

Cobalt Mines

Golden City

July 12th 1911

My very dearest Girl
I should have written to tell you I was going into this cursed place but at the time I thought it was only for two or three days at the most.

Today I have returned and find four of your letters - it seems a shame - June 12th - telling of Ruth and Ted's experience with the runaway on Cote St. Antoine, June 25th - telling about the R.C. Church near St. Denis St. being struck by lightning, July 2nd - saying that Naomi came to stay with you etc. and July 7th which is your first letter to me from Cap à l'Aigle.

I should like to write about other things Darling but the smell of the fire is everywhere and I can think of nothing else. Twice before we saved our home from the fire and the second time I worked so close to the fire that in the night time my eyes gave out. The doctor dropped cocaine in them and later for a couple of days I used boracic acid in a dark room. This was lucky because when I left the house I was using those goggles with the sides to them and these were the very greatest help in this last fire.

Tuesday morning came clear and fine, ~~but~~ and we had intended to take quite a long tramp out to Pearl Lake but after breakfast the nice breeze became rather wild and gusty so that we had some misgivings about leaving our home for the day, just in case some little fire

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should start up and the sparks be carried near our house.

- It is possible that had we started, our judgement might have erred and there would now be two more of those charred black shapes that one has to look at a second time to recognize the remains of a human being -

Presently our misgivings changed to fears and then as we saw, in two or three different spots, dense masses of smoke begin to gather - we knew that as on the two previous occasions we were in for trouble. The wind increased to a sixty or seventy mile gale, doors slammed and behind the house some trees blew over. By that time we knew that unless there was a change very soon, the town was doomed and nothing we could possibly do could save it.

Instead of becoming quieter the gale, if anything, increased. The smoke bore down upon us and several of the piles of stacked wood before our house became alight and blazed furiously.

In a little while we went to the restaurant a block away and had lunch - leaving one of the men to keep watch. A spirit of excitement was everywhere. A maid gave me her brooch - we mixed the flavours from the soda water stand and drank them in our water at table - a dynamite explosion enlivened things by bursting in the main front windows and we invited the girls to come for a boat ride. Everyone was laughing and joking as one

sometimes will in a high wind. But when we left the women started for the wharf. I don't think many of them waiting to get so much as a hat or a mouthful of food.

We went home again. Everything was about the same but we sent all the ladies and children down to the wharf to be taken across the lake in motor boats to Golden City.

We blew up a stump with dynamite as it ~~looked~~ seemed to be dangerously near the house. Sparks started the mass near us, the fires in the piled wood drew closer — a terrifying roar from the main bush fire ~~caused~~ ^{caused} us to make final preparations. As ~~the~~ the swirls of thick smoke bore down upon us we covered our trunks in the ditch with clay.

Every minute the chance of our house being saved grew more desperate. We carried pails from our water hole and put out small blazes a few feet from the house. (We turned.) Through rifts in the smoke the town behind us could be seen beginning to blaze. The smoke began to make our chances of ~~getting~~ losing our way grow alarming.

I picked up my coat, rain coat and small knapsack and ran for the kitchen. Tumbling a little grub into the knapsack I ~~closed~~ and tightly closed the front door. I remember the last thing I picked up on the steps was a drinking cup.

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left the women started for the waterfall.
I don't think many of them wanted to get so much
as a hat or a mouthful of food.

we went down again. Everything was about
the same but we cut off all the hair and
children down to the waterfall to be taken across the
lake in water boats to Ughla bit.
In the lake up a stump with a hole in it

~~the~~ seemed to be designed for the
in fact the first in the series
started the road near us. A terrific road
the filed wood here - a terrific road
from the road back fire ~~the~~ ^{small} waterfalls
the swirls of thick

proportion time. As the
smoke did down as we covered in tanks
in the ditch with

~~Waterfall~~

Every minute. The ~~water~~
around open and ~~beats~~. We carried poles for
our water but only put out small things
for feet for the trees. (We turned) through after
in the smoke the two lakes as well as seen
to walk

beginning of ~~the~~ being in way of ~~observing~~
our chances of ~~the~~ being in way of ~~observing~~

I picked up my coat, rain coat and small
knapsack and ran for the kitchen. Tossing a
little into the knapsack I ~~left~~

tight the chair the first bar. I remember the
last thing I picked up in the steps was a
drinking cup.

