

Norton Roy

The Plunderer



Roy Norton
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The Plunderer:

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TO

REX BEACH

WITH ALL THE AFFECTION THAT ONE

GIVES TO A PARTNER WITH WHOM

**HE HAS TRAILED, AND
MINED, AND ADVENTURED**

**FOR MANY YEARS, AND
NEVER FOUND WANTING**

WHEN BACKS WERE AGAINST THE WALL

CHAPTER I

BULLY PRESBY

Plainly the rambling log structure was a road house and the stopping place for a mountain stage. It had the watering trough in front, the bundle of iron pails cluttered around the rusted iron pump, and the trampled muddy hollow created by many tired hoofs striking vigorously to drive away the flies. It was in a tiny flat beside the road, and mountains were everywhere; hard-cut, relentless giants, whose stern faces portrayed a perpetual constancy. At the trough two burros, with their packs deftly lashed, thrust soft gray muzzles deep into the water, and held rigid their long gray ears, casting now and then a wise look at the young man in worn mining clothes who stood patiently beside them.

Another man, almost a giant in size, but with a litheness of movement that told of marvelous physical strength, emerged from the door of the road house, and the babel of sound that had been stilled when he entered, but a few minutes before, rose again. He crossed to the well, and smiled from half-humorous eyes at the younger man standing beside the animals, and said: "Bumped into a hornet's nest. Butted into an indignation meetin'. A Blackfoot war powwow when the trader had furnished free booze would have been a peace party put up against it."

The younger man, who had turned to pump more water, following the polite mountain custom of replenishing for what you have used, stopped with a hand on the handle, and looked at him inquiringly.

“It seems it’s a bunch of fellers that’s been workin’ some placer ground off back here somewheres”—and he waved a tanned hand indefinitely in a wide arc—“and some man got the double hitch on ’em with the law, provin’ that the ground was his’n, and the sheriff run ’em off! Now they’re sore. But it seems they cain’t help ’emselfes, so they’re movin’ over to some other place across the divide.”

“But what has that to do with us?”

“Nothin’, except that it took me five minutes to get the barkeep’ to tell me about the road. He says we’ve come all right this far, and this is the place where we hit the trail over the hills. Says we save a day and a half, with pack burros, by takin’ the cut-off. Says it’s seven or eight hours good ridin’ by the road if we were on horses and in a hurry.”

He paused and scanned the hills with an observant eye, while his companion resumed the pumping process. The trough again filled, the latter walked around the pails and joined him.

“Well, where does this trail start in?” he asked.

“He’s goin’ to show us as soon as he can get a minute’s rest from that bunch in there. Said we’d have to be shown. Said unless he could get away long enough we’d have to wait till somebody he named came in, and he’d head us into it.”

They led the burros across the road and into the shadow of a cliff where the morning sun, searching and fervid, did not reach, and threw themselves to the ground, resting their backs against the foot wall, and trying patiently to await the appearance of their guides. The steady, hurried clink of glass and bottle on bar, the ribald shouts and threats of the crowd that filled the road house, the occasional burst of a maudlin song, all told the condition of the ejected placer men who had stopped here on their journey.

“I don’t know nothin’ about the case, of course,” drawled the big man lazily, “and it’s none of my funeral; but it does seem as if this feller they call ‘Bully’ is quite some for havin’ him own way.”

He laughed softly as if remembering scraps of conversation he had segregated from the murmur inside, and rolled his long body over until he rested on his belly with the upper part of his torso raised on his elbows.

“It appears that the courts down at the county seat gave a decision in his favor, and that he lost about as much time gettin’ action as a hornet does when he’s come to a conclusion. He just shows up with the sheriff, and about twenty deputies, good and true, and says: ‘Hike! The courts say it’s mine. These is the sheriffs. Off you go, and don’t waste no time doin’ it, either!’ And so they hikes and have got this far, where they lay over for the night to comfort their insides with somethin’ that smelled like a cross between nitric acid, a corn farm, and sump water. And it don’t seem to cheer ’em up much, either, because their talk’s right ugly.”

“But I thought you said they were heading for some other ground?”

“So they are, but they’re takin’ their time on the road. I used to be that way till the day Arizona Bill plugged me because I was slow, all through havin’ stopped at a place too long. Then, says I, when I woke up a month later in the Widder Haskins’ back room: ‘Bill, this comes from corn and rye. Never have nothin’ to do with a farmer, or anything that comes from a farmer, after this; or some day, when your hand ain’t quick enough, and things look kind of hazy, some quarrelsome man’s goin’ to shoot first and you’ll cash in.’ And from that day to this, when I want to go on a bust, I drink a gallon of soda pop to have a rip-roarin’ time.”

A man lurched out of the door of the road house as if striving to find clean air, and stood leaning against one of the pole posts supporting a pole porch. Another one joined him, coarsely accusing him of being a “quitter” because he had left his drink on the bar. They were stubbornly passing words when, from down the road, there came the gritting of wheels over the pulverized stone, and the clacking of horses’ hoofs, slow moving, as if being rested by a cautious driver along the ascent.

The man by the post suddenly frowned in the direction of the sound, and then whirled back to the open door.

“It’s Bully!” he bellowed so loudly that his words were plainly audible to the partners lying in the shadow. “Bully’s a-comin’ up the road right now! Let’s get him!”

There was a fierce, bawling chorus of shouts that outdid

anything preceding, and the door seemed to vomit men in all stages of intoxication, who came heavily out with their boots stamping across the boards of the porch. They cursed, imprecated, shook their fists, and threatened, as they surged into the road and looked down it toward the approaching driver. The men in the shade got quickly to their feet, interested spectators, and the burros awoke from their drowsy somnolence, and turned inquiring, soft eyes on their owners.

Calmly driven up toward the mob in the road came a mountain buckboard drawn by two sweating horses. In the seat was a man who drove as if the reins were completely in control. He appeared to be stockily built, and his shoulders—broad, heavy, and high—had, even in that posture, the unmistakable stamp of one who is accustomed to stooping his way through drifts and tunnels. He wore a black slouch hat, which had been shaped by habitual handling to shade his eyes. His hair was white; his neck short and thick, with a suggestion of bull-like power and force. His face, as he approached to closer range, showed firm and masterful. His nose was dominant—the nose of a conqueror who overrides all obstacles. He came steadily forward, without in the least changing his attitude, or betraying anxiety, or haste. The men in the road waited, squarely across his path, and their hoarse fulminations had died away to a far more terrifying silence; yet he did not seem to heed them as his horses advanced.

“Gad! Doesn’t he know who they are?” the bigger man by the rock mumbled to his partner.

“If he doesn’t he has a supreme nerve,” the younger man replied. “They look to me as if they mean trouble. They’re in a pretty nasty temper—what with all the poison they’ve poured in, and all the injustice they believe they have met. Wonder who’s right?”

A shout from the crowd in the roadway interrupted any further speculation. The man who had first appeared on the road-house porch threw up his hand, and roared, “Here he is! We’ve got him! It’s the Bully!”

The shout was taken up by others until a miniature forest of raised fists shook themselves threateningly at the man in the buckboard who was now within a few feet of them.

“Get a rope, somebody! Hang him!” yelled an excited voice.

“Yes, that’s the goods,” screamed another, heard above the turmoil. “Up with the Bully!”

Two men sprang forward, and caught the horses by their bits, and brought them to an excited, nervous stop, and the others began to surround the wagon. The man in the seat made no movement, but sat there with a hard smile on his firm lips. The partners stepped to the top of a convenient rock, where they could overlook the meeting, and watched, perturbed.

“I don’t know about this,” the elder said doubtfully. “Looks to me like there’s too many against one, and I ain’t sure whether he deserves hangin’. What do you think?”

“Let’s wait and see. Then, if they get too ugly, we’ll give them a talk and try to find out,” the younger man answered.

Even as he spoke, a man came running from the door of the road house with a coil in his hand, and began to assert drunkenly: "Here it is! I've got it! A rope!"

The partners were preparing to jump forward and protest, when a most astonishing change took place. The man in the wagon suddenly stood up, stretched his hand commandingly to the men holding the horses' heads, and ordered: "Let go of my horses there, you drunken idiots! Let go of them, I say, or I'll come down there and make you! Understand?"

The men at the horses' heads wavered under that harsh, firm command, but did not release their hold. Without any further pause, the man jumped from his buckboard squarely into the road, struck the man holding the rope a sweeping side blow that toppled him over like a sprawling dummy, jerked the coil from his hands, and tore toward his horses' heads. As if each feared to bar his advance, the men of the mob made way for him, taken by surprise. He brought the coil of rope with a stinging, whistling impact into the face of the nearest man, who, blinded, threw his hands upward across his eyes and reeled back. The man at the other horse's head suddenly turned and dove out of reach, but the whistling coils again fell, lashing him across his head and shoulders.

Without any appearance of haste, and as if scornful of the mob that had so recently been threatening to hang him, the man walked back to his buckboard, climbed in, and stood there on his feet with the reins in one hand, and the rope in the other. "You

get away from in front of me there,” he said, in his harsh, incisive voice; “I’m tired of child’s play. If you don’t let me alone, I’ll kill a few of you. Now, clear out!”

The men around him were already backing farther away, and at this threat they opened the road in such haste that one or two of them nearly ran over others.

“Say,” admiringly commented the big observer on the rock, “we’d play hob helpin’ him out. He don’t need help, that feller don’t. If I ever saw a man that could take care of himself—”

“He certainly is the one!” his companion finished the sentence.

“Who does this rope belong to?” demanded the hard-faced victor in the buckboard, looking around him.

No one appeared eager to claim proprietorship. He gave a loud, contemptuous snort, and threw the rope far over toward the road house.

“Keep it!” he called, in his cold, unemotional voice. “Some of you might want to cheat the sheriff by hanging yourselves. After this, any or all of you had better keep away from me. I might lose my temper.”

He sat down in the seat with a deliberate effort to show his scorn, picked the reins up more firmly, glanced around at the rear of his buckboard to see that his parcels were safe, ignored the cowed men, and without ever looking at them started his horses forward. As they began a steady trot and passed the partners, he swept over them one keen, searching look, as if wondering

whether they had been of the mob, turned back to observe their loaded burros, apparently decided they had taken no part in the affair, and bestowed on them a faint, dry smile as he settled himself into his seat. At the bend of the road he had not deigned another look on the men who had been ravening to lynch him. He drove away as carelessly as if he alone were the only human being within miles, and the partners gave a gasp of enjoyment.

“Good Lord! What a man!” exclaimed the elder, and his companion answered in an equally admiring tone: “Isn’t he, though! Just look at these desperadoes, will you!”

With shuffling feet some of them were turning back toward the inviting door in which the bartender stood with his dirty apron knotted into a string before him. Some of the more voluble were accusing the others of not having supported them, and loudly expounding the method of attack that would have been successful. The man with red welts across his face was swearing that if he ever got a chance he would “put a rifle ball through Bully.” The young man by the rock grinned and said: “That’s just about as close as he would ever dare come to that fellow. Shoot him through the back at a half-mile range!”

The bartender suddenly appeared to remember the travelers, and ran across the road.

“I’m sorry, gents,” he said, “that I can’t do more to show you the way, but you see how it is. Go up there to that big rock that looks like a bear’s head, then angle off south-east, and you’ll find a trail. When you come to any crossin’s, don’t take ’em, but keep

straight on, and bimeby, about to-morrer, if you don't camp too long to-night, you'll see a peak—high it is—with a yellow mark on it, like a cross. Can't miss it. Right under it's the Croix Mine. You leave the trail to cross a draw, look down, and there you are. So long!”

He turned and ran back across the road in response to brawling shouts from the men whose thirst seemed to have been renewed by their encounter with the masterful man they called “Bully,” and the partners, glad to escape from such a place, headed their animals upward into the hills.

CHAPTER II

THE CROIX D'OR

It was the day after the halt at the road house. Half-obliterated by the débris of snowslide and melting torrents, the trail was hard to follow. In some places the pack burros scrambled for a footing or skated awkwardly with tiny hoofs desperately set to check their descent, to be steadied and encouraged by the booming voice, deep as a bell, of the man nearest them. Sometimes in dangerous spots where shale slides threatened to prove unstable, his lean, grim face and blue-gray eyes appeared apprehensive, and he braced his great shoulders against one of the bulging packs to assist a sweating, straining animal. After one of these perilous tracts he stopped beside the burros, pushed the stained white Stetson to the back of his head, exposing a white forehead which had been protected from the sun, and ran the sleeve of his blue-flannel shirt across his face from brow to chin to wipe away the moisture.

“Hell’s got no worse roads than this!” he exclaimed. “Next time anybody talks me into takin’ a cut-off over a spring trail to save a day and a half’s time, him and me’ll have an argument!”

Ahead, and at the moment inspecting a knot in a diamond hitch, the other man grinned, then straightened up, and, shading his eyes from the sun with his hat, looked off into the distance. He

was younger than his partner, whose hair was grizzled to a badger gray, but no less determined and self-reliant in appearance. He did not look his thirty years, while the other man looked more than his forty-eight.

“Well, Bill,” he said slowly, “it seems to me if we can get through at all we’ve saved a day and a half. By the way, come up here.”

The grizzled prospector walked up until he stood abreast, and from the little rise stared ahead.

“Isn’t that it?” asked the younger man. “Over there—through the gap; just down below that spike with a snow cap.” He stretched out a long, muscular arm, and his companion edged up to it and sighted along its length and over the index finger as if it were the barrel of a rifle, and stared, scowling, at the distant maze of mountain and sky that seemed upended from the green of the forests below.

“Say, I believe you’re right, Dick!” he exclaimed. “I believe you are. Let’s hustle along to the top of this divide, and then we’ll know for sure.”

They resumed their progress, to halt at the top, where there was abruptly opened below them a far-flung panorama of white and gray and purple, stretched out in prodigality from sky line to sky line.

“Well, there she is, Dick,” asserted the elder man. “That yellow, cross-shaped mark up there on the side of the peak. I kept tellin’ you to keep patient and we’d get there after a while.”

His partner did not reply to the inconsistency of this argument, but stood looking at the landmark as if dreaming of all it represented.

“That is it, undoubtedly,” he said, as if to himself. “The Croix d’Or. I suppose that’s why the old Frenchman who located the mine in the first place gave it that name—the Cross of Gold!”

“Humph! It looks to me, from what I’ve heard of it,” growled the older prospector, “that the Double Cross would have been a heap more fittin’ name for it. It’s busted everybody that ever had it.”

The younger man laughed softly and remonstrated: “Now, what’s the use in saying that? It wasn’t the Croix d’Or that broke my father—”

“But his half in it was all he had left when he died!”

“That is true, and it is true that he sunk more than a hundred thousand in it; but it was the stock-market that got him. Besides, how about Sloan, my father’s old-time partner? He’s not broke, by a long shot!”

“No,” came the grumbling response, “he’s not busted, just because he had sense enough to lay his hand down when he’d gone the limit.”

“Lay his hand down? Say, Bill, you’re a little twisted, aren’t you? Better go back over the last month or two and think it over. We, being partners, are working up in the Cœur d’Alenes. Our prospect pinches out. We’ve got just seven hundred left between us on the day we bring the drills and hammers back, throw them

in the corner of the cabin, and say 'We're on a dead one. What next?' Then we get the letter saying that my father, whom I haven't seen in ten years, nor heard much of, owing to certain things, is dead, and that all he left was his half of the Croix d'Or. The letter comes from whom? Sloan! And it says that although he and my father, owing to father's abominable temper, had not been intimate for a year or two, he still respected his memory, and wanted to befriend his son. Didn't he? Then he said that he had enough belief left in the Croix d'Or to back it for a hundred thousand more, if I, being a practical miner, thought well of it. Do you call that laying down a hand? Humph!"

The elder man finished rolling a cigarette, and then looked at him with twinkling, whimsical eyes, as if continuing the argument merely for the sake of debate.

"Well, if he thinks it's such a good thing, why didn't he offer to buy you out? Why didn't they work her sooner? She's been idle, and water-soaked, for three years, ain't she? As sure as your name's Dick Townsend, and mine's Bill Mathews, that old feller back East don't think you're goin' to say it's all right. He knows all about you! He knows you don't stand for no lies or crooked work, and are a fool for principle, like a bee that goes and sticks his stinger into somethin' even though he knows he's goin' to kill himself by doin' it."

"Bosh!"

"And how do you know he ain't figurin' it this way: 'Now I'll send Dick Townsend down there to look at it. He'll say it's no

good. Then I'll buy him out and unload this Cross of Gold hole and plant it on some tenderfoot and get mine back!" You cain't make me believe in any of those Wall Street fellers! They all deal from the bottom of the deck and keep shoemaker's wax on their cuff buttons to steal the lone ace!"

As if giving the lie to his growling complaints and pessimism, he laughed with a bellowing cachinnation that prompted the burros, now rested, to look at him with long gray ears thrust forward curiously, and wonder at his noise.

Townsend appeared to comprehend that his partner was but half in earnest, and smiled good-humoredly.

"Well, Bill," he said, "if the mine's not full of water or bad air, so that we can't form any idea at all, we'll not be long in saying what we think of it. We ought to be there in an hour from now. Let's hike."

They began the slow, plodding gait of the packer again, finding it easier now that they were on the crest of a divide where the trail was less obstructed and firmer, and the yellow lines on the peak, their goal, came more plainly into view. The cross resolved itself into a peculiar slide of oxidized earth traversing two gullies, and the arm of the cross no longer appeared true to the perpendicular. The tall tamaracks began to segregate as the travelers dropped to a lower altitude; and pine and fir, fragrant with spring odor, seemed watching them. The trail at last took an abrupt turn away from the cross-marked mountain, and they came to another halt.

“This must be where they told us to turn off through the woods and down the slope, I think,” said Townsend. “Doesn’t it seem so to you, Bill?”

The old prospector frowned off toward the top of the peak now high above them, and then, with the peculiar farsightedness of an outdoor man of the West, looked around at the horizon as if calculating the position of the mine.

“Sure,” he agreed. “It can’t be any use to keep on the trail now. We’d better go to the right. They said we’d come to a little draw, then from the top of a low divide we’d see the mine buildings. Come on, Jack,” he ended, addressing the foremost burro, which patiently turned after him as he led the way through the trees.

They came to the draw, which proved shallow, climbed the opposite bank, and gave an exclamation of surprise.

“Holy Moses! They had some buildings and plant there, eh, Dick?”

The other, as if remembering all that was represented in the scene below, did not answer. He was thinking of the days when his father and he had been friendly, and of how that restless, grasping, conquering dreamer had built many hopes, even as he squandered many dollars, on the Croix d’Or. It was to produce millions. It was to be one of the greatest gold mines in the world. All that it required was more development. Now, it was to have a huge mill to handle vast quantities of low-grade ore; then all it needed was cheaper power, so it must have electric equipment. Again the milling results were not good, and what it demanded

was the cyanide process.

And so it had been, for years that he could still remember, and always it led his father on and on, deferring or promising hope, to come, at last, to this! A great, idle plant with some of its buildings falling into decay, its roadways obliterated by the brush growth that was creeping back through the clearings as Nature reconquered her own, and its huge waste dumps losing their ugliness under the green moss.

It seemed useless to think of anything more than an occasional pay chute. Yet, as he thought of it, hope revived; for there had been pay chutes of marvelous wealth. Why, men still talked of the Bonanza Chute that yielded eighty thousand dollars in four days' blasting before it worked out! Maybe there were others, but that was what his father and Sloan had always expected, and never found!

His meditations were cut short by a shout from below. A man appeared, small in the distance, on the flat, or "yard" of what seemed to be the blacksmith shop.

"Wonder who that can be?" speculated Bill, drawing his hat rim farther over his eyes.

"I don't know," answered Townsend, puzzled. "I never heard of their having any watchmen here. But we'll soon find out."

They started down the hillside at a faster pace, the tired animals surmising, with their curiously acute instinct, that this must be the end of the journey and hastening to have it over with. As they broke through a screen of brush and came out to the

edge of what had been a clearing back of a huge log bunk-house, the man who had shouted came rapidly forward to meet them. There was a certain shiftless, sullen, yet authoritative air about him as he spoke.

“What do you fellers want here?” he asked. “I s’pose you know that no one’s allowed on the Cross ground, don’t you?”

“We didn’t know that,” replied Townsend, inclined to be pacific, “but I fancy, we are different from almost any one else that would come. We represent the owners.”

“Can’t help that,” came the blustering answer. “You’ll have to hit the trail. I don’t take orders from no one but Presby.”

A shade of annoyance was depicted on Townsend’s face as he continued to ignore the watchman’s arrogance, and asked: “And please tell us, who is Presby?”

“Presby? Who’s Presby? What are you handin’ me? You don’t know Presby?”

“I don’t, or I shouldn’t have asked you,” Townsend answered with less patience.

“Say,” drawled his companion, with a calm deliberation that would have been dreaded by those who knew him, “does it hurt you much to be civil? You were asked who this man Presby is. Do you get that?”

The watchman glared at him for a moment, but there was something in the cold eyes and firm lines of the prospector’s face that caused him to hesitate before venturing any further display of officiousness.

“He’s the owner of the Rattler,” he answered sullenly, “and I’ve got orders from him that nobody, not any one, is to step a foot on this ground. If you’d ’a’ come by the road, you’d ’a’ seen the sign.”

The partners looked at each other for an instant, and the younger man, ignoring the elder’s apparent wrath, said: “Well, I suppose the best thing we can do is to leave the burros here and go and see Presby, and get this man of his called off.”

“You’ll leave no burros here!” asserted the watchman, recovering his combativeness.

“Why, you fool,” exploded Mathews, starting toward him with his fists clenched and anger blazing from his eyes at the watchman’s obstinate stupidity, “you’re talking to one of the owners of this mine! This is Mr. Townsend.”

For an instant the man appeared abashed, and then grumbled acridly: “Well, I can’t help it. I’ve got orders and—”

“Oh, come on, Bill,” interrupted the owner, stepping to the nearest burro’s head. “We’ll go on over to Presby, and get rid of this man of his. It won’t hurt the burros to go a little farther.”

He turned to the watchman, who was scowling and obdurate. “Where can Presby and the Rattler be found?” he asked crisply.

“Around the turn down at the mouth of the cañon,” the watchman mumbled. “It’s not more than half or three-quarters of a mile from here, but you’d better go back up the hill.”

As if this last suggestion was the breaking straw, the big

prospector jumped forward, and caught the man's wrist with dexterous, sinewy fingers. He gave the arm a jerk that almost took the man from his feet. His eyes were hard and sharp now, and his jaw seemed to have shut tightly.

"We'll go back up no hill, you bet on that!" he asserted belligerently. "We go by the road. We're done foolin' with you, my bucko! You go ahead and show the way and be quick about it! If you don't, you'll have trouble with me. Now git!"

He released the wrist with a shove that sent the watchman ten feet away, and cowed him to subjection. He recovered his balance, and hesitated for a minute, muttering something about "being even for that," and then, as the big, infuriated miner took a step toward him, said: "All right! Come on," and started toward a roadway that, half ruined, led off and was lost at a turn. Cursing softly and telling the burros that it was a shame they had to go farther on account of a fool, the prospector followed, and the little procession resumed its straggling march.

They passed the huge bunk-house, a mess-house, an assay office, what seemed to be the superintendent's quarters, and a dozen smaller structures, all of logs, and began an abrupt descent. The top of the cañon was so high that they looked down on the roof of the big, silent stamp mill with its quarter of a mile of covered tramway stretching like a huge, weather-beaten snake to the dumps of the grizzly and breakers behind it.

The road was blasted from the side of the cañon on which they were, and far below, between them and the hoisting house and

the mill, ran a clear little mountain stream, undefiled for years by the silt of industry. The peak of the cross, lifting a needle point high above them, as if keeping watch over the Blue Mountains, the far-distant Idaho hills, the near-by forests of Oregon, and the puny, man-made structures at its feet, appeared to have a lofty disdain of them and the burrowings into its mammoth sides, as if all ravagers were mere parasites, mad to uncover its secrets of gold, and futile, if successful, to wreak the slightest damage on its aged heart.

CHAPTER III

AN UGLY WATCHMAN

By easy stages indicating competent engineering and a lavish expenditure of money, the road led them downward to a barricade of logs, in an opening of which swung a gate barely wide enough to pass the tired burros and their packs.

“You’ll find Presby over there,” said their unwilling guide, pointing at a group of red-painted mining structures nestled in a flat lap in the ragged mountains.

They surmised that this must be the Rattler camp, and inspected its display of tall smokestacks, high hoists, skeleton tramways, and bleak dumps. Before they could make any reply, the gate behind them slammed shut with a vicious bang that attracted their attention. They turned to see the watchman hurrying back up the road. Fixed to the barricade was a sign, crudely lettered, but insistently distinct:

No one allowed on these premises, by order of the owners. For any business to be transacted with the Croix d’Or, apply to Thomas W. Presby.

“Curt enough, at least, isn’t he?” commented Townsend, half-smiling.

“Curt!” growled his companion, frowning, with his recent anger but half-dissipated. “Curt as a bulldog takin’ a bite out

of your leg. Don't waste no time at all on words. Just says: 'It's you I'm lookin' after.' Where do you reckon we'll find this here Thomas Presby person?"

"I suppose he must have an office up there somewhere," answered Townsend, waving his arm in the direction of the scattered buildings spread in that profligacy of space which comes where space is free.

"These mules is tired. It's a shame we couldn't have left them up there," Mathews answered, looking at them and fondling the ears of the nearest one. "You go on up and get an order letting us into your mine, and I'll wait here. No use in makin' these poor devils do any more'n they have to."

Townsend assented, and followed a path which zigzagged around boulders and stumps up to the red cluster on the hillside above him. He was impatient and annoyed at the useless delays imposed upon them in this new venture, and wondered why his father's partner had not informed him of the fact that he would find the mine guarded by the owner of the adjoining property.

A camp "washwoman," with clothespins in her mouth, and a soggy gray shirt in her hands, paused to stare at him from beneath a row of other gray and blue shirts and coarse underwear, dripping from the lines above her head.

Two little boys, fantastically garbed in faded blue denim which had evidently been refashioned from cast-off wearing apparel of their sires, followed after him, hand in hand, as if the advent of a stranger on the Rattler grounds was an event of interest,

and he found himself facing a squat, red, white-bordered, one-storied building, over whose door a white-and-black sign told the stranger, or applicant for work, that he was at the "office."

A man came to a window in a picketed wicket as he entered, and said briskly: "Well?"

"I want to see Mr. Presby," Dick answered, wasting no more words than had the other.

"Oh, well, if nobody else will do, go in through that door."

Before he had finished his speech, the bookkeeper had turned again toward the ledgers spread out on an unpainted, standing desk against the wall behind his palings, and Dick walked to the only door in sight. He opened it, and stepped inside. A white-headed, scowling man, clean shaven, and with close-shut, thin, hard lips, looked up over a pile of letters and accounts laid before him on a cheap, flat-topped desk.

Dick's eyes opened a trifle wider. He was looking at the man who had defied the mob at the road house, and at this close range studied his appearance more keenly.

There was hard, insolent mastery in his every line. His face had the sternness of granite. His hands, poised when interrupted in their task, were firm and wrinkled as if by years of reaching; and his heavy body, short neck, and muscle-bent shoulders, all suggested the man who had relentlessly fought his way to whatever position of dominancy he might then occupy. He wore the same faded black hat planted squarely on his head, and was in his shirt-sleeves. The only sign of self-indulgence betrayed in

him or his surroundings was an old crucible, serving as an ash tray, which was half-filled with cigar stumps, and Dick observed, in that instant's swift appraisal, that even these were chewed as if between the teeth of a mentally restless man.

"You want to see me?" the man questioned, and then, as if the thin partition had not muffled the words of the outer office, went on: "You asked for Presby. I'm Presby. What do you want?"

For an instant, self-reliant and cool as he was, Dick was confused by the directness of his greeting.

"I should like to have you tell that watchman over at the Croix d'Or that we are to be admitted there," he replied, forgetting that he had not introduced himself.

"You should, eh? And who are you, may I ask?" came the dry, satirical response.

Dick flushed a trifle, feeling that he had begun lamely in this reception and request.

"I am Richard Townsend," he answered, recovering himself. "A son of Charles Townsend, and a half-owner in the property. I've come to look the Croix d'Or over."

He was not conscious of it then, but remembered afterward, that Presby was momentarily startled by the announcement. The man's eyes seemed intent on penetrating and appraising him, as he stood there without a seat having been proffered, or any courtesy shown. Then, as if thinking, Presby stared at the inkwell before him, and frowned.

"How am I to know that?" he asked. "The Cross has had

enough men wanting to look it over to make an army. Maybe you're one of them. Got any letters telling me that I'm to turn it over to you?"

For an instant Dick was staggered by this obstacle.

"No," he said reluctantly, "I have not; that is, nothing directed to you. I did not know that you were in charge of the property."

He was surprised to notice that Presby's heavy brows adjusted themselves to a scowl. He wondered why the mine owner should be antagonistic to him, when there was nothing at stake.

"Well, I am," asserted Presby. "I hired the watchman up there, and I see to it that all the stuff lying around loose isn't stolen."

"On whose authority, may I ask?" questioned Dick, without thought of giving offense, but rather as a means of explaining his position.

"Sloan's. Why, you don't think I'm watching it because I want it, do you, young man? The old watchman threw up his job. I had Sloan's address, and wrote him about it. Sloan wrote and asked me to get a man to look after it, and I did. Now, you show me that you've got a right to go on the grounds of the Cross Mine, and I'll give an order to the watchman."

There was absolute antagonism in his tone, although not in his words. Dick thought of nothing at the moment but that he had one sole proof of his ownership, the letter from Sloan himself. He unbuttoned the flap of his shirt pocket, and, taking out a bundle of letters, selected the one bearing on the situation.

"That should be sufficient," he said, throwing it, opened,

before Presby.

The latter, without moving his solid body in the least, and as if his arms and hands were entirely independent of it, stolidly picked up the letter and read it. Dick could infer nothing of its reception. He could not tell whether Presby was inclined to accept it as sufficient authority, or to question it. Outside were the sounds of the Rattler's activity and production, the heavy, thunderous roar of the stamp mill, the clash of cars of ore dumped into the maws of the grizzly to be hammered into smaller fragments in their journey to the crusher, and thence downward to end their journeys over the thumping stamps, and out, disintegrated, across the wet and shaking tables.

It seemed, as he stood waiting, that the dust of the pulverized mountains had settled over everything in the office save the granite-like figure that sat at the desk, rereading the letter which had changed all his life. For the first time he thought that perhaps he should not have so easily displayed that link with his past. It seemed a useless sacrilege. If the mine-owner was not reading the letter, he was pondering, unmoved, over a course of action, and took his time.

Dick thought bitterly, in a flash, of all that it represented. The quarrel with his father on that day he had returned from Columbia University with a mining course proudly finished, when each, stubborn by nature, had insisted that his plan was the better; of his rebellious refusal to enter the brokerage office in Wall Street, and declaration that he intended to go into the

far West and follow his profession, and of the stern old man's dismissal when he asserted, with heat:

"You've always taken the road you wanted to go since your mother died. I objected to your taking up mining engineering, but you went ahead in spite of me. I tried to get you to take an interest in the business that has been my life work, but you scorned it. You wouldn't be a broker, or a banker. You had to be a mining engineer! All right, you've had your way, so far. Now, you can keep on in the way you have selected. I'll give you five thousand dollars, but you'll never get another cent from me until you've learned what a fool you're making of yourself, and return to do what I want you to do. It won't be long! There's a vast difference between dawdling around a university learning something that is going to be useless while your father pays the bills, and turning that foolish education into dollars to stave off an empty belly. You can go now."

In those days the house of Phillip Townsend had been a great name in New York. Now this was all that was left of it. Dissolution, death, and dust, and a half-interest in an abandoned mine! The harsh voice of Bully Presby aroused him from his thoughts.

"All right," it said. "This seems sufficient, but if you've got the sense and judgment Sloan seems to think you have, you'll come to the conclusion that there's not much use in wasting any of his good, hard dollars on the Croix d'Or. It never has paid. It never will pay. I offered to buy it once, but I wouldn't give a dollar for

it now, beyond what the timber above ground is worth. It owns a full section of timberland, and that's about all."

He reached for a pen and wrote a note to the watchman, telling him that the bearer, Richard Townsend, had come to look over the property and that his orders must be accepted, and signed it with his hard-driven scrawl. He handed it up to Dick without rising from his seat, and said: "That'll fix you up, I think."

As if by an afterthought, he asked: "Have you any idea of the condition of the mine?"

"No," Dick answered, as he folded the letter and put it into his pocket, together with the one from his late father's partner.

"Well, then, I can tell you, it's bad," said Presby, fixing him with his cool, hard stare. "The Cross is spotted. Once in a while they had pay chutes. They never had a true ledge. There isn't one there, as far as anybody that ever worked it knows. They wasted five hundred thousand dollars trying to find it, and drove ten thousand feet of drifts and tunnels. They went down more than six hundred feet. She's under water, no one knows how deep. It might take twenty thousand to un-water the sinking shaft again, and at the bottom you'd find nothing. Take my advice. Let it alone. Good-day."

Dick walked out, scarcely knowing whether to feel grateful for the churlish advice or to resume his wonted attitude of self-reliance and hold himself unprejudiced by Presby's condemnation of the Croix d'Or. He wondered if Bully Presby suspected him of having been friendly with the mob of drunken

ruffians at the road house, but he had been given no chance to explain.

At the bottom of the gulch he found Bill sprawled at length on his elbows almost under the forefeet of one of the burros which was nosing him over in a friendly caress. He called out as he approached, and the big prospector sat up, deftly snapped the cigarette he had been smoking into the creek with his thumb and forefinger, and got to his feet.

“Do we get permission to go on the claim?” he grinned, as Townsend reached him.

“Yes, I’ve got an order to the watchman. The old man doesn’t seem to think much of it. Says it’s spotted. Had rich pay chutes, but they pinched. No regular formation. Always been a loser. Thinks we’d be foolish to do anything with it.”

“Good of him, wasn’t it?”

Dick looked quickly at the hard, lined face of his companion.

“That’s the first thing I’ve heard that made me feel better,” declared the prospector, as he swung one of the burro’s heads back into the trail and hit the beast a friendly slap on the haunches to start it forward. “Whenever a man, like this old feller seems to be, gives me that kind of advice, I sit up and take notice.”

“Why—why, what do you know about him?” Dick asked, falling into the trail behind the pack animals, which had started forward with their slow jog trot, and ears swaying backward and forward as they went.

