

FICTION

Horatio Alger

Ben's Nugget

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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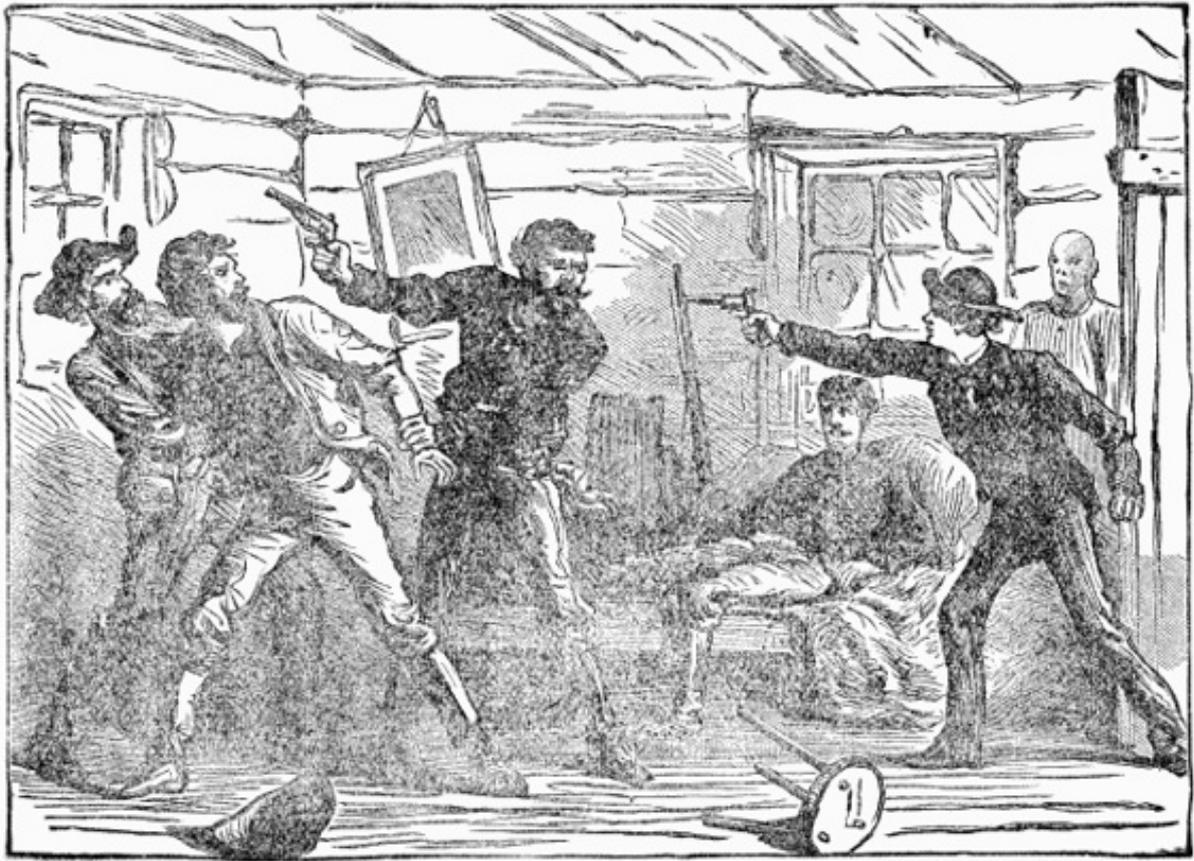
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FICTION

BEN'S NUGGET



BY
HORATIO
ALGER
JR.



Turning The Tables.

BEN'S NUGGET;
OR,
A BOY'S SEARCH FOR FORTUNE.

A Story of the Pacific Coast.

BY
HORATIO ALGER, JR.,

AUTHOR OF "RAGGED DICK," "TATTERED TOM," "LUCK AND PLUCK," "BRAVE AND BOLD SERIES," ETC., ETC.

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To
Three San Francisco Boys,
JOSEPH AND MAXEY SLOSS AND CLARENCE WALTER,
THIS STORY
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

"BEN'S NUGGET" is the concluding volume of the Pacific Series. Though it is complete in itself, and may be read independently, the chief characters introduced will be recognized as old friends by the readers of "The Young Explorer," the volume just preceding, not omitting Ki Sing, the faithful Chinaman, whose virtues may go far to diminish the prejudice which, justly or unjustly, is now felt toward his countrymen.

Though Ben Stanton may be considered rather young for a miner, not a few as young as he drifted to the gold-fields in the early days of California. Mining is carried on now in a very different manner, and I can hardly encourage any of my young readers to follow his example in seeking fortune so far from home.

NEW YORK, May 19, 1882.

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BEN'S NUGGET;
OR,
A BOY'S SEARCH FOR FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOUNTAIN-CABIN.

"What's the news, Ben? You didn't happen to bring an evenin' paper, did you?"

The speaker was a tall, loose-jointed man, dressed as a miner in a garb that appeared to have seen considerable service. His beard was long and untrimmed, and on his head he wore a Mexican sombrero.

This was Jake Bradley, a rough but good-hearted miner, who was stretched carelessly upon the ground in front of a rude hut crowning a high eminence in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Ben Stanton, whom he addressed, was a boy of sixteen, with a pleasant face and a manly bearing. [Pg 14]

"No, Jake," he answered with a smile, "I didn't meet a newsboy."

"There ain't many in this neighborhood, I reckon," said Bradley. "I tell you, Ben, I'd give an ounce of dust for a New York or Boston paper. Who knows what may have happened since we've been confined here in this lonely mountain-hut? Uncle Sam may have gone to war, for aught we know. P'rhaps the British may be bombarding New York this moment."

"I guess not," said Ben, smiling.

"I don't think it likely myself," said Bradley, filling his pipe. "Still, there may be some astonishin' news if we could only get hold of it."

"I don't think we can complain, Jake," said Ben, turning to a pleasanter subject. "We've made considerable money out of Mr. Dewey's claim."

"That's so. The three weeks we've spent here haven't been thrown away, by a long chalk. We shall be pretty well paid for accommodatin' Dick Dewey by stayin' and takin' care of him."

"How much gold-dust do you think we're got, Mr. Bradley?" [Pg 15]

"What!" exclaimed Bradley, taking the pipe from his mouth; "hadn't you better call me the Honorable Mr. Bradley, and done with it? Don't you feel acquainted with me yet, that you put the handle on to my name?"

"Excuse me, Jake," said Ben; "that's what I meant to say, but I was thinking of Mr. Dewey and that's how I happened to call you Mister."

"That's a different matter. Dick's got a kind of dignity, so that it seems natural to call him Mister; but as for me, I'm Jake Bradley, not a bad sort of fellow, but I don't wear store-clo'es, and I'd rather be called Jake by them as know me well."

"All right, Jake; but you haven't answered my question."

"What about?"

"The gold-dust."

"Oh yes. Well, I should say that the dust we've got out must be worth nigh on to five hundred dollars."

"So much as that?" asked Ben, his eyes sparkling.

"Yes, all of that. That claim of Dewey's is a splendid one, and no mistake. I think we ought to pay him a⁶¹ commission for allowing us to work it."

"I think so too, Jake."

They were sitting outside the rude hut which had been roughly put together on the summit of the mountain.

The door was open, and what they said could be heard by the occupant, who was stretched on a hard pallet in one corner of the cabin.

"Come in, you two," he called out.

"Sartin, Dick," said Bradley; and he entered the cabin, followed by Ben.

"What was that you were saying just now?" asked Richard Dewey.

"Tell him, Ben," said Bradley.

"Jake was saying that we ought to pay you a commission on the gold-dust we took from your claim, Mr. Dewey," said our hero, for that is Ben's position in our story.

"Why should you?" asked Dewey.

"Because it's yours. You found it, and you ought to get some good of it."

"So I have, Jake. In the first place, I got a thousand dollars out of it before I fell sick--that is, sprained my ankle."

"But you ain't gettin' anything out of it now."

"I think I am," said Dewey, smiling and looking gratefully at his two friends. "I am getting the care and attention of two faithful friends, who will see that I do not suffer while I am laid up in this lonely hut."

"We don't want to be paid for that, Dick."

"I know that, Bradley; but I don't call it paying you to let you work the claim which I don't intend to work myself."

"But you would work it if you were well."

"No, I wouldn't," answered Dewey, with energy. "I would leave this place instantly and take the shortest path to San Francisco."

"To see the gal that sent us out after you?"

"Yes. But, Jake, suppose you call her the young lady."

"Of course. You mustn't mind me, Dick. I don't know much about manners. I was raised kind of rough, and never had no chance to learn politeness. Ben, here, knows ten times as much as I do about how to behave among fashionable folks."

"I don't know about that, Jake," said Ben. "I was brought up in the country, and I know precious little about fashionable folks."

"Oh, well, you know how to talk. Besides, didn't you bring out Miss Douglas from the States?"

"She brought me," said Ben.

"It seems to me we are wandering from the subject," said Dewey. "It was a piece of good luck for me when you two happened upon this cabin where I lay helpless, with no one to look after me but Ki Sing."

"Ki Sing took pretty good care of you for a haythen," said Bradley.

"So he did. He is a good fellow, if he is a Chinaman, and far more grateful than many of his white brothers; but I was sighing for the sight of one of my own color, who would understand my wants better than that poor fellow, faithful as he is."

"I reckon the news we brought you helped you some, Dick," said Jake Bradley.

"Yes. It put fresh life into me to learn that Florence Douglas, my own dear Florence, had come out to this distant coast to search for me. But I tell you, Jake, it's rather tantalizing to think that she is waiting for me in San Francisco, while I am tied by the ankle to this lonely cabin so many miles away."

"It won't be for long now, Dick," said Bradley. "You feel a good deal better, don't you?"

"Yes; my ankle is much stronger than it was. Yesterday I walked about the cabin, and even went out of doors. I felt rather tired afterward, but it didn't hurt me."

"All you want is a little patience, Dick. You mustn't get up too soon. A sprain is worse than a break, so I've often heard: I can't say I know from experience."

"I hope you won't. It's a very trying experience, as I can testify."

"You'd get well quicker if we had some doctor's stuff to put on it, but I reckon anyhow you'll be out in a week or ten days."

"I hope so. If I could only write to Florence and let her know where and how I am, I wouldn't mind so much the waiting."

"Don't worry about her. She's in 'Frisco, where nothing can't happen to her," said Bradley, whose loose grammar I cannot recommend my young readers to imitate.

"I am not sure about that. Her guardian might find out where she is, and follow her even to San Francisco. If I were on the spot he could do no harm."

"I tell you, Dick, that gal--excuse me, I mean that young lady--is a smart one, and I reckon she can get ahead of her guardian if she wants to. Ben here told me how she circumvented him at the Astor House over in York. She'll hold her own ag'in him, even if he does track her to 'Frisco."

Some of my readers may desire to know more about Dewey and his two friends, and I will sketch for their benefit the events to which Bradley referred.

Florence Douglas was the ward of the Albany merchant, John Campbell, who by the terms of her father's will was entrusted with the care of her large property till she had attained the age of twenty-five, a period nearly a year distant. Mr. Campbell, anxious to secure his ward's large property for his son, sought to induce Florence to marry the said son, but this she distinctly declined to do. Irritated and disappointed, Mr. Campbell darkly intimated that should her opposition continue he would procure from two pliant physicians a certificate of her insanity and have her confined in that most terrible of prisons, a mad-house. The fear that he would carry his threat into execution nerved Florence to a bold movement. Being mistress of a fortune of thirty thousand dollars, left by her mother, she had funds enough for her purpose. She fled to New York, where chance made her acquainted with our hero, Ben Stanton, under whose escort she safely reached San Francisco, paying Ben's expenses in return for his protection.

Arrived in San Francisco, she furnished Ben with the necessary funds to seek out Richard Dewey (to whom, without her guardian's knowledge, she was privately betrothed) and inform him of her presence in California. After a series of adventures Ben and his companion had found Dewey, laid up with a sprained ankle in a rude hut high up among the mountains. He had met with an accident while successfully working a rich claim near by.

Of course Richard Dewey was overjoyed to meet friends of his own race who could provide for him better than his faithful attendant, Ki Sing. As he could not yet leave the spot, he offered to Ben and Bradley the privilege of working his claim.

In the next chapter I will briefly explain Ben's position, and the object which brought him to California, and then we shall be able to proceed with our story.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING CHINAMAN.

If Florence Douglas was an heiress, our young hero, Ben Stanton, was likewise possessed of property, though his inheritance was not a very large one. When his father's estate was settled it was found that it amounted to three hundred and sixty-five dollars. Though rather a large sum in Ben's eyes, he was quite aware that the interest of this amount would not support him. Accordingly, being ambitious, he drew from his uncle, Job Stanton, a worthy shoemaker, the sum of seventy-five dollars, and went to New York, hoping to obtain employment.

In this he was disappointed, but he had the good fortune to meet Miss Florence Douglas, by whom he was invited to accompany her to California as her escort, his expenses of course being paid by his patroness. It is needless to say that Ben accepted this proposal with alacrity, and, embarking on a steamer, landed in less than a month at San Francisco. He did not remain here long, but started for the mining-districts, still employed by Miss Douglas, in search of Richard Dewey, her affianced husband, whom her guardian had forbidden her to marry. As we have already said, Ben and his chosen companion, Jake Bradley, succeeded in their mission, but as yet had been unable to communicate tidings of their success to Miss Douglas, there being no chance to send a letter to San Francisco from the lonely hut where they were at present living.

Besides carrying out the wishes of his patroness, Ben intended to try his hand at mining, and had employed the interval of three weeks since he discovered Mr. Dewey in working the latter's claim, with the success already referred to.

The time when the two friends are introduced to the reader is at the close of the day, when, fatigued by their work on the claim, they are glad to rest and chat. Mr. Bradley has a pipe in his mouth, and evidently takes considerable comfort in his evening smoke.

"I wish I had a pipe for you, Ben," he said. "You don't know how it rests me to smoke." [Pg 25]

"I'll take your word for it, Jake," returned Ben, smiling.

"Won't you take a whiff? You don't know how soothin' it is."

"I don't need to be soothed, Jake. I'm glad you enjoy it, but I don't envy you a particle."

"Well, p'r'aps you're right, Ben. Our old doctor used to say smokin' wasn't good for boys, but I've smoked more or less since I was twelve years old."

"There's something I'd like better than smoking just now," said Ben.

"What's that?"

"Eating supper."

"Just so. I wonder where that heathen Ki Sing is?"

Ki Sing was cook and general servant to the little party, and performed his duties in a very satisfactory manner--better than either Ben or Bradley could have done--and left his white employers freer to work at the more congenial occupation of searching for gold.

"Ki Sing is unusually late," said Richard Dewey. "I wonder what can have detained him? I am beginning to feel hungry myself."

"The heathen is usually on time," said Bradley, "though he hasn't got a watch, any more than I have.--Dick, what time is it?"

"Half-past six," answered Richard Dewey, who, though a miner, had not been willing to dispense with all the

appliances of civilization.

"Maybe Ki Sing has found another place," suggested Ben, jocosely.

"He is faithful; I will vouch for that," said Dewey. "I am more afraid that he has met with some accident--like mine, for instance."

"You won't catch a Chinaman spraining his ankle," said Bradley; "they're too spry for that. They'll squeeze through where a white man can't, and I wouldn't wonder if they could turn themselves inside out if they tried hard."

"It is possible," suggested Dewey, "that Ki Sing may have met with some of our own race who have treated him roughly. You know the strong prejudice that is felt against the poor fellows by some who are far less deserving than they. They think it good sport to torment a Chinaman."

"I can't say I like 'em much myself," said Bradley; "but I don't mind saying that Ki Sing is a gentleman. He is the best heathen I know of, and if I should come across any fellow harmin' him I reckon I'd be ready to take a hand myself."

"We couldn't get along very well without him, Jake," said Ben.

"That's where you're right, Ben. He's made himself useful to us, and no mistake."

"I have reason to feel indebted to him," said Dewey. "Injured as I was, I should have fared badly but for his faithful services. I am not at all sure that I should have been living at this moment had not the grateful fellow cared for me and supplied my wants."

It may be explained here that Richard Dewey had at one time rescued Ki Sing from some rough companions who had made up their minds to cut off the Chinaman's queue, thereby, in accordance with Chinese custom, preventing him ever returning to his native country. It was the thought of this service that had prompted Ki Sing to faithful service when he found his benefactor in need of it.

Half an hour passed, and still the Chinaman did not appear.

All three became anxious, especially Dewey. "Bradley," said he, "would you mind going out to look for Ki Sing? I'm sure something has happened to him."

"Just what I was thinkin' of myself," said Bradley. "I'll go, and I'll bring him back if he's above ground."

"I'll go with you, Jake," said Ben, rising from the ground on which he was seated.

"You'd better stay with Dick Dewey," said Bradley; "maybe he'll want you."

"I forgot that. Yes, I will stay."

"No; I would rather you would go with Bradley," said the invalid. "Two will stand a better chance of success than one. I sha'n't need anything while you are away."

"Just as you say, Dick.--Well, Ben, let's start along. I reckon we'll find Ki Sing before long, and then we'll have some supper."

As the two started on their errand Richard Dewey breathed a sigh of relief. "I really believe I'm getting attached to Ki Sing," he said to himself. "He's a good fellow, if he is a Chinaman, and if ever I am prosperous I will take him into my service and see that he is comfortably provided for."

The poor Chinaman, though Dewey did not suspect it, was at that moment in a very uncomfortable position indeed, and he himself was menaced by a peril already near at hand against which his helpless condition allowed of no defence. His lonely and monotonous life was destined to be varied that evening in an unpleasant manner.



CHAPTER III.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD.

Perhaps two hours earlier two horsemen might have been seen riding slowly over a lower slope of the mountain. The horses they bestrode were of the Mexican breed, or, in common parlance, mustangs. They were themselves dressed in Mexican style, and bore a strong resemblance to bandits as we are apt to picture them.

These gentlemen were Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley, hailing originally from Missouri, but not reflecting any particular credit on their native State. They were in fact adventurers, having a strong objection to honest work and a decided preference for gaining a living by unlawful means. The very horses they bestrode were stolen, having once belonged to Jake Bradley and Ben Stanton. The circumstances under which they were stolen will be remembered by readers of *The Young Explorer*.

"Beastly place, this, Tom!" said Bill Mosely, with a strong expression of disgust. [Pg 31]

"I should say so," answered Hadley, who was wont by this phrase to echo the sentiments expressed by his companion and leader.

"I wouldn't have come up here if it had proved safe to stay lower down," continued Bill Mosely. "That last man we relieved of his gold-dust might prove troublesome if we should fall in with him again--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so," remarked Mr. Hadley in a tone of sincere conviction.

"I should like to see him when he wakes up and finds his bag of dust missing," said Mosely, with a laugh.

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a good-sized bag which appeared to be nearly full of dust. "There must be several hundred dollars' worth there," he said, complacently.

