

**THE LUCK OF ROARING
CAMP & STORIES
BY
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The Luck of Roaring Camp

There was commotion in Roaring Camp. It could not have been a fight, for in 1850 that was not novel enough to have called together the entire settlement. The ditches and claims were not only deserted, but “Tuttle’s grocery” had contributed its gamblers, who, it will be remembered, calmly continued their game the day that French Pete and Kanaka Joe shot each other to death over the bar in the front room. The whole camp was collected before a rude cabin on the outer edge of the clearing. Conversation was carried on in a low tone, but the name of a woman was frequently repeated. It was a name familiar enough in the camp—“Cherokee Sal.”

Perhaps the less said of her the better. She was a coarse and, it is to be feared, a very sinful woman. But at that time she was the only woman in Roaring Camp, and was just then lying in sore extremity, when she most needed the ministrations of her own sex. Dissolute, abandoned, and irreclaimable, she was yet suffering a martyrdom hard enough to bear even when veiled by sympathizing womanhood, but now terrible in her loneliness. The primal curse had come to her in that original isolation which must have made the punishment of the first transgression so dreadful. It was, perhaps, part of the expiation of her sin that, at a moment when she most lacked her sex’s intuitive tenderness and care, she met only the half-contemptuous faces of her masculine associates. Yet a few of the spectators were, I think, touched by her sufferings. Sandy Tipton thought it was “rough on Sal,” and, in the contemplation of

her condition, for a moment rose superior to the fact that he had an ace and two bowers in his sleeve.

It will be seen also that the situation was novel. Deaths were by no means uncommon in Roaring Camp, but a birth was a new thing. People had been dismissed the camp effectively, finally, and with no possibility of return; but this was the first time that anybody had been introduced AB INITIO. Hence the excitement.

“You go in there, Stumpy,” said a prominent citizen known as “Kentuck,” addressing one of the loungers. “Go in there, and see what you kin do. You’ve had experience in them things.”

Perhaps there was a fitness in the selection. Stumpy, in other climes, had been the putative head of two families; in fact, it was owing to some legal informality in these proceedings that Roaring Camp—a city of refuge—was indebted to his company. The crowd approved the choice, and Stumpy was wise enough to bow to the majority. The door closed on the extempore surgeon and midwife, and Roaring Camp sat down outside, smoked its pipe, and awaited the issue.

The assemblage numbered about a hundred men. One or two of these were actual fugitives from justice, some were criminal, and all were reckless. Physically they exhibited no indication of their past lives and character. The greatest scamp had a Raphael face, with a profusion of blonde hair; Oakhurst, a gambler, had the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet; the coolest and most courageous man was scarcely over five feet in height, with a soft voice and an embarrassed, timid manner. The term “roughs” applied to them was a distinction rather than a definition. Perhaps in the minor details of fingers, toes, ears,

etcetera, the camp may have been deficient, but these slight omissions did not detract from their aggregate force. The strongest man had but three fingers on his right hand; the best shot had but one eye.

Such was the physical aspect of the men that were dispersed around the cabin. The camp lay in a triangular valley between two hills and a river. The only outlet was a steep trail over the summit of a hill that faced the cabin, now illuminated by the rising moon. The suffering woman might have seen it from the rude bunk whereon she lay—seen it winding like a silver thread until it was lost in the stars above.

A fire of withered pine boughs added sociability to the gathering. By degrees the natural levity of Roaring Camp returned. Bets were freely offered and taken regarding the result. Three to five that “Sal would get through with it;” even that the child would survive; side bets as to the sex and complexion of the coming stranger. In the midst of an excited discussion an exclamation came from those nearest the door, and the camp stopped to listen. Above the swaying and moaning of the pines, the swift rush of the river, and the crackling of the fire rose a sharp, querulous cry—a cry unlike anything heard before in the camp. The pines stopped moaning, the river ceased to rush, and the fire to crackle. It seemed as if Nature had stopped to listen too.

The camp rose to its feet as one man! It was proposed to explode a barrel of gunpowder; but in consideration of the situation of the mother, better counsels prevailed, and only a few revolvers were discharged; for whether owing to the rude surgery of the camp, or some other reason, Cherokee Sal was sinking fast. Within an hour she had climbed, as it were, that rugged road that led to the stars, and so passed out of Roaring Camp, its sin and shame, forever. I do not think

that the announcement disturbed them much, except in speculation as to the fate of the child. "Can he live now?" was asked of Stumpy. The answer was doubtful. The only other being of Cherokee Sal's sex and maternal condition in the settlement was an ass. There was some conjecture as to fitness, but the experiment was tried. It was less problematical than the ancient treatment of Romulus and Remus, and apparently as successful.

When these details were completed, which exhausted another hour, the door was opened, and the anxious crowd of men, who had already formed themselves into a queue, entered in single file. Beside the low bunk or shelf, on which the figure of the mother was starkly outlined below the blankets, stood a pine table. On this a candle-box was placed, and within it, swathed in staring red flannel, lay the last arrival at Roaring Camp. Beside the candle-box was placed a hat. Its use was soon indicated. "Gentlemen," said Stumpy, with a singular mixture of authority and EX OFFICIO complacency—"gentlemen will please pass in at the front door, round the table, and out at the back door. Them as wishes to contribute anything toward the orphan will find a hat handy." The first man entered with his hat on; he uncovered, however, as he looked about him, and so unconsciously set an example to the next. In such communities good and bad actions are catching. As the procession filed in comments were audible—criticisms addressed perhaps rather to Stumpy in the character of showman; "Is that him?" "Mighty small specimen;" "Has n't more 'n got the color;" "Ain't bigger nor a derringer." The contributions were as characteristic: A silver tobacco box; a doubloon; a navy revolver, silver mounted; a gold specimen; a very beautifully embroidered lady's handkerchief (from Oakhurst the gambler); a diamond breastpin; a diamond ring (suggested by the pin, with the remark from the giver that he "saw that pin and went two diamonds better"); a slung-shot;

a Bible (contributor not detected); a golden spur; a silver teaspoon (the initials, I regret to say, were not the giver's); a pair of surgeon's shears; a lancet; a Bank of England note for 5 pounds; and about \$200 in loose gold and silver coin. During these proceedings Stumpy maintained a silence as impassive as the dead on his left, a gravity as inscrutable as that of the newly born on his right. Only one incident occurred to break the monotony of the curious procession. As Kentuck bent over the candle-box half curiously, the child turned, and, in a spasm of pain, caught at his groping finger, and held it fast for a moment. Kentuck looked foolish and embarrassed. Something like a blush tried to assert itself in his weather-beaten cheek. "The damned little cuss!" he said, as he extricated his finger, with perhaps more tenderness and care than he might have been deemed capable of showing. He held that finger a little apart from its fellows as he went out, and examined it curiously. The examination provoked the same original remark in regard to the child. In fact, he seemed to enjoy repeating it. "He rasted with my finger," he remarked to Tipton, holding up the member, "the damned little cuss!"

It was four o'clock before the camp sought repose. A light burnt in the cabin where the watchers sat, for Stumpy did not go to bed that night. Nor did Kentuck. He drank quite freely, and related with great gusto his experience, invariably ending with his characteristic condemnation of the newcomer. It seemed to relieve him of any unjust implication of sentiment, and Kentuck had the weaknesses of the nobler sex. When everybody else had gone to bed, he walked down to the river and whistled reflectingly. Then he walked up the gulch past the cabin, still whistling with demonstrative unconcern. At a large redwood-tree he paused and retraced his steps, and again passed the cabin. Halfway down to the river's bank he again paused, and then returned and knocked at the door. It was opened by Stumpy. "How

goes it?" said Kentuck, looking past Stumpy toward the candle-box. "All serene!" replied Stumpy. "Anything up?" "Nothing." There was a pause—an embarrassing one—Stumpy still holding the door. Then Kentuck had recourse to his finger, which he held up to Stumpy. "Rastled with it—the damned little cuss," he said, and retired.

The next day Cherokee Sal had such rude sepulture as Roaring Camp afforded. After her body had been committed to the hillside, there was a formal meeting of the camp to discuss what should be done with her infant. A resolution to adopt it was unanimous and enthusiastic. But an animated discussion in regard to the manner and feasibility of providing for its wants at once sprang up. It was remarkable that the argument partook of none of those fierce personalities with which discussions were usually conducted at Roaring Camp. Tipton proposed that they should send the child to Red Dog—a distance of forty miles—where female attention could be procured. But the unlucky suggestion met with fierce and unanimous opposition. It was evident that no plan which entailed parting from their new acquisition would for a moment be entertained. "Besides," said Tom Ryder, "them fellows at Red Dog would swap it, and ring in somebody else on us." A disbelief in the honesty of other camps prevailed at Roaring Camp, as in other places.

The introduction of a female nurse in the camp also met with objection. It was argued that no decent woman could be prevailed to accept Roaring Camp as her home, and the speaker urged that "they didn't want any more of the other kind." This unkind allusion to the defunct mother, harsh as it may seem, was the first spasm of propriety—the first symptom of the camp's regeneration. Stumpy advanced nothing. Perhaps he felt a certain delicacy in interfering with the selection of a possible successor in office. But when questioned, he averred stoutly that he and "Jinny"—the

mammal before alluded to—could manage to rear the child. There was something original, independent, and heroic about the plan that pleased the camp. Stumpy was retained. Certain articles were sent for to Sacramento. “Mind,” said the treasurer, as he pressed a bag of gold-dust into the expressman’s hand, “the best that can be got—lace, you know, and filigree-work and frills—damn the cost!”

Strange to say, the child thrived. Perhaps the invigorating climate of the mountain camp was compensation for material deficiencies. Nature took the foundling to her broader breast. In that rare atmosphere of the Sierra foothills—that air pungent with balsamic odor, that ethereal cordial at once bracing and exhilarating—he may have found food and nourishment, or a subtle chemistry that transmuted ass’ milk to lime and phosphorus. Stumpy inclined to the belief that it was the latter and good nursing. “Me and that ass,” he would say, “has been father and mother to him! Don’t you,” he would add, apostrophizing the helpless bundle before him, “never go back on us.”

By the time he was a month old the necessity of giving him a name became apparent. He had generally been known as “The Kid,” “Stumpy’s Boy,” “The Coyote” (an allusion to his vocal powers), and even by Kentuck’s endearing diminutive of “The damned little cuss.” But these were felt to be vague and unsatisfactory, and were at last dismissed under another influence. Gamblers and adventurers are generally superstitious, and Oakhurst one day declared that the baby had brought “the luck” to Roaring Camp. It was certain that of late they had been successful. “Luck” was the name agreed upon, with the prefix of Tommy for greater convenience. No allusion was made to the mother, and the father was unknown. “It’s better,” said the philosophical Oakhurst, “to take a fresh deal all round. Call him Luck, and start him fair.” A day was accordingly

set apart for the christening. What was meant by this ceremony the reader may imagine who has already gathered some idea of the reckless irreverence of Roaring Camp. The master of ceremonies was one "Boston," a noted wag, and the occasion seemed to promise the greatest facetiousness. This ingenious satirist had spent two days in preparing a burlesque of the Church service, with pointed local allusions. The choir was properly trained, and Sandy Tipton was to stand godfather. But after the procession had marched to the grove with music and banners, and the child had been deposited before a mock altar, Stumpy stepped before the expectant crowd. "It ain't my style to spoil fun, boys," said the little man, stoutly eyeing the faces around him," but it strikes me that this thing ain't exactly on the squar. It's playing it pretty low down on this yer baby to ring in fun on him that he ain't goin' to understand. And ef there's goin' to be any godfathers round, I'd like to see who's got any better rights than me." A silence followed Stumpy's speech. To the credit of all humorists be it said that the first man to acknowledge its justice was the satirist thus stopped of his fun. "But," said Stumpy, quickly following up his advantage, "we're here for a christening, and we'll have it. I proclaim you Thomas Luck, according to the laws of the United States and the State of California, so help me God." It was the first time that the name of the Deity had been otherwise uttered than profanely in the camp. The form of christening was perhaps even more ludicrous than the satirist had conceived; but strangely enough, nobody saw it and nobody laughed. "Tommy" was christened as seriously as he would have been under a Christian roof and cried and was comforted in as orthodox fashion.

And so the work of regeneration began in Roaring Camp. Almost imperceptibly a change came over the settlement. The cabin assigned to "Tommy Luck"—or "The Luck," as he was more frequently called—first showed signs

of improvement. It was kept scrupulously clean and whitewashed. Then it was boarded, clothed, and papered. The rose wood cradle, packed eighty miles by mule, had, in Stumpy's way of putting it, "sorter killed the rest of the furniture." So the rehabilitation of the cabin became a necessity. The men who were in the habit of lounging in at Stumpy's to see "how 'The Luck' got on" seemed to appreciate the change, and in self-defense the rival establishment of "Tuttle's grocery" bestirred itself and imported a carpet and mirrors. The reflections of the latter on the appearance of Roaring Camp tended to produce stricter habits of personal cleanliness. Again Stumpy imposed a kind of quarantine upon those who aspired to the honor and privilege of holding The Luck. It was a cruel mortification to Kentuck—who, in the carelessness of a large nature and the habits of frontier life, had begun to regard all garments as a second cuticle, which, like a snake's, only sloughed off through decay—to be debarred this privilege from certain prudential reasons. Yet such was the subtle influence of innovation that he thereafter appeared regularly every afternoon in a clean shirt and face still shining from his ablutions. Nor were moral and social sanitary laws neglected. "Tommy," who was supposed to spend his whole existence in a persistent attempt to repose, must not be disturbed by noise. The shouting and yelling, which had gained the camp its infelicitous title, were not permitted within hearing distance of Stumpy's. The men conversed in whispers or smoked with Indian gravity. Profanity was tacitly given up in these sacred precincts, and throughout the camp a popular form of expletive, known as "D——n the luck!" and "Curse the luck!" was abandoned, as having a new personal bearing. Vocal music was not interdicted, being supposed to have a soothing, tranquilizing quality; and one song, sung by "Man-o'-War Jack," an English sailor from her Majesty's Australian colonies, was quite popular as a lullaby. It was a lugubrious recital of the

exploits of "the Arethusa, Seventy-four," in a muffled minor, ending with a prolonged dying fall at the burden of each verse, "On b-oo-o-ard of the Arethusa." It was a fine sight to see Jack holding The Luck, rocking from side to side as if with the motion of a ship, and crooning forth this naval ditty. Either through the peculiar rocking of Jack or the length of his song—it contained ninety stanzas, and was continued with conscientious deliberation to the bitter end—the lullaby generally had the desired effect. At such times the men would lie at full length under the trees in the soft summer twilight, smoking their pipes and drinking in the melodious utterances. An indistinct idea that this was pastoral happiness pervaded the camp. "This 'ere kind o' think," said the Cockney Simmons, meditatively reclining on his elbow, "is 'evingly." It reminded him of Greenwich.

On the long summer days The Luck was usually carried to the gulch from whence the golden store of Roaring Camp was taken. There, on a blanket spread over pine boughs, he would lie while the men were working in the ditches below. Latterly there was a rude attempt to decorate this bower with flowers and sweet-smelling shrubs, and generally some one would bring him a cluster of wild honeysuckles, azaleas, or the painted blossoms of Las Mariposas. The men had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were beauty and significance in these trifles, which they had so long trodden carelessly beneath their feet. A flake of glittering mica, a fragment of variegated quartz, a bright pebble from the bed of the creek, became beautiful to eyes thus cleared and strengthened, and were invariably pat aside for The Luck. It was wonderful how many treasures the woods and hillsides yielded that "would do for Tommy." Surrounded by playthings such as never child out of fairyland had before, it is to be hoped that Tommy was content. He appeared to be serenely happy, albeit there was an infantine gravity about him, a contemplative light in his

round gray eyes, that sometimes worried Stumpy. He was always tractable and quiet, and it is recorded that once, having crept beyond his "corral,"—a hedge of tessellated pine boughs, which surrounded his bed—he dropped over the bank on his head in the soft earth, and remained with his mottled legs in the air in that position for at least five minutes with unflinching gravity. He was extricated without a murmur. I hesitate to record the many other instances of his sagacity, which rest, unfortunately, upon the statements of prejudiced friends. Some of them were not without a tinge of superstition. "I crep' up the bank just now," said Kentuck one day, in a breathless state of excitement "and dern my skin if he was a-talking to a jay bird as was a-sittin' on his lap. There they was, just as free and sociable as anything you please, a- jawin' at each other just like two cherrybums." Howbeit, whether creeping over the pine boughs or lying lazily on his back blinking at the leaves above him, to him the birds sang, the squirrels chattered, and the flowers bloomed. Nature was his nurse and playfellow. For him she would let slip between the leaves golden shafts of sunlight that fell just within his grasp; she would send wandering breezes to visit him with the balm of bay and resinous gum; to him the tall redwoods nodded familiarly and sleepily, the bumblebees buzzed, and the rooks cawed a slumbrous accompaniment.

Such was the golden summer of Roaring Camp. They were "flush times," and the luck was with them. The claims had yielded enormously. The camp was jealous of its privileges and looked suspiciously on strangers. No encouragement was given to immigration, and, to make their seclusion more perfect, the land on either side of the mountain wall that surrounded the camp they duly preempted. This, and a reputation for singular proficiency with the revolver, kept the reserve of Roaring Camp inviolate. The expressman—their only connecting link with

the surrounding world— sometimes told wonderful stories of the camp. He would say, “They’ve a street up there in ‘Roaring’ that would lay over any street in Red Dog. They’ve got vines and flowers round their houses, and they wash themselves twice a day. But they’re mighty rough on strangers, and they worship an Ingin baby.”

With the prosperity of the camp came a desire for further improvement. It was proposed to build a hotel in the following spring, and to invite one or two decent families to reside there for the sake of The Luck, who might perhaps profit by female companionship. The sacrifice that this concession to the sex cost these men, who were fiercely skeptical in regard to its general virtue and usefulness, can only be accounted for by their affection for Tommy. A few still held out. But the resolve could not be carried into effect for three months, and the minority meekly yielded in the hope that something might turn up to prevent it. And it did.

The winter of 1851 will long be remembered in the foothills. The snow lay deep on the Sierras, and every mountain creek became a river, and every river a lake. Each gorge and gulch was transformed into a tumultuous watercourse that descended the hillsides, tearing down giant trees and scattering its drift and debris along the plain. Red Dog had been twice under water, and Roaring Camp had been forewarned. “Water put the gold into them gulches,” said Stumpy. “It been here once and will be here again!” And that night the North Fork suddenly leaped over its banks and swept up the triangular valley of Roaring Camp.

In the confusion of rushing water, crashing trees, and crackling timber, and the darkness which seemed to flow with the water and blot out the fair valley, but little could be done to collect the scattered camp. When the morning broke, the cabin of Stumpy, nearest the river-bank, was gone.

Higher up the gulch they found the body of its unlucky owner; but the pride, the hope, the joy, The Luck, of Roaring Camp had disappeared. They were returning with sad hearts when a shout from the bank recalled them.

It was a relief-boat from down the river. They had picked up, they said, a man and an infant, nearly exhausted, about two miles below. Did anybody know them, and did they belong here?

It needed but a glance to show them Kentuck lying there, cruelly crushed and bruised, but still holding The Luck of Roaring Camp in his arms. As they bent over the strangely assorted pair, they saw that the child was cold and pulseless. "He is dead," said one. Kentuck opened his eyes. "Dead?" he repeated feebly. "Yes, my man, and you are dying too." A smile lit the eyes of the expiring Kentuck. "Dying!" he repeated; "he's a-taking me with him. Tell the boys I've got The Luck with me now;" and the strong man, clinging to the frail babe as a drowning man is said to cling to a straw, drifted away into the shadowy river that flows forever to the unknown sea.

Miggles

We were eight, including the driver. We had not spoken during the passage of the last six miles, since the jolting of the heavy vehicle over the roughening road had spoiled the Judge's last poetical quotation. The tall man beside the Judge was asleep, his arm passed through the swaying strap and his head resting upon it— altogether a limp, helpless-looking object, as if he had hanged himself and been cut down too late. The French lady on the back seat was asleep, too, yet in a half-conscious propriety of attitude, shown even in the disposition of the handkerchief which she held to her forehead and which partially veiled her face. The lady from Virginia City, traveling with her husband, had long since lost all individuality in a wild confusion of ribbons, veils, furs, and shawls. There was no sound but the rattling of wheels and the dash of rain upon the roof. Suddenly the stage stopped and we became dimly aware of voices. The driver was evidently in the midst of an exciting colloquy with someone in the road—a colloquy of which such fragments as “bridge gone,” “twenty feet of water,” “can't pass,” were occasionally distinguishable above the storm. Then came a lull, and a mysterious voice from the road shouted the parting adjuration:

“Try Miggles’.”

We caught a glimpse of our leaders as the vehicle slowly turned, of a horseman vanishing through the rain, and we were evidently on our way to Miggles’.

Who and where was Miggles? The Judge, our authority, did not remember the name, and he knew the country thoroughly. The Washoe traveler thought Miggles must keep a hotel. We only knew that we were stopped by high water in front and rear, and that Miggles was our rock of refuge. A ten minutes splashing through a tangled by-road, scarcely wide enough for the stage, and we drew up before a barred and boarded gate in a wide stone wall or fence about eight feet high. Evidently Miggles', and evidently Miggles did not keep a hotel.

The driver got down and tried the gate. It was securely locked. Miggles! O Miggles!"

No answer.

"Migg-ells! You Miggles!" continued the driver, with rising wrath.

"Migglesy!" joined the expressman, persuasively. "O Miggy! Mig!"

But no reply came from the apparently insensate Miggles. The Judge, who had finally got the window down, put his head out and propounded a series of questions, which if answered categorically would have undoubtedly elucidated the whole mystery, but which the driver evaded by replying that "if we didn't want to sit in the coach all night, we had better rise up and sing out for Miggles."

So we rose up and called on Miggles in chorus; then separately. And when we had finished, a Hibernian fellow-passenger from the roof called for "Maygells!" whereat we all laughed. While we were laughing, the driver cried "Shoo!"

We listened. To our infinite amazement the chorus of “Miggles” was repeated from the other side of the wall, even to the final and supplemental “Maygells.”

“Extraordinary echo,” said the Judge.

“Extraordinary damned skunk!” roared the driver, contemptuously. “Come out of that, Miggles, and show yourself! Be a man, Miggles! Don’t hide in the dark; I wouldn’t if I were you, Miggles,” continued Yuba Bill, now dancing about in an excess of fury.

“Miggles!” continued the voice. “O Miggles!”

“My good man! Mr. Myghail!” said the Judge, softening the asperities of the name as much as possible. “Consider the inhospitality of refusing shelter from the inclemency of the weather to helpless females. Really, my dear sir—” But a succession of “Miggles,” ending in a burst of laughter, drowned his voice.

Yuba Bill hesitated no longer. Taking a heavy stone from the road, he battered down the gate, and with the expressman entered the enclosure. We followed. Nobody was to be seen. In the gathering darkness all that we could distinguish was that we were in a garden—from the rosebushes that scattered over us a minute spray from their dripping leaves—and before a long, rambling wooden building.

“Do you know this Miggles?” asked the Judge of Yuba Bill.

“No, nor, don’t want to,” said Bill, shortly, who felt the Pioneer Stage Company insulted in his person by the contumacious Miggles.

“But, my dear sir,” expostulated the Judge as he thought of the barred gate.

“Lookee here,” said Yuba Bill, with fine irony, “hadn’t you better go back and sit in the coach till yer introduced? I’m going in,” and he pushed open the door of the building.

A long room lighted only by the embers of a fire that was dying on the large hearth at its farther extremity; the walls curiously papered, and the flickering firelight bringing out its grotesque pattern; somebody sitting in a large armchair by the fireplace. All this we saw as we crowded together into the room, after the driver and expressman.

“Hello, be you Miggles?” said Yuba Bill to the solitary occupant.

The figure neither spoke nor stirred. Yuba Bill walked wrathfully toward it, and turned the eye of his coach lantern upon its face. It was a man’s face, prematurely old and wrinkled, with very large eyes, in which there was that expression of perfectly gratuitous solemnity which I had sometimes seen in an owl’s. The large eyes wandered from Bill’s face to the lantern, and finally fixed their gaze on that luminous object, without further recognition.

Bill restrained himself with an effort.

“Miggles! Be you deaf? You ain’t dumb anyhow, you know”; and Yuba Bill shook the insensate figure by the shoulder.

To our great dismay, as Bill removed his hand, the venerable stranger apparently collapsed—sinking into half his size and an undistinguishable heap of clothing.

“Well, dern my skin,” said Bill, looking appealingly at us, and hopelessly retiring from the contest.

The Judge now stepped forward, and we lifted the mysterious invertebrate back into his original position. Bill was dismissed with the lantern to reconnoiter outside, for it was evident that from the helplessness of this solitary man there must be attendants near at hand, and we all drew around the fire. The Judge, who had regained his authority, and had never lost his conversational amiability—standing before us with his back to the hearth—charged us, as an imaginary jury, as follows:

“It is evident that either our distinguished friend here has reached that condition described by Shakespeare as ‘the sere and yellow leaf,’ or has suffered some premature abatement of his mental and physical faculties. Whether he is really the Miggles—”

Here he was interrupted by “Miggles! O Miggles! Migglesy! Mig!” and, in fact, the whole chorus of Miggles in very much the same key as it had once before been delivered unto us.

We gazed at each other for a moment in some alarm. The Judge, in particular, vacated his position quickly, as the voice seemed to come directly over his shoulder. The cause, however, was soon discovered in a large magpie who was perched upon a shelf over the fireplace, and who immediately relapsed into a sepulchral silence which contrasted singularly with his previous volubility. It was, undoubtedly, his voice which we had heard in the road, and our friend in the chair was not responsible for the discourtesy. Yuba Bill, who re-entered the room after an unsuccessful search, was loath to accept the explanation, and still eyed the helpless sitter with suspicion. He had found a

shed in which he had put up his horses, but he came back dripping and skeptical. “Thar ain’t nobody but him within ten mile of the shanty, and that ‘ar damned old skeesicks knows it.

But the faith of the majority proved to be securely based. Bill had scarcely ceased growling before we heard a quick step upon the porch, the trailing of a wet skirt, the door was flung open, and with flash of white teeth, a sparkle of dark eyes, and an utter absence of ceremony or diffidence, a young woman entered, shut the door, and, panting, leaned back against it.

“Oh, if you please, I’m Miggles!”

And this was Miggles! this bright-eyed, full-throated young woman, whose wet gown of coarse blue stuff could not hide the beauty of the feminine curves to which it clung; from the chestnut crown of whose head, topped by a man’s oilskin sou’wester, to the little feet and ankles, hidden somewhere in the recesses of her boy’s brogans, all was grace—this was Miggles, laughing at us, too, in the most airy, frank, offhand manner imaginable.

“You see, boys,” said she, quite out of breath, and holding one little hand against her side, quite unheeding the speechless discomfiture of our party, or the complete demoralization of Yuba Bill, whose features had relaxed into an expression of gratuitous and imbecile cheerfulness—“you see, boys, I was mor’n two miles away when you passed down the road. I thought you might pull up here, and so I ran the whole way, knowing nobody was home but Jim— and—and—I’m out of breath—and—that lets me out.”

And here Miggles caught her dripping oilskin hat from her head, with a mischievous swirl that scattered a shower of raindrops over us; attempted to put back her hair; dropped two hairpins in the attempt; laughed and sat down beside Yuba Bill, with her hands crossed lightly on her lap.

The Judge recovered himself first, and essayed an extravagant compliment.

“I’ll trouble you for that thar harpin,” said Miggles, gravely. Half a dozen hands were eagerly stretched forward; the missing hairpin was restored to its fair owner; and Miggles, crossing the room, looked keenly in the face of the invalid. The solemn eyes looked back at hers with an expression we had never seen before. Life and intelligence seemed to struggle back into the rugged face. Miggles laughed again—it was a singularly eloquent laugh—and turned her black eyes and white teeth once more toward us.

“This afflicted person is—” hesitated the Judge.

“Jim,” said Miggles.

“Your father?”

“No.”

“Brother?”

“No.”

“Husband?”

Miggles darted a quick, half-defiant glance at the two lady passengers who I had noticed did not participate in the

general masculine admiration of Miggles, and said gravely, "No; it's Jim."

There was an awkward pause. The lady passengers moved closer to each other; the Washoe husband looked abstractedly at the fire; and the tall man apparently turned his eyes inward for self-support at this emergency. But Miggles' laugh, which was very infectious, broke the silence. "Come," she said briskly, "you must be hungry. Who'll bear a hand to help me get tea?"

She had no lack of volunteers. In a few moments Yuba Bill was engaged like Caliban in bearing logs for this Miranda; the expressman was grinding coffee on the veranda; to myself the arduous duty of slicing bacon was assigned; and the Judge lent each man his good-humored and voluble counsel. And when Miggles, assisted by the Judge and our Hibernian "deck passenger," set the table with all the available crockery, we had become quite joyous, in spite of the rain that beat against windows, the wind that whirled down the chimney, the two ladies who whispered together in the corner, or the magpie who uttered a satirical and croaking commentary on their conversation from his perch above. In the now bright, blazing fire we could see that the walls were papered with illustrated journals, arranged with feminine taste and discrimination. The furniture was extemporized, and adapted from candle boxes and packing-cases, and covered with gay calico, or the skin of some animal. The armchair of the helpless Jim was an ingenious variation of a flour barrel. There was neatness, and even a taste for the picturesque, to be seen in the few details of the long low room.

The meal was a culinary success. But more, it was a social triumph—chiefly, I think, owing to the rare tact of Miggles in guiding the conversation, asking all the questions

herself, yet bearing throughout a frankness that rejected the idea of any concealment on her own part, so that we talked of ourselves, of our prospects, of the journey, of the weather, of each other—of everything but our host and hostess. It must be confessed that Miggles' conversation was never elegant, rarely grammatical, and that at times she employed expletives the use of which had generally been yielded to our sex. But they were delivered with such a lighting-up of teeth and eyes, and were usually followed by a laugh—a laugh peculiar to Miggles—so frank and honest that it seemed to clear the moral atmosphere.