“While you was gone,” Mathews answered, “I had a long talk

with a boy that came along and got friendly. You can believe boys, most of 'em. They know a heap more than men. They think out things that men don't. Kids are always friends with me; you know that. I reckon, from what I gathered, that this Presby man is about as hard and grasping an old cuss as ever worked the last ounce of gold out of a waste dump. He makes the men save the fags of the candles and the drips, so's he can melt 'em over again. He runs a company store, and if they don't buy boots and grub from him, they have to tear out mighty quick. He fired a fireman because the safety-valve in the boiler-house let go one day twenty minutes before the noon shift went back to work. If he says, 'Let the Cross alone,' I think it's because he wants it."

"You couldn't guess who he is," Dick said, preparing to move.

"Why? Do I know him?"

"In a way. He's the man we saw the mob tackle, back there at the road house."

Bill gave a long whistle.

"So that's the chap, eh? Bully Presby! Well, if we ever run foul of him, we've got our work cut out for us. Things are beginnin' to get interestin'. 'I like the place,' as Daniel said when he went to sleep in the lion's den."

They opened the gate through the barricade without any formality, and were well started up the inclined road of the Croix d'Or before they encountered the watchman who had given them so much trouble. As he came toward them, frowning, they observed that he had buckled a pistol round him as if to resist

any intrusion in case it should be attempted without instructions. Dick handed him Presby's order, and the man read it through in surly silence; then his entire attitude underwent a swift change. He became almost obsequiously respectful.

"I'll have to go down and have a talk with Mr. Presby," he said, and would have ventured a further remark, but was cut short by the mine-owner.

"Yes, you'd better go and see him," Dick said concisely. "And when you go, take all of your dunnage you can carry, then come back and get the rest. I shall not want you on the claim an hour longer than necessary for you to get your stuff away. You're too good a man to have around here."

The fellow gave a shrug of his shoulders, an evil grin, and turned back up the road to vanish in what had evidently been the superintendent's cabin, and noisily began to whistle as he gathered his stuff together. The partners halted before the door, and Dick looked inside.

"I suppose you have the keys for everything, haven't you?" he called.

The man impudently tossed a bundle at him without a word. Apparently his belongings were but few, which led the newcomers to believe that he had taken his meals at the Rattler, and perhaps slept there on many nights. They watched him as he rolled his blankets, and prepared to start down the trail.

"The rest of that plunder in there, the pots and the lamp, belong to the mine," he said. And then, without other words,

turned away.

“That may be the last of him, and maybe it won’t!” growled Bill, as he began throwing the hitches off the tired burros that stood panting outside the door. “Anyway, it’s the fag end of him to-night.”

They were amazed at the lavish expenditure of money that had been made in the superintendent’s quarters. There were a porcelain bathtub brought up into the heart of the wilderness, a mahogany desk whose edges had been burned by careless smokers, and a safe whose door swung open, exposing a litter of papers, mine drawings, and plans. The four rooms evidently included office and living quarters, and they betokened a reckless financial outlay for the purpose.

“Poor Dad!” said Dick, looking around him. “No wonder the Cross lost money if this is a sample of the way the management spent it.”

He stepped outside to where the cañon was beginning to sink into the dusk. The early moon, still behind the silhouette of the eastern fringe of peaks and forests, lighted up the yellow cross mark high above, and for some reason, in the stillness of the evening, he accepted it as a sign of promise.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLACK DEATH

It took seven days of exploration to reveal the condition of the Cross of Gold, and each night the task appeared more hopeless. The steel pipe line, leading down for three miles of sinuous, black length, from a reservoir high up in the hills, had been broken here and there maliciously by some one who had traversed its length and with a heavy pick driven holes into it that inflicted thousands of dollars of expense.

The Pelton wheels in the power house, neglected, were rusted in their bearings, and without them and the pipe line there could be no electric power on which the mill depended. The mill had been stripped of all smaller stuff, and its dynamos had been chipped with an ax until the copper windings showed frayed and useless. The shoes of the huge stamps were worn down to a thin, uneven rim, battering on broken surfaces. The Venners rattled on their foundations, and the plates had been scarred as if by a chisel in the hands of a maniac.

The blacksmith's tunnel—the tunnel leading off from the level—was blocked by fallen timbers where a belt of lime formation cut across; and fragments of wood, splintered into toothpick size, had been thrown out when the mountain settled to its place. But a short distance from the main shaft, which was a double

compartment, carrying two cages up and down, in every level the air was foul down to the five-hundred foot, and below that the mine was filled with water.

Patiently Dick and the veteran explored these windings as far as they might until the guttering of their candles warned them that the air was loaded with poison, and often they retreated none too soon to scale the slippery, yielding rungs of the ladder with dizzy heads. Expert and experienced, they were puzzled by what was disclosed. Either the mine had yielded exceedingly rich streaks and had been, in mining parlance, "gophered," or else the management had been as foolish as ever handled a property.

In the assay-house, where the furnaces were dust-covered, the scale case black with grime, and the floor littered with refuse crucibles, cupels, mufflers, and worn buckboards, they discovered a bundle of old tablets. Almost invariably these showed that the assays had been made from samples that would have paid to work, but this alone gave them no hope.

But this was not all. A mysterious enmity seemed to pursue all their efforts. Yet its displays were unaccountable for by natural causes. On their arrival at the mine they found water, fresh and clear, piped into every cabin, the mess-house, and the superintendent's quarters. They traced it back and discovered a small lake formed and fed by a large spring on what was evidently land of the mine. It suddenly failed them, and proved unwholesome. An investigation of the tiny reservoir disclosed masses of poisonous weeds in the water. They decided that they

must have been blown there after their arrival, cleared the supply and yet, but two days later, when there had been no wind of more than noticeable violence, the weeds were there again. They abandoned their water supply for the time being and resorted to the stream at the bottom of the cañon.

A day later one of their burros died mysteriously, and Bill, puzzled, said he believed that it had lost its sense of smell and eaten something poisonous. On the day following the other died, apparently from the same complaint. The veteran miner grieved over them as for friends.

“I’ve been acquainted with a good many of ’em,” he said, sorrowfully, “but I never knew two that had finer characters than these two did. They were regular burros! No cheaters—just the square, open and above-board kind, that never kicked without layin’ back their ears to give you warnin’ and never laid down on the trail unless they wanted to rest. The meanest thing a burro or a man can do is to die voluntarily when you’re dependin’ on him, or when he owes you work or money. So it does seem as if I must have been mistaken in these two, after all, because we may need ’em.”

Dick did not smile at his homily, for he caught the significance of it, that the Croix d’Or would have to make a better showing than they had so far discovered to warrant them in opening it. They had come almost to the end of the investigations possible. They scanned plans and scales in the office to familiarize themselves with the property, and there was but one portion of

it they had not visited. That was a shaft which had been the "discovery hole," where the first find of ore had been made. And it was this they entered on the day when Fate seemed most particularly unkind. Yet even Fate appeared to relent, in the end, through one of those trifling afterthoughts which lead men to do the insignificant act. They had prepared everything for the venture. They had an extra supply of candles, chalk for making a course mark, sample bags for such pieces of ore as might interest them, and the prospectors' picks and hammers when they started out. They were a hundred yards from the office when the younger man hesitated, stopped and turned back.

"I've an idea we might need those old maps," he said. "We haven't gone over them very much and they might come in handy."

Bill protested, but despite this Dick went back to the quarters and got them. They were crude, apparently, compared with the later work when competent engineers had opened the mine in earnest; but doubtless had served their purpose. The men came to the mouth of the old shaft which had been loosely covered over with poles, and around which a thicket of wild blackberry bushes had sprung up in stunted growth. An hour's work disclosed the black opening and a ladder in a fair state of preservation. They lowered a candle into the depths and saw that it burned undimmed, indicating that the air was pure, and then descended cautiously, testing each rung as they went. The shaft was not more than fifty feet deep, and they found themselves standing on

the bottom and peering off into a drift which had been crudely timbered and had fallen in here and there as the unworked ground had settled.

“There doesn’t seem to be much of anything here except some starved quartz,” Bill said, staring at the wall after they had gone in some thirty or forty feet, and they had come to a place where the lagging had dropped away. He caught another piece of the half-rotted timbering and jerked it loose for a better inspection. It gave with a dull crack, then, immediately after, and seeming almost an echo, there was a terrific rumble, and a report like the explosion of a huge gun back in the direction of the shaft. Their candles flickered in the air impact, and for an instant they feared that the roof was coming down on them to crush them out of all resemblance to human beings.

They turned and ran toward the shaft. A few loose pebbles and pieces of rock were dripping from above like a shower of porphyry. For an instant they dared not step out, but stood inside the drift, waiting for what might happen and staring at each other with set faces exposed in the still flickering light. They had said nothing up to this time, being under too great stress to offer other than sharp exclamations.

“Sounds like that shaft had given way!” the veteran exclaimed. “If it has—”

He leaned forward and looked into Dick’s face.

“If it has,” the latter took up, “we are in a bad predicament.” They stood tensed and anxious until the pebbles stopped

falling and a silence like that of a tomb, so profound as to seem thick and dense, invaded the hollows; then Dick started out into the shaft. He felt a restraining hand on his arm.

“Wait a minute, boy,” the elder man said. “You’re the owner here. It’s dangerous. I ought to be the one to go first and find out what’s happened. You wait inside the drift.”

But Dick shook his hand off and stepped out to look upward. A dense blackness filled what should have been a space of light. This he had partially expected from the fact that when they came out toward the shaft there had been no sign of day; but he had not anticipated such a complete closing of the opening.

“Lord! We’re buried in!” came an exclamation from behind him, and he felt a sudden sinking of the heart.

“I’ll go easily till I come to it,” he said, his voice sounding strained and loud although he had spoken scarcely above a whisper. “You stand clear so that if anything gives, Bill, you won’t be caught.”

The elder miner would have protested, but already he was slowly and cautiously climbing the ladder. Step by step he ascended, holding the light above his head to discover the place where the shaft had given way, and then Bill, standing anxiously below, heard a harsh shout.

“I think the ladder will bear your weight as well as mine. Come up here.”

The big man climbed steadily upward until he stood directly beneath the younger man’s feet. He ventured an exclamation that

was almost an oath.

“Not the shaft at all,” he said, an instant later. “It’s just a boulder so big that it filled the whole opening. We’re plugged and penned in here like rats in a trap!”

Dick took his little prospecting hammer and tapped the boulder, at first gently, then with firmer strokes, and looked down at his partner with a distressed face.

“Hear that?” he exclaimed, rather than questioned. “It’s a big one, and solid. It sounds bad to me.”

For a minute they waved their candles round the edge, inspecting the resting place of the rock that had imprisoned them. Everywhere it was set firmly. A fitted door could have been no more secure. They consulted, and at last Bill descended and stepped back into the entrance to the drift to avoid falling stone, while the younger man attacked the edge beneath the boulder, inch by inch, trying to find some place where he could pick through to daylight. At last, his arm wearied and the point of his prospecting hammer dulled, he rested.

“Come down, Dick, and I’ll take a spell,” Bill called up from below, and he obeyed.

The big miner, without comment, climbed up, and again the vault-like space was filled with the persistent picking of steel on stone. For a half-hour it continued, and then, slowly, Bill descended. He sat down at the foot of the shaft, wiped the sweat from his face, thrust his candlestick in a crevice and rolled a cigarette before he said anything, and then only as Dick started

to the foot of the ladder.

“It’s no use,” he said. “We’re holed up all right. I picked clear around the lower edge and there isn’t a place where she isn’t resting on solid rock. Nothing but dynamite could ever move that stone. Unless we can find some other way out we’re—”

He paused and Dick added the finishing word, “Gone!”

“Exactly! No one knows we’re here. No one comes to the mine. We’re in the old works which I don’t suppose a man has been inside of in five or ten years, and the map shows that it doesn’t connect with the other ones. Answer—the finish!”

Dick pulled the worn and badly drawn plans from his pocket and then lighted his own candle, indulging in the extravagance of two that he might study the faint and smudged penciled lines.

“Here, Bill,” he said, pointing at the drawing. “These two side drifts each end in what are now sump holes. We’ve got to watch out for them. That makes it safe for us to take the main drift and see where it leads. The two end drifts evidently ran but a few feet and were then abandoned. So, if these plans are any good, they, too, are safe, if we can get into them.”

The elder miner peered at the plans and studied them. He stood up and blew out his candle. He thrust his hands into his pockets.

“I’ve got three candles left,” he said, “and I cain’t just exactly say why I put that many in unless the Lord gave me a hunch we’d need ’em. How many you got!”

“One in my pocket, and this.”

“Then we’d better move fast, eh?”

They took a desperate chance on foul air and plunged down the drift, pausing only now and then when they came to the first side drifts to make sure of their course. They were informed by the plans that they had barely three hundred feet to explore, yet they had gone even farther than that before they came to a halt, a threatening one, for directly ahead of them the timbering had given way, the shaft caved, and there seemed at first no opening through the débris.

“Well, this looks pretty tough!” exclaimed Bill, stooping down and examining the face of the barrier.

His companion lighted his own candle and together they went over the face of the obstruction.

“It looks to me as if we could open her up a little if we can shift this timber here and use it as a lever,” he said, pointing to one projecting near the roof.

“May bring the whole mountain down, but it’s our only chance,” agreed Bill. “Here she goes. Stand back. No use in both of us getting it.”

He caught the end of the timber in his heavy hands, planted his feet firmly on the floor and heaved. The big timber creaked, but did not give. Again he planted himself and this time his great shoulders seemed to twist and writhe until the muscles cracked and then, with a crash, the barrier gave way. He sprang back with amazing quickness and they ran back up the drift for twenty or thirty feet while the mass again readjusted itself and settled

slowly into position. A cloud of dust bellowed toward them, half-choking them with its gritty fineness, and then, in a minute, the air had cleared. They went cautiously forward.

“Well, we got some farther, anyhow, unless she comes down while we’re working through. We’ve got a hole to crawl into, and that’s something,” the big miner asserted.

Before he could say anything more Dick had crowded him to one side and was entering the aperture. He had prevented his partner from taking the first perilous chance. Painfully he made his way, while the man behind listened with terrified apprehension; for none knew better than he the risk of that progress.

“All right, but be careful,” a voice came to him faintly from the distance. “She’s bad, but the air over here seems good. It’s a close shave.”

The big miner dropped down and began crawling through beneath the tons of balanced rock, which might give at any instant. Larger than his younger companion, he found it more difficult for his great shoulders persisted in brushing at all times, and now and then he was compelled to squeeze himself through a narrow place that for a moment threatened to be impossible. Once a timber above him gave a little and a rock crowded down until only by exerting his whole force could he sustain it while he scraped his hips through from under it. Then as it descended between his legs he found one of them pinioned. He shut his teeth desperately to avoid shouting, and twisted sidewise, and back, to

and fro, at the imminent danger of dislodging everything above him. He heard an anxious voice calling outside and replied that he was coming and was all right. He rested for an instant to regain breath, then made a desperate forward effort to find that his foot alone caught him. Again he rolled from side to side, and again he rested.

“Bill! Bill! For God’s sake, what has happened?” he heard an agonized call from ahead.

“I’m all right, boy,” he called back patiently. “Just keep away from the hole so I can get air. I’m—I’m just findin’ some places a little tight.”

His reply did not seem to allay the solicitude of his companion, who called again, “Can I help you in any way?”

“Only by keeping clear. I’ll make another try. Stand clear so if she comes down you won’t be caught. If she does come—well—good-bye, Dick!”

As he spoke the final word he made another fiercely desperate effort from his new position. There was a ripping, searing pain along the length of his foot which he disregarded in that supreme attempt and suddenly he seemed to slide forward while back of him came a crunching, grinding noise as the disturbed rock which had pinioned him settled down into place. He crawled desperately forward. A light flared in his eyes and he felt strong hands thrust under his arm pits and was jerked bodily out to the floor of the drift. They fell together and the candle, falling with them, was extinguished. They were overwhelmed, as they

lay there in the darkness, gasping, by a terrific crashing impact as if the whole mountain had given way and at their very feet huge rocks thundered down. They crawled farther along on hands and knees and the falling rock seemed to pursue them malignantly. For an age it seemed as if the whole drift would give way as each set of timbers came to the strain and failed to hold. Then again all was still.

Strangling, sweating, spent, they got to the side wall and raised themselves up, gasping for fresh air. Their senses wavered and swooned in that half-suffocation and slowly they comprehended that they were still alive and that the dust was settling. "Are you all right?" they called to each other in acute unison, their voices betraying a great apprehension, and then, reassured for the instant, they sagged weakly against the walls and each reached out to find the other. Their hands met and clasped fervently and, again in unison, they said, "Thank God!"

A match spluttered dimly through the dark and dust-clogged air, a candle slowly took flame and they looked at each other. Bill was leaning against the wall, weakly, and trying to recover his strength. A tattered trousers leg clung above his bared leg and foot where he had wrenched himself loose from the rock, and torn his boot away in so doing. Along the length of the white flesh was a flaring line of red, where the point of rock had cut deeply when he made that last desperate struggle to escape. He dropped to the floor and clutched his wound with his hands while Dick, almost with a moan, thrust his candlestick into a timber

and savagely tore his shirt off and rent it into strips. He stooped over and with hasty skill bandaged the wound.

“It’s not bad, I hope,” he said, “but it does hurt, doesn’t it, old partner?”

“That’s nothin’,” bravely drawled the giant, striving to force a grin to his pain-drawn lips. “Don’t worry now, boy! Think what might have happened if I’d been there a minute or two longer, or if I couldn’t have got loose at all!”

In their thankfulness for the last escape they had almost forgotten the fact that their situation was still almost hopeless, and that perhaps the speedy end would have been preferable to one more agonizing, more slow, to come. They got to their feet at last and hobbled forward, the big man resting half his weight on his friend’s shoulder and making slow progress. Again they were centered on the faint hope that beyond was some sort of opening, because now they knew but too well that their retreat was effectually cut off. If there was no opening ahead they were doomed. They consulted the plan again and went forward. Abruptly they came to a halt, shutting their jaws hard. They had come to the end of the main drift and it was a blank wall of solid stone where the prospectors had finished!

“Well, old man, there’s still the two side drifts to examine,” said Bill with a plain attempt to appear hopeful that did not in the least deceive the other.

“Yes. That’s back there about fifty feet,” Dick assented, finding that it required an effort to steady his voice. “The other

one is behind that barrier.”

They looked at each other, reading the same thought. They had but one more chance and that was almost futile; for the plans indicated that the side drift extended but a score or so of yards and had then been abandoned. They felt their feet faltering when they turned into it, dreading the end, dreading the revelation that must tell them they were to die in this limited burrow in the hills. But courageously they tried to assume an air of confidence. They did not speak as they progressed, each dreading that instant when he would again face an inexorable barrier. They counted their steps as they went, to themselves. They came to the twentieth, twenty-first, twenty-second, and were peering fixedly ahead. Together they stopped and turned toward each other. Dimly in the faintly thrown light of the candle beams, they could see it, the dusky gray mass where hope had pictured a continuing blackness. The wall leered at them as they stood there panting, despairing, desperate as trapped animals. Their imaginations told them the end.

“Well, old man”—Bill’s voice sounded with exceptional softness—“they didn’t extend this drift any farther. All we can do now is to go up and sit down at the foot of it, and—wait!”

“But it won’t take long, Bill,” Dick replied. “The air, you know. It can’t last forever.”

They trudged forward for the few remaining yards and then, abruptly, the candle they were carrying gave a little flicker. This time they stopped in their tracks and shouted. Bill suddenly

loosened his hold on the younger man's shoulder and began hopping forward, and the light threw huge, grotesque, strangely moving shadows on the wall ahead of them. Dick ran after him, crowding on his heels and shouting meaningless hopes. Abruptly they came to a right-angle drift, and then, but a few yards down it, they discovered an upraise, crude and uncared-for, but climbing into the higher darkness, and down this there streamed fresh air.

It was such a one as prospectors make, having here and there a pole with cleats to serve as a ladder, then ascending at an incline which, though difficult, was not impossible, and again reverting to rocky footholds at the sides. Up this Dick boosted his partner, thrusting a shoulder beneath his haunches and straining upward with the exultation of reaction. They were saved! He knew it! The fresh air told that story to their experienced nostrils. Up, up, up they clambered for a long slanting distance and then fell out on the floor of another drift, at whose end was a shadowy light. Again they hobbled down a long length, ever approaching their goal. Bill stopped and leaned against the side wall and voiced his exultation.

"I know where we are," he exclaimed. "This is the blacksmiths' tunnel. They made that upraise following the ore, and that's why the mine was opened for the second time here. They didn't complete the plans because they knew the old work was useless. Dick, we've been through some pretty hard times together and had some narrow shaves; but I don't care for many more like that! Come on. Help me out. I want you to take a look

and see if my head is any whiter than it was at nine o'clock this mornin' when we went into that other hole."

CHAPTER V

THE AGED ENGINEER

The sunlight was good to see again—good as only sunlight can be when men have not expected ever again to be enlivened by its glory. They were astonished at the shortness of the time of their imprisonment. They had lived years in dread thought, and but a few hours in reality. They had suffered for the spans of lives to find that the clock had imperturbably registered brief intervals. They had played the gamut of dread, terror, and anguish, to learn how trivial, after all, was the completed score.

“I think that will do,” said Dick, with a sigh of relief, as he straightened up from bandaging Bill’s leg. “The stitches probably hurt some, but aside from a day’s stiffness I don’t think you will ever know it happened.”

“Won’t eh?” rumbled the patient. “Sure, the leg’s all right; but it ain’t bruised limbs a man remembers. They heal. You can see the scars on a man’s legs, but only the Lord Almighty can see those on his mind, and they’re the only ones that last. Dick, now that it’s all over, I ain’t ashamed to tell you that there was quite a long spell down there underground when I thought over a heap of things I might have done different if I’d had a chance to do ’em over again. And, boy, I thought quite a little bit about you! It didn’t seem right that a young fellow like you, with so much

to live for, should be snuffed out down there in that black place, where the whole mountain acted as if it was chasin' us, step by step, to wipe us off the slate."

He stood on his feet and limped across the room to his coat in an effort to recover himself, and Dick, more stirred than he cared to admit by the affection in his voice, tramped out to the little porch in front and pretended to whistle a tune, that proved tuneless. He looked at the little valley around the shoulder of the mountain at the head of the ravine, which they had so carelessly invaded that morning, and shuddered. Inside he heard Bill moving around, and then after a time his steps advancing stiffly, and turned to see him coming out.

"I think," he said smiling, "that we're entitled to a rest for to-day. By to-morrow you'll be all right again, unless I'm mistaken. Let's put in the day looking over these old records."

Bill grinned whimsically and assented. He could keep quiet when he had to; but the day following found him again restlessly investigating anything that seemed worth the trouble and the afternoon saw him standing looking upward toward the same valley of dread.

"I've got over it a little," he said to the younger man, "and do you know I'm right curious to go over there and see how big that rock was that tumbled into the mouth of the old shaft. Want to come along?"

Dick had sustained that same curiosity, so together they made their way to the beginning of the previous day's disaster. They

chilled when they saw how effectually they had been caught; for the boulder completely filled the entrance to the shaft and would have proved a hopeless trap had they tried to escape by burrowing around its edge. It rested, as they had discovered, on solid rock, and its course down the hillside was clearly marked.

“What gets me,” said the veteran miner, “is what could have started it. I noticed it up there when we went in. It was sort of poised on that little ledge you see, and it didn’t have to roll more than thirty feet.”

He began to climb up the boulder’s well-defined path, and suddenly called to his partner with a hoarse shout, needlessly loud.

“Come up here,” he said. “That boulder never started itself! Some one helped it. What do you think of that?”

Dick hastily climbed up to his side and looked. The rock around was bare of growth or covering, so that no footprints could be discerned; but a rock rested there that had plainly been used as a fulcrum. The surface beneath it was weather beaten and devoid of moisture, which indicated that it had lain there but a short time, probably only from the time of its mission on the preceding day. They found themselves standing up and staring around at the surrounding hills as if seeking sight of the man who had attempted to murder them.

“We’ll find out about this!” Bill exclaimed. “Good thing we know enough to look.”

He limped to the edge of the barren spot and began to circle

around its edge, while Dick did likewise, following his example. They found a footprint at last and took the trail. It did not lead them far before they came to a path on top of the hill that was so well used that any attempt to follow it was useless; but, intent on seeing where it led, they walked along it as it led straight away toward the timber. Scarcely inside the cool shadows of the tamaracks they paused and looked at each other understandingly; for thrown carelessly into a clump of laurel was a long, freshly cut sapling, that had been used as a lever. They recovered it from its resting place and inspected it. There was no doubt whatever that it had been the instrument of motion. Its scarred end, its length, and all, told that the man who had used it had carried it this far to discard it, believing his murderous work done.

“I noticed that rock, as I said before,” declared Bill. “You noticed how round it was on one side? Well, a man could take this lever, and by teetering on it until he got it in motion, finally upset it. The chances were a hundred to one it would land in the mouth of the shaft. And it’s a cinch, it seems to me, he wouldn’t do that for fun.”

Dick shook his head gravely.

“But who could it be?” he insisted. “Who is there that could want us out of the way badly enough to murder us? No one here knows or cares a continental about us! It seems incredible. It must have been sheer carelessness of some restless loafer who wanted to see the rock roll.”

Yet they knew that the theory was scarcely tenable. They

walked farther along the path and found that it was one used by workmen, evidently, leading at last down the steep mountain side and across to the Rattler. They surmised that it must be one made by the timber cutters for the mine, and learned, in later months, that the surmise was correct.

“It makes one thing certain,” Bill declared that evening when, candidly discouraged, they sat on the little porch in front of the office they had made their home and discussed the day’s findings. “And that is that until we get a force to work here, if we ever do, it ain’t a right healthy place for us. Of course with a gang of men around there wouldn’t be a ghost of a chance for any enemy to get us; but until then we’d better watch out all the time. I begin to believe that about everything that’s happened to us here has been the work of somebody who ain’t right fond of us. Wish we could catch him at it once!”

There was a grim undercurrent in his wish that left nothing to words. They remembered that in all the time since their arrival they had seen no other human being, the Rattler men having left them as severely alone as if they had been under quarantine.

In the stillness of twilight they heard the slow, soft padding of a man’s feet laboriously climbing the hill, and listened intently at the unusual sound.

“Wonder who that is,” speculated Bill, leaning forward and staring at the dim trail. “Looks like a dwarf from here. Some old man of the mountain coming up to drive us off!”

“Hello,” hailed a shrill, quavering voice. “Be you the bosses?”

“We are,” Dick shouted, in reply, “Come on up.”

The visitor came halting up the slope, and they discerned that he was lame and carrying a roll of blankets. He paused before them, panting, and then dropped the roll from his back, and sat down on the edge of the porch with his head turned to face them. He was white headed and old, and seemed to have exhausted his surplus strength in his haste to reach them before darkness.

“I’m Bells Park,” he said. “Bells Park, the engineer. Maybe you’ve heard of me? Eh? What? No? Well, I used to have the engines here at the Cross eight or ten years ago, and I’ve come to take ’em again. When do I go to work? They hates me around here. They drove me out once. I said I’d come back. I’m here. I’m a union man, but I tell ’em what I think of ’em, and it don’t set well. When did you say I go to work?”

“I’m afraid you don’t go,” Dick answered regretfully.

The Cross, so far as he could conjecture, would never again ring with the sounds of throbbing engines. Already he was more than half-convinced that he should write to Sloan and reject his kindly offer of support. “We’ve been here but a week, but it doesn’t look promising to us.”

“Well, then you’re a pair of fools!” came the disrespectful and irascible retort. “They told me down in Goldpan that some miners had come to open the Cross up again. You’re not miners. I’ve hoofed it all the way up here for nothin’.”

The partners looked at each other, and grinned at the old man’s tirade. He went on without noticing them, speaking of himself

in the third person:

“I can stay here to-night somewhere, can’t I? Bells Park is askin’ it. Bells Park that used to be chief in the Con and Virginia, and once had his own cabin here—cabin that was a home till his wife went away on the long trip. She’s asleep up there under the cross mark on the hill. Bells Park as came back because he wanted to be near where she was put away! She was the best woman that ever lived. I’m looking for my old job back. I can sleep here, can’t I?”

His querulous question was more of a challenge than a request, and Dick hastened to assure him that he could unroll his blankets in a bunk in the rambling old structure that loomed dim, silent, and ghostly, on the hill beyond where they were seated. His pity and hospitality led him farther.

“Had your supper?” he asked.

Bells Park shook his head in negation.

“Then you can share with us,” Dick said, getting to his feet and entering the cabin from which in a few moments came a rattle of fire being replenished, a coffee-pot being refilled, and the crisp, frying note of sizzling bacon and eggs.

“Who might that young feller be?” asked the engineer, glowering with sudden curiosity, after his long silence, into the face of the grizzled old prospector, who, in the interim, had sat quietly.

“Him? That’s Dick Townsend, half-owner in the mine,” Bill replied.

“Half owner? Cookin’ for me? Why don’t you do it? What right have you got sittin’ here on your long haunches and lettin’ a boss do the work? Hey? Who are you?”

“I’m his superintendent,” grinned Bill, appreciating the joke of being superintendent of a mine where no one worked.

“Oh!” said the engineer. And then, after a pause, as if readjusting all these conditions to meet his approval: “Say, he’s all right, ain’t he!”

“You bet your life!” came the emphatic response.

The applicant said no more until after he had gone into the cabin and eaten his fill, after which he insisted on clearing away the dishes, and then rejoined them in a less-tired mood. He squatted down on the edge of the porch, where they sat staring at the shadows of the glorious night, and appeared to be thoughtful for a time, while they were silently amused.

“You’re thinkin’ it’s no good, are you?” he suddenly asked, brandishing his pipe at Dick. “Well, I said you were a fool. Take it kindly, young feller. I’m an old man, but I know. You’ve been good to me. I didn’t come here to butt my nose in, but I know her better than you do. Say!” He pivoted on his hips, and tapped an emphatic forefinger on the warped planks beneath in punctuation. “There never was a set of owners shell-gamed like them that had the Croix d’Or! There never was a good property so badly handled. Two superintendents are retired and livin’ on the money they stole from her. One millman’s bought himself a hotel in Seattle with what he got away with. There was enough

ore packed off in dinner-pails from the Bonanza Chute to heel half the men who tapped it. They were always lookin' for more of 'em. They passed through a lead of ore that would have paid expenses, on the six-hundred-foot level, and lagged it rather than hoist it out. I know! I've seen the cars come up out of the shaft with a man standin' on the hundred foot to slush 'em over with muddy sump water so the gold wouldn't show until the car men could swipe the stuff and dump it out of the tram to be picked up at night. It ain't the rich streaks that pays. It's the four-foot ledge that runs profit from two bits to a couple of dollars a ton. That's what showed on the six-hundred level. Get it?"

The partners by this time were leaning eagerly forward, half-inclined to believe all that had been told them, yet willing to discount the gabbling of the old man and find content. Until bedtime he went on, and they listened to him the next morning, when the slow dawn crept up, and decided to take the plunge. And so it was that Dick wrote a long statement of the findings to his backer in New York and told him that he was going to chance it and open the Croix d'Or again until he was satisfied, either that it would not pay to work, or would merit larger expenditure.

Once again the smoke belched from the hoisting house of the Cross, and the throb of the pumps came, hollow and clanking, from the shaft below. A stream of discolored water swirled into the creek from the waste pipes, and the rainbow trout, affrighted and disgusted, forsook its reaches and sought the pools of the river into which it emptied.

Slowly they gained on its depths, and each day the murk swam lower, and the newly oiled cage waited for its freshly stretched cable, one which had happened to be coiled in the store-house. The compressor shivered and vibrated as the pistons drove clean, sweet air through the long-disused pipes, and at last the partners knew they could reach the anticipated six-hundred-foot level and form their own conclusions.

“Well, here goes,” said Bill, grinning from under his sou’wester as they entered the cage with lamps in hand. “We’ll see how she looks if the air pipes aren’t broken.”

They saw the slimy black sides of the shaft slip past them as Bells Park dropped them into the depths, and felt the cage slow down as he saw his pointer above the drum indicate the approach of the six-hundred-foot level. They stepped out cautiously, whiffed the air, and knew that the pipes, which had been protected by the water, were intact, and that they had no need to fear foul air. The rusted rails, slime-covered, beneath their rubber boots, glowed a vivid red as they inspected the timbering above, and saw that the sparse stulls, caps, and columns were still holding their own, and that the heavy porphyritic formation would scarcely have given had the timbers rotted away. Dank, glistening walls and a tremulous waving blackness were ahead of them as they cautiously invaded the long-deserted precincts, scraping and striking here and there with their prospector’s picks in search of the lost lead.

“About two hundred feet from the shaft, Bells said,” Dick

commented. "And this must be about the place where they cut through pay ore in search of another lobe of the Bonanza Chute. What thieves they were!"

He suddenly became aware that his companion was not with him, and whirled round. Back of him shone a tiny spark of flaring light, striving to illumine the solid blackness. He paused expectantly, and a voice came bellowing through the dark:

"Here it is. The old man's right, I think. This looks like ore to me."

Dick hastened back, and assisted while they broke away the looser pieces of green rock, glowing dully, and filled their sample sacks.

Three hours later they stood over the scales in the log assay-house above, and congratulated each other.

"It'll pay!" Dick declared gleefully. "Not much, but enough to justify going on with the work. I am glad I wrote Sloan that I should draw on him, and now we'll go ahead and hire a small gang to set the mill and the Cross in shape."

They were like boys when they crossed to the engine house and told the news to the hard-worked engineer, who chuckled softly and asserted that he had "told them so."

"Now, the best way for you to get a gang around here," he said, "is to go down to Goldpan and tell 'The Lily' you want her to pass the word, or stick a sign up in her place saying what men, and how many, you want."

"Sounds like a nice name," Mathews commented.

“The Lily?” questioned Dick, anxious as to who this camp character could be.

“Sure,” the engineer rasped, as if annoyed by their ignorance. “Ain’t you never heard of her? Well, her right name, so they tell, is Lily Meredith. She owns the place called the High Light. Everybody knows her. She’s square, even if she does run a dance hall and rents a gamblin’ joint. She don’t stand for nothin’ crooked, Lily don’t. She pays her way, and asks no favors. Go down and tell her you want men. They all go there, some time or another.”