He expected to hear Hadley answer in his usual style, but was disappointed.

"When are we going to divide?" asked Hadley, with an expression of interest not unmingled with anxiety.

"You'd better let me carry it, Tom; it's all the same." [Pg 32]

"I should say so. No, I would prefer to take charge of my part," said Hadley, "or at least to carry the bag part of the time."

Bill Mosely frowned darkly, and he brought his hand near the pocket in which he carried his pistol. "Hadley," he said, sternly, "do you doubt my honor?"

"I should say--not," answered Tom Hadley in a dissatisfied tone, bringing out the last word after a slight pause; "but I don't see why I shouldn't carry the bag part of the time."

"Had you doubted my honor," continued Mosely with a grand air, "though you are my friend, I should have been compelled to take your life. I never take any back talk. I chaw up any one who insults me. I'm a regular out-and-out desperado, I am, when I'm riled."

"I've heard all that before," said Tom Hadley, rather impatiently.

It was quite true, for this was the style in which Bill Mosely was accustomed to address new acquaintances. It had not succeeded with Jake Bradley, who had enough knowledge of human nature to detect the falsity of Mosely's pretensions and the sham character of his valor.

"You've heard it before," said Mosely, severely, "but ain't it true? That's what I ask you, Tom Hadley."

"I should say so," slipped out almost unconsciously from the lips of the habitual echo.

"'Tis well," said Mosely, waving his hand. "You know it and you believe it. I'm a bad man to insult, I am. I

generally chaw up them that stand in my way."

Tom Hadley was really a braver man than Mosely, and he answered obstinately, "Give me half that gold-dust, or I'll take it."

Bill Mosely saw his determined face and felt that it was necessary to back down. "I don't know why I don't shoot you," he said, trying to keep up his air of domination.

"Because two can play at that game," said Hadley, doggedly.

He produced a pouch, and Bill Mosely, much against his will, was compelled to divide the contents of the stolen bag, managing, however, to retain the larger share himself.

"I don't want to quarrel with a friend," said Bill, more mildly, "but you don't act friendly to-day."

"It's all right now," said Hadley, satisfied.

"Maybe you think I don't want to act fair," continued Mosely in an injured tone. "Why, the very horse you are riding is a proof to the contrary. I didn't ask for both horses, did I?"

"You couldn't ride both," answered Tom Hadley, with practical good sense.

"I wonder where the fellows are we took them from?" said Mosely, with a change of subject. "The man was a regular fire-eater: I wouldn't like to meet him again."

"I should say so," chimed in Hadley, emphatically.

Bradley had paid Mosely in his own coin, and boasted of his prowess even more extravagantly than that braggadocio, claiming to have killed from seventy to eighty men in the course of his experience. Mosely had been taken in by his confident tone, and knowing that he was himself a sham desperado, though a genuine thief and highwayman, had been made to feel uneasy while in Bradley's company.

"I wonder what became of them?" continued Mosely, thoughtfully.

As Tom Hadley's special phrase could not come in here appropriately, he forbore to make any remark.

"He thought he would scare me by his fierce talk," said Mosely, who would hardly have spoken so confidently had he known that Bradley was only two miles distant from him at that identical moment. "It takes a good deal to scare a man like me--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so," returned Hadley, but it was noticeable that he spoke rather dubiously, and not with his usual positiveness.

"I'm a hard man to handle," continued Mosely, complacently, relapsing into the style of talk which he most enjoyed. "I'm as bad as they make 'em."

"I should say so," chimed in Tom Hadley; and there was nothing doubtful in his tone now.

Bill Mosely looked at him as if he suspected there was something suspicious under this speech, but Tom Hadley wore his usual look, and his companion dismissed his momentary doubt. "You never saw me afraid of any living man--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so," answered Hadley.

There was something equivocal in this speech, and Bill Mosely looked vexed.

"Can't you say anything but that?" he grumbled. "It looks as if you doubted my statement. No man doubt my word--and lives."

Tom Hadley merely shrugged his shoulders. He was not a man of brilliant intellectual ability or of rare penetration, but there were times when even he was led to suspect that his companion was a humbug. Yet

Mosely had greater force of character, and took uncommon pains to retain his ascendancy over his more simple-minded companion, and had in the main been successful, though in the matter of the gold-dust he had been obliged to score a defeat.

As Hadley did not see fit to express any doubt of this last statement, Bill Mosely was content to let the matter drop, assuming that he had gained a victory and recovered his ascendancy over his echo.

They had met no one for some hours, and did not look for an encounter with anything wearing the semblance of humanity, when all at once Tom Hadley uttered an exclamation.

"What is it, Tom?" asked Mosely.

"Look there!" was the only answer, as Hadley, with outstretched finger, pointed to a Chinaman walking slowly up the hill.

"It's a heathen Chinee!" exclaimed Mosely with animation.

"I should say so," echoed Hadley.

Mosely urged his mustang to greater speed, and soon overtook Ki Sing, for it was Richard Dewey's attendant whom the two adventurers had fallen in with.



CHAPTER IV.

KI SING IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Ki Sing turned when he heard the sound of horses' feet, for in that mountain-solitude such a sound was unusual. He was not reassured by the appearance of the two men, whose intention seemed to be to overtake him, and he turned aside from the path with the intention of getting out of the way.

"Stop there, you heathen!" called Bill Mosely in his fiercest tone.

Ki Sing halted, and an expression of uneasiness came over his broad, flat face.

"What are you doing here, you Chinese loafer?"

Ki Sing did not exactly comprehend this speech, but answered mildly, "How do, Melican man?"

"How do?" echoed Bill Mosely, laughing rather boisterously.--"Tom, the heathen wants to know how I do.-- Well, heathen, I'm so's to be around, and wouldn't mind chawing up a dozen Chinamen. Where do you live?"

"Up mountain," answered Ki Sing.

"Which way?"

The Chinaman pointed in the right direction.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Wait on Melican man--cookee, washee."

"So you are a servant to a white man, John?"

"Yes, John."

"Don't you call me John, you yellow mummy! I'm not one of your countrymen, I reckon.--What do you say to that, Tom? The fellow's gettin' familiar."

"I should say so," remarked Tom Hadley, with his usual originality.

"What's the name of the Melican man you work for?" continued Mosely, after a slight pause.

"Dickee Dewee," answered Ki Sing, repeating the familiar name applied by Bradley to the invalid. The name seemed still more odd as the Chinaman pronounced it.

"Well, he's got a queer name, that's all I can say," continued Mosely. "What's your name?"

"Ki Sing."

[Pg 40]

"Ki Sing? How's Mrs. Ki Sing?" asked Mosely, who was disposed, like the cat, to play with his victim before turning and rending him.

"Me got no wiffee," said the Chinaman, stolidly.

"Then you're in the market. Do you want to marry?"

"Me no want to mally?"

"So much the worse for the ladies. Well, as to this Dickee, as you call him? What does he do?"

"He sick--lie down on bedee."

"He's sick, is he? What's the matter with him?"

"Fall down and hurt leggee."

"Oh, that was it? What did he do before he hurt himself?"

"Dig gold."

Bill Mosely became more interested. "Did he find much gold?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, muchee," answered Ki Sing, unsuspectingly.

"Does he keep it with him?"

Bill Mosely betrayed a little too much interest when he asked this question, and the Chinaman, hitherto unsuspectingly, became on his guard.

"Why you wantee know?" he asked shrewdly.

"Do you dare give me any of your back talk, you yellow heathen?" exclaimed Mosely, angrily. "Answer my question, or I'll chaw you up in less'n a minute."

"What you ask?" said Ki Sing, innocently.

"You know well enough. Where does this Dickee keep the gold he found before he met with an accident?"

"He no tellee me," answered Ki Sing.

This might be true, so that Mosely did not feel sure that the Chinaman's ignorance was feigned. Still, he resolved to push the inquiry, in the hope of eliciting some information that might be of value, for already a plan had come into his mind which was in accordance with his general character and reputation--that of relieving the invalid of his hoard of gold-dust.

"Where do you think he keeps the gold, John?" he asked mildly.

Ki Sing looked particularly vacant as he expressed his ignorance on this subject.

"Has he got a cabin up there?" asked Mosely.

"Yes."

"And how far might it be?"

"Long way," answered Ki Sing, who wished to divert Mosely from the plan which the faithful servant could see he had in view.

Bill Mosely was keen enough to understand the Chinaman's meaning, and answered, "Long or not, I will go and see your master. I am a doctor," he added, winking to Hadley, "and perhaps I can help him.--Ain't I a doctor, Tom?"

"I should say so," answered Hadley, whose respect for truth did not interfere with his corroborating in his usual style anything which his companion saw fit to assert.

Ki Sing did not express any opinion on the subject of Bill Mosely's medical pretensions, though he was quite incredulous.

"Lead the way, John," said Mosely.

"Where me go?" asked the Chinaman innocently.

"Go? Go to the cabin where your master lives, and that by the shortest path. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

Ki Sing, however, still faithful to the man who had befriended him in the hour of danger, did not direct his course toward Richard Dewey's cabin, but guided the two adventurers in a different direction. The course he took was a circuitous one, taking him no farther away from the cabin, but encircling the summit and drawing no nearer to it. He hoped that the two men, whose purpose he suspected was not honest nor friendly, would become tired and would give up the quest.

He did not, however, understand the perseverance of Mosely when he felt that he was on the scent of gold.

Finally, Mosely spoke. "John," he said, "is the cabin near by?"

Ki Sing shook his head. "Long way," he answered.

"How did you happen to get so far away from it, then, I should like to know?" and he examined the face of his guide sharply.

But Ki Sing's broad face seemed utterly void of expression as, neglecting to answer the question, he reiterated his statement, "Housee long way."

"The man's a fool, Tom," said Mosely, turning to his companion.

"I should say so," was all the help he got from Hadley.

"Do you know what I mean to do, Hadley?--Here, you yellow mummy, go a little ahead." (The Chinaman did so.)--"There's a bonanza up there in that cabin, wherever it is. The Chinaman says that this man with the queer name had got out a good deal of gold before he met with an accident--broke his leg, likely. Well, it stands to reason he's got the gold now. There ain't no chance here of sendin' off the dust, and of course he's got it hid somewhere in his cabin. Do you see the point, Tom?"

"I should say so."

"And I should say so too. It strikes me as a particularly good chance. This man is disabled and helpless. He can't prevent us walking off with his gold, can he?"

"Suppose he won't tell us where it is?" suggested Tom Hadley with extraordinary mental acuteness.

"Why, we'll knock him on the head or put a bullet in him, Hadley. It's a pity if two fire-eaters like us can't tackle a man with a broken leg. What do you say?"

"I should say so."

Fifteen minutes more passed, and they seemed to be getting no nearer their destination. At any rate, no cabin was in sight. Ki Sing only answered, when interrogated, "Long way."

"Hadley," said Bill Mosely, "I begin to believe that heathen's misleading us. What do you say?"

"I should say so."

"Then I'll attend to his case.--Here, you heathen!"

"Whatee want?"

Bill Mosely sprang from his mustang, seized Ki Sing, and, in spite of howls, with Hadley's assistance tied him to a small tree with a strong cord he had in his pocket.

"That disposes of you, my friend," he said, mounting his mustang. "I think we shall find the cabin better without you."

The two men rode off, leaving poor Ki Sing in what appeared, considering the loneliness of the spot, to be hopeless captivity.

CHAPTER V.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF BILL MOSELY.

Bill Mosley and his companion pushed on after leaving the poor Chinaman tied to the tree.

"The yellow heathen may starve, for all I care," said Mosely, carelessly. "It's all his own fault. Why didn't he speak up like a man and tell me what I wanted to know?"

"I should say so," chimed in Tom Hadley.

"The question is now, 'Whereabouts is that cabin we are in search of?'"

Hadley appeared to have no idea, and no suggestion to offer.

"It strikes me it must be somewhere near the top of the mountain," said Mosely. "What do you say?"

"I should say so."

"Then we'll take the shortest way to the summit. I tell you, Tom, we're on the track of something rich. We'll take all this fellow's gold-dust, and he can't help himself. It'll be richer than any claim we've worked yet, if it pans out as well as I expect--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill," answered Hadley, with an expression of interest.

"I tell you, Tom," said Bill Mosely, complacently, "you were in luck when you fell in with me. We've done pretty well since we jined hosses, pard."

"I should say so--but," added Hadley, after a pause, "it would go hard with us if we got caught."

"We don't mean to get caught," said Mosely, promptly. "As for this new job, there's no danger in it. This man is down with a broken leg, and he can't help our taking his gold. The Chinaman's out of the way, and we've got a clear field. Take a good look, Tom, for your eyes are better than mine, and tell me if you see anything that looks like a cabin anywhere around?"

This inquiry was made some twenty minutes after they had left Ki Sing. They had pursued a circuitous course, or in half the time they might have been as near the cabin as they now were.

Tom Hadley didn't answer in his customary phrase, but instead raised himself erect on his mustang and looked sharply about him.

"Well?" demanded Mosely, impatiently.

"I don't see anything that looks like a cabin," said Hadley, deliberately, "but I think I see smoke."

"Where?" asked his companion in an eager tone.

"There," said Tom Hadley, pointing with his whip in a particular direction.

Mosely strained his eyes, but he was a trifle near-sighted and could see nothing.

"I can't see anything," he said, "but that proves nothing. If there's smoke, there's a house. There's no question about that, and there's not likely to be more than one cabin about here. Steer in the direction of the smoke, Tom, and I'll follow in your tracks. My horse is getting tired; he'll be glad to rest for the night."

"Will it be safe?" queried Hadley.

"Safe enough. The Chinaman is disposed of, and as for this broken-legged Dewey, we'll bind him fast and set him outside of the cabin while we make ourselves comfortable within. I shall be sorry to inconvenience him, but when a man has company he must expect to be put out--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill."

The two worthy gentlemen kept on their way till, making a sudden turn, the house, which had hitherto been concealed from them by a cliff, stood plainly revealed.

"There it is, Tom!" cried Mosely, joyfully. "We've found it, in spite of that lying heathen. It seems good to see a house after wandering about for weeks without a chance to sleep under a roof--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill."

It will be observed that Mr. William Mosely was fond of designating Ki Sing as a heathen, evidently appreciating his own superiority as a Christian. Yet I am inclined to think that a heathen like the Chinaman possessed more moral worth than a dozen Christians of the type of Mosely. From youth he had preyed upon the community, and his aim had been to get a living in any way that did not involve labor. Honesty was an obsolete word in his vocabulary, and a successful theft yielded him a satisfaction such as other men derive from the consciousness of well-doing. In fact, Mosely's moral nature was warped, and there was very little chance of his reformation.

Now that the cabin was near at hand, the two men did not quicken their speed, for the ascent was somewhat steep and their animals were tired.

"Take it easy, Tom. The whole thing's in our hands. Wonder whether Dewey's expectin' visitors?" he added, chuckling. "I say, Hadley, he'll be glad to see us--don't you think so?"

"I should say so," returned Hadley, before the joke dawned upon him.

"You see, we are going to relieve him of the care of that gold-dust of his. We're two bankers from 'Frisco, that's what we are, and we'll take care of all the gold-dust we can take in."

"I shall want my half," said Tom Hadley, unexpectedly deviating from his customary formula.

Mosely shrugged his shoulders. He did not quite like this new disposition of Hadley's to look after his own interests, but at present did not think it politic to say much about it. Though Tom Hadley had generally been subservient to him, he knew very well that if any difficulty should arise between them Tom would be a formidable antagonist. Fortunately for him, Hadley did not know his own power, or he would not have remained in subjection to a man whom he could have overcome had he been so disposed. He did not fully believe Bill Mosely's ridiculous boasts of his own prowess, but he was nevertheless disposed to overrate the man who made so many pretensions. All he asked was a fair share of the booty which the two together managed to secure, and this he had made up his mind to have.

They reached the cabin at last, and halted their horses before the door.

Both sprang off, and Bill Mosely, with a sign to his companion to remain in charge of them, entered at the open door.

"Is that you, Ki Sing?" asked Dewey, whose face was turned toward the wall.

Bill Mosely could not tell from the way he lay on the pallet, covered with a blanket, whether his leg were broken or not, but believed that this was the case. "That doesn't happen to be my name, stranger," he answered.

Richard Dewey turned suddenly on his low bed and fixed his eyes on the intruder. "Who are you? what do you want?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I thought I'd come round and make you a call, being in the neighborhood," answered Mosely, with a smile.

"Who are you?"

"Well, I'm not the President of the United States, nor I ain't Queen Victoria, as I know of," said Mosely.

"You look more like a horse-thief," said Richard Dewey, bluntly.

"Do you mean to insult me?" exclaimed Bill Mosely, fiercely. "Do you know who I am?"

Dewey was not easily frightened, and he answered coolly, "You haven't told me yet."

"Well, I'm Bill Mosely from the State of Missouri. I'm a regular tearer, I am. I don't take no back talk. When a man insults me I kill him."

"Very well. Now I know who you are," said Richard Dewey, calmly. "Now, what do you want?"

"How much gold-dust have you in this cabin? We may as well come to business."

"None at all."

"I know better. You can't pull wool over my eyes. Your Chinaman tells a different story."

"Ha! Have you seen Ki Sing?" asked Dewey, interested at last.

"Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting the heathen you refer to."

"Where is he now? Can you tell me?"

"To the best of my knowledge he is tied to a tree a mile or so from here. I don't think he will get away very easily."

"Scoundrel! you shall answer for this!" exclaimed Richard Dewey, springing to his feet, and thereby showing that neither of his legs was broken.



CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEQUAL CONTEST.

Bill Mosely was decidedly startled when the man whom he thought helpless sprang up so suddenly and approached him in a menacing manner. He rose precipitately from the rude seat on which he had settled himself comfortably, his face wearing an expression of alarm.

Richard Dewey paused and confronted him. A frown was on his face, and he appeared very much in earnest in the question he next asked. "Have you dared to ill-treat my servant, you scoundrel?" he demanded.

"Look here, stranger," said Mosely, with a faint attempt at bluster, "you'd better take care what you say to me. I'm a bad man, I am."

"I don't doubt it," said Dewey, contemptuously.

This was not altogether satisfactory to Bill Mosely, though it expressed confidence in the truth of his statement.

"You haven't answered my question," continued Dewey. "What have you done with my servant?"

"Perhaps he wasn't your servant," said Bill Mosely, evasively.

"There is but one Chinaman in this neighborhood," said Richard Dewey impatiently, "and he is my faithful servant. Did you tie him to a tree?"

"He was impudent to me," answered Bill Mosely, uneasily.

"Ki Sing is never impudent to any one," returned Dewey, his eyes flashing with anger. "Tell me what you did with him, or I will fell you to the ground."

"I didn't harm him," said Bill Mosely, hastily. "I wanted to teach him a lesson; that is all."

"And so you tied him to a tree, did you?"