Once during the meal we heard a noise like the rubbing of a heavy body against the outer walls of the house. This was shortly followed by a scratching and sniffing at the door. "That's Joaquin," said Miggles, in reply to our questioning glances; "would you like to see him?" Before we could answer she had opened the door, and disclosed a half-grown grizzly, who instantly raised himself on his haunches, with his forepaws hanging down in the popular attitude of mendicancy, and looked admiringly at Miggles, with a very singular resemblance in his manner to Yuba Bill. "That's my watch dog," said Miggles, in explanation. "Oh, he don't bite," she added, as the two lady passengers fluttered into a corner. "Does he, old Topsy?" (the latter remark being addressed directly to the sagacious Joaquin). "I tell you what, boys," continued Miggles after she had fed and closed the door on URSA MINOR, "you were in big luck that Joaquin wasn't hanging round when you dropped in tonight." "Where was he?" asked the Judge. "With me," said Miggles. "Lord love you; he trots round with me nights like as if he was a man."

We were silent for a few moments, and listened to the wind. Perhaps we all had the same picture before us—of Miggles walking through the rainy woods, with her savage

guardian at her side. The Judge, I remember, said something about Una and her lion; but Miggles received it as she did other compliments, with quiet gravity. Whether she was altogether unconscious of the admiration she excited—she could hardly have been oblivious of Yuba Bill's adoration—I know not; but her very frankness suggested a perfect sexual equality that was cruelly humiliating to the younger members of our party.

The incident of the bear did not add anything in Miggles' favor to the opinions of those of her own sex who were present. In fact, the repast over, a chillness radiated from the two lady passengers that no pine boughs brought in by Yuba Bill and cast as a sacrifice upon the hearth could wholly overcome. Miggles felt it; and, suddenly declaring that it was time to "turn in," offered to show the ladies to their bed in an adjoining room. "You boys will have to camp out here by the fire as well as you can," she added, "for thar ain't but the one room."

Our sex—by which, my dear sir, I allude of course to the stronger portion of humanity—has been generally relieved from the imputation of curiosity, or a fondness for gossip. Yet I am constrained to say that hardly had the door closed on Miggles than we crowded together, whispering, snickering, smiling, and exchanging suspicions, surmises, and a thousand speculations in regard to our pretty hostess and her singular companion. I fear that we even hustled that imbecile paralytic, who sat like a voiceless Memnon in our midst, gazing with the serene indifference of the Past in his passionate eyes upon our wordy counsels. In the midst of an exciting discussion the door opened again, and Miggles re-entered.

But not, apparently, the same Miggles who a few hours before had flashed upon us. Her eyes were downcast,

and as she hesitated for a moment on the threshold, with a blanket on her arm, she seemed to have left behind her the frank fearlessness which had charmed us a moment before. Coming into the room, she drew a low stool beside the paralytic's chair, sat down, drew the blanket over her shoulders, and saying, "If it's all the same to you, boys, as we're rather crowded, I'll stop here tonight," took the invalid's withered hand in her own, and turned her eyes upon the dying fire. An instinctive feeling that this was only premonitory to more confidential relations, and perhaps some shame at our previous curiosity, kept us silent. The rain still beat upon the roof, wandering gusts of wind stirred the embers into momentary brightness, until, in a lull of the elements, Miggles suddenly lifted up her head, and, throwing her hair over her shoulder, turned her face upon the group and asked:

"Is there any of you that knows me?"

There was no reply.

"Think again! I lived at Marysville in '53. Everybody knew me there, and everybody had the right to know me. I kept the Polka saloon until I came to live with Jim. That's six years ago. Perhaps I've changed some."

The absence of recognition may have disconcerted her. She turned her head to the fire again, and it was some seconds before she again spoke, and then more rapidly:

"Well, you see I thought some of you must have known me. There's no great harm done, anyway. What I was going to say was this: Jim here"—she took his hand in both of hers as she spoke—"used to know me, if you didn't, and spent a heap of money upon me. I reckon he spent all he had. And one day—it's six years ago this winter—Jim came into

my back room, sat down on my sofy, like as you see him in that chair, and never moved again without help. He was struck all of a heap, and never seemed to know what ailed him. The doctors came and said as how it was caused all along of his way of life—for Jim was mighty free and wild-like—and that he would never get better, and couldn't last long anyway. They advised me to send him to Frisco to the hospital, for he was no good to anyone and would be a baby all his life. Perhaps it was something in Jim's eye, perhaps it was that I never had a baby, but I said 'No.' I was rich then, for I was popular with everybody—gentlemen like yourself, sir, came to see me—and I sold out my business and bought this yer place, because it was sort of out of the way of travel, you see, and I brought my baby here."

With a woman's intuitive tact and poetry, she had, as she spoke, slowly shifted her position so as to bring the mute figure of the ruined man between her and her audience, hiding in the shadow behind it, as if she offered it as a tacit apology for her actions. Silent and expressionless, it yet spoke for her; helpless, crushed, and smitten with the Divine thunderbolt, it still stretched an invisible arm around her.

Hidden in the darkness, but still holding his hand, she went on:

"It was a long time before I could get the hang of things about yer, for I was used to company and excitement. I couldn't get any woman to help me, and a man I dursen't trust; but what with the Indians hereabout, who'd do odd jobs for me, and having everything sent from the North Fork, Jim and I managed to worry through. The Doctor would run up from Sacramento once in a while. He'd ask to see 'Miggles' baby,' as he called Jim, and when he'd go away, he'd say, 'Miggles; you're a trump—God bless you'; and it didn't seem so lonely after that. But the last time he was here

he said, as he opened the door to go, ‘Do you know, Miggles, your baby will grow up to be a man yet and an honor to his mother; but not here, Miggles, not here!’ And I thought he went away sad—and—and—and—” and here Miggles’ voice and head were somehow both lost completely in the shadow.

“The folks about here are very kind,” said Miggles, after a pause, coming a little into the light again. “The men from the fork used to hang around here, until they found they wasn’t wanted, and the women are kind—and don’t call. I was pretty lonely until I picked up Joaquin in the woods yonder one day, when he wasn’t so high, and taught him to beg for his dinner; and then thar’s Polly—that’s the magpie—she knows no end of tricks, and makes it quite sociable of evenings with her talk, and so I don’t feel like as I was the only living being about the ranch. And Jim here,” said Miggles, with her old laugh again, and coming out quite into the firelight, “Jim- -why, boys, you would admire to see how much he knows for a man like him. Sometimes I bring him flowers, and he looks at ‘em just as natural as if he knew ‘em; and times, when we’re sitting alone, I read him those things on the wall. Why, Lord!” said Miggles, with her frank laugh, “I’ve read him that whole side of the house this winter. There never was such a man for reading as Jim.”

“Why,” asked the Judge, “do you not marry this man to whom you have devoted your youthful life?”

“Well, you see,” said Miggles, “it would be playing it rather low down on Jim, to take advantage of his being so helpless. And then, too, if we were man and wife, now, we’d both know that I was bound to do what I do now of my own accord.”

“But you are young yet and attractive—”

“It’s getting late,” said Miggles, gravely, “and you’d better all turn in. Good night, boys”; and, throwing the blanket over her head, Miggles laid herself down beside Jim’s chair, her head pillowed on the low stool that held his feet, and spoke no more. The fire slowly faded from the hearth; we each sought our blankets in silence; and presently there was no sound in the long room but the pattering of the rain upon the roof and the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

It was nearly morning when I awoke from a troubled dream. The storm had passed, the stars were shining, and through the shutterless window the full moon, lifting itself over the solemn pines without, looked into the room. It touched the lonely figure in the chair with an infinite compassion, and seemed to baptize with a shining flood the lowly head of the woman whose hair, as in the sweet old story, bathed the feet of him she loved. It even lent a kindly poetry to the rugged outline of Yuba Bill, half-reclining on his elbow between them and his passengers, with savagely patient eyes keeping watch and ward. And then I fell asleep and only woke at broad day, with Yuba Bill standing over me, and “All aboard” ringing in my ears.

Coffee was waiting for us on the table, but Miggles was gone. We wandered about the house and lingered long after the horses were harnessed, but she did not return. It was evident that she wished to avoid a formal leave-taking, and had so left us to depart as we had come. After we had helped the ladies into the coach, we returned to the house and solemnly shook hands with the paralytic Jim, as solemnly settling him back into position after each handshake. Then we looked for the last time around the long low room, at the stool where Miggles had sat, and slowly took our seats in the waiting coach. The whip cracked, and we were off!

But as we reached the highroad, Bill's dexterous hand laid the six horses back on their haunches, and the stage stopped with a jerk. For there, on a little eminence beside the road, stood Miggles, her hair flying, her eyes sparkling, her white handkerchief waving, and her white teeth flashing a last "good-by." We waved our hats in return. And then Yuba Bill, as if fearful of further fascination, madly lashed his horses forward, and we sank back in our seats. We exchanged not a word until we reached the North Fork, and the stage drew up at the Independence House. Then, the Judge leading, we walked into the barroom and took our places gravely at the bar.

"Are your glasses charged, gentlemen?" said the Judge, solemnly taking off his white hat.

They were.

"Well, then, here's to MIGGLES. GOD BLESS HER!"

Perhaps He had. Who knows?

Salomy Jane

ONE

A KISS AND AN ESCAPE

Only one shot had been fired. It had gone wide of its mark—the ringleader of the Vigilantes—and had left Red Pete, who had fired it, covered by their rifles and at their mercy. For his hand had been cramped by hard riding, and his eye distracted by their sudden onset, and so the inevitable end had come. He submitted sullenly to his captors; his companion fugitive and horse-thief gave up the protracted struggle with a feeling not unlike relief. Even the hot and revengeful victors were content. They had taken their men alive. At any time during the long chase they could have brought them down by a rifle-shot, but it would have been unsportsmanlike, and have ended in a free fight, instead of an example. And, for the matter of that, their doom was already sealed. Their end, by a rope and a tree, although not sanctified by law, would have at least the deliberation of justice. It was the tribute paid by the Vigilantes to that order which they had themselves disregarded in the pursuit and capture. Yet this strange logic of the frontier sufficed them, and gave a certain dignity to the climax.

“Ef you’ve got anything to say to your folks, say it now, and say it quick,” said the ringleader.

Red Pete glanced around him. He had been run to earth at his own cabin in the clearing, whence a few relations and friends, mostly women and children, non-combatants, had outflowed, gazing vacantly at the twenty Vigilantes who surrounded them. All were accustomed to scenes of violence, blood-feud, chase, and hardship; it was only the suddenness of the onset and its quick result that had surprised them. They looked on with dazed curiosity and some disappointment; there had been no fight to speak of—no spectacle! A boy, nephew of Red Pete, got upon the rain-barrel to view the proceedings more comfortably; a tall, handsome, lazy Kentucky girl, a visiting neighbor, leaned against the doorpost, chewing gum. Only a yellow hound was actively perplexed. He could not make out if a hunt were just over or beginning, and ran eagerly backwards and forwards, leaping alternately upon the captives and the captors.

The ringleader repeated his challenge. Red Pete gave a reckless laugh and looked at his wife.

At which Mrs. Red Pete came forward. It seemed that she had much to say, incoherently, furiously, vindictively, to the ringleader. His soul would roast in hell for that day's work! He called himself a man, skunkin' in the open and afraid to show himself except with a crowd of, other "Kiyi's" around a house of women and children. Heaping insult upon insult, inveighing against his low blood, his ancestors, his dubious origin, she at last flung out a wild taunt of his invalid wife, the insult of a woman to a woman, until his white face grew rigid, and only that Western-American fetich of the sanctity of sex kept his twitching fingers from the lock of his rifle. Even her husband noticed it, and with a half-authoritative "Let up on that, old gal," and a pat of his freed left hand on her back, took his last parting. The ringleader, still white under the lash of the woman's tongue, turned

abruptly to the second captive. “And if you’ve got anybody to say ‘good-by’ to, now’s your chance.”

The man looked up. Nobody stirred or spoke. He was a stranger there, being a chance confederate picked up by Red Pete, and known to no one. Still young, but an outlaw from his abandoned boyhood, of which father and mother were only a forgotten dream, he loved horses and stole them, fully accepting the frontier penalty of life for the interference with that animal on which a man’s life so often depended. But he understood the good points of a horse, as was shown by the one he bestrode—until a few days before the property of Judge Boompointer. This was his sole distinction.

The unexpected question stirred him for a moment out of the attitude of reckless indifference, for attitude it was, and a part of his profession. But it may have touched him that at that moment he was less than his companion and his virago wife. However, he only shook his head. As he did so his eye casually fell on the handsome girl by the doorpost, who was looking at him. The ringleader, too, may have been touched by his complete loneliness, for he hesitated. At the same moment he saw that the girl was looking at his friendless captive.

A grotesque idea struck him.

“Salomy Jane, ye might do worse than come yere and say ‘good-by’ to a dying man, and him a stranger,” he said.

There seemed to be a subtle stroke of poetry and irony in this that equally struck the apathetic crowd. It was well known that Salomy Jane Clay thought no small potatoes of herself, and always held off the local swain with a lazy nymph-like scorn. Nevertheless, she slowly disengaged herself from the doorpost, and, to everybody’s astonishment,

l lounged with languid grace and outstretched hand towards the prisoner. The color came into the gray reckless mask which the doomed man wore as her right hand grasped his left, just loosed by his captors. Then she paused; her shy, fawn-like eyes grew bold, and fixed themselves upon him. She took the chewing-gum from her mouth, wiped her red lips with the back of her hand, by a sudden lithe spring placed her foot on his stirrup, and, bounding to the saddle, threw her arms about his neck and pressed a kiss upon his lips.

They remained thus for a hushed moment—the man on the threshold of death, the young woman in the fullness of youth and beauty—linked together. Then the crowd laughed; in the audacious effrontery of the girl’s act the ultimate fate of the two men was forgotten. She slipped languidly to the ground; she was the focus of all eyes—she only! The ringleader saw it and his opportunity. He shouted: “Time’s up—Forward!” urged his horse beside his captives, and the next moment the whole cavalcade was sweeping over the clearing into the darkening woods.

Their destination was Sawyer’s Crossing, the headquarters of the committee, where the council was still sitting, and where both culprits were to expiate the offense of which that council had already found them guilty. They rode in great and breathless haste—a haste in which, strangely enough, even the captives seemed to join. That haste possibly prevented them from noticing the singular change which had taken place in the second captive since the episode of the kiss. His high color remained, as if it had burned through his mask of indifference; his eyes were quick, alert, and keen, his mouth half open as if the girl’s kiss still lingered there. And that haste had made them careless, for the horse of the man who led him slipped in a gopher-hole, rolled over, unseated his rider, and even dragged the

bound and helpless second captive from Judge Boompointer's favorite mare. In an instant they were all on their feet again, but in that supreme moment the second captive felt the cords which bound his arms had slipped to his wrists. By keeping his elbows to his sides, and obliging the others to help him mount, it escaped their notice. By riding close to his captors, and keeping in the crush of the throng, he further concealed the accident, slowly working his hands downwards out of his bonds. Their way lay through a sylvan wilderness, mid-leg deep in ferns, whose tall fronds brushed their horses' sides in their furious gallop and concealed the flapping of the captive's loosened cords. The peaceful vista, more suggestive of the offerings of nymph and shepherd than of human sacrifice, was in a strange contrast to this whirlwind rush of stern, armed men. The westering sun pierced the subdued light and the tremor of leaves with yellow lances; birds started into song on blue and dove-like wings, and on either side of the trail of this vengeful storm could be heard the murmur of hidden and tranquil waters. In a few moments they would be on the open ridge, whence sloped the common turnpike to "Sawyer's," a mile away. It was the custom of returning cavalcades to take this hill at headlong speed, with shouts and cries that heralded their coming. They withheld the latter that day, as inconsistent with their dignity; but, emerging from the wood, swept silently like an avalanche down the slope. They were well under way, looking only to their horses, when the second captive slipped his right arm from the bonds and succeeded in grasping the reins that lay trailing on the horse's neck. A sudden vaquero jerk, which the well-trained animal understood, threw him on his haunches with his forelegs firmly planted on the slope. The rest of the cavalcade swept on; the man who was leading the captive's horse by the riata, thinking only of another accident, dropped the line to save himself from being dragged backwards from

his horse. The captive wheeled, and the next moment was galloping furiously up the slope.

It was the work of a moment; a trained horse and an experienced hand. The cavalcade had covered nearly fifty yards before they could pull up; the freed captive had covered half that distance uphill. The road was so narrow that only two shots could be fired, and these broke dust two yards ahead of the fugitive. They had not dared to fire low; the horse was the more valuable animal. The fugitive knew this in his extremity also, and would have gladly taken a shot in his own leg to spare that of his horse. Five men were detached to recapture or kill him. The latter seemed inevitable. But he had calculated his chances; before they could reload he had reached the woods again; winding in and out between the pillared tree trunks, he offered no mark. They knew his horse was superior to their own; at the end of two hours they returned, for he had disappeared without track or trail. The end was briefly told in the "Sierra Record"—

Red Pete, the notorious horse-thief, who had so long eluded justice, was captured and hung by the Sawyer's Crossing Vigilantes last week; his confederate, unfortunately, escaped on a valuable horse belonging to Judge Boompinter. The judge had refused one thousand dollars for the horse only a week before. As the thief, who is still at large, would find it difficult to dispose of so valuable an animal without detection, the chances are against either of them turning up again.

TWO

THE LADY'S REFLECTIONS

Salomy Jane watched the cavalcade until it had disappeared. Then she became aware that her brief popularity had passed. Mrs. Red Pete, in stormy hysterics, had included her in a sweeping denunciation of the whole universe, possibly for simulating an emotion in which she herself was deficient. The other women hated her for her momentary exaltation above them; only the children still admired her as one who had undoubtedly "canoodled" with a man "a-going to be hung"—a daring flight beyond their wildest ambition. Salomy Jane accepted the change with charming unconcern. She put on her yellow nankeen sunbonnet—a hideous affair that would have ruined any other woman, but which only enhanced the piquancy of her fresh brunette skin—tied the strings, letting the blue-black braids escape below its frilled curtain behind, jumped on her mustang with a casual display of agile ankles in shapely white stockings, whistled to the hound, and waving her hand with a "So long, sonny!" to the lately bereft but admiring nephew, flapped and fluttered away in her short brown holland gown.

Her father's house was four miles distant. Contrasted with the cabin she had just quitted, it was a superior dwelling, with a long "lean-to" at the rear, which brought the eaves almost to the ground and made it look like a low triangle. It had a long barn and cattle sheds, for Madison Clay was a "great" stockraiser and the owner of a "quarter section." It had a sitting-room and a parlor organ, whose transportation thither had been a marvel of "packing." These things were supposed to give Salomy Jane an undue

importance, but the girl's reserve and inaccessibility to local advances were rather the result of a cool, lazy temperament and the preoccupation of a large, protecting admiration for her father, for some years a widower. For Mr. Madison Clay's life had been threatened in one or two feuds—it was said, not without cause—and it is possible that the pathetic spectacle of her father doing his visiting with a shotgun may have touched her closely and somewhat prejudiced her against the neighboring masculinity. The thought that cattle, horses, and “quarter section” would one day be hers did not disturb her calm. As for Mr. Clay, he accepted her as housewifely, though somewhat “interfering,” and, being one of “his own womankind,” therefore not without some degree of merit.

“Wot's this yer I'm hearin' of your doin's over at Red Pete's? Honey-foglin' with a horse-thief, eh?” said Mr. Clay two days later at breakfast.

“I reckon you heard about the straight thing, then,” said Salomy Jane unconcernedly, without looking round.

“What do you kalkilate Rube will say to it? What are you goin' to tell him?” said Mr. Clay sarcastically.

“Rube,” or Reuben Waters, was a swain supposed to be favored particularly by Mr. Clay. Salomy Jane looked up.

“I'll tell him that when he's on his way to be hung, I'll kiss him—not till then,” said the young lady brightly.

This delightful witticism suited the paternal humor, and Mr. Clay smiled; but, nevertheless, he frowned a moment afterwards.

“But this yer hoss-thief got away arter all, and that’s a hoss of a different color,” he said grimly.

Salomy Jane put down her knife and fork. This was certainly a new and different phase of the situation. She had never thought of it before, and, strangely enough, for the first time she became interested in the man. “Got away?” she repeated. “Did they let him off?”

“Not much,” said her father briefly. “Slipped his cords, and going down the grade pulled up short, just like a vaquero agin a lassoed bull, almost draggin’ the man leadin’ him off his hoss, and then skyuted up the grade. For that matter, on that hoss o’ Judge Boompointer’s he mout have dragged the whole posse of ‘em down on their knees ef he liked! Sarved ‘em right, too. Instead of stringin’ him up afore the door, or shootin’ him on sight, they must allow to take him down afore the hull committee ‘for an example.’ ‘Example’ be blowed! Ther’ ‘s example enough when some stranger comes unbeknownst slap onter a man hanged to a tree and plugged full of holes. That’s an example, and he knows what it means. Wot more do ye want? But then those Vigilantes is allus clingin’ and hangin’ onter some mere scrap o’the law they’re pretendin’ to despise. It makes me sick! Why, when Jake Myers shot your ole Aunt Viney’s second husband, and I laid in wait for Jake afterwards in the Butternut Hollow, did I tie him to his hoss and fetch him down to your Aunt Viney’s cabin ‘for an example’ before I plugged him? No!” in deep disgust. “No! Why, I just meandered through the wood, careless-like, till he comes out, and I just rode up to him, and I said”—

But Salomy Jane had heard her father’s story before. Even one’s dearest relatives are apt to become tiresome in narration. “I know, dad,” she interrupted; “but this yer

man—this hoss-thief—did he get clean away without gettin’ hurt at all?”

“He did, and unless he’s fool enough to sell the hoss he kin keep away, too. So ye see, ye can’t ladle out purp stuff about a ‘dyin’ stranger’ to Rube. He won’t swaller it.”

“All the same, dad,” returned the girl cheerfully, “I reckon to say it, and say more; I’ll tell him that ef he manages to get away too, I’ll marry him—there! But ye don’t ketch Rube takin’ any such risks in gettin’ ketched, or in gettin’ away arter!”

Madison Clay smiled grimly, pushed back his chair, rose, dropped a perfunctory kiss on his daughter’s hair, and, taking his shotgun from the corner, departed on a peaceful Samaritan mission to a cow who had dropped a calf in the far pasture. Inclined as he was to Reuben’s wooing from his eligibility as to property, he was conscious that he was sadly deficient in certain qualities inherent in the Clay family. It certainly would be a kind of mesalliance.

Left to herself, Salomy Jane stared a long while at the coffee-pot, and then called the two squaws who assisted her in her household duties, to clear away the things while she went up to her own room to make her bed. Here she was confronted with a possible prospect of that proverbial bed she might be making in her willfulness, and on which she must lie, in the photograph of a somewhat serious young man of refined features—Reuben Waters—stuck in her window-frame. Salomy Jane smiled over her last witticism regarding him and enjoyed it, like your true humorist, and then, catching sight of her own handsome face in the little mirror, smiled again. But wasn’t it funny about that horse-thief getting off after all? Good Lordy! Fancy Reuben hearing he was alive and going round with that kiss of hers

set on his lips! She laughed again, a little more abstractedly. And he had returned it like a man, holding her tight and almost breathless, and he going to be hung the next minute! Salomy Jane had been kissed at other times, by force, chance, or stratagem. In a certain ingenuous forfeit game of the locality known as "I'm a-pinin'," many had "pined" for a "sweet kiss" from Salomy Jane, which she had yielded in a sense of honor and fair play. She had never been kissed like this before—she would never again; and yet the man was alive! And behold, she could see in the mirror that she was blushing!

She should hardly know him again. A young man with very bright eyes, a flushed and sunburnt cheek, a kind of fixed look in the face, and no beard; no, none that she could feel. Yet he was not at all like Reuben, not a bit. She took Reuben's picture from the window, and laid it on her work-box. And to think she did not even know this young man's name! That was queer. To be kissed by a man whom she might never know! Of course he knew hers. She wondered if he remembered it and her. But of course he was so glad to get off with his life that he never thought of anything else. Yet she did not give more than four or five minutes to these speculations, and, like a sensible girl, thought of something else. Once again, however, in opening the closet, she found the brown holland gown she had worn on the day before; thought it very unbecoming, and regretted that she had not worn her best gown on her visit to Red Pete's cottage. On such an occasion she really might have been more impressive.

THREE

THE KISS REPEATED

When her father came home that night she asked him the news. No, they had not captured the second horse-thief, who was still at large. Judge Boompointer talked of invoking the aid of the despised law. It remained, then, to see whether the horse-thief was fool enough to try to get rid of the animal. Red Pete's body had been delivered to his widow. Perhaps it would only be neighborly for Salomy Jane to ride over to the funeral. But Salomy Jane did not take to the suggestion kindly, nor yet did she explain to her father that, as the other man was still living, she did not care to undergo a second disciplining at the widow's hands. Nevertheless, she contrasted her situation with that of the widow with a new and singular satisfaction. It might have been Red Pete who had escaped. But he had not the grit of the nameless one. She had already settled his heroic quality.

“Ye ain't harkenin' to me, Salomy.”

Salomy Jane started.

“Here I'm askin' ye if ye've see that hound Phil Larrabee sneaking by yer to-day?”

Salomy Jane had not. But she became interested and self-reproachful for she knew that Phil Larrabee was one of her father's enemies. “He wouldn't dare to go by here unless he knew you were out,” she said quickly.

“That's what gets me,” he said, scratching his grizzled head. “I've been kind o' thinkin' o' him all day, and

one of them Chinamen said he saw him at Sawyer's Crossing. He was a kind of friend o' Pete's wife. That's why I thought yer might find out ef he'd been there." Salomy Jane grew more self-reproachful at her father's self-interest in her "neighborliness." "But that ain't all," continued Mr. Clay. "Thar was tracks over the far pasture that warn't mine. I followed them, and they went round and round the house two or three times, ez ef they mout hev bin prowlin', and then I lost 'em in the woods again. It's just like that sneakin' hound Larrabee to hev bin lyin' in wait for me and afraid to meet a man fair and square in the open."

"You just lie low, dad, for a day or two more, and let me do a little prowlin'," said the girl, with sympathetic indignation in her dark eyes. "Ef it's that skunk, I'll spot him soon enough and let you know whar he's hiding."

"You'll just stay where ye are, Salomy," said her father decisively. "This ain't no woman's work—though I ain't sayin' you haven't got more head for it than some men I know." Nevertheless, that night, after her father had gone to bed, Salomy Jane sat by the open window of the sitting-room in an apparent attitude of languid contemplation, but alert and intent of eye and ear. It was a fine moonlit night. Two pines near the door, solitary pickets of the serried ranks of distant forest, cast long shadows like paths to the cottage, and sighed their spiced breath in the windows. For there was no frivolity of vine or flower round Salomy Jane's bower. The clearing was too recent, the life too practical for vanities like these. But the moon added a vague elusiveness to everything, softened the rigid outlines of the sheds, gave shadows to the lidless windows, and touched with merciful indirectness the hideous debris of refuse gravel and the gaunt scars of burnt vegetation before the door. Even Salomy Jane was affected by it, and exhaled something between a sigh

and a yawn with the breath of the pines. Then she suddenly sat upright.

Her quick ear had caught a faint “click, click,” in the direction of the wood; her quicker instinct and rustic training enabled her to determine that it was the ring of a horse’s shoe on flinty ground; her knowledge of the locality told her it came from the spot where the trail passed over an outcrop of flint scarcely a quarter of a mile from where she sat, and within the clearing. It was no errant “stock,” for the foot was shod with iron; it was a mounted trespasser by night, and boded no good to a man like Clay.

She rose, threw her shawl over her head, more for disguise than shelter, and passed out of the door. A sudden impulse made her seize her father’s shotgun from the corner where it stood—not that she feared any danger to herself, but that it was an excuse. She made directly for the wood, keeping in the shadow of the pines as long as she could. At the fringe she halted; whoever was there must pass her before reaching the house.

Then there seemed to be a suspense of all nature. Everything was deadly still—even the moonbeams appeared no longer tremulous; soon there was a rustle as of some stealthy animal among the ferns, and then a dismounted man stepped into the moonlight. It was the horse-thief—the man she had kissed!

For a wild moment a strange fancy seized her usually sane intellect and stirred her temperate blood. The news they had told her was not true; he had been hung, and this was his ghost! He looked as white and spirit-like in the moonlight, dressed in the same clothes, as when she saw him last. He had evidently seen her approaching, and moved quickly to meet her. But in his haste he stumbled slightly; she reflected

suddenly that ghosts did not stumble, and a feeling of relief came over her. And it was no assassin of her father that had been prowling around—only this unhappy fugitive. A momentary color came into her cheek; her coolness and hardihood returned; it was with a tinge of sauciness in her voice that she said:

“I reckoned you were a ghost.”

“I mout have been,” he said, looking at her fixedly; “but I reckon I’d have come back here all the same.”

“It’s a little riskier comin’ back alive,” she said, with a levity that died on her lips, for a singular nervousness, half fear and half expectation, was beginning to take the place of her relief of a moment ago. “Then it was you who was prowlin’ round and makin’ tracks in the far pasture?”

“Yes; I came straight here when I got away.”

She felt his eyes were burning her, but did not dare to raise her own. “Why,” she began, hesitated, and ended vaguely. “How did you get here?”

“You helped me!”

“I?”

“Yes. That kiss you gave me put life into me—gave me strength to get away. I swore to myself I’d come back and thank you, alive or dead.”

Every word he said she could have anticipated, so plain the situation seemed to her now. And every word he said she knew was the truth. Yet her cool common sense struggled against it.

“What’s the use of your escaping, ef you’re comin’ back here to be ketched again?” she said pertly.

He drew a little nearer to her, but seemed to her the more awkward as she resumed her self-possession. His voice, too, was broken, as if by exhaustion, as he said, catching his breath at intervals:

“I’ll tell you. You did more for me than you think. You made another man o’ me. I never had a man, woman, or child do to me what you did. I never had a friend—only a pal like Red Pete, who picked me up ‘on shares.’ I want to quit this yer—what I’m doin’. I want to begin by doin’ the square thing to you”—He stopped, breathed hard, and then said brokenly, “My hoss is over thar, staked out. I want to give him to you. Judge Boompointer will give you a thousand dollars for him. I ain’t lyin’; it’s God’s truth! I saw it on the handbill agin a tree. Take him, and I’ll get away afoot. Take him. It’s the only thing I can do for you, and I know it don’t half pay for what you did. Take it; your father can get a reward for you, if you can’t.”