He stooped over to inspect the fire under the small boiler he was working, and straightened up before he went on. Through the black coating on his face, he appeared thoughtful.

“Best time to see The Lily and get action is at night. All the day-shift men hang around the camp then, and, besides that, they’ve got a new batch of placer ground about a mile and a half over the other side, and lots of them fellers come over. Want to go to-day?”

The partners looked at each other, as if consulting, and then Dick said: “Yes. I think the sooner the better.”

Bells Park pulled the visor of his greasy little cap lower over his eyes, and stepped to the door.

“Come out here onto the yard,” he said, and they followed. “Go down to the Rattler, then bear off to the right. The trail starts in back of the last shanty on the right-hand side. You see that gap up yonder? Not the big one, but the narrow one.” He pointed

with a grimy hand. "Well, you go right through that and drop down, and you'll see the camp below you. It's a stiff climb, but the trail's good, and it's just about two miles over there. It's so plain you can make it home by moonlight."

Without further ceremony or advice, he returned into the boiler-room, and the partners, after but slight preparations, began their journey.

It was a stiff climb! The sun had set, and the long twilight was giving way to darkness when they came down the trail into the upper end of the camp. Some embryo artist was painfully overworking an accordion, while a dog rendered melancholy by the unmusical noise, occasionally accompanied him with prolonged howls. A belated ore trailer, with the front wagon creaking under the whine of the brakes and the chains of the six horses clanking, lurched down from a road on the far side of the long, straggling street, and passed them, the horses' heads hanging as if overwork had robbed them of all stable-going spirit of eagerness.

The steady, booming "clumpety-clump! clumpety-clump!" of a stamp-mill on a shoulder of a hill high above the camp, drowned the whir and chirp of night insects, and from the second story of a house they passed they heard the crude banging of a piano, and a woman's strident voice wailing, "She may have seen better da-a-ys," with a mighty effort to be pathetic.

"Seems right homelike! Don't it?" Bill grinned and chuckled. "That's one right nice thing about minin'. You can go from

Dawson to Chiapas, and a camp's a camp! Always the same. I reckon if you went up the street far enough you'd find a Miner's Home Saloon, maybe a Northern Light or two, and you can bet on there bein' a First Class."

The High Light proved to be the most pretentious resort in Goldpan. For one thing it had plate-glass windows and a gorgeous sign painted thereon. Its double doors were wide, and at the front was a bar with a brass rail that, by its very brightness, told only too plainly that the evening's trade had not commenced. Two bartenders, one with a huge crest of hair waved back, and the other with his parted in the middle, plastered low and curled at the ends, betokened diverse taste in barbering. A Chinese was giving the last polish to a huge pile of glasses, thick and heavy.

On the other side of the room, behind a roulette wheel, a man who looked more like a country parson than a gambler sat reading a thumbed copy of Taine's "English Literature." Three faro layouts stretched themselves in line as if watching for newcomers, and in the rear a man was lighting the coal-oil lamps of the dance hall. It was separated from the front part of the house by an iron rail, and had boxes completely around an upper tier and supported by log pillars beneath, and a tiny stage with a badly worn drop curtain.

"Is the boss here?" Bill asked, pausing in front of the man with a wave.

"Who do you mean—Lily?" was the familiar reply.

"Yes."

“I think she’s over helpin’ nurse the Widder Flannery’s sick kids this afternoon. They’ve got chicken pox. Might go over there and see her if you’re in a rush.”

“We didn’t say we wanted to borrow money,” Bill retorted to the jocular latter part of the bartender’s speech. “What time will she be here?”

“About ten, I guess,” was the more courteous reply.

The partners walked out and past the row of buildings until they came to a general store, where they occupied themselves in making out an order for supplies and arranging for their delivery on the following day. The trader was a loquacious individual with the unmistakable “Yankee” twang and nasal whine of the man from that important speck of the United States called New England.

When they again turned into the street, the long twilight had been replaced by night, and on the tops of the high peaks to the westward the light of the full moon was beginning to paint the chill white with a shining glow. The street was filled with men, most of them scorning the narrow board walks and traversing the roadway. A pandemonium of sound was robbing the night of peace through music, of assorted character, which boiled forth from open doors in discordant business rivalry, but underneath it all was the steady, dull monotone of the stamp-mill, remorselessly beating the ore as if in eternal industry.

“Hardly know the place now, eh?” Bill said, as they entered the open doors of the High Light. “It certainly keeps gettin’ more

homelike. Camp must be makin' money, eh?"

Dick did not answer. He was staring at a woman who stood at the lower end of the bar outside, and talking to a man with a medicine case in his hand. He surmised that she must be The Lily, and was astonished. He had expected the customary brazen appearance of other camp women he had known in his years of wandering; the hard-faced, combatative type produced by greed. Instead, he saw a woman of perhaps thirty years of age, or in that vague boundary between thirty and thirty-five.

She was dressed in a short skirt, wore a spotless shirt waist over an exceptionally graceful pair of shoulders, and her hair, neatly coiled in heavy bronze folds, was surmounted by a white hat of the frontier type, dented in regulation form with four hollows.

From the hat to the high tan boots, she was neat and womanly; yet it was not this that attracted him so much as her profile. From the straight brow, down over the high, fine nose and the firm lips to the firmer chin, the face was perfect.

As if sensing his inspection, she turned toward him, and met his wondering eyes. Her appraisal was calm, repressed, and cold. Her face gave him the impression that she had forgotten how to smile. Townsend advanced toward her, certain that she must be the proprietress of the High Light.

"You are Miss Meredith?" he interrogated, as he halted in front of her.

"Mrs. Meredith," she corrected, still unbending, and looking

at him a question as to his business.

A forgotten courtesy impelled him to remove his hat as he introduced himself, but Mathews did not follow it when he was introduced, and reached out and caught her competent hand with a hard grip. Dick explained his errand, feeling, all the time under that steady look, that he was being measured.

“Oh, yes, they’ll be all right by to-morrow, Lily,” the doctor interrupted. “Excuse me for being so abrupt, but I must go now. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” she answered, and then: “I’ll be up there at three o’clock to-morrow afternoon. Ah, you were saying you wanted—”

She had turned to the partners again with her unfinished question leading them on to state their mission.

“Men. Here’s a list,” Dick answered, handing her a memorandum calling for go many millmen, so many drill runners, swampers, car handlers, and so forth; in all, a list of twenty odd.

“Who told you to come here?” She exploded the question as if it were vital.

“Park. Bells Park.”

She laughed mirthlessly between lips that did not smile and regular, white teeth. But her laugh belied her lack of sympathy.

“Poor old Bells!” she said, with a touch of sadness in her voice. “Poor old fool! I tried to keep him from gambling when he had money, and he went broke, like all the other fools. But he loved his wife. He made her happy. Some one in this world must be

happy. So he came back, did he? And is up there at the Cross? Well, he's a faithful man. I'm not an employment agency, but maybe I can help you. I would do it for Bells. I like him. Good men are scarce. The bums and loafers are always easy to get. There isn't a mine around here that isn't looking for good men, since they made that discovery over in the flat. Most of them broke to the placer ground. Wages are nothing when there's a chance for better."

She had not looked at Dick as she talked, but had her eyes fixed on the paper, though not seeming to scan its contents. The room was crowded with men and filled with a confused volume of sound as she spoke, the click and whir of the wheel, the monotonous voice of the student-turned gambler—calling "Single O and the house wins. All down?" the sharp snap of the case-keeper's buttons before the faro layouts, the screech of the orchestra in the dance hall, and the heavy shuffling of feet; yet her words and intonations were distinct.

"We would like to get them as soon as we can," Dick answered. "We have unwatered the main shaft and—"

From the dance hall in the rear there came a shrill, high shriek, oaths, shouts, and the orchestra stopped playing. Men jumped to their feet from the faro layouts, and then, mob-like, began to surge toward the door, while in the lead, uttering scream on scream, ran one of the dance-hall girls with her gaudy dress bursting into enveloping flame. She had the terror of a panic-stricken animal flying into the danger of the open air to die.

As if springing forward from live ground, Mathews leaped into her path, and caught her in his arms. He jammed her forward ahead of him, taking no pains to shield her body save with his bent arm, and seized the cover of the roulette wheel, which lay neatly folded on the end of the bar.

“Give me room!” he bellowed, in his heavy, thunderous voice. “Stop ’em, Dick! For God’s sake, stop ’em!”

Dick leaped in among the crowd that was madly stampeding—women with faces whose terror showed through masks of rouge, shrieking, men who cursed, trampled, and elbowed their way to the outer air, and the wild-eyed musicians seeking to escape from a fire-trap. Dick struck right and left, and in the little space created Bill swathed the girl in the cover, smothering the flames. And all the time he shouted:

“Don’t run. What’s the matter with you? Go back and put the fire out! Don’t be idiots!”

As suddenly as it had commenced the panic subsided, and the tide turned the other way. Sobbing women hovered round the door, and men began to form a bucket line. In a long age of five or ten minutes the excitement was over, and the fire extinguished. The dance-hall floor was littered with pieces of scorched wood torn bodily from the boxes, and the remnants of the lamp which had exploded and caused the havoc were being swept into the sodden, steaming heap in the center of the room.

Through the press at the sides came The Lily, who, in the turmoil, had sought refuge behind the bar. The partners, stooping

over the unconscious, swaddled figure on the floor, looked up at her, and Dick saw that her face was as calm and unemotional as ever.

“Bring her to my room,” she said; “I’ll show you where it is. You, Tim,” she called to one of the bartenders, “go as quickly as you can and get Doctor Mills.”

The partners meekly followed her lead, pausing but once, when she turned to hold up an authoritative hand and tell the curious ones who formed a wake that they must go back, or at least not come ahead to make the case more difficult. Mathews carried his senseless burden as easily as if it were of no weight, and even as they turned up a hallway leading to a flight of stairs ascending to The Lily’s apartments, the doctor and bartender came running to join them.

Not until they had swathed the girl in cooling bandages did any one speak. Then, as they drew the sheet tenderly over her, they became conscious of one another. As Bill looked up through blistered eyelids, exposing a cruelly scorched face, his lips broke into a painful smile.

“Doctor,” The Lily said, “now you had better care for this patient.”

She put her firm, white fingers out, brushed the miner’s singed hair back from his brow, and said: “I’ve forgotten your name, but—I want to say—you’re a man!”

CHAPTER VI

MY LADY OF THE HORSE

“It serves you right for bein’ so anxious to help one of them dance-hall women; not but what I’d probably ’a’ done it myself,” was the croaking, querulous consolation offered by Bells Park as he sat beside the plainly suffering and heavily bandaged Bill that night, or rather in the early hours of the morning, in the cabin on the Cross. “They ain’t no good except for young fools to gallop around with over a floor.”

He poured some more olive oil over the bandages, and relented enough to add: “All but The Lily, and she don’t dance with none of ’em. She’s all right, she is. Mighty peart looker, too. None purtier than Dorothy Presby, though.”

Dick, looking up from where he sat with his tired chin resting on his tired hands and elbows, thought of the gruff Bully Presby with some interest.

“Oh, so the old Rattler owner has a daughter, eh?”

“I don’t mean old skinflint Presby!” sharply corrected the engineer. “He ain’t the only Presby in this whole United States, is he? He don’t own the whole world and the name, even if he thinks he does. This Presby I’m talkin’ about ain’t no kin of his. He’s too white. He owns all them sawmills on the other side of the Cross peak, about four miles from here. Got a railroad of his

own. Worth about a billion, I reckon.”

Dick’s momentary interest subsided, but he heard the old man babbling on:

“I worked for him once, when Dorothy was a little bit of a kid. Him and me fought, but he’s a white man. She’s been away to some of those fool colleges for women back East, they say, for the last four or five years. It don’t do women no good to know too much. My wife couldn’t read or write, and she was the best woman that ever lived, bar none.”

He looked around as if delivering a challenge, and, finding that no one was paying any attention to him, subsided, fidgeted for a minute, and then said he guessed he’d “turn in so’s the water wouldn’t gain on the pumps in the mornin’.”

On the insistent demand of his partner, Dick also retired shortly, and the cabin on the hillside was dark save for the dim light that glowed in the sufferer’s room.

They began to straggle in, the men wanted, before the partners had finished their breakfast on the following morning. Some of them were real miners, and others were nondescripts, bearing out The Lily’s statement that good men were scarce, but all were hired as they came, and the Croix d’Or began to thrill with activity.

A fat cook—and no miner can explain why a camp cook is always fat—beamed from the mess-house door. A blacksmith, accepting the ready name of “Smuts,” oiled the rusted wheels of his blower, and swore patiently and softly at a new helper as

he selected the drills for sharpening. Three Burley drill runners tinkered with their machines, and scraped off the verdigris and accumulated dust of storage; millmen began to reset the tables, strip the damaged plates, and lay in new water pipes to drip ceaselessly over the powered ore. Over all these watched Bill with his bandaged face, rumbling orders here and there, and tirelessly active. Out on the pipe line, winding by cut and trestle from the reservoir in the high hills, Dick superintended repairs and laid plans.

Leaving his gang replacing sections near the power-house, he climbed up the length of the line to discover, if possible, how far the labors of the vandal had extended. Foot by foot he had traversed it, almost to the reservoir itself, when he paused to breathe and look off at the mountains spread below and around.

The Cross, in the distance, was softened again to a miracle of dim yellow laid against a field of purple, and, like a speck, a huge eagle swept in circles round its point to come to rest on its extreme summit. He turned from admiring its flight to inspect a boulder that had tumbled down from the slope above and come to rest in a big dent; it had smashed in the top of the pipe. He picked up a piece of a storm-broken limb, used it as a lever, and sent the rock crashing across the pipe to go bounding down the hillside as it gained momentum with every leap.

There was a startled snort, a sudden threshing of the brush, and it parted to disclose a girl astride a horse that was terrified and endeavoring his best to dismount his rider. Dick, surmising that

horse and rider had suffered a narrow escape from the boulder, ran toward them remorsefully, but the girl already had the animal in control after a display of splendid horsemanship.

“Thank you,” she said, as he hastened toward the horse’s head, intent on seizing the snaffle. “Please don’t touch him. I can quiet him down.”

“I am so sorry,” he pleaded, with his hat in his hand. “I had no idea that any one ever rode up this way.”

“Don’t apologize,” she answered, with a careless laugh. “No one ever does, save me. It’s an old and favorite view of mine. I used to ride here, to see the Cross, many years ago, before I went away to school. So I came back to see my old friend, and—well—your boulder would have struck us if my horse hadn’t jumped.”

She laughed again, and reached a yellow-gauntleted hand down to pat her mount’s shoulder with a soothing caress. The horse stopped trembling, and looked at Dick with large, intelligent eyes.

“Ah,” said Dick, remembering the garrulity of the engineer. “I believe you must be Miss Presby.”

Even as she said simply: “I am, but how did you know? I don’t remember ever seeing you,” he took note of her modish blue riding-dress with divided skirts and patent-leather boots. There was a clean freshness about her person, a smiling candor in her eyes, and a fine, frank girlishness in her face that attracted him beyond measure. She appeared to be about twenty years of age, and was such a girl as those he had known and danced with, in

those distant university days when his future seemed assured, and life a joyous conquest with all the odds in his favor. Now she was of another world, for he was, after all, but a workingman, while she, the daughter of a millionaire lumberman, would dance and associate with those other university men whose financial incomes enabled them to dawdle as they pleased through life. He had no bitterness in this summary, but he sustained an instant's longing for a taste of that old existence, and the camaraderie of such girls as the one who sat before him on her horse.

"No," he said, looking up at her, "you never saw me before. I have been in the Blue Mountains but six weeks. I am Richard Townsend."

Her face took on a look of aroused interest, different from the casual look she had been giving him in the brief minute of their meeting.

"Oh," she said, "then you must be the Mr. Townsend of the Croix d'Or. I learned of your arrival last night after I came home. You are rehabilitating the old mine?"

"Yes," he answered, smiling. "At least we are trying to. As to the outcome—I don't know."

"You mustn't say that!" she protested. "Faith in anything is the first requisite for success. That's what it says in the copybooks, doesn't it?"

She laughed again in her clear, mezzo voice, and then with a resumption of gravity gathered her reins into a firmer grip, and, as her horse lifted his head in response to the summons,

said: "Anyway, I thank you for volunteering to rescue me, Mr. Townsend, and wish you lots of good luck, but please don't start any more bowlders down the hill, because if you do I shall be robbed of my most enjoyable trip each day. Good-by."

"Don't be afraid," he called to her, as she started away. "There are no more bowlders to roll."

He stood and watched her as she rode, masterfully seated on the black horse, around a crag that stuck out into the trail.

"Faith in anything is the first requisite for success," he repeated to himself, striving to recall whether or not it was, as she had intimated, a hackneyed proverb for the young; yet there was something bracing in it, coming from her calm, young, womanly lips. "That's it; she has it," he again said to himself. "Faith. That's what I need." And he resumed his tramp up the mountainside with a better courage and more hope for the Croix d'Or. He was still vaguely troubled when he made his way back past the power-house, in a sliding, scrambling descent, his boots starting tiny avalanches of shale and loose rock to go clattering down the mountainside.

The new men were proving competent under the direction of a boss pipeman who had been made foreman, and Dick trudged away toward the mine, feeling that one part of the work, at least, would be speedily accomplished.

Bill was still striding backward and forward, but devoting most of his attention to cleaning up the mill, and declared, with a wry smile, that he never felt better in his life, but never liked talking

less.

When the noon whistle shrieked its high, staccato note from the engine-house, they went up to the mess, and seated themselves at the head of the table. As a whole, the men were fairly satisfactory. Bill stared coldly down the table, and appeared to be mentally tabulating those who would draw but one paycheck, and that when their "time" was given them, but Dick's mind persisted in wandering afield to the chance encounter of the morning.

The men had finished their hasty meal, in hasty miner's fashion, silently, and tramped, with clumping feet, out of the mess-house to the shade of its northern side before Bill had ended his painful repast. Whiffs of tobacco smoke and voices came through the open windows, where the miners lounged and rested on a long bench while waiting for the whistle.

"Don't you fool yourself about Bully Presby," one of them was saying. "It's true he's a hard man, and out for the dust every minute of his life, but he's got nerve, all right. He'll bulldoze and fight and growl and gouge, but he's there in other ways. I don't like him, and we quit pretty sudden, yet I saw him do somethin' once that beat me."

"Did you work on the Rattler?" another voice queried.

"No," the other went on, "I worked for him down on the Placer Belle in California. It was under the old system and was a small mine. Kept all the dynamite on the hundred-foot level in an old chamber. Every man went there to get it when it was time to

load his holes. I was startin' for mine one evenin', whistlin' along, when I smelled smoke. Stopped and sniffed, and about weakened. Knowed it was comin' from the powder room down there. It wan't more'n twenty feet from the shaft, and there was two or three tons of it in that hole. Ran back and gave the alarm bell to the engineer, then ducked my head and went toward the smoke to see if anything could be done before she blew up the whole works. On his hands and knees, with all that was left of his coat, was Bully. He'd got the fire nearly smothered out, and we coughed and spit, and drowned the rest of the sparks from the water barrel. He'd fought it to a finish all alone, and I had to drag him out to the cage that was slidin' up and down as if the engineer was on a drunk, and every time it went up I could see the boys' faces, kind of white, and worried, and hear the alarms bangin' away like mad. But he'd put the fire out there with all that stuff around him. That took some nerve, I tell you!"

"What did he do for you?" asked another voice.

The narrator gave a heavy laugh, and chuckled.

"Do for me? When he got fresh air in him again, up in the hoist, he sat up and opened his hand. In it was a candlestick and a snipe, burned on the side till the wick looked about a foot long. 'Who owns this candlestick?' says he. No one spoke, but some of us knowed it belonged to old Deacon Wells, an absent-minded old cuss, but the deacon had a family of nigh on to ten kids. So nobody answered. 'Some fool left this here,' Bully bellowed, tearing around. 'And that's what started the fire. I'll kick the man

off the works that owns the stick.' Still nobody said anything. He caught me grinnin'. 'You know who it was,' says he. 'Sure I do,' says I, 'but I'm a little tongue-tied.' Then he told me he'd fire me if I didn't say who it was. 'Give me my time-check,' says I, and he gave it. He found out afterward I was the man that dragged him out, and sent a letter up to Colusa askin' me to come back, but I didn't go. Don't s'pose he'd remember me now, and don't know as I'd want him to. Any man that works for Bully comes about as near givin' away his heart's blood as any one could, and live."

The voices went rumbling on, and Dick sat thinking of the strange, powerful man of the Rattler.

"Three of the millmen know their business," mumbled Bill, as if all the time he had been mentally appraising his force. "Two are rumdums. The chips isn't bad. He could carpenter anywhere, and if he's as smart a timberman as he is millwright, will make good. The engineer that's to relieve Bells ain't so much, but I'll leave it to Bells to cuss him into line. That goes. Two of the Burley men are all right, and I fired the third in the first hour because he didn't know what was the nut and which the wrench. Smuts is a gem. He put the pigeon-blue temper on a bunch of drills as fast as any man could have done it."

Dick did not answer, but concentrated his mind on the work ahead. The whistle blew, and he compelled Bill to submit to new bandages, following the doctor's instructions, and smiled at his steady swearing as the wrappings were removed and the blisters redressed. They walked across to the hoist, entered the cage,

and felt the sinking sensation as they were dropped, rather than lowered, to the six-hundred-foot level. The celerity of the descent almost robbed him of breath, but he thought of sturdy old Bells' boast, that he had "never run a cage into the sheaves, nor dropped it to the sump, in forty years of steam."

Lights glowed ahead of them, and they heard hammering. The suck of fresh air under pressure, vaped like steam, whirled around them in gusts, and the water oozed and rippled beside their feet as they went forward. The carpenter was putting in a new set of timbers, and his task was nearly finished, while beside him waited a drill man and a swamper with the cumbersome, spiderlike mechanism ready to set. The carpenter gave a few more blows to a key block, and methodically flung his hammer into his box and hurried back out through the tunnel toward the cage, intent on resuming his work at the mill.

Bill tentatively inspected the timbers, tapped the roof with a pick taken from the swamper's hands, heard the true ring of live rock, and backed away. The drill was drawn up to the green face of ore.

"About there, I should say," Dick directed, pointing an indicatory finger, and the drill runner nodded.

The swamper, who appeared to know his business, came forward with the coupling which fed compressed air to the machine, the runner gave a last inspection of his drill, turned his chuck screw, setting it against the rocky face, and signaled for the air. With a clatter like the discharge of a rapid-fire gun, the

steel bit into the rock, and the Cross was really a mine again. Spattered with mud, and satisfied that the new drift was working in pay, the partner trudged back out.

They signaled for the cage, shot upward, and emerged to the yard near the blacksmith's tunnel in time to see a huge bay horse, with a woman rider, come toiling up the slope. There was something familiar about the white hat, and as she neared them they recognized The Lily. Before they could assist her to dismount, she leaped from the saddle, landing lightly on her toes, and dropped the horse's reins over his head.

"Good-day—never mind—he'll stand," she said, all in a breath, striding toward them with an extended hand.

Dick accepted it with a firm grip, and lifted his hat, while Bill merely shook hands and tried to smile. It was to him that she turned solicitously.

"I'm glad you are out," she remarked, without lowering her eyes which swept over the bandages on his face. "You're all right, are you?"

"Sure. But how's that girl? It don't matter much about an old cuss like me. Girls are a heap scarcer."

The owner of the High Light looked troubled for a moment, and removed her gloves before answering.

"Doctor Mills says she will live," she said quietly, "but she is terribly burned. She will be so disfigured that she can never work in a dance hall any more. It's pretty rough luck."

Dick recoiled and felt a chill at this hard, cold statement. The

girl could never work in a dance hall any more! And this was accepted as a calamity! Accustomed as he was to the frontier, this matter-of-fact acceptance of a dance-hall occupation as something desirable impressed him with its cynicism. Not that he doubted the virtue of many of those forlorn ones who gayly tripped their feet over rough boards, and drank tea or ginger ale and filled their pockets with bar checks to make a living as best they might, but because the whole garish, rough, drink-laden, curse-begrimed atmosphere of a camp dance hall revolted him.

Mrs. Meredith had intuition, and read men as she read books, understandingly. She arose to the defense of her sex.

“Well,” she said, facing him, as if he had voiced his sentiment, “what would you have? Women are what men make them, no better, no worse.”

“I have made no criticism,” he retorted.

“No, but you thought one,” she asserted. “But, pshaw! I didn’t come here to argue. I came up to tell you that the dance-hall girl will recover and has friends who will see that she doesn’t starve, even if she no longer works in my place. Also, I came to see how Mister—what is your name, anyway?—is.”

“Mathews, ma’am. William Mathews. My friends call me Bill. I don’t allow the others to call me anything.”

The temporary and threatening cloud was dissipated by the miner’s rumbling laugh, and they sauntered across the yard, the bay horse looking after them, but standing as firmly as if the loosened reins were tied to a post instead of resting on the

ground. A swamper, carrying a bundle of drills, trudged across the yard to the blacksmith shop, as they stood in its doorway.

“I sent you the best men I could pick up,” The Lily said. “You did me a good turn, and I did my best to pay it back. That blacksmith is all right. Some of the others I know, but I don’t know him. Never saw him before. You’d better watch him.”

She pointed at the swamper as coolly as if he were an inanimate object, and he glared at her in return, then dropped his eyes.

“I told you I didn’t run an employment agency,” she went on, “but if any of these fellows get fresh, let me know, and I’ll try to get you others. How does the Cross look, anyway?”

They turned away and accompanied her over the plant above ground, and heard her greet man after man on a level of comradeship, as if she were but a man among men. Her hard self-possession and competence impressed the younger man as a peculiar study. It seemed to him, as he walked beside her thoughtfully, that every womanly trait had been ground from her in the stern mills of circumstance. He had a vague desire to probe into her mind and learn whether or not there still dwelt within it the softness of her sex, but he dared not venture. He stood beside the bandaged veteran as she rode away, a graceful, independent figure.

“Is she all tiger, or part woman?” he said, turning to Mathews, whose eyes had a singularly thoughtful look.

The latter turned to him with a quick gesture, and threw up

his unbandaged hand.

“My boy,” he said, “she’s not a half of anything. She’s all tiger, or all woman! God only knows!”

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN UNAFRAID

They were to have another opportunity to puzzle over the character of The Lily before a week passed, when, wishing to make out a new bill of supplies, they went down to the camp. The night was fragrant with the spring of the mountains, summer elsewhere—down in the levels where other occupations than mining held rule. The camp had the same dead level of squalor in appearance, the same twisting, wriggling, reckless life in its streets.

“Fine new lot of stuff in,” the trader said, pushing his goods in a brisk way. “Never been a finer lot of stuff brought into any camp than I’ve got here now. Canned tomatoes, canned corn, canned beans, canned meat, canned tripe, canned salmon. That’s a pretty big layout, eh? And I reckon there never was no better dried prunes and dried apricots ever thrown across a mule’s back than I got. Why, they taste as if you was eatin’ ’em right off the bushes! And Mexican beans! Hey, look at these! Talk about beans and sowbelly, how would these do?”

He plunged his grimy hand into a sack, and lifted a handful of beans aloft to let them sift through his fingers, clattering, on those below. The partners agreed that he had everything in the world that any one could crave in the way of delicacies, and gave

him their orders; then, that hour's task completed, sauntered out into the street.

Dick started toward the trail leading homeward, but Bill checked him, with a slow: "Hold on a minute."

The younger man turned back, and waited for him to speak.

"I'd kind of like to go down to the High Light for a while," the big man said awkwardly. "We ought to go round there and see Mrs. Meredith, and patronize her as far as a few soda pops, and such go, hadn't we? Seein' as how she's been right good to us."

Dick, nothing loath to a visit to The Lily, assented, although the High Light, with its camp garishness, was an old and familiar sight to any one who had passed seven years in outlying mining regions.

The proprietress was not in sight when they entered, but the bartenders greeted them in a more friendly way, and the Chinese, who seemed forever cleaning glasses, grinned them a welcome. They nodded to those they recognized, and walked back to the little railing.

"Lookin' for Lily?" the man with the bangs asked, trying to show his friendliness. "She ain't here now, but she'll be here soon. She's about due. Go on up and grab a box for yourselves. The house owes you fellers a drink, it seems to me. Can I send you up a bottle of Pumbry? The fizzy stuff's none too good for you, I guess."

He appeared disappointed when Dick told him to send up two lemonades, and turned back to lean across the bar and hail some

new arrival. The partners went up and seated themselves in one of the cardboard stalls dignified by the name of boxes, and, leaning over the railing in front between the gilt-embroidered, red-denim curtains, looked down on the dancers. Two or three of their own men were there, grimly waltzing with girls who tried to appear cheerful and joyous.

Shrill laughter echoed now and then, and when the music changed a man with a voice like a megaphone shouted: "Gents! Git pardners for the square sets!" and the scene shifted into one of more regular pattern, where different individuals were more conspicuous. Some of the more hilarious cavorted, and tried clumsy shuffles on the corners when the raucous-voiced man howled: "Bala-a-ance all!" and others merely jiggged up and down with stiff jerks and muscle-bound limbs, gravely, and with a desperate, earnest endeavor to enjoy themselves.

A glowering, pockmarked man, evidently seeking some one with no good intent, pulled open the curtains at the back of the box, and stared at them in half-drunken gravity; then discovering his mistake, with a clumsy "Beg pardon, gents," let the draperies drop, and passed on down the row.

Across from them, in the opposite box, some man from the placers, with his face tanned to a copper color, was hilariously surrounding himself with all the girls he could induce to become his guests, holding a box party of his own. He was leaning over the rail and bellowing so loudly that his voice could be heard above the din: "Hey, down there! You, Tim! Bring me up a

bottle of the bubbly water—two bottles—five—no, send up a case. Whoop-ee! Pay on seventeen! This is where little Hank Jones celebrates! Come on up, girls. Here's where no men is wanted. It's me all by my little lonely!”

Some one threw a garland of paper flowers round his neck, which he esteemed as a high honor, and shook it out over the floor below, where all the dancers were becoming confused in an endeavor simultaneously to watch his antics, and keep their places in the dance.

“The most disgusting object in the world is a man who drinks!” came a cold voice behind them, and they turned to see The Lily standing back of them, and frowning at the scene across.

Bill turned to greet her, holding out his hand, and his broad shoulders shut out the view of Bacchanalia.

“The bartender says you drink nothing stronger than lemonade,” she said, looking up at the giant, “and I am glad to hear it. It is a pleasure to meet men like you once in a while. It keeps one from losing faith in all.”

She sat down in one of the chairs—a trifle wearily, Dick thought, and he noticed that there were lines under the eyebrows, melancholy, pensive, that he had not observed before in the few times they had met her. As on the occasion of their meeting at the mine, she appeared to sense his thoughts, and turned toward him as if to defend herself.

“You are asking yourself and me the question, why, if I dislike liquor, and gambling, and all this, I am owner of the High Light?”

she said, reverting to her old-time hardness. "Well, it's because I want money. Does that answer you?"

"I didn't ask you a question," he retorted.

"No, but it's just like it always is with you! You looked one. I'm not sure that I like you; you look so devilish clean-minded. You always accuse me, without saying anything so that I can have a chance to answer back. It isn't fair. I don't like to be made uncomfortable. I am what I am, and can't help it."

She turned her frowning eyes on Bill, and they softened. She relented, and for the first time in the evening her rare laugh sounded softly from between her white, even teeth.

"You see," she said, addressing him, "I can't help being angry with Mr. Townsend. I think I'm a little afraid of him. I'm a coward in some ways. You're different. You just smile kindly at me, as if you were older than Methuselah, and had all the wisdom of Solomon or Socrates, and were inclined to be tolerant when you couldn't agree."

"Go on," Bill said. "You're doin' all the talkin'."

"I have a right to exercise at least one womanly prerogative, once in a while," she laughed. And then: "But I am talking more than usual. Tell me about the mine and the men? How goes it?"

They had but little to tell her, yet she seemed to find it interesting, and her eyes had the absent look of one who listens and sees distant scenes under discussion to the exclusion of all immediate surroundings.

"Have you met Bully Presby yet?" she asked.

They smiled, and told her they had.

“He is a wonderful man,” she said admiringly. “He makes his way over everything and everybody. He is ruthless in going after what he wants. He fears nothing above or below. I honestly believe that if the arch demon were to block him on the trail, Bully Presby would take a chance and try to throw him over a cliff. I don’t suppose he ever had a vice or a human emotion. I believe I’d like him better if he had a little of both.”

Dick laughed outright, and stared at her with renewed interest. He admitted to himself that she was one of the most fascinating women he had ever met, and wondered what vicissitude could have brought such a woman, who used classical illustrations, fluent, cultivated speech, and who was strong grace exemplified, to such a position. She seemed master of her surroundings, and yet not of them, looking down with a hard and lofty scorn on the very men from whom she made her living. He began to believe what was commonly said of her, that her virtue, physical and ethical, was unassailable.

There was a crash and a loud guffaw of laughter. They pulled the curtains farther apart, and looked across at the man who was celebrating. He had dropped a bottle of wine to the floor below, and was beseeching some one to bring it up to him.

Bill leaned farther out of the box to look, and suddenly the drummer saw him, pointed in his direction with a drumstick, and spoke to a girl leaning near by. She, too, looked up, and then clapped her hands.

“There he is!” she called in her high treble voice. “Up there in number five! The man that carried Pearl out and got burned himself.”

Some man near her climbed to the little stage and pointed, took off his hat, and shouted: “A tiger for that man! Now! All together! Whoeee! Whoeee! Whoeee! Ow!”

In the wild yell that every one joined, Bill was abashed. He shrank back into the box, flushed and embarrassed, while Dick laughed outright, with boyish enjoyment at his confusion, and The Lily watched him with a soft look in her eyes, and then stared down at the floor below.

Suddenly her figure seemed to stiffen, and the look on her face altered to one of cold anger. She peered farther over as if to assure herself of something, and Dick, following her eyes, saw they were fixed on a man who stood leaning against one of the pillars near the entrance to the dance floor. He alone, apparently, was taking no part in the demonstration in Bill’s honor, but glowered sullenly toward the box. It took no long reasoning for Dick to know why. The man was the one who had been the watchman at the mine when they arrived.

The band struck up again, and another dance began, the enthusiasts forgetting Bill as quickly as they had saluted him; but the ex-watchman continued to lean against the post, a picture of sullenness, and in the box The Lily stood with knitted brows, as if trying to recollect him.