"Yes."

"Then go back and release him instantly, or it will be the worse for you. I would go with you, to make sure that you did so, but my ankle is weak. Where did you leave him?"

"A little way down the hill."

"Then go at once and release him. If you fail to do it, some day I shall meet you again and I will make you bitterly repent it."

"All right, stranger; make your mind easy."

Bill Mosely turned to leave the cabin, and Richard Dewey threw himself down on the pallet once more.

But Mosely had no intention of letting the matter rest there. Had he been alone he would not have ventured on any further conflict with Dewey, who, invalid as he was, had shown so much spirit; but he felt considerable confidence in his companion, who was strong and powerful.

He approached Tom Hadley and whispered in his ear. Tom nodded his head, and the two stealthily approached the entrance again and re-entered the cabin.

Richard Dewey had laid himself down on the pallet, thinking that Bill Mosely had gone about his business, when Tom Hadley, who had been assigned to this duty by his more timid companion, threw himself upon the invalid and overpowered him.

"Perhaps you'll insult a gentleman again," exclaimed Mosely tauntingly as he stood by and witnessed the ineffectual struggles of Tom's victim, who had been taken at disadvantage.--"Here's the cord, Tom, tie his hands and feet."

"You're contemptible cowards," exclaimed Dewey. "It takes two of you to overpower a sick man."

"You don't look very sick," said Mosely, tauntingly.

"I have sprained my ankle or I would defy both of you."

"Talk's cheap!" retorted Bill Mosely.

"What is your object in this outrageous assault upon a stranger?" demanded Dewey.

"We'll tell you presently," answered Mosely.--"Now tie his feet, Tom."

"Be careful of my ankle--it is sore and sensitive," said Dewey, addressing himself to Tom Hadley. "You need not tie me further. In my present condition I am no match for you both. Tell me why it is you have chosen to attack a man who has never harmed you?"

Tom Hadley looked to Mosely to answer.

"I'll tell you what we want, Dewey, if that is your name," said the superior rascal. "We want that gold-dust you've got hidden about here somewhere."

"Who told you I had any gold-dust?" inquired the invalid.

"Your servant. He let it out without thinking, but when we wanted him to guide us here, he wouldn't. That's why we left him tied to a tree--isn't it, Tom?"

"I should say so."

"Poor fellow! I am glad to hear he was faithful even when he found himself in the power of two such ruffians as you."

"Look here, Dewey: don't give us any of your back talk. It ain't safe--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill."

"I intend to express my opinion of you and your villainous conduct," said Dewey, undaunted, "whatever you choose to call it. So Ki Sing wouldn't guide you here?"

"No, he led us round in a circle. When we found it out we settled his hash pretty quick--"

"Like cowards, as you were."

"Are we going to stand this, Tom?" asked Bill, fiercely.

Tom Hadley shrugged his shoulder. He did not enjoy what Bill Mosely called "back talk" as well as his partner, and it struck him as so much waste of time. He wanted to come to business, and said briefly, "Where's the gold?"

"Yes, Dewey, let us know what you have done with your gold."

"So you are thieves, you two?"

"I should say so," interjected Tom Hadley.

"You're a fool," ejaculated Bill Mosely, frowning. "What makes you give yourself away?"

"Because," said Hadley, bluntly, "we are thieves, or we wouldn't be after this man's gold."

"That ain't the way to put it," said Bill Mosely, who shrank from accepting the title to which his actions entitled him. "We're bankers from 'Frisco, and we are going to take care of Dewey's gold, as he ain't in a situation to take care of it himself."

"You are very kind," said Dewey, who, embarrassing as his position was, rather enjoyed the humor of the situation. "So you are a banker, and your friend a thief? I believe I have more respect for the thief, who openly avows his objects.--Tom, if that is your name, I am sorry that you are not in a better business. That man is wholly bad, but I believe you could lead an honest life."

Tom Hadley said nothing, but he looked thoughtful. His life had been a lawless one, but he was not the thorough-going scoundrel that Bill Mosely was, and would have been glad if circumstances had favored a more creditable mode of life.

"We're wastin' time, Dewey," said Bill Mosely. "Where's the gold-dust?"

"Sure you know I have it? I leave you to find it for yourself," answered the sick man, who was never lacking for courage, and did not tremble, though wholly in the power of these men.

"What shall we do, Tom?" asked Mosely.

"Hunt for the gold," suggested Tom Hadley.

If Mosely had judged it of any use to threaten Dewey, he would have done so, hoping to force him to reveal the hiding-place of the gold; but the undaunted spirit thus far displayed by his victim convinced him that the attempt would be unsuccessful. He therefore proceeded, with the help of his companion, to search the hut. The floor was of earth, and he occupied himself in digging down into it, considering that the most likely place of concealment for the treasure.

Richard Dewey watched the work going on in silence.

"If only Ben and Bradley would come back," he said to himself, "I should soon be free of these rascals. They won't find the gold where they are looking, but I needn't tell them that."



CHAPTER VII.

TIED TO A TREE.

When Ben and his friend Bradley left the cabin in search of Ki Sing, they were puzzled to fix upon the direction in which it was best to go. There was no particular reason to decide in favor of any one against the others.

"Shall we separate, Jake, or shall we go together?" asked Ben.

"I think we had better stick together, Ben. Otherwise, if one succeeds he won't have any way of letting the other know."

"That's true."

"Besides, we may need each other's help," added Bradley.

"You mean in case Ki Sing has met with an accident?"

"Well, no; I don't exactly mean that, Ben."

"Perhaps," said Ben, laughing, "you think two pairs of eyes better than one."

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"That's true, Ben; but you haven't caught my idea."

"Then, suppose you catch it for me and give me the benefit of it."

"I think," said Bradley, not smiling at this sally of Ben's, "that our Chinese friend has fallen in with some rough fellows who have done him harm."

"I hope not," said Ben, sobered by this suggestion.

"So do I. Ki Sing is a good fellow, if he is a heathen, and I'd like to scalp the man that ill-treats him."

"There are not many travellers among these mountains."

"No, but there are some. Some men are always pulling up stakes and looking for better claims. Besides, we are here, and why shouldn't others come here as well?"

"That is so."

"I think, Ben, we'll keep along in this direction," said Bradley, indicating a path on the eastern slope of the hill. "I haven't any particular reason for it, but I've got a sort of idea that this is the right way."

"All right, Jake; I will be guided by you. I hope you're mistaken about Ki Sing's fate. Why couldn't he have fallen and sprained his ankle, like Mr. Dewey?"

"Of course he could, but it isn't likely he has."

"Why not?"

"Because Chinamen, I have always noticed, are cautious and supple. They are some like cats; they fall on their feet. They are not rash like white men, but know better how to take care of their lives and limbs. That's why I don't think Ki Sing has tumbled down or hurt himself in any way."

"Of course he wouldn't leave us without notice," said Ben, musingly.

"Certainly not: that isn't Ki Sing's way. He's faithful to Dick Dewey, and won't leave him as long as Dick is laid up. I never had much idea of Chinamen before, and I don't know as I have now, but Ki Sing is a good fellow, whatever you may say of his countrymen. They're not all honest. I was once robbed by a Chinaman, but I'll bet something on Ki Sing. He might have robbed Dick when he was helpless and dependent, before

we came along, but he didn't do it. There are plenty of white men you couldn't say that of."

"For instance, the gentlemen who stole our horses."

"It makes me mad whenever I think of that little transaction," said Bradley. "As for that braggart, Mosely, he'll come to grief some of these days. He'll probably die with his boots on and his feet some way from the ground. Before that happens I'd like a little whack at him myself."

"I owe him a debt too," said Ben. "His running off with my mustang cost me a good many weary hours. But hark! what's that?" said Ben, suddenly.

"What's what?"

"I thought I heard a cry."

"Where away?"

"To the left."

Jake Bradley halted and inclined his ear to listen.

"Ben," said he, looking up, "I believe we're on the scent. That cry came either from a Chinaman or a cat."

Ben couldn't help laughing, in spite of the apprehensions which the words of his companion suggested. "Let us push on, then," he said.

Three minutes later the two came in sight of poor Ki Sing, chafing in his forced captivity and making ineffectual attempts to release himself from his confinement.

"That's he, sure enough," exclaimed Jake Bradley, excited. "The poor fellow's regularly treed."

The Chinaman had not yet seen the approach of his friends, for he happened to be looking in another direction.

"Ki Sing!" called Ben.

An expression of relief and joy overspread the countenance of the unfortunate captive when he saw our hero and Bradley.

"How came you here, Ki Sing?" asked Bradley. "Did you tie yourself to the tree?"

"No, no," replied the Chinaman, earnestly. "Velly bad men tie Ki Sing."

"How many of them bad men were there?" queried Bradley.

"Two."

"That's one apiece for us, Ben," said Bradley. "There a job ahead for us."

At the same time he busied himself in cutting the cord that confined the poor Chinaman to the tree, and Ki Sing, with an expression of great relief and contentment, stretched his limbs and chafed his wrists and ankles, which were sore from the cutting of the cord.

"Now, Ki Sing, tell us a little more about them men. What did they look like?"

The Chinaman, in the best English he had at command, described the two men who had perpetrated the outrage.

"Did you hear either of them call the other by name?" inquired Bradley.

"One Billee; the other Tommee," answered Ki Sing, who remembered the way in which they addressed each other.

"Why, those are the names of the men who stole our horses!" said Ben, in surprise.

"That's so!" exclaimed Bradley, in excitement. "It would be just like them scamps to tie up a poor fellow like Ki Sing.--I say, Ki, did them fellows have horses?"

"Yes," answered the Chinaman.

"I believe they're the very fellows," cried Bradley. "I hope they are, for there's a chance of overhauling them.--Why did they tie you, Ki Sing?"

Ki Sing explained that they had tried to induce him to guide them to Richard Dewey's cabin, but that he was sure they wanted to steal his gold, and he had led them astray.

"That's the sort of fellow Ki Sing is," said Bradley, nodding to Ben; "you see, he wouldn't betray his master."

"So they tie me to tlee," continued the poor fellow. "I thought I stay here all night."

"You didn't take us into the account, Ki Sing. When these scoundrels left you where did they go?"

Ki Sing pointed.

"And you think they went in search of the cabin?"

"Yes--they say so."

"Did they know we were there--Ben and I?"

"No; me only say Dickee Dewey."

"Did you say that Dewey was sick?"

"Yes."

"It is clear," said Bradley, turning to Ben, "that them rascals were bent on mischief. From what Ki Sing told them they concluded that Dewey would be unable to resist them, and that they would have a soft thing stealing his gold-dust."

"They may have found the cabin and be at work there now," suggested Ben.

"So they may," answered Bradley, hastily. "What a fool I am to be chattering here when Dick may be in danger!--Stir your stumps, Ki Sing. We're goin' back to the cabin as fast as our legs can carry us. I only hope we'll be in time to catch the scoundrels."

Not without anxiety the three friends retraced their steps toward the little mountain-hut which was at present their only home.



CHAPTER VIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

When the three friends came in view of the cabin, the first sight which attracted their attention was the two mustangs, who stood, in patient enjoyment of the rest they so much needed, just outside. Their unlawful owners, as we know, were engaged inside in searching for gold-dust, without the slightest apprehension or expectation of interference.

"That's my mustang," exclaimed Bradley in a tone of suppressed excitement. "I never looked to lay eyes on him again, but, thank the Lord! the thief has walked into a trap which I didn't set for him. We'll have a reckoning, and that pretty soon."

"How do you know it's your mustang?" asked Ben.

"There's a white spot on the left flank. The other one's yours: I know it by his make, though I can't lay hold of any sign. Even if I didn't know him, his bein' in company with mine makes it stand to reason that ^[Pg 71] belongs to you."

"I shall be glad to have it again," said Ben, "but we may have a tussle for them."

"I'm ready," said Jake Bradley, grimly.

By this time they had come to a halt to consider the situation.

"I don't hear anything," said Bradley, listening intently. "I expect the skunks must be inside. Pray Heaven they haven't harmed poor Dewey!"

Just then Dewey's voice was heard, and they were so near that they could distinguish his words.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "how are you getting on? Have you found anything yet?"

"No, curse it!" responded Mosely. "Suppose you give us a hint."

"Thank you, but I don't see how that's going to benefit me. If you find the money you mean to take it, don't you?"

"I should say so," answered Tom Hadley, frankly.

Richard Dewey smiled. "I commend your frankness," he said. "Well, you can't expect a man to assist in robbing himself, can you?"

"You're mighty cool," growled Bill Mosely.

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"On the contrary, my indignation is very warm, I assure you."

"Look here, Dewey," said Mosely, pausing: "I'm goin' to make you a proposition."

"Go on."

"Of course we shall find this gold-dust of yours, but it's rather hard and troublesome work; so I'll tell you what we'll do. If you'll tell us where to find it, we'll leave a third of it for you. That'll be square, won't it? One part for me, one for my pard, and one for you? What do you say?"

"That you are very kind to allow me a third of what belongs wholly to me. But even if I should think this a profitable arrangement to enter into, how am I to feel secure against your carrying off all of the treasure?"

"You can trust to the honor of a gentleman," laid Mr. William Mosely, pompously.

"Meaning you?" asked Dewey, with a laugh.

"Meaning me, of course, and when perhaps for myself, perhaps for my pard also--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill."

"I've heard there's honor among thieves," said Dewey, smiling, "and this appears to be an illustration of it. Well, gentlemen, I'm sorry to say I don't feel that confidence in your honor or your word which would justify me in accepting your kind proposal."

"Do you doubt my word?" blustered Mosely.

"I feel no doubt on the subject," answered Dewey.

"I accept your apology," said Mosely; "it's lucky you made it. Me and my friend don't stand no insults. We don't take no back talk. We're bad men when we get into a scrimmage--eh, Tom?"

"I don't doubt your word in the least," said Dewey. "It gives me pleasure to assent cordially to the description you give of yourselves."

Tom Hadley, who was rather obtuse, took this as a compliment, but Mosely was not altogether clear whether Dewey was not chaffing them. "That sounds all right," said he, suspiciously, "if you mean it."

"Oh, set your mind quite at rest on that subject, Bill, if that is your name. You may be sure that I mean everything I say."

"Then you won't give us a hint where to dig?"

"I am sorry to disoblige you, but I really couldn't."

"Do you hear that, Ben?" said Jake Bradley, his mouth distended with a grin. "Dick's chaffin' them scoundrels, and they can't see it. It looks as if they was huntin' for the gold-dust. They haven't found anything yet, and they haven't hurt Dick, or he wouldn't talk as cool as he does."

There was a brief conference, and then the first movement was made by the besieging-party.

Ki Sing, by Bradley's direction, walked to the entrance of the hut and looked placidly in.

As Mosely looked up he saw the Chinaman's face looking like a full moon, and for an instant he was stupefied. He could not conceive how his victim could have escaped from his captivity.

"Tom," he ejaculated, pointing to the doorway, "look there!"

"I should say so!" ejaculated Tom Hadley, no less surprised than his friend.

"How did you get here?" demanded Bill Mosely, addressing the Chinaman.

"Me walk up hill," answered Ki Sing, with a bland smile.

"How did you get away from the tree? That's what I mean, you stupid."

"Fliend come along--cut stling," answered the Chinaman, pronouncing his words in Mongolian fashion.

Bill Mosely was startled. So Ki Sing had a friend. Was the friend with him? "Where is your friend?" he asked abruptly.

"That my fliend," said the crafty Ki Sing, pointing to his master on the pallet in the corner.

"Yes, Ki Sing," said Dewey, "we are friends and will remain so, my good fellow."

Though he did not quite understand why Ben and Jake Bradley did not present themselves, he felt sure that they were close at hand, and that his unwelcome visitors would very soon find it getting hot for them.

"Look here, you yellow baboon!" said Bill Mosely, angrily, "you know what I mean. This man here didn't free

you from the tree. Anyway, you were a fool to come back. Do you know what I am going to do with you?"

Ki Sing shook his head placidly.

"I am going to tie you hand and foot and roll you down hill. You'd better have stayed where you were."

"No want loll down hillee," said the Chinaman, without, however, betraying any fear.

"I sha'n't ask whether you like it or not. But stop! Perhaps you can help us. Do you know where the gold-dust is?"

"Yes," answered Ki Sing.

Bill Mosely's face lighted up with pleasure. He thought he saw the way out of his difficulty.

"That's the very thing!" he cried, turning to his partner--"eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill."

"Just show us where it is, and we won't do you any harm."

"If my fliend, Dickee Dewee, tell me to, I will," said Ki Sing.

Dewey, thus appealed to, said, "No, Ki Sing; they only want to rob me, and I am not willing to have you show them."

"You'd better shut up, Dewey," said Mosely, insolently; "you're a dead duck, and you're only gettin' this foolish heathen into trouble. We've got tired of waitin' 'round here, and--"

"I am ready to excuse you any time," said Dewey. "Don't stay on my account, I beg. In fact, the sooner you leave the better it will please me."

Bill Mosely, who didn't fancy Dewey's sarcasm, frowned fiercely and turned again to Ki Sing. "Will you show us or not?" he demanded.

"Velly solly," said Ki Sing, with a childish smile, "but Dickee Dewee won't let me."

With an oath Mosely sprang to the doorway and tried to clutch the Chinaman, when the latter slid to one side and Jake Bradley confronted him.

"You'd better begin with me, Bill Mosely," he said.

CHAPTER IX.

BRADLEY'S SIGNAL VICTORY.

Bill Mosely started back as if he had seen a rattlesnake, and stared at Jake Bradley in mingled surprise and dismay.

"You didn't expect to see me, I reckon?" said Bradley, dryly.

Mosely still stared at him, uncertain what to say or what to do.

"I take it very kind of you to bring back the hosses you borrowed a few weeks since. You took 'em rather sudden, without askin' leave; it was a kind of oversight on your part."

"I don't know what you mean," answered Mosely, determined to brazen it out and keep the horses if possible, for he was lazy and a pedestrian tramp would not have suited him very well.

"You know what I mean well enough, Bill Mosely. If you don't, them mustangs outside may refresh your recollection. They look kinder fagged out. You've worked 'em too hard, Mosely."

"Those mustangs are ours. We bought 'em," said Mosely, boldly.--"Didn't we, Tom?"

"I should say so," remarked Hadley, with striking originality.

"That's a lie, Tom," remarked Bradley, calmly, "and you know it as well as I do."

"Are we goin' to stand that, Tom?" blustered Mosely, whose courage was beginning to revive, as he had thus far only seen Bradley, and considered that the odds were two to one in his favor. Of course the Chinaman counted for nothing.

Tom Hadley looked a little doubtful, for he could see that the enemy, though apparently single-handed, was a man of powerful frame and apparently fearless even to recklessness. He had a strong suspicion that Bill Mosely was a coward and would afford him very little assistance in the event of a scrimmage.

"If you can't stand it," said Bradley, "sit down, if you want to."