Such were the ethics of this strange locality that neither the man who made the offer nor the girl to whom it was made was struck by anything that seemed illogical or indelicate, or at all inconsistent with justice or the horse-thief’s real conversion. Salomy Jane nevertheless dissented, from another and weaker reason.

“I don’t want your hoss, though I reckon dad might; but you’re just starvin’. I’ll get suthin’.” She turned towards the house.

“Say you’ll take the hoss first,” he said, grasping her hand. At the touch she felt herself coloring and struggled, expecting perhaps another kiss. But he dropped her hand.

She turned again with a saucy gesture, said, "Hol' on; I'll come right back," and slipped away, the mere shadow of a coy and flying nymph in the moonlight, until she reached the house.

Here she not only procured food and whiskey, but added a long dust-coat and hat of her father's to her burden. They would serve as a disguise for him and hide that heroic figure, which she thought everybody must now know as she did. Then she rejoined him breathlessly. But he put the food and whiskey aside.

"Listen," he said; "I've turned the hoss into your corral. You'll find him there in the morning, and no one will know but that he got lost and joined the other hosses."

Then she burst out. "But you—you—what will become of you? You'll be ketched!"

"I'll manage to get away," he said in a low voice, "ef—ef"—

"Ef what?" she said tremblingly.

"Ef you'll put the heart in me again—as you did!" he gasped.

She tried to laugh—to move away. She could do neither. Suddenly he caught her in his arms, with a long kiss, which she returned again and again. Then they stood embraced as they had embraced two days before, but no longer the same. For the cool, lazy Salomy Jane had been transformed into another woman—a passionate, clinging savage. Perhaps something of her father's blood had surged within her at that supreme moment. The man stood erect and determined.

“Wot’s your name?” she whispered quickly. It was a woman’s quickest way of defining her feelings.

“Dart.”

“Yer first name?”

“Jack.”

“Let me go now, Jack. Lie low in the woods till tomorrow sunup. I’ll come again.”

He released her. Yet she lingered a moment. “Put on those things,” she said, with a sudden happy flash of eyes and teeth, “and lie close till I come.” And then she sped away home.

But midway up the distance she felt her feet going slower, and something at her heartstrings seemed to be pulling her back. She stopped, turned, and glanced to where he had been standing. Had she seen him then, she might have returned. But he had disappeared. She gave her first sigh, and then ran quickly again. It must be nearly ten o’clock! It was not very long to morning!

She was within a few steps of her own door, when the sleeping woods and silent air appeared to suddenly awake with a sharp “crack!”

She stopped, paralyzed. Another “crack!” followed, that echoed over to the far corral. She recalled herself instantly and dashed off wildly to the woods again.

As she ran she thought of one thing only. He had been “dogged” by one of his old pursuers and attacked. But there were two shots, and he was unarmed. Suddenly she

remembered that she had left her father's gun standing against the tree where they were talking. Thank God! she may again have saved him. She ran to the tree; the gun was gone. She ran hither and thither, dreading at every step to fall upon his lifeless body. A new thought struck her; she ran to the corral. The horse was not there! He must have been able to regain it, and escaped, after the shots had been fired. She drew a long breath of relief, but it was caught up in an apprehension of alarm. Her father, awakened from his sleep by the shots, was hurriedly approaching her.

“What's up now, Salomy Jane?” he demanded excitedly.

“Nothin’,” said the girl with an effort. “Nothin’, at least, that I can find.” She was usually truthful because fearless, and a lie stuck in her throat; but she was no longer fearless, thinking of him. “I wasn't abed; so I ran out as soon as I heard the shots fired,” she answered in return to his curious gaze.

“And you've hid my gun somewhere where it can't be found,” he said reproachfully. “Ef it was that sneak Larrabee, and he fired them shots to lure me out, he might have potted me, without a show, a dozen times in the last five minutes.”

She had not thought since of her father's enemy! It might indeed have been he who had attacked Jack. But she made a quick point of the suggestion. “Run in, dad, run in and find the gun; you've got no show out here without it.” She seized him by the shoulders from behind, shielding him from the woods, and hurried him, half expostulating, half struggling, to the house.

But there no gun was to be found. It was strange; it must have been mislaid in some corner! Was he sure he had not left it in the barn? But no matter now. The danger was over; the Larrabee trick had failed; he must go to bed now, and in the morning they would make a search together. At the same time she had inwardly resolved to rise before him and make another search of the wood, and perhaps—fearful joy as she recalled her promise!—find Jack alive and well, awaiting her!

FOUR

ANOTHER ESCAPE

Salomy Jane slept little that night, nor did her father. But towards morning he fell into a tired man's slumber until the sun was well up the horizon. Far different was it with his daughter: she lay with her face to the window, her head half lifted to catch every sound, from the creaking of the sun-warped shingles above her head to the far-off moan of the rising wind in the pine trees. Sometimes she fell into a breathless, half-ecstatic trance, living over every moment of the stolen interview; feeling the fugitive's arm still around her, his kisses on her lips; hearing his whispered voice in her ears—the birth of her new life! This was followed again by a period of agonizing dread—that he might even then be lying, his life ebbing away, in the woods, with her name on his lips, and she resting here inactive, until she half started from her bed to go to his succor. And this went on until a pale opal glow came into the sky, followed by a still paler pink on the summit of the white Sierras, when she rose and hurriedly began to dress. Still so sanguine was her hope of meeting him, that she lingered yet a moment to select the brown holland skirt and yellow sunbonnet she had worn when she first saw him. And she had only seen him twice! Only twice! It would be cruel, too cruel, not to see him again!

She crept softly down the stairs, listening to the long-drawn breathing of her father in his bedroom, and then, by the light of a guttering candle, scrawled a note to him, begging him not to trust himself out of the house until she returned from her search, and leaving the note open on the table, swiftly ran out into the growing day.

Three hours afterwards Mr. Madison Clay awoke to the sound of loud knocking. At first this forced itself upon his consciousness as his daughter's regular morning summons, and was responded to by a grunt of recognition and a nestling closer in the blankets. Then he awoke with a start and a muttered oath, remembering the events of last night, and his intention to get up early, and rolled out of bed. Becoming aware by this time that the knocking was at the outer door, and hearing the shout of a familiar voice, he hastily pulled on his boots, his jean trousers, and fastening a single suspender over his shoulder as he clattered downstairs, stood in the lower room. The door was open, and waiting upon the threshold was his kinsman, an old ally in many a blood-feud—Breckenridge Clay!

“You are a cool one, Mad!” said the latter in half-admiring indignation.

“What's up?” said the bewildered Madison.

“You ought to be, and scootin' out o' this,” said Breckenridge grimly. “It's all very well to ‘know nothin’;’ but here Phil Larrabee's friends hev just picked him up, drilled through with slugs and deader nor a crow, and now they're lettin' loose Larrabee's two half-brothers on you. And you must go like a derned fool and leave these yer things behind you in the bresh,” he went on querulously, lifting Madison Clay's dust-coat, hat, and shotgun from his horse, which stood saddled at the door. “Luckily I picked them up in the woods comin' here. Ye ain't got more than time to get over the state line and among your folks thar afore they'll be down on you. Hustle, old man! What are you gawkin' and starin' at?”

Madison Clay had stared amazed and bewildered—horror-stricken. The incidents of the past night

for the first time flashed upon him clearly—hopelessly! The shot; his finding Salomy Jane alone in the woods; her confusion and anxiety to rid herself of him; the disappearance of the shotgun; and now this new discovery of the taking of his hat and coat for a disguise! She had killed Phil Larrabee in that disguise, after provoking his first harmless shot! She, his own child, Salomy Jane, had disgraced herself by a man's crime; had disgraced him by usurping his right, and taking a mean advantage, by deceit, of a foe!

“Gimme that gun,” he said hoarsely.

Breckenridge handed him the gun in wonder and slowly gathering suspicion. Madison examined nipple and muzzle; one barrel had been discharged. It was true! The gun dropped from his hand.

“Look here, old man,” said Breckenridge, with a darkening face, “there's bin no foul play here. Thar's bin no hiring of men, no deputy to do this job. You did it fair and square—yourself?”

“Yes, by God!” burst out Madison Clay in a hoarse voice. “Who says I didn't?”

Reassured, yet believing that Madison Clay had nerved himself for the act by an over-draught of whiskey, which had affected his memory, Breckenridge said curtly, “Then wake up and ‘lite’ out, ef ye want me to stand by you.”

“Go to the corral and pick me out a hoss,” said Madison slowly, yet not without a certain dignity of manner. “I've suthin' to say to Salomy Jane afore I go.” He was holding her scribbled note, which he had just discovered, in his shaking hand.

Struck by his kinsman's manner, and knowing the dependent relations of father and daughter, Breckenridge nodded and hurried away. Left to himself, Madison Clay ran his fingers through his hair, and straightened out the paper on which Salomy Jane had scrawled her note, turned it over, and wrote on the back:

You might have told me you did it, and not leave your ole father to find it out how you disgraced yourself and him, too, by a low-down, underhanded, woman's trick! I've said I done it, and took the blame myself, and all the sneakiness of it that folks suspect. If I get away alive—and I don't care much which—you needn't foller. The house and stock are yours; but you ain't any longer the daughter of your disgraced father,

MADISON CLAY

He had scarcely finished the note when, with a clatter of hoofs and a led horse, Breckenridge reappeared at the door elate and triumphant. "You're in [racial expletive] luck, Mad! I found that stole hoss of Judge Boompoiner's had got away and strayed among your stock in the corral. Take him and you're safe; he can't be outrun this side of the state line."

"I ain't no hoss-thief," said Madison grimly.

"Nobody sez ye are, but you'd be wuss—a fool—ef you didn't take him. I'm testimony that you found him among your hosses; I'll tell Judge Boompoiner you've got him, and ye kin send him back when you're safe. The judge

will be mighty glad to get him back, and call it quits. So ef you've writ to Salomy Jane, come."

Madison Clay no longer hesitated. Salomy Jane might return at any moment—it would be part of her "fool womanishness,"—and he was in no mood to see her before a third party. He laid the note on the table, gave a hurried glance around the house, which he grimly believed he was leaving forever, and, striding to the door, leaped on the stolen horse, and swept away with his kinsman.

But that note lay for a week undisturbed on the table in full view of the open door. The house was invaded by leaves, pine cones, birds, and squirrels during the hot, silent, empty days, and at night by shy, stealthy creatures, but never again, day or night, by any of the Clay family. It was known in the district that Clay had flown across the state line, his daughter was believed to have joined him the next day, and the house was supposed to be locked up. It lay off the main road, and few passed that way. The starving cattle in the corral at last broke bounds and spread over the woods. And one night a stronger blast than usual swept through the house, carried the note from the table to the floor, where, whirled into a crack in the flooring, it slowly rotted.

But though the sting of her father's reproach was spared her, Salomy Jane had no need of the letter to know what had happened. For as she entered the woods in the dim light of that morning she saw the figure of Dart gliding from the shadow of a pine towards her. The unaffected cry of joy that rose from her lips died there as she caught sight of his face in the open light.

"You are hurt," she said, clutching his arm passionately.

“No,” he said. “But I wouldn’t mind that if”—

“You’re thinkin’ I was afeard to come back last night when I heard the shootin’, but I did come,” she went on feverishly. “I ran back here when I heard the two shots, but you were gone. I went to the corral, but your hoss wasn’t there, and I thought you’d got away.”

“I did get away,” said Dart gloomily. “I killed the man, thinkin’ he was huntin’ me, and forgettin’ I was disguised. He thought I was your father.”

“Yes,” said the girl joyfully, “he was after dad, and you—you killed him.” She again caught his hand admiringly.

But he did not respond. Possibly there were points of honor which this horse-thief felt vaguely with her father. “Listen,” he said grimly. “Others think it was your father killed him. When I did it—for he fired at me first—I ran to the corral again and took my hoss, thinkin’ I might be follered. I made a clear circuit of the house, and when I found he was the only one, and no one was follerin’, I come back here and took off my disguise. Then I heard his friends find him in the wood, and I know they suspected your father. And then another man come through the woods while I was hidin’ and found the clothes and took them away.” He stopped and stared at her gloomily.

But all this was unintelligible to the girl. “Dad would have got the better of him ef you hadn’t,” she said eagerly, “so what’s the difference?”

“All the same,” he said gloomily, “I must take his place.”

She did not understand, but turned her head to her master. "Then you'll go back with me and tell him all?" she said obediently.

"Yes," he said.

She put her hand in his, and they crept out of the wood together. She foresaw a thousand difficulties, but, chiefest of all, that he did not love as she did. She would not have taken these risks against their happiness.

But alas for ethics and heroism. As they were issuing from the wood they heard the sound of galloping hoofs, and had barely time to hide themselves before Madison Clay, on the stolen horse of Judge Boompointer, swept past them with his kinsman.

Salomy Jane turned to her lover.

* * * * *

And here I might, as a moral romancer, pause, leaving the guilty, passionate girl eloped with her disreputable lover, destined to lifelong shame and misery, misunderstood to the last by a criminal, fastidious parent. But I am confronted by certain facts, on which this romance is based. A month later a handbill was posted on one of the sentinel pines, announcing that the property would be sold by auction to the highest bidder by Mrs. John Dart, daughter of Madison Clay, Esquire, and it was sold accordingly. Still later—by ten years—the chronicler of these pages visited a certain "stock" or "breeding farm," in the "Blue Grass Country," famous for the popular racers it has produced. He was told that the owner was the "best judge of horse-flesh in the country." "Small wonder," added his informant, "for they say as a young man out in California he was a horse-

thief, and only saved himself by eloping with some rich farmer's daughter. But he's a straight-out and respectable man now, whose word about horses can't be bought; and as for his wife, she's a beauty! To see her at the 'Springs,' rigged out in the latest fashion, you'd never think she had ever lived out of New York or wasn't the wife of one of its millionaires."

A Millionaire of Rough and Ready

PROLOGUE

There was no mistake this time: he had struck gold at last!

It had lain there before him a moment ago—a misshapen piece of brown-stained quartz, interspersed with dull yellow metal; yielding enough to have allowed the points of his pick to penetrate its honeycombed recesses, yet heavy enough to drop from the point of his pick as he endeavored to lift it from the red earth.

He was seeing all this plainly, although he found himself, he knew not why, at some distance from the scene of his discovery, his heart foolishly beating, his breath impotently hurried. Yet he was walking slowly and vaguely; conscious of stopping and staring at the landscape, which no longer looked familiar to him. He was hoping for some instinct or force of habit to recall him to himself; yet when he saw a neighbor at work in an adjacent claim, he hesitated, and then turned his back upon him. Yet only a moment before he had thought of running to him, saying, “By Jingo! I’ve struck it,” or “D——n it, old man, I’ve got it”; but that moment had passed, and now it seemed to him that he could scarce raise his voice, or, if he did, the ejaculation would appear forced and artificial. Neither could he go over to him

coolly and tell his good fortune; and, partly from this strange shyness, and partly with a hope that another survey of the treasure might restore him to natural expression, he walked back to his tunnel.

Yes; it was there! No mere “pocket” or “deposit,” but a part of the actual vein he had been so long seeking. It was there, sure enough, lying beside the pick and the debris of the “face” of the vein that he had exposed sufficiently, after the first shock of discovery, to assure himself of the fact and the permanence of his fortune. It was there, and with it the refutation of his enemies’ sneers, the corroboration of his friends’ belief, the practical demonstration of his own theories, the reward of his patient labors. It was there, sure enough. But, somehow, he not only failed to recall the first joy of discovery, but was conscious of a vague sense of responsibility and unrest. It was, no doubt, an enormous fortune to a man in his circumstances: perhaps it meant a couple of hundred thousand dollars, or more, judging from the value of the old Martin lead, which was not as rich as this, but it required to be worked constantly and judiciously. It was with a decided sense of uneasiness that he again sought the open sunlight of the hillside. His neighbor was still visible on the adjacent claim; but he had apparently stopped working, and was contemplatively smoking a pipe under a large pine-tree. For an instant he envied him his apparent contentment. He had a sudden fierce and inexplicable desire to go over to him and exasperate his easy poverty by a revelation of his own new-found treasure. But even that sensation quickly passed, and left him staring blankly at the landscape again.

As soon as he had made his discovery known, and settled its value, he would send for his wife and her children in the States. He would build a fine house on the opposite hillside, if she would consent to it, unless she preferred, for

the children's sake, to live in San Francisco. A sense of a loss of independence—of a change of circumstances that left him no longer his own master—began to perplex him, in the midst of his brightest projects. Certain other relations with other members of his family, which had lapsed by absence and his insignificance, must now be taken up anew. He must do something for his sister Jane, for his brother William, for his wife's poor connections. It would be unfair to him to say that he contemplated those things with any other instinct than that of generosity; yet he was conscious of being already perplexed and puzzled.

Meantime, however, the neighbor had apparently finished his pipe, and, knocking the ashes out of it, rose suddenly, and ended any further uncertainty of their meeting by walking over directly towards him. The treasure-finder advanced a few steps on his side, and then stopped irresolutely.

“Hollo, Slinn!” said the neighbor, confidently.

“Hollo, Masters,” responded Slinn, faintly. From the sound of the two voices a stranger might have mistaken their relative condition. “What in thunder are you mooning about for? What's up?” Then, catching sight of Slinn's pale and anxious face, he added abruptly, “Are you sick?”

Slinn was on the point of telling him his good fortune, but stopped. The unlucky question confirmed his consciousness of his physical and mental disturbance, and he dreaded the ready ridicule of his companion. He would tell him later; Masters need not know WHEN he had made the strike. Besides, in his present vagueness, he shrank from the brusque, practical questioning that would be sure to follow the revelation to a man of Masters' temperament.

“I’m a little giddy here,” he answered, putting his hand to his head, “and I thought I’d knock off until I was better.”

Masters examined him with two very critical gray eyes. “Tell ye what, old man!—if you don’t quit this dog-goned foolin’ of yours in that God-forsaken tunnel you’ll get loony! Times you get so tangled up in follerin’ that blind lead o’ yours you ain’t sensible!”

Here was the opportunity to tell him all, and vindicate the justice of his theories! But he shrank from it again; and now, adding to the confusion, was a singular sense of dread at the mental labor of explanation. He only smiled painfully, and began to move away. “Look you!” said Masters, peremptorily, “ye want about three fingers of straight whiskey to set you right, and you’ve got to take it with me. D——n it, man, it may be the last drink we take together! Don’t look so skeered! I mean—I made up my mind about ten minutes ago to cut the whole d——d thing, and light out for fresh diggings. I’m sick of getting only grub wages out o’ this bill. So that’s what I mean by saying it’s the last drink you and me’ll take together. You know my ways: sayin’ and doin’ with me’s the same thing.”

It was true. Slinn had often envied Masters’ promptness of decision and resolution. But he only looked at the grim face of his interlocutor with a feeble sense of relief. He was GOING. And he, Slinn, would not have to explain anything!

He murmured something about having to go over to the settlement on business. He dreaded lest Masters should insist upon going into the tunnel.

“I suppose you want to mail that letter,” said Masters, drily. “The mail don’t go till to-morrow, so you’ve got time to finish it, and put it in an envelope.”

Following the direction of Masters’ eyes, Slinn looked down and saw, to his utter surprise, that he was holding an unfinished pencilled note in his hand. How it came there, when he had written it, he could not tell; he dimly remembered that one of his first impulses was to write to his wife, but that he had already done so he had forgotten. He hastily concealed the note in his breast-pocket, with a vacant smile. Masters eyed him half contemptuously, half compassionately.

“Don’t forget yourself and drop it in some hollow tree for a letter-box,” he said. “Well—so long!—since you won’t drink. Take care of yourself,” and, turning on his heel, Masters walked away.

Slinn watched him as he crossed over to his abandoned claim, saw him gather his few mining utensils, strap his blanket over his back, lift his hat on his long-handled shovel as a token of farewell, and then stride light-heartedly over the ridge.

He was alone now with his secret and his treasure. The only man in the world who knew of the exact position of his tunnel had gone away forever. It was not likely that this chance companion of a few weeks would ever remember him or the locality again; he would now leave his treasure alone—for even a day perhaps—until he had thought out some plan and sought out some friend in whom to confide. His secluded life, the singular habits of concentration which had at last proved so successful had, at the same time, left him few acquaintances and no associates. And in all his well-laid plans and patiently-digested theories for finding the

treasure, the means and methods of working it and disposing of it had never entered.

And now, at the hour when he most needed his faculties, what was the meaning of this strange benumbing of them!

Patience! He only wanted a little rest—a little time to recover himself. There was a large boulder under a tree in the highway of the settlement—a sheltered spot where he had often waited for the coming of the stage-coach. He would go there, and when he was sufficiently rested and composed he would go on.

Nevertheless, on his way he diverged and turned into the woods, for no other apparent purpose than to find a hollow tree. “A hollow tree.” Yes! that was what Masters had said; he remembered it distinctly; and something was to be done there, but what it was, or why it should be done, he could not tell. However, it was done, and very luckily, for his limbs could scarcely support him further, and reaching that boulder he dropped upon it like another stone.

And now, strange to say, the uneasiness and perplexity which had possessed him ever since he had stood before his revealed wealth dropped from him like a burden laid upon the wayside. A measureless peace stole over him, in which visions of his new-found fortune, no longer a trouble and perplexity, but crowned with happiness and blessing to all around him, assumed proportions far beyond his own weak, selfish plans. In its even-handed benefaction, his wife and children, his friends and relations, even his late poor companion of the hillside, met and moved harmoniously together; in its far-reaching consequences there was only the influence of good. It was not strange that this poor finite mind should never have conceived the

meaning of the wealth extended to him; or that conceiving it he should faint and falter under the revelation. Enough that for a few minutes he must have tasted a joy of perfect anticipation that years of actual possession might never bring.

The sun seemed to go down in a rosy dream of his own happiness, as he still sat there. Later, the shadows of the trees thickened and surrounded him, and still later fell the calm of a quiet evening sky with far-spaced passionless stars, that seemed as little troubled by what they looked upon as he was by the stealthy creeping life in the grasses and underbrush at his feet. The dull patter of soft little feet in the soft dust of the road, the gentle gleam of moist and wondering little eyes on the branches and in the mossy edges of the boulder, did not disturb him. He sat patiently through it all, as if he had not yet made up his mind.

But when the stage came with the flashing sun the next morning, and the irresistible clamor of life and action, the driver suddenly laid his four spirited horses on their haunches before the quiet spot. The express messenger clambered down from the box, and approached what seemed to be a heap of cast-off clothes upon the boulder.

“He don’t seem to be drunk,” he said, in reply to a querulous interrogation from the passengers. “I can’t make him out. His eyes are open, but he cannot speak or move. Take a look at him, Doc.”

A rough unprofessional-looking man here descended from the inside of the coach, and, carelessly thrusting aside the other curious passengers, suddenly leant over the heap of clothes in a professional attitude.

“He is dead,” said one of the passengers.

The rough man let the passive head sink softly down again. “No such luck for him,” he said curtly, but not unkindly. “It’s a stroke of paralysis—and about as big as they make ‘em. It’s a toss-up if he ever speaks or moves again as long as he lives.”

CHAPTER ONE

When Alvin Mulrady announced his intention of growing potatoes and garden “truck” on the green slopes of Los Gatos, the mining community of that region, and the adjacent hamlet of “Rough-and- Ready,” regarded it with the contemptuous indifference usually shown by those adventurers towards all bucolic pursuits. There was certainly no active objection to the occupation of two hillsides, which gave so little promise to the prospector for gold that it was currently reported that a single prospector, called “Slinn,” had once gone mad or imbecile through repeated failures. The only opposition came, incongruously enough, from the original pastoral owner of the soil, one Don Ramon Alvarado, whose claim for seven leagues of hill and valley, including the now prosperous towns of Rough-and-Ready and Red Dog, was met with simple derision from the squatters and miners. “Looks ez ef we woz goin’ to travel three thousand miles to open up his d——d old wilderness, and then pay for the increased valoo we give it—don’t it? Oh, yes, certainly!” was their ironical commentary. Mulrady might have been pardoned for adopting this popular opinion; but by an equally incongruous sentiment, peculiar, however, to the man, he called upon Don Ramon, and actually offered to purchase the land, or “go shares” with him in the agricultural profits. It was alleged that the Don was so struck with this concession that he not only granted the land, but struck up a quaint reserved friendship for the simple-minded agriculturist and his family. It is scarcely necessary to add that this intimacy was viewed by the miners with the contempt that it deserved. They would have been more contemptuous, however, had they known the opinion that Don Ramon entertained of their particular vocation, and which he early confided to Mulrady.

“They are savages who expect to reap where they have not sown; to take out of the earth without returning anything to it but their precious carcasses; heathens, who worship the mere stones they dig up.” “And was there no Spaniard who ever dug gold?” asked Mulrady, simply. “Ah, there are Spaniards and Moors,” responded Don Ramon, sententiously. “Gold has been dug, and by caballeros; but no good ever came of it. There were Alvarados in Sonora, look you, who had mines of SILVER, and worked them with peons and mules, and lost their money—a gold mine to work a silver one—like gentlemen! But this grubbing in the dirt with one’s fingers, that a little gold may stick to them, is not for caballeros. And then, one says nothing of the curse.”

“The curse!” echoed Mary Mulrady, with youthful feminine superstition. “What is that?”

“You knew not, friend Mulrady, that when these lands were given to my ancestors by Charles V., the Bishop of Monterey laid a curse upon any who should desecrate them. Good! Let us see! Of the three Americanos who founded yonder town, one was shot, another died of a fever—poisoned, you understand, by the soil—and the last got himself crazy of aguardiente. Even the *scientifico*,¹ who came here years ago and spied into the trees and the herbs: he was afterwards punished for his profanation, and died of an accident in other lands. But,” added Don Ramon, with grave courtesy, “this touches not yourself. Through me, YOU are of the soil.”

Indeed, it would seem as if a secure if not a rapid prosperity was the result of Don Ramon’s manorial

¹ Don Ramon probably alluded to the eminent naturalist Douglas, who visited California before the gold excitement, and died of an accident in the Sandwich Islands.

patronage. The potato patch and market garden flourished exceedingly; the rich soil responded with magnificent vagaries of growth; the even sunshine set the seasons at defiance with extraordinary and premature crops. The salt pork and biscuit consuming settlers did not allow their contempt of Mulrady's occupation to prevent their profiting by this opportunity for changing their diet. The gold they had taken from the soil presently began to flow into his pockets in exchange for his more modest treasures. The little cabin, which barely sheltered his family—a wife, son, and daughter—was enlarged, extended, and refitted, but in turn abandoned for a more pretentious house on the opposite hill. A whitewashed fence replaced the rudely-split rails, which had kept out the wilderness. By degrees, the first evidences of cultivation—the gashes of red soil, the piles of brush and undergrowth, the bared boulders, and heaps of stone—melted away, and were lost under a carpet of lighter green, which made an oasis in the tawny desert of wild oats on the hillside. Water was the only free boon denied this Garden of Eden; what was necessary for irrigation had to be brought from a mining ditch at great expense, and was of insufficient quantity. In this emergency Mulrady thought of sinking an artesian well on the sunny slope beside his house; not, however, without serious consultation and much objection from his Spanish patron. With great austerity Don Ramon pointed out that this trifling with the entrails of the earth was not only an indignity to Nature almost equal to shaft-sinking and tunneling, but was a disturbance of vested interests. "I and my fathers, San Diego rest them!" said Don Ramon, crossing himself, "were content with wells and cisterns, filled by Heaven at its appointed seasons; the cattle, dumb brutes though they were, knew where to find water when they wanted it. But thou sayest truly," he added, with a sigh, "that was before streams and rain were choked with hellish engines, and poisoned with their spume. Go on, friend

Mulrady, dig and bore if thou wilt, but in a seemly fashion, and not with impious earthquakes of devilish gunpowder.”

With this concession Alvin Mulrady began to sink his first artesian shaft. Being debarred the auxiliaries of steam and gunpowder, the work went on slowly. The market garden did not suffer meantime, as Mulrady had employed two Chinamen to take charge of the ruder tillage, while he superintended the engineering work of the well. This trifling incident marked an epoch in the social condition of the family. Mrs. Mulrady at once assumed a conscious importance among her neighbors. She spoke of her husband's “men”; she alluded to the well as “the works”; she checked the easy frontier familiarity of her customers with pretty Mary Mulrady, her seventeen-year-old daughter. Simple Alvin Mulrady looked with astonishment at this sudden development of the germ planted in all feminine nature to expand in the slightest sunshine of prosperity. “Look yer, Malviny; ain't ye rather puttin' on airs with the boys that want to be civil to Mamie? Like as not one of 'em may be makin' up to her already.” “You don't mean to say, Alvin Mulrady,” responded Mrs. Mulrady, with sudden severity, “that you ever thought of givin' your daughter to a common miner, or that I'm goin' to allow her to marry out of our own set?” “Our own set!” echoed Mulrady feebly, blinking at her in astonishment, and then glancing hurriedly across at his freckle-faced son and the two Chinamen at work in the cabbages. “Oh, you know what I mean,” said Mrs. Mulrady sharply; “the set that we move in. The Alvarados and their friends! Doesn't the old Don come here every day, and ain't his son the right age for Mamie? And ain't they the real first families here—all the same as if they were noblemen? No, leave Mamie to me, and keep to your shaft; there never was a man yet had the least sabe about these things, or knew what was due to his family.” Like most of his larger minded, but feebler equipped sex, Mulrady was

too glad to accept the truth of the latter proposition, which left the meannesses of life to feminine manipulation, and went off to his shaft on the hillside. But during that afternoon he was perplexed and troubled. He was too loyal a husband not to be pleased with this proof of an unexpected and superior foresight in his wife, although he was, like all husbands, a little startled by it. He tried to dismiss it from his mind. But looking down from the hillside upon his little venture, where gradual increase and prosperity had not been beyond his faculties to control and understand, he found himself haunted by the more ambitious projects of his helpmate. From his own knowledge of men, he doubted if Don Ramon, any more than himself, had ever thought of the possibility of a matrimonial connection between the families. He doubted if he would consent to it. And unfortunately it was this very doubt that, touching his own pride as a self-made man, made him first seriously consider his wife's proposition. He was as good as Don Ramon, any day! With this subtle feminine poison instilled in his veins, carried completely away by the logic of his wife's illogical premises, he almost hated his old benefactor. He looked down upon the little Garden of Eden, where his Eve had just tempted him with the fatal fruit, and felt a curious consciousness that he was losing its simple and innocent enjoyment forever.