“Well,” she said at last, “I must go now. Come and see me

whenever you can, both of you. I like you.”

They arose and followed her out of the box, and down the flimsy stairs that led to the floor below. She paused on the bottom step, and clutched the casing with both hands, then tried to get a closer look at the ex-watchman, who had turned away until but a small part of his face was exposed. She walked onward, still looking angrily preoccupied, to the end of the bar, and the partners were on the point of bidding her good-night, when she abruptly started, seemed to tense herself, and exclaimed: “Now I know him!”

The partners wondered when she made a swift clutch under the end of the bar and slipped something into the bosom of her jacket. She took five or six determined steps toward the ex-watchman and tapped him on the shoulder.

He whirled sharply as if his mind had guilty fears, and faced her defiantly.

Those immediately around, suspecting something unusual, stopped to watch them, and listened.

“So you are here in Goldpan, are you, Wolff?” she demanded, with a cold sneer in her voice.

He gave her a fierce, defiant stare, and brazenly growled: “You’re off. My name’s not Wolff. My name’s Brown.”

“You lie!” she flared back, with a hard anger in her voice. “Your name is Gus Wolff! You get out of this place, and don’t you ever come in again! If you do, I’ll have you thrown out like a dog.”

He glowered at the crowd that was forming around him, as crowds invariably form in any controversy, and then started toward the door, but he made a grave mistake. He called back a vile epithet as he went.

“Stop!” she commanded him, with an imperious, compelling tone.

He half-turned, and then shrugged his shoulders, and made as if to move on.

“Stop, I said!”

He turned again to face a pistol which she had snatched from her jacket, and now the partners, amazed, understood what that swift motion had meant. He halted irresolutely.

“You used a name toward me that I permit no man to use,” she said fiercely. “So I shall explain to these men of Goldpan who you are, Gus Wolff! You were in Butte five years ago. You induced a poor, silly little fool named Rose Trevor to leave the dance hall where she worked, and go with you. You were one of those who believe that women are made to be brutalized. But good as most of them are, and bad as some of them are, there is none, living or dead, that you are or were fit to consort with. You murdered her. Don’t you dare to deny it! They found her dead outside of your cabin. They arrested you, and tried you, and should have hanged you, but they couldn’t get the proof of what everybody believed, that you—you brute—had killed, then thrown her over the rocks to claim that she had fallen there in the darkness.”

She paused as if the tempest of her words had left her

breathless, and men glared at him savagely. It seemed as if every one had crowded forward to hear her denunciation.

“Bah!” she added scornfully. “The jury was made up of fools, and men knew it. The sheriff himself told you so when he slipped you out of the jail where he had protected you, and let you loose across the border in the night. Didn’t he? And he told you that if ever you came back to Butte, he would not turn a hand to keep you from the clutches of the mob; didn’t he? And now you are plain ‘Mister Brown,’ working somewhere back up in the hills, are you? Well, Mr. Brown, you keep away from the High Light. Get out!”

Some one made a restless motion, and declared the man should be hanged, even now, but The Lily turned her angry eyes on the speaker, and silenced him.

“Not if I can help it, or any of my friends can,” she said coolly. “There’ll be no mobbing anybody around here. I’ve said enough. Let him alone, but remember what kind of a blackguard he is. That’s all!”

She turned back and tossed the pistol behind the bar, and the crowd, as if her words and the advice of the more contained element prevailed, resumed its play. She looked up, and saw the partners waiting to bid her good-night, and suddenly bit her lip, as if ashamed that they had seen her fury unmasked.

“We’re going now,” Bill said, reaching out his hand. She did not take it, but looked around the room with unreadable eyes.

“I’ll walk with you to the beginning of your trail,” she said.

“I’m sick of this,” and led the way out into the night.

For half the length of the long street, she strode between them, wordless, and then suddenly halted and held her arms apart appealingly.

“What must you think of me?” she said, with a note of grief in her voice. “Oh, you two don’t know it all! You don’t know what it takes to make a woman, who tries to be decent, rebellious at everything under the skies. What brutes there are walking the earth! Sometimes, lately, I begin to doubt if there is a God!”

“And that,” exclaimed the quiet, steadfast young voice at her side, “is unworthy of you and your intelligence.”

She halted again, as if thinking.

“And I,” said the giant, in his deep, musical tones, “know there’s one. It takes more than men to make me believe there ain’t. I know it when I look at them!” He waved his hands at the starlit mountains surrounding them, and towering in serenity high up to the cloudless spaces.

“I’d be mighty ashamed to doubt when I can see them,” he said, “and if they went away, I’d still believe it; because if I didn’t, I couldn’t see no use in livin’ any more. It’s havin’ Him lean down and whisper to you once in a while, in the night, when everything seems to be goin’ wrong, ‘Old boy, you did well,’ that keeps it all worth while and makes a feller stiffen his back and go ahead, with his conscience clean and not carin’ a cuss what anybody says or thinks, so longs as he knows that the Lord knows he did the right thing.”

She faltered for a moment, and Dick, staring through the darkness at her, could not decide whether it was because the woman in her was melting after the storm of anger, or whether she was merely weighing his partner's words. As abruptly as had been any of her actions in all the time they had known her, she turned and walked away from them, her soft "Good-night" wafting itself back with a note of profound sadness and misery.

"I've decided what she is," Bill said, as they paused for a last look at the lights of the camp. "She's all woman, and a mighty good one, at that!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE INCONSISTENT BULLY

“Them beans,” declared the fat cook, plaintively, “looks as if they had been put through some sort of shrivelin’ process. The dried prunes are sure dry all right! Must have been put up about the time they dried them mummy things back in Egypt. Apuricots? Humph! I soaked some of ’em all day and to-night took one over to the shop and cut it open with a chisel to see if it was real leather, or only imitation. The canned salmon, and the canned tripe is all swells so that the cans is round instead of flat on the ends. I reckon you’d better go down and see that storekeeper. I dassen’t! If I did I’d probably lose my temper and wallop him. If somebody don’t go, the men here’ll be makin’ a mistake, blamin’ it on me, and I can’t exactly see how they could keep from hangin’ me, if they want to do justice.”

He had stood in the doorway of the office to voice his complaint, and now, without further words walked away toward his own particular section of the little camp village.

“So that’s the way that trader down there filled the order, is it?” Dick said, frowning at his companion.

The latter merely grunted and then offered a solution.

“Probably,” he said, “that stuff was sent up here without bein’ opened, just as he got it. If that’s so it ain’t his fault. About half

the rows in life come from takin' things for granted. The other half because we know too well how things did happen."

He stood up and stretched his arms.

"What do you say we go down and hear what the trader has to say? If he's square he'll make good. If he ain't—we'll make him!"

Taking it for granted that the younger man would accompany him, he was already slipping off his working shirt and peering around the corners of the room for his clean boots. Dick hesitated and had to be urged. He wondered then if it were not possible that something beside the errand to the trader's caused Bill's eagerness; but wisely kept the idea to himself.

The camp was in the dusk when they entered it, the soft dusk that falls over early summer evenings in the hills, when everything in nature seems drowsily awaiting the night. They thought there was an unusual hush in the manner of those they met. Men talked on the corners or in groups in the roadway with unaccustomed earnestness. Women leaned across window sills and chatted across intervening spaces with an air of anxiety; the very dogs in the street appeared to be subdued. At the trader's there was not the usual small gathering of loungers, squatted sociably around on cracker boxes and packing cases, and the man with the twang was alone.

"Say, there's something wrong with that stuff you sent us," Bill began, and the trader answered with a soft, absent-minded, "So?"

Bill repeated the words of the cook; but the storekeeper

continued to stare out of the door as if but half of what was said proved interesting.

“I’ll send up and bring it back to-morrow,” he replied when the miner had concluded his complaint. “The fact is it’s a job lot I bought in Portland, and I didn’t look at it. Came in yesterday. I ain’t—I ain’t exactly feelin’ right. I suppose you heard about it?”

The partners looked at him questioningly, but he did not shift his eyes from the door through which he still appeared to be staring away into the distance, and it was easy to conjecture, from the expression of his eyes, that he was seeing a tragedy.

“I’m sort of busted up,” he went on, without looking at them. “You see I had a brother over there. A shift boss, he was. Him and me was more than brothers. We was friends. It don’t seem right that Hiram was down there, in the dark, when the big cave came—came just as if the whole mountain wanted to smash them men under it. It don’t seem right! I can’t quite get it all yet. I’m goin’ over there on the stage in the mornin’. He’s left a widder and a couple of little shavers. I’m goin’ to bring ’em here.”

“We don’t quite understand you,” Dick said, hesitatingly, and with sympathy in his voice. “We haven’t heard about it—whatever it is. I’m sorry if—”

The trader straightened up from where he had been leaning on his elbows across the counter and they saw that his face was drawn.

“Oh, I see,” he said, in the same slow, hopeless voice. “I forgot you men don’t come down here very often and that my driver

never has anything to say to anybody. Why, it's the Blackbird mine over across the divide—on the east spur. Bad, old fashioned mine she was, with crawlin' ground. Lime streaks all through the formation and plenty of water. Nobody quite knows how it happened. There was a big slip over there a few days ago on the four-hundred-foot level. Thirty odd men back of it. Timbers went off, they say, like a gatlin' gun. I just can't seem to understand how they didn't handle that ground better. It don't look right to me!"

He stooped and twisted his fingers together and the palms of his hands gave out dry, rasping sounds. His attitude seemed inconsistent with the immobility of his face, but Dick surmised that he was trying to regain control of his emotions. He had a keen desire to know more of the particulars of the tragedy, but sensed from the storekeeper's appearance that he was scarcely able to give a coherent account of it. His words had already told his sorrow. Bill's voice broke the pause.

"We're right sorry we bothered you about the supplies," he said, softly. "But we didn't know, you see. I reckon we ain't in any big hurry. You just take your time about fixin' it up. We can live on most anything for a day or two."

The storekeeper looked at him gratefully and then lowered his eyes again. He turned away from them with a long sigh.

"Nope," he said. "Much obliged. I'll send my man up tomorrow. Business keeps a-goin' on just the same, no matter who passes out. If you or me died to-night, the whole world would

just keep joggin' along. I'll send up."

They turned and walked out, feeling that anything they could say would be useless, and sound hollow, and they did not speak until they were some distance farther up the street.

"He's hard hit, poor cuss!" Bill said. "Wonder what the rest of it was. Lets go on up toward the High Light. Seems as if it must have been pretty bad. What's the commotion down there?"

Ahead of them they saw men clustering toward a central point, and others who had been in the street hurrying forward to be absorbed into the group. They quickened their steps a trifle, speculating as to whether it could mean a brawl, or something relating to the disaster of which they had just learned. It proved the latter. A man was standing in the center of the gathering crowd with the reins of a tired horse hanging loosely over his arm. He was talking to the doctor, who was asking him questions.

"No," Bill and Dick heard him say as they crowded into the group, "there ain't nothin' you can do, Doc. It's all over with 'em. I was there until quite late. God! It's awful!"

"Anybody get out at all?" someone asked.

"No. That's a cinch. You see they were driving back in and feeling for the ledge. Blocking out, I think. Pretty lean ore, over there, you know. So there was just one drift away from the shaft, and it was in that she caved."

There was a moment's silence and then a half-dozen questions asked almost in the same moment. The man turned first to one and then to another as if striving to decide which query should

be answered first, and shook his head hopelessly.

“They didn’t have a chance,” he asserted. “It happened three days ago, as you all know. They sent over to Arrapahoe and all the boys over there went and volunteered. They worked just as many men as could get into the drift at a time, and they spelled each other in half-hour shifts, so’s every man could do his best. They hadn’t got in twenty feet before they saw that she was bad. Seemed as if the whole drift had been wiped out. It was as solid as rock in place—just as if the whole mountain had slipped!”

“Did you go down, Jim?” the doctor asked.

For reply the man held up his hands. Dick, close behind him and peering forward to see them in the light that came from a street lamp, saw they were a mass of blisters with the skin torn away, red and bleeding. The answer was too eloquent to require words for the man they called Jim had evidently been there and striving madly, as had others, in the attempt to rescue. There was a surge forward as the crowd pressed in, each man trying to inspect these evidences of the tragedy. The questions were coming faster and from all sides. Most frequently the anxious demand, coupled with a pronounced eagerness was, “Is there anything any of us can do? Can we help if we get over there?”

“How far over is it?” Bill asked the man nearest him.

“Forty-miles,” was the answer. They were all willing to travel that far, or farther, if they could be of any assistance whatever.

“No, there’s no use in going,” the man in the center said. “There’s more men there now than can be handled, and all they’re

doing is to try to get at the boys' bodies. It's sure that they can't live till they're taken out. You all know that! They're gone, every one of 'em. And that ain't the worst. They left twenty-six widows, most of 'em with children!"

A groan went up from the crowd. The word passed back along like the waves cast up by a rock thrown into the center of a pool of blackness. It began at the center with its repetition as the words were conveyed to those out of earshot. "He says there's twenty-six widows. He says there's a lot of children."

The questions were flowing inward again.

"No, boys, there ain't a thing you can do," the man they called Jim repeated. "That is, there ain't a thing can be done for the boys underground. They're gone; but somebody ought to do what can be done for them that's left. It's money that helps the most. That's the best way to show that most all of us had friends who went out."

He turned and climbed back into his saddle in the little open space, and there was another moment's silence. The crowd looked up at him now, as he sat there in the center of the light thrown downward, feebly, from the lamp.

"Give me room, boys, won't you?" he asked. "My cayuse is about all in. There ain't nothing more to tell. There ain't a thing you can do; but just what I said. Those women and children will need money. They're all broke."

The crowd slowly parted and he rode through a narrow lane where his stirrups brushed against those in the front ranks, and

then the gathering began to twist backward and forward, to disintegrate, to spread itself outward and up the street of the camp. It talked in a subdued way as it went. There were but few in it who did not know and picture the meaning of all that had been imparted by the courier—the desperate alarm, the haggard, sobbing women in front of a hoist, the relays of men who were ready to descend and beat hammer on steel and tear madly at slow-yielding rock, the calls for a rest while carpenters hastily propped up tottering roofs and walls, the occasional warning shouts when men fell back to watch other huge masses of rock fall into the black drift, and the instants when some rescuer, overwrought, thought he heard sounds of “rock telegraphing” and bade the others pause and listen. There were those among the men on the street who had seen the desperate, melancholy conclusions, when hope, flaming ever more feebly, guttered out as a burned candle and died. There were those among them who had been in those black holes of despair and been rescued, to carry scars of the body for life, but recklessly forget the scars of the mind, the horrors of despair. Comparative strangers to the camp as were the two men of the Cross, they appreciated the full meaning of the blow; for doubtless there was scarcely a man around them who had not known some of those who perished in that terrible, lingering agony. Besides they were miners all.

“Pretty tough luck, isn’t it?”

They found themselves confronted by the doctor, who had turned at the sound of their voices as they resumed conversation.

“We just learned of it,” Dick answered, “and know scarcely anything whatever of it, save what we just heard.”

The doctor shook his head.

“It has been almost the sole topic here for the last two days,” he said. “We heard of it after it was too late for any of us to be of use. I started over, but got word from a confrère of mine from a camp farther east, that there were already four doctors on the spot and that I need not come unless they called for me. Even then they were hopeless. Most of the men of the Blackbird were good men, too. The kind that have families, and are steady; but I suppose from what I hear they were nearly all fellows who have been idle for some time, or have just moved into the district, so probably they had nothing much to leave in the way of support—for those left behind.”

He stopped for a moment and peered at other men who were passing them.

“I think it my duty to do something in that regard,” he said, quietly. “I believe I shall get Mrs. Meredith to call a meeting out in front of her place. Nearly every man of the camp goes there at some time or another, in the course of the evening. Perhaps I could—”

Again he stopped, as if thinking of the best plan.

“I see,” interpolated the miner, almost as his younger companion was about to offer the same suggestion. “Let her send out word that every man in the camp is wanted. Then you give them the last news and get them to do what they can. That’s

right.”

“It is the best way,” asserted Dick, agreeing with the project. “You can do more than any one. They all respect and know you.”

They left him to make his way toward the High Light and stood at the borders of little gatherings on the street, gleaning other details of the tragedy, for nearly an hour, and then were attracted by a sound below them. Men were calling to one another. Out in front of the High Light two torches flared, their flames glowing steadily in the still night air and lighting the faces of those who gathered toward them. They went with the street current and again found themselves in a crowd; but it was not so dense as that first one they had encountered. Men stood in groups, thoughtfully, with hands in pockets, their harsh, strong faces rendered soft by the light. They talked together with a quiet and sad sympathy, as if in that hour they were all of one family up there in the heart of the mountains from which they tore their hard livelihood. There was a stir from the nearest store and a voice called, “Here, Doc! Here’s a couple of boxes for you to stand on so they can see you when you talk.”

Men were carrying some large packing cases, or tumbling them end over end, with hollow, booming noises, to form a crude platform. The boxes clashed together. Two men holding the torches climbed up on them and they saw two others boosting the doctor upward. At sight of him there was a restraining hiss passed round through the gathering crowd, commanding silence. He waited for it to become complete.

“Men,” he said, “you have all heard the news. Thirty-three of our fellows died over across the divide, or are dying now. God knows which! God grant they went quickly!”

He stopped and although not a trained orator, the pause could have been no more effective. Dick looked around him. The faces of those nearest were grave and unmoved, as if carved from the mother rock of the country in which they delved; but he saw a light in their frowning eyes that told how deeply their sympathies were stirred.

“I didn’t get up here to talk to you so much about them, however,” the doctor went on, quietly, “as I did to remind you that out of thirty-three of these men there were twenty-six who left widows, or widows and children behind them. The boys over there did all they could. There were a hundred and fifty men who tried to save them. They are now working merely to get their bodies. We couldn’t be there to help in that; so we do what we can here. And that doing shall consist in helping out those women and children. There’s a box down here in front of me. I wish you’d put what you can on it.”

Bill, staring over the heads of those around him, saw a movement among those nearest the orator’s stand, and into the ring of light stepped The Lily. Apparently she was speaking to the doctor, who leaned down to listen. He straightened up and called for silence.

“Mrs. Meredith,” he said, “says that any man here who has no money with him can sign what he wants to give on a piece

of paper, and that she will accept it as she would a pay-check and forward the cash. Then on pay-day the man can come and redeem his paper pledge.”

There was a low murmur of approval swept round over the crowd which began to move forward with slow regularity. The doctor dropped down from his rostrum as if his task were done. The torches lowered as their bearers followed him and planted them beside the box on which coins, big round silver dollars and yellow gold-pieces, were falling, with here and there a scrap of paper. No one stood guard over that collection. The crowd was thinning out. Dick turned toward his friend and looked up at him to meet eyes as troubled as his own. Each understood the other.

“I wish I had some money of my own,” the younger man exclaimed; “but I haven’t a dollar that actually belongs to me. I am going to borrow a little from Sloan.”

“I can’t do that much,” was the sorrowful reply. “And there ain’t nothin’ I’d rather do in the world than walk up there and drop a couple of hundred on that pile. I’m—I’m—”

His manner indicated that he was about to relapse into stronger terms. He suddenly whirled. A hand had been laid on his sleeve and a low, steady voice said, “Excuse me, I heard you talking and I understand. I know what you feel. I want you to permit me.”

It was Mrs. Meredith who had walked around behind them unobserved and now held out her hand. They fell back, embarrassed. She appeared to fathom their position.

“I know,” she said. “I wasn’t eavesdropping. I saw you here. I wanted to talk to you both and so, well, I overheard. Take this, won’t you? Please permit me.”

Bill suddenly reached his hand out and found in his palm a roll of bills, rare in that camp. He looked at them curiously.

“There is five hundred dollars in it,” she said. “That permits a reasonable gift from each of you. You can return it to me at your convenience.”

Neither of them had spoken to her in all this time. Now both voiced thanks. But a moment later Dick found himself talking alone and telling her that he would send her a check within a few days to cover the amount of the loan; but she was not looking at him. He saw that her eyes were fixed on the big man by his side, who stood there looking down into her face. For some reason she appeared embarrassed by that direct scrutiny, and her eyes fell, and wandered around on those standing nearest. Suddenly she frowned, and wondering they followed the direction of her look. Not ten feet from them, standing stockily on his feet with his high, heavy shoulders squared, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his firm face unmoved, his hat shading his eyes, stood Bully Presby. He made no movement toward the goal of the contributors, and seemed to have no intention of so doing. As if to escape an unpleasant situation The Lily suddenly walked toward him.

“Good-evening, Mister Presby,” she saluted, and he slowly turned his head and stared at her. He did not shift his attitude in

the least, and appeared granite-like in his rigid pose.

“I suppose,” she said, “that you have put something into the contribution.”

“I have not,” he replied with his customary incisive, harsh voice. “Why should I? The contribution means nothing to me.”

The brutality, the inhumanity of his words made her recoil for an instant, and then she recovered her fearlessness and dignity.

“I might have known that,” she said, coolly. “I should have expected nothing more from you. The lives of these—all these—” and she gestured toward those around—“mean nothing to you. Nor the sufferings and poverties of those dependent on them.”

“Certainly not,” he answered with a trace of a harsh sneer outlined on his face. “If they get killed, I am sorry. If they live, they are useful. If they are lost, others take their places. They are merely a part of the general scheme. They are for me to use.”

His words were like a challenge. He watched her curiously as if awaiting her reply. Dick felt Bill starting forward, angrily, then checked him.

“Wait!” he whispered. “Let’s hear what he has to say.”

The Lily took a step forward to arraign him. Her face shone whiter than ever in the light of the torches.

“And that is all? That is your attitude?”

He did not answer, but stared at her curiously. It seemed to anger her more.

“I wonder,” she said, “if you would care for my estimate of you! I wonder if you would care for the estimate of those

around you. It does not seem strange that you are called by the fitting sobriquet of 'Bully Presby.' You are that! You are one of those shriveled souls that fatten on the toil of others—that thrive on others' misfortunes and miseries. My God! A usurer—a pawnbroker, is a prince compared to you. You are without compassion, pity, charity or grace. Your code is that of winning all, the code of greed! Listen to me. You doubtless look down on me as a camp woman, and with a certain amount of scorn! But knowing what I am, I should far rather be what I am, the owner of the High Light, a sordid den, than to be you, the owner of the Rattler, the man they call Bully Presby!"

To their astonishment he leaned his head back and laughed, deeply, from his chest, as if her anger, her scorn, her bitter denunciation, had all served to amuse him. It was as if she had flattered him by her characterizations. She was too angry to speak and stood regarding him coldly until he had finished. He turned and appeared for the first time to observe the men of the Croix d'Or scowling at him, and his laugh abruptly stopped. He scowled back at them, and, without so much as a good-night salutation turned and walked away and lost himself in the shadows of the street.

"Oh," she said, facing them and clenching her hands, "sometimes I hate that man! He is unfathomable! There have been times when I wondered if he was human."

She bit her lip as if to restrain her words, and then looked up at the partners.

“And there are times,” drawled the big miner, “when I wonder how long I’ll be able to keep my hands off of him. And one of those times has been in the last minute! If you think it would do any good, I’ll—”

She looked up at him and smiled, for the first time since they had met. She interrupted him.

“No, the only way you can do any good is to make your contribution. I’ll go with you.”

They walked together toward the box which was now deserted, save by the doctor and one other, who were scooping the money into a water pail they had secured somewhere. Bill threw his roll of bills into it and the doctor looked up and smiled.

“I knew you would come,” he said. “And that, with the two thousand that Mrs. Meredith has volunteered—”

She checked him.

“That was to be my secret. Please, none of you, speak of it again.”

“As you wish,” replied the doctor. “And I apologize. Now I would suggest that you take charge of this and take it to the High Light. I’ll send it over to-morrow by Jim. The boys have done well.”

That was all he said, and yet in his simple sentence was much. The camp had done well. He straightened up with an air of weariness.

“This pail is pretty heavy,” he said. “Won’t you take it, Mathews, and carry it over?”

The miner caught it up in his arms, fearing lest the bail break loose under its weight. The doctor bade them good night, and they started toward the High Light, leaving the torch man to extinguish his flares. She talked freely as she walked between them, expressing her relief that none of the destitute in that distant camp of mourning would suffer unduly after the receipt of Goldpan's offering. As they entered the house of the lights and noise the bartender nearest hailed her, wiped his hands on his apron and reached out an envelope.

"Bully Presby was in here about an hour or two ago," he said, "and left this. It was before you and Doc Mills was goin' out to try and get the boys interested."

She tore it open, then flushed, and passed it to the partners who together read it.

"I hear," the letter read, "that some of the men who were killed over at the Blackbird used to work for me down in California. Also that there are some women and children over there who may have a hard time of it. Will you see to it that this goes to the right channels, and regard it as confidential? I don't want to appear to be a philanthropist on even a small scale. Presby."

Pinned to the letter was a check. It was for ten thousand dollars. Bill lifted it in his fingers, scanned each word, then handed it to Mrs. Meredith who stood frowning with her eyes fixed on the floor.

"I've known burros, and other contrary cusses, in my time," he said, slowly, "but this feller Presby has 'em all lookin' as simple,

and plain, and understandable, as a cross-roads guide-post.”

And The Lily, contrite, agreed.

CHAPTER IX

WHERE A GIRL ADVISES

“There’s one thing about you, pardner, I don’t quite sabe,” drawled Bill to his employer as they sat in front of their cabin one night, after discussing the assays which Dick made his especial work. “You ain’t as talkative as you used to be. Somethin’s on your mind. It’s more’n two weeks now since I had time to think about anything but the green lead, and I’m beginnin’ to notice. Where the devil do you go every mornin’ between nine and eleven?”

Dick turned toward him impulsively, and then made no reply, other than to laugh softly. Then slowly he felt a wave of embarrassment.

“Not that it’s any of my business, bein’ as you’re you and I’m me; but we were pardners for some years before things changed and made you the boss and me the hired hand. And it may be I’m undue curious. Who’s that girl you go up on the pipe line to meet every mornin’?”

His question was so abrupt that, for an instant, the younger man had a hot, childish anger; but he controlled himself, and wondered why he should have been annoyed by the frank interrogation.

“Miss Presby, the lumberman’s daughter,” he said crisply.

“But what interests me most is how you knew?”

The elder miner slapped his leg gleefully, as if pleased with a joke, and said: “Well, I went up there five or six days ago, tryin’ to find you, because I’d lost the combination to the safe, and wanted to look over them old drawings. I sneaked back, because I was a little jealous to see you sittin’ on the pipe talkin’ right friendly to such a good-looker. Three evenin’s later while you were workin’ on them mill samples, I thought I’d like to see the whole of the line. I took a walk. There’s been a real good horse trail worked into the ground up there, ain’t there? And it’s a new trail, too. Seems as if somebody must have been riding up and down that way every day for just about two weeks. And it’s serious, too, because you don’t say nothin’ to a man you was pardners with for more’n seven years. Hey, Dick! What ails you, anyway?”

The younger man was on his feet with one of his fists drawn back, in an attitude of extreme temper.

“Suppose after this you mind your own business?”

For a full half minute the elder man sat there in the dusk, and then said slowly: “All right, boy—I mean, Mister Townsend—I will hereafter.”

In the gloom his figure seemed suddenly bent forward more than usual, and his voice had a note of terrible hurt. It was as if all the ties of seven years of vicissitude had been arbitrarily cast off by his old partner; that they had become master and man. His words conveyed an indescribable sorrow, and loss.

“Bill!”

Dick's arm had relaxed, and he had stepped closer. Mathews did not lift his head. A hand, pleading, fell on his shoulder, and rested there.

"Bill, I didn't mean it! I'm—I'm—well, I'm upset. Something's happened to me. I didn't seem to realize it till just now. I'm—well, thank you, I'm making a fool of myself."

The faithful gray head lifted itself, and the gray eyes glowed warmly as they peered in the dusk at the younger man's face.

"Whe-e-w!" he whistled. "It's as bad as that, is it, boy? Just forget it, won't you? That is, forget I butted in."

Dick sat down, hating himself for such an unusual outburst. He felt foolish, and extremely young again, as if his steadfast foundations of self-reliance and repression had been proven nothing more than sand.

"I know how them things go," the slow voice, so soft as to be scarcely audible, continued. "I was young once, and it was good to be young. Not that I'm old now, because I'm not; but because when a feller is younger, there are hot hollows in his heart that he don't want anybody to know about. Only don't make me feel again that I ought to 'mister' you. I don't believe I could do that. It's pretty late to begin."

Dick went to his bed with a critical admission of the truth, and from any angle it appeared foolish. How had it all happened? He was not prone to be easy of heart. He had known the light, fleeting loves of boyhood, and could laugh at them; but they had been different to this. And it had come on him at a time

when everything was at stake, and when his undivided thoughts and attention should have been centered on the Croix d'Or. He reviewed his situation, and scarcely knew why he had drifted into it, unless it had been through a desire to talk to some one who knew, as he knew, all that old life from which he had been, and would forever be, parted.

Not that he regretted its easy scramble, and its plethora of civilized concomitants; for he loved the mountains, the streams, the open forests, and the physical struggles of the wild places; but—and he gave over reasoning, and knew that it was because of the charm of Miss Presby herself, and that he wanted her, and had hoped unconsciously. Sternly arraigning himself, he knew that he had no groundwork to hope, and nothing to offer, just then; that he must first win with the Croix d'Or, and that it was his first duty to win with that, and justify the confidence of the kindly old Sloan who backed him with hard dollars.

He had not appreciated how much the daily meeting of Miss Presby meant to him until, on the following morning, and acting on his hardly reached resolution of the night before, he went up for what might be the last time. It was difficult to realize that the short summer of the altitudes was there in its splendid growth, and that it had opened before his unobserving eyes, passed from the tender green of spring to the deep-shaded depths of maturity, and that the wild flowers that carpeted the open slopes had made way for roses. Even the cross on the peak was different, and it came to him that he had not observed it in the weeks he had been

climbing to the slope, but had always waited eagerly for the light of a woman's face.

She came cantering up the trail, and waved a gay hand at him as she rounded the bend of the crag. There was a frank expectancy in her face—the expectancy of a pleasant hour's visit with a good comrade. He wondered, vaguely and with new scrutiny, if that were not all—just friendliness. They talked of nothing; but his usual bantering tone was gone, and, quick to observe, she divined that there had come to him a subtle change, not without perturbation.

“You don't seem talkative to-day,” she accused as he stood up, preparatory to going. “Have you finished work on your pipe line?”

He flushed slightly under the bronze of his face at the question, it being thus brought home to him that he had used it as a pretext for continuing their meetings for more than two weeks after that task was completed and the pipemen scattered—perhaps working in some subway in New York by that time.

“Yes,” he said, “the work is finished. I shall not come up here again unless it is for the sole purpose of seeing you.”

There was something in his tone that caused her to glance up at him and there was that in his eyes, on his face, in his bearing of restraint, that caused her to look around again, as if to escape, and hastily begin donning her gloves. She pulled the fingers, though they fitted loosely, as if she had difficulty with them—even as though they were tight gloves of kid, and said: “Well, you might

do that, sometimes—when you have time; but you mustn't neglect your work. I come here because it is my favorite ride. You must not come merely to talk to me when there are other duties.”

“Yes,” he said, endeavoring to appear unconcerned. “The Croix d’Or is apt to be a most insistent tyrant.”

“And it should come first!” He was obtuse for the instant in his worryment, and did not catch the subtle shade of bitterness in which she spoke.

She tugged at the reins of her horse, and the animal reluctantly tore loose a last mouthful of the succulent grass growing under the moisture and shadow of the big steel pipe, and stood expectantly waiting for her to mount. She was in the saddle before Dick could come around to her side to assist her. He made a last desperate compromise, finding an excuse.

“When I feel that I must see you, because you are such a good little adviser, I shall come back here,” he said, “morning after morning, in the hope of seeing you and unburdening my disgruntlement.”

She laughed, as if it were a joke.

“I’m afraid I’m not a very good miner,” she said, “although I suppose I ought to be a yellow-legged expert, having been brought up somewhere within sound of the stamps all my life. Good luck to you. Good-by.”

His reply was almost a mumble, and the black horse started down the trail. He watched her, with a sinking, hungry heart. Just as the crag was almost abreast of her mount, she turned and

called back: "Oh, I forgot to say that I shall probably come here almost every day."

He did not understand, until long afterward, the effort that speech cost her; nor did he know ever that her face was suffused when her horse, startled, sprang out of sight at the touch of her spurs. He did not know, as he stood there, wishing that he had called her back, that she was riding recklessly down the road, hurt, and yet inclined to be strangely happy over that parting and all it had confessed. With a set face, as if a whole fabric of dreams had been wrenched from his life, the miner turned and walked slowly over the trail, worn by his own feet, which led him back to the Croix d'Or, and the struggle with the stubborn rock.

As he topped the hill he suddenly listened, and his steps quickened. From below a new sound had been added to the threnody of the hills; a new note, grumbling and roaring, insistent and strong. Its message was plain. The mill of the Cross was running again for the first time in years; and, even as he looked down on the red roof, the whistle in the engine-house gave a series of cheerful toots in salute of the fact.

Down on the flat in front of the long structure which held, in its batteries, almost two-score stamps, a tall figure came out, and looked around as if seeking him, and then, casting its eyes upward, beheld him, and lifted a battered hat and swung it overhead. It was Bill, rejoicing in his work.

A car of ore slid along the tramway, with the carboy dangling one leg over the back end while steadying himself by the

controller, as if he had been thus occupied for years. Dick tore his hat off, threw it in the air, and shouted, and raced down the hill. From now on it must be work; unless they met with great success—then—he dared not stop to think of what then.

He hastened on down to the mill and entered the door. Everything about it, from the dumping of the cars sixty feet above, the wrench of the crushers breaking the ore into smaller fragments, the clash of the screens as it came on down to the stamps, and their terrific “jiggety-jig-jig,” roared, throbbed, and trembled. Every timber in the structure seemed to keep pace with that resistless shaking as the tables slid to and fro, dripping from the water percolating at their heads, to distribute the fine silt of crushed, muddy ore evenly over the plates in the steady downward slant. Already the bright plates of copper, coated with quicksilver, were catching, retaining, amalgamating the gold.

“The vanners need a little more slant, don’t you think?” bellowed his partner, with his hands cupped and held close against Dick’s ear in the effort to make himself heard in that pandemonium where millmen worked the shift through without attempting to speak.