Thus far, Richard Dewey had remained silent, but he wished to participate in the defence of their property if there should be need, and of course must be released first.

"Jake," said he, "these fellows have tied me hand and foot. They couldn't have done it if I had not been partially disabled. Send in Ki Sing to cut the cords."

"They dared to tie you?" said Bradley, sternly.--"Mosely, what was that for?"

"To remove one obstacle in the way of plunder," Dewey answered for them.

"They're not only hoss-thieves, but thieves through and through. Since they tied you, they must untie you.-- Mosely, go and cut the cords."

"I am not a slave to be ordered round," returned Mosely, haughtily.

"What are you, then?"

"A gentleman."

"Then you'll be a dead gentleman in less than a minute if you don't do as I tell you."

As he spoke he drew out his revolver and levelled it at Mosely.

The latter turned pale. "Don't handle that we'pon so careless, stranger," he said. "It might go off." [Pg 81]

"So it might--as like as not," answered Bradley, calmly.

"Put it up," said Mosely, nervously.--"Tom, just cut them cords."

"Tom, you needn't do it.--Mosely, you're the man for that duty. Do you hear?"

Bill Mosely hesitated. He didn't like to yield and be humiliated before the man over whom he had retained so long an ascendancy.

"You'd better be quick about it," said Bradley, warningly. "This here we'pon goes off terrible easily. I don't want to shoot you, but there might be an accident. I've killed twenty-one men with it already. You'll be the twenty-second."

That was hint enough. Pride gave way, and Bill Mosely knelt down and cut the cords which confined Dewey, and the invalid, with a sense of relief, sat up on his pallet and watched the conference.

"There! are you satisfied?" asked Mosely, sullenly.

"It'll do as far as it goes, Mosely," said Bradley. "I wouldn't advise you to try any more of them tricks."

He lowered his weapon, and was about to replace it, when Mosely, who had made a secret sign to his companion, sprang forward simultaneously with Tom Hadley and seized the intrepid Bradley.

The attack was sudden, and also unexpected, for Bradley had such a contempt for the prowess of William Mosely that he had not supposed him capable of planning or carrying out so bold an attack. It must be admitted that he was taken at disadvantage, and might have been temporarily overpowered, for Tom Hadley was strong, and Mosely, though a coward, was nerved by desperation.

Richard Dewey saw his friend's danger, but, unhappily, he had no weapon at hand.

But help was not long in coming.

Concealed by the walls of the cabin, Ben had heard all that had been said, and observed the attack upon his comrade.

He did not hesitate a moment, but sprang forward and showed himself at Bradley's side.

"Let him go, or I'll shoot," he exclaimed in a tone of command, pointing at Mosely the twin brother of the revolver which Bradley owned.

"Confusion!" ejaculated Mosely, in fresh dismay.

"Let go," repeated Ben, firmly.

Bill Mosely released Bradley, and the latter threw off the grasp of Tom Hadley.

"Now," said he, as standing side by side with Ben he confronted the two thieves, "shall we shoot?"

"No, no," said Mosely, nervously.

"Serve you right if we did. So you thought you'd got me, did you? You didn't know about Ben, there. He ain't half your size, but he's got twice the courage.--Ben, what shall we do with them?"

Bill Mosely turned toward Ben, anxious to hear what our hero would say. He was entirely in the power of the two friends, as he realized.

"Serve them as they served Ki Sing," suggested Ben.

"That's a good idea, that is!--Here, you two rascals, trot out here."

Following directions, the two men emerged from the cabin and stood on one side of the doorway, feeling that they would gladly be in some other part of California at that precise moment.

"Mosely, do you see that tree?"

"Yes."

"Go to it."

Bill Mosely slowly and unwillingly proceeded to do as he was told.

"Ki Sing," said Jake Bradley to the Chinaman, who was standing near at hand, his face wearing a bland and contented smile, "have you any cord in your pocket?"

"Yes," answered the Celestial.

"Tie that man to the tree."

Ki Sing approached to follow instructions, when Bill Mosely shouted, "I'll brain you, you yaller heathen, if you dare to touch me!"

"Just as you say, squire," said Bradley, nonchalantly raising his revolver; "if you'd prefer to be shot I'm a very accommodatin' man, and I'll oblige you. I guess it'll be better, as we'll save all trouble."

"Stop! stop!" cried Mosely, in dismay. "He can tie me."

"You've changed your mind. I thought you would," said Bradley.--"Ki Sing, go ahead."

With native dexterity, and not without a feeling of satisfaction easily understood under the circumstances, Ki Sing proceeded to tie his former captor, but present captive, to a stout sapling.

"Is it strong?" asked Bradley.

"Velly stlong," answered the Chinaman, with a satisfied look.

"That's good.--Now, Tom, it's your turn. There's your tree! Annex yourself to it."

Tom Hadley saw the futility of resistance, and quietly allowed himself to be confined in the same manner as his companion.

When both were thus disposed of Jake Bradley turned to the Chinaman:

"Now, Ki Sing, let us have some supper as soon as possible. We've been doin' considerable business, Ben and I, and we're as hungry as bears.--Good-night, Mosely. Hope you'll have a good night's rest!"

"You are not going to leave us here all night, are you?" said Bill Mosely, uneasily.

"That's just what I'm goin' to do. I'll let you go in the mornin' if you behave yourself. Still, if you'd rather be shot I can accommodate you."

"What a bloodthirsty brute!" ejaculated the unhappy Mosely as Bradley disappeared within the doorway.

"I should say so!" echoed Tom Hadley from the other tree.

CHAPTER X.

"THE BEST OF FRIENDS MUST PART."

Mosely and his companion continued in captivity through the night. Some of my readers may consider the punishment a severe one, and it must be admitted that it was attended with no small share of discomfort. But for that time it was an exceedingly mild penalty for the offence which the two men had committed. In the early days of California, theft was generally punished in the most summary manner by hanging the culprit from a limb of the nearest tree, and that, in the majority of cases, would have been the fate of Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley.

But neither Bradley nor Ben was willing to go to such extremes. Jake Bradley had had rough experiences, and he was no soft-hearted sentimentalist, but he had a natural repugnance to taking the life of his fellow-creatures.

"Money," he said on one occasion to Ben, "ain't to be measured ag'in a man's life. I don't say I wouldn't kill a man for some things, though I should hate to mightily, but it wouldn't be on account of robbery. I wouldn't have a man's blood on my conscience for such a thing as that."

It is needless to say that our young hero, whose heart was warm and humane, agreed fully with his older companion.

When the two friends got up in the morning and went out of the cabin, they found their two captives in the same position in which they had left them. They looked weary and were stiff in the limbs, as well they might be.

"Well, my friends," said Bradley, "I hope you've passed a pleasant night."

"I'm almost dead," growled Bill Mosely. "I feel as if I'd been here a week."

"Do you feel the same way?" inquired Bradley, addressing Tom Hadley.

"I should say so," answered Hadley, in a voice of intense disgust.

"It was your own choice, Mosely," said Jake Bradley. "It was either all night braced up against a tree, or to be shot at once and put out of your misery."

"Who wants to be shot?" returned Mosely. "That would be worse than stayin' here all night. You might have let us go last night."

"So I might, but I wanted to teach you a lesson. You know very well, Bill Mosely, you'd have fared a good deal worse with some men. You'd have been swingin' from the nearest bough, and so would your friend. You'll come to that some time, but I'd rather some one else would hang you. It ain't a job I hanker after."

"Are you goin' to set us free?" asked Mosely, impatiently, not enjoying Bradley's prediction as to his future fate.

"Yes, I think I will--on one condition."

"Go ahead! I'll agree to anything."

"That you'll leave this part of California and not come back. I don't want you to cross my path ag'in."

"You can bet I don't mean to," said Mosely; and there is no doubt he was entirely in earnest.

"Do you make the same promise, Tom?" asked Bradley, turning to Hadley.

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"I should say so," returned Hadley; and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity also.

"You see, my friends, you don't appear to know the difference between your property and mine, particularly

when it comes to hosses. It is an unfortunate little peculiarity of yours that will bring your life to an untimely end some of these days. If you should ever reform and set up as respectable men, I might be willin' to know you, but there's about as much chance of that, accordin' to my reckonin', as of water runnin' up hill."

While he was expressing himself thus he was cutting the cords of his prisoners, and they took the first chance to stretch their cramped limbs.

"Feel better, don't you?" asked Bradley, smiling.

"I should say so," answered Hadley.

"Couldn't you give us something to eat?" asked Mosely; "I haven't eaten a mouthful since yesterday noon, and I feel faint."

"Ki Sing," said Bradley, "bring out some victuals. These men are not particular friends of mine, but we won't send them away hungry. I've known what it is to fast for thirty-six hours at a stretch, and I understand how it feels."

Ki Sing brought out some cold meat and other plain food, which the two adventurers ate as if they were famished. Their long fast and exposure during the night had sharpened their appetites and lent a keener zest to their enjoyment of the meal.

When they had finished Jake Bradley pointed down the mountain. "You've had your breakfast," he said, "and now there is only one thing more. I want to see you travel."

Bill Mosely looked askance at the two mustangs, which were tied only a few rods off.

Jake Bradley caught the direction of his glance. "It's no go, my friend," he said. "You don't borrow our mustangs this time. We shall have occasion to use them ourselves. It won't do you any harm to try your own legs for a while."

Bill Mosely wasn't easily abashed. He was lazy, and the prospect of tramping all day was by no means agreeable to him. Thanks to his last robbery, he and his companion were tolerably well supplied with gold-dust, which was a common circulating medium in California at that time. An idea struck him, which he lost no time in carrying out. "What value do you set on them horses?" he asked.

"What makes you ask?" inquired Jake Bradley, with some curiosity.

"We'll buy 'em if you'll take a fair price."

"Buy our mustangs! Have you got the money?"

"We've got gold-dust."

"Where did you get it? I'll warrant you didn't work for it."

"That's our business," answered Mosely, stiffly. "The question is, Do you want to sell?"

"No, I don't; and if I did I should want to know whose money I was takin'."

Bill Mosely was disappointed. In that lonely neighborhood it was hardly likely there would be any other opportunity of obtaining horses, and there was nothing for it but to walk.

"You haven't got any other business, have you, Mosely?" asked Bradley.

"No.--Tom, come on."

"Good-bye, then. Our acquaintance has been brief, Mosely, but I know you as well as if we'd lived in the same town for years. You're a fine man, you are, and an ornament to your native State; but if you ain't a little more careful you'll be likely to die young, and the world will lose a man who in his line can't be beat."

Bill Mosely did not attempt any reply to this farewell, but strode down the sloping path, closely followed by Tom Hadley.

When he had got out of hearing of his late captors he turned to Hadley and said, "I hate that man! He has put a stain on my honor; he has insulted and outraged me."

"I should say so," observed Tom Hadley.

"He has treated you just as badly, Hadley; that stain must be washed out in blood."

"When?" inquired his companion, in a matter-of-fact manner.

"I don't know. Some time. He has had the advantage over us this time, but we shall meet again. Do you hear that, Tom Hadley?" continued Mosely, in a theatrical tone, raising his voice at the same time--"we shall meet again."

"I don't want to meet him again," said Hadley.

"You don't comprehend me. When we meet it will be our turn to deal with him."

"Just as you say," returned Tom Hadley, varying his usual formula.

"It's very unlucky we went up to that cabin," said Bill, after a pause.

"I should say so," chimed in Tom, very emphatically.

"It was cursed ill-luck, but how could we know that that dare-devil was a friend of Dewey's? If we'd let well enough alone, we shouldn't have lost our horses and been compelled to tramp on foot over these mountains."

"Where are we going?" asked Tom Hadley.

"Down hill," answered Mosely briefly.

This answer did not appear to Tom Hadley to contain much information, but his mind was not active enough to frame another question, and the two plodded along in silence.



CHAPTER XI.

PLANS FOR DEPARTURE.

The recovery of the horses was in one respect especially fortunate. Richard Dewey was anxious to leave the mountain-cabin as soon as possible and make his way to San Francisco, where, as we know, his promised wife was anxiously awaiting him. But there was considerable danger that his ankle, which had been severely sprained, would not be in a condition for travelling for a considerable time yet. The rough mountain-paths would have tried it, and perhaps a second sprain would have resulted.

Now, however, he would be able to ride on one of the horses, and need not walk at all if he pleased.

This idea occurred to Jake Bradley, who suggested it to Richard Dewey.

Dewey's face brightened up, for he was secretly chafing over the delay made necessary by his accident. "But, my friend," he said, "it would be selfish in me to take your horse and leave you to go on foot."

"Look here, Dick Dewey," said Bradley: "what do you take me for? Do you think I'm so delicate I can't walk? I wasn't brought up in no such way. I can do my regular share of trampin', whether on the prairie or on the mountain. I ain't no tender-foot."

"I don't doubt your strength and endurance, friend Bradley," said Dewey, "but a man doesn't always like to do what he is fully able to do."

"Then we needn't say no more about it. There's a gal--I beg your pardon, a young lady--in 'Frisco that's pinin' to see you, Dick Dewey, and that hoss'll get you there sooner'n if you waited till you could walk."

"I am too selfish to resist your arguments, my good friend," said Dewey. "I think I can venture to start within a week, as I am to ride."

"No doubt of it."

"You'd better let me buy your horse, and then if we don't meet again, or anything happens to it, you won't be the loser."

"If we don't meet again?" repeated Bradley, puzzled. "You don't mean to say you are goin' to set out alone?"

"I don't want to take you and Ben away from your claim. It isn't half exhausted yet."

"Then let somebody else exhaust it," returned Bradley. "You don't suppose, Dick, we are goin' to let you go off alone?"

"I shall not be alone. My faithful attendant, Ki Sing, will be with me."

"And what good would Ki Sing be in case you fell in with a grizzly? I want to know that," asked Bradley. "I don't say anything against the heathen; he's squarer than many a white man I've met with, and he's worth a dozen such men as Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley; but, all the same, he wouldn't be much in a scrimmage. Them Chinamen are half women, accordin' to my reckonin'. They look like it and speak like it. No, Ben and I go when you do, and the first man that comes along is welcome to the claim."

"I shall certainly be delighted to have you both with me," said Richard Dewey. "You're a good fellow, Jake Bradley, and I trust you more than any man I have met since I came to California. Ben acted as escort to Florence, and I owe him a debt for that which I hope some day to repay."

"Then it's all fixed," said Bradley, in a tone of satisfaction. "We four are to keep together till we see you within reach of 'Frisco. When you and your young lady meet you won't need us any more."

Richard Dewey smiled. "Florence will wish to thank you for your kind care of me, Bradley," he said.

"I've no objection to that. You can invite me to the weddin', Dick."

"I give you that invitation now, and hope you may not have long to wait for the occasion. All difficulties are not yet removed, but I hope they may vanish speedily. I get impatient sometimes, but I try to curb my impatient feeling."

"I reckon I would feel so myself if I was in your fix," observed Bradley.

"I hope you may be, Jake."

Bradley shook his head.

"I'm a cross-grained old bachelor," he said, "and I reckon no gal would look at me twice."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROFITS OF MINING.

A few evenings later Ben and Bradley were sitting just outside the cabin as the twilight deepened.

"It doesn't seem as if this was our last night in the old shanty," said Jake Bradley, taking the pipe from his mouth. "It ain't a palace, but I shall kinder hate to leave it."

"I've got to feel very much at home here myself, Jake; still, I should like to get somewhere where it isn't quite so far out of the world."

"There's something in that, Ben."

"I haven't heard anything from home for a good many weeks; I wish I knew whether my uncle's family are all well."

"How many is there in the family, Ben?"

"There's Uncle Job and Aunt Hannah and Cousin Jennie."

"That's just what I thought," said Jake.

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"I don't understand you," said Ben, puzzled. "What did you think?"

"I thought there was a Cousin Jennie."

Our hero laughed, and, it may be, blushed a little. "What made you think that?"

"There generally is, I notice," said Mr. Bradley, eagerly. "Is Cousin Jennie pretty?"

"To be sure she is."

"I thought that too, Ben."

"What are you driving at, Jake?"

"I was sure there was some one besides the old folks that you was anxious about."

"Well, you happen to be right," said Ben, laughing. "But I must tell you that Jennie is only fourteen, and I am only sixteen."

"You'll both of you be older some day, Ben. But there's a matter that we must settle before we go."

"What's that?"

"About the gold we have found since we've been here. We must have some arrangement about dividin' it."

"We sha'n't quarrel about that, Jake."

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"No, there's no danger of that. That'll be easy enough. We'll divide it into two piles, one for you, and the other for me."

"Jake, I have no right to half of it. You ought to have two-thirds."

"I'd like to argy that matter, Ben. Why should I have two-thirds?"

"Because you earned it. You understood mining better than I."

"We're equal partners, Ben. I stick to that, and I mean to have my way. I've been making a little calculation, and I reckon there's nigh on to a thousand dollars for the two of us."

"As much as that, Jake?" said Ben, eagerly.

"I reckon there is, though I can't justly tell."

"It doesn't seem possible I can be worth five hundred dollars," said Ben, thoughtfully. "We've only been here four weeks. That makes a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week."

"So it does. That's pretty high pay for a boy."

"Before I left home," said Ben, "there was an old farmer, Deacon Pitkins, who wanted to hire me for a year. What do you think he offered me?"

"How much?"

"Twenty dollars a year and board," answered Ben.

"I reckon you did better to come to Californy."

"It looks so now. How the old deacon would stare if he knew how I had been prospering at the mines! I wish there was any way of sending part of this money home. I would like to make a present to Uncle Job."

"When you get to 'Frisco you won't have any trouble about sendin' it."

"Uncle Job thought it was very risky for a boy like me to leave home and seek my fortune in California. I would like to prove to him that I didn't make a mistake."

"It's likely you haven't, Ben," said Bradley cautiously, "but you ain't out of the woods yet. I hope things will go on as well as they have, and you'll be able to carry a pile home. But we've got to start in good season tomorrow, and we may as well turn in and go to sleep."



CHAPTER XIII.

KI SING'S RIDE.

The next morning after breakfast the party got off. Fortunately, there were no trunks or heavy luggage to carry. California pioneers had no occasion for Saratoga trunks, and the amount of clothing they carried in addition to what they had on was very small.

"Ki Sing," said Bradley, jocosely, "I am afraid we can't carry your trunk with us."

"'Tlunk'!" repeated the Chinaman, looking puzzled.

"Yes, trunk, or 'tlunk,' as you call it. Haven't you a trunk to carry your clothes?"

"Got clothes on," said Ki Sing, pointing to his blouse and wide pants.

"I see," said Bradley, laughing. "We're all about in the same fix. The clothes of the whole party wouldn't half fill a trunk."

The two horses were brought out and saddled.

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Bradley assisted Richard Dewey to mount one, and motioned to Ben to mount the other. "Get on, Ben," he said. "It's time the procession was moving."