Happily, about this time Don Ramon died. It is not probable that he ever knew the amiable intentions of Mrs. Mulrady in regard to his son, who now succeeded to the paternal estate, sadly partitioned by relatives and lawsuits. The feminine Mulradys attended the funeral, in expensive mourning from Sacramento; even the gentle Alvin was forced into ready-made broadcloth, which accented his good-natured but unmistakably common presence. Mrs. Mulrady spoke openly of her "loss"; declared that the old families were dying out; and impressed the wives of a few

new arrivals at Red Dog with the belief that her own family was contemporary with the Alvarados, and that her husband's health was far from perfect. She extended a motherly sympathy to the orphaned Don Caesar. Reserved, like his father, in natural disposition, he was still more gravely ceremonious from his loss; and, perhaps from the shyness of an evident partiality for Mamie Mulrady, he rarely availed himself of her mother's sympathizing hospitality. But he carried out the intentions of his father by consenting to sell to Mulrady, for a small sum, the property he had leased. The idea of purchasing had originated with Mrs. Mulrady.

"It'll be all in the family," had observed that astute lady, "and it's better for the looks of the things that we shouldn't be his tenants."

It was only a few weeks later that she was startled by hearing her husband's voice calling her from the hillside as he rapidly approached the house. Mamie was in her room putting on a new pink cotton gown, in honor of an expected visit from young Don Caesar, and Mrs. Mulrady was tidying the house in view of the same event. Something in the tone of her good man's voice, and the unusual circumstance of his return to the house before work was done, caused her, however, to drop her dusting cloth, and run to the kitchen door to meet him. She saw him running through the rows of cabbages, his face shining with perspiration and excitement, a light in his eyes which she had not seen for years. She recalled, without sentiment, that he looked like that when she had called him—a poor farm hand of her father's—out of the brush heap at the back of their former home, in Illinois, to learn the consent of her parents. The recollection was the more embarrassing as he threw his arms around her, and pressed a resounding kiss upon her sallow cheek.

“Sakes alive! Mulrady!” she said, exorcising the ghost of a blush that had also been recalled from the past with her housewife’s apron, “what are you doin’, and company expected every minit?”

“Malviny, I’ve struck it; and struck it rich!”

She disengaged herself from his arms, without excitement, and looked at him with bright but shrewdly observant eyes.

“I’ve struck it in the well—the regular vein that the boys have been looking fer. There’s a fortin’ fer you and Mamie: thousands and tens of thousands!”

“Wait a minit.”

She left him quickly, and went to the foot of the stairs. He could hear her wonderingly and distinctly. “Ye can take off that new frock, Mamie,” she called out.

There was a sound of undisguised expostulation from Mamie.

“I’m speaking,” said Mrs. Mulrady, emphatically.

The murmuring ceased. Mrs. Mulrady returned to her husband. The interruption seemed to have taken off the keen edge of his enjoyment. He at once abdicated his momentary elevation as a discoverer, and waited for her to speak.

“Ye haven’t told any one yet?” she asked.

“No. I was alone, down in the shaft. Ye see, Malviny, I wasn’t expectin’ of anything.” He began, with an attempt

at fresh enjoyment, "I was just clearin' out, and hadn't reckoned on anythin'."

"You see, I was right when I advised you taking the land," she said, without heeding him.

Mulrady's face fell. "I hope Don Caesar won't think"—he began, hesitatingly. "I reckon, perhaps, I oughter make some sorter compensation—you know."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Mulrady, decidedly. "Don't be a fool. Any gold discovery, anyhow, would have been yours—that's the law. And you bought the land without any restrictions. Besides, you never had any idea of this!"—she stopped, and looked him suddenly in the face—"had you?"

Mulrady opened his honest, pale-gray eyes widely.

"Why, Malviny! You know I hadn't. I could swear!"

"Don't swear, and don't let on to anybody but what you DID know it was there. Now, Alvin Mulrady, listen to me." Her voice here took the strident form of action. "Knock off work at the shaft, and send your man away at once. Put on your things, catch the next stage to Sacramento at four o'clock, and take Mamie with you."

"Mamie!" echoed Mulrady, feebly.

"You want to see Lawyer Cole and my brother Jim at once," she went on, without heeding him, "and Mamie wants a change and some proper clothes. Leave the rest to me and Abner. I'll break it to Mamie, and get her ready."

Mulrady passed his hands through his tangled hair, wet with perspiration. He was proud of his wife's energy and

action; he did not dream of opposing her, but somehow he was disappointed. The charming glamour and joy of his discovery had vanished before he could fairly dazzle her with it; or, rather, she was not dazzled with it at all. It had become like business, and the expression "breaking it" to Mamie jarred upon him. He would have preferred to tell her himself; to watch the color come into her delicate oval face, to have seen her soft eyes light with an innocent joy he had not seen in his wife's; and he felt a sinking conviction that his wife was the last one to awaken it.

"You ain't got any time to lose," she said, impatiently, as he hesitated.

Perhaps it was her impatience that struck harshly upon him; perhaps, if she had not accepted her good fortune so confidently, he would not have spoken what was in his mind at the time; but he said gravely, "Wait a minit, Malviny; I've suthin' to tell you 'bout this find of mine that's sing'lar."

"Go on," she said, quickly.

"Lysin' among the rotten quartz of the vein was a pick," he said, constrainedly; "and the face of the vein sorter looked ez if it had been worked at. Follering the line outside to the base of the hill there was signs of there having been an old tunnel; but it had fallen in, and was blocked up."

"Well?" said Mrs. Mulrady, contemptuously.

"Well," returned her husband, somewhat disconnectedly, "it kinder looked as if some feller might have discovered it before."

“And went away, and left it for others! That’s likely—ain’t it?” interrupted his wife, with ill-disguised intolerance. “Everybody knows the hill wasn’t worth that for prospectin’; and it was abandoned when we came here. It’s your property and you’ve paid for it. Are you goin’ to wait to advertise for the owner, Alvin Mulrady, or are you going to Sacramento at four o’clock to-day?”

Mulrady started. He had never seriously believed in the possibility of a previous discovery; but his conscientious nature had prompted him to give it a fair consideration. She was probably right. What he might have thought had she treated it with equal conscientiousness he did not consider. “All right,” he said simply. “I reckon we’ll go at once.”

“And when you talk to Lawyer Cole and Jim, keep that silly stuff about the pick to yourself. There’s no use of putting queer ideas into other people’s heads because you happen to have ‘em yourself.”

When the hurried arrangements were at last completed, and Mr. Mulrady and Mamie, accompanied by a taciturn and discreet Chinaman, carrying their scant luggage, were on their way to the high road to meet the up stage, the father gazed somewhat anxiously and wistfully into his daughter’s face. He had looked forward to those few moments to enjoy the freshness and naivete of Mamie’s youthful delight and enthusiasm as a relief to his wife’s practical, far-sighted realism. There was a pretty pink suffusion in her delicate cheek, the breathless happiness of a child in her half-opened little mouth, and a beautiful absorption in her large gray eyes that augured well for him.

“Well, Mamie, how do we like bein’ an heiress? How do we like layin’ over all the gals between this and ‘Frisco?”

“Eh?”

She had not heard him. The tender beautiful eyes were engaged in an anticipatory examination of the remembered shelves in the “Fancy Emporium” at Sacramento; in reading the admiration of the clerks; in glancing down a little criticisingly at the broad cowhide brogues that strode at her side; in looking up the road for the stage-coach; in regarding the fit of her new gloves—everywhere but in the loving eyes of the man beside her.

He, however, repeated the question, touched with her charming preoccupation, and passing his arm around her little waist.

“I like it well enough, pa, you know!” she said, slightly disengaging his arm, but adding a perfunctory little squeeze to his elbow to soften the separation. “I always had an idea SOMETHING would happen. I suppose I’m looking like a fright,” she added; “but ma made me hurry to get away before Don Caesar came.”

“And you didn’t want to go without seeing him?” he added, archly.

“I didn’t want him to see me in this frock,” said Mamie, simply. “I reckon that’s why ma made me change,” she added, with a slight laugh.

“Well I reckon you’re allus good enough for him in any dress,” said Mulrady, watching her attentively; “and more than a match for him NOW,” he added, triumphantly.

“I don’t know about that,” said Mamie. “He’s been rich all the time, and his father and grandfather before him; while we’ve been poor and his tenants.”

His face changed; the look of bewilderment, with which he had followed her words, gave way to one of pain, and then of anger. “Did he get off such stuff as that?” he asked, quickly.

“No. I’d like to catch him at it,” responded Mamie, promptly. “There’s better nor him to be had for the asking now.”

They had walked on a few moments in aggrieved silence, and the Chinaman might have imagined some misfortune had just befallen them. But Mamie’s teeth shone again between her parted lips. “La, pa! it ain’t that! He cares everything for me, and I do for him; and if ma hadn’t got new ideas—” She stopped suddenly.

“What new ideas?” queried her father, anxiously.

“Oh, nothing! I wish, pa, you’d put on your other boots! Everybody can see these are made for the farrows. And you ain’t a market gardener any more.”

“What am I, then?” asked Mulrady, with a half-pleased, half-uneasy laugh.

“You’re a capitalist, I say; but ma says a landed proprietor.” Nevertheless, the landed proprietor, when he reached the boulder on the Red Dog highway, sat down in somewhat moody contemplation, with his head bowed over the broad cowhide brogues, that seemed to have already gathered enough of the soil to indicate his right to that title. Mamie, who had recovered her spirits, but had not lost her

preoccupation, wandered off by herself in the meadow, or ascended the hillside, as her occasional impatience at the delay of the coach, or the following of some ambitious fancy, alternately prompted her. She was so far away at one time that the stage-coach, which finally drew up before Mulrady, was obliged to wait for her.

When she was deposited safely inside, and Mulrady had climbed to the box beside the driver, the latter remarked, curtly—

“Ye gave me a right smart skeer, a minit ago, stranger.”

“Ez how?”

“Well, about three years ago, I was comin’ down this yer grade, at just this time, and sittin’ right on that stone, in just your attitude, was a man about your build and years. I pulled up to let him in, when, darn my skin! if he ever moved, but sorter looked at me without speakin’. I called to him, and he never answered, ‘cept with that idiotic stare. I then let him have my opinion of him, in mighty strong English, and drove off, leavin’ him there. The next morning, when I came by on the up-trip, darn my skin! if he wasn’t thar, but lyin’ all of a heap on the boulder. Jim drops down and picks him up. Doctor Duchesne, ez was along, allowst it was a played-out prospector, with a big case of paralysis, and we expressed him through to the County Hospital, like so much dead freight. I’ve allus been kinder superstitious about passin’ that rock, and when I saw you jist now, sittin’ thar, dazed like, with your head down like the other chap, it rather threw me off my centre.”

In the inexplicable and half-superstitious uneasiness that this coincidence awakened in Mulrady’s unimaginative

mind, he was almost on the point of disclosing his good fortune to the driver, in order to prove how preposterous was the parallel, but checked himself in time.

“Did you find out who he was?” broke in a rash passenger. “Did you ever get over it?” added another unfortunate.

With a pause of insulting scorn at the interruption, the driver resumed, pointedly, to Mulrady: “The pint of the whole thing was my cussin’ a helpless man, ez could neither cuss back nor shoot; and then afterwards takin’ you for his ghost layin’ for me to get even.” He paused again, and then added, carelessly, “They say he never kem to enuff to let on who he was or whar he kem from; and he was eventooally taken to a ‘Sylum for Doddering Idjits and Gin’ral and Permiskus Imbeciles at Sacramento. I’ve heerd it’s considered a first-class institooshun, not only for them ez is paralyzed and can’t talk, as for them ez is the reverse and is too chipper. Now,” he added, languidly turning for the first time to his miserable questioners, “how did YOU find it?”

CHAPTER TWO

When the news of the discovery of gold in Mulrady shaft was finally made public, it created an excitement hitherto unknown in the history of the country. Half of Red Dog and all Rough-and-Ready were emptied upon the yellow hills surrounding Mulrady's, until their circling camp fires looked like a besieging army that had invested his peaceful pastoral home, preparatory to carrying it by assault. Unfortunately for them, they found the various points of vantage already garrisoned with notices of "preemption" for mining purposes in the name of the various members of the Alvarado family. This stroke of business was due to Mrs. Mulrady, as a means of mollifying the conscientious scruples of her husband and of placating the Alvarados, in view of some remote contingency. It is but fair to say that this degradation of his father's Castilian principles was opposed by Don Caesar. "You needn't work them yourself, but sell out to them that will; it's the only way to keep the prospectors from taking it without paying for it at all," argued Mrs. Mulrady. Don Caesar finally assented; perhaps less to the business arguments of Mulrady's wife than to the simple suggestion of Mamie's mother. Enough that he realized a sum in money for a few acres that exceeded the last ten years' income of Don Ramon's seven leagues.

Equally unprecedented and extravagant was the realization of the discovery in Mulrady's shaft. It was alleged that a company, hastily formed in Sacramento, paid him a million of dollars down, leaving him still a controlling two-thirds interest in the mine. With an obstinacy, however, that amounted almost to a moral conviction, he refused to include the house and potato-patch in the property. When the company had yielded the point, he declined, with equal

tenacity, to part with it to outside speculators on even the most extravagant offers. In vain Mrs. Mulrady protested; in vain she pointed out to him that the retention of the evidence of his former humble occupation was a green blot upon their social escutcheon.

“If you will keep the land, build on it, and root up the garden.” But Mulrady was adamant.

“It’s the only thing I ever made myself, and got out of the soil with my own hands; it’s the beginning of my fortune, and it may be the end of it. Mebbe I’ll be glad enough to have it to come back to some day, and be thankful for the square meal I can dig out of it.”

By repeated pressure, however, Mulrady yielded the compromise that a portion of it should be made into a vineyard and flower-garden, and by a suitable coloring of ornament and luxury obliterate its vulgar part. Less successful, however, was that energetic woman in another effort to mitigate the austerities of their earlier state. It occurred to her to utilize the softer accents of Don Caesar in the pronunciation of their family name, and privately had “Mulrade” take the place of Mulrady on her visiting card. “It might be Spanish,” she argued with her husband. “Lawyer Cole says most American names are corrupted, and how do you know that yours ain’t?” Mulrady, who would not swear that his ancestors came from Ireland to the Carolinas in ‘98, was helpless to refute the assertion. But the terrible Nemesis of an un-Spanish, American provincial speech avenged the orthographical outrage at once. When Mrs. Mulrady began to be addressed orally, as well as by letter, as “Mrs. Mulraid,” and when simple amatory effusions to her daughter rhymed with “lovely maid,” she promptly refused the original vowel. But she fondly clung to the Spanish courtesy which transformed her husband’s baptismal name,

and usually spoke of him—in his absence— as “Don Alvino.” But in the presence of his short, square figure, his orange tawny hair, his twinkling gray eyes, and retrouse nose, even that dominant woman withheld his title. It was currently reported at Red Dog that a distinguished foreigner had one day approached Mulrady with the formula, “I believe I have the honor of addressing Don Alvino Mulrady?” “You kin bet your boots, stranger, that’s me,” had returned that simple hidalgo.

Although Mrs. Mulrady would have preferred that Mamie should remain at Sacramento until she could join her, preparatory to a trip to “the States” and Europe, she yielded to her daughter’s desire to astonish Rough-and-Ready, before she left, with her new wardrobe, and unfold in the parent nest the delicate and painted wings with which she was to fly from them forever. “I don’t want them to remember me afterwards in those spotted prints, ma, and like as not say I never had a decent frock until I went away.” There was something so like the daughter of her mother in this delicate foresight that the touched and gratified parent kissed her, and assented. The result was gratifying beyond her expectation. In that few weeks’ sojourn at Sacramento, the young girl seemed to have adapted and assimilated herself to the latest modes of fashion with even more than the usual American girl’s pliancy and taste. Equal to all emergencies of style and material, she seemed to supply, from some hitherto unknown quality she possessed, the grace and manner peculiar to each. Untrammelled by tradition, education, or precedent, she had the Western girl’s confidence in all things being possible, which made them so often probable. Mr. Mulrady looked at his daughter with mingled sentiments of pride and awe. Was it possible that this delicate creature, so superior to him that he seemed like a degenerate scion of her remoter race, was his own flesh and blood? Was she the daughter of her mother, who even in her

remembered youth was never equipped like this? If the thought brought no pleasure to his simple, loving nature, it at least spared him the pain of what might have seemed ingratitude in one more akin to himself. "The fact is, we ain't quite up to her style," was his explanation and apology. A vague belief that in another and a better world than this he might approximate and understand this perfection somewhat soothed and sustained him.

It was quite consistent, therefore, that the embroidered cambric dress which Mamie Mulrady wore one summer afternoon on the hillside at Los Gatos, while to the critical feminine eye at once artistic and expensive, should not seem incongruous to her surroundings or to herself in the eyes of a general audience. It certainly did not seem so to one pair of frank, humorous ones that glanced at her from time to time, as their owner, a young fellow of five-and-twenty, walked at her side. He was the new editor of the "Rough- and-Ready Record," and, having been her fellow-passenger from Sacramento, had already once or twice availed himself of her father's invitation to call upon them. Mrs. Mulrady had not discouraged this mild flirtation. Whether she wished to disconcert Don Caesar for some occult purpose, or whether, like the rest of her sex, she had an overweening confidence in the unheroic, unsexed, and purely platonic character of masculine humor, did not appear.

"When I say I'm sorry you are going to leave us, Miss Mulrady," said the young fellow, lightly, "you will comprehend my unselfishness, since I frankly admit your departure would be a positive relief to me as an editor and a man. The pressure in the Poet's Corner of the 'Record' since it was mistakingly discovered that a person of your name might be induced to seek the 'glade' and 'shade' without being 'afraid,' 'dismayed,' or 'betrayed,' has been

something enormous, and, unfortunately, I am debarred from rejecting anything, on the just ground that I am myself an interested admirer.”

“It’s dreadful to be placarded around the country by one’s own full name, isn’t it?” said Mamie, without, however, expressing much horror in her face.

“They think it much more respectful than to call you ‘Mamie,’” he responded, lightly; “and many of your admirers are middle-aged men, with a mediaeval style of compliment. I’ve discovered that amatory versifying wasn’t entirely a youthful passion. Colonel Cash is about as fatal with a couplet as with a double-barreled gun, and scatters as terribly. Judge Butts and Doctor Wilson have both discerned the resemblance of your gifts to those of Venus, and their own to Apollo. But don’t undervalue those tributes, Miss Mulrady,” he added, more seriously. “You’ll have thousands of admirers where you are going; but you’ll be willing to admit in the end, I think, that none were more honest and respectful than your subjects at Rough-and-Ready and Red Dog.” He stopped, and added in a graver tone, “Does Don Caesar write poetry?”

“He has something better to do,” said the young lady, pertly.

“I can easily imagine that,” he returned, mischievously; “it must be a pallid substitute for other opportunities.”

“What did you come here for?” she asked, suddenly.

“To see you.”

“Nonsense! You know what I mean. Why did you ever leave Sacramento to come here? I should think it would suit you so much better than this place.”

“I suppose I was fired by your father’s example, and wished to find a gold mine.”

“Men like you never do,” she said, simply.

“Is that a compliment, Miss Mulrady?”

“I don’t know. But I think that you think that it is.”

He gave her the pleased look of one who had unexpectedly found a sympathetic intelligence. “Do I? This is interesting. Let’s sit down.” In their desultory rambling they had reached, quite unconsciously, the large boulder at the roadside. Mamie hesitated a moment, looked up and down the road, and then, with an already opulent indifference to the damaging of her spotless skirt, sat herself upon it, with her furled parasol held by her two little hands thrown over her half-drawn-up knee. The young editor, half sitting, half leaning, against the stone, began to draw figures in the sand with his cane.

“On the contrary, Miss Mulrady, I hope to make some money here. You are leaving Rough-and-Ready because you are rich. We are coming to it because we are poor.”

“We?” echoed Mamie, lazily, looking up the road.

“Yes. My father and two sisters.”

“I am sorry. I might have known them if I hadn’t been going away.” At the same moment, it flashed across her

mind that, if they were like the man before her, they might prove disagreeably independent and critical. "Is your father in business?" she asked.

He shook his head. After a pause, he said, punctuating his sentences with the point of his stick in the soft dust, "He is paralyzed, and out of his mind, Miss Mulrady. I came to California to seek him, as all news of him ceased three years since; and I found him only two weeks ago, alone, friendless—an unrecognized pauper in the county hospital."

"Two weeks ago? That was when I went to Sacramento."

"Very probably."

"It must have been very shocking to you?"

"It was."

"I should think you'd feel real bad?"

"I do, at times." He smiled, and laid his stick on the stone. "You now see, Miss Mulrady, how necessary to me is this good fortune that you don't think me worthy of. Meantime I must try to make a home for them at Rough-and-Ready."

Miss Mulrady put down her knee and her parasol. "We mustn't stay here much longer, you know."

"Why?"

"Why, the stage-coach comes by at about this time."

“And you think the passengers will observe us sitting here?”

“Of course they will.”

“Miss Mulrady, I implore you to stay.”

He was leaning over her with such apparent earnestness of voice and gesture that the color came into her cheek. For a moment she scarcely dared to lift her conscious eyes to his. When she did so, she suddenly glanced her own aside with a flash of anger. He was laughing.

“If you have any pity for me, do not leave me now,” he repeated. “Stay a moment longer, and my fortune is made. The passengers will report us all over Red Dog as engaged. I shall be supposed to be in your father’s secrets, and shall be sought after as a director of all the new companies. The ‘Record’ will double its circulation; poetry will drop out of its columns, advertising rush to fill its place, and I shall receive five dollars a week more salary, if not seven and a half. Never mind the consequences to yourself at such a moment. I assure you there will be none. You can deny it the next day—I will deny it—nay, more, the ‘Record’ itself will deny it in an extra edition of one thousand copies, at ten cents each. Linger a moment longer, Miss Mulrady. Fly, oh fly not yet. They’re coming—hark! oh! By Jove, it’s only Don Caesar!”

It was, indeed, only the young scion of the house of Alvarado, blue-eyed, sallow-skinned, and high-shouldered, coming towards them on a fiery, half-broken mustang, whose very spontaneous lawlessness seemed to accentuate and bring out the grave and decorous ease of his rider. Even in his burlesque preoccupation the editor of the “Record” did not withhold his admiration of this perfect horsemanship.

Mamie, who, in her wounded amour propre, would like to have made much of it to annoy her companion, was thus estopped any ostentatious compliment.

Don Caesar lifted his hat with sweet seriousness to the lady, with grave courtesy to the gentleman. While the lower half of this Centaur was apparently quivering with fury, and stamping the ground in his evident desire to charge upon the pair, the upper half, with natural dignity, looked from the one to the other, as if to leave the privilege of an explanation with them. But Mamie was too wise, and her companion too indifferent, to offer one. A slight shade passed over Don Caesar's face. To complicate the situation at that moment, the expected stagecoach came rattling by. With quick feminine intuition, Mamie caught in the faces of the driver and the expressman, and reflected in the mischievous eyes of her companion, a peculiar interpretation of their meeting, that was not removed by the whispered assurance of the editor that the passengers were anxiously looking back "to see the shooting."

The young Spaniard, equally oblivious of humor or curiosity, remained impassive.

"You know Mr. Slinn, of the 'Record,'" said Mamie, "don't you?"

Don Caesar had never before met the Senor Esslinn. He was under the impression that it was a Senor Robinson that was of the "Record."

"Oh, HE was shot," said Slinn. "I'm taking his place."

"Bueno! To be shot too? I trust not."

Slinn looked quickly and sharply into Don Caesar's grave face. He seemed to be incapable of any double meaning. However, as he had no serious reason for awakening Don Caesar's jealousy, and very little desire to become an embarrassing third in this conversation, and possibly a burden to the young lady, he proceeded to take his leave of her. From a sudden feminine revulsion of sympathy, or from some unintelligible instinct of diplomacy, Mamie said, as she extended her hand, "I hope you'll find a home for your family near here. Mamma wants pa to let our old house. Perhaps it might suit you, if not too far from your work. You might speak to ma about it."

"Thank you; I will," responded the young man, pressing her hand with unaffected cordiality.

Don Caesar watched him until he had disappeared behind the wayside buckeyes.

"He is a man of family—this one—your countryman?"

It seemed strange to her to have a mere acquaintance spoken of as "her countryman"—not the first time nor the last time in her career. As there appeared no trace or sign of jealousy in her questioner's manner, she answered briefly but vaguely:

"Yes; it's a shocking story. His father disappeared some years ago, and he has just found him—a helpless paralytic—in the Sacramento Hospital. He'll have to support him—and they're very poor."

"So, then, they are not independent of each other always—these fathers and children of Americans!"

“No,” said Mamie, shortly. Without knowing why, she felt inclined to resent Don Caesar’s manner. His serious gravity—gentle and high-bred as it was, undoubtedly—was somewhat trying to her at times, and seemed even more so after Slinn’s irreverent humor. She picked up her parasol, a little impatiently, as if to go.

But Don Caesar had already dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree with a strong lariat that hung at his saddle-bow.

“Let us walk through the woods towards your home. I can return alone for the horse when you shall dismiss me.”

They turned in among the pines that, overcrowding the hollow, crept partly up the side of the hill of Mulrady’s shaft. A disused trail, almost hidden by the waxen-hued yerba buena, led from the highway, and finally lost itself in the undergrowth. It was a lovers’ walk; they were lovers, evidently, and yet the man was too self-poised in his gravity, the young woman too conscious and critical, to suggest an absorbing or oblivious passion.

“I should not have made myself so obtrusive to-day before your friend,” said Don Caesar, with proud humility, “but I could not understand from your mother whether you were alone or whether my company was desirable. It is of this I have now to speak, Mamie. Lately your mother has seemed strange to me; avoiding any reference to our affection; treating it lightly, and even as to-day, I fancy, putting obstacles in the way of our meeting alone. She was disappointed at your return from Sacramento where, I have been told, she intended you to remain until you left the country; and since your return I have seen you but twice. I may be wrong. Perhaps I do not comprehend the American mother; I have—who knows?—perhaps offended in some

point of etiquette, omitted some ceremony that was her due. But when you told me, Mamie, that it was not necessary to speak to HER first, that it was not the American fashion—”

Mamie started, and blushed slightly.

“Yes,” she said hurriedly, “certainly; but ma has been quite queer of late, and she may think—you know—that since—since there has been so much property to dispose of, she ought to have been consulted.”

“Then let us consult her at once, dear child! And as to the property, in Heaven’s name, let her dispose of it as she will. Saints forbid that an Alvarado should ever interfere. And what is it to us, my little one? Enough that Dona Mameta Alvarado will never have less state than the richest bride that ever came to Los Gatos.”

Mamie had not forgotten that, scarcely a month ago, even had she loved the man before her no more than she did at present, she would still have been thrilled with delight at these words! Even now she was moved—conscious as she had become that the “state” of a bride of the Alvarados was not all she had imagined, and that the bare adobe court of Los Gatos was open to the sky and the free criticism of Sacramento capitalists!

“Yes, dear,” she murmured with a half childlike pleasure, that lit up her face and eyes so innocently that it stopped any minute investigation into its origin and real meaning. “Yes, dear; but we need not have a fuss made about it at present, and perhaps put ma against us. She wouldn’t hear of our marrying now; and she might forbid our engagement.”

“But you are going away.”

“I should have to go to New York or Europe FIRST, you know,” she answered, naively, “even if it were all settled. I should have to get things! One couldn’t be decent here.”

With the recollection of the pink cotton gown, in which she had first pledged her troth to him, before his eyes, he said, “But you are charming now. You cannot be more so to me. If I am satisfied, little one, with you as you are, let us go together, and then you can get dresses to please others.”

She had not expected this importunity. Really, if it came to this, she might have engaged herself to some one like Slinn; he at least would have understood her. He was much cleverer, and certainly more of a man of the world. When Slinn had treated her like a child, it was with the humorous tolerance of an admiring superior, and not the didactic impulse of a guardian. She did not say this, nor did her pretty eyes indicate it, as in the instance of her brief anger with Slinn. She only said gently—

“I should have thought you, of all men, would have been particular about your wife doing the proper thing. But never mind! Don’t let us talk any more about it. Perhaps as it seems such a great thing to you, and so much trouble, there may be no necessity for it at all.”

I do not think that the young lady deliberately planned this charmingly illogical deduction from Don Caesar’s speech, or that she calculated its effect upon him; but it was part of her nature to say it, and profit by it. Under the unjust lash of it, his pride gave way.

“Ah, do you not see why I wish to go with you?” he said, with sudden and unexpected passion. “You are beautiful; you are good; it has pleased Heaven to make you

rich also; but you are a child in experience, and know not your own heart. With your beauty, your goodness, and your wealth, you will attract all to you—as you do here—because you cannot help it. But you will be equally helpless, little one, if THEY should attract YOU, and you had no tie to fall back upon.”

It was an unfortunate speech. The words were Don Caesar’s; but the thought she had heard before from her mother, although the deduction had been of a very different kind. Mamie followed the speaker with bright but visionary eyes. There must be some truth in all this. Her mother had said it; Mr. Slinn had laughingly admitted it. She HAD a brilliant future before her! Was she right in making it impossible by a rash and foolish tie? He himself had said she was inexperienced. She knew it; and yet, what was he doing now but taking advantage of that inexperience? If he really loved her, he would be willing to submit to the test. She did not ask a similar one from him; and was willing, if she came out of it free, to marry him just the same. There was something so noble in this thought that she felt for a moment carried away by an impulse of compassionate unselfishness, and smiled tenderly as she looked up in his face.

“Then you consent, Mamie?” he said, eagerly, passing his arm around her waist.

“Not now, Caesar,” she said, gently disengaging herself. “I must think it over; we are both too young to act upon it rashly; it would be unfair to you, who are so quiet and have seen so few girls—I mean Americans—to tie yourself to the first one you have known. When I am gone you will go more into the world. There are Mr. Slinn’s two sisters coming here—I shouldn’t wonder if they were far cleverer and talked far better than I do—and think how I should feel if I knew that only a wretched pledge to me kept

you from loving them!” She stopped, and cast down her eyes.

It was her first attempt at coquetry, for, in her usual charming selfishness, she was perfectly frank and open; and it might not have been her last, but she had gone too far at first, and was not prepared for a recoil of her own argument.