In the critical calculation of the professional miner, Dick forgot all other affairs, and leaned down to see the run of water. He nodded his head, beckoned to the mill boss, and by well-known signs indicated his wish. He scrambled above and studied the pulp, slipping it through his fingers and feeling its fineness, and speculating whether or not they would be troubled with any

solution of lead that would render the milling difficult and slime the plates so that the gold would escape to go roistering down the creek with waste water. It did feel very slippery, and he was reassured. He was eager to get to the assay-house and make his first assay of "tailings," refuse from the mill, to discover what percentage of gold they were saving, and, in parlance, "How she would run on mill test."

Fascinated in his inspection and direction of certain minor changes, he was astonished when the noise suddenly dropped from fortissimo to a dull whine, as the mill slowed down to a stop for the noon hour. And the afternoon passed as quickly while he worked over the bucking board—a plate used to crush ore for assaying—in the assay-house, and watched the gasoline flare and fume in his furnaces to bring the little cupels, with their mass of powdered, weighed, and numbered samples, to a molten state. He took them out with his tongs, watched them cool, and weighed, on the scales that could tell the weight of a lead pencil mark on a sheet of paper, the residue of gold, thus making his computations. He was not pleased with the result. The green lead was not as rich as they had believed.

"It won't pay more than fifty cents a ton with the best milling we can do," he said to Bill, who came eagerly into the assay office.

"But you know the old idea—that she gets richer as we go down?" his partner asserted. "If it pays fifty cents a ton at the mill plates, we'll open up the face of the ledge and put on a day

and night shift. We can handle a heap of ore with this plant. It begins to look to me as if the Cross is all to the good. Come on. Let's go down to the power-house and see how things look down there when we're working."

They had been contemplating a new timber road, and, after visiting the power plant and finding it trim, and throbbing with its new life, they cut across and debouched into the public road leading up the cañon, by the banks of the stream, to the Rattler. When almost at the fork, where their own road branched off and crossed the stream to begin its steep little climb up to the Croix d'Or, they saw a man standing on the apron of the bridge, and apparently listening to the roar of their mill. His back was toward them, and seemingly he was so absorbed in the sounds of industry from above that he did not hear them approach until their feet struck the first planks leading to the heavy log structure. He turned his head slowly toward them, and they recognized him as Bully Presby. It was the first time either of them had seen him since the evening in the camp.

"So you're running, eh?" he asked Dick without any preliminary courtesy.

"Yes, we started the mill to-day."

"On ore, or waste?" There was a sneer in his question which caused Dick to stiffen a trifle; and Bill frowned, as if the question carried an insult.

Still the younger man was inclined to avoid words.

"Naturally, we shouldn't put waste through the mill," he said

coldly. "We have opened up an old vein which the other managers did not seem to think worth while."

"And so, I suppose, showing superior knowledge, you will demonstrate that the men before you were a set of dubs? Humph! From babes and fools come wisdom!"

His voice was hard and cynical, and his grim lips curled with a slightly contemptuous twitch. The hot, impulsive streak in Dick leaped upward. His eyes were angry when he answered.

"If you apply the latter to me," he retorted hotly, "you are going pretty far. I don't know what business it is of yours. We have never asked you for any advice, and we don't want any. I expect no favors from any one, and if I did, am certain, in view of your attitude, that I shouldn't ask them from you."

"Steady! Steady, boy!" admonished his partner's drawling voice at his side. Dick did not utter other words that were surging to his tongue, and finished with an angry shrug of his shoulders.

Bill turned coolly to the owner of the Rattler, and appeared to probe him with his eyes; and his stare was returned with one as searching as his own.

"Who are you?" Presby asked, as if the big miner were some man he had not noticed before.

"Me? My name's Mathews. I'm superintendent of the Croix d'Or," Bill answered, as calmly as if the form of question had been ignored.

"And I suppose the young Mister Townsend relies on you for advice, and that he—"

“He don’t need to rely on any one for advice,” interrupted the soft, repressed voice. “I rely on him. He knows more than I do. And say,” he added, taking a step toward Bully Presby, and suddenly appearing to concentrate himself with all his muscles flexed as if for action, “I’ve mined for thirty-five years. And I’ve met some miners. And I’ve never met one who had as little decency for the men on the next claim, or such bullying ways as you’ve got.”

Presby’s face did not change in the least, nor did he shift his eyes. There was an instant’s pause, and he showed no inclination to speak.

“Most every one around these diggings seems to be kind of buffaloeed by you,” Bill added; “but I sort of reckon we ain’t like them. I’m handin’ it to you right straight, so you and me won’t have any trouble after this, because if we do—well, we’d have to find out which was the better man.”

Bully Presby’s eyes flashed a singular look. It seemed as if they carried something of approval, and at the same time a longing to test the question of physical superiority. And then, abruptly, he laughed. Astonished by this strange, complex character, Bill relaxed, and turned toward his partner. Dick, seeing that the interview was ended, as far as the necessity for saying anything was concerned, moved across the bridge, and Bill took a last hard stare at the mine owner. The latter laughed again, with his cold, cynical rumble.

“I think,” he said, “that when the Cross shuts down for good,

I'd like to give you a job. When it does, come and see me.”

Without another look, word, or sign of interest, he turned his back on them, and marched up the hill toward the Rattler.

CHAPTER X

TROUBLE STALKS ABROAD

August had come, with its broiling heat at midday and its chill at night, when the snow, perpetual on the peaks, sent its cold breezes downward to the gulches below. Here and there the grass was dying. The lines on Dick's brows had become visible; and even Mathews' resolute sanguinity was being tested to the utmost. The green lead was barely paying expenses. There had come no justification for a night shift, and use of all the batteries of the mill, for the ledge of ore was gradually, but certainly, narrowing to a point where it must eventually pinch out.

Five times, in as many weeks, Dick had crossed the hill and waited for Miss Presby. Twice he had been bitterly disappointed, and three times she had cantered around to meet him. Their first meeting had been constrained. He felt that it was due to his own bald discovery that he wanted her more than anything in life, and was debarred from telling her so. In the second meeting she had been the good comrade, and interested, palpably, in the developments at the Croix d'Or.

"You should sink, I believe," she had said hesitatingly, as if with a delicate fear that she was usurping his position. "I know this district very well, indeed; and there isn't a mine along this range that has paid until it had gone the depth. Do I talk like a

miner?"

She laughed, in cheerful carelessness as if his worries meant but little to her.

"You see, I've heard so much of mines and mining, although my father seldom talks of them to me, that I know the geological formation and history of this district like a real miner. I played with nothing but miners' children from the time I was so high, pigtails and pinafores, until I was this high, short skirts and frocks."

She indicated the progressive stages of her growth with her riding crop, as if seeing herself in those younger years.

"Then my father sent me to an aunt, in New York, with instructions that I was to be taught something, and to be a lady. I believe I used to eat with my knife when I first went to her home."

She leaned back and laughed until the tears welled into her eyes.

"She was a Spartan lady. She cured me of it by rapping my knuckles with the handle of a silver-plated knife. My, how it hurt! I feel it yet! I wonder that they were not enlarged by her repeated admonitions."

Dick looked at them as she held them reminiscently before her, and had an almost irresistible desire to seize and crush the long, slender, white fingers in his own. But the end of the meeting had been commonplace, and they had parted again without treading on embarrassing ground.

Dick had heard no more from the owner of the Rattler,

save indirectly, nor met him since the strained passage of the bridge; but mess-house gossip, creeping through old Bells, who recognized no superiors, and calmly clumped into the owner's quarters whenever he felt inclined, said that the neighboring mine was prodigiously prosperous.

"I heard down in Goldpan," he squeaked one night, "that Wells Fargo takes out five or six bars of bullion for him every mill clean-up. And you can bet none of it ever gets away from that old stiff."

"But how does this news leak out?" Dick asked, wondering at such a tale, when millmen and miners were distinguished for keeping inviolate the secrets of the property on which they worked.

"Wells Fargo," the engineer answered. "None of the boys would say anything. He pays top wages and hires good men. Got to hand that to him. He brags there ain't no man so high-priced that he can't make money off'n him—Bully Presby does. And they ain't no better miner than him on earth. He can smell pay ore a mile underground—Bully Presby can."

The old man suddenly looked at the superintendent, and said: "Say, Bill. You been down to the camp a few times, ain't you?"

"Yes, we've been down there several times. Why?"

"Well, I suppose you know they's a lot of talk goin' around that the Cross is workin' in good pay now?"

"Oh, I've heard it; but don't pay any attention when it's not so."

Bells Park leaned farther over, and lowered his shrill,

garrulous voice to a thin murmur.

“Well, I cain’t tell you what it is, but I want to give you the right lead. When that gets to goin’ on about newcomers in the Blue Mountains—fellers like you be—look out for storms.”

“Go on! You’re full of stuff again!” Bill gibed, with his hearty laugh. “If we’d listened to all the mysterious warnin’s you’ve handed us since we came up here, Bells, we’d been like a dog chasin’ his tail around when it happened to be bit off down to the rump and no place to get hold of. Better look out! Humph!”

The old engineer got up in one of his tantrums, fairly screamed with rage, threatened to leave as soon as he could get another job, and then tramped down the hill to the cabin he occupied with the other engineer. But that was not new, either, for he had made the same threat at least a half-dozen times, and yet the men from the Cœur d’Alenes knew that nothing could drive him away but dismissal.

It was but two or three days later that the partners, coming from the assay-house to the mess late, discovered a stranger talking to the men outside under the shade of a great clump of tamaracks that nestled at the foot of a slope. They passed in and sat down at their table, wondering who the visitor could be. The cook’s helper, a mute, served them, and they were alone when they were attracted by a shrill, soft hiss from the window. They looked, and saw Bells Park. Nothing but his head, cap-crowned, was visible as he stood on tiptoe to reach the opening.

“I told you to look out,” he said warningly. “Old Mister

Trouble's come. Don't give anything. Stand pat. A walkin' delegate from Denver's here. God knows why. Look out."

His head disappeared as if it were a jack-in-the-box, shut down; and the partners paused with anxious eyes and waited for him to reappear. Dick jumped to his feet and walked across to the window. No one was in sight. He went to the farther end of the mess-house and peered through a corner of the nearest pane. Out under the tamaracks the stranger was orating, and punctuating his remarks with a finger tapping in a palm. His words were not audible; but Dick saw that he was at least receiving attention. He returned to the table, and told Bill what he had seen. The latter was perturbed.

"It looks as if we were goin' to have an argument, don't it?" he asked, voicing his perplexity.

"But about what?" Dick insisted. "We pay the union scale, and, while I don't know, I believe there isn't a man on the Cross that hasn't a card."

"Well," replied his partner, "we'll soon see. Finished?"

As they walked to the office, men began to hurry across the gulch toward the hoist, others toward the mill, and by the time they were in their cabin the whistle blew. It was but a minute later that they heard someone striding over the porch, and the man they assumed to be the walking delegate entered. He was not of the usual stamp, but appeared intent on his errand. Save for a certain air of craftiness, he was representative and intelligent. He was quietly dressed, and gave the distinct impression that he had

come up from the mines, and had known a hammer and drill—a typical “hard-rock man.”

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I am representing the Consolidated Miners’ Association.”

He drew a neat card from a leather case in his pocket, and presented it, and was asked to seat himself.

“What can we do for you?” Dick asked, wasting no time on words.

“I suppose this mine is fair?”

“Yes. It is straight, as far as I know.”

“It has no agreement.”

“But we are ready to sign one whenever it is presented.”

The delegate drew a worn wallet from his pocket, extracted a paper, and tendered it.

“I anticipated no trouble,” he said, but without smiling or giving any sign of satisfaction. “Would you mind looking that over, and seeing if it meets with your approval?”

Dick stepped to the high desk at the side of the room which he had been utilizing as a drawing board, laid the sheet out, and began reading it, while Bill stood up and scanned it across his shoulders. Bill suddenly put a stubby finger on a clause, and mumbled: “That’s not right.”

Dick slowly read it; and, before he had completed the involved wording, the finger again clapped down at another section. “Nor that. Don’t stand for it!”

“What do you want, anyhow?” Bill demanded, swinging round

and facing the delegate.

The latter looked at him coolly and exasperatingly for a moment, then said: "What position do you occupy here, my man?"

Dick whirled as if he had been struck from behind.

"What position does he occupy? He is my superintendent, and my friend. Anything he objects to, or sanctions, I object to, or agree with. Anything he says, I'll back up. Now I'll let him do the talking."

The delegate calmly flicked the ash from a cigar he had lighted, puffed at it, blew the smoke from under his mustache toward the ceiling, and looked at the thin cloud before answering. It was as if he had come intent on creating a disturbance through studied insolence.

"Well," he said, without noticing the hot, antagonistic attitude of the mine owner, "what do you think of the proffered agreement?"

"I think it's no good!" answered Mathews, facing him. "It's drawn up on a number-one scale. This mine ain't in that class."

"Oh! So you've signed 'em before."

"I have. A dozen times. This mine has but one shift—the regular day shift. It has but one engineer and a helper. It has but one mill boss."

"Working eight batteries?"

"No. You know we couldn't work eight batteries with one small shift."

“Well, you’ve got to have an assistant millman at the union scale, you know,” insisted the delegate.

“What to do? To loaf around, I suppose,” Bill retorted.

“And you’ve got to have a turn up in the engine-house. You need another hoisting engineer,” continued the delegate, as if all these matters had been decided by him beforehand.

Dick thought that he might gain a more friendly footing by taking part in the conversation himself.

“See here,” he said. “The Croix d’Or isn’t paying interest. Maybe we aren’t using the requisite number of men as demanded under this rating; but they are all satisfied, and—”

“I don’t know about that,” interrupted the delegate, with an air of insolent assurance.

“And if we can’t go on under the present conditions, we may as well shut down,” Dick concluded.

“That’s up to you,” declared the delegate, with an air of disinterest. “If a mine can’t pay for the working, it ought to shut down.”

The partners looked at each other. There was a mutual question as to whether it would be policy to throw the delegate out of the door. Plainly they were in a predicament, for the man was master, in his way.

“Look here,” Bill said, accepting the responsibility, “this ain’t right. You know it ain’t. We’re in another class altogether. You ought to put us, at present, under—”

“It is right,” belligerently asserted the delegate. “I’ve looked it

all over. You'll agree to it, or I'll declare the Croix d'Or unfair."

He had arisen to his feet as if arbitrarily to end the argument. For a wonder, the veteran miner restrained himself, although there was a hard, glowing light in his eyes.

"We won't stand for it," he said, restraining Dick with his elbow. "When you're ready to talk on a square basis, come back, and we'll use the ink. Until then we won't. We might as well shut down, first as last, as to lose money when we're just breakin' even as it is. Think it over a while, and see if we ain't right."

"Well, you'll hear from me," declared the delegate, as he put his hat on his head and turned out of the door without any parting courtesy. "Keep the card. My name's Thompson, you know."

For a full minute after he had gone, the partners stared at each other with troubled faces.

"Oh, he's a bluff! That's all there is to it," asserted Mathews, reaching into the corner for his rubber boots, preparatory to going underground. "He knows it ain't right, just as well as I do. If he can put this over, all right. If he can't he'll give us the other rating."

He left Dick making up a time-roll, and turned down the hill; and they did not discuss it again until they were alone that night.

It was seven o'clock the next evening when the partners observed an unusual stir in the camp. They came into the mess-house to find that the men had eaten in unusually short order; and from the bench outside, usually filled at that hour with laughing loungers, there was not a sound. A strange stillness had invaded

the colony of the Croix d'Or, almost ominous. Preoccupied, and each thinking over his individual trials, the partners ate their food and arose from the table. Out on the doorstep they paused to look down the cañon, now shorn of ugliness and rendered beautiful by the purple twilight. The faint haze of smoke from the banked fires, rising above the steel chimney of the boiler-house, was the only stirring, living spectacle visible; save one.

“What does that mean?” Bill drawled, as if speaking to himself.

Far below, just turning the bend of the road, Dick saw a procession of men, grouped, or walking in pairs. They disappeared before he answered.

“Looks like the boys,” he said, using the term of the camps for all men employed. “I wonder where they are bound for? If it were pay night, I could understand. It would mean Goldpan, the dance halls, a fight or two, and sore heads to-morrow; but to-night—I don't know.”

Bill did not answer. He seemed to be in a silent, contemplative mood when they sat in the rough easy-chairs on the porch in front of the office and looked up at the first rays of light on the splendid, rugged peak above. Dick's mind reverted to the lumberman's daughter, as does the needle veer to the magnet; and for a long time they sat there, until the fires of their cigars glowed like stars. The moon came up, and the cross was outlined, dimly, above them, and against the background of black, cast upon the somber, starlit blue of the night.

From far below, as if steel had been struck upon stone, came a faint, ringing sound. Living in that strange world of acuteness to which men of the high hills are habituated, they listened, alert. Accustomed, as are all those dwellers of the lonesome spots, to heeding anything out of the ordinary, they strained their ears for a repetition. Clattering up the roadway came the sound of a hard-ridden horse's hoofs, then his labored breathing, and a soft voice steadying him to further effort. Into the shadows was injected something moving, some unfamiliar, living shape. It turned up the hill over the trail, and plunged wearily toward them. They jumped to their feet and stepped down off the porch, advancing to meet the belated visitor. The horse, with lathering neck and distended nostrils, paused before them. The moon cleared the top of the eastern ridges with a slow bound, lowering the shadows until the sweat on the horse's neck glistened like a network of diamond dust strewn on a velvet cloak. It also lighted to a pallid gleam the still face of the night rider. It was Lily Meredith.

"I've come again," she said. "They're trying to make trouble for you, down there in the camp. Bells Park came out and told me about it. The miners' union stirred up by that man from Denver. Bells said the only chance you had was to come down there at once. They've split on your account—on account of the Croix d'Or. I've ridden two miles to warn you, and to get you there before the meeting breaks up. Bells will try and hold them until you can come and demand a hearing. If you don't make it they will scab the mine. You must hurry. It's your only chance. I know

them, the best friends in peace, and devils when turned the other way.”

She stopped abruptly and looked off at the moon, and then around over the dark and silent camp. Only one light was visible, that in the cook's end of the mess-house, where that fat worthy lay upon his back and read a yellow-backed, sentimental novel. Faint and rumbling came the subdued roar of the mill at the Rattler, beating out the gold for Bully Presby; and through some vague prescience Dick was aware of its noise for the first time in weeks, and it conveyed a sense of menace. Everything was at stake. Everything watched him. He looked up at the white face of The Lily above him, and in the moonlight saw that her eyes were fixed, glowing, not on him or the scenes of the night, but on the aroused giant at his side.

CHAPTER XI

BELLS' VALIANT FIGHT

"We'll get there as soon as we can," Dick said. "It may not do any good; but we'll demand a word and give them an argument. I haven't time to thank you now, Mrs. Meredith, but some day—"

"You owe me no thanks," was her rejoinder. "It is I who owe you. Turn about, you know."

The big man said nothing, but took a step nearer to her horse, and looked up into her face with his penetrating eyes. He reached up and closed his hand over both of hers, and held them for an instant, and then whirled back into the cabin to get his hat. The horse pivoted and started away.

"If I see Bells before you do," a voice floated up from the shadows below, where the moon had not yet penetrated, "I'll tell him you're coming. So long."

As the partners dog-trotted down the trail, she was already a long way in advance. Now and then, as they panted up the steep path leading away behind the Rattler, whose lights glowed dimly, they heard faint sounds telling them that she was hastening back to Goldpan. The winding of the trail took them away from the immediate roar of the stamp mill behind, and they were still in the gloom, when they saw the horse and rider outlined for a moment high above them on the crest of the divide and they

thought she stopped for a moment and looked back. Then the silhouette seemed to float down out of sight, and was gone.

At the top, wordless, and sweating with effort, they filled their lungs, hitched their belts tighter, and plunged into the shadows leading toward the straggling rows of lights far below. They ran now, doggedly, hoping to arrive in the camp before the meeting came to an end.

“All we want,” Bill said jerkily, as his feet pounded on the last decline, “is a chance to argue it out with the men themselves before this Denver feller gets his work in. I’m entitled to talk to ’em. I’ve got my own card, and am as good a union man as any of ’em. The boys’ll be reasonable if they stop to think.”

They hastened up the roadway of the street, which was, as at any hour of the night, filled with moving men and clamorous with sound. They knew that the miners’ hall was at its farthest end over the Golden Age Saloon, and so lost no time in directing their steps toward it. A group in the roadway compelled them to turn out; and they were hurrying past, when a high, angry voice arrested them.

“And that’s what they did to me—me, old Bells Park, who is sixty-four!”

Dick turned into the crowd, followed by his partner, and began forcing his way through. Bells was screaming and sobbing now in anger, and venting a tirade of oaths. “If I’d been younger they couldn’t have done it so easily. If I’d ’a’ had my gun, I’d ’a’ killed some of ’em, I would!”

As the partners gained the little opening around him, the light from a window disclosed the white-headed, little man. Two men were half-holding him up. His face was a mass of blood, which one of his supporters was endeavoring to wipe away with a handkerchief, and from all sides came indignant, sympathetic mutterings.

“Who did that?” roared the heavy, infuriated voice of Bill as he turned to those around him.

Bells, whose eyes were swollen shut, recognized the voice, and lurched forward.

“Some fellers backin’ up that Denver thug,” he wailed. “I was tryin’ to hold ’em till you come. He had the meetin’ packed with a lot of bums I never saw before, and, when I told ’em what I thought of ’em and him, he ordered me thrown out. I tore my card to pieces and chucked ’em in his fat face, and then one of the fellers that came with him hit me. They threw me down the stairs, and might ’a’ killed me if there hadn’t been one or two of my friends there. They call ’emselves union miners! The dirty loafers!” And his voice screamed away again into a line of objurgations and anathemas until Bill quieted him.

“Here, Dick,” he said, “give us a hand. We’ll take him over to Lily’s rooms and have her get Doc Mills.”

His voice was unusually calm and contained. Dick had heard him use that tone but once before, when he made a proposition to a man in an Arizona camp that the road was wide, the day fine, and each well armed. He had helped bury the other man after

that meeting, so now read the danger note.

“I’ll go get The Lily to come up and open the door,” one of Bells’ supporters said; “and won’t you go for Doc?” He addressed the man on the other side of the engineer.

“Sure!” replied the other.

Within five minutes they were in Mrs. Meredith’s rooms again; and it seemed to Dick, as he looked around its dainty fittings, that it was forever to be a place of tragedy; for the memory of that terribly burned victim of the fire was still there, and he seemed to see her lying, scorched and unconscious, on the white counterpane.

“His nose is busted, I think,” his partner said to The Lily, whose only comment was an abrupt exclamation: “What a shame! The cowards!”

He turned to the woman with his set face, and, still speaking in that calm, deadly voice, said: “Do you happen to have your gun up here?”

Her eyes opened wider, and Dick was about to interpose, when she answered understandingly: “Yes; but I’ll not give it to you, Bill Mathews.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, as quietly as if his request or her refusal had been mere desultory conversation. “I might need one in a pinch; but if you can’t spare it, I reckon the boy and me can do what we have to do without one.”

He turned and walked from the room and Dick followed, hoping to argue him from that dangerous mood.

“Say, Bill,” he said, “isn’t it about bad enough without any more trouble?”

“What? You don’t mean to say you’re not with me?” exclaimed the miner, suddenly turning on him and stopping abruptly in the street. “Are you for lettin’ ’em get away with it? Of course you ain’t! You always stick. Come on.”

They saw that the lights in the miners’ hall were out, and began a steady tour of the saloons in the vicinity. One of their own men was in one of them—Smuts, the blacksmith, cursing loudly and volubly as they entered.

“Them boys has always treated us white clean through,” he bawled, banging his fist on the bar, “and a lot of you pikers that don’t know nothin’ about the case sit around like a lot of yaps and let this Denver bunch pack the meetin’ and declare a strike. Then you let the same Denver bunch jump on poor old Bells, and hammer him to a pulp after they’ve hustled him out of the door, instead of follerin’ out to see that he don’t get the worst of it. Bah! I’m dead sick of you.”

The partners had paused while listening to him, and he now saw them.

“Come out here, Smuts,” Dick said, turning toward the door, and the smith followed them.

“So they’ve ordered a strike on us, have they?” Dick asked.

“Yes,” was the blacksmith’s heated response; “but it don’t go for me! I stick.”

“Then if you’re with us, where is that Denver bunch?” Bill

asked; and Dick knew that any effort to deter his partner from his purpose would prove useless.

“They all went down to the High Light,” the smith answered. “Have you seen Bells?”

“Yes, and taken care of him. Now I’m goin’ to take care of the man that done it.”

The blacksmith banged a heavy hand on the superintendent’s shoulder.

“Bully for you! I’m with you. We’ll go together!” he exclaimed, and at once led the way toward the flaming lights of the High Light but a few doors below.

Dick nerved himself for the inevitable, and grimly walked with them as they entered the doors. As they stood there, with the big miner in front, a sudden hush invaded the babel of noise, and men began to look in their direction. The grim, determined man in the lead, glaring here and there with cold, terrible eyes, was too noticeable a figure to escape observation. The set face of his partner, scarcely less determined, and the smith, with brawny, clenched hands, and bushy, black brows drawn into a fierce scowl, completed the picture of a desperate trio come to avenge.

“You’re the man I’m after,” suddenly declared Bill, pointing a finger at Thompson, of Denver, who had been the center of an admiring group. “You’re the one that’s responsible for old Bells. Let’s see if you or any of your bunch are as brave with a younger man. Come outside, won’t you?”

When first he began to speak, in that silky, soft rumble, Thompson, who was nearly as large as Mathews, assumed an air of amused disdain; but before the speech was ended his face went a little white.

“Oh, go on away, you drunken loafers!” he said, half-turning, as if to resume his conversation.

Instantly Bill sprang at him; and it seemed that he launched his sinewy bulk with a tiger’s directness and deadliness straight through the ten feet intervening. He drove his fist into the face of the Denver man, and the latter swept back against those behind him. Again he lifted the merciless fist, and now began striking with both with incredible rapidity. The battered Thompson was driven back, to fall against a faro layout. The miner bent him backward over the table until he was resting on the wildly scattered gold and silver coins, and struck again, and this time the blood spurted in a stream, to run across the green cloth, the staring card symbols, and the case rack.

“Don’t kill him, Bill, don’t kill him!” Dick’s shout arose above the shouts of men and the screams of dance-hall women. He had barely time to observe, in a flash, that Bill had picked the limp form of Thompson up, and heavy as it was, lifted it high above his head and thrown it violently into a vacant corner back of the table in a crumpled heap, when he was almost felled to the floor by a blow from behind, and turned to fight his own battle with one of the Denver bullies.

His old gymnasium training stood him in good stead; for, half-

dazed by the blow, he could only reel back and block the heavy fists that were smashing toward him, when there came a sudden pause, and he saw that the smith had forced his way forward and lunged, with his heavy, slow arm, a deadly punch that landed under his assailant's ear, and sent him limp and dazed to the floor. The smith jumped forward and lifted his heavy boot to kick the weaving face; but Dick caught him by the arm, and whirled him back in time to prevent needless brutality.

"There's another of 'em that hit Bells," the smith yelled, pointing to a man who began desperately edging toward the door.

All the rage of the primitive was aroused in Dick by this time, the battle lust that dwells, placidly through life, perhaps, in every man, but which breaks loose in a torrent when once unleashed. He leaped after the retreating man, seized him by the collar, and gave a wrench that tore coat, collar, and tie from the man's throat. He drove a blow into the frightened face, and yelled: "That for old Bells Park! And that!"

The room had become a pandemonium. Men seemed striking everywhere. Fists were flying, the bartenders and gamblers shouting for order; and Dick looked back to where Smuts and Bill were clearing a wide circle as they went after individual members of Thompson's supporters who were edging in. Suddenly he saw a man leap on the bar, and recognized in him the man who had been watchman at the Croix d'Or. Even in that tempestuous instant Dick wondered at his temerity in entering the place.

Something glistened in the light, and he saw that the watchman

held a drawn revolver, and was leveling it at Bill. The motion of the fight was all that prevented the shot, as Mathews leaped to and fro. A dozen men were between Dick and the watchman; but almost under his hand, at the edge of the bar, stood a whisky bottle. He dove for it, brought it up, and threw. The watchman, struck fairly on the side of the head, dropped off backward, and fell to the floor behind the bar, and his pistol exploded harmlessly upward.

Instantly there came a change. From terrific uproar the room became as still as a solitude. Brutal and deadly as had been that fierce minute or two of battle in which all men fought, or strove to protect themselves from the maddened ones nearest, the sound of the shot brought them to their senses. A fight was one thing, a shooting another. Gunmen as many of them were, they dreaded the results if firearms were resorted to in that dense mass of excited men, and each one stood still, panting, listening, calmed.

“I think Bells Park has played even,” came a calm, steady voice at the door.

They turned in surprise. Standing in the doorway, motionless, scornful, and immaculate, with her white hat still on her head, as if she had just entered from the street, stood The Lily.

“Poor old Bells! Poor old man!” she said, in that panting silence, and then for what seemed a long time looked at the floor. “Bells Park,” she said at last, lifting her eyes, “is dead!”

Suddenly, and before any one could speak, she clenched her hands at her sides, her eyes blazed, her face twisted, and went

white.

“Oh,” she said bitterly, in a voice low-pitched and tortured with passion, “I hate you! I hate you! You brutes of Goldpan. You gambling dogs! You purchasers of women. From this time, forever, I am done with you!”

She lifted her arms, opened her hands, and made one wide, sweeping, inclusive gesture, and turned and walked out into the night.

“Dead! Dead! Bells is dead!”

Dick heard an unutterably sorrowful voice exclaim; and Bill, half-denuded, his blue shirt in shreds, his face puffed from blows, and his cut knuckles dripping a slow, trickling red, plunged toward him, followed by the smith. No one blocked their way as they went, the three together, as they had come. Behind them, the room broke into hushed, awed exclamations, and began to writhe and twist, as men lifted and revived the fallen, and took stock of their injuries.

Two men came running down the street with weapons in hand; and the moonlight, which had lifted until it shone white and clear into the squalors of the camp, picked out dim blazes from the stars on their breasts. They were the town marshal and a deputy sheriff, summoned from some distant saloon by the turmoil, and hastening forward to arrest the rioters, not suspecting that men were wanted for a graver offense. Standing alone in the moonlight, in the middle of the road, with her hands clenched before her, the three men discerned another figure, and, when

they gained it, saw that in the eyes of The Lily swam unshed tears.

Dick and the smith hastened onward toward her rooms; but Bill abruptly turned, after they had passed her, and spoke. They did not hear what he said. They scarcely noted his pause, for in but two or three steps he was with them again, grimly hurrying to where lay the man they had come to love.

CHAPTER XII

A DISASTROUS BLOW

In after years it all came back to Dick as a horrible nightmare of unreality, that tragic night's events and those which followed. The grim setting of the coroner's jury, where men with bestial, bruised, and discolored faces sat awkwardly or anxiously, with their hats on their knees, in a hard stillness; the grave questions of the coroner, coupled with the harsh, decisive interrogations of the prosecuting attorney, who had been hastily summoned from the county seat across the hills; and there in the other room, quiet, and at rest, the faithful old man who had given his life in defense of his friends.

Dick gave his testimony in a dulled voice that sounded strange and unfamiliar, telling all that the engineer had said of the assault. He had one rage of vindictiveness, when the three men from Denver were identified as the ones who had attacked the engineer, and regretted that they were alive to meet the charge against them. He but vaguely understood the technical phraseology of Doctor Mills when he stated that Bells Park died from the shock of the blows and kicks rained on him in that last valorous chapter of his life. He heard the decision placing the responsibility on the men from Denver, saw the sheriff and his deputies step forward and lay firm hands on their arms and lead

them away; and then was aroused by the heavy entrance of the camp undertaker to make ready, for the quiet sleep, the body of Bells Park, the engineer.

“He belongs to us,” said Dick numbly; “to Bill and me. He died for the Croix d’Or. The Croix d’Or will keep him forever, as it would if he had lived and we had made good.”

He saw, as they trudged past the High Light, that its door was shut, and remembered, afterward, a tiny white notice pasted on the glass. The trail across the divide was of interminable length, as was that other climb up to the foot of the yellow cross on the peak, and to the grave he had caused to be dug beside that other one which Bells had guarded with jealous care, planted with flowers, weeded, and where a faded, rough little cross bore the rudely carved inscription:

A DISASTEROUS BLOW

MEHITABLE PARK

THE BEST WOMAN THAT EVER LIVED

Those who had come to pay the last honor to the little engineer filed back down the hill, and the Croix d’Or was left alone,

silent and idle. The smoke of the banked fires still wove little heat spirals above the stacks as if waiting for the man of the engines. The men were shamefacedly standing around the works and arguing, and one or two had rolled their blankets and dumped them on the bench beside the mess-house.

Two or three of them halted Dick and his partner as they started up the little path to the office building where they made their home.

“Well?” Bill asked, facing them with his penetrating eyes.

“We don’t want you boys to think we had any hand in any of this,” the old drill runner said, taking the lead. “They jobbed us. There were but three or four of the Cross men there when they voted a strike, and before that there wasn’t a man that hadn’t taken the floor and fought for your scale. The meeting dragged for some reason, because old Bells kept bringing up arguments—long-winded ones—as if holding it off.”

He appeared to choke up a little, and gave a swift glance over his shoulder at the yellow landmark above.

“If any of us had been there, they’d never have gotten him. We all liked Bells. But they tell me that meeting was packed by that”—and he suddenly flamed wrathful and used a foul epithet—“from Denver, and the three thugs he brought with him. Mr. Townsend, there ain’t a man on the Cross that don’t belong to the union. You know what that means. You know how hard it is for us to scab ourselves. But there ain’t a man on the Cross that hasn’t decided to stick by the mine if you want us. We’re making a protest to

the head officers, and if that don't go—well, we stick!"

Dick impulsively put out his hand. He could not speak. He was choking.

"Want you, boys? Want you?" Bill rumbled. "We want all of you. Every man jack on the works. You know how she's goin' as well as we do; but I'm here to tell you that if the Cross makes good, there'll be one set of men that'll always have the inside edge."

The men with the blankets grinned, and furtively flung them through an open bunk-house window. They all turned away, tongue-tied in emotion, as are nearly all men of the high hills, and tried to appear unconcerned; while Dick, still choking, led the way up the trail. The unwritten law of the mines had decreed there should be no work that day; and he saw the men of the Cross pass down the road, arguing with stolid emphasis against the injustice of the ordered strike. He knew they would return to the camp and continue that argument, with more or less heat, and wondered what the outcome would be.