Ben shook his head. "No, Jake," he said. "You are older than I am. It is proper that you should ride."

"If I'm older than you," said Bradley, "I am stronger than you, and am better able to walk."

"I am strong enough, Jake. I sha'n't get tired."

"One of us ought to ride. There's no use in havin' a horse if you ain't going to use him."

"Suppose," suggested Ben, laughing, "we let Ki Sing ride?"

Bradley saw that a joke was intended, and he turned gravely to the Chinaman. "Ki Sing," he said, "come here and mount this mustang. We are goin' to let you ride."

An expression of alarm overspread the Chinaman's broad face. He had never been on a horse's back in his life, but he knew something of the Californian mustangs. More than once he had seen them buck and throw the ill-fated riders over their heads, and, not being of a daring or venturesome nature, he preferred to walk rather than trust himself to mount the back of so treacherous an animal.

"Ki Sing no wantee lide," he said, starting back in alarm.

"But, Ki Sing, you will get tired tramping over these hills. It will be much easier to ride on a mustang."

"No likee mustang--mustang buckee," objected the Chinaman.

"You are right, Ki Sing. They do buck sometimes, but this animal is as mild and peaceful as a lamb. However, we won't insist on your riding now. Some other day, when you have found out how safe he is, you shall try him."

The Chinaman seemed much relieved at the privilege accorded him of walking, and with his small bundle prepared to take his place in the procession.

"Ben," said Bradley, "the best way for us to arrange will be to take turns in riding. I'd a good deal rather^{07]} walk half the way. My legs get cramped when I am on horseback too long. You remember I used to get off and lead the horse when we had one apiece. You may take your turn first, and as you are riding I will give you a bag to carry. Mind you don't lose it, for it contains our store of gold-dust."

"All right, Jake. I'll ride first, if you say so." In truth, Ben was pleased to find himself once more on the back of a horse. He had not had much practice in riding at the East, but the practice he had had in California had already made him a good rider, and even if the mustang had taken a fancy to buck he would have found it rather hard to dislodge our young hero. The animal he bestrode, however, was very well-behaved, especially when he felt that his rider had the mastery over him. Any horse, with any spirit, is apt to take advantage of a timid or unpractised rider, and the animal is very quick to learn when this is the case.

During the first day the mustang behaved remarkably well. To begin with, both Ben and Bradley were good riders. Moreover, the path was very uneven, chiefly up and down hill, and the horse was too sensible to go much beyond a walk.

As for Dewey, he got on very comfortably. His ankle was nearly as strong as at first, but if he had been compelled to use it for a day's tramp it would undoubtedly have ached and become sensitive. On the back of his horse--or rather Bradley's--there was of course no danger of injury. When he became tired of his constrained position he got off and walked a quarter or half a mile, and experienced the needed relief.

At the end of the first day they had got well down the mountain, and the commencement of the second day's ride was over a nearly level plateau.

"This is a good place for Ki Sing to ride," suggested Ben.

"Just so," said Bradley, taking the hint.--"Ki Sing, you must take your turn now."

"No wantee lide," said the Chinaman, but he did not greet the proposal with so much alarm as on the morning previous. He had noticed the quiet behavior and regular pace of the two mustangs, and concluded that they were of a different kind from those he had seen misbehave on former occasions.

"Oh, you'll like it well enough when you try it, Ki Sing," said Bradley. "Were you ever on a horse's back?"

"Me never lide," answered the Chinaman.

"Then it is high time you began. You see, Ki Sing, it isn't exactly fair that Ben and I should ride half the time and leave you to walk all the way."

"Likee walk," said Ki Sing.

"That's because you never tried riding. You see, these two hosses of ours are jest like lambs. They're so gentle they could be rid by a two-year-old baby."

The Chinaman looked at the mustangs, and confidence came to him. So far as he had observed, what Jake Bradley said was strictly true. They certainly did seem remarkably tame.

With a little more persuasion he was induced to mount, Ben assisting him to get into position, and the reins were put into his hands.

The mustang began to move off at a regular pace, very favorable to an inexperienced rider, and a bland and child-like smile of content overspread the face of the Chinaman.

"You see, Ki Sing," said Bradley, who walked alongside, "it's nothing to ride. You thought you couldn't ride, yet you are pacing it off like a veteran."

"Me likee lide," observed Ki Sing, with a pleased smile.

"Just so: I thought you would.--Ben, doesn't Ki Sing ride well?"

"Splendidly!" said Ben, contemplating with amusement the Mongolian horseman.

Certainly, Ki Sing in his Chinese garb, as he gingerly held the reins, with his bland, smiling face, did look rather queer.

But I am sorry to say that the poor Chinaman's pleasure and contentment were destined to be of short duration. Bradley and Ben were eager for the amusement they promised themselves when they planned this practical joke at the expense of their Asiatic friend.

Winking at Ben, Bradley said, "You don't go fast enough, Ki Sing."

As he spoke he brought down a stick which he had in his hand with emphasis on the flanks of the mustang. The effect was magical. The tame animal immediately started off at great speed, arching his neck and shaking his head, while the poor Chinaman, his bland smile succeeded by a look of extreme terror, was bounced up and down in the most unceremonious fashion, and would have been thrown off quickly but for the Mexican saddle, which is a securer seat than that used at the East.

He uttered a howl of anguish, while his almond eyes seemed starting out of their sockets as his steed dashed along the road.

Though Ben sympathized with the terrified Chinaman, he knew there was little or no danger, and he threw himself on the ground and gave way to a paroxysm of laughter.

Finally the horse slackened his pace, and Ki Sing lost no time in sliding to the ground.

"How do you like it, Ki Sing?" asked Bradley, trying to keep his face straight.

"No likee lide," answered Mr. Chinaman. "Horsee 'most kill Ki Sing."

"You rode splendidly, Ki Sing," said Ben, laughing. "You made him go fast."

"No likee go fast," said Ki Sing, inspecting his limbs to see that none were broken.

The poor Chinaman's limbs were sore for a day or two, and he could never be induced to mount one of the mustangs again.

It was his first and last ride.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOLDEN GULCH HOTEL.

The party were able to cover a greater distance on the second day than on the first, being now among the foot-hills, where travelling was attended with less difficulty.

In the mountain-cabin they had been solitary. Their only visitors had been Bill Mosely and his friend Tom Hadley, and such visitors they were glad to dispense with. Now, however, it was different. Here and there they found a little mining-settlement with its quota of rough, bearded men clad in strange fashion. Yet some of these men had filled responsible and prominent positions in the East. One of the most brigandish-looking miners had been a clergyman in Western New York, who had been compelled by bronchial troubles to give up his parish, and, being poor, had wandered to the California mines in the hope of gathering a competence for the support of his family.

"It seems good to see people again," said Ben, whose temperament was social. "I felt like Robinson Crusoe on his desert island when I was up on the mountain."

"Yes," answered Bradley, "I like to see people myself when they're of the right sort. When they're like Bill Mosely I'd rather be alone."

"I agree with you there," said Ben. "Poor company is worse than none."

Besides the mining-settlements there were little knots of miners at work here and there, who generally gave the travellers a cordial welcome, and often invited them to stay and join them.

"No," said Bradley, "we're in a hurry to get to 'Frisco."

"Oh, you've made your pile, then?" was generally answered. "What luck have you had?"

"Our pile is a small one," Bradley was wont to reply, "but we've got business in 'Frisco. Leastwise, he has," pointing to Richard Dewey, who headed the procession.

"Will you come back to the mines?"

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"I shall, for one," said Bradley. "I ain't rich enough to retire yet, and I don't expect to be for half a dozen years yet."

"Will the boy come back?"

"Yes," answered Ben. "I'm in the same situation as my friend, Mr. Bradley. I haven't my fortune yet."

"You'd better stay with us, boy. We'll do the right thing by you."

Ben shook his head and declined with thanks. He did not want to forsake his present companions. Besides, he had been commissioned by Florence Douglas to find Richard Dewey, and he wanted to execute that commission thoroughly. He wanted to see the two united, and then he would be content to return to the rough life of the mining-camp.

It is easy to understand why Ben should have received so many friendly invitations. A boy was a rarity in California at that time--at any rate, in the mining-districts. There were plenty of young men and men of middle age, but among the adventurous immigrants were to be found few boys of sixteen, the age of Paul⁶¹ hero. The sight of his fresh young face and boyish figure recalled to many miners the sons whom they had left behind them, and helped to make more vivid the picture of home which their imaginations often conjured up, and they would have liked to have Ben join their company. But, as I have said, Ben had his reasons for declining all invitations at present, though he had every reason to anticipate good treatment.

Toward the close of the second day the little party reached a small mining-settlement containing probably

about fifty miners.

It was known as Golden Gulch, and it even boasted a small hotel, with a board sign, on which had been scrawled in charcoal--

GOLDEN GULCH HOTEL.

KEPT BY JIM BROWN.

"I believe we are getting into the domain of civilization," said Richard Dewey. "Actually, here is a hotel. If Mr. Brown is not too exorbitant in his prices, we had better put up here for the night."

"It doesn't look like an expensive hotel," said Ben, looking at the rough shanty which the proprietor had dignified by the appellation of "hotel."

It was roughly put together, had but one story, was unpainted, and was altogether hardly equal, architecturally, to some of the huts which are to be found among the rocks at the upper end of Manhattan Island.

Such was Jim Brown's "Golden Gulch Hotel." Such as it was, however, it looked attractive to our pilgrims, who for so long had been compelled to be their own cooks and servants.

They found, upon inquiry, that Jim Brown's terms for supper, lodging, and breakfast were five dollars a day, or as nearly as that sum could be reached in gold-dust. It was considerably higher than the prices then asked at the best hotels in New York and Philadelphia; but high prices prevailed in California, and no one scrupled to pay them.

The party decided to remain, and the landlord set to work to prepare them a supper as good as the limited resources of the Golden Gulch Hotel would allow. Still, the fare was better and more varied than our travellers had been accustomed to for a long time, and they enjoyed it.

Ki Sing sat down to the table with them. This was opposed at first by Jim Brown, the landlord, who regarded Chinamen as scarcely above the level of his mules.

"You don't mean to say you want that heathen to sit down at the table with you?" he remonstrated.

"Yes, I do," said Richard Dewey.

"I'd sooner be kicked by a mule than let any yaller heathen sit next to me," remarked Jim Brown, whose education and refinement made him sensitive to such social contamination.

Richard Dewey smiled. "Of course you can choose for yourself," he said. "Ki Sing is a friend of mine, though he is acting as my servant, and I want him to have equal privileges."

Jim Brown remarked that of course Dewey could choose his own company, though he intimated that he thought his taste might be improved.

"Me eatee aftelward," said Ki Sing when he perceived that his presence at the table was the subject of controversy, but he was overruled by Richard Dewey, who possessed a large share of independence, and would not allow himself to be controlled or influenced by the prejudices of others.

This may not seem a very important matter, but it aroused a certain hostility on the part of the landlord, which arrayed him against Dewey and his companions at a critical time.

Entirely unconscious of the storm that was soon to gather about them, the little party did good justice to the supper which Mr. Brown set before them.

"How would it seem, Jake, to have supper like this every night?" remarked Ben.

"It would make me feel like a prince," answered Jake Bradley.

"It is no better than I used to get at Uncle Job's, and yet he was a poor man. How he would stare if he knew I was paying five dollars a day for no better fare than he gave me!" replied our hero.

"That's true, Ben; but maybe it's easier to get the five dollars here than it would have been to scrape together fifty cents at home."

"You're right there, Jake. Fifty cents was a pretty big sum to me a year ago. I don't believe Uncle Job himself averages over a dollar and a quarter a day, and he has a family to support. If I only do well here, I'll make him comfortable in his old age."

"I guess you'll have the chance, Ben. You're the boy to succeed. You're smart, and you're willin' to work, and them's what leads to success out here."

"Thank you, Jake. I will try to deserve your favorable opinion."

As Ben finished these words, there was a confused noise outside, the hoarse murmur as of angry men, and a minute later Jim Brown the landlord entered the room, his face dark and threatening.

"Strangers," said he, "I reckoned there was something wrong about you when you let that yaller heathen sit down with you. Now, I know it. You ain't square, respectable men; you're hoss-thieves!"



CHAPTER XV.

BILL MOSELY REAPPEARS.

It will be necessary to go back a little in order to explain how so extraordinary a charge came to be made against the party in which we are interested.

Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley did not become reconciled to the loss of their stolen horses. They found it much less agreeable to use their own legs than the legs of the two mustangs which had borne them so comfortably over the hills. They cursed the fate which had led to their meeting with Ki Sing, and the poor Chinaman would have fared worse at their hands had they anticipated the trouble which he indirectly brought them.

Bill Mosely was naturally lazy; any sort of work he considered beneath him, and he desired to avoid all possible trouble in the lawless and vagabond life which he had chosen. He took it worse, indeed, than his³¹ companion, who was neither so shiftless nor so lazy as he.

During the few days which had elapsed since they were glad to leave the mountain-cabin they had averaged less than ten miles' daily travel. They had money enough to purchase animals to replace those which had been taken from them, but had not found any one who was willing to sell for a reasonable price, and Mosely, though he came easily by his money, was far from lavish in the spending of it.

It chanced that an hour after the arrival of Richard Dewey and his party at the Golden Gulch Hotel, Mosely and his companion, dusty and tired, approached the small mining-settlement, of which the hotel was the principal building.

They had had nothing to eat since morning, and both of them felt hungry, not to say ravenous.

"Thank Heaven, Tom, there's a mining-town!" ejaculated Mosely, with an expression of devotion not usual to him. "Now we can get something to eat, and I, for my part, feel as empty as a drum. It's hard travelling on an empty stomach."

"I should say so," remarked Mr. Hadley, with his usual formula. It must be admitted, however, that in the²⁴ present instance he was entirely sincere, and fully meant what he said.

"There's a hotel," said Tom Hadley, a minute later, venturing on an original observation.

"So there is; what is the name?" inquired Mosely, who was not as far-sighted as his companion.

"The Golden Gulch Hotel," answered Hadley, shading his eyes and reading from a distance of fifty rods the pretentious sign of the little inn.

"I suppose they'll charge a fortune for a supper," said Mosely, whose economical spirit was troubled by the exorbitant prices then prevalent in California, "but we must have it at any cost."

"I should say so," assented Tom Hadley, cordially.

"You always have a good appetite of your own," observed Mosely, not without sarcasm, which, however, Tom Hadley was too obtuse to comprehend.

"I should say so," returned Tom complacently, as if he had received a compliment.

"No doubt you'll get your money's worth, no matter how much we pay for supper."

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Tom Hadley himself was of this opinion, and so expressed himself.

They had already caught sight of two mustangs which were browsing near the Golden Gulch Hotel, and the sight of these useful animals excited the envy and longing of Bill Mosely.

"Do you see them mustangs, Tom?" he inquired.

"I should say so."

"I wish we had them."

"Couldn't we take them?" suggested Hadley, his face brightening at the thought of this easy mode of acquiring what they so much needed.

"Are you mad, Tom Hadley?" returned Bill Mosely, shrugging his shoulders. "Are you anxious to die?"

"I should say--not."

"Then you'd better not think of carrying off them horses. Why, we'd have the whole pack of miners after us, and we'd die in our boots before twenty-four hours had passed."

On the whole, this prospect did not appear to be of an encouraging character, and Tom Hadley quietly dropped the plan.

"Perhaps we can buy them," suggested Mosely by way of amendment. "I've got tired of tramping over these hills on foot. After we've got some supper we'll inquire who they belong to."

Up to this point neither Mosely nor his companion suspected that the mustangs which they desired to purchase had once been in their possession. That discovery was to come later.

Before reaching the Golden Gulch Hotel they encountered the landlord, already introduced as Jim Brown.

Mr. Brown scanned the new-comers with an eye to business. Being strangers, he naturally looked upon them as possible customers, and was disposed from motives of policy to cultivate their acquaintance.

"Evenin', strangers," he remarked, as affably as a rather gruff voice and manner would permit.

"Good-evening," said Bill Mosely, socially. "What might be the name of this settlement?"

"You kin see the name on that sign yonder, stranger, ef your eyes are strong enough."

"Golden Gulch?"

"I reckon."

"It ought to be a good place, from the name."

"It's middlin' good. Where might you be from?"

"We're prospectin' a little," answered Bill Mosely vaguely; for there had been circumstances in his California career that made it impolitic to be too definite in his statements.

"Where are you bound?" continued the landlord, with that licensed curiosity which no one ventured to object to in California.

"That depends upon circumstances, my friend," said Bill Mosely, guardedly. "We may go to 'Frisco, and then again we may not. To-night we propose to remain here in Golden Gulch. Is that a comfortable hotel?"

"Well, stranger, seein' I keep it myself, it mightn't be exactly the thing for me to say much about it; but I reckon you won't complain of it if you stop there."

"I'm glad to meet you," said Bill Mosely, grasping the landlord's hand fervently. "I don't need to ask any more about it, seein' you're the landlord. You look like a man that can keep a hotel--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so," returned Tom Hadley, making the answer that was expected of him.

"You're a gentleman!" said Jim Brown, on whom this flattery had its effect. "Just come along with me and

"I'll see that you are treated as such."

"What are your terms, say, for supper and lodgin', landlord?" asked Bill, with commendable caution.

"Five dollars," answered Brown.

Bill Mosely's jaw fell. He had hoped it would be less.

"And for supper alone?" he asked.

"Two dollars."

"We'll only take supper," said Mosely.

"Just as you say."

"We're so used to campin' out that we couldn't breathe in-doors--eh, Tom?"

"I should say so, Bill."

"Suit yourselves, strangers. I reckon you'll want breakfast in the mornin'."

"As likely as not." Then, turning his attention to the mustangs: "Are them mustangs yours, landlord?"

"No; they belong to a party that's stoppin' with me."

"Will they sell?"

"I reckon not. There's a lame man in the party, and he can't walk much."

"A lame man? Who is with him?" asked Bill Mosely, with a sudden suspicion of the truth.

"Well, there's another man and a boy and a heathen Chinee."

"Tom," said Bill Mosely, in excitement, "it's the party we left on the mountain."

"I should say so, Bill."

"Do you know them, strangers?"

"Know them?" ejaculated Bill Mosely, who instantly formed a plan which would gratify his love of vengeance and secure him the coveted horses at one and the same time--"I reckon I know them only too well. They stole those mustangs from me and my friend a week ago. I thought them animals looked natural."

"Hoss-thieves!" said the landlord. "Well, I surmised there was something wrong about them when they let that yaller heathen set down to the table with them."



CHAPTER XVI.

A TRAVESTY OF JUSTICE.

It was speedily noised about in the mining-camp that a party of horse-thieves had had the audacity to visit the settlement, and were even now guests of the Golden Gulch Hotel.

