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Extracts from **THE BOTTOMLESS WELL**

by
Walter S. Terry

The Town

A mile away from the eastern town limit Buena Vista Mountain [Monte Sano] rises a thousand feet above the valley floor, providing a backdrop of green in the spring and summer, turning to a potpourri of color in the fall, fading to a gray-green in the winter. At one end of the mountain, the north end, a crude rock road twists and strains up the steep slopes to the summit. Up there is a narrow plateau where some of the moneyed families of Garth [Huntsville] maintain summer homes. On that plateau, at the tail end of the previous century, a hotel enjoyed a brief vogue, honored by visits from statesmen and magnates from the business world. The altitude, the waters of iron and limestone springs, were advertised as the very essence of good health. A cable railway lifted the people up out of the valley to this health resort for millionaires; or surreys brought them up the twisting road. In less than a decade the hotel succumbed to the fickleness of human tastes. In more recent years its gray and rotting structure has stood like a bleak ghost on the west bluff, with the old cable railroad only an occasional faint scar in the mountain forest below.

Homesite — The Mountain

"It's beautiful, Clay," Grace said, looking out over the valley. "I never imagined there would be such beautiful hills in these parts."

"We call these mountains," Clay said. He pointed at Morrision Hill down in the valley. "*That's* a hill."

"All right," Grace said, "*mountains*. By any name they're beautiful."

To the south, the chain of mountains, of which Buena Vista was a segment, stretched away toward and beyond the river. The winding, seeking course of the river could be seen until it disappeared, easterly, through a gap in the mountains and, westerly, into the flat blue-hazed horizon.

The land, and the town, lay before them. From this height and from a spot halfway up the side, where he and Ross used to go to sit and look and dream and in other moods tear wildly through the mountain woods on the magic feet of youth, the town appeared as a thing you could hold in your grasp, to feel and treasure and even understand. In miniature, its infinite complexity of human emotions and human actions was lost. It was one bound entity, the simple fact of a town, the beautiful and pristine. Sometimes, as a boy and as a youth, he had tried to take this concept of the town down the mountain with him. He was never able to; once he had stepped across the city limit, that severe line between dreams and reality, his detachment was lost; he became as much a part of the town, as subject to its joys and its hurts, as all the people in it that he had looked down upon so few minutes or hours before.

Now the town was changing. Its new growth spread like twisting octopus arms toward the south and the east, the south-reaching tentacles threatening the river, the east-reaching tentacles encroaching on the mountain's foot. Across the river the buildings of the Arsenal looked like the sudden upsurging of another town, with the river caught between its growth and that of Garth.

Clay's eyes moved to the left. He saw that the upper balconies of the Old Buena Vista Hotel, and part of the roof, had collapsed. Weeds and bushes obscured most of the lower windows.

