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## Crowsnest Pass

by Richard Lewis

My mind drifted as I trailed Crowsnest Pass from Calgary to Pincher Creek. The wind moaned like a coyote, whipping up spirals of dust, rising like smoke from ghostly campfires. It stuck to my sweat stained face and left an earthy taste whenever I licked my parched lips.

The reins cut my hands as I bounced along, loose as a sack of bones. I'd bought the old nag for ten dollars from the livery stable. The first thing I noticed about him was the musky, fetid odour. But it was the only way to reach Pincher I was told, having missed the weekly stagecoach. My reluctant steed tossed his head in annoyance, no doubt aware his new owner was sadly lacking in the riding skills department.

The year was 1923. I was preoccupied with resentment towards my father who'd sent me out to the wilds of Canada to manage my uncle's ranch, due to his untimely death. I was nineteen and should have stood up to him and said no but he was a hard man, hard to refuse. I told myself it was short-term, I'd find someone to take over and return home soon enough.

After hours in the saddle I fell into a dreamlike state, as if I was acting in a Western movie. The swirling landscape seemed unreal but I felt my objective could not be far off. The trail began to rise steeply, my horse slowing with the effort, finally came to an abrupt halt, refusing to go further. I had no choice but to dismount and lead him up to the ridge, fearing I'd have to walk for the duration.

As I reached the summit I was confronted with the most dramatic sight. The land fell away to reveal a vast sunken plain. In the distance I could see what I was sure must be the Rio Alto, my final destination. It was a visceral experience.

I felt something shift inside and a great sense of wonder and elation washed through my being. My resentment left me, like a boulder rolling to the valley below and in that moment everything I knew to be true about myself was gone.