Now, in the eyes of a miner a horse-thief was as bad as a murderer. He was considered rather worse than an ordinary thief, since the character of his theft gave him better facilities for getting away with his plunder. He was looked upon by all as a common and dangerous enemy, on whom any community was justified in visiting the most condign punishment.

Bill Mosely knew very well the feeling he would rouse against the men whom he hated, and, having started the movement, waited complacently for the expected results to follow.

Jim Brown was by no means slow in spreading the alarm. True, these men were his guests, and it might be considered that it was against his interests to denounce them, but he knew his claim for entertainment would be allowed him out of the funds found in possession of the party, with probably a liberal addition as a compensation for revealing their real character.

Horse-thieves! No sooner did the news spread than the miners, most of whom were through work for the day, began to make their way to the neighborhood of the hotel.

There hadn't been any excitement at Golden Gulch for some time, and this promised a first-class sensation.

"Hang 'em up! That's what I say," suggested Brown the landlord.

"Where's the men that call 'em thieves?" asked one of the miners, a middle-aged man, who was sober and slow-spoken, and did not look like a man to be easily carried away by a storm of prejudice or a wave of excitement.

"Here they be," said Brown, pointing to Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley, who were speedily surrounded by an excited crowd.

"What have you say?" asked the first speaker of Mosely.

Bill Mosely repeated his story glibly. It was to this effect: They had met the Chinaman, who induced them to accompany him to the cabin where his master lay sick. From motives of compassion they assented. When they reached the cabin they were set upon by the combined party, their horses were taken from them, they were tied to trees, where they were kept in great pain all night, and in the morning stripped of the greater part of their money and sent adrift.

It will be seen that the story did not entirely deviate from fact, and was very artfully framed to excite sympathy for the narrator and indignation against the perpetrators of the supposed outrage. Tom Hadley, who had not the prolific imagination of his comrade, listened in open-mouthed wonder to the fanciful tale, but did not offer to corroborate it in his usual manner.

The tale was so glibly told that it carried conviction to the minds of most of those present, and a storm of indignation arose.

"Let's have 'em out! let's hang 'em up!" exclaimed one impetuous miner.

Others echoed the cry, and the company of miners in stern phalanx marched to the hotel, where, unconscious of the impending peril, our friends were resting after the day's fatigue.

We have already described the manner in which Jim Brown burst in upon them with the startling charge that they were horse-thieves.

Of course all were startled except Ki Sing, who did not fully comprehend the situation.

Richard Dewey was the first to speak. "What do you mean," he said, sternly, "by this preposterous charge?"

"You'll find out soon enough," said the landlord, nodding significantly. "Jest you file out of that door pretty quick. There's some of us want to see you."

"What does all this mean?" asked Dewey, turning to Jake Bradley.

"I don't know," answered Bradley. "It looks like a conspiracy."

The party filed out, and were confronted by some thirty or forty black-bearded, stern-faced men, who had tried and condemned them in advance of their appearance.

Richard Dewey glanced at the faces before him, and his spirit sank within him. He had been present at a similar scene before--a scene which had terminated in a tragedy--and he knew how swift and relentless those men could be. Who could have made such a charge he did not yet know, but, innocent as he and his companions were, he knew that their word would not be taken, and the mistake might lead to death. But he was not a man to quail or blanch.

"Hoss-thieves! string 'em up!" was shouted from more than one throat.

Richard Dewey calmly surveyed the angry throng. "Gentlemen," he said, "I am no more a horse-thief than any one of you."

There was a buzz of indignation, as if he had confessed his guilt and implicated them in it.

"I demand to see and face my accusers," he said boldly. "What man has dared to charge me and my friends with the mean and contemptible crime of stealing horses?"

Jake Bradley had been looking about him too. Over the heads of the men, who stood before them drawn up in a semicircle, he saw what had escaped the notice of Richard Dewey, the faces and figures of Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley.

"Dick," said he, suddenly, "I see it all. Look yonder! There are them two mean skunks, Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley. It's they who have been bringin' this false slander ag'in us."

Richard Dewey and Ben immediately looked in the direction indicated.

Bill Mosely eyed them with a glance of evil and exulting triumph, as much as to say, "It's my turn now; I am having my revenge."

But Jim Brown, who seemed to be acting as prosecuting attorney, had already summoned the two men to come forward and testify.

"Here's the men!" he said, exultingly. "Here's the men you robbed of their horses and tied to trees.--Isn't it so, stranger?"

Bill Mosely inclined his head in the affirmative, and Tom Hadley, being also asked, answered, but rather faintly, "I should say so."

Lying did not come as natural to him as to Bill.

Richard Dewey laughed scornfully.

"Are those the men," he asked, "who charge us with stealing their horses?"

"In course they do."

"Then," burst forth Jake Bradley, impetuously, "of all the impudent and lyin' scoundrels I ever met, they'll carry off the prize."

"Of course you deny it," said Bill Mosely, brazenly persisting in his falsehood. "A man that'll steal will lie. Perhaps you will charge us with stealin' the horses next."

"That's just what I do," said Bradley, in an excited tone. "You're not only horse-thieves, but you'll take gold-dust an' anything else you can lay your hands on."

"Gentlemen," said Bill Mosely, shrugging his shoulders, "you see how he is tryin' to fasten his own guilt on me and my innocent pard here. It isn't enough that he stole our horses and forced us to foot it over them rough hills, but now he wants to steal away our reputation for honor and honesty. He thinks you're easy to be imposed on, but I know better. You won't see two innocent men lied about and charged with disgraceful crimes?"

"I admire that fellow's cheek," said Bradley in an undertone to Richard Dewey, but he soon found that the consequences were likely to be disastrous to him and his party. The crowd were getting impatient, and readily seconded the words of Jim Brown when he followed up Bill Mosely's speech by a suggestion that they proceed at once to vindicate justice by a summary execution.

They rushed forward and seized upon our four friends, Ki Sing included, and hurried them off to a cluster of tall trees some twenty rods away.



CHAPTER XVII.

LYNCH LAW.

Nothing is so unreasoning as a crowd under excitement. The miners were inflamed with fierce anger against men of whom they knew nothing, except that they were accused of theft by two other men, of whom also they knew nothing. Whether the charge was true or false they did not stop to inquire. Apparently, they did not care. They only wanted revenge, and that stern and immediate.

The moderate speaker, already referred to, tried to turn the tide by an appeal for delay. "Wait till morning," he said. "This charge may not be true. Let us not commit an injustice."

But his appeal was drowned in the cries of the excited crowd, "Hang the horse-thieves! string 'em up."

Each of the four victims was dragged by a force which he couldn't resist to the place of execution. [Pg 140]

Richard Dewey was pale, but his expression was stern and contemptuous, as if he regarded the party of miners as fools or lunatics.

"Was this to be the end?" he asked himself. "Just as the prospect of happiness was opening before him, just as he was to be reunited to the object of his affection, was he to fall a victim to the fury of a mob?"

Jake Bradley perhaps took the matter more philosophically than either of the other three. He had less to live for, and his attachment to life was not therefore so strong. Still, to be hanged as a thief was not a pleasant way to leave life, and that was what he thought of most. Again, his sympathy was excited in behalf of the boy Ben, whom he had come to love as if he were his own son. He could not bear to think of the boy's young life being extinguished in so shocking a manner.

"This is rough, Ben," he managed to say as the two, side by side, were hurried along by the vindictive crowd.

Ben's face was pale and his heart was full of sorrow and awe with the prospect of a shameful death pressing before him. Life was sweet to him, and it seemed hard to lose it.

"Yes it is," answered Ben, faltering. "Can't something be done?"

Jake Bradley shook his head mournfully. "I am afraid not," he said. "I'd like to shoot one of those lyin' scoundrels" (referring to Bill Mosely and his companion) "before I am swung off. To think their word should cost us our lives! It's a burnin' shame!"

Ki Sing looked the image of terror as he too was forced forward by a couple of strong miners. His feet refused to do their office, and he was literally dragged forward, his feet trailing along the ground. He was indeed a ludicrous figure, if anything connected with such a tragedy can be considered ludicrous. Probably it was not so much death that Ki Sing feared, for with his race life is held cheap, but Chinamen shrink from violence, particularly that of a brutal character. They are ready with their knives, but other violence is not common among them.

Bill Mosely and Tom Hadley followed in the rear of the crowd. They would have liked to improve their time by stealing away with the mustangs which they coveted, but even in this hour of public excitement they knew it would not be safe, and the act might arouse suspicion.

While Mosely felt gratified that the men he hated were likely to be put out of the way, there was in his heart a sensation of fear, and he involuntarily shuddered when he reflected that if justice were done he would be in the place of these men who were about to suffer a shameful death. Moreover, he knew that some day it were far from improbable that he himself would be figuring in a similar scene as a chief actor, or rather chief victim. So, though he exulted, he also trembled.

Meanwhile the place of execution had been reached. Then it was discovered that one important accessory to the contemplated tragedy was lacking--a rope. So one of the party was sent to the hotel for a rope, being

instructed by Jim Brown where to find it.

It seemed the last chance for an appeal, and, hopeless as it seemed, Richard Dewey resolved to improve it. "Gentlemen," he said in a solemn tone, "I call God to witness that you are about to put to death four innocent men."

"Enough of that!" said Jim Brown, roughly, "We don't want to hear any more of your talk."

But Dewey did not stop. "You have condemned us," he proceeded, "on the testimony of two as arrant scoundrels as can be found in California;" and he pointed scornfully at Bill Mosely and his partner.

"Are you goin' to let him insult us?" asked Mosely in the tone of a wronged man.

"That don't go down, stranger," said Jim Brown. "We know you're guilty, and that's enough."

"You know it? How do you know it?" retorted Dewey. "What proof is there except the word of two thieves and liars who deserve the fate which you are preparing for us?"

"Hang 'em up!" shouted somebody; and the cry was taken up by the rest.

"If you won't believe me," continued Dewey, "I want to make one appeal--to ask one last favor. Spare the life of that innocent boy, who certainly has done no evil. If there are any fathers present I ask, Have you the heart to take away the life of a child just entering upon life and its enjoyments?"

He had touched the chord in the hearts of more than one.

"That's so!" cried the speaker who had tried to stem the popular excitement. "It would be a crime and a disgrace, and I'll shoot the man that puts the rope 'round the boy's neck."

"You're right," cried three others, who themselves had left children in their distant homes. "The boy's life must be saved."

The two men who held Ben in their grasp released him, and our young hero found himself free. There was a great rush of joy to his heart as he saw the shadow of death lifted from him, but he was not satisfied that his life alone should be spared. He resolved to make an appeal in turn. "Gentlemen," he said, "I am only a boy, but I want to speak a few words, and those words shall be true."

Ben had been a good speaker at school, and he had unconsciously assumed the attitude with which he commenced declaiming upon the school-rostrum.

"Hear the boy!" shouted several; and there was a general silence. It was a new thing to be addressed by a boy, and there was a feeling of curiosity as to what he would say.

"I want to say this," continued Ben--"that what Mr. Dewey has said is strictly true. Not one of us is guilty of the crime that has been charged upon us. The men who have testified against us are thieves, and robbed us of these very horses, which we finally recovered from them. May I tell you how it all happened?"

Partly from curiosity, the permission was given, and Ben, in plain, simple language, told the story of how they had received Mosely and Hadley hospitably, and awoke in the morning to find that they had stolen their horses. He also described the manner in which later they tried to rob Dewey when confined to his bed by sickness. His words were frank and sincere, and bore the impress of truth. Evidently a sentiment was being created favorable to the prisoners, and Bill Mosely saw it and trembled.

"Let us go," he whispered to Hadley.

"If you wish to know whether I speak the truth," Ben concluded, "look in the faces of those two men who have accused us."

The terror in the face of Bill Mosely was plainly to be seen. Suddenly the minds of the fickle multitude veered round to the two accusers, and shouts arose: "The boy's right! Hang the thieves!"

Then Bill Mosely did perhaps the most unwise thing possible. His courage fairly broke down, and he started to run. Immediately a dozen men were on his track. He was brought back, moaning and begging for mercy, but the crowd was in no merciful mood. Victims they demanded, and when the rope was brought the two wretched men were summarily suspended to the branches of two neighboring trees.

They had fallen into the pit which they had prepared for others.

As for Ben, he became the hero of the hour. The miners raised him on their shoulders and bore him aloft in triumph to the hotel from which he had so recently been dragged to execution.



CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE EXECUTION.

While Ben rejoiced and lifted silent thanks to God for his narrow escape from a shameful death, he felt no satisfaction in the knowledge that the men who had basely conspired against them had suffered the like terrible fate. He averted his head in horror from the sight, and, innocent as he was of fault, he felt depressed to think that his words had resulted in bringing this punishment upon them.

I have said that he was the hero of the hour. Boys were scarce in California, and the hearts of the miners warmed to him on account of his youth and the memories it called up of their own children far away.

A self-appointed committee waited upon him and asked him to stay with them.

"We'll all help you along," they said. "We will make your share equal to that of the luckiest miner among us. You're true grit, and we respect you for it. What do you say?"

"What shall I do, Jake?" he asked of Bradley.

"It's a fair offer, Ben. Perhaps you'd best stay. I'd stay too, only I want to see Dick Dewey safe in 'Frisco. When he and his gal are j'ined I'll come back and try my luck here."

"I will do the same, Jake. I want to go to San Francisco and see the lady who was so kind to me. I sha'n't feel that I've done all my duty till I have seen her and Mr. Dewey united. Then I shall be ready to come back."

"Tell 'em so, Ben."

Ben gave this answer to those who had asked him to stay, thanking them gratefully for their kind offer. His answer gave general satisfaction.

Ben could hardly realize that these very men had been impatient to hang him only an hour before. He was thankful for this change in their sentiments, though he did not pretend to understand it.

Bradley and Dewey, knowing the fickleness of a mining-community, were a little apprehensive that their original suspicions might again be aroused, and that some among them might be led to think they had made a mistake, after all, and hung the wrong men. That would be serious, and perhaps dangerous to them. They reflected that only Ben's speech had turned the tide of sentiment, and the two thieves had been hung on the unsupported word of a boy. Might not this occur to some of the company in some of their cooler moments? They decided in a secret conference that it would be best for them to get away early the next morning--that is, as early as practicable--before any change had come over the minds of their new friends.

Later, however, they were relieved from their momentary apprehension.

Two men who had been out hunting did not return to the camp till an hour after the execution had taken place.

"What's happened? they asked.

"We've only been hangin' a couple of hoss-thieves," was answered coolly by one of their comrades. "We came near hangin' the wrong men, but we found out our mistake."

The two hunters went to view the bodies of the malefactors, who were still suspended from the extemporized gallows. [Pg 150]

"I know them men," said one with sudden recognition.

"What do you know about them? Did you ever meet them?"

"I reckon I did. They camped with me one night, and in the morning they were missing, and all my gold-dust too."

"Then it's true what the boy said? they're thieves, and no mistake?"

"You've made no mistake this time. You've hung the right men."

This fresh testimony was at once communicated to the miners, and received with satisfaction, as one or two had been a little in doubt as to whether the two men were really guilty. No one heard it with more pleasure than Dewey and Bradley, who felt now that they were completely exonerated.



CHAPTER XIX.

BEN WINS LAURELS AS A SINGER.

Our party had no further complaint to make of ill-treatment. During the remainder of the evening they were treated with distinguished consideration, and every effort was made to make their sojourn pleasant.

As the miners gathered round a blazing log-fire built out of doors, which the cool air of evening made welcome, it was proposed that those who had any vocal gifts should exert them for the benefit of the company.

Three or four of those present had good voices, and sang such songs as they knew.

Finally, one of the miners turned to Bradley. "Can't you sing us something, friend?" he asked.

"You don't know what you're asking," said Bradley. "My voice sounds like a rusty saw. If you enjoy the howlin' of wolves, mayhap you might like my singin'."

"I reckon you're excused," said the questioner.

"My friend Dick Dewey will favor you, perhaps. I never heard him sing, but I reckon he might if he tried."

"Won't you sing?" was asked of Dewey.

Richard Dewey would have preferred to remain silent, but his life had been spared, and the men around him, though rough in manner, seemed to mean kindly. He conquered his reluctance, therefore, and sang a couple of ballads in a clear, musical voice with good effect.

"Now it's the boy's turn," said one.

Ben, was in fact, a good singer. He had attended a country singing-school for two terms, and he was gifted with a strong and melodious voice. Bradley had expected that he would decline bashfully, but Ben had a fair share of self-possession, and felt there was no good reason to decline.

"I don't know many songs," he said, "but I am ready to do my share."

The first song which occurred to him was "Annie Laurie," and he sang it through with taste and effect. As his sweet, boyish notes fell on the ears of the crowd they listened as if spellbound, and at the end gave him a round of applause.

I don't wish to represent that Ben was a remarkable singer. His knowledge of music was only moderate, but his voice was unusually strong and sweet, and his audience were not disposed to be critical.

He sang one song after another, until at last he declared that he was tired and would sing but one more. "What shall it be?" he asked.

"Sweet Home," suggested one; and the rest took it up in chorus.

That is a song that appeals to the heart at all times and in all places, but it may well be understood that among the California mountains, before an audience every man of whom was far from home, it would have a peculiar and striking effect. The singer, too, as he sang, had his thoughts carried back to the home three thousand miles away where lived all who were near and dear to him, and the thought lent new tenderness and pathos to his song.

Tears came to the eyes of more than one rough miner as he listened to the sweet strains, and there were few in whom home-memories were not excited.

There was a moment's hush, and then a great roar of applause. Ben had made a popular success of which a prima donna might have been proud.

One enthusiastic listener wanted to take up a contribution for the singer, but Ben steadily declined it. "I am glad if I have given any one pleasure," he said, "but I can't take money for that."

"Ben," said Jake Bradley, when the crowd had dispersed, "you've made two ten-strikes to-day. You've carried off all the honors, both as an orator and a singer."

"You saved all our lives by that speech of yours, Ben," said Dewey. "We will not soon forget that."

"It was your plea for me that give me the chance, Mr. Dewey," said Ben. "I owe my life, first of all to you."

"That does not affect my obligation to you. If I am ever in a situation to befriend you, you may count with all confidence upon Richard Dewey."

"Thank you, Mr. Dewey. I would sooner apply to you than any man I know--except Bradley," he added, noticing that his faithful comrade seemed disturbed by what he said.

Jake Bradley brightened up and regarded Ben with a look of affection. He had come to feel deeply attached to the boy who had shared his dangers and privations, and in all proved himself a loyal friend.

The next morning the three friends set out for San Francisco, carrying with them the hearty good wishes of the whole mining-settlement.

"You have promised to come back?" said more than one.

"Yes," said Bradley; "we'll come back if we ain't prevented, and I reckon we won't be unless we get hanged for hoss-stealin' somewhere on the road."

This sally called forth a hearty laugh from the miners, who appreciated the joke.

"It's all very well for you to laugh," said Bradley, shaking his head, "but I don't want to come any nearer hangin' than I was last night."

