sitting there, subdued after that couple of pages out of his past, an athletic young fellow, with bright and cunning eyes, came over the flats and accosted us, thrust himself upon us, for Hank was extremely cold. I was a novice in their world and kept silent, realizing that Hank's air of cold-shouldering had some good reason behind it, for there was no man could come out of his shell so readily and listen to wayside chatter as he. Had I not seen him lean on a snake-fence and listen to a garrulous farmer bemoaning the price of cherries and his mortgages? Had I not heard him maunder for a quarter of an hour over the genial heart of a cowpuncher riding past who, tilting his head to a black cloud flying over, had greeted us with: "How-do, buddy! Rain coming up?"

This dapper young man with the bright and unscrupulous eyes was very solicitous about our comfort. Poor places to camp round there, he told us. Slim left his grasshopper and, right hand under belt, left hand dangling, shoulders swaying slightly, came back in slow strides to listen to the talk.

"I've just been telling your partners," said the stranger, "that there's quite a nice shack back of the town up here——"

"Oh, you have?" gently.

"—where you could sleep for the night," the young man continued.

"Oh, we could, could we?"

"Yes," and there was, just for a moment, a baffled look in the young man's eyes.

"Are you wanting to rent us this shack?" asked Slim, suavely.

"It's not mine."

"It's not yours, ain't it? Acting for the fellow that owns it?" Slim inquired with extreme gentleness of voice, so gently indeed that to me it sounded a warning.

"No, no. But he's away from here for some time and I just came over to tell you boys that you could easily enough get the door open and sleep there for the night."

"Well, that was sure very kind of you. Awful kind of you to be so interested in strangers passing through," and Slim put hands on hips, bending back, and smiled.

Then suddenly he turned, gave this visitor his back, and squatted down on heels, facing us.

The young man remained standing there while we sat still.

"You don't think you would care to go up?" he said.

"How's that?" asked Slim over his shoulder.

"I said you don't think you'd care to have me show you where the shack is?"

"Oh, that's what you said?" said Slim, and turned his back again.

The man moved away slowly.

"What's all this?" I asked.

"Police," replied Slim. "It's one way of doing with characters like hus. Don't like to see hus hanging around——"

"The idea is to precipitate trouble," explained Hank, "get us to break into a shack, then come and arrest us, and they're shut of us. That's the scheme."

"Is that so!" I exclaimed.

"That's so," they both replied.

"Well!" said I. "The dirty dog!"

Slim gave me a nod and a smile.

"We're just close to the boundary here," said Hank, "and the refrain is," he chanted, "'Move on, move on!' Come on, let's get away."

"Yep," said Slim, rising, "we'll be buttocks deep in Washington in a coupla days."

"I was thinking," said Hank, "we could stroll on with him to Greenwood and see him off."

"All right."

But when we came to Greenwood we found that if I was to arrive in Nelson with the price of a bed and a breakfast, I had only enough money left to pay my fare from Grand Forks thither. They took that news, which we received at the depot, more philosophically than I, but their ease in the matter put me at ease.

"Why, you got nothing to do," said Slim, "but hit the ties to Grand Forks. There is no use suggesting you could live on hand-outs on the way?" he inquired, and laughed.

"None at all," I said. "I seem to be awfully squeamish about that!"

Hank threw back his head and laughed.

"Well, part of the grub we have belongs to you, anyway," said Slim. "Take your share; and you're all right."

"He doesn't have to go all the way on the track," said Hank. "It takes a big loop here. You can take the road up the hill to Phoenix, where the track comes back after going all round a mountain. Yes, and you don't need to hit the ties then, even. It takes another twist after that. You might just as well keep right on through the woods on the wagon-road."

"Well, that's all right. Before he pikes off, how about eating?" suggested Slim. "I haven't been buying whisky. I'll stand a steak before we part."

"I got ten dollars for that plumbing job," said Hank. "I can stand it."

"You and I can fix that up when we're walking down through Washington—on our way to Nevada to see if that old lady's boiler held together," said Slim. "Come on and get a steak, and then we'll go in the jingles somewhere and have supper."

