

match for him. He twisted free of his feeble clutch, gave the man a push, and the latter fell to the ground.

"Oh, I've made a mistake," he said quickly, regarding Alan more clearly.

"It seems so," replied Alan, with curiosity and pity commingled, regarding his assailant. The latter was a hollow-cheeked, meanly-dressed person. Deprivation, poverty, even hunger, it seemed, showed in his drawn, colorless features. "You spoke the name of Ridgeway, though. Was you looking for him and is it Burt Ridgeway you mean?"

"Yes, it was," sullenly retorted the man. "I had a right to suppose you were him, for I heard he was a regular visitor at that house yonder. I've been watching to come across him."

"Well, Ridgeway is away from the town, has been for a week," explained Alan. "You didn't have a very friendly welcome waiting for him, it seems," he intimated. "That's not my business, though. See here, my man," added Alan, as the other arose, and in trying to keep his feet staggered somewhat as though from sheer weakness, "you look and act as if you needed help."

Alan was surprised, as the man, instead of replying in words, turned away from him and leaning against a tree, buried his face in his hands and began weeping. He sobbed out incoherently something about "a great wrong" somebody had done to his—"disgrace," "ruin," a long tramp, the need of food and shelter.

Through it all ran a secret, bitter strain connected vaguely with Ridgeway, but the man did not explain further. Alan was sympathetic. He saw that the man was in hard luck. In a kindly, considerate way he made a proffer of assistance. The result was that the poor wretch was comfortably housed at the little hotel in the village that night. All Alan could learn from him the next day was that he was a wandering derelict, anxious to get work and away from

the section which seemed to hold bitter reminders only for him.

When Alan started out on his unique painting trip, the stranger, who was named Jim Prevoast, accompanied him. The latter seemed to breathe more freely and his spirits rose considerably, the further he got away from civilization. He never referred to his troubles or to Ridgeway now, and Alan was glad that he had lifted the man from a forlorn refugee position to a really harmonious companionship.

During a month bright, cheering letters followed Alan in his wilderness course. Then, although he wrote regularly, there came no replies. He decided that the same were lost or delayed, following his erratic route. He was anxious to hasten his program and get back to the girl he loved.

One afternoon Alan and his companion had been working since day-break on a particularly perilous undertaking—the painting of a sign on the face of a cliff looking sheer down over 3,000 feet into a rock strewn ravine. Alan had left Prevoast to put on the finishing touches, and had gone to the near settlement to arrange for the removal of their traps to their next stop.

Returning, his heart stood still as he neared the cliff. A man was hacking at the ropes sustaining the frail platform a hundred feet down. He sawed them through, there was a crash below, a blood-curdling shriek.

"Burt Ridgeway!" exclaimed Alan in amazement and horror, and rushed at the villain. The latter, unnerved, as though he saw the wraith of the man he had intended to plunge to his doom, went down like a shot as Alan hit him, his head striking a rock. There he lay, senseless.

Alan peered over the edge of the cliff, way down below the platform hung, suspended by one rope. Clinging to a trailing cable swinging to and fro, was his helper. It was the work of a moment to descend, to ven-