“If you admit that it is possible—that it is possible to you!” he said, quickly.

She saw her mistake. “We may not have many opportunities to meet alone,” she answered, quietly; “and I am sure we would be happier when we meet not to accuse each other of impossibilities. Let us rather see how we can communicate together, if anything should prevent our meeting. Remember, it was only by chance that you were able to see me now. If ma has believed that she ought to have been consulted, our meeting together in this secret way will only make matters worse. She is even now wondering where I am, and may be suspicious. I must go back at once. At any moment some one may come here looking for me.”

“But I have so much to say,” he pleaded. “Our time has been so short.”

“You can write.”

“But what will your mother think of that?” he said, in grave astonishment.

She colored again as she returned, quickly, “Of course, you must not write to the house. You can leave a letter somewhere for me— say, somewhere about here. Stop!” she added, with a sudden girlish gayety, “see, here’s the very place. Look there!”

She pointed to the decayed trunk of a blasted sycamore, a few feet from the trail. A cavity, breast high, half filled with skeleton leaves and pine-nuts, showed that it had formerly been a squirrel's hoard, but for some reason had been deserted.

"Look! it's a regular letter-box," she continued, gayly, rising on tip-toe to peep into its recesses. Don Caesar looked at her admiringly; it seemed like a return to their first idyllic love-making in the old days, when she used to steal out of the cabbage rows in her brown linen apron and sun-bonnet to walk with him in the woods. He recalled the fact to her with the fatality of a lover already seeking to restore in past recollections something that was wanting in the present. She received it with the impatience of youth, to whom the present is all sufficient.

"I wonder how you could ever have cared for me in that holland apron," she said, looking down upon her new dress.

"Shall I tell you why?" he said, fondly, passing his arm around her waist, and drawing her pretty head nearer his shoulder.

"No—not now!" she said, laughingly, but struggling to free herself. "There's not time. Write it, and put it in the box. There," she added, hastily, "listen!—what's that?"

"It's only a squirrel," he whispered reassuringly in her ear.

"No; it's somebody coming! I must go! Please! Caesar, dear! There, then—"

She met his kiss half-way, released herself with a lithe movement of her wrist and shoulder, and the next moment seemed to slip into the woods, and was gone.

Don Caesar listened with a sigh as the last rustling ceased, cast a look at the decayed tree as if to fix it in his memory, and then slowly retraced his steps towards his tethered mustang.

He was right, however, in his surmise of the cause of that interruption. A pair of bright eyes had been watching them from the bough of an adjacent tree. It was a squirrel, who, having had serious and prior intentions of making use of the cavity they had discovered, had only withheld examination by an apparent courteous discretion towards the intruding pair. Now that they were gone he slipped down the tree and ran towards the decayed stump.

CHAPTER THREE

Apparently dissatisfied with the result of an investigation, which proved that the cavity was unfit as a treasure hoard for a discreet squirrel, whatever its value as a receptacle for the love-tokens of incautious humanity, the little animal at once set about to put things in order. He began by whisking out an immense quantity of dead leaves, disturbed a family of tree-spiders, dissipated a drove of patient aphides browsing in the bark, as well as their attendant dairymen, the ants, and otherwise ruled it with the high hand of dispossession and a contemptuous opinion of the previous incumbents. It must not be supposed, however, that his proceedings were altogether free from contemporaneous criticism; a venerable crow sitting on a branch above him displayed great interest in his occupation, and, hopping down a few moments afterwards, disposed of some worm-eaten nuts, a few larvae, and an insect or two, with languid dignity and without prejudice. Certain incumbrances, however, still resisted the squirrel's general eviction; among them a folded square of paper with sharply defined edges, that declined investigation, and, owing to a nauseous smell of tobacco, escaped nibbling as it had apparently escaped insect ravages. This, owing to its sharp angles, which persisted in catching in the soft decaying wood in his whirlwind of house-cleaning, he allowed to remain. Having thus, in a general way, prepared for the coming winter, the self-satisfied little rodent dismissed the subject from his active mind.

His rage and indignation a few days later may be readily conceived, when he found, on returning to his new-made home, another square of paper, folded like the first, but much fresher and whiter, lying within the cavity, on top of

some moss which had evidently been placed there for the purpose. This he felt was really more than he could bear, but it was smaller, and with a few energetic kicks and whisks of his tail he managed to finally dislodge it through the opening, where it fell ignominiously to the earth. The eager eyes of the ever-attendant crow, however, instantly detected it; he flew to the ground, and, turning it over, examined it gravely. It was certainly not edible, but it was exceedingly rare, and, as an old collector of curios, he felt he could not pass it by. He lifted it in his beak, and, with a desperate struggle against the superincumbent weight, regained the branch with his prize. Here, by one of those delicious vagaries of animal nature, he apparently at once discharged his mind of the whole affair, became utterly oblivious of it, allowed it to drop without the least concern, and eventually flew away with an abstracted air, as if he had been another bird entirely. The paper got into a manzanita bush, where it remained suspended until the evening, when, being dislodged by a passing wild-cat on its way to Mulrady's hen-roost, it gave that delicately sensitive marauder such a turn that she fled into the adjacent county.

But the troubles of the squirrel were not yet over. On the following day the young man who had accompanied the young woman returned to the trunk, and the squirrel had barely time to make his escape before the impatient visitor approached the opening of the cavity, peered into it, and even passed his hand through its recesses. The delight visible upon his anxious and serious face at the disappearance of the letter, and the apparent proof that it had been called for, showed him to have been its original depositor, and probably awakened a remorseful recollection in the dark bosom of the omnipresent crow, who uttered a conscious-stricken croak from the bough above him. But the young man quickly disappeared again, and the squirrel was once more left in undisputed possession.

A week passed. A weary, anxious interval to Don Caesar, who had neither seen nor heard from Mamie since their last meeting. Too conscious of his own self-respect to call at the house after the equivocal conduct of Mrs. Mulrady, and too proud to haunt the lanes and approaches in the hope of meeting her daughter, like an ordinary lover, he hid his gloomy thoughts in the monastic shadows of the courtyard at Los Gatos, or found relief in furious riding at night and early morning on the highway. Once or twice the up-stage had been overtaken and passed by a rushing figure as shadowy as a phantom horseman, with only the star-like point of a cigarette to indicate its humanity. It was in one of these fierce recreations that he was obliged to stop in early morning at the blacksmith's shop at Rough-and-Ready, to have a loosend horseshoe replaced, and while waiting picked up a newspaper. Don Caesar seldom read the papers, but noticing that this was the "Record," he glanced at its columns. A familiar name suddenly flashed out of the dark type like a spark from the anvil. With a brain and heart that seemed to be beating in unison with the blacksmith's sledge, he read as follows:

Our distinguished fellow-townsmen, Alvin Mulrady, Esquire, left town day before yesterday to attend an important meeting of directors of the Red Dog Ditch Company, in San Francisco. Society will regret to hear that Mrs. Mulrady and her beautiful and accomplished daughter, who are expecting to depart for Europe at the end of the month, anticipated the event nearly a fortnight, by taking this opportunity of accompanying Mr. Mulrady as far as San Francisco, on their way to the East. Mrs. and Miss Mulrady intend to visit London, Paris, and Berlin, and will be absent three years. It is possible

that Mr. Mulrady may join them later at one or other of those capitals. Considerable disappointment is felt that a more extended leave-taking was not possible, and that, under the circumstances, no opportunity was offered for a 'send off' suitable to the condition of the parties and the esteem in which they are held in Rough-and-Ready.

The paper dropped from his hands. Gone! and without a word! No, that was impossible! There must be some mistake; she had written; the letter had miscarried; she must have sent word to Los Gatos, and the stupid messenger had blundered; she had probably appointed another meeting, or expected him to follow to San Francisco. "The day before yesterday!" It was the morning's paper—she had been gone scarcely two days—it was not too late yet to receive a delayed message by post, by some forgetful hand—by—ah—the tree!

Of course it was in the tree, and he had not been there for a week! Why had he not thought of it before? The fault was his, not hers. Perhaps she had gone away, believing him faithless, or a country boor.

"In the name of the Devil, will you keep me here till eternity!"

The blacksmith stared at him. Don Caesar suddenly remembered that he was speaking, as he was thinking—in Spanish.

"Ten dollars, my friend, if you have done in five minutes!"

The man laughed. "That's good enough American," he said, beginning to quicken his efforts. Don Caesar again took up the paper. There was another paragraph that recalled his last interview with Mamie:

"Mr. Harry Slinn, Jr., the editor of this paper, has just moved into the pioneer house formerly occupied by Alvin Mulrady, Esquire, which has already become historic in the annals of the county. Mr. Slinn brings with him his father—H. J. Slinn, Esquire—and his two sisters. Mr. Slinn, Sen., who has been suffering for many years from complete paralysis, we understand is slowly improving; and it is by the advice of his physicians that he has chosen the invigorating air of the foothills as a change to the debilitating heat of Sacramento."

The affair had been quickly settled, certainly, reflected Don Caesar, with a slight chill of jealousy, as he thought of Mamie's interest in the young editor. But the next moment he dismissed it from his mind; all except a dull consciousness that, if she really loved him—Don Caesar—as he loved her, she could not have assisted in throwing into his society the young sisters of the editor, who she expected might be so attractive.

Within the five minutes the horse was ready, and Don Caesar in the saddle again. In less than half an hour he was at the wayside boulder. Here he picketed his horse, and took the narrow foot-trail through the hollow. It did not take him long to reach their old trysting-place. With a beating heart he approached the decaying trunk and looked into the cavity. There was no letter there!

A few blackened nuts and some of the dry moss he had put there were lying on the ground at its roots. He could not remember whether they were there when he had last

visited the spot. He began to grope in the cavity with both hands. His fingers struck against the sharp angles of a flat paper packet: a thrill of joy ran through them and stopped his beating heart; he drew out the hidden object, and was chilled with disappointment.

It was an ordinary-sized envelope of yellowish-brown paper, bearing, besides the usual government stamp, the official legend of an express company, and showing its age as much by this record of a now obsolete carrying service as by the discoloration of time and atmosphere. Its weight, which was heavier than that of any ordinary letter of the same size and thickness, was evidently due to some loose enclosures, that slightly rustled and could be felt by the fingers, like minute pieces of metal or grains of gravel. It was within Don Caesar's experience that gold specimens were often sent in that manner. It was in a state of singular preservation, except the address, which, being written in pencil, was scarcely discernible, and even when deciphered appeared to be incoherent and unfinished. The unknown correspondent had written "dear Mary," and then "Mrs. Mary Slinn," with an unintelligible scrawl following for the direction. If Don Caesar's mind had not been lately preoccupied with the name of the editor, he would hardly have guessed the superscription.

In his cruel disappointment and fully aroused indignation, he at once began to suspect a connection of circumstances which at any other moment he would have thought purely accidental, or perhaps not have considered at all. The cavity in the tree had evidently been used as a secret receptacle for letters before; did Mamie know it at the time, and how did she know it? The apparent age of the letter made it preposterous to suppose that it pointed to any secret correspondence of hers with young Mr. Slinn; and the address was not in her handwriting. Was there any secret

previous intimacy between the families? There was but one way in which he could connect this letter with Mamie's faithlessness. It was an infamous, a grotesquely horrible idea, a thought which sprang as much from his inexperience of the world and his habitual suspiciousness of all humor as anything else! It was that the letter was a brutal joke of Slinn's—a joke perhaps concocted by Mamie and himself—a parting insult that should at the last moment proclaim their treachery and his own credulity. Doubtless it contained a declaration of their shame, and the reason why she had fled from him without a word of explanation. And the enclosure, of course, was some significant and degrading illustration. Those Americans are full of those low conceits; it was their national vulgarity.

He had the letter in his angry hand. He could break it open if he wished and satisfy himself; but it was not addressed to HIM, and the instinct of honor, strong even in his rage, was the instinct of an adversary as well. No; Slinn should open the letter before him. Slinn should explain everything, and answer for it. If it was nothing—a mere accident—it would lead to some general explanation, and perhaps even news of Mamie. But he would arraign Slinn, and at once. He put the letter in his pocket, quickly retraced his steps to his horse, and, putting spurs to the animal, followed the high road to the gate of Mulrady's pioneer cabin.

He remembered it well enough. To a cultivated taste, it was superior to the more pretentious "new house." During the first year of Mulrady's tenancy, the plain square log-cabin had received those additions and attractions which only a tenant can conceive and actual experience suggest; and in this way the hideous right angles were broken with sheds, "lean-to" extensions, until a certain picturesqueness was given to the irregularity of outline, and a home-like

security and companionship to the congregated buildings. It typified the former life of the great capitalist, as the tall new house illustrated the loneliness and isolation that wealth had given him. But the real points of vantage were the years of cultivation and habitation that had warmed and enriched the soil, and evoked the climbing vines and roses that already hid its unpainted boards, rounded its hard outlines, and gave projection and shadow from the pitiless glare of a summer's long sun, or broke the steady beating of the winter rains. It was true that pea and bean poles surrounded it on one side, and the only access to the house was through the cabbage rows that once were the pride and sustenance of the Mulradys. It was this fact, more than any other, that had impelled Mrs. Mulrady to abandon its site; she did not like to read the history of their humble origin reflected in the faces of their visitors as they entered.

Don Caesar tied his horse to the fence, and hurriedly approached the house. The door, however, hospitably opened when he was a few paces from it, and when he reached the threshold he found himself unexpectedly in the presence of two pretty girls. They were evidently Slinn's sisters, whom he had neither thought of nor included in the meeting he had prepared. In spite of his preoccupation, he felt himself suddenly embarrassed, not only by the actual distinction of their beauty, but by a kind of likeness that they seemed to bear to Mamie.

“We saw you coming,” said the elder, unaffectedly. “You are Don Caesar Alvarado. My brother has spoken of you.”

The words recalled Don Caesar to himself and a sense of courtesy. He was not here to quarrel with these fair strangers at their first meeting; he must seek Slinn elsewhere, and at another time. The frankness of his reception and the

allusion to their brother made it appear impossible that they should be either a party to his disappointment, or even aware of it. His excitement melted away before a certain lazy ease, which the consciousness of their beauty seemed to give them. He was able to put a few courteous inquiries, and, thanks to the paragraph in the "Record," to congratulate them upon their father's improvement.

"Oh, pa is a great deal better in his health, and has picked up even in the last few days, so that he is able to walk round with crutches," said the elder sister. "The air here seems to invigorate him wonderfully."

"And you know, Esther," said the younger, "I think he begins to take more notice of things, especially when he is out-of-doors. He looks around on the scenery, and his eye brightens, as if he knew all about it; and sometimes he knits his brows, and looks down so, as if he was trying to remember."

"You know, I suppose," exclaimed Esther, "that since his seizure his memory has been a blank—that is, three or four years of his life seem to have been dropped out of his recollection."

"It might be a mercy sometimes, Senora," said Don Caesar, with a grave sigh, as he looked at the delicate features before him, which recalled the face of the absent Mamie.

"That's not very complimentary," said the younger girl, laughingly; "for pa didn't recognize us, and only remembered us as little girls."

"Vashti!" interrupted Esther, rebukingly; then, turning to Don Caesar, she added, "My sister, Vashti, means

that father remembers more what happened before he came to California, when we were quite young, than he does of the interval that elapsed. Doctor Duchesne says it's a singular case. He thinks that, with his present progress, he will recover the perfect use of his limbs; though his memory may never come back again."

"Unless— You forget what the doctor told us this morning," interrupted Vashti again, briskly.

"I was going to say it," said Esther, a little curtly. "UNLESS he has another stroke. Then he will either die or recover his mind entirely."

Don Caesar glanced at the bright faces, a trifle heightened in color by their eager recital and the slight rivalry of narration, and looked grave. He was a little shocked at a certain lack of sympathy and tenderness towards their unhappy parent. They seemed to him not only to have caught that dry, curious toleration of helplessness which characterizes even relationship in its attendance upon chronic suffering and weakness, but to have acquired an unconscious habit of turning it to account. In his present sensitive condition, he even fancied that they flirted mildly over their parent's infirmity.

"My brother Harry has gone to Red Dog," continued Esther; "he'll be right sorry to have missed you. Mrs. Mulrady spoke to him about you; you seem to have been great friends. I s'pose you knew her daughter, Mamie; I hear she is very pretty."

Although Don Caesar was now satisfied that the Slinns knew nothing of Mamie's singular behavior to him, he felt embarrassed by this conversation. "Miss Mulrady is very pretty," he said, with grave courtesy; "it is a custom of

her race. She left suddenly,” he added with affected calmness.

“I reckon she did calculate to stay here longer—so her mother said; but the whole thing was settled a week ago. I know my brother was quite surprised to hear from Mr. Mulrady that if we were going to decide about this house we must do it at once; he had an idea himself about moving out of the big one into this when they left.”

“Mamie Mulrady hadn’t much to keep her here, considerin’ the money and the good looks she has, I reckon,” said Vashti. “She isn’t the sort of girl to throw herself away in the wilderness, when she can pick and choose elsewhere. I only wonder she ever come back from Sacramento. They talk about papa Mulrady having BUSINESS at San Francisco, and THAT hurrying them off! Depend upon it, that ‘business’ was Mamie herself. Her wish is gospel to them. If she’d wanted to stay and have a farewell party, old Mulrady’s business would have been nowhere.”

“Ain’t you a little rough on Mamie,” said Esther, who had been quietly watching the young man’s face with her large languid eyes, “considering that we don’t know her, and haven’t even the right of friends to criticise?”

“I don’t call it rough,” returned Vashti, frankly, “for I’d do the same if I were in her shoes—and they’re four-and-a-halves, for Harry told me so. Give me her money and her looks, and you wouldn’t catch me hanging round these diggings—goin’ to choir meetings Saturdays, church Sundays, and buggy-riding once a month— for society! No—Mamie’s head was level—you bet!”

Don Caesar rose hurriedly. They would present his compliments to their father, and he would endeavor to find

their brother at Red Dog. He, alas! had neither father, mother, nor sister, but if they would receive his aunt, the Dona Inez Sepulvida, the next Sunday, when she came from mass, she should be honored and he would be delighted. It required all his self-possession to deliver himself of this formal courtesy before he could take his leave, and on the back of his mustang give way to the rage, disgust and hatred of everything connected with Mamie that filled his heart. Conscious of his disturbance, but not entirely appreciating their own share in it, the two girls somewhat wickedly prolonged the interview by following him into the garden.

“Well, if you MUST leave now,” said Esther, at last, languidly, “it ain’t much out of your way to go down through the garden and take a look at pa as you go. He’s somewhere down there, near the woods, and we don’t like to leave him alone too long. You might pass the time of day with him; see if he’s right side up. Vashti and I have got a heap of things to fix here yet; but if anything’s wrong with him, you can call us. So-long.”

Don Caesar was about to excuse himself hurriedly; but that sudden and acute perception of all kindred sorrow which belongs to refined suffering, checked his speech. The loneliness of the helpless old man in this atmosphere of active and youthful selfishness touched him. He bowed assent, and turned aside into one of the long perspectives of bean-poles. The girls watched him until out of sight.

“Well,” said Vashti, “don’t tell ME. But if there wasn’t something between him and that Mamie Mulrady, I don’t know a jilted man when I see him.”

“Well, you needn’t have let him SEE that you knew it, so that any civility of ours would look as if we were ready

to take up with her leavings,” responded Esther, astutely, as the girls reentered the house.

Meantime, the unconscious object of their criticism walked sadly down the old market-garden, whose rude outlines and homely details he once clothed with the poetry of a sensitive man’s first love. Well, it was a common cabbage field and potato patch after all. In his disgust he felt conscious of even the loss of that sense of patronage and superiority which had invested his affection for a girl of meaner condition. His self-respect was humiliated with his love. The soil and dirt of those wretched cabbages had clung to him, but not to her. It was she who had gone higher; it was he who was left in the vulgar ruins of his misplaced passion.

He reached the bottom of the garden without observing any sign of the lonely invalid. He looked up and down the cabbage rows, and through the long perspective of pea-vines, without result. There was a newer trail leading from a gap in the pines to the wooded hollow, which undoubtedly intersected the little path that he and Mamie had once followed from the high road. If the old man had taken this trail he had possibly over-tasked his strength, and there was the more reason why he should continue his search, and render any assistance if required. There was another idea that occurred to him, which eventually decided him to go on. It was that both these trails led to the decayed sycamore stump, and that the older Slinn might have something to do with the mysterious letter. Quickening his steps through the field, he entered the hollow, and reached the intersecting trail as he expected. To the right it lost itself in the dense woods in the direction of the ominous stump; to the left it descended in nearly a straight line to the highway, now plainly visible, as was equally the boulder on which he had last discovered Mamie sitting with young Slinn. If he were not mistaken, there was a figure sitting there now; it was surely a man. And

by that half-bowed, helpless attitude, the object of his search!

It did not take him long to descend the track to the highway and approach the stranger. He was seated with his hands upon his knees, gazing in a vague, absorbed fashion upon the hillside, now crowned with the engine-house and chimney that marked the site of Mulrady's shaft. He started slightly, and looked up, as Don Caesar paused before him. The young man was surprised to see that the unfortunate man was not as old as he had expected, and that his expression was one of quiet and beatified contentment.

"Your daughters told me you were here," said Don Caesar, with gentle respect. "I am Caesar Alvarado, your not very far neighbor; very happy to pay his respects to you as he has to them."

"My daughters?" said the old man, vaguely. "Oh, yes! nice little girls. And my boy Harry. Did you see Harry? Fine little fellow, Harry."

"I am glad to hear that you are better," said Don Caesar, hastily, "and that the air of our country does you no harm. God benefit you, senior," he added, with a profoundly reverential gesture, dropping unconsciously into the religious habit of his youth. "May he protect you, and bring you back to health and happiness!"

"Happiness?" said Slinn, amazedly. "I am happy—very happy! I have everything I want: good air, good food, good clothes, pretty little children, kind friends—" He smiled benignantly at Don Caesar. "God is very good to me!"

Indeed, he seemed very happy; and his face, albeit crowned with white hair, unmarked by care and any disturbing impression, had so much of satisfied youth in it that the grave features of his questioner made him appear the elder. Nevertheless, Don Caesar noticed that his eyes, when withdrawn from him, sought the hillside with the same visionary abstraction.

“It is a fine view, Senor Esslinn,” said Don Caesar.

“It is a beautiful view, sir,” said Slinn, turning his happy eyes upon him for a moment, only to rest them again on the green slope opposite.

“Beyond that hill which you are looking at—not far, Senor Esslinn— I live. You shall come and see me there—you and your family.”

“You—you—live there?” stammered the invalid, with a troubled expression—the first and only change to the complete happiness that had hitherto suffused his face. “You—and your name is—is Ma—”

“Alvarado,” said Don Caesar, gently. Caesar Alvarado.”

“You said Masters,” said the old man, with sudden querulousness.

“No, good friend. I said Alvarado,” returned Don Caesar, gravely.

“If you didn’t say Masters, how could I say it? I don’t know any Masters.”

Don Caesar was silent. In another moment the happy tranquillity returned to Slinn's face; and Don Caesar continued:

“It is not a long walk over the hill, though it is far by the road. When you are better you shall try it. Yonder little trail leads to the top of the hill, and then—”

He stopped, for the invalid's face had again assumed its troubled expression. Partly to change his thoughts, and partly for some inexplicable idea that had suddenly seized him, Don Caesar continued:

“There is a strange old stump near the trail, and in it a hole. In the hole I found this letter.” He stopped again—this time in alarm. Slinn had staggered to his feet with ashen and distorted features, and was glancing at the letter which Don Caesar had drawn from his pocket. The muscles of his throat swelled as if he was swallowing; his lips moved, but no sound issued from them. At last, with a convulsive effort, he regained a disjointed speech, in a voice scarcely audible.

“My letter! my letter! It's mine! Give it me! It's my fortune— all mine! In the tunnel—hill! Masters stole it—stole my fortune! Stole it all! See, see!”

He seized the letter from Don Caesar with trembling hands, and tore it open forcibly: a few dull yellow grains fell from it heavily, like shot, to the ground.

“See, it's true! My letter! My gold! My strike! My—my—my God!”

A tremor passed over his face. The hand that held the letter suddenly dropped sheer and heavy as the gold had

fallen. The whole side of his face and body nearest Don Caesar seemed to drop and sink into itself as suddenly. At the same moment, and without a word, he slipped through Don Caesar's outstretched hands to the ground. Don Caesar bent quickly over him, but no longer than to satisfy himself that he lived and breathed, although helpless. He then caught up the fallen letter, and, glancing over it with flashing eyes, thrust it and the few specimens in his pocket. He then sprang to his feet, so transformed with energy and intelligence that he seemed to have added the lost vitality of the man before him to his own. He glanced quickly up and down the highway. Every moment to him was precious now; but he could not leave the stricken man in the dust of the road; nor could he carry him to the house; nor, having alarmed his daughters, could he abandon his helplessness to their feeble arms. He remembered that his horse was still tied to the garden fence. He would fetch it, and carry the unfortunate man across the saddle to the gate. He lifted him with difficulty to the boulder, and ran rapidly up the road in the direction of his tethered steed. He had not proceeded far when he heard the noise of wheels behind him. It was the up stage coming furiously along. He would have called to the driver for assistance, but even through that fast-sweeping cloud of dust and motion he could see that the man was utterly oblivious of anything but the speed of his rushing chariot, and had even risen in his box to lash the infuriated and frightened animals forward.

An hour later, when the coach drew up at the Red Dog Hotel, the driver descended from the box, white, but taciturn. When he had swallowed a glass of whiskey at a single gulp, he turned to the astonished express agent, who had followed him in.

“One of two things, Jim, hez got to happen,” he said, huskily. “Either that there rock hez got to get off the road, or I have. I’ve seed HIM on it agin!”

CHAPTER FOUR

No further particulars of the invalid's second attack were known than those furnished by Don Caesar's brief statement, that he had found him lying insensible on the boulder. This seemed perfectly consistent with the theory of Doctor Duchesne; and as the young Spaniard left Los Gatos the next day, he escaped not only the active reporter of the "Record," but the perusal of a grateful paragraph in the next day's paper recording his prompt kindness and courtesy. Doctor Duchesne's prognosis, however, seemed at fault; the elder Slinn did not succumb to this second stroke, nor did he recover his reason. He apparently only relapsed into his former physical weakness, losing the little ground he had gained during the last month, and exhibiting no change in his mental condition, unless the fact that he remembered nothing of his seizure and the presence of Don Caesar could be considered as favorable. Doctor Duchesne's gravity seemed to give that significance to this symptom, and his cross-questioning of the patient was characterized by more than his usual curtness.

"You are sure you don't remember walking in the garden before you were ill?" he said. "Come, think again. You must remember that." The old man's eyes wandered restlessly around the room, but he answered by a negative shake of his head. "And you don't remember sitting down on a stone by the road?"

The old man kept his eyes resolutely fixed on the bedclothes before him. "No!" he said, with a certain sharp decision that was new to him.

The doctor's eye brightened. "All right, old man; then don't."

On his way out he took the eldest Miss Slinn aside. "He'll do," he said, grimly: "he's beginning to lie."

"Why, he only said he didn't remember," responded Esther.

"That was because he didn't want to remember," said the doctor, authoritatively. "The brain is acting on some impression that is either painful and unpleasant, or so vague that he can't formulate it; he is conscious of it, and won't attempt it yet. It's a heap better than his old self-satisfied incoherency."

A few days later, when the fact of Slinn's identification with the paralytic of three years ago by the stage-driver became generally known, the doctor came in quite jubilant.

"It's all plain now," he said, decidedly. "That second stroke was caused by the nervous shock of his coming suddenly upon the very spot where he had the first one. It proved that his brain still retained old impressions, but as this first act of his memory was a painful one, the strain was too great. It was mighty unlucky; but it was a good sign."

"And you think, then—" hesitated Harry Slinn.

"I think," said Doctor Duchesne, "that this activity still exists, and the proof of it, as I said before, is that he is trying now to forget it, and avoid thinking of it. You will find that he will fight shy of any allusion to it, and will be cunning enough to dodge it every time."

He certainly did. Whether the doctor's hypothesis was fairly based or not, it was a fact that, when he was first taken out to drive with his watchful physician, he apparently took no notice of the boulder—which still remained on the roadside, thanks to the later practical explanation of the stage-driver's vision—and curtly refused to talk about it. But, more significant to Duchesne, and perhaps more perplexing, was a certain morose abstraction, which took the place of his former vacuity of contentment, and an intolerance of his attendants, which supplanted his old habitual trustfulness to their care, that had been varied only by the occasional querulousness of an invalid. His daughters sometimes found him regarding them with an attention little short of suspicion, and even his son detected a half-suppressed aversion in his interviews with him.

Referring this among themselves to his unfortunate malady, his children, perhaps, justified this estrangement by paying very little attention to it. They were more pleasantly occupied. The two girls succeeded to the position held by Mamie Mulrady in the society of the neighborhood, and divided the attentions of Rough- and-Ready. The young editor of the "Record" had really achieved, through his supposed intimacy with the Mulradys, the good fortune he had jestingly prophesied. The disappearance of Don Caesar was regarded as a virtual abandonment of the field to his rival: and the general opinion was that he was engaged to the millionaire's daughter on a certain probation of work and influence in his prospective father-in-law's interests. He became successful in one or two speculations, the magic of the lucky Mulrady's name befriending him. In the superstition of the mining community, much of this luck was due to his having secured the old cabin.

"To think," remarked one of the augurs of Red Dog, French Pete, a polyglot jester, "that while every fool went to

taking up claims where the gold had already been found no one thought of stepping into the old man's old choux in the cabbage-garden!" Any doubt, however, of the alliance of the families was dissipated by the intimacy that sprang up between the elder Slinn and the millionaire, after the latter's return from San Francisco.

It began in a strange kind of pity for the physical weakness of the man, which enlisted the sympathies of Mulrady, whose great strength had never been deteriorated by the luxuries of wealth, and who was still able to set his workmen an example of hard labor; it was sustained by a singular and superstitious reverence for his mental condition, which, to the paternal Mulrady, seemed to possess that spiritual quality with which popular ignorance invests demented people.

"Then you mean to say that during these three years the vein o' your mind, so to speak, was a lost lead, and sorter dropped out o' sight or follerin'?" queried Mulrady, with infinite seriousness.