My last shopping in the company of Slim was all in character. I went with him alone, Hank waiting for us with the bundles just to west of the town, in the woods.

"How do you do, Mr. Butcher?" Slim saluted, entering the butcher's shop—or "flaggon foundry," as he called it. "Give me a pound of steak."

The butcher merely grunted a "how-do" and honed his knife on the steel sharpener that dangled from his belt.

And then: "No, no," said Slim, "I want it cut here. See, there's where I want you to cut it."

"Am I cutting this or are you?" asked the butcher.

"You're sure cutting it," replied Slim, "but you're cutting it under my directions. You ain't cutting it for yourself. You're cutting it for me. What's biting you?"

What was biting him, I think, was that "Mr. Butcher." He did not seem to like to be called "Mr. Butcher," had frowned when thus addressed; but he cut the steak as requested. So that was satisfactory.

"And now, Mr. Butcher," said Slim, putting down the money for the meat, "just slap a piece of suet on the top, will you?"

The butcher assuredly slapped it, and slapped the parcel on the counter too, with very ill grace. Slim strolled out

smiling.

"If you ask for the suet along with the steak," he explained to me on the sidewalk, "they count it in with the weight. Most people who live for making money are as mean as hell."

He could not remember if we had sufficient tea left or not.

"I'll get a screw of it anyhow, just in case," he said.

We went into a grocery store.

"How do you do, Mr. Grocer?" said Slim. "I want a coupla loaves," for we were going to have bread for that last supper instead of flapjacks.

"Yes. And the next thing?"

"Do you sell that there butter by the half-pound?"

"Yes."

"Half a pound of butter, then."

"Half a pound of butter. And the next thing?"

"Ten cents' worth of tea."

Tea was cheaper in those days than it is now. There was a canister with a card in front of it: "Our own blend, 40 cents per lb." The grocer, with a gesture of contempt, picked up a fragment of paper, twisted it into a cone, tossed a palmful of tea into it and laid that beside the loaves and the butter.

"What's the weight of that?" asked Slim.

"Weight of what?"

"That twist of tea you gave us."

"That's ten cents' worth," snapped the grocer.

"I was asking you about the weight," replied Slim.

"That's ten cents' worth!" shouted the grocer.

Slim smiled, and his voice went quieter as the grocer's went louder.

"I heard you," he said, "but I was asking you what was the weight. Do you think it is a quarter of a pound?"

"You—asked—for—ten—cents'—worth!" yelled the grocer.

"Mr. Grocer," began Slim, suavely, thrusting his hand under his belt and hitching his right shoulder.

"If you don't want it you don't have to take it," said the grocer.

"No, I don't have to," agreed Slim. "That was just what I was going to tell you. I tell you what you can do with it."

"How's that?"

"You can put it where the monkey put the nutshells," said Slim.

"What did you say?"

Slim was strolling to the door.

"What did you say?" shouted the grocer.

"You heard all right," said Slim, and we passed on to the sidewalk. "I must sure ask for a quarter of a pound in the next

store," said he, "and not ten cents' worth. Say, wouldn't them people immersed in trade give you a pain?"

Much as he took a train on the fly had Slim taken the grocer. His motto, round a heraldic device of a shade tree, a camp-fire, and an old tomato can for kettle, might have been *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re!* But anyone with half an eye would know it was a dangerous suavity. He seemed, masterless man though he was, undisciplined in the ordinary sense, to have mastered the truth of Blake's view that it is not good for one to be in a temper, but good to have a temper in one. Some men would have flared over Mr. Grocer's narrow-gauge impertinence and, though in the right, have been open to accusation of "loss of temper." That smiling grip of Slim's, I admired immensely.

He was not depressed over the incident, as Hank would have been. Hank would have seen in it all a sad commentary upon humanity. Earlier paltriness he had met with would have recurred to mind, treated so, and he would probably have blazed, in Slim's place, and perhaps it would all have ended with the calling in of the police, and one knows, in advance, whose side they would have taken. Slim only realized, as we passed on to find another grocer, that he had rather enjoyed himself with that one.