"All's well that ends well," said one of the miners lightly.

Neither Ben nor Richard Dewey could speak or think so lightly of the narrow escape they had had from a shameful death, and though they smiled, as was expected by the crowd, it was a grave smile, with no mirth in it.

"You'll come back too, boy?" was said to Ben.

"Yes, I expect to."

"You won't be sorry for it.--Boys, let us stake out two claims for the boy and his friend, and when they come back we'll help them work them for a while."

"Agreed! agreed!" said all.

So with hearty manifestations of good-will the three friends rode on their way.

"It's strange," observed Dewey, thoughtfully, "how this wild and lonely life effects the character. Some of these men who were so near hanging us on the unsupported accusation of two men of whom they knew nothing were good, law-abiding citizens at home. There they would not have dreamed of such summary proceedings."

"That's where it comes in," said Bradley. "It ain't here as it is there. There's no time here to wait for courts and trials."

"So you too are in favor of Judge Lynch?"

"Judge Lynch didn't make any mistake when he swung off them two rascals, Hadley and Bill Mosely."

"We might have been in their places, Jake," said Ben.

"That would have been a pretty bad mistake," said Bradley, shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER XX.

A LITTLE RETROSPECT.

It will be remembered that a merchant in Albany, Mr. John Campbell, was the guardian of Miss Florence Douglas, whom our hero, Ben, had escorted from New York to San Francisco.

The disappearance of his ward was exceedingly annoying, since it interfered with plans which he had very much at heart. He had an only son, Orton Campbell, now a young man of twenty-eight. He was young in years only, being a stiff, grave, wooden-faced man, who in his starched manners was a close copy of his father. Both father and son were excessively fond of money, and the large amount of the fortune of the young lady, who stood to the father in the relation of ward, had excited the covetousness of both. It was almost immediately arranged between father and son that she should marry the latter, either of her own free will or upon compulsion.

In pursuance of this agreement, Mr. Orton Campbell took advantage of the ward's residence in his father's family to press upon her attentions which clearly indicated his ultimate object.

Florence Douglas felt at first rather constrained to receive her guardian's son with politeness, and this, being misinterpreted, led to an avowal of love.

Orton Campbell made his proposal in a confident, matter-of-fact manner, as if it were merely a matter of form, and the answer must necessarily be favorable.

The young lady drew back in dignified surprise, hastily withdrawing the hand which he had seized. "I cannot understand, Mr. Campbell," she said, "what can have induced you to address me in this manner."

"I don't know why you should be surprised, Miss Douglas," returned Orton Campbell, offended.

"I have never given you any reason to suppose that I regarded you with favor."

"You have always seemed glad to see me, but perhaps that was only coquetry," said Orton, in a disagreeable manner.

"I certainly have never treated you with more than ordinary politeness, except, indeed, as my residence in your father's house has necessarily brought us nearer together."

"I don't think, Miss Douglas, you would find me a bad match," said the young man, condescending to drop his sneering tone and plead his cause. "I am already worth a good sum of money. I am my father's partner, and I shall become richer every year."

"It is not a matter of money with me, Mr. Campbell. When I marry, that will be a minor consideration."

"Of course, because you have a fortune of your own."

"Yes," said Florence, regarding him significantly, for she suspected that it was rather her fortune than herself that he desired, being no stranger to his love of money.

Perhaps he understood her, for he continued: "Of course I don't care for that, you know. I should offer myself to you if you had nothing."^{161]}

This Florence Douglas thoroughly disbelieved. She answered coldly, "I thank you for the compliment you pay me, but I beg you to drop the subject."

"I will wait."

"You will wait in vain. I will look upon you as a friend if you desire it, but there can be nothing more than friendship between us."

Orton Campbell was very much chagrined, and reported the result of his suit to his father.

"I will speak to her myself," said the father. "As her guardian I ought to have some influence with her."

He soon ascertained, however, that Florence Douglas had a will of her own.

After a time he dropped persuasion and had recourse to threats. "Miss Douglas," he said, "I shall have to remind you that I am your guardian."

"I am quite aware of that fact, sir."

"And I shall remain in that position till you have completed your twenty-fifth year."

"That is quite true, sir."

"If you take any imprudent steps I shall think it necessary to interfere."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I shall not allow you to fall a prey to any designing fortune-hunter."

"You need not fear, sir: I am in no danger."

"I am of a different opinion. I am quite aware that Richard Dewey has been seeking to ingratiate himself with you."

"Then," said his ward with dignity, "I have no hesitation in informing you that he has succeeded."

"Ha! I thought so. That is why you rejected my son."

"Excuse me, sir: you are quite mistaken. I should refuse your son if there were no other man in the world likely to marry me."

"And what is the matter with my son, Miss Douglas?" demanded her guardian, stiffly.

Florence might have answered that he was too much like his father, but she did not care to anger her guardian unnecessarily, and she simply answered, "It would be quite impossible for me to regard him as I wish to regard the man whom I hope to marry."

"But you could regard Richard Dewey in that way," sneered Campbell. "Well, Miss Douglas, I may as well tell you that he asked my permission yesterday to address you, and I ordered him out of my presence. Moreover, I have charged the servants not to admit him into the house."

"So you have insulted him, Mr. Campbell?" said his ward, her eyes flashing with resentment.

"It was the treatment which he deserved as an unscrupulous fortune-hunter."

"That word will better apply to your son," said the young lady, coldly. "I shall not remain here to have Mr. Dewey insulted."

"You will repent this, Miss Douglas," said her guardian, with an ugly frown. "Mark my words: I will keep you and Dewey apart. I have the power, and I will exert it."

Two weeks later Richard Dewey sailed for California in search of fortune, and five months later Miss Douglas, fearing that her guardian might imprison her in a mad-house, escaped from his residence, and, aided by Ben, also managed to reach California. For a time Mr. Campbell was entirely ignorant of her place of refuge. The next chapter will show how he discovered it.



CHAPTER XXI.

MR. CAMPBELL RECEIVES TIDINGS OF HIS WARD.

"It is strange we can't find Florence," said Orton Campbell to his father one morning some months after the young lady's departure. "Is there no clue?"

"The detective I have employed has failed to trace her."

"Has he no theory?"

"He suggests that she may have gone to Europe," said Mr. Campbell, "but I am not of that opinion."

"What do you think, then?"

"I suspect she has buried herself in some obscure country place under some assumed name, there to remain till she has attained her twenty-fifth year, when my guardianship ceases."

"When will that be?"

"Six months hence."

"It is very important, then, that we should find her before that time," said Orton Campbell, thoughtfully. Pg 166]

"That is true. After the time referred to my power ceases, and I shall be unable to assist you in your plans."

"Her fortune amounts to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, does it not?"

"More than that. The interest has been accumulating till it amounts to nearer one hundred and seventy thousand dollars."

Orton Campbell's eyes sparkled with covetous greed.

"That is a stake worth playing for," he said. "With what I have of my own, it would make me independently rich."

"Just so, Orton," said his father.

"And nothing stands in the way but the caprice of a foolish girl! I declare, father, it is too exasperating. Suppose we try another detective? Your man can't be very sharp."

"I have no objection, Orton," said the merchant, "but as he would be employed in your interest, it is only fair that you should pay the expense incurred."

"I don't see that," said the son. "She is your ward, you know. It ought to come out of her property."

"The item may not be allowed. In that case I should be responsible," said John Campbell, cautiously.

"I'll tell you what I will do, father: if she is found and I marry her, I'll freely pay the whole expense."

"Suppose we find her, and she won't marry you: what then?" asked his father, keenly.

The son looked nonplussed, but finally consented in that case to defray the expense out of his private means--that is, if it could not be taken out of the young lady's fortune.

The matter having been satisfactorily adjusted, they were discussing the choice of a detective when a clerk came to the door of the private counting-room in which father and son were seated and said, "There's a man outside wants to speak to you, Mr. Campbell."

"Who is he, Saunders?"

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"I think it's Jones, who used to be in your employ as light porter."

"How does he look? Well-to-do?"

"He is decidedly shabby," answered Saunders.

"Come to ask help, probably," muttered the merchant. "I think I won't see him."

Saunders left the office, but presently returned.

"Well, has he gone?" asked the merchant.

"No; he says he wants to see you on business of importance."

"Of importance to himself, probably.--Shall I see him, Orton?"

"Yes, father. If he is humbugging us, we can send him off."

So permission was given, and almost immediately Saunders ushered into the room a short, broad-shouldered fellow, who looked very much like a professional tramp.

"Good-morning, Mr. Campbell," said he, deferentially.

"Humph, Jones, is it you? You don't look as if you had prospered."

"No more I have, sir."

"Don't come near me. Really, your appearance is very disreputable."

"I can't help that, sir. I've just come from California in the steerage, and you can't keep very neat there."

"I believe you went to California to make your fortune, didn't you, Jones?" said Orton Campbell, with a cynical smile.

"Yes, Mr. Orton, I did."

"And you didn't make it, I infer from your appearance."

"I haven't got much money about me now," said Jones, with a shrug and a smile.

"You would have done better not to have left my employment, Jones," said the merchant. "You wanted higher pay, I believe, and as I wouldn't give it, you decided that you could better yourself at the mines."

"That is about so, sir."

"Well, and what luck did you have?"

"Good luck at first, sir. I made a thousand dollars at the mines in a few months."

"Indeed!" said Orton, in surprise.

"I came with it to San Francisco, and gambled it away in one night. Then I was on my beam-ends, as the sailors say."

"Did you go back?"

"No. I went to work in the city, and managed to get enough money to buy a steerage passage, and here I am."

"I suppose you have come to ask me to take you back into my employ? That, I take it, is your business with me."

"No, sir--not exactly."

"Then, what is it?" asked the merchant, looking a little puzzled. It crossed his mind that Jones might so far

have forgotten his rule never to give away money for any purpose as to suppose there was a chance to effect a loan.

"I thought you and Mr. Orton might be willing to pay my expenses back to San Francisco," said Jones, coolly.

"Are you out of your head, Jones?" demanded Orton Campbell, amazed at the man's effrontery.

"Not at all."

"If this is meant as a joke, Jones," said the merchant in a dignified tone, "it is a very poor--and, I may add, a very impudent--one. What possible claim have you on us, that you should expect such a favor?"

"Have you heard anything of your ward, Mr. Campbell?" asked Jones, not in the least abashed.

"No. What has my ward to do with your concerns?"

"I have seen her," answered Jones, briefly.

"Where?" asked John Campbell and his son simultaneously.

"That information belongs to me," said Jones, quietly. "A detective doesn't work without pay."

The two Campbells now began to see the point. This man had information to sell, and would not give it up without what he considered suitable compensation. They determined to drive the best possible bargain with him. He was poor, and probably could be bought over for a small sum.

"Your information is worth something, Jones," said the merchant, guardedly. "I will go so far as to give you twenty-five dollars cash for it."

"That won't do," said Jones, shaking his head.

"Your information may be worth nothing," said Orton. "You may have seen her, but that doesn't show where she is now."

"I know where she is now," said Jones.

"Is she in California?"

"I don't mind telling you as much as that, Mr. Orton."

"Then we can find her without your assistance."

"I don't think you can. At any rate, it will take time, especially as, if you don't make a bargain with me, I shall write her that you are on her track."

Father and son looked at each other.

It was evident that Jones was no fool, and they would be obliged to submit to his terms or give up the search, which was not to be thought of.

"What do you propose, Jones?" asked Mr. Campbell, a little less haughtily.

"That you pay my expenses back to California and one thousand dollars," said Jones, promptly. "If you or Mr. Orton will go with me, I will show you where she lives, and then you can take your own course."

This was finally agreed to, and Orton Campbell and the ex-porter sailed by the next steamer for San Francisco, where Florence Douglas, still boarding with Mrs. Armstrong, was waiting impatiently for news of Richard Dewey.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MORNING CALL.

Florence Douglas had now been an inmate of Mrs. Armstrong's household for some months. She avoided making acquaintances, and therefore was often lonely. But she was buoyed up by the thought that Richard Dewey was somewhere in the State, and that the two messengers whom she had sent out would eventually find him. She felt great confidence in Ben, and also in Bradley, who had impressed her as an honest, straightforward man, though illiterate and not at all times superior to temptation.

Her hope had been sustained by a letter received from Ben at the time he and Bradley were on the point of starting for the Sierras, where they had information that Dewey was engaged in mining. Then weeks passed, and she heard nothing. She began to feel anxious for the safety of her two agents, knowing that not alone wild beasts, but lawless men, were to be encountered among the mountains. Should Ben and his companion come to harm, she would be sincerely sorry for their fate, feeling in a measure responsible for it. Still more, Richard Dewey would then be left ignorant of her presence in California, and might return to the East in that ignorance, leaving her friendless and alone more than three thousand miles from her old home.

How would her heart have been cheered could she have known that at that moment Richard Dewey, with his two faithful friends, was but four days' journey from the city! So it happens that good fortune is often nearer to us than we imagine, even when our hearts are most anxious.

While she was trying to look on the bright side one morning, Mrs. Armstrong entered her room. "Miss Douglas," she said, "there is a gentleman in the parlor who wishes to see you."

Her heart gave a great bound. Who could it be but Richard Dewey who would call upon her?

"Did he give his name?" she asked, in agitation.

"No; he said you would know him."

"It must be Richard," she said to herself; and, controlling her agitation as well as she could, she descended to the parlor. She paused a moment before opening the door to regain her self-possession. Then, with an effort, she turned the knob, and entering the room, found herself face to face with Orton Campbell!

It was so unexpected and so bitter a disappointment that an expression of blank dismay overspread her face, and she sank into the nearest chair without venturing on a single word of greeting.

"You didn't expect to see me, Miss Douglas?" said Orton, enjoying the effect of his appearance, for he had never deceived himself with the thought that his father's ward would be glad to see him.

By this time Florence had regained her self-possession, and with it came back scorn for the man whose object in pursuing her she well understood to be love of her fortune, not of herself.

"You are entirely right, Mr. Campbell," she answered. "You are the last person I expected to see."

"You don't appear very glad to see me," he continued.

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"Why should I appear so? You know very well that I am not glad to see you," said the heiress, frankly.

"That is complimentary," said Orton, rather provoked, though he knew very well in advance that such was her feeling.

"I suppose you didn't come here for compliments, Mr. Campbell?" said Florence, coldly.

"You are right: I didn't."

"May I ask if you are in San Francisco on business?"

"You take things very coolly, I must say, Miss Douglas. Certainly you cannot be ignorant of my motive in coming here at great personal inconvenience."

"I hope I have nothing to do with your reason."

"You are the sole reason."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"I came to remonstrate with you on the very unwise step you took in running away from your legal guardian."

"My legal guardian, as you call him, though I look upon him as such only as far as my property is concerned, rendered the step necessary."

"I don't see how."

"In plain terms, Mr. Orton Campbell, I believe that you and your father entered into a conspiracy to keep my fortune in the family by inducing me to become your wife."

"I certainly did ask you to become my wife, but it was not because of your fortune," answered the young man.

Florence's lip curled. She thoroughly disbelieved his statement. Though she said nothing, it was clear to him from her expression that she put no confidence in his words.

"You may believe me or not," he said, doggedly; "but why should you think so poorly of yourself as to suppose you have nothing to attract lovers except your money?"

"I may not be so modest as you suppose, Mr. Campbell. I do believe that I have won the love of a true and noble man. My doubt only related to yourself."

"You mean Richard Dewey, I suppose?" said Orton Campbell, with a sneer.

"I do mean Richard Dewey," answered Florence, with composure.

"By the way, he came to California, I believe."

"Yes."

"And you came here in pursuit of him?" he added, with a sneer.

"I came here to find him, knowing that in him I had a true friend, while your father's persecution and your own made me feel the need of one."

"Have you found him? Do you know where he is?" asked Orton Campbell, eagerly.

"I only know he is somewhere at the mines. I have taken steps to find him, and hope eventually to succeed."

"Why don't you advertise?" asked the young man, with an angry sneer.

"Would you advise it?" asked Miss Douglas, coolly.

"No," muttered Orton, for he feared such a step might prove successful. "What steps have you taken?" he asked.

"I prefer to keep them to myself."

"Miss Douglas," said Orton Campbell, after a pause, "all this is very foolish and humiliating. There is only one proper course for you to pursue."

"What is it?"

"Return to New York with me in the next steamer, and place yourself once more under the care of my father, whose protection you never ought to have left."

"Protection!" repeated Florence, with bitter emphasis. "What protection did he give me?"

"All that was required."

"All that was required"? You know very well that you and he had conspired to put me in a mad-house if I would not agree to enrich you by giving you my hand."

"That is not true," said Orton Campbell, rather confused.

"Not true"? He distinctly threatened to do it as a means of terrifying me into compliance with his and your wishes. It was not until then that I decided to leave your house and seek some place of refuge until time and the law should set me completely free from your family and their machinations."

"It is evident, Miss Douglas, that you are under a delusion. Your way of talking is sufficient to show that your mind is affected. Any good physician would need no other proof."

Florence Douglas looked at him with distrust. Was this a threat, or how should she interpret it?

"It is convenient, Mr. Orton Campbell," she retorted with spirit, "to charge with madness those who oppose us. At home I felt afraid of your threats: here I am secure."

He thought that perhaps he had gone too far, since the young lady was independent of him, and it was not certain that he could gain possession of her.

"Miss Douglas," he said, "I have already told you that you have taken an unwise step. There is one way to remedy it, and I hope I may be able to induce you to take it. Let me assure you that I have called upon you as a friend, as a warm friend, as one who seeks to be something more than a friend."

"Well, sir?"

"Let me urge you to consent to an immediate marriage with me, and to accompany me home on the next steamer. My father will receive you as a daughter, and never allude to your flight."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for your disinterested proposal, Mr. Campbell, but I can only tell you that you ask what is entirely out of the question. This is final. Allow me to wish you good-morning."

"But, Miss Douglas--"

She did not turn back nor heed these last words, and Orton Campbell found himself alone.

He rose slowly from his seat, and an evil look came into his eyes. "She has not done with me yet," he muttered as he left the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SECRET CONFERENCE.

The affairs of Florence Douglas are so interwoven with the fortunes of my young hero that I find myself obliged to devote a part of my space to their record. I confess that I have no pleasure in detailing the schemes of Orton Campbell, who seems to me a very disagreeable character, but it seems necessary.

After leaving the presence of Miss Douglas he took a walk, to consider the situation and decide what it was most expedient to do. He was spending considerable time and money in the effort to recover his father's ward, and he did not like to fail. Yet it was not easy to decide upon any plan which would bring success. It was not a matter in which he could invoke the assistance of the law. The young lady's manner convinced him that she would not of her own free will consent to accompany him back. What, then, was to be ~~done?~~

On the principle that two heads are better than one, he resolved to take his companion, Jones, into his confidence and ask him to make a suggestion.

"How did you find the young lady, Mr. Orton?" asked his follower on his return to the hotel.