He tried to forget his sorrow and bodily pains by checking over his old assay slips, while Bill wandered, like a bruised and melancholy survivor of a battle, from the mill to the hoist, from cabin to cabin, and mess-house to bunk-house, stopping now and then to stare upward at the peak, as if still thinking of that fresh and fragrant earth piled in a mound above Bells Park.

Once, in the night, they were awakened by the sounds of the men returning, as they discussed their situation and interjected

copious curses for the instruments of the tragedy. Once again, later, Dick was awakened by a series of blasts, and turned restlessly in his bed, struck a match, and looked at his watch, wondering if it had all been a dream, and the morning shots of the Rattler had aroused him. It was but three o'clock, and he returned to his troubled sleep thinking that he must have been mistaken. Barely half-awake, he heard Bill climb out of his bed and don his clothing, the whistle pulled by the new hands, and the clang of hammer on steel in the blacksmith's shop. Then with a start, he was aroused from the dreamless slumber of the utterly exhausted by a heavy hand laid on his shoulder and a heavy voice: "Wake up, Dick! Wake up, boy! They've got us."

He sat up, rubbing his eyes and fumbling with the cordings of his pajamas. Bill was sitting on the edge of his bed, scowling and angry.

"Got us? Got us?" Dick repeated vaguely.

"Yes. Dynamited the Peltons, and I'm afraid that ain't all. We'll have to go up the pipe line to find out."

Dick rolled out and jumped for his clothing. He did not take time to follow his partner's kindly suggestion that he had better go to the mess-house and get the "cookie" to give him a cup of hot coffee. He was too much upset by the disaster, and walked rapidly over the trail. Not a man was in sight around the works; and as he passed the smith's door, he saw that Smuts, too, had gone, without taking time to don his cap or doff his apron. The whole force appeared to have collected around the power-house

at the foot of the hill, which was around a bend and shut off from view of the Cross. A jagged rent, scattered stone and mortar, and a tangle of twisted steel told the story; but that was not the most alarming damage he had to fear, for the heavy steel pipe, where it entered the plant, was twisted loose, gaping and dry.

He scrambled up the hill, seizing the manzanita brush here and there to drag himself up faster, and gained the brow where the pipe made its last abrupt descent. Far ahead, and walking sturdily, he recognized the stalwart figure of his partner, and knew that Bill was suffering the same anxiety. He ran when the ascent was less steep, and shouted to the grizzled miner ahead, who turned and waited for him.

"I'm afraid of it," Bill called as he approached; and Dick, breathless, made no reply, but hurried ahead with him to the reservoir. In all the journey, which seemed unduly long and hot that morning, they said nothing. Once, as they passed the familiar scene of his tryst with Miss Presby, now ages past, Dick bit his lips, and suppressed a moan like that of a hurt animal. Bitterly he thought that now she was more unattainable, and his dreams more idle than ever they had been. And the first sight of the reservoir confirmed it.

To a large extent, the reservoir of the Cross was artificial. It had been constructed by throwing a deep stone and concrete dam across a narrow cañon through which there percolated, in summer, a small stream. Its cubic capacity was such, however, that when this reservoir was filled by spring freshets it contained

water enough to run the full season round if sparingly used; and it was on this alone that the mill depended for its power, and the mine for its lights and train service, from hoist to breakers.

Where had stood the dam, gray with age and moss-covered, holding in check its tiny lake, was now nothing but ruins. The shots had been placed in the lower point, which was fifty feet down and conical as it struck and rested on the mother rock. Whoever had placed the charges knew well the explosive directions of his powder, and his work had been disastrously effective.

The whole lower part of the dam was out, and through it, in the night, had rushed the deluge of water so vital to the Croix d'Or. Small trees that had grown up since the dam had been built were uprooted in the bed of the cañon, and great boulders pulled from their sockets and sent resistlessly downward. Where, the day before, had been grassy beds and heavy growths of ferns, was now but a naked bed, stripped to the rock, down which flowed a small stream oozing from what had been the reservoir.

The partners stood, as if paralyzed, on the edge of the gulch, and looked down. The catastrophe, coming on top of all that had gone before, was a death blow, stupefying, stupendous, and hopelessly irremediable.

“Well, you were right,” Dick said despairingly. “They’ve got us at last!”

Bill nodded, without shifting his eyes from the ruin below. They stood for another minute before scrambling down the

cañon's steep side to inspect more closely the way the vandalism had been effected. Slipping down the muddy bank, heedless of their clothing or bruised hands, they clambered over the broken pieces of wall, and looked upward through the great hole and into the daylight beyond. The blow was too great to permit of mere anger. It was disaster supreme, and they could find no words in that time of despondency.

"I'll give a hundred dollars toward a reward for the man who did that," shouted a voice, hoarse with indignation, above them; and they looked up to see the smith on the bank, shaking his smudged and clenched fist in the air.

"And I'll take a hundred more," growled one of the drill runners in the augmenting group behind him.

And then, as if the blow had fallen equally on all, the men of the Cross stormed and raved, and clambered over the ruins and anathematized their unknown enemy; all but one known as Jack Rogers, the boss millman, who silently, as if his business had rendered him mute as well as deaf, stood looking up and down the gulch. While the others continued their inspection of the damage, he drifted farther and farther away, intent on the ground about him, and the edge of the stream. Suddenly he stooped over and picked up something water-stained and white. He came back toward them.

"Whoever did the one job," he said tersely, "did both. Probably one man. Set the fuses at the power-house, then came on here and set these. Then he must have got away by going to

the eastward.”

“For heaven’s sake, how do you figure that out?” Dick asked eagerly, while the others gathered closer around, with grim, inquiring faces, and leaned corded necks forward to catch the millman’s words.

“I found a piece of fuse down at the power plant,” he said. “See, here it is. It’s a good long one. The fellow that did the job knew just how long it would take him to walk here; and he knew fuse, and he knew dynamite. The proof that he did it that way is shown by this short piece of fuse I found down there at the edge of the wash. He cut the fuse short when he shot the dam. He wanted the whole thing, both places, to go up at once. Now it’s plain as a Digger Indian’s trail that he didn’t intend to go back the way he came, so he must have gone eastward. And if he went that way, it shows he didn’t intend to hit it back toward Goldpan, but to keep on goin’ over the ridge cut-off till he hit the railroad.”

Dick was astonished at the persistent reasoning of the man whom hitherto he had regarded as a singularly taciturn old worker, wise in milling and nothing more.

“Now, if there’s any of you boys here that know trails,” he said, “come along with me, and we’ll section the hillside up there and pick it up. If you don’t, stay here, because I can get it in time, and don’t want no one tramplin’ over the ground. I was—a scout for five years, and—well, I worked in the Geronimo raid.”

Dick and Bill looked at him with a new admiration, marveling that the man had never before betrayed that much of his

variegated and hard career.

“You’re right! I believe you’re right,” the superintendent exclaimed. “I can help you. So can Dick. We’ve lived where it came in handy sometimes.”

But two other men joined them, one a white-headed old miner called Chloride and the other a stoker named Sinclair who had been at the Cross for but a few weeks, and admitted that he had been a packer in Arizona.

Slowly the men formed into a long line, and began working toward one another, examining the ground in a belt twenty feet wide and covering the upper eastward edge of the cañon. Each had his own method of trailing. The white-headed man stooped over and passed slowly from side to side. Bill walked with slow deliberation, stopping every three or four feet and scanning the ground around him with his brilliant, keen eyes. The stoker worked like a pointer dog, methodically, and examining each bush clump for broken twigs.

But it was Rogers the millman, whose method was more like Bill’s, who gave the gathering call. On a patch of earth, close by the side of the rampart and where the moisture had percolated sufficiently to soften the ground, was the plain imprint of a man’s foot, shod in miner’s brogans, and half-soled. Nor was that all. The half-soling had evidently been home work, and the supply of pegs had been exhausted. In lieu of them, three square-headed hobnails had been driven into the center of the seam holding the patch of leather to the under part of the instep, or palm of the

foot. They were off like a pack of bloodhounds, with the old millman in the lead.

Dick started to follow, and then paused. He saw that Bill was standing aside, as if hesitating what to do.

“Bill, old partner,” he said wearily, “if anything can be found they can find it. I think you and I had better go back and try to think some way out of this—try to see some opening. It looks pretty black.”

The big fellow took four or five of his long, swinging steps, and threw an arm over the younger man’s shoulder.

“Boy,” he said, “they’re a-givin’ us a right fast run for our money; but we ain’t whipped yet—not by a long way! And if they do, well, it’s a mighty big world, with mighty big mountains, and we’ll strike it yet; but they haven’t cleaned us out of the Cross, and can’t as long as you and me are both kickin.’ They’ve got poor old Bells. They’ve tried to hand us a strike. They’ve blown our reservoir so’s we can’t work the mill until another spring passes over; and yet we’re still here, and the Croix d’Or is still there, off under the peak that’s holdin’ it down.”

He waved his arm above in a broad gesture, and Dick took heart as they turned back toward the mine, calculating whether they could find a means of opening it underground to pay; whether they would need as many men as they had, and other troublesome details.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DYNAMITER

The men of the Croix d'Or slowly made their way upward toward the higher crest of the range, spread out in an impatient fan whose narrow point was made up of the three experienced men. At times the trail was almost lost in the carpet of pine needles and heavy growths of mountain grass, and again it would show plainly over long stretches where the earth was exposed. It dipped down over a crest and sought a hollow in which ran a mountain stream, spread out over a rocky bed and running swiftly. At its bank they paused. It was plain that their man had taken to the water to retard pursuit, if such came. The millman threw up his hand and called the others around him.

“Before we go any farther,” he said, “let’s find out how many shooting irons are in this crowd. We may need ’em.”

The men looked blankly at one another, expressing by their actions the fact that in all the party there was not one who possessed a weapon.

“Then it seems to me the best thing to do is for one man to go back to the mine and get some,” said Rogers, assuming leadership. “Who ever goes will find my gun hanging up at the head of my bunk in a holster. Bring that and the belt. There’s cartridges in it.”

One after another told where a weapon might be found, and two men volunteered to return for them. It was agreed that the others were to keep on and that after leaving the stream men were to be posted at intervals to guide the messengers as they came up. Rogers proved something of a general in the disposition of his little army, and then, with Sinclair on one bank of the stream and Chloride on the other, he plunged into the water and began an up-stream course.

“It stands to reason,” he argued, “that our man didn’t go down stream unless it was for a blind. He wouldn’t double back because it would bring him out almost where he started. He will keep on up this way until she gets too small to travel in and then will hit off somewhere else. You other fellers keep behind.”

They began a slow, painstaking course up the stream and began to fear they had been mistaken in their surmise, when Sinclair gave a shout. He had found the trail again, a telltale footprint with the patched sole. It broke upward on the other side of the cañon, and now men were posted within shouting distance of one another and left behind to notify the two men bringing weapons which way to go. Across spots where the trail was difficult or entirely lost, and still higher until the timber line was passed and bare gray rocks were everywhere, the man-hunters made their way, and another watchman was left on the highest point. Down the other side and into the timber line again, directed only by a broken twig, a freshly turned boulder, or now and then a faint suggestion of a footprint, they plunged as rapidly

as they could and then through tangled brush until suddenly they came out to an old disused path. Unerringly they picked up the footprints again, and now these indicated that the quarry had felt himself secure against pursuit and made no further attempt at concealment.

“He is heading out to the east, just as you said he would,” the smith declared, as he sat down with the others to await the coming of the messengers. They were certain now that henceforth they would travel rapidly. They talked in low, angry voices among themselves, while Rogers, silent and grim, sat quietly on a boulder and smoked. A shout from the hilltop attracted their attention and they looked up to see a group beginning to descend. The men with guns had returned and the outposts doubled back on themselves as they came, adding a man at intervals, until they joined those waiting for them. Without delay the men strung out in single file along the path, with the old millman in the lead. For the most part they went as quietly as would Indians on the war-path, loping along now and then down declivities, or panting upward when the trail climbed to higher altitudes. There was no doubt at all that the man who had dynamited the dam was certain of his having evaded all followers, and indeed he would have done so with men less trained and astute.

“Does any one know this country here?” demanded Rogers, suddenly halting his little band.

“I do,” declared one of the drill runners. “I worked over here

on this side one time about two years ago. Why?"

"Well, where does this trail go?"

"To an old logging camp, first, then from there there is a road leading over to Malapi."

Rogers lowered his hand from his ear and looked thoughtful for a moment.

"Many men at the camp?"

"No, I think it's been abandoned for two or three years," replied the drill runner. Rogers slapped his hand on his leg, and seemed confident again.

"Then that's where we'll find him. In that old, abandoned camp," he exclaimed. "It's a ten-to-one bet that he got some supplies up there some time within the last few days, when he made up his mind to do this job, and that he plans to lay quiet there until it is safe for him to get out of the country."

The others nodded their heads sagely.

"If you're sure of that," the drill runner said, "the best thing to do is for us to leave the trail over here a ways and come up to the old camp from behind it. He might be on the watch for this trail."

"Good again!" asserted the millman. "Here, you take the lead now and we'll follow."

For another hour they plugged along the trail with an increasing alertness, and wondering how soon the drill runner would turn off. At last he looked back and gestured to them. They understood. He slipped off the trail into the brush and began going slowly. Once he stopped to whisper to them to be

cautious, inasmuch as within a few hundred yards they would reach their goal. Now they began to exercise the utmost caution of movement, spreading out according to individual judgment to avoid windfalls and thickets. Again the lead man stopped and signaled them. He beckoned with his arm, and they closed up and peered where he indicated.

Out in the center of a clearing stood a big, rambling structure that had done service and been abandoned. A slow wisp of smoke, gray and thin, floated upward from the rough chimney, a part of whose top rocks had been dislodged by winter storms. They dropped to the ground and held a whispered consultation. They argued heatedly over the best course to pursue. The millman favored surrounding the cabin, and then permitting him with two others to advance boldly to the door and endeavor to capture their man.

The packer, Sinclair, suggested another course, which was nothing less valorous than a straight rush for the doors and windows; but Chloride fought that plan.

“It ain’t that I’m afraid to take my chances,” he declared; “but if we do that, some of us, with such a crowd, is sure to get shot. We don’t want to lose no lives on a skunk of a dynamiter like this feller must be. I’m for surroundin’ the house, then callin’ him out. If he’s an honest man, he’ll come. If he ain’t, he’ll fight. Then we’ll get him in the long run if we have to fire the cabin to-night.”

“And maybe burn a couple of million dollars worth of timber with it at the same time,” growled the drill runner. “That’s a fine

idea! I'm for Jack's plan. First, line out around the cabin, out of sight of course, then two men walk up and get him. I'm one of 'em."

"And I the other," declared Rogers. "Let's lose no time."

Silently, as before, the party spread out until it had completed the ring around the cabin and then, when all was in readiness, the millman and the runner, with pistols loosened, stepped out into the open and walked around to the door. There was a moment's tensity as they made that march, neither they nor the watchers knowing when a shot might sound and bring one of them to the ground. The runner rapped on the door, insistently. It creaked and gave back a sodden, hollow sound, but at first there was no response. He rapped again, and at the same time tried to open it; but it was barred. A voice from inside called, "Hello! What do you want out there?"

"Want to see you," the runner answered. "Open the door, can't you?"

There was an instant's hesitation and then again the voice, "Well, what do you want? Who are you?"

"Two men that ain't familiar with these parts," was the wary reply of the runner. "Want to talk it over with you."

There was the creaking of a bar, and the door was opened cautiously. One eye applied to a crack scanned the runner, who stood there alert. Rogers was out of sight. Apparently the man in the cabin did not recognize the runner, for now he flung the door wide and stepped out. As he did so he saw the millman,

whom he recognized, and swiftly pulled a gun and shot at him. Even as he did so the younger man leaped upon him, caught his wrist and wrenched the weapon from his hand. He did the unexpected thing. Instead of fighting, or attempting to regain the cabin, he deftly threw out a foot, tripped the runner against Rogers, leaped over both as they fell, and dashed headlong for the forest. Suddenly, as he gained the edge, several shots cracked viciously, but none of them seemed to have taken effect. He snarled loudly with excitement and plunged into the edge of the timber. Quite as quickly as he gained it a man arose straight in his path, leaped forward, caught him around the waist, and brought him to the ground. Men came rushing forward, almost falling over one another, but arrived too late to assist in the capture. Lying under and pinned to the earth by the huge blacksmith, struggling for release, and cursing between shut teeth, was the man who had been the watchman at the Croix d'Or when its new proprietor arrived, the man Wolff, whose past had been exposed by The Lily in the presence of some of those who were now his captors.

“Might have guessed it,” growled the smith. “It’s like him, anyhow.”

Two others reached over and assisted him. They caught Wolff by his arms and lifted him to his feet, where they held him. Another man ran his hand over his clothes and took out a big hunting knife, sheathed. A further search revealed nothing save a small sum of money and a few dynamite caps. The prisoner

attempted to brazen it out.

“What do you mean by this, anyhow?” he demanded. “Bein’ held up, am I?”

No one replied to him directly, but it was Rogers who said, “Lift his feet up there until we get a look at the shoes.” Unceremoniously they hoisted him clear of the ground, although in a sudden panic he kicked and struggled. There was no doubt of it. The shoes were identical with those worn by the man who had dynamited the reservoir dam. The hobnails had betrayed him. For the first time he seemed to lose courage and whined a protest.

“Where were you last night?” demanded the smith, frowning in his face.

“Right here in this cabin. Been here two days now.”

They walked him between them back to the door and Chloride and Sinclair went in. They inspected it closely. They dropped to their knees and examined the deposit of dust. They walked over to the fireplace and inspected the ash surrounding the little blaze, which had been started less than an hour before, as far as they could decide. Below was a heap of mouldy ash that had been beaten down by winter snows and summer rains falling through the broken chimney. The others watched the two inquisitors curiously through the open door.

“If he has been here two days he has moved around the room scarcely at all,” Sinclair declared, “because the dust isn’t disturbed by more than one or two trails. And, what’s more, that fire is the first one that has been built here in many a long month,

and it wasn't started very long ago. It's too thin. He just got here! He's the man!"

The prisoner was ringed round by accusing, scowling eyes. He shoved a dry tongue out and wet his lips as if the nervous strain were beginning to tell. He started to speak, but apparently decided to say nothing and stood looking at the ground.

"Well," demanded Rogers, "what have you to say for yourself? You've plainly lied about being here in the cabin. What did you do that for?"

"I didn't say that I was in the cabin. I slept outside," Wolff growled.

"Then take us to the place where you camped," suggested one of the drill runners. A chorus of approving shouts seconded his request; but Wolff began to appear more confused than ever and did not answer. He took refuge in a fierce burst of anger.

"What do you fellows mean, anyhow?" he demanded. "I ain't done nothin'. What right have you to come up here and grab a man that way? Who are you lookin' for, anyhow?"

"Wolff," said the old millman, steadily, "we are looking for the man that blew up the Croix d'Or power-house and dam last night. And what's more, we think we've got him. You're the man, all right!"

His attempts to pretend ignorance and innocence were pitiful. This impromptu court was trying him there in the open beside the cabin, and he knew that its verdict would be a speedy one. He started to run the gamut of appeal, denial, and anger; but his

hearers were inflexible. They silenced him at last.

“We need just one thing more, boys,” said Rogers, “and that is to be sure that these are the same boots that made the tracks there by the dam. All we have to do to prove that is to take this fellow back with us. The tracks will still be there. If they are the same we can be sure.”

“That’s right,” added the blacksmith. “That’d be proof enough. Let’s move out.”

They knotted their huge handkerchiefs and bound his arms at the elbows and then his hands at the wrists, and started him forward. He fought at first, but on being prodded sharply with the muzzle of a gun moved sullenly in their midst along the trail he had so lately come over. They trudged in a harsh silence, save now and then when he tried to persuade them of his innocence, only to convince them further that he lied. Their return was made much faster than their coming, for now they had no need to seek a trail, nor to walk in a mountain stream. They forged ahead rapidly under the direction of the runner who had been in that part of the mountains before, and yet it was almost dusk when they came down the hill above the great wreck. They led him to the big heap of broken masonry and then ordered him to sit down. He had to be thrown from his feet, after which they removed his shoes, and while two of them stood guard over him the others descended to the edge of the wall and found the clear-cut prints which had been first noted that morning and which, trailed, had led to his capture. They struck matches to be certain that there

was no mistake and bent over while Rogers carefully pressed one of the shoes into the mud beside that first imprint. They were undoubtedly the same. He then fitted the shoe into that track, and all further proof was unnecessary. Grimly they passed back to where Wolff was being guarded.

“Well, boys,” said Rogers, gravely, “this is the man! There isn’t a doubt of it. Now you all know who he is, what his past has been, what he has done here, and I want to get your ideas what should be done with him.”

The smith stepped forward and took off his hat. It was as if he knew that he were the one to impose a death sentence.

“There ain’t but one thing for the likes of him. That’s hangin’,” he declared, steadily. “I vote to hang him. Here and now, across the end of the dam he shot out.”

He stepped back into the closely drawn circle. Rogers faced man after man, calling the name of each. There was no dissenting voice. The verdict was unanimous. So certain had been the outcome that one of their number had started along the pipe line to the wreck of the power-house for a rope before ever they compared the imprints of the telltale shoes, and now, almost by the time they had cast their ballot, this man returned.

“Wolff, you’ve heard,” said the old millman, with solemnity. “If you’ve got any messages you want sent, we’ll send them. If you want time to pray, this is your chance. There’s nothing you can say is going to change it. You are as good as dead. Boys, some of you get one of those beams that’s tore loose there at the

side, fasten the rope around the end, and shove it over the edge of the wall above the cañon there for a few feet. He shall hang above the dam he dynamited.”

Wolff knew that they were in earnest. There was something more inexorable in their actions than in a court of law. At the last he showed some courage of a brute kind, reviling them all, sputtering forth his hatred, and interlarding it with a confession and threats of what he wanted to do. They silenced him by leading him to the wall and adjusting the noose. Once more Rogers besought him to pray and then, when he again burst into oaths, they thrust him off. The fall was as effective as ever hangman devised.

“In the morning, boys,” said the smith, “a half-dozen of us must be up early and come back here. The hound is at least entitled to a half-way decent burial. I’ll call some of you to come with me.”

That was their sole comment. They had neither regrets, compunctions, nor rancor. They had finished their task according to their own ideas of justice, without hesitation.

At the Croix d’Or the partners, worried over their problems, and somewhat astonished at the non-appearance of the force, sat on the bench by the mess-house, smoking and silent.

In soft cadence they heard, as from the opposite side of the gulch, the tramping of feet. Swinging along in the dusk the men came, shadowy, unhalting, and homeward bound, like so many tired hounds returning after the day’s hunt. Their march led them

past the bench; but they did not look up. There was an unusual gravity in their silence, a pronounced earnestness in their attitude.

“Well,” called Dick, “what did you learn?”

It was the smith who answered, but the others never halted, continuing that slow march to the bunk-house.

“We got him.”

“Where is he, then?”

“Hanging to a beam across the dam he blew up,” was the remorseless response.

He started as if to proceed after the others, then paused long enough to add: “It was that feller that used to be watchman here; the feller that tried to shoot Bill that night. Found him in that old, deserted cabin near the Potlach. Had the shoe on him, and at last said he did it, and was sorry for just one thing, that he didn’t get all of us. Said he’d ’a’ blown the bunk-house and the office up in a week more, and that he’d tried to get you two with a bowlder and had killed your burros—well, when we swung him off, he was still cursing every one and everything connected with the Croix d’Or.”

He paused for an instant, then came closer, and lowered his voice.

“And that ain’t all. He said just before he went off—just like this—mind you: ‘I’d ’a’ got Bully Presby, too, because he didn’t treat me fair, after me doin’ my best and a-keepin’ my mouth shut about what I knew of the big lead.’ Now, what in hell do you suppose he meant by that?”

CHAPTER XIV

“THOUGH LOVE SAY NAY”

“Of one thing I am sure,” said Dick on the following day, when they began to readjust themselves for a decision, “and that is that if we can find work for them, there isn’t a man on the works that I don’t want to keep. They are too true and loyal to lose.”

“We could drive into the blacksmith’s tunnel,” Bill said; “and I’ve an idea we might strike something when we pass under that hard cone just above—well, just about under where Bells is. I saw it yesterday when we were up there for the first time. That would give the millman and his gang something to do. Some of ’em can take out the rest of the green lead, and after that drift see if it comes in again. And the others that can’t do anything underground, can turn to and build up the dam, with a few masons to help, and, when a new wheel comes, the millman will know how to set that all right again. So, you see, we don’t have to lose any of them that has stood by us, so long as Sloan is ready to take his gamble and the hundred thousand lasts. Before that’s gone, we’ll just have to make good. And somehow I feel we will.”

As if to add to the mental trials of the half-owner of the Croix d’Or, but another day elapsed after this decision and adjustment before he received a letter from a Seattle broker offering him a price for his interest in the mine. Thus wrote the agent:

“My client has the timber and water rights of your property in view more than anything underground, which, on the advice of experts who have visited the property in previous years, he seems to regard as worthless. He informs me that you are, to all intents, representing not only your own interest, but that of the other partner, who places implicit confidence in you. I presume that you will therefore be amenable to doing all you can to save from the wreckage of the dead property all that is possible in behalf of that partner as well as yourself, and am authorized to make you the extremely liberal offer of sixty thousand dollars for the full title to the property.”

The price was ridiculously low, and Dick knew it; yet if the mine produced nothing more, and was, as the experts were supposed to have reported, worthless, the amount was extremely liberal. But for Bill he would have hesitated to decline such an offer. That worthy, however, threw his head back and roared derisively.

“Sixty thousand? Sixty thousand! What does that idiot think men who have dropped a quarter of a million in a property would quit for? Does he think that sixty thousand is any saving from a wreck like this has been? Tell him to chase himself—that the tail goes with the hide, and you’ll quit clean whipped, or not at all.”

But Dick was loath to refuse any offer without consulting his superior in New York, and accordingly wandered off into the hills to think. It was late in the afternoon, and he mechanically tramped over the trail to the pipe line, where, when hope ran

higher, he had dared to dream.

The whole situation had become a nerve-racking tragedy of mind and action. His desperate desire for success after his self-acknowledgment that he loved Miss Presby, and then the blows that had been rained on him and the mine, the failure of the green lead to hold out when it had at least promised and justified operation—all cumulated into a disheartening climax which was testing his fortitude as it had never been tried before. He was not of those who lack either persistence, determination, or moral bravery; and it was this last characteristic, coupled with a certain maturing caution, which made him question the honesty of proceeding to lay out, perhaps, the entire hundred thousand volunteered by Sloan, with such little certainty of returns. Had the money been his own, he would have taken the chances uncomplainingly; but his judgment told him that, had he been sent to the Croix d'Or as an expert to pass an opinion on the justification of putting a hundred thousand into the ground, under present conditions, he would have advised against it.

He went as far as the reservoir. Its wreckage seemed to mock his efforts. To rebuild it alone meant big expense in a country where every barrel of cement had to be brought in on the backs of pack mules, and where stone masons received unduly high wages. The repairs to the plant would not prove so heavy; but after that? None knew better than he the trials of expensive prospecting underground, the long drives to end in nothing, the drifts that tapped no ore, the ledges that promised to come in strongly,

and led the worker on with hope deferred until his purse was exhausted. The cruelty of nature itself flaunting the golden will-o'-the-wisp in the blackness of the earth.

He stood on a timber thrown carelessly on the brink of the gorge, and suddenly thought how it happened to be there, and for what tragic purpose it had served—a gallows. He shuddered, thinking of the mentally distorted wretch who had died at its end, cursing as the men of the Cross pushed him over to gasp and wrench his life away fifty feet above the ruin he had wrought. He wondered where the man had been buried, and hurried back along the pipe line to try and forget that episode.

A little flutter of white from a clump of brush attracted his eyes, and he extracted from the brambles a dainty handkerchief still fragrant with the personality of the girl he loved. He lifted it to his lips tightly, and, with a heart that was almost in pain, dropped to the line, and sat on the pipe, bent, and utterly dejected. He sat there for some minutes, and then a sound caused him to straighten himself with a jerk. The black horse was thundering down the hill as he had seen it on those other mornings when, looking backward, the “world was young.”

“I saw you, Mr. Townsend,” Miss Presby said as he assisted her to alight, and her voice was sympathetic and grave. “You are unhappy. I don’t blame you. I have heard all about it, and—well, I have had to fight an hourly impulse to come to you ever since I heard the news. Oh, my friend, believe me, I am so sorry! So sorry!”

He could not reply, lest his voice betray the emotions aroused by her kindly sympathy. All his yearnings were fanned to flame by the cadence of her voice and the softness of her eyes. Mechanically he resumed his place on the pipe, and she seated herself by his side, half-facing him. Her slender foot, booted, braced against the ground, and almost touching his heavy miner's boot, tapped its toe on the sward as if she were impatient to find words.

"It has been a little tough," he said; "but it seems less hard to me now that I know you care."

He had blundered in his first words to the beginning of dangerous heights, and his pulses gave a wild throb when he glanced up at her and saw a light in her face, in her eyes, in her whole attitude, that he had never surprised there before. Words, unuttered, leaped hotly from his heart; a mad desire to tell of his love, of the visions he had seen in the air, on the blue of the peaks, in the cool shadows of the forests, in the black depths hundreds of feet under the ground. Of how the Croix d'Or had come to represent, not financial success, but a battle for her, and his love.

His face went white, and he bit his dry, twisting lips, and clenched his hands until they hurt.

"Not now!" he savagely commanded himself. "Not now!"

She appeared to be thinking of something she had to say, and her first words rendered him thankful that he had held his tongue, otherwise he might never have known the depths of the girl seated there by his side.

“I don’t want you to think me forward,” she said quietly; “but I have wanted for the last two days to ask you something. It makes it easier now that I know you know, that—that I care for it. What are your—your—how are your finances?”

She had stammered it out at last, and, now that the conversation had been led in that direction, he could speak. He sat there quietly, as if by a comrade, and told her all. Told her of his boyhood, his father’s death, and that he, in his own right, had nothing in the world but youth and a half-ownership in the Croix d’Or, which threatened to prove worthless. He voiced that dread of wasting his backer’s money when he had none of his own to put with it, meeting dollar for dollar as it was thrown into the crucibles of fate. He stopped at last, a little ashamed of having so completely unbosomed himself, for he was by habit and nature reticent.

“You have made it a great deal easier for me,” she said, with an assumption of gayety. “I can say what I’ve been thinking of for two days without spludging all over my words.”

She laughed as if in recollection of her previous embarrassment, and again became seriously grave, and went on:

“They say my father is a hard man. At times I have been led to believe it; but he has been a good father to me, and I appreciate it and his worries more, after a four years’ absence in an Eastern school, and—well, perhaps because I am so much older now, and better able to judge leniently. I have never known much of his business from his lips. It is one subject on which he is not exactly

loquacious, as probably you know.”

Again she laughed a little, grim laugh. Dick had opened his lips to say that he had never met her father, when she continued:

“On the day I met you first, up here by your pipe line, the day you almost ended my bright young career by starting a half-ton boulder down the hill—don’t interrupt with repeated apologies, please—I had my birth anniversary. I was twenty-one, and—my own boss.”

“Congratulations, belated, but fervent.”

“Thank you; but you again interrupt. On that day when I went home, my father, in his customary gruff way, turned back just as he was going to the office where he lives at least eighteen hours out of every twenty-four, and threw in my lap a bank-book. ‘Joan,’ he said, ‘you’re of age now. That’s for you. It’s all yours, to do just what you dam’ please with. I have nothing to do with it. If you make a fool use of it, it’ll be your fault, not mine. I’m giving it to you so that if anything happened to me, or the Rattler, you’d not be helplessly busted.’”

He jumped to his feet with an exclamation.

“The Rattler! The Rattler! And—and your name is Joan and not Dorothy, and you are Bully Presby’s daughter?”

He was bewildered by surprise.

“Why, yes. Certainly! Didn’t you know that—all this time?”

“No!” he blurted. “There is a Dorothy Presby, and a—”

“Dorothy Presby!” She doubled over in a gust of mirth. “The daughter of the lumberman over on the other side. Oh, this is too

good to keep! I must tell her the next time I see her. After all these months, you still thought—”

Again her laughter overwhelmed her; but it was not shared by Dick, who stood above her on the slope, frowning in perplexity, thinking of the strange blunder into which he had been led by the words of poor old Bells, his acceptance of her identity, his ignorance that Bully Presby had kith or kin, and of the mine owner’s sarcastic references and veiled antagonism throughout all those troubled months preceding.

If she were Bully Presby’s daughter, he might never gain her father’s consent, though the Croix d’Or were in the list of producers. He thought of that harsh encounter on the trail, and his assertion that he was capable of attending to his own business and asked neither friendship nor favor from any man under the skies; of Bully Presby’s gruff reply, and of their passing each other a second time, in the streets of Goldpan, without recognition. The girl in front of him, so unlike her father save for the firm chin and capable brow, did not appear to sense his perturbation.

“Well,” she said, “it doesn’t matter. I am not jealous—I’m not any different—just the same. Come back here and sit down, please, while I go ahead with what I wish to say.”

The interlude appeared to have rendered her more self-possessed.

“So, on that day I met you, I became quite rich. That money has rested in a bank, doing neither me nor any one else any

benefit. I think I have drawn one check, for twenty-five dollars, just to convince myself that it was all reality. And I am, in some ways, the daughter of my father. I want my money to work. I'm quite a greedy young person, you see. I want to lend you as much of that money as you need."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. I have as much faith in you, perhaps more, than this Mister Sloan, of whom I'm a trifle jealous. I want to have a share in your success. I want to make you feel that, even if I'm not the daughter of a lumberman, I am, and shall have a right to be, interested in—in—the Croix d'Or."

"Impossible!"

"It isn't any such thing. I mean it!"

"Then it's because I haven't made it plain to you—haven't made you understand that even now I am thinking, to preserve my honor, of telling Mr. Sloan that it is too much of a venture. If I should decline to venture his money, why should I—?"

"Refuse mine? That's just it. His money you could decline. He isn't on the ground. He doesn't know mines, mining, or miners. I know them all. I am here. I know the history of the Cross from the day it made its first mill run. I went five hundred feet underground in a California mine when I was a month old. I've run from the lowest level to the top of the hoist, and from the grizzlies to the tables, for at least ten years of my life. I've absorbed it. I've lived in it. Had I the strength, there isn't a place in this, or any mine, that I couldn't fill. I'm backing my judgment. The Croix

d'Or will prove good with depth. It may never pay until you get it. The blowing of your dam, the loss of your green lead, and all of those troubles, don't amount to that."