In the next grocery store we were treated genially, not evil-eyed, even informed that it was fine weather. And then away we went down to the jungles, guided to Hank by a little trickle of blue smoke rising among them, and ate that last supper together, Slim narrating over it the story of the first grocer, but Hank listening only with half attention. It was an early supper; when it was finished we extinguished the fire.

"Well," said Slim, "if we go now, Hank, we'll get through Midway and across the river, and be ankle deep in Washington before we have to spread the blankets. Kind of sorry to leave the queer fellow," he added.

"You think that fire's out, all right?" asked Hank.

We said we were sure it was.

"Well," he said, and held out his hand.

He turned abruptly away, then came back.

"By the way," said he, "I should warn you to be careful with these notes you have in your pocket of hobo-slang and hobo-songs. If I were you I'd mail them to a friend to keep for you. You've got a little way to hike alone yet before you start traveling respectably, and you're not wised up in everything. Why, if you were arrested and searched you'd be damned utterly by these notes on you. Any man of brains, of course, would know they were proof that you weren't one of the fraternity, but policemen are a very ignorant class, ignorant and crooked. They'd use them as proof that you were a vagrant. Even if one of them happened to realize that a real hobo would have the words and the songs in his head, instead of on paper, he would twist it around that you were a novice hobo, or something of the kind. You'll do that?" he added anxiously.

"I have a couple of stamps," I said. "I'll see to it."

"Well, so-long," said Slim, canted himself backwards and held out his hand.

Away they went along the track for Midway.

But that was not the end of them. Hank had to have an anti-climax—and yet I don't know that anti-climax is the word.

I stayed that night in an old shack between Phoenix and Grand Forks, feeling very lonely as I ate the sandwiches I had brought with me and, in the can I had used to drink from while with them, made tea over a fire. I felt lonely and dazed, and the evening light on the trees seemed unreal, suggesting that all might at any moment be magic-ed away.

When I rolled myself in my blanket and fell asleep that night I dreamt I was in camp with them, woke and wondered where I was, looked to my side for Slim and Hank. Oh, no; of course not. I was alone. "He shall be missed for his place shall be empty." I fell asleep and dreamt again, dreamt that we were trudging through the woods, not talking of dope-fiends and men serving sentence for rape, but Hank and I deep in theological talk (theology and sociology both subjects that interested him), discussing that heart-rending story of the Crucifixion and hazarding various conceivable elucidations for the cryptic last cry of Christ; Slim trudging alongside with the air of one thinking it did not much matter one way or another, a hand held out rigidly before him because a butterfly had settled thereon and he had it under happy

examination, just with head turned now and then toward us and a fugitive look of intellectual curiosity and pondering on his face. So I relived, in a dream, one memorable, and in some ways almost anomalous hour with them, and awoke to know myself alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

At Grand Forks I just missed the train, had to stay there overnight, sleeping in a bed again.

Next day, to be sure of catching the train, I was on the depot platform well in advance of time. Suddenly before me appeared Slim.

"Gosh, I'm glad you're still here," he said.

He looked worried.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Something happened to Hank?"

"Say, we fairly traveled. We got plumb away into Washington after we left you. Moody, broody, say! The queer fellow sat up awake all night, talking about you, and fretting over that time he offered to put the ax in your head. The only way to content him was to come after you and apologize. He slept better last night, hus being after you, but worried in case you'd got the train."

"Where is he?"

"Along in the bush here with the bindles. This is an awful hostile town to hus. The bull here is a fair body-snatcher."

He looked along the platform, not timidly, but on guard, took off his hat and wiped his kerchief round it, removing the dust. It had come to that. He replaced it on his head very carefully after that attempt to look more spry.

"Guess the bull has had his eye on you," he said, "and has watched you till he knowed you'd got a ticket for your train. Yep, Hank figured that you'd probably lose it yesterday and that we'd catch you to-day. Some hike! Come along and put him at ease. He's bugs about it."