"Yes," returned Slinn, with less impatience than he usually showed to questions.

"And durin' that time, when you was dried up and waitin' for rain, I reckon you kinder had visions?"

A cloud passed over Slinn's face.

"Of course, of course!" said Mulrady, a little frightened at his tenacity in questioning the oracle. "Nat'rally, this was private, and not to be talked about. I meant, you had plenty of room for 'em without crowdin'; you kin tell me some day when you're better, and kin sorter select what's points and what ain't."

“Perhaps I may some day,” said the invalid, gloomily, glancing in the direction of his preoccupied daughters; “when we’re alone.”

When his physical strength had improved, and his left arm and side had regained a feeble but slowly gathering vitality, Alvin Mulrady one day surprised the family by bringing the convalescent a pile of letters and accounts, and spreading them on a board before Slinn’s invalid chair, with the suggestion that he should look over, arrange, and docket them. The idea seemed preposterous, until it was found that the old man was actually able to perform this service, and exhibited a degree of intellectual activity and capacity for this kind of work that was unsuspected. Doctor Duchesne was delighted, and divided with admiration between his patient’s progress and the millionaire’s sagacity. “And there are envious people,” said the enthusiastic doctor, “who believe that a man like him, who could conceive of such a plan for occupying a weak intellect without taxing its memory or judgment, is merely a lucky fool! Look here. May be it didn’t require much brains to stumble on a gold mine, and it is a gift of Providence. But, in my experience, Providence don’t go round buyin’ up d——d fools, or investin’ in dead beats.”

When Mr. Slinn, finally, with the aid of crutches, was able to hobble every day to the imposing counting-house and the office of Mr. Mulrady, which now occupied the lower part of the new house, and contained some of its gorgeous furniture, he was installed at a rosewood desk behind Mr. Mulrady’s chair, as his confidential clerk and private secretary. The astonishment of Red Dog and Rough-and-Ready at this singular innovation knew no bounds; but the boldness and novelty of the idea carried everything before it. Judge Butts, the oracle of Rough-and-Ready, delivered its decision: “He’s got a man who’s physically incapable of

running off with his money, and has no memory to run off with his ideas. How could he do better?" Even his own son, Harry, coming upon his father thus installed, was for a moment struck with a certain filial respect, and for a day or two patronized him.

In this capacity Slinn became the confidant not only of Mulrady's business secrets, but of his domestic affairs. He knew that young Mulrady, from a freckle-faced slow country boy, had developed into a freckle-faced fast city man, with coarse habits of drink and gambling. It was through the old man's hands that extravagant bills and shameful claims passed on their way to be cashed by Mulrady; it was he that at last laid before the father one day his signature perfectly forged by the son.

"Your eyes are not ez good ez mine, you know, Slinn," said Mulrady, gravely. "It's all right. I sometimes make my Y's like that. I'd clean forgot to cash that check. You must not think you've got the monopoly of disremembering," he added, with a faint laugh.

Equally through Slinn's hands passed the record of the lavish expenditure of Mrs. Mulrady and the fair Mamie, as well as the chronicle of their movements and fashionable triumphs. As Mulrady had already noticed that Slinn had no confidence with his own family, he did not try to withhold from them these domestic details, possibly as an offset to the dreary catalogue of his son's misdeeds, but more often in the hope of gaining from the taciturn old man some comment that might satisfy his innocent vanity as father and husband, and perhaps dissipate some doubts that were haunting him.

"Twelve hundred dollars looks to be a good figger for a dress, ain't it? But Malviny knows, I reckon, what ought to be worn at the Tooilleries, and she don't want our

Mamie to take a back seat before them furrin' princesses and gran' dukes. It's a slap-up affair, I kalkilate. Let's see. I disremember whether it's an emperor or a king that's rulin' over thar now. It must be suthin' first class and A 1, for Malviny ain't the woman to throw away twelve hundred dollars on any of them small-potato despots! She says Mamie speaks French already like them French Petes. I don't quite make out what she means here. She met Don Caesar in Paris, and she says, 'I think Mamie is nearly off with Don Caesar, who has followed her here. I don't care about her dropping him TOO suddenly; the reason I'll tell you hereafter. I think the man might be a dangerous enemy.' Now, what do you make of this? I allus thought Mamie rather cottoned to him, and it was the old woman who fought shy, thinkin' Mamie would do better. Now, I am agreeable that my gal should marry any one she likes, whether it's a dook or a poor man, as long as he's on the square. I was ready to take Don Caesar; but now things seem to have shifted round. As to Don Caesar's being a dangerous enemy if Mamie won't have him, that's a little too high and mighty for me, and I wonder the old woman don't make him climb down. What do you think?"

"Who is Don Caesar?" asked Slinn.

"The man what picked you up that day. I mean," continued Mulrady, seeing the marks of evident ignorance on the old man's face—"I mean a sort of grave, genteel chap, suthin' between a parson and a circus-rider. You might have seen him round the house talkin' to your gals."

But Slinn's entire forgetfulness of Don Caesar was evidently unfeigned. Whatever sudden accession of memory he had at the time of his attack, the incident that caused it had no part in his recollection. With the exception of these rare intervals of domestic confidences with his crippled

private secretary, Mulrady gave himself up to money-getting. Without any especial faculty for it—an easy prey often to unscrupulous financiers—his unfailing luck, however, carried him safely through, until his very mistakes seemed to be simply insignificant means to a large significant end and a part of his original plan. He sank another shaft, at a great expense, with a view to following the lead he had formerly found, against the opinions of the best mining engineers, and struck the artesian spring he did NOT find at that time, with a volume of water that enabled him not only to work his own mine, but to furnish supplies to his less fortunate neighbors at a vast profit. A league of tangled forest and canyon behind Rough-and-Ready, for which he had paid Don Ramon's heirs an extravagant price in the presumption that it was auriferous, furnished the most accessible timber to build the town, at prices which amply remunerated him. The practical schemes of experienced men, the wildest visions of daring dreams delayed or abortive for want of capital, eventually fell into his hands. Men sneered at his methods, but bought his shares. Some who affected to regard him simply as a man of money were content to get only his name to any enterprise. Courted by his superiors, quoted by his equals, and admired by his inferiors, he bore his elevation equally without ostentation or dignity. Bidden to banquets, and forced by his position as director or president into the usual gastronomic feats of that civilization and period, he partook of simple food, and continued his old habit of taking a cup of coffee with milk and sugar at dinner. Without professing temperance, he drank sparingly in a community where alcoholic stimulation was a custom. With neither refinement nor an extended vocabulary, he was seldom profane, and never indelicate. With nothing of the Puritan in his manner or conversation, he seemed to be as strange to the vices of civilization as he was to its virtues. That such a man should offer little to and receive little from the companionship of women of any kind

was a foregone conclusion. Without the dignity of solitude, he was pathetically alone.

Meantime, the days passed; the first six months of his opulence were drawing to a close, and in that interval he had more than doubled the amount of his discovered fortune. The rainy season set in early. Although it dissipated the clouds of dust under which Nature and Art seemed to be slowly disappearing, it brought little beauty to the landscape at first, and only appeared to lay bare the crudenesses of civilization. The unpainted wooden buildings of Rough-and-Ready, soaked and dripping with rain, took upon themselves a sleek and shining ugliness, as of second-hand garments; the absence of cornices or projections to break the monotony of the long straight lines of downpour made the town appear as if it had been recently submerged, every vestige of ornamentation swept away, and only the bare outlines left. Mud was everywhere; the outer soil seemed to have risen and invaded the houses even to their most secret recesses, as if outraged Nature was trying to revenge herself. Mud was brought into the saloons and barrooms and express offices, on boots, on clothes, on baggage, and sometimes appeared mysteriously in splashes of red color on the walls, without visible conveyance. The dust of six months, closely packed in cornice and carving, yielded under the steady rain a thin yellow paint, that dropped on wayfarers or unexpectedly oozed out of ceilings and walls on the wretched inhabitants within. The outskirts of Rough-and-Ready and the dried hills round Los Gatos did not appear to fare much better; the new vegetation had not yet made much headway against the dead grasses of the summer; the pines in the hollow wept lugubriously into a small rivulet that had sprung suddenly into life near the old trail; everywhere was the sound of dropping, splashing, gurgling, or rushing waters.

More hideous than ever, the new Mulrady house lifted itself against the leaden sky, and stared with all its large-framed, shutterless windows blankly on the prospect, until they seemed to the wayfarer to become mere mirrors set in the walls, reflecting only the watery landscape, and unable to give the least indication of light or heat within. Nevertheless, there was a fire in Mulrady's private office that December afternoon, of a smoky, intermittent variety, that sufficed more to record the defects of hasty architecture than to comfort the millionaire and his private secretary, who had lingered after the early withdrawal of the clerks. For the next day was Christmas, and, out of deference to the near approach of this festivity, a half-holiday had been given to the employees. "They'll want, some of them, to spend their money before to-morrow; and others would like to be able to rise up comfortably drunk Christmas morning," the superintendent had suggested. Mr. Mulrady had just signed a number of checks indicating his largess to those devoted adherents with the same unostentatious, undemonstrative, matter-of-fact manner that distinguished his ordinary business. The men had received it with something of the same manner. A half-humorous "Thank you, sir"—as if to show that, with their patron, they tolerated this deference to a popular custom, but were a little ashamed of giving way to it—expressed their gratitude and their independence.

"I reckon that the old lady and Mamie are having a high old time in some of them gilded pallises in Saint Petersburg or Berlin about this time. Them diamonds that I ordered at Tiffany ought to have reached 'em about now, so that Mamie could cut a swell at Christmas with her war-paint. I suppose it's the style to give presents in furrin' countries ez it is here, and I allowed to the old lady that whatever she orders in that way she is to do in Californy style—no dollar-jewelry and galvanized-watches business. If she wants to make a present to any of them nobles ez has

been purlite to her, it's got to be something that Rough-and-Ready ain't ashamed of. I showed you that pin Mamie bought me in Paris, didn't I? It's just come for my Christmas present. No! I reckon I put it in the safe, for them kind o' things don't suit my style: but s'pose I orter sport it to-morrow. It was mighty thoughtful in Mamie, and it must cost a lump; it's got no slouch of a pearl in it. I wonder what Mamie gave for it?"

"You can easily tell; the bill is here. You paid it yesterday," said Slinn. There was no satire in the man's voice, nor was there the least perception of irony in Mulrady's manner, as he returned quietly—

"That's so; it was suthin' like a thousand francs; but French money, when you pan it out as dollars and cents, don't make so much, after all." There was a few moments' silence, when he continued, in the same tone of voice, "Talkin' o' them things, Slinn, I've got suthin' for you." He stopped suddenly. Ever watchful of any undue excitement in the invalid, he had noticed a slight flush of disturbance pass over his face, and continued carelessly, "But we'll talk it over to-morrow; a day or two don't make much difference to you and me in such things, you know. P'raps I'll drop in and see you. We'll be shut up here."

"Then you're going out somewhere?" asked Slinn, mechanically.

"No," said Mulrady, hesitatingly. It had suddenly occurred to him that he had nowhere to go if he wanted to, and he continued, half in explanation, "I ain't reckoned much on Christmas, myself. Abner's at the Springs; it wouldn't pay him to come here for a day— even if there was anybody here he cared to see. I reckon I'll hang round the shanty, and look after things generally. I haven't been over

the house upstairs to put things to rights since the folks left. But YOU needn't come here, you know."

He helped the old man to rise, assisted him in putting on his overcoat, and then handed him the cane which had lately replaced his crutches.

"Good-by, old man! You musn't trouble yourself to say 'Merry Christmas' now, but wait until you see me again. Take care of yourself."

He slapped him lightly on the shoulder, and went back into his private office. He worked for some time at his desk, and then laid his pen aside, put away his papers methodically, placing a large envelope on his private secretary's vacant table. He then opened the office door and ascended the staircase. He stopped on the first landing to listen to the sound of rain on the glass skylight, that seemed to echo through the empty hall like the gloomy roll of a drum. It was evident that the searching water had found out the secret sins of the house's construction, for there were great fissures of discoloration in the white and gold paper in the corners of the wall. There was a strange odor of the dank forest in the mirrored drawing-room, as if the rain had brought out the sap again from the unseasoned timbers; the blue and white satin furniture looked cold, and the marble mantels and centre tables had taken upon themselves the clamminess of tombstones. Mr. Mulrady, who had always retained his old farmer-like habit of taking off his coat with his hat on entering his own house, and appearing in his shirt-sleeves, to indicate domestic ease and security, was obliged to replace it, on account of the chill. He had never felt at home in this room. Its strangeness had lately been heightened by Mrs. Mulrady's purchase of a family portrait of some one she didn't know, but who, she had alleged, resembled her "Uncle Bob," which hung on the wall beside

some paintings in massive frames. Mr. Mulrady cast a hurried glance at the portrait that, on the strength of a high coat-collar and high top curl—both rolled with equal precision and singular sameness of color—had always glared at Mulrady as if HE was the intruder; and, passing through his wife's gorgeous bedroom, entered the little dressing-room, where he still slept on the smallest of cots, with hastily improvised surroundings, as if he was a bailiff in "possession." He didn't linger here long, but, taking a key from a drawer, continued up the staircase, to the ominous funeral marches of the beating rain on the skylight, and paused on the landing to glance into his son's and daughter's bedrooms, duplicates of the bizarre extravagance below. If he were seeking some characteristic traces of his absent family, they certainly were not here in the painted and still damp blazoning of their later successes. He ascended another staircase, and, passing to the wing of the house, paused before a small door, which was locked. Already the ostentatious decorations of wall and passages were left behind, and the plain lath-and-plaster partition of the attic lay before him. He unlocked the door, and threw it open.

CHAPTER FIVE

The apartment he entered was really only a lumber-room or loft over the wing of the house, which had been left bare and unfinished, and which revealed in its meagre skeleton of beams and joints the hollow sham of the whole structure. But in more violent contrast to the fresher glories of the other part of the house were its contents, which were the heterogeneous collection of old furniture, old luggage, and cast-off clothing, left over from the past life in the old cabin. It was a much plainer record of the simple beginnings of the family than Mrs. Mulrady cared to have remain in evidence, and for that reason it had been relegated to the hidden recesses of the new house, in the hope that it might absorb or digest it. There were old cribs, in which the infant limbs of Mamie and Abner had been tucked up; old looking-glasses, that had reflected their shining, soapy faces, and Mamie's best chip Sunday hat; an old sewing-machine, that had been worn out in active service; old patchwork quilts; an old accordion, to whose long drawn inspirations Mamie had sung hymns; old pictures, books, and old toys. There were one or two old chromos, and, stuck in an old frame, a colored print from the "Illustrated London News" of a Christmas gathering in an old English country house. He stopped and picked up this print, which he had often seen before, gazing at it with a new and singular interest. He wondered if Mamie had seen anything of this kind in England, and why couldn't he have had something like it here, in their own fine house, with themselves and a few friends? He remembered a past Christmas, when he had bought Mamie that now headless doll with the few coins that were left him after buying their frugal Christmas dinner. There was an old spotted hobby-horse that another Christmas had brought to Abner—Abner, who would be driving a fast trotter to-morrow at the Springs!

How everything had changed! How they all had got up in the world, and how far beyond this kind of thing—and yet—yet it would have been rather comfortable to have all been together again here. Would THEY have been more comfortable? No! Yet then he might have had something to do, and been less lonely to-morrow. What of that? He HAD something to do: to look after this immense fortune. What more could a man want, or should he want? It was rather mean in him, able to give his wife and children everything they wanted, to be wanting anything more. He laid down the print gently, after dusting its glass and frame with his silk handkerchief, and slowly left the room.

The drum-beat of the rain followed him down the staircase, but he shut it out with his other thoughts, when he again closed the door of his office. He set diligently to work by the declining winter light, until he was interrupted by the entrance of his Chinese waiter to tell him that supper—which was the meal that Mulrady religiously adhered to in place of the late dinner of civilization— was ready in the dining-room. Mulrady mechanically obeyed the summons; but on entering the room the oasis of a few plates in a desert of white table-cloth which awaited him made him hesitate. In its best aspect, the high dark Gothic mahogany ecclesiastical sideboard and chairs of this room, which looked like the appointments of a mortuary chapel, were not exhilarating; and to-day, in the light of the rain-filmed windows and the feeble rays of a lamp half-obsured by the dark shining walls, it was most depressing.

“You kin take up supper into my office,” said Mulrady, with a sudden inspiration. “I’ll eat it there.”

He ate it there, with his usual healthy appetite, which did not require even the stimulation of company. He had just finished, when his Irish cook—the one female servant of the

house—came to ask permission to be absent that evening and the next day.

“I suppose the likes of your honor won’t be at home on the Christmas Day? And it’s me cousins from the old country at Rough- and-Ready that are invitin’ me.”

“Why don’t you ask them over here?” said Mulrady, with another vague inspiration. “I’ll stand treat.”

“Lord preserve you for a jinerous gintleman! But it’s the likes of them and myself that wouldn’t be at home here on such a day.”

There was so much truth in this that Mulrady checked a sigh as he gave the required permission, without saying that he had intended to remain. He could cook his own breakfast: he had done it before; and it would be something to occupy him. As to his dinner, perhaps he could go to the hotel at Rough-and-Ready. He worked on until the night had well advanced. Then, overcome with a certain restlessness that disturbed him, he was forced to put his books and papers away. It had begun to blow in fitful gusts, and occasionally the rain was driven softly across the panes like the passing of childish fingers. This disturbed him more than the monotony of silence, for he was not a nervous man. He seldom read a book, and the county paper furnished him only the financial and mercantile news which was part of his business. He knew he could not sleep if he went to bed. At last he rose, opened the window, and looked out from pure idleness of occupation. A splash of wheels in the distant muddy road and fragments of a drunken song showed signs of an early wandering reveller. There were no lights to be seen at the closed works; a profound darkness encompassed the house, as if the distant pines in the hollow had moved up and round it. The silence was broken now only by the

occasional sighing of wind and rain. It was not an inviting night for a perfunctory walk; but an idea struck him—he would call upon the Slinns, and anticipate his next day's visit! They would probably have company, and be glad to see him: he could tell the girls of Mamie and her success. That he had not thought of this before was a proof of his usual self-contained isolation, that he thought of it now was an equal proof that he was becoming at last accessible to loneliness. He was angry with himself for what seemed to him a selfish weakness.

He returned to his office, and, putting the envelope that had been lying on Slinn's desk in his pocket, threw a serape over his shoulders, and locked the front door of the house behind him. It was well that the way was a familiar one to him, and that his feet instinctively found the trail, for the night was very dark. At times he was warned only by the gurgling of water of little rivulets that descended the hill and crossed his path. Without the slightest fear, and with neither imagination nor sensitiveness, he recalled how, the winter before, one of Don Caesar's vaqueros, crossing this hill at night, had fallen down the chasm of a landslip caused by the rain, and was found the next morning with his neck broken in the gully. Don Caesar had to take care of the man's family. Suppose such an accident should happen to him? Well, he had made his will. His wife and children would be provided for, and the work of the mine would go on all the same; he had arranged for that. Would anybody miss him? Would his wife, or his son, or his daughter? No. He felt such a sudden and overwhelming conviction of the truth of this that he stopped as suddenly as if the chasm had opened before him. No! It was the truth. If he were to disappear forever in the darkness of the Christmas night there was none to feel his loss. His wife would take care of Mamie; his son would take care of himself, as he had before—relieved of even the scant paternal authority he rebelled against. A more imaginative

man than Mulrady would have combated or have followed out this idea, and then dismissed it; to the millionaire's matter-of-fact mind it was a deduction that, having once presented itself to his perception, was already a recognized fact. For the first time in his life he felt a sudden instinct of something like aversion towards his family, a feeling that even his son's dissipation and criminality had never provoked. He hurried on angrily through the darkness.

It was very strange; the old house should be almost before him now, across the hollow, yet there were no indications of light! It was not until he actually reached the garden fence, and the black bulk of shadow rose out against the sky, that he saw a faint ray of light from one of the lean-to windows. He went to the front door and knocked. After waiting in vain for a reply, he knocked again. The second knock proving equally futile, he tried the door; it was unlocked, and, pushing it open, he walked in. The narrow passage was quite dark, but from his knowledge of the house he knew the "lean-to" was next to the kitchen, and, passing through the dining-room into it, he opened the door of the little room from which the light proceeded. It came from a single candle on a small table, and beside it, with his eyes moodily fixed on the dying embers of the fire, sat old Slinn. There was no other light nor another human being in the whole house.

For the instant Mulrady, forgetting his own feelings in the mute picture of the utter desolation of the helpless man, remained speechless on the threshold. Then, recalling himself, he stepped forward and laid his hand gayly on the bowed shoulders.

"Rouse up out o' this, old man! Come! this won't do. Look! I've run over here in the rain, jist to have a sociable time with you all."

“I knew it,” said the old man, without looking up; “I knew you’d come.”

“You knew I’d come?” echoed Mulrady, with an uneasy return of the strange feeling of awe with which he regarded Slinn’s abstraction.

“Yes; you were alone—like myself—all alone!”

“Then, why in thunder didn’t you open the door or sing out just now?” he said, with an affected brusquerie to cover his uneasiness. “Where’s your daughters?”

“Gone to Rough-and-Ready to a party.”

“And your son?”

“He never comes here when he can amuse himself elsewhere.”

“Your children might have stayed home on Christmas Eve.”

“So might yours.”

He didn’t say this impatiently, but with a certain abstracted conviction far beyond any suggestion of its being a retort. Mulrady did not appear to notice it.

“Well, I don’t see why us old folks can’t enjoy ourselves without them,” said Mulrady, with affected cheerfulness. “Let’s have a good time, you and me. Let’s see—you haven’t any one you can send to my house, hev you?”

“They took the servant with them,” said Slinn, briefly. “There is no one here.”

“All right,” said the millionaire, briskly. “I’ll go myself. Do you think you can manage to light up a little more, and build a fire in the kitchen while I’m gone? It used to be mighty comfortable in the old times.”

He helped the old man to rise from his chair, and seemed to have infused into him some of his own energy. He then added, “Now, don’t you get yourself down again into that chair until I come back,” and darted out into the night once more.

In a quarter of an hour he returned with a bag on his broad shoulders, which one of his porters would have shrunk from lifting, and laid it before the blazing hearth of the now lighted kitchen. “It’s something the old woman got for her party, that didn’t come off,” he said, apologetically. “I reckon we can pick out enough for a spread. That darned Chinaman wouldn’t come with me,” he added, with a laugh, “because, he said, he’d knocked off work ‘allege same, Mellican man!’ Look here, Slinn,” he said, with a sudden decisiveness, “my pay-roll of the men around here don’t run short of a hundred and fifty dollars a day, and yet I couldn’t get a hand to help me bring this truck over for my Christmas dinner.”

“Of course,” said Slinn, gloomily.

“Of course; so it oughter be,” returned Mulrady, shortly. “Why, it’s only their one day out of 364; and I can have 363 days off, as I am their boss. I don’t mind a man’s being independent,” he continued, taking off his coat and beginning to unpack his sack—a common “gunny

bag”—used for potatoes. “We’re independent ourselves, ain’t we, Slinn?”

His good spirits, which had been at first labored and affected, had become natural. Slinn, looking at his brightened eye and fresher color, could not help thinking he was more like his own real self at this moment than in his counting-house and offices—with all his simplicity as a capitalist. A less abstracted and more observant critic than Slinn would have seen in this patient aptitude for real work, and the recognition of the force of petty detail, the dominance of the old market-gardener in his former humble, as well as his later more ambitious, successes.

“Heaven keep us from being dependent upon our children!” said Slinn, darkly.

“Let the young ones alone to-night; we can get along without them, as they can without us,” said Mulrady, with a slight twinge as he thought of his reflections on the hillside. “But look here, there’s some champagne and them sweet cordials that women like; there’s jellies and such like stuff, about as good as they make ‘em, I reckon; and preserves, and tongues, and spiced beef—take your pick! Stop, let’s spread them out.” He dragged the table to the middle of the floor, and piled the provisions upon it. They certainly were not deficient in quality or quantity. “Now, Slinn, wade in.”

“I don’t feel hungry,” said the invalid, who had lapsed again into a chair before the fire.

“No more do I,” said Mulrady; “but I reckon it’s the right thing to do about this time. Some folks think they can’t be happy without they’re getting outside o’ suthin’, and my directors down at ‘Frisco can’t do any business without a dinner. Take some champagne, to begin with.”

He opened a bottle, and filled two tumblers. "It's past twelve o'clock, old man, so here's a merry Christmas to you, and both of us ez is here. And here's another to our families—ez isn't."

They both drank their wine stolidly. The rain beat against the windows sharply, but without the hollow echoes of the house on the hill. "I must write to the old woman and Mamie, and say that you and me had a high old time on Christmas Eve."

"By ourselves," added the invalid.

Mr. Mulrady coughed. "Nat'rally—by ourselves. And her provisions," he added, with a laugh. "We're really beholden to HER for 'em. If she hadn't thought of having them—"

"For somebody else, you wouldn't have had them—would you?" said Slinn, slowly, gazing at the fire.

"No," said Mulrady, dubiously. After a pause he began more vivaciously, and as if to shake off some disagreeable thought that was impressing him, "But I mustn't forget to give you YOUR Christmas, old man, and I've got it right here with me." He took the folded envelope from his pocket, and, holding it in his hand with his elbow on the table, continued, "I don't mind telling you what idea I had in giving you what I'm goin' to give you now. I've been thinking about it for a day or two. A man like you don't want money—you wouldn't spend it. A man like you don't want stocks or fancy investments, for you couldn't look after them. A man like you don't want diamonds and jewellery, nor a gold-headed cane, when it's got to be used as a crutch. No, sir. What you want is suthin' that won't run away from you; that is always there before you and won't wear out, and

will last after you're gone. That's land! And if it wasn't that I have sworn never to sell or give away this house and that garden, if it wasn't that I've held out agin the old woman and Mamie on that point, you should have THIS house and THAT garden. But, mebbe, for the same reason that I've told you, I want that land to keep for myself. But I've selected four acres of the hill this side of my shaft, and here's the deed of it. As soon as you're ready, I'll put you up a house as big as this—that shall be yours, with the land, as long as you live, old man; and after that your children's."

"No; not theirs!" broke in the old man, passionately. "Never!"

Mulrady recoiled for an instant in alarm at the sudden and unexpected vehemence of his manner, "Go slow, old man; go slow," he said, soothingly. "Of course, you'll do with your own as you like." Then, as if changing the subject, he went on cheerfully: "Perhaps you'll wonder why I picked out that spot on the hillside. Well, first, because I reserved it after my strike in case the lead should run that way, but it didn't. Next, because when you first came here you seemed to like the prospect. You used to sit there looking at it, as if it reminded you of something. You never said it did. They say you was sitting on that boulder there when you had that last attack, you know; but," he added, gently, "you've forgotten all about it."

"I have forgotten nothing," said Slinn, rising, with a choking voice. "I wish to God I had; I wish to God I could!"

He was on his feet now, supporting himself by the table. The subtle generous liquor he had drunk had evidently shaken his self-control, and burst those voluntary bonds he had put upon himself for the last six months; the insidious stimulant had also put a strange vigor into his blood and

nerves. His face was flushed, but not distorted; his eyes were brilliant, but not fixed; he looked as he might have looked to Masters in his strength three years before on that very hillside.

“Listen to me, Alvin Mulrady,” he said, leaning over him with burning eyes. “Listen, while I have brain to think and strength to utter, why I have learnt to distrust, fear, and hate them! You think you know my story. Well, hear the truth from ME to-night, Alvin Mulrady, and do not wonder if I have cause.”

He stopped, and, with pathetic inefficiency, passed the fingers and inward-turned thumb of his paralyzed hand across his mouth, as if to calm himself. “Three years ago I was a miner, but not a miner like you! I had experience, I had scientific knowledge, I had a theory, and the patience and energy to carry it out. I selected a spot that had all the indications, made a tunnel, and, without aid, counsel or assistance of any kind, worked it for six months, without rest or cessation, and with scarcely food enough to sustain my body. Well, I made a strike; not like you, Mulrady, not a blunder of good luck, a fool’s fortune—there, I don’t blame you for it—but in perfect demonstration of my theory, the reward of my labor. It was no pocket, but a vein, a lead, that I had regularly hunted down and found—a fortune!

“I never knew how hard I had worked until that morning; I never knew what privations I had undergone until that moment of my success, when I found I could scarcely think or move! I staggered out into the open air. The only human soul near me was a disappointed prospector, a man named Masters, who had a tunnel not far away. I managed to conceal from him my good fortune and my feeble state, for I was suspicious of him—of any one; and as he was going away that day I thought I could keep my secret until he was

gone. I was dizzy and confused, but I remember that I managed to write a letter to my wife, telling her of my good fortune, and begging her to come to me; and I remember that I saw Masters go. I don't remember anything else. They picked me up on the road, near that boulder, as you know."

"I know," said Mulrady, with a swift recollection of the stage-driver's account of his discovery.

"They say," continued Slinn, tremblingly, "that I never recovered my senses or consciousness for nearly three years; they say I lost my memory completely during my illness, and that by God's mercy, while I lay in that hospital, I knew no more than a babe; they say, because I could not speak or move, and only had my food as nature required it, that I was an imbecile, and that I never really came to my senses until after my son found me in the hospital. They SAY that—but I tell you to-night, Alvin Mulrady," he said, raising his voice to a hoarse outcry, "I tell you that it is a lie! I came to my senses a week after I lay on that hospital cot; I kept my senses and memory ever after during the three years that I was there, until Harry brought his cold, hypocritical face to my bedside and recognized me. Do you understand? I, the possessor of millions, lay there a pauper. Deserted by wife and children—a spectacle for the curious, a sport for the doctors—AND I KNEW IT! I heard them speculate on the cause of my helplessness. I heard them talk of excesses and indulgences—I, that never knew wine or woman! I heard a preacher speak of the finger of God, and point to me. May God curse him!"

"Go slow, old man; go slow," said Mulrady, gently.

"I heard them speak of me as a friendless man, an outcast, a criminal—a being whom no one would claim. They were right; no one claimed me. The friends of others

visited them; relations came and took away their kindred; a few lucky ones got well; a few, equally lucky, died! I alone lived on, uncared for, deserted.