She snapped a thumb and forefinger derisively, and went on before he could interject a word, so intent was she on assisting him and encouraging him, and proving to him that her judgment, through knowledge, was better than his.

"Borrow my money, Dick, and sink."

The name came so easily to her lips! It was the first time he had ever heard her utter it. It swept away his flying restraint even as the flame of powder snaps through a fuse to explosion; and he made a sudden, swinging step toward her, and caught her in his arms savagely, greedily, tenderly fierce. All his love was bursting, molten, to speech; but she lifted both hands and thrust herself away from him.

"Oh, not that!" she said. "Not that! I wish you had not. It robs me of my wish. I wanted you to take my money as a comrade, not as my— Oh, Dick! Dick! Don't say anything to me now, or do anything now! Please let me have my way. You will win. I know it! The Cross must pay. It shall pay! And when it does, then—then—"

She stood, trembling, and abashed by her own words, before him. Slowly the delicacy of her mind, the romanticism of her dreams, the great, unselfish love within her, fluttering yet valiant, overwhelmed him with a sense of infinite unworthiness and weakness. He took his hat from his head, leaned over, and caught

one of the palpitant hands in both his own, and raised it reverently to his lips. It was as if he were paying homage to heaven devoutly.

“I understand,” he said softly, still clinging to the fingers, every throb of which struck appealingly on his heartstrings. “Forgive me, and—yet—don’t. Joan, little Joan, I can’t take your money. It would make me a weakling. But I can make the Cross win. If it never had a chance before, it will have now. It must! God wouldn’t let it be otherwise!”

“Help me to my horse,” she said faintly. “We mustn’t talk any more. Let us keep our hopes as they are.”

He lifted her lightly to the saddle, and the big black, with comprehending eyes, seemed to stand as a statue after she was in her seat. The purple shadows of the mountain twilight were, with a soft and tender haze, tinting the splendid peak above them. Everything was still and hushed, as if attuned to their parting. She leaned low over her saddle to where, as before something sacred, he stood with parted lips, and upturned face, bareheaded, in adoration. Quite slowly she bent down and kissed him full on the lips, and whispered: “God bless you, dear, and keep you—for me!”

The abrupt crashing of a horse’s hoofs awoke the echoes and the world again. She was gone; and, for a full minute after the gray old rocks and the shadows had encompassed her, there stood in the purple twilight a man too overcome with happiness to move, to think, to comprehend, to breathe!

CHAPTER XV

“MR. SLOAN SPEAKS”

“Wow! Somethin’ seems to have kind of livened up the gloom of this dump, seems to me,” exclaimed Bill on the following morning, when returning from his regular trip underground, he stamped into the office, threw himself into a chair, and hauled off one of his rubber boots preparatory to donning those of leather.

Dick had been bent over the high desk, with plans unrolled before him, and a sheet of paper on which he made calculations, whistling as he did so.

“First time I’ve heard you whistle since we left the Cœur d’Alenes,” Bill went on, grinning slyly, as if secretly pleased. “What’re you up to?”

“Finding out if by sinking we couldn’t cut that green lead about two hundred feet farther down.”

“Bully boy! I’m with you!” encouraged the older miner, throwing the cumbersome boots into the corner, and coming over behind Dick, where he could inspect the plans across the angle of the other’s broad shoulder. “How does she dope out?”

“We cut the green lead on the six-hundred-foot, at a hundred and ten feet from the shaft, didn’t we? Well, the men before us cut on the five-hundred at a hundred and seventy from the shaft, and at two-twenty from the shaft on the four-hundred-foot level,

where they stoped out a lot of it before concluding it wouldn't pay to work. It was a strong but almost barren ledge when they first came into it on the two-hundred-foot level. The Bonanza chute made gold because they happened to hit it at a crossing on the four-hundred-foot level. At the six-hundred, as we know, it was almost like a chimney of ore that is playing out as we drift west. If the mill had not been put out of business, we were going to stope it out, though, and prove whether it was the permanent ledge, weren't we?"

"Right you are, pardner."

"Well, then, at the same angle, we would have to drift less than seventy feet on the seven-hundred-foot level to cut it again, and at the eight-hundred-foot we'd just about have it at the foot of the shaft. Well, I'm sinking, regardless of expense."

"It might be right, boy, it might be right," Bill said, thoughtfully scowling at the plans, and going over the figures of the dip. "But you're the boss. What you say goes."

"But don't you think I'm right?"

"Yes," hesitatingly, "or, anyway, it's worth takin' a chance on. Bells used to say the mines around here all had to get depth, and that most of the ledges came in stronger as they went down. The Cross ain't shown it so far, but eight hundred feet ought to show whether that's the right line of work."

"How is the sump hole under the shaft?" Dick asked.

"Must be somewhere about seventy or eighty feet of water in it; but we can pump that out in no time. She isn't makin' much

water. Almost a dry mine now, for some reason I don't quite get. Looks as if it leaked away a good deal, somewhere, through the formation. There wouldn't be no trouble in sinkin' the shaft."

"And thirty feet, about, would bring us to the seven-hundred-foot mark?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you what I want to do: I want you to shift the crew so that there is a day and a night shift. The rebuilding of the dam can be put off for a while, except for such work as the millmen are agreeable to take on. I want to sink! I don't want to waste any time about it. I want to go down just as fast as it can be done, and when we get to the seven-hundred-foot, one gang must start to drift for the green lead, and the others must keep going down."

He was almost knocked over the desk by a rousing, enthusiastic slap on the back.

"Now you're my old pardner again!" Bill shouted. "You're the lad again that was fresh from the schools, knew what he wanted, and went after it. Dick, I've been kind of worried about you since we came here," the veteran went on, in a softer tone of voice. "You ain't been like the old Dick. You ain't had the zip! It's as if you were afraid all the time of losing Sloan's money, and it worried you. And sometimes—now, I don't want you to get sore and cuss me—it seemed to me as if your mind wa'n't altogether on the job! As if the Cross didn't mean everything."

He waited expectantly for a moment, as if inviting a

confidence; then, observing that the younger man was flushed, and not looking at him, grinned knowingly, and trudged out of the office, calling back as he went: "There'll be sump water in the creek in half an hour."

As if imbued with new energy, he ordered one of the idle millmen to act as stoker, if he cared to do so, which was cheerfully done, had the extra pump attached, saw the fire roaring from another boiler, and by noon the shaft rang with the steady throb of the pistons pounding and pulling the waste water upward. The last of the unwatering of the Cross was going forward in haste. By six o'clock in the evening he reported that soundings showed that the map had not been checked up, and that the shaft was seven hundred and ten feet deep, and that they would commence a drift on the seven-hundred-foot mark the next day.

Dick was awakened at an early hour, and found Bill missing. He went over to the hoist house, where a sleepy night man, new to the hours, grinned at him with a pleasant: "Looks like we're busy, just-the-same, Mr. Townsend! The old man"—the superintendent of a mine is always "the old man," be he but twenty—"left orders last night that when the water was clear at seven hundred feet he was to be called. He kicked up two of the drill men at four this mornin', and they're down there puttin' the steel into the rock ever since. Hear 'em? He's makin' things hump!"

Dick leaned over the unused compartment of the shaft, and

heard the steady, savage chugging of the drills. Bill was "makin' things hump!" with a vengeance.

A man who had been sent to the camp for the semi-weekly mail arrived while the partners were at breakfast, and the first letter laid before them was one with a New York postmark, which Dick read anxiously. It was from Sloan, who told him that he had been unexpectedly called to the Pacific coast on a hurried trip, and that, while he did not have time to visit the Croix d'Or, he very earnestly hoped that Dick would arrange, on receipt of the letter, to meet him in Seattle, and named a date.

"Whe-e-w! You got to move some, ain't you? Let's see, if you want to meet him you'll have to be hittin' the trail out of here in an hour," said Bill, laying down his knife and fork. "What do you s'pose is up? Goin' to tie the poke strings again?"

Dick feared something was amiss. And he continued to think of this after he had written a hasty note to Joan, telling her of his abrupt absence, and that he expected to return in a week. He pondered for a moment whether or not to add some note of affection, but decided that he was still under her ban, and so contented himself with the closing line:

"I am following your advice. We are sinking!"

He had to run, bag in hand, to catch the stage from Goldpan, and as it jolted along over the rough passes and rugged inclines had a medley of thought. Sometimes he could not imagine why Sloan had been so anxious to talk with him, and in the other and happier intervals, he thought of Joan Presby, daughter of the man

whom he had come to regard as antagonistic in many ways.

The confusion of mind dwelt with him persistently after he had boarded the rough "accommodation" that carried him to the main line, where he must wait for the thunderous arrival of the long express train that was to carry him across the broad and splendid State of Washington. Idaho and Oregon were left behind. The magnificent wheat belt spread from horizon to horizon, and harvesters paused to wave their hats at the travelers. The Western ranges of the Olympics, solid, dignified, and engraved against the sky with their outline of peak and forest, came into view, and yet his perturbation continued.

He saw the splendid panorama of Puget Sound open to his view, and the train, at last, after those weary hours of jolting, rattled into the long sheds that at that time disgraced the young giant city of the North-west. It was the first time he had even entered its shadows, and as he turned its corner he looked curiously at the stump of a tree that had been hollowed into an ample office, and was assailed by the strident cries of cabmen.

"The Butler House," he said, relinquishing his bag into the hands of the first driver who reached him, and settled back into the cushions with a sense of bewilderment, as if something long forgotten had been recalled. He knew what it was as he drove along in all that clamor of sound which issues from a great and hurrying city. It was New York, and he was in the young New York of the North-west, with great skeleton structures uprearing and the turmoil of building. Only here was a difference, for side

by side on the streets walked men clad in the latest fashion, and men bound to or coming from the arctic fields of gold-bound Alaska. Electric cars tearing along at a reckless speed, freight wagons heavily laden, newsboys screaming the call of extras, and emerging from behind log wagons, and everything betokening that clash of the old and the intensely new.

At the Butler House the man behind the desk twirled the register toward him, and assigned him a room.

“Sloan?” he replied to Dick’s inquiry. “Oh, yes. He’s the old chap from New York who said he was expecting someone, and to send him right up. I suppose you’re the man. Here, boy, show Mr. Townsend to five-fifty. Right that way, sir.”

And before his words were finished he had turned to a new arrival.

The clamor of the streets, busy as is no other city in the world busy when the season is on, was still in his ears, striking a familiar note in his memory, and the modernity of the elevator, the brass-buttoned boy, and the hotel itself brought back the last time he had seen Mr. Sloan, and the day he had parted from his father in that office on Wall Street. He found the Wall Street veteran grayer, much older, and more kindly, when he was ushered into the room to receive his greeting. He subsided into a chair, but his father’s old-time friend protested.

“Stand up!” he commanded, “and turn around, young fellow, so I can see whether you have filled out. Humph! You’ll do, I guess, physically. I don’t think I should want to have any trouble

with you. You look as if you could hold your own most anywhere. I'm glad. Now, sit down, and tell me all about the mine."

He listened while Dick went into details of the work, sparing none of the misfortunes and disappointments, and telling of the new method employed. He was interrupted now and then by a shrewd question, an exclamation, or a word of assent, and, after he had finished the account, said: "Well, that is all there is to report. What do you think?"

"Who is Thomas W. Presby?" Sloan's question was abrupt.

"The owner of the Rattler, the mine next to us."

"He is?" the question was explosive. "Ah, ha! The moth in the closet, eh? So that accounts for it! I spent a hundred dollars, then, to good purpose, it seems to me!"

Dick looked an intent and wondering question.

"An agent here in Seattle wrote me that they had written you, making an offer of sixty thousand dollars for the property—yes—the same one you wrote me about. He said they had reason to believe I was the financial backer for the mine, and that they now wished to deal with me, inasmuch as you might be carried away by youthful enthusiasm to squandering my hard-earned cash. I wrote back that your judgment satisfied me. Then, just before I left, I got a flat offer of a hundred thousand dollars for the property in full, or seventy-five thousand for my share alone. It set me to thinking, and wondering if some one wasn't trying to cut your feet from under you. So, having business in Portland, I came on up here, and got after this agent."

Dick had a chill of apprehension. He knew before the loyal old man had proceeded half-way what to expect.

“It cost me a hundred dollars in entertainment, and a lot of apparent readiness to talk business, to get him confidential with me. Then I got the name of the would-be purchaser, under injunctions of secrecy, because those were the agent’s positive instructions. The man who wants to buy is Presby!”

For one black, unworthy instant, Dick looked out of the window, wondering if it were possible that Joan had known of her father’s efforts, and had withheld the information. Then the memory of that gentle face, the candid eyes, her courageous advice, and—last of all—the kiss and prayer on her lips, made him mentally reproach himself for the thought. But he remembered that he still owed affection and deference to the stanch old man who sat before him, who had been his benefactor in an hour of need, and backed faith with money.

“Well, sir,” he said, turning to meet the kindly eyes, “what do you think of it?”

“Think of it? Think of it?” Sloan replied, raising his voice. “I’ll tell you my answer. ‘You sit down,’ I said, ‘and write this man Presby that I knew no one in connection with the Croix d’Or but the son of the man who many times befriended me, in desperate situations when I needed it! That I was paying back to the son what I was unfortunately prevented from paying back to the father—a constant gratitude! That I’d see him or any other man in their graves before I’d sell Richard Townsend out in that

way. That I'd back Dick Townsend on the Croix d'Or as long as he wanted me to, and that when he gave that up, I'd still back him on any other mine he said was good!" That's what I said!"

He had lost his calm, club poise, and was again the virulent business man of that Wall Street battle, waged daily, where men must have force or fail to survive. Dick saw in him the man who was, the man who at times had shaken the financial world with his desperate bravery and daring, back in the days when giants fought for the beginnings of supremacy. He felt very inexperienced and young, as he looked at this veteran with scars, and impulsively rose to his feet and held out his hand. He was almost dumb with gratitude.

"I shouldn't have asked you to say so much," he said. "I am—well—I am sort of down and out with it all! I feel a little bit as I did when the Cornell eleven piled on top of me in the annual, when I played half-back."

"Hey! And wasn't that a game!" the old man suddenly enthused, with sparkling eyes. "And how your father and I did yell and howl and beat the heads of those in front! Gad! I remember the old man had a silk hat, and he banged it up and down on a bald head in front until there was nothing but a rim left, and then looked as sheepish as a boy caught stealing apples when he realized what he had done. Oh, but your Daddy was a man, even if he did have a temper, my boy!"

His eyes sparkled with a fervid love of the game of his college days, and he seemed to have dismissed the Croix d'Or from his

mind, as if it were of no importance. Nor did he, during the course of that visit, refer to it again. He made exception, when he shook hands with Dick at the train.

“Don’t let anybody bluff you,” he said. “Remember that a brave front alone often wins. If you fail with the Croix the world is still big, and—well—you’re one of my legatees. Good-by. Good luck!”

Again Dick endured the rumbling of trains through long hours, the change from one to another at small junctions, the day and night in a stage coach whose springs seemed to have lost resiliency, and the discourse of two drummers, Hebraic, the chill aloofness of a supercilious mining expert new to the district, and the heated discussions of two drill runners, veterans, off to a new field, and celebrating the journey with a demijohn. The latter were union men, and long after he was tired of their babel they broached a conversation which brought Dick to a point of eager listening.

“Yes, you see,” one of the men asserted; “they got the goods on him. Thompson had been a good delegate until he got the finger itch, then he had an idea he could use the miners’ union to scratch ’em. He held up one or two small mines before the big guns got wise. That got him to feelin’ his oats, and he went for bigger game.”

“But how did they get him?” the other runner insisted.

“They got him over here to where we’re goin—Goldpan. He held up some fellers that’s got a mine called the Craw Door, or

some-thing' like that. Fetched three of his pals from Denver with him. They called 'emselves miners! God! Miners nothin'! They'd worked around Cripple Creek long enough to get union cards, but two of 'em was prize fighters, and the other used to be bouncer at the old Alcazar when she was the hottest place to lose money that ever turned a crooked card. I remember there one time when—”

“Nobody asked you about that,” growled the other man. “What I'm interested in is about this big stiff, Thompson.”

“Him? Oh, yes. Where was I? Well, he fixed things for a hold-up. Was goin' to get these fellers at the Craw Door to untie their pokes, but they don't stand for it. He packs a meetin' with a lot of swampers that don't know nothin' about the case, and before they gets done they votes a strike, and an old feller from this Craw Door gets his time. Gets kicked to death, the same as they uster in Park City when the Cousin Jacks from the Ontario cut loose on one another. The Denver council takes cawgnizance of this, and investigates. It snoops around till it gets the goods. Then—*wow! bing!* goes this here Thompson. They sue him themselves, and now he's up in Cañon City, a-lookin' plaintive like through these things.”

He held his knotted, rough fingers open before his face, and jerked his head sideways, simulating a man peering through penitentiary bars. Then, with a roar, he started in to bellow, “The union forever—hooraw, boys hooraw!” in which his companion, forgetting all the story, joined until it was again time to tilt the wicker-covered jug.

And so that was the end of Thompson and presumably the strike, Dick thought, as he settled back into the corner he had claimed. And it was easy to see, with this damning evidence to be brought forward, that Bells Park's murderers would pay, to the full, the penalty. For them, on trial, it meant nothing less than life. He was human enough to be glad.

The stage rattled into Goldpan, and, stiff and sore from his journey, he began his tramp toward the trail of the cut-off leading homeward: He stopped but once. It was in front of the High Light, where a small scrap of paper still clung to the plate glass. On it was written, in a hurried, but firm and womanly, handwriting:

This place is closed for good. It is not for sale. It has held hell. Hereafter it shall hold nothing but cobwebs.

Lily Meredith.

The date was that of the tragic night, the night when Bells Park, fighting for those on whom he had bestowed a queer, distorted affection, had been kicked to death by the ruffians now cowering in a distant jail!

Verily the camp and the district had memories for him as he trudged away from its straggling shanties, and filled his lungs with the fresh, free air from the wide, rugged stretches beyond. When he came through the borders of the Rattler he looked eagerly, insistently, for a glimpse of his heart's desire, and thought, with annoyance, that he did not so much as know the cabin which she called home. But he was not rewarded. It

was still the same, with no enlivening touch of form or color, the same spider-web tramways debouching into the top of the mill, the same sullen roar and rumble of falling stamps, the same columns of smoke from tall chimney and humble log structure, alike, and the same careless clash of the breakers.

Bill came hurrying down the trail to meet him, waving his hat, and shouting a welcome. Up at the yard the smith held a black hand and muscled arm up to shade his eyes from the last sunlight, and then shook a hammer aloft. From the door of the engine room the man who had been Bells' assistant bawled a greeting, and the fat cook shook a ladle at him through the mess-house window. It all gave him an immense and satisfactory warmth of home-coming, and the Croix d'Or, with its steadfast, friendly little colony, was home in truth!

"We're in sixty feet on the seven-hundred-foot," Bill grinned, with the air of one giving a pleasant surprise, "and say, boy, we've hit the edge of ore. You were all right. The green lead is still there, only she looks better to me than she did before, and I know rock, some."

There was nothing wanting in the pleasure of his return, and the last addition to that satisfactory day was a note he found, lying on the very top of other letters awaiting him. It was from Joan Presby, and Bill, starting to enter the office, saw his partner's face in the light of the lamp, smiled affectionately, and then tiptoed away into the darkness, as if to avoid intrusion at such a time.

CHAPTER XVI

BENEFITS RETURNED

Dick waited impatiently at the rendezvous, saw Joan coming, hurried to meet her, and was restrained from displaying his joy by her upheld hand, as she smiled and cautioned: "Now, steady, Dick! You know we were not to-to-be anything but comrades for a while yet."

He was compelled to respect her wishes, but his eyes spoke all that his tongue might have uttered. In the joy of meeting her, he had forgotten the part played by her father in his surreptitious attempt to gain possession of the Croix d'Or: but her first words reminded him of it:

"It has been terribly lonesome since you left. I have felt as if the whole world had deserted me. Dad is not a cheery sort of companion, because he is so absorbed by the Rattler that he lives with it, eats with it, sleeps with it. And, to make him worse, something appears to have upset him in the last week or ten days until a bear would be a highly lovable companion by comparison."

She failed to notice the gravity of his face, for he surmised how Sloan's answer must have affected the owner of the Rattler, who strode mercilessly over all obstacles and men, but now had come to one which he could not surmount. He wondered how

obdurate Bully Presby would prove if the time ever came when he dared ask for Joan, and whether, if the father refused, Joan's will would override this opposition.

Studying the lines of her face, and the firm contour of her chin as it rounded into the grace of her throat, he had a joyful sense of confidence that she would not prove wanting, and dismissed Bully Presby from his thoughts. With a great embarrassment, he fumbled in the pocket of his shirt, and brought out a little box which he opened, to display a glittering gem. He held it toward her, in the palm of his hand; but she pulled her gloves over her fingers, and blushed and laughed.

"It seems to me," she declared, "that you have plenty of assurance."

"Why?" he insisted.

"Because I haven't made my mind up—that far, yet, and because if I had I shouldn't say so until the Croix d'Or had been proven one way or the other."

She stopped, awkwardly embarrassed, as if her objection had conveyed a suggestion that his financial standing had a bearing on her acceptance, and hastened to rectify it:

"Not that its success or the money it would bring has anything to do with it."

"But if it failed?" he interrogated, striving to force her to an admission.

"I should accept you as quickly as if it were a success; perhaps more quickly, for I have money enough. But that isn't it. Don't

you see, can't you understand, that I want you to make good just to show that you can?"

"Yes," he answered gloomily. "But if I didn't feel quite confident, I shouldn't offer you the ring. And if I failed, I shouldn't ask you."

"Then you musn't fail," she retorted. "And, do you know," she hastened, as if eager to change the subject, and get away from such a trying pass, "that I've never seen the Croix since you took possession of it?"

"Come now," he said, with boyish eagerness. "I've wanted you to see what we are doing for weeks—yes, months. Will you? We can lead your horse down over the trail easily."

He walked by her side, the black patiently following them, and told her of what had been accomplished in his absence, and of their plans. She listened gravely, offering such sage advice now and then that his admiration of her knowledge constantly increased. There were but few men in sight as they crossed the head of the cañon, and came slowly down past the blacksmith shop.

"Why, if there isn't Mr. Clark!" she exclaimed, and the smith looked up, grinned, dropped his tongs, and came toward them, wiping his hand on his smudgy apron.

"Hello, Joan!" he called out. "You're a bit bigger'n you used to be, when I made iron rings for you."

"Oh, Smuts," she laughed happily, stepping to meet him, "do you know I still have one, and that it's in my jewel case, among

my most precious possessions?”

She held out her white, clean hand, and he almost seized it in his grimy, fist, then drew her back.

“Most forgot!” he declared. “I reckon I’d muss that up some if I took it in my fist.”

“Then muss it,” she laughed. “You weren’t always so particular.” And he grabbed, held, and patted the hand that he had known in its childhood.

“Why, little Joan,” he growled, with a suspicious softness in his voice, “you ain’t changed none since you used to sit on the end of that old-fashioned forge, dirty up your pinafores, and cry when Bully led you off. Him and me ain’t friends no more, so’s you could notice. Seven years now since I hit him for cussin’ me for somethin’ that wa’n’t my fault! But, by gee whiz, old Bully Presby could go some! We tipped an anvil over that day, and wrecked a bellows before they pulled us off each other. I’ve always wondered, since then which of us is the better man!”

He spoke with such an air of regret that Joan and Dick laughed outright, and in the midst of it a shadow came across their own, and they turned to meet the amused, complacent stare of Bill. In acknowledging the introduction, Joan felt that his piercing eyes were studying her, probing her soul, as appraisingly as if seeking to lay her appearance and character bare. His harsh, determined face suddenly broke into a wondrous warmth of smile, and he impulsively seized her hand again.

“Say,” he said, “you’ll do! You’re all right!”

And she knew intuitively that this giant of the hills and lonely places had read her, with all her emotions and love, as he would read print, and that, with the quick decision of such men, he was prepared to give her loyal friendship and affection.

They walked slowly around the plant, Dick pointing out their technical progress as they went, and she still further gained Bill's admiration in the assay-house when she declared that she had a preference for another kind of furnace than they were using.

"Why, say, Miss Presby, can you assay?" he burst out.

"Assay!" she said. "Why, I lived in the assay-house at two or three times, and then studied it afterward."

"Hey, up there!" a shout came from the roadway below.

They turned and went out to the little cindered, littered level in front of the door, and looked down to where, on the roadway a hundred feet below, a man stood at the head of a string of panting burros, and they recognized in him a packer from Goldpan.

"I've got somethin' here for you." He waved his hand back toward the string of burros.

"What is it?" asked Bill, turning to Dick.

"I don't know what it can be. I have ordered nothing as heavy as that outfit appears to be."

Perplexed, they excused themselves and descended the slope, leaving Joan standing there in front of the assay office, and enjoying the picture of the cañon, with its border of working buildings on one side, and its scattered cabins, mess- and bunk-houses on the other, the huge waste dump towering away from

the hoist, and filling the head of the cañon, and the sparkle of the stream below.

“It’s for you, all right,” the packer insisted. “The Wells Fargo agent turned it over to me down in Goldpan, and said the money had been sent to pay me for bringin’ it up here. I don’t know what it is. It’s stones of some kind.”

Still more perplexed, the partners ordered him to take his pack train around to the storage house, and Bill led the way while his partner climbed back up the hill, and rejoined Joan. He was showing her some of the assay slips from the green lead when they heard a loud call from the yard. It was Bill, beckoning. They went across to meet him. One of the hitches had been thrown, and the other burros stood expectantly waiting to be relieved of their burdens.

“It’s a tombstone,” Bill said gravely. “It’s for Bell’s grave. The express receipt shows that it was sent by—” he hesitated for a moment, as if studying whether to use one name, or another, and then concluded—“The Lily.”

He pointed to a section of granite at their feet, and on its polished surface they read:

Under this granite sleeps Bells Park, an engineer.
Murdered in defense of his employers. Faithful when living,
and faithful when dead, to the Croix d’Or and all those
principles which make a worthy man.

A sudden, overwhelming sadness seemed to descend upon them. Bill turned abruptly, and stepped across toward the boiler-

house. The whistle sent out a long-drawn, booming call—the alarm signal for the mine. In all the stress of the Croix d’Or it was the first time that note had ever been used save in drill. The bells of the hoist arose into a jangling clamor. They heard the wheels of the cage whirl as it shot downward, the excited exclamations of men ascending, some of them with tools in hand, the running of a man’s feet, emerging from the blacksmith’s tunnel, the shout of the smith to his helper, and the labored running of the cook and waiter across the cinders of the yard. Bill slowly returned toward them.

“We’ll have to get you to land it up there,” he said, waving his arm toward the cross high above. “Give us a hand here, will you? and we’ll throw this hitch again.”

The entire force of the mine had gathered around them before he had finished speaking, and, seeing the stone, understood. Joan caught her riding skirts deftly into her hand, and, with Bill leading the way up the steep and rock-strewn ascent, they climbed the peak. The burros halted now and then to rest, straining under the heaviness of their task. The men of the Croix d’Or sometimes assisted them with willing shoulders pushing behind, and there by the mound, on which flowers were already beginning to show green and vivid, they laid out the sections of granite. Only the cook’s helper was absent. Willing hands caught the sections, which had been grooved to join, and, tier on tier, they found their places until there stood, high and austere, the granite shaft that told of one man’s loyalty.

Dick gave some final instructions as to the rearranging of the grave and the little plot that had been created around it, and they descended in a strange silence, saddened by all that had been recalled. No one spoke, save Bill, who gave orders to the men to return to their tasks, and then said, as if to himself: "I'd like mighty well to know where Lily Meredith is. We cain't even thank her. Once I wondered what she was. Now I know more than ever. She was all woman!"

And to this, Joan, putting out her hand to bid them good-by, assented.

The night shots had been fired at five o'clock—the time usually selected by mines working two shifts—supper had been eaten, and the partners were sitting in front of their quarters when Bill again referred to Mrs. Meredith. High up on the hill, where the new landmark had been, erected, at the foot of the cross, the day shift of the Croix d'Or was busied here and there in clearing away the ground around the grave of the engineer, some of the men on hands and knees casting aside small bowlders, others trimming a clearing in the surrounding brush, and still others painfully building a low wall of rock.

"The hard work of findin' out where The Lily is," said Bill softly, "is because she covered her trail. Nobody knows where she went. The stage driver saw her on the train, but the railway agent told him she didn't buy no ticket. The conductor wrote me that he put her off at the junction, and that she took the train toward Spokane. That's all! It ends there as if she'd got on the

train, and then it had never stopped. We cain't even thank her."

Dick, absorbed in thoughts of Joan, heard but little of what he said, and so agreed with a short: "No, that's right." And Bill subsided into silence. A man came trudging up the path leading from the roadway lower down, and in his hand held a bundle of letters.

"Got the mail," he said. "The stage may run every other day after this, instead of twice a week, the postmaster over at the camp told me. Not much to-night. Here it is."

He handed Dick a bundle of letters, and then, sighting the others on the side of the peak above, started to join them, and take his share in that labor of respect and affection. In the approaching twilight Dick ran through the packet, selected one letter addressed to his partner, and gave it to him, then tore open the first one at hand. It was addressed in an unfamiliar and painful chirography, with the postmark of Portland, Ore., stamped smudgily in its corner. He began casually to read, then went white as the laborious lines flowed and swam before his eyes:

Dear Mister Townsend, owner of the cross mine, I write you because I am afraid I aint got your pardners name right and because Ive got something on my mind that I cant keep any more. Im the girl that got burned at the High Light. Your pardner saved my life and you were awful kind to me. Everybody's been very kind to me too. I spose you know I'll not be able to work in dance halls no more because Im quite ugly now with them scars all over my face. But that dont

make no difference. Mrs. Meredith has been here to see me and told me who it was saved my life. Mrs. Meredith dont want nobody to know where shes gone. Shes not coming back any more. Shes quit the business and is running a sort of millinery store in—

Here a name had been painstakingly obliterated, as if by afterthought, the very paper being gouged through with ink.

Shes paid all my hospital bills and when I get strong enough shes going to let me go to work for her. But that aint what Im writing about and this letter is the biggest I ever wrote. The nurse says Im making a book. I wasn't a very bad girl or a very good girl when I was in the camps. Maybe you know that but I done my best and was as decent as I could be. There was a man was my sweetheart and sometimes when he drank too much he talked too much. Men always say a whole lot when theyre full of rotgut, unless they get nasty. My man never got nasty. Hes gone away and I dont know where. Maybe he dont want nothing more to do with me since I got my face burned. Ive kept my mouth shut until I found out it was you two men who saved me and Im writing this to pay you back the only way I can. Bully Presby is stealing all his best pay ore from the Croix d'Or. Hes worked clean under you and got the richest ledge in the district. They aint nobody but confidential men ever get into that drift. Hes been stealing that ore for going on two years andll give you a lot of trouble if you dont mind your Ps and

Qs. I hope you beat him out, and I pray for both of you.

Your ever grateful,

Pearl Walker.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN REASON SWINGS

Dick suddenly crumpled the sheet of paper, and put it in his pocket. He lifted himself, as a man distracted, from the chair in which he had been sitting, gripping the arms with hands that were tensely responding to an agony of spirit. He almost lurched forward as he stepped to the little steps leading down from the porch, and into the worn trail, hesitated at the forks leading to mess-house or assay office, and then mechanically turned in the latter direction, it being where the greater number of his working hours were passed.

“Where you goin’?” the voice of his partner called, as he plunged forward.

He had to make a determined attempt to speak, then his voice broke, harsh and strained, through dry lips:

“Assay office.”

He did not look back, but went forward, with limp hands and tottering knees, turning neither to right nor left. The whole world was a haze. The steadfast mountain above him was a cynical monster, and dimly, in the shadow of the high landmark, he discerned a change, sinister, gloating, and leering on him and his misery. The soft voices of the men of the day shift returning from their voluntary task, the staccato exhaust of the hoisting engine

bringing up a load of ore from the refund lead, the clash of a car dumping its load of waste, and the roar of the Rattler's stamps, softened by distance, blended into discordance.

He entered the assay-house like a whipped dog seeking the refuge of its kennel, threw himself on a stool before the bench, leaned his head into his hollowed arms, and groaned as would a stricken warrior of olden days when surrendering to his wounds.

This, then, explained it all—that sequence of events, frustrating, harrying, baffling him, since the first hour he had come to the mine of the Croix d'Or. The rough suggestion of Bully Presby on the first day, discouraging him; the harsh attitude; the persistent attempts to dishearten him and buy him out; the endeavor to buy half the property from, and remove the backing, of Sloan, without which he could not go on; the words of the watchman, who doubtless had discovered Bully Presby's secret theft, blackmailed him as much as he could, and, dying, cursed him; but, hating the men of the mine more, had withheld the vital meaning of his accusation. Perhaps Presby had been instrumental in Thompson's strike. But no, that could scarcely be, although, in the light of other events in that iniquitous chain, it might be possible. That he had any part in the dynamiting of the dam or power-house, Dick cast aside as unworthy of such a man. The strong, hard, masterful, and domineering face of Bully Presby arose before him as from the darkening shadows of the room, and it seemed triumphant.

He lifted his head suddenly, thinking, in his superacute state

of mind, that he had heard a noise. He must have air! The assay office, with its smell of nitric acid, its burned fumes, its clutter of broken cupels and slag, was unbearable. He arose from the stool so suddenly that it went toppling over to fall against the stacked crucibles beneath the bench which lent their clatter to the upset. He stepped out into the night. It was dark, only the stars above him dimly betraying the familiar shapes of mountains, forests, and buildings around. Up in the bunk-house some man was wailing a verse of "Ella Re," accompanied by a guitar, and the doleful drone of the hackneyed chorus was caught up by the other men "off shift." But, nauseating as it was to him, this piebald ballad of the hills, it contained one shrieking sentence: "Lost forevermore!" That was it! Joan was lost!

He looked up at the superintendent's quarters, which had been his home, and saw that its lights were out. Bill, he conjectured, always hard working and early rising, had tumbled into his bed, unconscious of this tragedy. He struck off across the gulch, and took the trail he had so frequently trodden with a beating heart, and high and tender hope. It led him to the black barrier of the pipe line, the place where first he had met her, the sacred clump of bushes that had held and surrendered to him the handkerchief enshrined in his pocket, the slope where she had leaned down from her horse and kissed him in the only caress he had ever received from her lips, and told him that he should be with her in her prayers.