So I posted along whither Slim led, and we pushed our way into a patch of scrub. There sat Hank cross-legged beside the bindles. By his look there had been another bottle of whisky after I left them, but he smiled at sight of me and motioned to me to sit down.

"Doesn't it make you feel sorry to give up the life, seeing us sitting here with the bindles?" he asked.

"Well, a bit, perhaps," I said.

"Did he tell you," and he pointed to Slim, "what we've come after you for?"

"Yes," I said.

"That's easier for me, then," he went on. "We got along pretty well on the roads and the trail together, and certainly you were no slouch. I'm sorry about that time in the woods when I suggested putting you out of misery."

"That's all right," I assured him.

"Well, I apologize," said he.

"That's all right," I repeated. "Don't let that worry you."

He shook hands with me. Then——

"Were you scared?" he inquired. "Apart from apologizing to you, that's a thing I wondered—whether you were scared or not—for I couldn't make out."

I sought for a tactful reply.

"I didn't know whether to be scared or not," I confessed at last, "for I didn't know whether you were serious or not."

He thought that over, head on side.

"Oh, that was the way of it, was it?" he said. "Well, look here, now, just suppose this was a bluff and I hadn't come to

apologize to you. Just suppose, thinking it all over, I decided it would be a good job to polish you off for your own peace and I'd come after you all these weary miles to do it."

He turned round and fumbled in his blanket-roll, suddenly educed the little Washington and held it over me again.

"Are you scared now?" he asked.

History was repeating itself. I looked into his eyes.

"Aw, cut it out!" said Slim. "Cut it out! I wouldn't have hiked back with you if I'd knowed what you were going to do. You'll be lying awake at night bothering over this next. Man, you're bugs!"

"Perhaps I am bugs," said Hank, and pushed the Washington into his blankets.

Then another look came on his face, humane.

"Well, we mustn't make you lose your train again," he said. "I'm only joking, I'm only joking. Hope you believe that I'm only joking."

He rose and looked at his bindle.

"That damned blanket of mine is wearing thin," he remarked.

Inexplicable though he was, deranged by drink as I surmised, the soft side of me was touched by this crazy return. I thought of that, rather than of how he had spoilt it all by this repeating of the incident. The outer blanket that I had was an ordinary gray one, but I had an inner one which was really a traveling rug, Stewart tartan upon the one side and Gordon upon the other, greatly admired by any Indians who saw it, admired also by these two.

"Would you care," said I, "to have a little parting gift from me? Would you care to have my traveling rug?"

But he wouldn't hear of it.

"No, no. Well, we'll beat it," he said. "This isn't getting to Nevada to see if that boiler held," and his mouth twisted in a wry laugh.

"Keep that scheme of yours in mind," I advised, "to get horses and a wagon some day and be king of the tinkers. It would be a great life in its way, and no one would evil-eye you."

He wagged his head up and down, then said once more: "Well. . . ."

So we shook hands again.

"Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

They turned and hiked away. As I went back to the depot I looked round. Slim was swinging along, flutters of cigarette smoke coming over his shoulder, right elbow protruding, and I knew that his right hand would be thrust under his belt. By his side trudged Hank. His hands were not at his side; his head was lowered. I knew the pose, and that as he walked he'd be plucking the nails of his left hand with his right. It was a very bright day, hot and cloudless. They walked in a quivering heat-haze, and the worn portions of Hank's old blue serge suit reflected rays like a mirror.

Transcriber's Note

Punctuation errors have been corrected.

The following suspected printer's errors have been addressed.

Page 22. brakesmen changed to brakemen. (the brakemen can't see you)

Page 61. waching changed to watching. (the watching of the trains).

Page 80. unbrella changed to umbrella. (That dam' umbrella-mender).

Page 83. geyser changed to geezer. (One old geezer like that).

Page 154. nostils changed to nostrils. (blowing through her nostrils).

Page 246. A note, 'See Water, page 20', in the white space after Chapter XVII had no relevance to any part of the text on page 20 and was deleted.

Page 248. bundles changed to bindles. (cross legged beside the bindles).

[End of *Wild Honey*, by Frederick Niven]