“The first year,” he went on more rapidly, “I prayed for their coming. I looked for them every day. I never lost hope. I said to myself, ‘She has not got my letter; but when the time passes she will be alarmed by my silence, and then she will come or send some one to seek me.’ A young student got interested in my case, and, by studying my eyes, thought that I was not entirely imbecile and unconscious. With the aid of an alphabet, he got me to spell my name and town in Illinois, and promised by signs to write to my family. But in an evil moment I told him of my cursed fortune, and in that moment I saw that he thought me a fool and an idiot. He went away, and I saw him no more. Yet I still hoped. I dreamed of their joy at finding me, and the reward that my wealth would give them. Perhaps I was a little weak still, perhaps a little flighty, too, at times; but I was quite happy that year, even in my disappointment, for I had still hope!”

He paused, and again composed his face with his paralyzed hand; but his manner had become less excited, and his voice was stronger.

“A change must have come over me the second year, for I only dreaded their coming now and finding me so altered. A horrible idea that they might, like the student, believe me crazy if I spoke of my fortune made me pray to God that they might not reach me until after I had regained my health and strength—and found my fortune. When the third year found me still there—I no longer prayed for them—I cursed them! I swore to myself that they should never enjoy my wealth; but I wanted to live, and let them know I had it. I found myself getting stronger; but as I had no money, no friends, and nowhere to go, I concealed my

real condition from the doctors, except to give them my name, and to try to get some little work to do to enable me to leave the hospital and seek my lost treasure. One day I found out by accident that it had been discovered! You understand—my treasure!—that had cost me years of labor and my reason; had left me a helpless, forgotten pauper. That gold I had never enjoyed had been found and taken possession of by another!”

He checked an exclamation from Mulrady with his hand. “They say they picked me up senseless from the floor, where I must have fallen when I heard the news—I don’t remember—I recall nothing until I was confronted, nearly three weeks after, by my son, who had called at the hospital, as a reporter for a paper, and had accidentally discovered me through my name and appearance. He thought me crazy, or a fool. I didn’t undeceive him. I did not tell him the story of the mine to excite his doubts and derision, or, worse (if I could bring proof to claim it), have it perhaps pass into his ungrateful hands. No; I said nothing. I let him bring me here. He could do no less, and common decency obliged him to do that.”

“And what proof could you show of your claim?” asked Mulrady, gravely.

“If I had that letter—if I could find Masters,” began Slinn, vaguely.

“Have you any idea where the letter is, or what has become of Masters?” continued Mulrady, with a matter-of-fact gravity, that seemed to increase Slinn’s vagueness and excite his irritability.

“I don’t know—I sometimes think—” He stopped, sat down again, and passed his hands across his forehead. “I

have seen the letter somewhere since. Yes," he went on, with sudden vehemence, "I know it, I have seen it! I—" His brows knitted, his features began to work convulsively; he suddenly brought his paralyzed hand down, partly opened, upon the table. "I WILL remember where."

"Go slow, old man; go slow."

"You asked me once about my visions. Well, that is one of them. I remember a man somewhere showing me that letter. I have taken it from his hands and opened it, and knew it was mine by the specimens of gold that were in it. But where—or when—or what became of it, I cannot tell. It will come to me—it MUST come to me soon."

He turned his eyes upon Mulrady, who was regarding him with an expression of grave curiosity, and said bitterly, "You think me crazy. I know it. It needed only this."

"Where is this mine," asked Mulrady, without heeding him.

The old man's eyes swiftly sought the ground.

"It is a secret, then?"

"No."

"You have spoken of it to any one?"

"No."

"Not to the man who possesses it?"

"No."

“Why?”

“Because I wouldn’t take it from him.”

“Why wouldn’t you?”

“Because that man is yourself!”

In the instant of complete silence that followed they could hear that the monotonous patter of rain on the roof had ceased.

“Then all this was in MY shaft, and the vein I thought I struck there was YOUR lead, found three years ago in YOUR tunnel. Is that your idea?”

“Yes.”

“Then I don’t sabe why you don’t want to claim it.”

“I have told you why I don’t want it for my children. I go further, now, and I tell you, Alvin Mulrady, that I was willing that your children should squander it, as they were doing. It has only been a curse to me; it could only be a curse to them; but I thought you were happy in seeing it feed selfishness and vanity. You think me bitter and hard. Well, I should have left you in your fool’s paradise, but that I saw to-night, when you came here, that your eyes had been opened like mine. You, the possessor of my wealth, my treasure, could not buy your children’s loving care and company with your millions, any more than I could keep mine in my poverty. You were to-night lonely and forsaken, as I was. We were equal, for the first time in our lives. If that cursed gold had dropped down the shaft between us into the hell from which it sprang, we might have clasped hands like brothers across the chasm.”

Mulrady, who in a friendly show of being at his ease had not yet resumed his coat, rose in his shirt-sleeves, and, standing before the hearth, straightened his square figure by drawing down his waistcoat on each side with two powerful thumbs. After a moment's contemplative survey of the floor between him and the speaker, he raised his eyes to Slinn. They were small and colorless; the forehead above them was low, and crowned with a shock of tawny reddish hair; even the rude strength of his lower features was enfeebled by a long, straggling, goat-like beard; but for the first time in his life the whole face was impressed and transformed with a strong and simple dignity.

“Ez far ez I kin see, Slinn,” he said, gravely, “the pint between you and me ain’t to be settled by our children, or wot we allow is doo and right from them to us. Afore we preach at them for playing in the slumgullion, and gettin’ themselves splashed, perhaps we mout ez well remember that that thar slumgullion comes from our own sluice-boxes, where we wash our gold. So we’ll just put THEM behind us, so,” he continued, with a backward sweep of his powerful hand towards the chimney, “and goes on. The next thing that crops up ahead of us is your three years in the hospital, and wot you went through at that time. I ain’t sayin’ it wasn’t rough on you, and that you didn’t have it about as big as it’s made; but ez you’ll allow that you’d hev had that for three years, whether I’d found your mine or whether I hadn’t, I think we can put THAT behind us, too. There’s nothin’ now left to prospect but your story of your strike. Well, take your own proofs. Masters is not here; and if he was, accordin’ to your own story, he knows nothin’ of your strike that day, and could only prove you were a disappointed prospector in a tunnel; your letter—that the person you wrote to never got—YOU can’t produce; and if you did, would be only your own story without proof! There is not a business man ez would look at your claim; there isn’t a friend of yours that

wouldn't believe you were crazy, and dreamed it all; there isn't a rival of yours ez wouldn't say ez you'd invented it. Slinn, I'm a business man—I am your friend—I am your rival—but I don't think you're lyin'—I don't think you're crazy—and I'm not sure your claim ain't a good one!

“Ef you reckon from that that I'm goin' to hand you over the mine to-morrow,” he went on, after a pause, raising his hand with a deprecating gesture, “you're mistaken. For your own sake, and the sake of my wife and children, you've got to prove it more clearly than you hev; but I promise you that from this night forward I will spare neither time nor money to help you to do it. I have more than doubled the amount that you would have had, had you taken the mine the day you came from the hospital. When you prove to me that your story is true—and we will find some way to prove it, if it IS true—that amount will be yours at once, without the need of a word from law or lawyers. If you want my name to that in black and white, come to the office to-morrow, and you shall have it.”

“And you think I'll take it now?” said the old man passionately. “Do you think that your charity will bring back my dead wife, the three years of my lost life, the love and respect of my children? Or do you think that your own wife and children, who deserted you in your wealth, will come back to you in your poverty? No! Let the mine stay, with its curse, where it is—I'll have none of it!”

“Go slow, old man; go slow,” said Mulrady, quietly, putting on his coat. “You will take the mine if it is yours; if it isn't, I'll keep it. If it is yours, you will give your children a chance to sho what they can do for you in your sudden prosperity, as I shall give mine a chance to show how they can stand reverse and disappointment. If my head is level—and I reckon it is—they'll both pan out all right.”

He turned and opened the door. With a quick revulsion of feeling, Slinn suddenly seized Mulrady's hand between both of his own, and raised it to his lips. Mulrady smiled, disengaged his hand gently, and saying soothingly, "Go slow, old man; go slow," closed the door behind him, and passed out into the clear Christmas dawn.

For the stars, with the exception of one that seemed to sparkle brightly over the shaft of his former fortunes, were slowly paling. A burden seemed to have fallen from his square shoulders as he stepped out sturdily into the morning air. He had already forgotten the lonely man behind him, for he was thinking only of his wife and daughter. And at the same moment they were thinking of him; and in their elaborate villa overlooking the blue Mediterranean at Cannes were discussing, in the event of Mamie's marriage with Prince Rosso e Negro, the possibility of Mr. Mulrady's paying two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the gambling debts of that unfortunate but deeply conscientious nobleman.

CHAPTER SIX

When Alvin Mulrady reentered his own house, he no longer noticed its loneliness. Whether the events of the last few hours had driven it from his mind, or whether his late reflections had repeopled it with his family under pleasanter auspices, it would be difficult to determine. Destitute as he was of imagination, and matter-of-fact in his judgments, he realized his new situation as calmly as he would have considered any business proposition. While he was decided to act upon his moral convictions purely, he was prepared to submit the facts of Slinn's claim to the usual patient and laborious investigation of his practical mind. It was the least he could do to justify the ready and almost superstitious assent he had given to Slinn's story.

When he had made a few memoranda at his desk by the growing light, he again took the key of the attic, and ascended to the loft that held the tangible memories of his past life. If he was still under the influence of his reflections, it was with very different sensations that he now regarded them. Was it possible that these ashes might be warmed again, and these scattered embers rekindled? His practical sense said No! whatever his wish might have been. A sudden chill came over him; he began to realize the terrible change that was probable, more by the impossibility of his accepting the old order of things than by his voluntarily abandoning the new. His wife and children would never submit. They would go away from this place, far away, where no reminiscence of either former wealth or former poverty could obtrude itself upon them. Mamie—his Mamie—should never go back to the cabin, since desecrated by Slinn's daughters, and take their places. No! Why should

she?— because of the half-sick, half-crazy dreams of an old vindictive man?

He stopped suddenly. In moodily turning over a heap of mining clothing, blankets, and india-rubber boots, he had come upon an old pickaxe—the one he had found in the shaft; the one he had carefully preserved for a year, and then forgotten! Why had he not remembered it before? He was frightened, not only at this sudden resurrection of the proof he was seeking, but at his own fateful forgetfulness. Why had he never thought of this when Slinn was speaking? A sense of shame, as if he had voluntarily withheld it from the wronged man, swept over him. He was turning away, when he was again startled.

This time it was by a voice from below—a voice calling him— Slinn's voice. How had the crippled man got here so soon, and what did he want? He hurriedly laid aside the pick, which, in his first impulse, he had taken to the door of the loft with him, and descended the stairs. The old man was standing at the door of his office awaiting him.

As Mulrady approached, he trembled violently, and clung to the doorpost for support.

“I had to come over, Mulrady,” he said, in a choked voice; “I could stand it there no longer. I've come to beg you to forget all that I have said; to drive all thought of what passed between us last night out of your head and mine forever! I've come to ask you to swear with me that neither of us will ever speak of this again forever. It is not worth the happiness I have had in your friendship for the last half-year; it is not worth the agony I have suffered in its loss in the last half-hour.”

Mulrady grasped his outstretched hand. "P'raps," he said, gravely, "there mayn't be any use for another word, if you can answer one now. Come with me. No matter," he added, as Slinn moved with difficulty; "I will help you."

He half supported, half lifted the paralyzed man up the three flights of stairs, and opened the door of the loft. The pick was leaning against the wall, where he had left it. "Look around, and see if you recognize anything."

The old man's eyes fell upon the implement in a half-frightened way, and then lifted themselves interrogatively to Mulrady's face.

"Do you know that pick?"

Slinn raised it in his trembling hands. "I think I do; and yet—"

"Slinn! is it yours?"

"No," he said hurriedly.

"Then what makes you think you know it?"

"It has a short handle like one I've seen."

"And is isn't yours?"

"No. The handle of mine was broken and spliced. I was too poor to buy a new one."

"Then you say that this pick which I found in my shaft is not yours?"

"Yes."

“Slinn!”

The old man passed his hand across his forehead, looked at Mulrady, and dropped his eyes. “It is not mine,” he said simply.

“That will do,” said Mulrady, gravely.

“And you will not speak of this again?” said the old man, timidly.

“I promise you—not until I have some more evidence.”

He kept his word, but not before he had extorted from Slinn as full a description of Masters as his imperfect memory and still more imperfect knowledge of his former neighbor could furnish. He placed this, with a large sum of money and the promise of a still larger reward, in the hands of a trustworthy agent. When this was done he resumed his old relations with Slinn, with the exception that the domestic letters of Mrs. Mulrady and Mamie were no longer a subject of comment, and their bills no longer passed through his private secretary’s hands.

Three months passed; the rainy season had ceased, the hillsides around Mulrady’s shaft were bridal-like with flowers; indeed, there were rumors of an approaching fashionable marriage in the air, and vague hints in the “Record” that the presence of a distinguished capitalist might soon be required abroad. The face of that distinguished man did not, however, reflect the gayety of nature nor the anticipation of happiness; on the contrary, for the past few weeks, he had appeared disturbed and anxious, and that rude tranquillity which had characterized him was

wanting. People shook their heads; a few suggested speculations; all agreed on extravagance.

One morning, after office hours, Slinn, who had been watching the careworn face of his employer, suddenly rose and limped to his side.

“We promised each other,” he said, in a voice trembling with emotion; “never to allude to our talk of Christmas Eve again unless we had other proofs of what I told you then. We have none; I don’t believe we’ll ever have any more. I don’t care if we ever do, and I break that promise now because I cannot bear to see you unhappy and know that this is the cause.”

Mulrady made a motion of deprecation, but the old man continued—

“You are unhappy, Alvin Mulrady. You are unhappy because you want to give your daughter a dowry of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and you will not use the fortune that you think may be mine.”

“Who’s been talking about a dowry?” asked Mulrady, with an angry flush.

“Don Caesar Alvarado told my daughter.”

“Then that is why he has thrown off on me since he returned,” said Mulrady, with sudden small malevolence, “just that he might unload his gossip because Mamie wouldn’t have him. The old woman was right in warnin’ me agin him.”

The outburst was so unlike him, and so dwarfed his large though common nature with its littleness, that it was

easy to detect its feminine origin, although it filled Slinn with vague alarm.

“Never mind him,” said the old man, hastily; “what I wanted to say now is that I abandon everything to you and yours. There are no proofs; there never will be any more than what we know, than what we have tested and found wanting. I swear to you that, except to show you that I have not lied and am not crazy, I would destroy them on their way to your hands. Keep the money, and spend it as you will. Make your daughter happy, and, through her, yourself. You have made me happy through your liberality; don’t make me suffer through your privation.”

“I tell you what, old man,” said Mulrady, rising to his feet, with an awkward mingling of frankness and shame in his manner and accent, “I should like to pay that money for Mamie, and let her be a princess, if it would make her happy. I should like to shut the lantern jaws of that Don Caesar, who’d be too glad if anything happened to break off Mamie’s match. But I shouldn’t touch that capital—unless you’d lend it to me. If you’ll take a note from me, payable if the property ever becomes yours, I’d thank you. A mortgage on the old house and garden, and the lands I bought of Don Caesar, outside the mine, will screen you.”

“If that pleases you,” said the old man, with a smile, “have your way; and if I tear up the note, it does not concern you.”

It did please the distinguished capitalist of Rough-and-Ready; for the next few days his face wore a brightened expression, and he seemed to have recovered his old tranquillity. There was, in fact, a slight touch of consequence in his manner, the first ostentation he had ever indulged in, when he was informed one morning at his private office that

Don Caesar Alvarado was in the counting-house, desiring a few moments' conference. "Tell him to come in," said Mulrady, shortly. The door opened upon Don Caesar—erect, sallow, and grave. Mulrady had not seen him since his return from Europe, and even his inexperienced eyes were struck with the undeniable ease and grace with which the young Spanish-American had assimilated the style and fashion of an older civilization. It seemed rather as if he had returned to a familiar condition than adopted a new one.

"Take a cheer," said Mulrady.

The young man looked at Slinn with quietly persistent significance.

"You can talk all the same," said Mulrady, accepting the significance. "He's my private secretary."

"It seems that for that reason we might choose another moment for our conversation," returned Don Caesar, haughtily. "Do I understand you cannot see me now?"

Mulrady hesitated, he had always revered and recognized a certain social superiority in Don Ramon Alvarado; somehow his son—a young man of half his age, and once a possible son-in-law—appeared to claim that recognition also. He rose, without a word, and preceded Don Caesar up-stairs into the drawing-room. The alien portrait on the wall seemed to evidently take sides with Don Caesar, as against the common intruder, Mulrady.

"I hoped the Senora Mulrady might have saved me this interview," said the young man, stiffly; "or at least have given you some intimation of the reason why I seek it. As you just now proposed my talking to you in the presence of

the unfortunate Senor Esslinn himself, it appears she has not.”

“I don’t know what you’re driving at, or what Mrs. Mulrady’s got to do with Slinn or you,” said Mulrady, in angry uneasiness.

“Do I understand,” said Don Caesar, sternly, “that Senora Mulrady has not told you that I entrusted to her an important letter, belonging to Senor Esslinn, which I had the honor to discover in the wood six months ago, and which she said she would refer to you?”

“Letter?” echoed Mulrady, slowly; “my wife had a letter of Slinn’s?”

Don Caesar regarded the millionaire attentively. “It is as I feared,” he said, gravely. “You do not know or you would not have remained silent.” He then briefly recounted the story of his finding Slinn’s letter, his exhibition of it to the invalid, its disastrous effect upon him, and his innocent discovery of the contents. “I believed myself at that time on the eve of being allied with your family, Senor Mulrady,” he said, haughtily; “and when I found myself in the possession of a secret which affected its integrity and good name, I did not choose to leave it in the helpless hands of its imbecile owner, or his sillier children, but proposed to trust it to the care of the Senora, that she and you might deal with it as became your honor and mine. I followed her to Paris, and gave her the letter there. She affected to laugh at any pretension of the writer, or any claim he might have on your bounty; but she kept the letter, and, I fear, destroyed it. You will understand, Senor Mulrady, that when I found that my attentions were no longer agreeable to your daughter, I had no longer the right to speak to you on the subject, nor could I, without misapprehension, force her to return it. I should

have still kept the secret to myself, if I had not since my return here made the nearer acquaintance of Senor Esslinn's daughters. I cannot present myself at his house, as a suitor for the hand of the Senorita Vashti, until I have asked his absolution for my complicity in the wrong that has been done to him. I cannot, as a caballero, do that without your permission. It is for that purpose I am here."

It needed only this last blow to complete the humiliation that whitened Mulrady's face. But his eye was none the less clear and his voice none the less steady as he turned to Don Caesar.

"You know perfectly the contents of that letter?"

"I have kept a copy of it."

"Come with me."

He preceded his visitor down the staircase and back into his private office. Slinn looked up at his employer's face in unrestrained anxiety. Mulrady sat down at his desk, wrote a few hurried lines, and rang a bell. A manager appeared from the counting-room.

"Send that to the bank."

He wiped his pen as methodically as if he had not at that moment countermanded the order to pay his daughter's dowry, and turned quietly to Slinn.

"Don Caesar Alvarado has found the letter you wrote your wife on the day you made your strike in the tunnel that is now my shaft. He gave the letter to Mrs. Mulrady; but he has kept a copy."

Unheeding the frightened gesture of entreaty from Slinn, equally with the unfeigned astonishment of Don Caesar, who was entirely unprepared for this revelation of Mulrady's and Slinn's confidences, he continued, "He has brought the copy with him. I reckon it would be only square for you to compare it with what you remember of the original."

In obedience to a gesture from Mulrady, Don Caesar mechanically took from his pocket a folded paper, and handed it to the paralytic. But Slinn's trembling fingers could scarcely unfold the paper; and as his eyes fell upon its contents, his convulsive lips could not articulate a word.

"P'raps I'd better read it for you," said Mulrady, gently. "You kin follow me and stop me when I go wrong."

He took the paper, and, in dead silence, read as follows:

DEAR WIFE—I've just struck gold in my tunnel, and you must get ready to come here with the children, at once. It was after six months' hard work; and I'm so weak I... It's a fortune for us all. We should be rich even if it were only a branch vein dipping west towards the next tunnel, instead of dipping east, according to my theory—

"Stop!" said Slinn, in a voice that shook the room.

Mulrady looked up.

“It’s wrong, ain’t it?” he asked, anxiously; “it should be EAST towards the next tunnel.”

“No! IT’S RIGHT! I am wrong! We’re all wrong!”

Slinn had risen to his feet, erect and inspired. “Don’t you see,” he almost screamed, with passionate vehemence, “it’s MASTERS’ ABANDONED TUNNEL your shaft has struck? Not mine! It was Masters’ pick you found! I know it now!”

“And your own tunnel?” said Mulrady, springing to his feet in excitement. “And YOUR strike?”

“Is still there!”

The next instant, and before another question could be asked, Slinn had darted from the room. In the exaltation of that supreme discovery he regained the full control of his mind and body. Mulrady and Don Caesar, no less excited, followed him precipitately, and with difficulty kept up with his feverish speed. Their way lay along the base of the hill below Mulrady’s shaft, and on a line with Masters’ abandoned tunnel. Only once he stopped to snatch a pick from the hand of an astonished Chinaman at work in a ditch, as he still kept on his way, a quarter of a mile beyond the shaft. Here he stopped before a jagged hole in the hillside. Bared to the sky and air, the very openness of its abandonment, its unpropitious position, and distance from the strike in Mulrady’s shaft had no doubt preserved its integrity from wayfarer or prospector.

“You can’t go in there alone, and without a light,” said Mulrady, laying his hand on the arm of the excited man. “Let me get more help and proper tools.”

“I know every step in the dark as in the daylight,” returned Slinn, struggling. “Let me go, while I have yet strength and reason! Stand aside!”

He broke from them, and the next moment was swallowed up in the yawning blackness. They waited with bated breath until, after a seeming eternity of night and silence, they heard his returning footsteps, and ran forward to meet him. As he was carrying something clasped to his breast, they supported him to the opening. But at the same moment the object of his search and his burden, a misshapen wedge of gold and quartz, dropped with him, and both fell together with equal immobility to the ground. He had still strength to turn his fading eyes to the other millionaire of Rough- and-Ready, who leaned over him.

“You—see,” he gasped, brokenly, “I was not—crazy!”

No. He was dead!

Barker's Luck

A bird twittered! The morning sun shining through the open window was apparently more potent than the cool mountain air, which had only caused the sleeper to curl a little more tightly in his blankets. Barker's eyes opened instantly upon the light and the bird on the window ledge. Like all healthy young animals he would have tried to sleep again, but with his momentary consciousness came the recollection that it was his turn to cook the breakfast that morning, and he regretfully rolled out of his bunk to the floor. Without stopping to dress, he opened the door and stepped outside, secure in the knowledge that he was overlooked only by the Sierras, and plunged his head and shoulders in the bucket of cold water that stood by the door. Then he began to clothe himself, partly in the cabin and partly in the open air, with a lapse between the putting on of his trousers and coat which he employed in bringing in wood. Raking together the few embers on the adobe hearth, not without a prudent regard to the rattlesnake which had once been detected in haunting the warm ashes, he began to prepare breakfast. By this time the other sleepers, his partners Stacy and Demorest, young men of about his own age, were awake, alert, and lazily critical of his progress.

"I don't care about my quail on toast being underdone for breakfast," said Stacy, with a yawn; "and you needn't serve with red wine. I'm not feeling very peckish this morning."

"And I reckon you can knock off the fried oysters after the Spanish mackerel for ME," said Demorest gravely.

“The fact is, that last bottle of Veuve Clicquot we had for supper wasn’t as dry as I am this morning.”

Accustomed to these regular Barmecide suggestions, Barker made no direct reply. Presently, looking up from the fire, he said, “There’s no more saleratus, so you mustn’t blame me if the biscuit is extra heavy. I told you we had none when you went to the grocery yesterday.”

“And I told you we hadn’t a red cent to buy any with,” said Stacy, who was also treasurer. “Put these two negatives together and you make the affirmative—saleratus. Mix freely and bake in a hot oven.”

Nevertheless, after a toilet as primitive as Barker’s they sat down to what he had prepared with the keen appetite begotten of the mountain air and the regretful fastidiousness born of the recollection of better things. Jerked beef, frizzled with salt pork in a frying-pan, boiled potatoes, biscuit, and coffee composed the repast. The biscuits, however, proving remarkably heavy after the first mouthful, were used as missiles, thrown through the open door at an empty bottle which had previously served as a mark for revolver practice, and a few moments later pipes were lit to counteract the effects of the meal and take the taste out of their mouths. Suddenly they heard the sound of horses’ hoofs, saw the quick passage of a rider in the open space before the cabin, and felt the smart impact upon the table of some small object thrown by him. It was the regular morning delivery of the county newspaper!

“He’s getting to be a mighty sure shot,” said Demorest approvingly, looking at his upset can of coffee as he picked up the paper, rolled into a cylindrical wad as tightly as a cartridge, and began to straighten it out. This was no easy matter, as the sheet had evidently been rolled while

yet damp from the press; but Demorest eventually opened it and ensconced himself behind it.

“Nary news?” asked Stacy.

“No. There never is any,” said Demorest scornfully. “We ought to stop the paper.”

“You mean the paper man ought to. WE don’t pay him,” said Barker gently.

“Well, that’s the same thing, smarty. No news, no pay. Hallo!” he continued, his eyes suddenly riveted on the paper. Then, after the fashion of ordinary humanity, he stopped short and read the interesting item to himself. When he had finished he brought his fist and the paper, together, violently down upon the table. “Now look at this! Talk of luck, will you? Just think of it. Here are WE—hard-working men with lots of sabe, too—grubbin’ away on this hillside like [racial expletive]s, glad to get enough at the end of the day to pay for our soggy biscuits and horse-bean coffee, and just look what falls into the lap of some lazy sneakin’ greenhorn who never did a stoke of work in his life! Here are WE, with no foolishness, no airs nor graces, and yet men who would do credit to twice that amount of luck—and seem born to it, too—and we’re set aside for some long, lank, pen-wiping scrub who just knows enough to sit down on his office stool and hold on to a bit of paper.”

“What’s up now?” asked Stacy, with the carelessness begotten of familiarity with his partner’s extravagance.

“Listen,” said Demorest, reading. “Another unprecedented rise has taken place in the shares of the ‘Yellow Hammer First Extension Mine’ since the sinking of the new shaft. It was quoted yesterday at ten thousand dollars

a foot. When it is remembered that scarcely two years ago the original shares, issued at fifty dollars per share, had dropped to only fifty cents a share, it will be seen that those who were able to hold on have got a good thing.”

“What mine did you say?” asked Barker, looking up meditatively from the dishes he was already washing.

“The Yellow Hammer First Extension,” returned Demorest shortly.

“I used to have some shares in that, and I think I have them still,” said Barker musingly.

“Yes,” said Demorest promptly; “the paper speaks of it here. ‘We understand,’” he continued, reading aloud, “‘that our eminent fellow citizen, George Barker, otherwise known as ‘Get Left Barker’ and ‘Chucklehead,’ is one of these fortunate individuals.’”

“No,” said Barker, with a slight flush of innocent pleasure, “it can’t say that. How could it know?”

Stacy laughed, but Demorest coolly continued: “You didn’t hear all. Listen! ‘We say WAS one of them; but having already sold his apparently useless certificates to our popular druggist, Jones, for corn plasters, at a reduced rate, he is unable to realize.’”

“You may laugh, boys,” said Barker, with simple seriousness; “but I really believe I have got ‘em yet. Just wait. I’ll see!” He rose and began to drag out a well-worn valise from under his bunk. “You see,” he continued, “they were given to me by an old chap in return—”

“For saving his life by delaying the Stockton boat that afterward blew up,” returned Demorest briefly. “We know it all! His hair was white, and his hand trembled slightly as he laid these shares in yours, saying, and you never forgot the words, ‘Take ‘em, young man—and’—”

“For lending him two thousand dollars, then,” continued Barker with a simple ignoring of the interruption, as he quietly brought out the valise.

“TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS!” repeated Stacy. “When did YOU have two thousand dollars?”

“When I first left Sacramento—three years ago,” said Barker, unstrapping the valise.

“How long did you have it?” said Demorest incredulously.

“At least two days, I think,” returned Barker quietly. “Then I met that man. He was hard-up, and I lent him my pile and took those shares. He died afterward.”

“Of course he did,” said Demorest severely. “They always do. Nothing kills a man more quickly than an action of that kind.” Nevertheless the two partners regarded Barker rummaging among some loose clothes and papers with a kind of paternal toleration. “If you can’t find them, bring out your government bonds,” suggested Stacy. But the next moment, flushed and triumphant, Barker rose from his knees, and came toward them carrying some papers in his hands. Demorest seized them from him, opened them, spread them on the table, examined hurriedly the date, signatures, and transfers, glanced again quickly at the newspaper paragraph, looked wildly at Stacy and then at Barker, and gasped:

“By the living hookey! it is SO!”

“B’gosh! he HAS got ‘em!” echoed Stacy.

“Twenty shares,” continued Demorest breathlessly, “at ten thousand dollars a share—even if it’s only a foot—is two hundred thousand dollars! Jerusalem!”

“Tell me, fair sir,” said Stacy, with sparkling eyes, “hast still left in yonder casket any rare jewels, rubies, sarcenet, or links of fine gold? Peradventure a pearl or two may have been overlooked!”

“No—that’s all,” returned Barker simply.

“You hear him! Rothschild says ‘that’s all.’ Prince Esterhazy says he hasn’t another red cent—only two hundred thousand dollars.”

“What ought I to do, boys?” asked Barker, timidly glancing from one to the other. Yet he remembered with delight all that day, and for many a year afterward, that he saw in their faces only unselfish joy and affection at that supreme moment.

“Do?” said Demorest promptly. “Stand on your head and yell! No! stop! Come here!” He seized both Barker and Stacy by the hand, and ran out into the open air. Here they danced violently with clasped hands around a small buckeye, in perfect silence, and then returned to the cabin, grave but perspiring.

“Of course,” said Barker, wiping his forehead, “we’ll just get some money on these certificates and buy up that next claim which belongs to old Carter—where you know we thought we saw the indication.”