Reverently he caressed with his hands the spot where she had

so often sat on a gray old boulder, flat-topped. His heart cried for one more sight of her, one more caress, one more opportunity to listen to her voice before he dealt her the irrevocable wound that would end it all.

Not for an instant did he waver. The tempter, whispering in his ear, told him that he could conceal his knowledge, advise Sloan to sell, take his chance with Joan, and let the sleeping dog lie, forever undiscovered. It told him that Sloan was admittedly rich beyond his needs, and that with him the Croix d'Or was merely a matter of sentiment, and an opportunity of bestowing on the son of his old-time friend a chance to get ahead in the world.

But back of it all came the inexorable voice of truth, telling Dick that there was but one course open, and that was reparation; that to his benefactor he owed faith and loyalty; that Presby must pay, though his—Richard Townsend's—castles crumbled to dust in the wreckage of exposure. He must break the heart and faith of the girl who loved him, and whom, with every fiber of his being, he loved in return.

She would stand in the world as the daughter of a colossal thief! Not a thief of the marts, where crookedness was confused with shrewdness far removed from the theft of the hands; but a thief who had burrowed beneath another man's property, and carried away, to coinage, his gold. Between Bully Presby and the man who tunneled under a bank to loot the safe, there was no moral difference save in the romance of that mystic underground world where men bored like microbes for their spoil.

“Joan! Joan! Joan!” he muttered aloud, as if she were there to hear his hurt appeal.

It was for her that he felt the wound, and not for Bully Presby, her father. For the latter he spared scant sympathy; but it was Joan who would be stricken by any action he might take, and the action must be taken, and would necessarily be taken publicly.

Under criminal procedure men had served long terms behind bars for less offenses than Presby's. Others had made reparation through payment of money, and slunk away into the shadows of disgrace to avoid handcuffs. And the fall of Presby of the Rattler, as a plunderer, was one that would echo widely in the mining world where he had moved, a stalwart, unbending king. Not until then had Dick realized how high that figure towered. Presby, the irresistible, a thief, and fighting to keep out of the penitentiary, while Joan, the brave, the loving, the true, cowered in her room, dreading to look the world in the face.

And he, the man who loved her, almost accepted as her betrothed, with the ring even then burning in his pocket, was the one who must deal her this blow!

He got up and staggered through the darkness along the length of the line, almost envying the miserable dynamiter, who had died above the remnant of wall, for the quiet into which he had been thrust. If the train bringing him homeward had been wrecked, and his life extinguished, he could have saved her this. The Cross would have been sold. She might have grieved for him, for a time, but wounds will heal, unless too deep. He stood

above the abyss where daylight showed ruins, and knew that the destruction of the dam, heavy a blow as it had seemed when inflicted, was nothing as compared to this ruin of dreams, of love, and hope.

“Dick! Dick! What is it, boy?” came a soft voice from the night, scarcely above a whisper. “Can’t you tell me, old man? Ain’t we still pardners? Just as we uster be?”

He peered through the darkness, roused from his misery in the stillness of the hour, and the night, by the appeal. Dimly he discerned, seated above him on the abutment, a shape outlined against the stars. It threw itself down with hard-striking feet, and came toward him, and he knew it was not a phantom of misery. It came closer to where he stood on the brink of the blackness, and laid a hand on his shoulder, put it farther across and held him, as tenderly as father might have held, in this hour of distress.

“I’ve been follerin’ you, boy,” the kindly voice went on. “I saw that somethin’ had got you. That you were hard hit! I’ve been near you for the last two or three hours. I don’t know as I’d have bothered you now, if I hadn’t been afraid you’d fall over. Let’s go back, Dick—back to the mine.”

It seemed as if there had come to him in the night a strong support. Numbed and despairing, but with a strange relief, he permitted Bill to lead him back over the trail, and at last, when they were standing above the dim buildings below, found speech.

“It’s her,” he said. “It’s for her sake that I hate to do it. It’s Joan!”

“Sit down here by me,” the big voice, commiserating, said. “Here on this timber. I’ve kept it to myself, boy, but I know all about her. I stood on the bank, where I’d just gone to hunt you, on that day she reached down from the saddle. I knew the rest, and slipped away. You love her. She’s done somethin’ to you.”

“No!” the denial was emphatic. “She hasn’t! She’s as true as the hills. It’s her father. Look here!”

He fumbled in his pocket, pulled out the crumpled sheet, and struck a match. Bill took the letter in his hands and read, while the night itself seemed pausing to shield the flickering flame. With hurried fingers he struck another match, and the light flared up, exposing his frowning eyebrows, the lights in his keen eyes, the tight pressure of his firm lips.

He handed the letter back, and for a long time sat silently staring before him, his big, square shoulders bent forward, and his hat outlined against the light of the night, which was steadily increasing.

“I see how it is,” he said at last. “And it’s hard on you, isn’t it, boy? A man can stand anything himself, but it’s hell to hurt those we care for.”

The sympathy of his voice cut like a knife, with its merciful hurt. Dick broke into words, telling of his misery, but stammering as strong men stammer, when laying bare emotions which, without pressure, they always conceal. His partner listened, motionless, absorbing it all, and his face was concealed by the darkness, otherwise a great sympathy would

have flared from his eyes.

“We’ve got to find a way out of this, Dick,” he said at last, with a sigh. And the word “we” betrayed more fully than long sentences his compassion. “We must go slow. Somehow, I reckon, I’m cooler than you in this kind of a try-out. Maybe because it don’t hit me so close to home. Let’s go back, boy, back to the cabin, and try to rest. The daylight is like the Lord’s own drink. It clears the head, and makes us see things better than we can in the night—when all is dark. Let’s try to find a way out, and try to forget it for a while. Did you ever think how good it all is to us? Just the night, coming along every once in a while, to make us appreciate how good the sun is, and how bright the mornings are. It ain’t an easy old world, no matter how hard we try to make it that; because it takes the black times to make our eyes glad to watch the sunrise. Let me help you, old pardner. We’ve been through some pretty tight places together, and somehow, when He got good and ready, the Lord always showed us a way out.”

He arose on his feet, stretched his long muscular arms, and started down the hill, and Dick followed. There was not another word exchanged, other than the sympathetic “good-night” in which they had not failed for more than seven years, and outside the stars waned slowly, the stamp mill of the Rattler roared on, and the Croix d’Or was unmoved.

The daylight came, and with it the boom of the night shift setting off its morning blasts, and clearing the way for the day shift that would follow in sinking the hole that must inevitably

betray the dishonesty of the stern mine master at the foot of the hill. Dick had not slept, and turned to see a shadow in the door.

“Don’t you get up, Dick,” Bill said. “Just try to rest. I heard you tumblin’ around all the night. You don’t get anywhere by doin’ that. A man has to take himself in hand more than ever when there’s big things at stake. Then’s when he needs his head. You just try to get some rest. I’ll keep things goin’ ahead all right, and there ain’t no call to do nothin’ for a week or ten days—till we get our feet on the ground. After that we’ll find a trail. Don’t worry.”

Through the kindly tones there ran confidence, and, entirely exhausted, Dick turned over and tried to sleep. It came to him at last, heavy and dreamless, the sleep that comes beneficently to those who suffer. The sun, creeping westward, threw a beam across his face, and he turned restlessly, like a fever-stricken convalescent, and rolled farther over in the bed.

The beam pursued him, until at last there was no further refuge, and he sat up, dazed and bewildered, and hoping that all had been a nightmare, and that he should hear the cheery note of the whistle telling him that it was day again, and calling the men of the Croix d’Or to work.

It was monstrous, impossible, that all should have changed. It was but yesterday that he had returned to the mine with finances assured, confidence restored, and the certainty that Joan Presby loved him, and could come to his side when his work was accomplished.

He looked at his watch and the bar of sunlight. It was four

o'clock, and the day was gone. Everything was real. Everything was horrible. He crawled stiffly from his bed, thrust his head into the cold water of the basin, and, unshaven, stepped out to the porch and down the trail.

The plumes of smoke still wreathed upward from two stacks. Bill was still driving downward unceasingly. The mellow clang of the smith's hammer, sharpening drills, smote his ears, and the rumble of the cars. The cook, in a high, thin tenor, sang the songs with which he habitually whiled away his work. Everything was the same, save him! And his air castles had been blown away as by the wind.

In a fever of uncertainty, he stood on the hillside and thought of what he should do. He believed that it was his duty to be the one to break the harsh news to Joan, and wondered whether or not she might be found at the tryst. He remembered that, once before when he had not appeared, she had ridden over there in the afternoon. Perhaps, expecting him, and being disappointed, she might be there again.

He hurried down the slope, and back up across the divide and along the trail, his hopes and uncertainties alone rendering him certain that she must be there, and paused when the long, black line shone dully outlined in its course around the swelling boss of the hill. He experienced a thrill of disappointment when he saw that she was not waiting, and, again consulting his watch feverishly, tramped backward and forward along the confines of the hallowed place.

At last, certain from the fresh hoof marks on the yielding slope, that she had come and gone, he turned, and went slowly back to the mine. He had a longing to see his partner, and learn whether or not Mathews, with that strange, resourceful logic of his, had evolved some way out of the predicament. But Bill was nowhere in sight. He was not in the office, and the mill door was locked. The cook had not seen him; and the blacksmith, busy, stopped only long enough to say that he thought he had seen the superintendent going toward the hoisting-house.

“Have you seen Bill?” Dick asked of the engineer, who stood at his levers, and waited for a signal.

“He’s below,” the engineer answered, throwing over an arm, and watching the cage ascend with a car of ore.

It trundled away, and Dick stepped into the cage. The man appeared irresolute, and embarrassed.

“He’ll be up pretty soon, I think,” he ventured.

“Well, I’ll not wait for him,” Dick said. “Lower away.”

The man still stood, irresolute.

“Let her go, I said,” Dick called sharply, his usual patience of temper having gone.

“But—but—” halted the engineer. “Bill said to me, when he went down, says he: ‘You don’t let any one come below. Understand? I don’t care if it’s Townsend himself. Nobody comes down. You hold the cage, because I’ll send the shift up, and ‘tend to the firing myself.’”

For an instant Dick was enraged by this stubbornness, and

turned with a threat, and said: "Who's running this mine? I don't care what he said. You haven't understood him. Lower away there, I say, and be quick about it!"

The rails and engine room slid away from him. The cage slipped downward on its oiled bearings, as if reluctant, and the light above faded away to a small pin-point below, and then died in obscurity, as if the world had been blotted out. Only the sense of falling told him that he was going down, down, to the seven-hundred-foot level, and then he remembered that he had no candle. The cage came to a halt, and he fumbled for the guard bar, lifted it, and stepped out.

Straight ahead of him he saw a dim glow of light. With one hand on the wall he started toward it, approached it, and then, in the hollow of illumination saw something that struck him like a blow in the face. The hard, resounding clash of his heels on the rock underfoot stopped. His hands fell to his sides, as if fixed in an attitude of astonishment. Standing in the light beyond him stood Joan, with her hands raised, palms outward.

"Stop!" she commanded. "Stop! Stay where you are a moment!"

Amazed and bewildered, he obeyed mechanically, and comprehended rather than saw that, crouched on the floor of the drift beyond, his partner knelt with a watch in his hand, and in a listening attitude. Suddenly, as if all had been waiting for this moment, a dull tremor ran through the depths of the Croix d'Or. A muffled, beating, rending sound seemed to tear

its way, vibrant, through the solid ledge. He leaped forward, understanding all at once, as if in a flash of illumination, what the woman he loved and his partner had been waiting for. It was the sound of the five-o'clock blasts from the Rattler, as it stole the ore from beneath their feet. It was the audible proof of Bully Presby's theft.

"Joan! My Joan!" he said, leaping forward. "I should have spared you this!"

But she did not answer. She was leaning back against the wall of the tunnel, her hands outstretched in semblance of that cross whose name was the name of the mine—as if crucified on its cross of gold. The flaring lights of the candles in the sticks, thrust into the crevices around, lighted her pale, haggard face, and her white hands that clenched themselves in distress. She looked down at the giant who was slowly lifting himself from his knees, with his clear-cut face upturned; and the hollows, vibrant with silence, caught her whispered words and multiplied the sound to a sibilant wail.

"It's true!" she said. "It's true! You didn't lie! You told the truth! My father—my father is a thief, and may God help him and me!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BULLY MEETS HIS MASTER

The ache and pain in her whole being was no greater than the colossal desire Dick had to comfort and shield her. He rushed toward her with his arms reached out to infold, but she pushed him back, and said hoarsely: "No! No! I sha'n't let you! It would be an insult now!"

Her eyes were filled with a light he had never seen in them before, a commanding flame that held him in check and stupefied him, as he tried to reason why his love at that moment would be an insult. It did not dawn on him that he was putting himself in the position of one who was proffering silence for affection. All he knew was that everything in the world seemed against him, and, overstrained to the breaking point, he was a mere madman.

"You brought her here?" he hoarsely questioned Bill.

"I did."

"And told her that her father was under us?"

"Yes."

"And that I was to be kept above ground?"

"Of course, and I had a reason, because—"

He did not finish the sentence. The younger man shouted a furious curse, and lunged forward and struck at the same time.

His feet, turning under a fragment of rock, twisted the directness of his blow so that it lost force; but its heavy spat on the patient face before him was like the crack of a pistol in that underground chamber.

Bill's hands lifted impulsively, and then dropped back to his sides, hanging widely open. The flickering candlelight showed a slow red stream emerging slowly from one of his nostrils, and running down across the firm chin, and the pain-distorted lips. In his eyes was a hurt agony of reproach, as if the knife of a friend had been unexpectedly thrust into his heart. Dick's arm, tensed by the insane anger of his mind, was drawn back to deal another blow, and seemed to stop half-way, impotent to strike that defenseless face before him.

“Why don't you hit again, boy? I'll not strike back! I have loved you too much for that!”

There was a world of misery and reproach in the quiet voice of the giant, whose tremendous physical power was such that he could have caught the younger man's arm, and with one wrench twisted it to splintered bone. Before its echoes had died away another voice broke in, suffused with anguish, the shadows waving on the walls of gray rock twisted, and Joan's hands were on his arm.

“Dick! Dick! Are you mad? Do you know what you are doing?”

He shook her hands from his arm, reeled against the wall, and raised his forearm across his eyes, and brushed it across, as if

dazed and blinded by a rush of blood which he would sweep away. He had not noticed that in that staggering progress he had fallen full against a candlestick, and that it fell to the floor and lay there between them, with its flame slowly increasing as it formed a pool of grease. For the first time since he had spoken, the huge miner moved. He stepped forward, and ground the flame underfoot.

“There might be a stray cap around here somewhere,” he said.

His voice appeared to rouse the younger man, and bring him to himself. He stepped forward, with his hands behind him and his face still set, wild and drawn, and said brokenly: “Bill! Bill! Strike back! Do something! Old friend!”

“I cain’t,” came the reply, in a helpless monotone. “You know if it were any other man I’d kill him! But you don’t understand yet, and—”

“I made him bring me here,” Joan said, coming closer, until the shadows of the three were almost together. Her voice had a strange hopelessness in it, and yet a calm firmness. “He came to talk it over with me, on your account. Pleading your cause—begging me that, no matter what happened, I should not change my attitude toward you. Toward you, I say! He said your sense of honesty and loyalty to Sloan would drive you to demanding restitution even though it broke your heart. He said he loved you more than anything on earth, and begged me to help him find some way to spare—not me, or my father—but you!”

Dick tried to speak, but his throat restricted until he clutched

it with his fingers, and his lips were white and hard.

“I did not believe that what he said was true,” the voice went on, coming as from depths of desolation and misery, and with dead levels dulled by grief beyond emotion. “I have believed in my father! I thought there must be some mistake. I demanded of your partner that he lay off his own shift, and bring me here where we might listen. Oh, it was true—it was true!”

She suddenly turned and caught the steel handle of a candlestick in her hand, and tore its long steel point from the crevice.

“But I’ve found the way,” she said. “I’ve found the way. You must come with me—now! Right now, I say. We shall have this over with, and then—and then—I shall go away from here; for always!”

“Not that,” Dick said, holding his hands toward her. “Not that, Joan! What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to my father. He, too, must be spared. He must give it back. It must never be known. I must save him disgrace. It must be done to-night—now!”

She started down the drift toward the cage, walking determinedly, and Dick’s lips opened again to beg her to come back; but Bill’s hand was on his shoulder, and his grave and kindly voice in his ear.

“Go with her, boy. She’s right. It’s the only way. Have it over with to-night. If you don’t you’ll break her heart, as well as your own.”

They followed her to the cage, and the big miner gave the hoisting bell. The cage floated upward, and into the pale twilight. Heedless of anything around, they walked across the yard, and turned into the roadway leading down the gulch.

“Will you come?” she asked, turning toward Bill.

“No,” he said slowly. “I’m not needed. Besides, I couldn’t stand another blow to-day!”

It was the only reference he ever made to it, but it went through Dick with more pain than he had administered. Almost sullenly he followed her down the road, wordless, bewildered, and despairing. Unable to spare her, unable to shield her, unable to comfort her, and unable to be other than true to his benefactor, he plodded after her into the deeper shadows of the lower gulch, across the log bridge spanning the brawling mountain stream, and up into the Rattler camp. Her steps never faltered as she advanced straight to the office door, and stepped inside.

The bookkeepers were gone, and the inner door ajar. She threw it open, walked in, and closed it after Dick, who sustained a deadly anger against the man who sat at his desk, and as they entered looked up with a sharp stare of surprise.

Something in the attitude of the two appeared to render him more alert, more hard, more uncompromising and he frowned, as Dick had seen him frown before when angry men made way for him and his dominant mastery. His daughter had stopped in front of the closed door, and eyed him with eyes no less determined than his own.

“Your men are working under the Croix d’Or,” she said coldly, without wasting words in preliminary.

His face hardened instantly, and his eyes flamed, dull and defiant. The lines of his heavy jaw appeared to deepen, his shoulders lifted a trifle, as if the muscles of him had suddenly tensed for combat, and his lips had a trace of the imperious sneer.

“Oh, you’re certain of that, are you, my girl?”

“I am,” she retorted. “I was in their lower level when the Rattler’s shots were fired. I heard them.”

For an instant he seemed about to leap from his chair, and then, recovering himself, said with sarcastic emphasis, and a deadly calmness: “And pray what were you doing there? Was the young mine owner, Townsend, there with you? Was he so kind—?”

“Is there any need for an exchange of insults?” Dick demanded, taking a step toward him, and prevented from going farther only by recollection of his previous loss of temper.

For an instant the mine owner defiantly met his look, and then half-rose from his chair, and stared more coldly across the litter of papers, plans, and impedimenta on his desk.

“Then why are you here together?” he demanded. “Weren’t you man enough to come yourself, instead of taking my daughter underground? Did you want to compel her to be the chief witness in your claim? What right had you to—?”

“Father!” admonished Joan’s voice.

It served a double purpose, for had she not interrupted Dick

might have answered with a heat that he would have regretted, and Bully Presby dropped back into his chair, and drummed with his fingers on the desk.

“You took the ore. You must pay. You must!” went on the dull voice of his daughter.

“But how should I know how much it amounts to, even if I do find out that some of my men drove into the Cross pay?” he answered, fixing her with his flaming eyes.

“But you must know,” she insisted dully. “I know you know. I know you knew where the ore was coming from. It must be paid back.”

For an instant they eyed each other defiantly, and her brave attitude, uncompromising, seemed to lower the flood-gates of his anger. His cheeks flushed, and he lowered his head still farther, and stared more coldly from under the brim of his square-set hat. There were not many men who would have faced Bully Presby when he was in that mood; but before him stood his daughter, as brave and uncompromising as he, and fortified by something that he had allowed to run dwarf in his soul—a white conscience, burning undimmed, a true knowledge of what was right and what was wrong. Her inheritance of brain and blood had all the strength of his, and her fearlessness was his own. She did not waver, or bend.

“It must be paid back,” she reiterated, a little more firmly.

He suddenly jerked himself to his feet, his tremendous shoulders thrust forward across the desk, and raised his hand with

a commanding finger.

“Joan,” he ordered harshly, “you get out of here. Go to your room! Leave this affair to this man and me. This is none of your business. Go!”

“I shall not!” she defied him.

“I think it is best,” Dick said, taking a step toward her. “I can take care of my own and Mr. Sloan’s interests. Please go.”

The word “Joan” almost slipped from his lips. She faced him, and backed against the door. “Yours and Mr. Sloan’s interests? What of mine? What of my conscience? What of my own father? What of me?”

She stepped hastily to the desk, and tapped on it with her firm fingers, and faced the mine master.

“I said you must pay!” she declared, her voice rising and trembling in her stress. “And you must! You shall!”

He was in a fury of temper by now, and brought the flat of his heavy, strong hand down on its top, sending the inkwell and the electric stand lamp dancing upward with a bound.

“And I shall do as I please!” he roared. “And it doesn’t please me to pay until these men”—and between the words he brought his hand down in heavy emphasis—“until—these—men—of the Cross mine prove it! I’ll make them get experts and put men in my mine, and put you yourself on the stand before I’ll give them one damned dollar! I’ll fight every step of the road before I’ll lay my hand down. I’ll pay nothing!”

She stood there above him, fixing him with her clear, honest,

accusing eyes, and never faltered. Neither his words nor his rage had altered her determination. She was like a statue of justice, fixed and demanding the right. Dick had rushed forward to try and dissuade her from further speech, and stood at the end of the desk in the halo of light from the lamp, and there was a tense stillness in the room which rendered every outward sound more distinct. The voice of a boy driving mules to their stable and singing as he went, the clank and jingle of the chain tugs across the animals' backs, and the ceaseless monotone of the mill, all came through the open windows, and assailed their ears in that pent moment.

“Please let me have my way,” Joan said, turning to Dick, and in her voice was infinite sorrow and tragedy. “It is more my affair than yours now. Father, I shall not permit you to go any farther. It is useless. I know! I can't do it! I can't keep the money you gave me. It isn't mine! It is theirs! You say you will not pay. Well, then, I shall, to the last dollar!”

“But I shall accept nothing—not a cent—from you, if we never get a penny from the Cross!” declared Dick, half-turning, as if to end the interview.

She did not seem to hear him. She was still facing the hard, twisting face of Bully Presby, who had suddenly drawn back, as if confronted by a greater spirit than his own. She went on speaking to him as if Dick was not in the room.

“You stole their ore. You know you stole it. Somehow, it all hurts so that I cannot put it in words; for, Dad, I have loved you

so much—so much! Oh, Dad! Dad! Dad!”

She dropped to her knees, as if collapsed, to the outer edge of the desk, and her head fell forward on her hands. The unutterable wail of her voice as she broke, betrayed the desperate grief of her heart, the destruction of an idol. It was as if she told the man across the desk that he had been her ideal, and that his actions had brought this ruin about them; as if all the sorrows of the world had cumulated in that ruin of faith.

Dick looked down at her, and his nails bit into his palms as he fought off his desire to reach down and lift her to his arms. Bully Presby's chair went clashing back against the wall, where he kicked it as he leaped to his feet. He ran around the end of the desk, throwing Dick aside as he did so with one fierce sweep of his arm.

“Joan!” he said brokenly, laying his hand on her head. “Joan! My little Joan! Get up, girl, and come here to your Dad!”

She did not move. The excess of her grief was betrayed by her bent head and quivering shoulders. The light, gleaming above her, threw stray shadows into the depths of her hair, and softened the white, strained tips of her fingers.

Bully Presby, the arrogant and forceful, still resting his hand on her head, turned toward the twisted, youthful face of the man at his side, whose fingers were now clenched together, and held at arm's length in front of him. The mine owner seemed suddenly old and worn. The invincible fire of his eyes was dulled to a smoldering glow, as if, reluctantly, he were making way for

age. His broad shoulders appeared suddenly to have relinquished force and might. He stooped above her, as if about to gather her into his arms, and spoke with the slow voice of pathos.

“She’s right,” he said. “She’s right! I should pay; and I will! But I did it for her. She was all I had. I’ve starved for her, and worked for her, and stolen for her! Ever since her mother died and left her in my arms, I’ve been one of those carried away by ambition. God is damning me for it, in this!” He abruptly straightened himself to his old form, and gestured toward the sobbing girl at his feet. “I am paying more to her than as if I’d given you the Rattler and all—all—everything!—for the paltry ore I pulled from under your feet. You shall have your money. Bully Presby’s word is as good as his gold. You know that! I don’t know anything about you. I don’t hate you, because you are fighting for your own! Somehow I feel as if the bottom had been knocked out of everything, all at once! I wish you’d go now. I want to have her alone—I want to talk to her—just the way I used to, before—before—”

He had gone to the limit. His strong hands knotted themselves as they clenched, then unclenched as he stepped to the farther side of the door and looked at Dick, who had not moved; but now, as if his limitations also had been reached, the younger man leaned forward, stooped, and his arms caught Joan and lifted her bodily to his breast. In slow resignation, and with a sigh as if coming to shelter at last, her arms lifted up, her hands swept round his shoulders, and came to rest, clasped behind his head, and held him tightly, as if without capitulation.

There was a gasp of astonishment, and the rough pine floor creaked as Bully Presby, dumbfounded, comprehending, conquered, turned toward the door. He opened it blindly, fumbling for the knob with twitching hands—hands unused to faltering. He looked back and hesitated, as if all his directness of life, all his fierce decision of character had become undermined, irresolute. He opened his lips as if to protest, to demand, to dominate, to plead for a hearing; but no sound came. His face, unobserved by either the man he had robbed, or the daughter who had arraigned him, betrayed all these struggling, conflicting emotions. He was whipped! He was beaten more certainly than by fists. He was spiritually and physically powerless. Dazed, bewildered, he stood for an instant, then his heavy hands, which for the first time in his life had been held out in mute appeal, dropped to his sides. Habit only asserted when he slammed the door behind him as he walked out into the lonely darkness of the accusing night.

CHAPTER XIX

THE QUEST SUPREME

It was twilight again, and such a twilight as only the Blue Mountains of that far divide may know. It barred the west with golden bands, painted lavish purples and mauves in the hollows, and reddened the everlasting snows on the summits. It deepened the greens of the tamaracks, and made iridescent the foams of the streams tearing downward joyously to the wide rivers below. It painted the reddish-yellow bars of the cross on the peak above the Croix d'Or, and rendered its outlines a glorified symbol. It lent stateliness to the finger of granite beneath the base that told those who paused that beneath the shaft rested one who had a loyal heart. It swooped down and lingered caressingly on the strong, tender face of the girl who sat on the wall surrounding the graves of Bells Park and "the best woman that ever lived."

"For some reason," Joan said, speaking to the two men beside her, "the ugliness of some of it has gone. There is nothing left but the good and the beautiful. Ah, how I love it—all! All!"

Dick's arm slipped round her, and drew her close, and unresisting, to his side.

"And but for you and Bill," he said softly, "it might never have ended this way."

"Humph!" drawled the deep voice of the grizzled old miner.

“Things is just the way they have to be. Nobody can change ’em. The Lord Almighty fixes ’em, and I expect they have to work out about as He wants ’em to. Somehow, up here in the tops of the hills, where it’s close to the sky, He seems a heap friendlier and nearer than He does down on the plains. ’Most always I feel sorry for them poor fellers that live down there. They seem like such lonesome, forgotten cusses.”

The youthful couple by him did not answer. Their happiness was too new, too sacred, to admit of speech.

“Now,” Bill went on argumentatively, “me and Bully Presby are friends. He likes me for standin’ up for my own, and told me so to-day. He ain’t got over that feller Wolff yet. Says he could have killed him when he found out Wolff had poisoned the water and rolled the bowlder into the shaft to pen us in. I reckon Wolff tried to blackmail him about what he knew, but the Bully didn’t approve none of the other things. That ain’t his way of fightin’. You can bet on that! He drifted over and got the green lead in the Cross, when others had given it up and squandered money. That shows he was a real miner. We come along, and—well—all he’s done is just to help us find it, and then hand over the proceeds, all in the family, as I take it. Nobody’s loser. The families gets tangled up, and instead of there bein’ two there’s just one. The Rattler and the Croix d’Or threatens to be made into one mine, and the two plants consolidated to make it more economical. The green lead’s the best ledge in the Blue’s, and ’most everybody seems to be gettin’ along pretty well. That ain’t luck. It’s God

Almighty arrangin' things for the best."

He sat for a moment, and gave a long sigh, as if there were something else in his mind that had not been uttered. Dick lifted his eyes, and looked at him affectionately, and then whispered into the ear close by his shoulder: "Shall I tell him now?"

"Do!" Joan said, drawing away from him, and looking expectantly at the giant.

Dick fumbled in his pocket with a look of sober enjoyment.

"Oh, by the way, Bill," he said, "I got a letter from Sloan a few days ago. Here it is. Read it."

The latter took it, and frowning as he opened it, held it up to catch the light.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Gives the Croix d'Or to you. Says he wants you to have it, because you're the one that made good on it, and he don't need the money! That the deeds are on the way by registered mail, and all he asks is a small bar from the first clean-up!"

He folded the letter, and held it in his hands, looking thoughtfully off into the distance for a time while he absorbed the news.

"Why, Dick," he said, "you're a rich man! Richer'n I ever expected you'd be; but I'm a selfish old feller, after all! It seems to me as if we ain't never goin' to be the same again, as we uster be when all we had was a sack of flour and a side of bacon, and the whole North-west to prospect. It seems as if somethin' mighty dear has gone."

Dick got up and stood before him, with his hands in his pockets, and smiling downward into his eyes.

“I’ve thought of that, too, Bill,” he said, “and I can’t afford to lose you. I’d rather lose the Cross. So I’ll tell you something that I told Joan, long ago—that if ever the mine made good, and I could give you something beside a debt, you were to have half of what I made. A few days ago it would have been a quarter interest you owned. Now it is a half. We’re partners still, Bill, just as we were when there was nothing but a sack of flour and a side of bacon to divide.”

They looked at him, expecting him to show some sign of excitement, but he did not. Instead, he reached over, and painstakingly pulled a weed from the foot of the wall, and threw it away. He cleared his throat once or twice, but did not look at them, and then got to his feet and started as if to go down to the camp. Then, as if his feelings were under control again, came back, and took one of Joan’s and one of Dick’s hands into his own toil-worn palms, and said:

“Thanks, Dick! It’s more’n I deserve, this knowin’ both of you, and havin’ you give me a share in the Cross! And I accept it; but conditionally.”

He dropped their hands, and turned to look around, as if seeing a very broad world.

“What is the condition?” Joan asked, laying her hand on his arm, and looking up at him. “Can we change it?”

“No,” he said; “you can’t. I’ve had a hard hit of my own for

a long time now. I'm a-goin' to try to heal it. I'm goin' away on what may be a short, or a long, long trail." His voice dropped until it was scarcely audible. "I'm goin' away to keep goin' till I find The Lily. And when I find her, I'll come back, and bring her with me, if she'll come."

He turned his back toward them, unbuttoned the flap of his flannel shirt, and reached inside. He drew out a sheet of paper wrapped in an old silk handkerchief, as if it were a priceless possession to be carefully preserved, and held it toward them. He did not look at either of them as he spoke.

"I got that a long time ago," he said; "but somehow I could never say anything about it to any one. And I reckon you're the only two in the world that'll ever see it. Read it and give it back to me when—when you come down the mountain."

He turned and stalked away over the trail, his feet planting themselves firmly, as he had walked through life with firmness.

They watched him go, and opened the letter, and read, in a high, strong handwriting:

Dear Mr. Mathews: I am writing you of business, for one thing, and because I feel that I must, for another. I have paid for a tombstone suitable for Bells Park, whom I esteemed more than I have most men. And I have paid for its delivery to you, knowing that you will have it mounted in place. So you must pay nothing for it in any form, as I wish to stand all the expense in memory of an old and tried friend. I have left Goldpan for good and all, and all those old associations of my life. I am starting over again, to make

a good and clean fight, in clean surroundings. I am sick to death of all that has made up my life. I am bitter, knowing that I was handicapped from the start. My father educated me because it was easier to have me in a boarding school in all my girlhood than to have me with him. I never knew my mother. I had no love bestowed upon me in my girlhood. When I came of age my father, who was an adventurer of the discredited gentleman type, gave me to a friend of his. I learned a year after I had been married that I had been sold to my husband—God save the mark! I tried to be patient when he dragged me from camp to camp, and I want to say that whatever else I have been, I have been good. You understand me, I hope, because I am defending myself to you, the only living being for whose esteem I care. I have had two happy moments in my life—one when the news was brought me that my husband had shot himself across a gambling table, and the second when you faced me that night after Bells Park was killed, alone there in the street after your partner had gone on, and said: “Lily, it hurts you as it does me. You’re on the level, little pal. I want to stop long enough to tell you I believe in you.” Then you went on, and I shall not see you again.

I am writing this from a place I shall leave before it starts to you. You could not find me if you had the desire, and so I say to you that which perhaps I never should have said, if we had remained in sight of each other in the Blue Mountains. You are the only man I have ever met who made me heartsick because I was not worthy of him, and could not aspire to his level. You are the only man I have ever

loved so much that it was an ache. You are the only man who told me by the look in his eyes, that he thought my life unworthy, and accused me without words every time we met. I am through with it, and if it will do you any good to know that your reproaches have done more than anything else to cause me to begin all over again, and live a different life, I want you to have that satisfaction. And this shall be my only good-by.

Lily Meredith.

For a long time Joan stood holding the letter in her hands, and then, as if fathoming its cry of loneliness, clutched it tightly to her breast.

“He will find her!” she said. “I know it! He must! It wouldn’t be kind of heaven to keep her from him. And he loved her all the time!”

Far across the peaks of the Blue Mountains the last rays of the sunset went out, as an extinguished torch. A bird near by cheeped sleepily, and the new night was coming to its own. Throbbing, rumbling, and grinding in a melody softened by distance, the roar of the Rattler’s mills became audible, as it brought the yellow gold, glistening and beautiful, from its sordid setting of earth. In the camp of the Croix d’Or a chorus was wafted faintly up as men sitting in the dusk sang: “Hearts that are brave and true, my lads, hearts that are brave and true!”

Silently, arm in arm, they gave a last lingering look at the shaft, the peak above, and turned down the trail to the camp which seemed all aglow with rosy light.

THE END