The excitement of getting started being over, the four of us started out, Indian file and going slow. We each had a wet handkerchief for our eyes and mouth, a blanket and a little grub as we believed that the three towns were completely wiped out.

Probably our walk to the lake side would not exceed two or three hundred yards but it was long enough. We came on a man going in and out of his house probably bringing out valuables. We shouted to him to come at once. In the evening we found him in the same place, barely noticeable among the other cinders.

Near the water I tried to get hold of a team of horses, but the flames were all about and they were too wild. They too were burned with a dozen others.

On the wharf, the banks and in the water were scores of people and a number of horses, but we did not wait. The ladies and children were all safe and we had to look after ourselves.

They called us fools as we waded around the end of the lake in water and mud ~~to~~ of a depth ranging from our knees up to as deep as our chests. They thought we were crazy because we had to go a little bit towards a burning part in order to get to the opposite side of the lake.

I think we started about a quarter to three and I think we were about an hour and a half in the water. At times it was so dark that we could not see our companions on the same log. My Panama hat blew away and was carried like a flash to

a point at least 150 yards away before it touched the water. An almost continuous hail of spray whipped along over the surface of the water.

I did not find it very hard to breathe. It was more the dread than the actuality of being ^{choked} choked that made our trip exciting.

We camped finally on a sandy beach and made a shelter of an old boat while we dried our clothes and food in the wind and with the help of some slight fires.

By six o'clock it was possible to return to town which we did by a land route. There was no town. Everything was black and razed to the ground. We made our way home and uncovered our trunks only two out of eight were safe. The rest were each a smoking blackness. My suitcase was burned, with a watch - the only one I have ever borrowed besides the one you know of - my green leather pocket book which Mrs Pearson brought me from Japan, my few toilet articles nearly all of them presents and half a dozen other things. Only the crimson necktie which you made for me was saved as it was in a tin collar box which withstood the heat in some way. The blue one, I think I was wearing and it seems to be lost.

On enquiry we found that Golden City with the ladies and children was safe and we were taken there in a motor boat. It was crowded. We slept on the floor of an office. I sent out a man on the train at 5.30 this morning to wire you and the rest in case the newspaper reports might be exaggerated. The wires were down here and would be very busy when repaired.

In the towns as far as we can tell about half-

...at least 150 ...
...the water ...
...the surface of the water ...
...to breathe ...
...the possibility of being ...
...checked that was ...
...in camp ...
...shells of an old ...
...with ...

~~11/10/11~~
11/10/11
11/10/11

...to return to ...
...at ...
...to the ground ...
...in ...
...the rest was ...
...with ...
...a ...
...the ...
...which ...
...articles ...
...thing ...
...we ...
...with ...

~~11/10/11~~
11/10/11

...to ...
...On ...
...and children ...
...water ...
...of an officer ...
...to ...
...The ...
...of the town ...

-a-dozen people were drowned and about half-a-dozen
burned. At the mines there seem to be just two
seriously unfortunate. We were out there today. One lost
about 30 men women & children and the other about 10.

There could be no business here for us but
we waited over today to see if we could be of any
use

a couple of nights ago

It seems strange. I was playing Bridge with
one of the men who was drowned.

p.6 This is a disgusting letter Dear. I don't
know exactly just what good it can do sending
it to you but there is nothing but fire to think
about. This evening I will write you another letter
about other things. Perhaps I will be able to
get away tomorrow and change the base of my
operations to Montreal.

With all my love to you Love

Yours Edward S.W