“We’ll do nothing of the kind,” said Demorest decidedly. “WE ain’t in it. That money is yours, old chap—every cent of it—property acquired before marriage, you know; and the only thing we’ll do is to be damned before we’ll see you drop a dime of it into this Godforsaken hole. No!”

“But we’re partners,” gasped Barker.

“Not in THIS! The utmost we can do for you, opulent sir—though it ill becomes us horny-handed sons of toil to rub shoulders with Dives—is perchance to dine with you, to take a pasty and a glass of Malvoisie, at some restaurant in Sacramento—when you’ve got things fixed, in honor of your return to affluence. But more would ill become us!”

“But what are YOU going to do?” said Barker, with a half-hysterical, half-frightened smile.

“We have not yet looked through our luggage,” said Demorest with invincible gravity, “and there’s a secret recess—a double FOND—to my portmanteau, known only to a trusty page, which has not been disturbed since I left my ancestral home in Faginia. There may be a few First Debentures of Erie or what not still there.”

“I felt some strange, disklike protuberances in my dress suit the other day, but belike they are but poker chips,” said Stacy thoughtfully.

An uneasy feeling crept over Barker. The color which had left his fresh cheek returned to it quickly, and he turned his eyes away. Yet he had seen nothing in his companions’ eyes but affection—with even a certain kind of tender commiseration that deepened his uneasiness. “I

suppose,” he said desperately, after a pause, “I ought to go over to Boomville and make some inquiries.”

“At the bank, old chap; at the bank!” said Demorest emphatically. “Take my advice and don’t go ANYWHERE ELSE. Don’t breathe a word of your luck to anybody. And don’t, whatever you do, be tempted to sell just now; you don’t know how high that stock’s going to jump yet.”

“I thought,” stammered Barker, “that you boys might like to go over with me.”

“We can’t afford to take another holiday on grub wages, and we’re only two to work today,” said Demorest, with a slight increase of color and the faintest tremor in his voice. “And it won’t do, old chap, for us to be seen bumming round with you on the heels of your good fortune. For everybody knows we’re poor, and sooner or later everybody’ll know you WERE rich even when you first came to us.”

“Nonsense!” said Barker indignantly.

“Gospel, my boy!” said Demorest shortly.

“The frozen truth, old man!” said Stacy.

Barker took up his hat with some stiffness and moved toward the door. Here he stopped irresolutely, an irresolution that seemed to communicate itself to his partners. There was a moment’s awkward silence. Then Demorest suddenly seized him by the shoulders with a grip that was half a caress, and walked him rapidly to the door. “And now don’t stand foolin’ with us, Barker boy; but just trot off like a little man, and get your grip on that fortune; and when you’ve got your hooks in it hang on like grim death. You’ll”—he hesitated

for an instant only, possibly to find the laugh that should have accompanied his speech—"you're sure to find US here when you get back."

Hurt to the quick, but restraining his feelings, Barker clapped his hat on his head and walked quickly away. The two partners stood watching him in silence until his figure was lost in the underbrush. Then they spoke.

"Like him—wasn't it?" said Demorest.

"Just him all over," said Stacy.

"Think of him having that stock stowed away all these years and never even bothering his dear old head about it!"

'And think of his wanting to put the whole thing into this rotten hillside with us!"

"And he'd have done it, by gosh! and never thought of it again. That's Barker."

"Dear old man!"

"Good old chap!"

"I've been wondering if one of us oughtn't to have gone with him? He's just as likely to pour his money into the first lap that opens for it," said Stacy.

"The more reason why we shouldn't prevent him, or seem to prevent him," said Demorest almost fiercely. "There will be knaves and fools enough who will try and put the idea of our using him into his simple heart without that. No! Let him do as he likes with it—but let him be himself. I'd rather

have him come back to us even after he's lost the money—his old self and empty-handed—than try to change the stuff God put into him and make him more like others.”

The tone and manner were so different from Demorest's usual levity that Stacy was silent. After a pause he said: “Well! we shall miss him on the hillside—won't we?”

Demorest did not reply. Reaching out his hand abstractedly, he wrenched off a small slip from a sapling near him, and began slowly to pull the leaves off, one by one, until they were all gone. Then he switched it in the air, struck his bootleg smartly with it, said roughly: “Come, let's get to work!” and strode away.

Meantime Barker on his way to Boomville was no less singular in his manner. He kept up his slightly affected attitude until he had lost sight of the cabin. But, being of a simple nature, his emotions were less complex. If he had not seen the undoubted look of affection in the eyes of his partners he would have imagined that they were jealous of his good fortune. Yet why had they refused his offer to share it with him? Why had they so strangely assumed that their partnership with him had closed? Why had they declined to go with him? Why had this money—of which he had thought so little, and for which he had cared so little—changed them toward him? It had not changed HIM—HE was the same! He remembered how they had often talked and laughed over a prospective “strike” in mining and speculated what THEY would do together with the money! And now that “luck” had occurred to one of them, individually, the effect was only to alienate them! He could not make it out. He was hurt, wounded—yet oddly enough he was conscious now of a certain power within him to hurt and wound in retribution. He was rich: he would let them see HE could do without

them. He was quite free now to think only of himself and Kitty.

For it must be recorded that with all this young gentleman's simplicity and unselfishness, with all his loyal attitude to his partners, his FIRST thought at the moment he grasped the fact of his wealth was of a young lady. It was Kitty Carter, the daughter of the hotelkeeper at Boomville, who owned the claim that the partners had mutually coveted. That a pretty girl's face should flash upon him with his conviction that he was now a rich man meant perhaps no disloyalty to his partners, whom he would still have helped. But it occurred to him now, in his half-hurt, half-vengeful state, that they had often joked him about Kitty, and perhaps further confidence with them was debarred. And it was only due to his dignity that he should now see Kitty at once.

This was easy enough, for in the naive simplicity of Boomville and the economic arrangements of her father, she occasionally waited upon the hotel table. Half the town was always actively in love with her; the other half HAD BEEN, and was silent, cynical, but hopeless in defeat. For Kitty was one of those singularly pretty girls occasionally met with in Southwestern frontier civilization whose distinct and original refinement of face and figure were so remarkable and original as to cast a doubt on the sagacity and prescience of one parent and the morality of the other, yet no doubt with equal injustice. But the fact remained that she was slight, graceful, and self-contained, and moved beside her stumpy, commonplace father, and her faded, commonplace mother in the dining-room of the Boomville Hotel like some distinguished alien. The three partners, by virtue, perhaps, of their college education and refined manners, had been exceptionally noticed by Kitty. And for some occult reason—the more serious, perhaps, because it had no

obvious or logical presumption to the world generally—Barker was particularly favored.

He quickened his pace, and as the flagstaff of the Boomville Hotel rose before him in the little hollow, he seriously debated whether he had not better go to the bank first, deposit his shares, and get a small advance on them to buy a new necktie or a “boiled shirt” in which to present himself to Miss Kitty; but, remembering that he had partly given his word to Demorest that he would keep his shares intact for the present, he abandoned this project, probably from the fact that his projected confidence with Kitty was already a violation of Demorest’s injunctions of secrecy, and his conscience was sufficiently burdened with that breach of faith.

But when he reached the hotel, a strange trepidation overcame him. The dining-room was at its slack water, between the ebb of breakfast and before the flow of the preparation for the midday meal. He could not have his interview with Kitty in that dreary waste of reversed chairs and bare trestlelike tables, and she was possibly engaged in her household duties. But Miss Kitty had already seen him cross the road, and had lounged into the dining-room with an artfully simulated air of casually examining it. At the unexpected vision of his hopes, arrayed in the sweetest and freshest of rosebud-sprigged print, his heart faltered. Then, partly with the desperation of a timid man, and partly through the working of a half-formed resolution, he met her bright smile with a simple inquiry for her father. Miss Kitty bit her pretty lip, smiled slightly, and preceded him with great formality to the office. Opening the door, without raising her lashes to either her father or the visitor, she said, with a mischievous accenting of the professional manner, “Mr. Barker to see you on business,” and tripped sweetly away.

And this slight incident precipitated the crisis. For Barker instantly made up his mind that he must purchase the next claim for his partners of this man Carter, and that he would be obliged to confide to him the details of his good fortune, and as a proof of his sincerity and his ability to pay for it, he did so bluntly. Carter was a shrewd business man, and the well-known simplicity of Barker was a proof of his truthfulness, to say nothing of the shares that were shown to him. His selling price for his claim had been two hundred dollars, but here was a rich customer who, from a mere foolish sentiment, would be no doubt willing to pay more. He hesitated with a bland but superior smile. "Ah, that was my price at my last offer, Mr. Barker," he said suavely; "but, you see, things are going up since then."

The keenest duplicity is apt to fail before absolute simplicity. Barker, thoroughly believing him, and already a little frightened at his own presumption—not for the amount of the money involved, but from the possibility of his partners refusing his gift utterly—quickly took advantage of this LOCUS PENITENTIAE. "No matter, then," he said hurriedly; "perhaps I had better consult my partners first; in fact," he added, with a gratuitous truthfulness all his own, "I hardly know whether they will take it of me, so I think I'll wait."

Carter was staggered; this would clearly not do! He recovered himself with an insinuating smile. "You pulled me up too short, Mr. Barker; I'm a business man, but hang it all! what's that among friends? If you reckoned I GAVE MY WORD at two hundred—why, I'm there! Say no more about it—the claim's yours. I'll make you out a bill of sale at once."

"But," hesitated Barker, "you see I haven't got the money yet, and—"

“Money!” echoed Carter bluntly, “what’s that among friends? Gimme your note at thirty days—that’s good enough for ME. An’ we’ll settle the whole thing now—nothing like finishing a job while you’re about it.” And before the bewildered and doubtful visitor could protest, he had filled up a promissory note for Barker’s signature and himself signed a bill of sale for the property. “And I reckon, Mr. Barker, you’d like to take your partners by surprise about this little gift of yours,” he added smilingly. “Well, my messenger is starting for the Gulch in five minutes; he’s going by your cabin, and he can just drop this bill o’ sale, as a kind o’ settled fact, on ‘em afore they can say anything, see! There’s nothing like actin’ on the spot in these sort of things. And don’t you hurry ‘bout them either! You see, you sorter owe us a friendly call—havin’ always dropped inter the hotel only as a customer—so ye’ll stop here over luncheon, and I reckon, as the old woman is busy, why Kitty will try to make the time pass till then by playin’ for you on her new pianner.”

Delighted, yet bewildered by the unexpected invitation and opportunity, Barker mechanically signed the promissory note, and as mechanically addressed the envelope of the bill of sale to Demorest, which Carter gave to the messenger. Then he followed his host across the hall to the apartment known as “Miss Kitty’s parlor.” He had often heard of it as a sanctum impervious to the ordinary guest. Whatever functions the young girl assumed at the hotel and among her father’s boarders, it was vaguely understood that she dropped them on crossing that sacred threshold, and became “MISS Carter.” The county judge had been entertained there, and the wife of the bank manager. Barker’s admission there was consequently an unprecedented honor.

He cast his eyes timidly round the room, redolent and suggestive in various charming little ways of the young girl's presence. There was the cottage piano which had been brought up in sections on the backs of mules from the foot of the mountain; there was a crayon head of Minerva done by the fair occupant at the age of twelve; there was a profile of herself done by a traveling artist; there were pretty little china ornaments and many flowers, notably a faded but still scented woodland shrub which Barker had presented to her two weeks ago, and over which Miss Kitty had discreetly thrown her white handkerchief as he entered. A wave of hope passed over him at the act, but it was quickly spent as Mr. Carter's roughly playful voice introduced him:

“Ye kin give Mr. Barker a tune or two to pass time afore lunch, Kitty. You kin let him see what you're doing in that line. But you'll have to sit up now, for this young man's come inter some property, and will be sasheying round in 'Frisco afore long with a biled shirt and a stovepipe, and be givin' the go-by to Boomville. Well! you young folks will excuse me for a while, as I reckon I'll just toddle over and get the recorder to put that bill o' sale on record. Nothin' like squaring things to onct, Mr. Barker.”

As he slipped away, Barker felt his heart sink. Carter had not only bluntly forestalled him with the news and taken away his excuse for a confidential interview, but had put an ostentatious construction on his visit. What could she think of him now? He stood ashamed and embarrassed before her.

But Miss Kitty, far from noticing his embarrassment in a sudden concern regarding the “horrid” untidiness of the room, which made her cheeks quite pink in one spot and obliged her to take up and set down in exactly the same place several articles, was exceedingly delighted. In fact, she did not remember ever having been so pleased before in her life!

These things were always so unexpected! Just like the weather, for instance. It was quite cool last night—and now it was just stifling. And so dusty! Had Mr. Barker noticed the heat coming from the Gulch? Or perhaps, being a rich man, he—with a dazzling smile—was above walking now. It was so kind of him to come here first and tell her father.

“I really wanted to tell only—YOU, Miss Carter,” stammered Barker. “You see—” he hesitated. But Miss Kitty saw perfectly. He wanted to tell HER, and, seeing her, he asked for HER FATHER! Not that it made the slightest difference to her, for her father would have been sure to have told her. It was also kind of her father to invite him to luncheon. Otherwise she might not have seen him before he left Boomville.

But this was more than Barker could stand. With the same desperate directness and simplicity with which he had approached her father, he now blurted out his whole heart to her. He told her how he had loved her hopelessly from the first time that they had spoken together at the church picnic. Did she remember it? How he had sat and worshiped her, and nothing else, at church! How her voice in the church choir had sounded like an angel’s; how his poverty and his uncertain future had kept him from seeing her often, lest he should be tempted to betray his hopeless passion. How as soon as he realized that he had a position, that his love for her need not make her ridiculous to the world’s eyes, he came to tell her ALL. He did not even dare to hope! But she would HEAR him at least, would she not?

Indeed, there was no getting away from his boyish, simple, outspoken declaration. In vain Kitty smiled, frowned, glanced at her pink cheeks in the glass, and stopped to look out of the window. The room was filled with his love—it was encompassing her—and, despite his shy

attitude, seemed to be almost embracing her. But she managed at last to turn upon him a face that was now as white and grave as his own was eager and glowing.

“Sit down,” she said gently.

He did so obediently, but wonderingly. She then opened the piano and took a seat upon the music stool before it, placed some loose sheets of music in the rack, and ran her fingers lightly over the keys. Thus intrenched, she let her hands fall idly in her lap, and for the first time raised her eyes to his.

“Now listen to me—be good and don’t interrupt! There!—not so near; you can hear what I have to say well enough where you are. That will do.”

Barker had halted with the chair he was dragging toward her and sat down.

“Now,” said Miss Kitty, withdrawing her eyes and looking straight before her, “I believe everything you say; perhaps I oughtn’t to— or at least SAY it—but I do. There! But because I do believe you—it seems to me all wrong! For the very reasons that you give for not having spoken to me BEFORE, if you really felt as you say you did, are the same reasons why you should not speak to me now. You see, all this time you have let nobody but yourself know how you felt toward me. In everybody’s eyes YOU and your partners have been only the three stuck-up, exclusive, college-bred men who mined a poor claim in the Gulch, and occasionally came here to this hotel as customers. In everybody’s eyes I have been only the rich hotel- keeper’s popular daughter who sometimes waited upon you—but nothing more. But at least we were then pretty much alike, and as good as each other. And now, as soon as you have become suddenly rich,

and, of course, the SUPERIOR, you rush down here to ask me to acknowledge it by accepting you!”

“You know I never meant that, Miss Kitty,” burst out Barker vehemently, but his protest was drowned in a rapid roudade from the young lady’s fingers on the keys. He sank back in his chair.

“Of course you never MEANT it,” she said with an odd laugh; “but everybody will take it in that way, and you cannot go round to everybody in Boomville and make the pretty declaration you have just made to me. Everybody will say I accepted you for your money; everybody will say it was a put-up job of my father’s. Everybody will say that you threw yourself away on me. And I don’t know but that they would be right. Sit down, please! or I shall play again.

“You see,” she went on, without looking at him, “just now you like to remember that you fell in love with me first as a pretty waiter girl, but if I became your wife it’s just what you would like to FORGET. And I shouldn’t, for I should always like to think of the time when you came here, whenever you could afford it and sometimes when you couldn’t, just to see me; and how we used to make excuses to speak with each other over the dishes. You don’t know what these things mean to a woman who”—she hesitated a moment, and then added abruptly, “but what does that matter? You would not care to be reminded of it. So,” she said, rising up with a grave smile and grasping her hands tightly behind her, “it’s a good deal better that you should begin to forget it now. Be a good boy and take my advice. Go to San Francisco. You will meet some girl there in a way you will not afterward regret. You are young, and your riches, to say nothing,” she added in a faltering voice that was somewhat inconsistent with the mischievous smile that played upon her lips, “of your kind and simple heart, will

secure that which the world would call unselfish affection from one more equal to you, but would always believe was only BOUGHT if it came from me.”

“I suppose you are right,” he said simply.

She glanced quickly at him, and her eyebrows straightened. He had risen, his face white and his gray eyes widely opened. “I suppose you are right,” he went on, “because you are saying to me what my partners said to me this morning, when I offered to share my wealth with them, God knows as honestly as I offered to share my heart with you. I suppose that you are both right; that there must be some curse of pride or selfishness upon the money that I have got; but I have not felt it yet, and the fault does not lie with me.”

She gave her shoulders a slight shrug, and turned impatiently toward the window. When she turned back again he was gone. The room around her was empty; this room, which a moment before had seemed to be pulsating with his boyish passion, was now empty, and empty of HIM. She bit her lips, rose, and ran eagerly to the window. She saw his straw hat and brown curls as he crossed the road. She drew her handkerchief sharply away from the withered shrub over which she had thrown it, and cast the once treasured remains in the hearth. Then, possibly because she had it ready in her hand, she clapped the handkerchief to her eyes, and sinking sideways upon the chair he had risen from, put her elbows on its back, and buried her face in her hands.

It is the characteristic and perhaps cruelty of a simple nature to make no allowance for complex motives, or to even understand them! So it seemed to Barker that his simplicity had been met with equal directness. It was the possession of this wealth that had in some way hopelessly changed his

relations with the world. He did not love Kitty any the less; he did not even think she had wronged him; they, his partners and his sweetheart, were cleverer than he; there must be some occult quality in this wealth that he would understand when he possessed it, and perhaps it might even make him ashamed of his generosity; not in the way they had said, but in his tempting them so audaciously to assume a wrong position. It behoved him to take possession of it at once, and to take also upon himself alone the knowledge, the trials, and responsibilities it would incur. His cheeks flushed again as he thought he had tried to tempt an innocent girl with it, and he was keenly hurt that he had not seen in Kitty's eyes the tenderness that had softened his partners' refusal. He resolved to wait no longer, but sell his dreadful stock at once. He walked directly to the bank.

The manager, a shrewd but kindly man, to whom Barker was known already, received him graciously in recognition of his well-known simple honesty, and respectfully as a representative of the equally well-known poor but "superior" partnership of the Gulch. He listened with marked attention to Barker's hesitating but brief story, only remarking at its close:

"You mean, of course, the 'SECOND Extension' when you say 'First'?"

"No," said Barker; "I mean the 'First'—and it said First in the Boomville paper."

"Yes, yes!—I saw it—it was a printer's error. The stock of the 'First' was called in two years ago. No! You mean the 'Second,' for, of course, you've followed the quotations, and are likely to know what stock you're holding shares of. When you go back, take a look at them, and you'll see I am right."

“But I brought them with me,” said Barker, with a slight flushing as he felt in his pocket, “and I am quite sure they are the ‘First.’ He brought them out and laid them on the desk before the manager.

The words “First Extension” were plainly visible. The manager glanced curiously at Barker, and his brow darkened.

“Did anybody put this up on you?” he said sternly. “Did your partners send you here with this stuff?”

“No! no!” said Barker eagerly. “No one! It’s all MY mistake. I see it now. I trusted to the newspaper.”

“And you mean to say you never examined the stock or the quotations, nor followed it in any way, since you had it?”

“Never!” said Barker. “Never thought about IT AT ALL till I saw the newspaper. So it’s not worth anything?” And, to the infinite surprise of the manager, there was a slight smile on his boyish face.

“I am afraid it is not worth the paper it’s written on,” said the manager gently.

The smile on Barker’s face increased to a little laugh, in which his wondering companion could not help joining. “Thank you,” said Barker suddenly, and rushed away.

“He beats everything!” said the manager, gazing after him. “Damned if he didn’t seem even PLEASED.”

He WAS pleased. The burden of wealth had fallen from his shoulders; the dreadful incubus that had weighed

him down and parted his friends from him was gone! And he had not got rid of it by spending it foolishly. It had not ruined anybody yet; it had not altered anybody in HIS eyes. It was gone; and he was a free and happy man once more. He would go directly back to his partners; they would laugh at him, of course, but they could not look at him now with the same sad, commiserating eyes. Perhaps even Kitty—but here a sudden chill struck him. He had forgotten the bill of sale! He had forgotten the dreadful promissory note given to her father in the rash presumption of his wealth! How could it ever be paid? And more than that, it had been given in a fraud. He had no money when he gave it, and no prospect of any but what he was to get from those worthless shares. Would anybody believe him that it was only a stupid blunder of his own? Yes, his partners might believe him; but, horrible thought, he had already implicated THEM in his fraud! Even now, while he was standing there hesitatingly in the road, they were entering upon the new claim he had NOT PAID FOR—COULD NOT PAY FOR—and in the guise of a benefactor he was dishonoring them. Yet it was Carter he must meet first; he must confess all to him. He must go back to the hotel—that hotel where he had indignantly left her, and tell the father he was a fraud. It was terrible to think of; perhaps it was part of that money curse that he could not get rid of, and was now realizing; but it MUST be done. He was simple, but his very simplicity had that unhesitating directness of conclusion which is the main factor of what men call “pluck.”

He turned back to the hotel and entered the office. But Mr. Carter had not yet returned. What was to be done? He could not wait there; there was no time to be lost; there was only one other person who knew his expectations, and to whom he could confide his failure—it was Kitty. It was to taste the dregs of his humiliation, but it must be done. He ran up the staircase and knocked timidly at the sitting-room

door. There was a momentary pause, and a weak voice said "Come in." Barker opened the door; saw the vision of a handkerchief thrown away, of a pair of tearful eyes that suddenly changed to stony indifference, and a graceful but stiffening figure. But he was past all insult now.

"I would not intrude," he said simply, "but I came only to see your father. I have made an awful blunder—more than a blunder, I think—a FRAUD. Believing that I was rich, I purchased your father's claim for my partners, and gave him my promissory note. I came here to give him back his claim—for that note can NEVER be paid! I have just been to the bank; I find I have made a stupid mistake in the name of the shares upon which I based my belief in my wealth. The ones I own are worthless—am as poor as ever—I am even poorer, for I owe your father money I can never pay!"

To his amazement he saw a look of pain and scorn come into her troubled eyes which he had never seen before. "This is a feeble trick," she said bitterly; "it is unlike you—it is unworthy of you!"

"Good God! You must believe me. Listen! it was all a mistake—a printer's error. I read in the paper that the stock for the First Extension mine had gone up, when it should have been the Second. I had some old stock of the First, which I had kept for years, and only thought of when I read the announcement in the paper this morning. I swear to you—"

But it was unnecessary. There was no doubting the truth of that voice—that manner. The scorn fled from Miss Kitty's eyes to give place to a stare, and then suddenly changed to two bubbling blue wells of laughter. She went to the window and laughed. She sat down to the piano and laughed. She caught up the handkerchief, and hiding half her

rosy face in it, laughed. She finally collapsed into an easy chair, and, burying her brown head in its cushions, laughed long and confidentially until she brought up suddenly against a sob. And then was still.

Barker was dreadfully alarmed. He had heard of hysterics before. He felt he ought to do something. He moved toward her timidly, and gently drew away her handkerchief. Alas! the blue wells were running over now. He took her cold hands in his; he knelt beside her and passed his arm around her waist. He drew her head upon his shoulder. He was not sure that any of these things were effective until she suddenly lifted her eyes to his with the last ray of mirth in them vanishing in a big teardrop, put her arms round his neck, and sobbed:

“Oh, George! You blessed innocent!”

An eloquent silence was broken by a remorseful start from Barker.

“But I must go and warn my poor partners, dearest; there yet may be time; perhaps they have not yet taken possession of your father’s claim.”

“Yes, George dear,” said the young girl, with sparkling eyes; “and tell them to do so AT ONCE!”

“What?” gasped Barker.

“At once—do you hear?—or it may be too late! Go quick.”

“But your father—Oh, I see, dearest, you will tell him all yourself, and spare me.”

“I shall do nothing so foolish, Georgey. Nor shall you! Don’t you see the note isn’t due for a month? Stop! Have you told anybody but Paw and me?”

“Only the bank manager.”

She ran out of the room and returned in a minute tying the most enchanting of hats by a ribbon under her oval chin. “I’ll run over and fix him,” she said.

“Fix him?” returned Barker, aghast.

“Yes, I’ll say your wicked partners have been playing a practical joke on you, and he mustn’t give you away. He’ll do anything for me.”

“But my partners didn’t! On the contrary—”

“Don’t tell me, George,” said Miss Kitty severely. “THEY ought never to have let you come here with that stuff. But come! You must go at once. You must not meet Paw; you’ll blurt out everything to him; I know you! I’ll tell him you could not stay to luncheon. Quick, now; go. What? Well—there!”

Whatever it represented, the exclamation was apparently so protracted that Miss Kitty was obliged to push her lover to the front landing before she could disappear by the back stairs. But once in the street, Barker no longer lingered. It was a good three miles back to the Gulch; he might still reach it by the time his partners were taking their noonday rest, and he resolved that although the messenger had preceded him, they would not enter upon the new claim until the afternoon. For Barker, in spite of his mistress’ injunction, had no idea of taking what he couldn’t pay for; he would keep the claim intact until something could be

settled. For the rest, he walked on air! Kitty loved him! The accursed wealth no longer stood between them. They were both poor now—everything was possible.

The sun was beginning to send dwarf shadows toward the east when he reached the Gulch. Here a new trepidation seized him. How would his partners receive the news of his utter failure? HE was happy, for he had gained Kitty through it. But they? For a moment it seemed to him that he had purchased his happiness through their loss. He stopped, took off his hat, and ran his fingers remorsefully through his damp curls.

Another thing troubled him. He had reached the crest of the Gulch, where their old working ground was spread before him like a map. They were not there; neither were they lying under the four pines on the ridge where they were wont to rest at midday. He turned with some alarm to the new claim adjoining theirs, but there was no sign of them there either. A sudden fear that they had, after parting from him, given up the claim in a fit of disgust and depression, and departed, now overcame him. He clapped his hand on his head and ran in the direction of the cabin.

He had nearly reached it when the rough challenge of “Who’s there?” from the bushes halted him, and Demorest suddenly swung into the trail. But the singular look of sternness and impatience which he was wearing vanished as he saw Barker, and with a loud shout of “All right, it’s only Barker! Hooray!” he ran toward him. In an instant he was joined by Stacy from the cabin, and the two men, catching hold of their returning partner, waltzed him joyfully and breathlessly into the cabin. But the quick-eyed Demorest suddenly let go his hold and stared at Barker’s face. “Why, Barker, old boy, what’s up?”

“Everything’s up,” gasped the breathless Barker. “It’s all up about these stocks. It’s all a mistake; all an infernal lie of that newspaper. I never had the right kind of shares. The ones I have are worthless rags”; and the next instant he had blurted out his whole interview with the bank manager.

The two partners looked at each other, and then, to Barker’s infinite perplexity, the same extraordinary convulsion that had seized Miss Kitty fell upon them. They laughed, holding on each other’s shoulders; they laughed, clinging to Barker’s struggling figure; they went out and laughed with their backs against a tree. They laughed separately and in different corners. And then they came up to Barker with tears in their eyes, dropped their heads on his shoulder, and murmured exhaustedly:

“You blessed ass!”

“But,” said Stacy suddenly, “how did you manage to buy the claim?”

“Ah! that’s the most awful thing, boys. I’ve NEVER PAID FOR IT,” groaned Barker.

“But Carter sent us the bill of sale,” persisted Demorest, “or we shouldn’t have taken it.”

“I gave my promissory note at thirty days,” said Barker desperately, “and where’s the money to come from now? But,” he added wildly, as the men glanced at each other—“you said ‘taken it.’ Good heavens! you don’t mean to say that I’m TOO late—that you’ve—you’ve touched it?”

“I reckon that’s pretty much what we HAVE been doing,” drawled Demorest.

“It looks uncommonly like it,” drawled Stacy.

Barker glanced blankly from the one to the other. “Shall we pass our young friend in to see the show?” said Demorest to Stacy.

“Yes, if he’ll be perfectly quiet and not breathe on the glasses,” returned Stacy.

They each gravely took one of Barker’s hands and led him to the corner of the cabin. There, on an old flour barrel, stood a large tin prospecting pan, in which the partners also occasionally used to knead their bread. A dirty towel covered it. Demorest whisked it dexterously aside, and disclosed three large fragments of decomposed gold and quartz. Barker started back.

“Heft it!” said Demorest grimly.

Barker could scarcely lift the pan!

“Four thousand dollars’ weight if a penny!” said Stacy, in short staccato sentences. “In a pocket! Brought it out the second stroke of the pick! We’d been awfully blue after you left. Awfully blue, too, when that bill of sale came, for we thought you’d been wasting your money on US. Reckoned we oughtn’t to take it, but send it straight back to you. Messenger gone! Then Demorest reckoned as it was done it couldn’t be undone, and we ought to make just one ‘prospect’ on the claim, and strike a single stroke for you. And there it is. And there’s more on the hillside.”

“But it isn’t MINE! It isn’t YOURS! It’s Carter’s. I never had the money to pay for it—and I haven’t got it now.”

“But you gave the note—and it is not due for thirty days.”

A recollection flashed upon Barker. “Yes,” he said with thoughtful simplicity, “that’s what Kitty said.”

“Oh, Kitty said so,” said both partners, gravely.

“Yes,” stammered Barker, turning away with a heightened color, and, as I didn’t stay there to luncheon, I think I’d better be getting it ready.” He picked up the coffeepot and turned to the hearth as his two partners stepped beyond the door.

“Wasn’t it exactly like him?” said Demorest.

“Him all over,” said Stacy.

“And his worry over that note?” said Demorest.

“And ‘what Kitty said,’” said Stacy.

“Look here! I reckon that wasn’t ALL that Kitty said.”

“Of course not.”

“What luck!”