"Very offish, Jones."

"Then she wasn't glad to see you?" said Jones, with a grin.

"By no means. She hardly treated me with civility."

"That's because of the other man," said Jones, sagaciously.

"You are right. Mr. Dewey, as I learned, is in California."

"Then maybe they have an understanding together."

"No; she doesn't know where he is."

Jones was puzzled, and showed it in a way common to men of his class. He scratched his head and looked perplexed.

"Then, what good is it for her to stay here?" he asked, after a pause.

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"She is taking steps to find this Dewey, who is somewhere at the mines, though she would not tell me what they were. He may turn up any time, and then good-bye to all my hopes."

"You want to marry her yourself, Mr. Orton?"

"Of course. Otherwise I wouldn't have come so far in search of her."

"The young lady is very rich, isn't she?" asked Jones, shrewdly.

"She has a moderate fortune," replied Orton, guardedly; "but that doesn't influence me."

"Of course not," said Jones; but there was something in his tone which made Campbell eye him sharply.

"I am no fortune-hunter," said he, stiffly.

"You'd want to marry her just the same if she hadn't a cent?"

"Of course I would," snapped Orton.

"Now, that's what I call real love," said Jones. "To be sure, you're rich yourself, and needn't mind."

"Precisely so. I may not be rich, but I can support a wife."

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"As the young lady prefers some one else, I suppose we may as well go home?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about, Jones. Very likely this Dewey is dead; at any rate, he's a mere fortune-hunter. Now, although Florence doesn't care to marry me now, if our marriage could be brought about she would no doubt be reconciled to it after a while. Now, Jones, have you anything to suggest?"

Orton Campbell threw himself back in his chair and eyed Jones. He had formed a plan, but, if possible, he wanted the proposal to come from Jones.

Jones was not over-scrupulous; he had never been so, and the months he had spent in the mines in the company of adventurers of all kinds had not improved him. Even law-abiding citizens often lost their regard for law in California, and Jones had fewer scruples to overcome than most.

He suggested a plan which met with the approval of his employer, and promised his co-operation on the understanding that if successful Campbell should properly reward him.

It may be added that of the thousand dollars which he was to receive for his information he had actually received but three hundred, Orton Campbell having on various pretexts put off paying him. He received the assurance that this also should be paid him without further delay as soon as the plan referred to was successfully carried out.



CHAPTER XXIV.

MISS DOUGLAS RECEIVES A MESSAGE.

Florence Douglas felt somewhat uneasy after the visit of Orton Campbell. Though he had no legal right to interfere with her, even as the representative of his father, she knew the unscrupulous character of the man, and that he would not have spent time and money in a visit to California unless he had a strong hope of carrying her back with him. Her chief fear was that he would carry out his father's threat and try to have her pronounced of unsound mind, in which case he could have her confined in an asylum.

"If I could only hear from Richard Dewey!" she fervently ejaculated. "If he were here I would have nothing to fear."

Two days passed, and, considerably to her relief, she heard nothing from Campbell. She began to hope that he had given up his purpose and made arrangements to return to the East. She was determined to refuse^{89]} him an audience if he should call upon her again, either with or without companions. That she might feel more secure, she took her landlady, Mrs. Armstrong, into her confidence.

This lady had become much attached to her guest, and listened with great indignation to the account which Florence gave her. "My dear Miss Douglas," she said, "if that man Campbell calls, leave me to deal with him."

"How would you propose to do it?" asked Florence, smiling.

"I would give him a piece of my mind, you may depend upon that."

"He would be rude to you."

"In that case I would order him out of the house," said Mrs. Armstrong, resolutely. "The man needs a lesson, and I should like to be the one to give it to him."

"I shall be very glad to have you meet him in my place," said the young lady. "An interview with him is something which I would gladly avoid."

"That you shall! I only hope he'll come soon. He'll find one woman that isn't afraid of him." [Pg 190]

"I am not afraid of him, Mrs. Armstrong, but I own that I am apprehensive of what he may do. It would not surprise me at all if he should make his appearance with some needy physician who for a fee will be ready to pronounce me insane."

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Florence. I'll send the doctor packing, as well as his employer. Perhaps he will pronounce me insane. If he does, he is welcome to. I think he would find me an unsatisfactory patient."

"I think so too," said Florence, smiling, as she scanned the firm, determined face and the tall and muscular form of her hostess, who certainly would never be classed as a weak or timid woman.

On the afternoon of the third day a knock was heard at the door, for as yet it was unprovided with a bell.

Mrs. Armstrong and Florence were sitting together.

The two glanced at each other, and the same thought came to each.

"It may be Orton Campbell," said Florence, who was the first to speak. [Pg 191]

"Then let me go to the door. Stay where you are, Miss Douglas; I will receive the gentleman."

But when the landlady opened the door she saw a man who looked like a coachman. A covered carriage was at the gate, which he had evidently driven.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" demanded the landlady, sharply.

"Is there a young lady living with you named Florence Douglas?" asked the man.

"Miss Florence Douglas boards here," answered Mrs. Armstrong.

"I've got a message for her, ma'am."

"If it's from Mr. Orton Campbell, you can go back and tell him that she won't receive any messages from him," said the landlady, resolutely.

"I don't know who you mean, ma'am," replied the man, in apparent surprise. "I don't know any such gentleman."

"Then who sent you?" inquired the landlady, whose turn it was to be surprised.

"It's a man just come from the mines," said the driver--"a Mr. Dewey."

Florence had drawn near to the head of the stairs in her interest to hear who had called, and she caught the name of her lover. She came flying down stairs, and demanded breathlessly, "What about Richard Dewey? I am Miss Douglas, and your message is for me."

Jones, for it was he, touched his hat respectfully, and held out a note penned on rough paper and written in pencil.

"This will explain everything, miss," he said.

Florence took the paper, and with some difficulty read it. It ran thus:

"DEAR FLORENCE: I have struggled to reach you, but have been struck down by fever when I was nearly at the end of my journey. I have had bad luck at the mines, and was almost discouraged, when I learned that you were in San Francisco. Poor as I was, I determined to come to you, even at the risk of your misjudging me. I am not able to write much, and must defer particulars till I see you. I am staying at the house of a kind stranger a few miles from the city. The man whom I send with this note is trustworthy. If you will trust yourself to his guidance, he will bring you to me. I know that I am asking a great deal of you, but I think you will not fail me.

"Yours, with love,

"RICHARD DEWEY."

The writing was hurried--indeed, it was hardly more than a scrawl.

"He must be very weak," thought Florence, her heart swelling with painful emotions.--"My good friend," she said to the landlady, "Richard is sick and poor. He asks me to come to him. I must go."

"But can you trust that man? Is the letter genuine?" asked Mrs. Armstrong, suspiciously.

"I am sure it is genuine. It is written as Richard would write."

"But don't be in haste, Miss Douglas--Florence. Make some inquiries, and find out whether this news can be depended upon."

"Would you have me hesitate when Richard needs me?" asked Florence, reproachfully. "No, Mrs. Armstrong, I must go, and at once. I have waited so long to see him!"

"He will be very glad to see you, miss," said Jones respectfully. "He has been talking about you constant."

"Were Ben and Mr. Bradley with him? Why didn't one of them come?"

"Because, miss," said Jones with ready invention, though he had never heard of either of the persons mentioned, "one went for the doctor, and the other stayed to take care of him."

This seemed very plausible. Without a particle of suspicion Florence Douglas hastily dressed herself and entered the carriage in waiting.

CHAPTER XXV.

WALKING INTO A TRAP.

The thought that she was so soon to see Richard Dewey, and to minister to his comfort, was a source of pleasure to Florence. Her patient waiting was at length to be rewarded. What mattered it to her that he was poor and sick? He had all the more need of her.

"It's a long ride, miss," said Jones as he closed the carriage-door. "I hope you won't be tired before we get there."

"I shall not mind it," said Florence. "How far is it?"

"I don't rightly know. It's a matter of ten miles, I'm thinkin'."

"Very well."

Jones resumed his seat, and Florence gave herself up to pleasant thoughts. She felt thankful that she was blessed with abundant means, since it would enable her to spare no expense in providing for the sick man. Others might call him a fortune-hunter, but that produced no impression upon her, except to make her angry. She had given her whole love and confidence to the man whom her heart had chosen.

The carriage rolled onward rapidly: as from time to time she glanced out of the window, she saw that they had left behind the town and were in the open country. She gave herself no concern, however, and did not question Jones, taking it for granted that he was on the right road, and would carry her to the place where Richard Dewey had found a temporary refuge.

"It is some poor place, probably," she reflected, "but if he can be moved I will have him brought into town, where he can see a skilful doctor daily."

At the end of an hour and a half there was a sudden stop.

Florence looked out of the carriage-window, and observed that they were in front of a shabby-looking dwelling of two stories.

Jones leaped from his elevated perch and opened the door of the carriage. "This is the place, miss," he said. "Did you get tired?"

"No, but I am glad we have arrived."

"It's a poor place, miss, but Mr. Dewey was took sick sudden, so I was told, and it was the best they could do."

"It doesn't matter. Perhaps he can be moved."

"Perhaps so. Will you go in?"

"Yes."

The door was opened, and a slatternly-looking woman of sinister aspect appeared at the threshold. Florence took no particular notice of her appearance, but asked, hurriedly, "How is he?"

"Oh, he'll get along," answered the woman, carelessly. "Will you come in?"

"He is not dangerously sick, then?" said Florence, relieved.

"He's got a fever, but ain't goin' to die this time."

"This is Mrs. Bradshaw, Miss Douglas," said Jones, volunteering an introduction.

"I thank you, Mrs. Bradshaw, for your kindness to a sick man and a stranger," said Florence, earnestly. "Can I see him now?"

"Yes, miss, if you'll just walk up stairs. I hope you'll excuse the looks of things; I haven't had time to fix up."

"Oh, don't mention it."

In a tumult of emotion Florence followed her guide up a rough staircase.

On the landing Mrs. Bradshaw opened a door and, standing aside, invited Florence to enter.

On a sofa, with his back to her, lay the figure of a man covered with a shawl.

"Richard!" said the visitor, eagerly.

The recumbent figure slowly turned, and revealed to the dismayed Florence, not the face of the man she expected to see, but that of Orton Campbell.

"Mr. Campbell!" she ejaculated, in bewilderment.

"I see you know me, Miss Douglas," said Orton Campbell, throwing off the shawl and rising from the couch.

For the first time it dawned upon Florence that she had walked into a trap. She hurried to the door and strove to open it, but Mrs. Bradshaw had locked it.

"What does this mean, Mr. Campbell?" she demanded with spirit, in spite of her terror. "Is this unworthy trick of your devising?"

"I am afraid I must confess that it is," said Orton, coolly.

"And it was all a falsehood about Richard Dewey's sickness?"

"Yes."

"And the note?"

"I wrote it myself."

"Then, sir, you have acted shamefully," said Florence, indignantly.

"I am afraid I have," said Orton Campbell, smiling, "but I couldn't help it!"

"Couldn't help it?" repeated Miss Douglas.

"No; you would not receive me, and I had to contrive an interview."

"Do you know anything of Richard Dewey?"

"No; he is perfectly well, so far as I know, or he may be dead. Pray be seated."

"I would rather stand. May I ask what you expect to gain by this base deception?"

"Your consent to a marriage with me."

"Then it is clear you don't know me, Orton Campbell."

"It is quite as clear, Miss Florence Douglas, that you don't know me."

"I believe you capable of any atrocity."

"Then you do know me. I am capable of anything that will break down your opposition to my suit."

"Do you propose to keep me here?"

"Yes, until you give me a favorable answer."

"That will never be."

"Then you will stay here an indefinite period."

"Are there no laws in California?"

"None that will interfere with me. The people who live here are devoted to my interests, as you will find. I don't wish to hurry you in your decision, and will therefore leave you for the present. Your meals will be sent you at regular times, and I will call again to-morrow."

He drew a key from his pocket, opened the door, and left the room, locking the door behind him.

Florence sank into a chair, almost in despair.



CHAPTER XXVI.

A HARD-HEARTED JAILER.

Florence soon recovered a degree of self-possession, and began to consider the situation. The room in which she so unexpectedly found herself a prisoner was about fifteen feet square. There were two front windows, from which she took a survey of the neighborhood, which she had but slightly observed from the windows of the carriage. She could see no other house, and naturally concluded that this had been selected on account of its lonely location.

The distance from the window-sill to the ground was not over twelve feet, and Florence began to consider whether she could not manage to escape in this way.

She tried to open one of the windows, but could not stir it. Closer examination showed her that it had been nailed down. She went to the second window, and found that secured in a similar way.

"They evidently anticipated that I would try to escape," she thought to herself.

Next her thoughts recurred to the woman who appeared to be the mistress of the house. Not that she had any intention of appealing to her kindness of heart, for the hard-featured Mrs. Bradshaw was not a woman likely to be influenced by any such considerations. Florence had enjoyed but a transient view of the lady's features, but she already had a tolerably correct idea of her character.

"She is probably mercenary," thought Florence, "and is in Orton Campbell's pay. I must outbid him."

This thought inspired hope, especially when from the window she saw her persecutor ride away on horseback. This would give her a fair field and a chance to try the effect of money upon her jailer without risk of interruption. She would have felt less sanguine of success if she had heard the conversation which had just taken place between Mrs. Bradshaw and her captor:

"Mind, Mrs. Bradshaw, you must not let the young lady leave her room on any consideration." [Pg 203]

"All right, sir."

"I take it for granted, Mrs. Bradshaw, you are not easily taken in?"

"I should say not, sir," said the woman, emphatically.

"The young lady will try to impose upon you while I am away."

"Then she'd better save her trouble," said Mrs. Bradshaw, tossing her head.

"She's very artful," said Orton. "Most crazy people are."

"You don't mean to say she's crazy?" said Mrs. Bradshaw in surprise. "She don't look like it."

"You are quite right. She doesn't look like it, but she's wrong here," continued Campbell, tapping his forehead.

"Why, she fancies herself immensely rich, Mrs. Bradshaw, when, as a matter of fact, she's a penniless cousin of mine, who would have gone to the poorhouse but for my father's charity."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradshaw, interested. [Pg 204]

"Sometimes she thinks she's worth millions of dollars. I wish she were, for in that case my father would be relieved of the burden of supporting her."

"To be sure, sir!"

"Some time since she managed to elude our vigilance and escaped from our home in Albany. Knowing how feeble-minded she was, we felt very anxious about her, but for some time were unable to get a trace of her. Finally, we learned that she had been seen in California, and I came out at great personal inconvenience to

bring her back."

"Very kind of you, sir, I am sure: but how could she travel so far without money?"

"That is easily explained. She opened my father's desk and took out some hundreds of dollars," answered Orton Campbell, with unblushing falsehood. "Of course, we don't consider her responsible, as she is of unsound mind. Otherwise, we should look upon her as very ungrateful."

"She seems to be very good-looking," observed Mrs. Bradshaw.

"So she is, and if her mind were healthy I can imagine that she would be admired. As it is, her beauty counts for nothing."

"To be sure!"

"I hope to calm her down, and induce her without a violent disturbance to embark on the next steamer for New York with me. She won't listen to me now, but I shall call to-morrow forenoon and see how she appears. Meanwhile, she will probably try to bribe you to release her. She may promise you thousands, perhaps millions, of dollars, for it's all the same to her, poor thing! But of course you're too sensible a woman to be taken in by the promises of a crazy girl?"

"I should say so!" returned Mrs. Bradshaw, who was thoroughly deceived by the artful story of her employer, who, by the way, had promised her one hundred dollars for her co-operation in his scheme.

"She will probably tell you that she came to California in search of her lover, who is at the mines. Of course there is no such person, but she thinks there is."

"I understand," said the woman, confidently.

"I thought you would. Well, Mrs. Bradshaw, I will see you to-morrow. I am sure you are to be relied upon."

About six o'clock Mrs. Bradshaw carried up some supper to her prisoner.

"I hope you've got an appetite, miss," she said.

"Stay a moment," said Florence, eagerly. "I want to speak to you."

"Now it's coming," thought Mrs. Bradshaw, with some curiosity. She was rather taken aback by the first words of her prisoner:

"How much money has Mr. Orton Campbell promised to pay you for assisting him in his plot?"

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Bradshaw, bristling, for though she had been bribed she did not like to confess it.

"He is to pay me rent for this room," she said, after a pause.

"Then I am your lodger, am I?" asked Florence.

"I suppose so," answered the woman, rather embarrassed by this unexpected question.

"Very well, then. I don't think I care to occupy the room. I will pay you a week's rent out of my own purse, and leave you after supper."

"I think not," said Mrs. Bradshaw, decidedly.

"Then I am to consider myself your prisoner?"

"You may call it so if you like."

"It is just as well to call things by their right names. Of course Mr. Campbell has hired you to detain me here. Tell me how much he is to pay you, and I will pay you more to release me."

"Then you are rich, I suppose?" said the woman.

"Yes, I am rich."

Mrs. Bradshaw laughed. "You are worth several millions, I suppose?" she said, mockingly.

"Certainly not. Who told you so?"

"Mr. Campbell warned me that you would pretend you were rich."

"It is no pretence; I am rich, though at present his father has the greater part of my fortune under his charge."

"Oh, of course!" said the woman, laughing again. "I understand all about it."

"What has Orton Campbell told you?" asked Florence, suspiciously.

"He said you would pretend to be rich, and try to bribe me, though you were only a poor relation of his who would have gone to the poorhouse unless his father had supported you out of charity."

"He has deceived you, Mrs. Bradshaw. His father wanted me to marry this man in order to keep my fortune in his own family. That is why I ran away from his house."

"What made you come to California?" asked the woman.

"Because the man whom I really loved was at work somewhere in the mines."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Mrs. Bradshaw, loudly.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because you are as crazy as a loon. Mr. Campbell told me just what you would say. He told me all about your stealing money from his father's desk, and running off to California after a lover in the mines. It's turned out exactly as he said."

"Did he dare to slander me in that way?" demanded Florence, so indignantly that her jailer drew back in some alarm.

"No violence, miss, if you please," she said. "You'd better be quiet, or you'll have to be tied."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Florence, "I would not have believed Orton Campbell so false and artful!"

"He's acting for your good, miss. So you'd better not make a fuss;" and the landlady left the room, not failing to lock the door securely behind her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STAR IN THE CLOUD.

Meanwhile, though things looked dark for Florence and favorable for her persecutor, there was one circumstance that threatened failure to the latter's plans. Orton Campbell was a mean man, and his meanness in this instance worked against him. He had promised his confederate, Jones, a thousand dollars as the price of his information and co-operation, but intended all the while to avoid paying it if it were a possible thing. Of this sum seven hundred dollars were still due, besides an extra sum for the services of Jones in making Florence a captive.

It was in regard to these sums that Jones called on Mr. Campbell on the evening succeeding the success of the plot.

Orton Campbell was about to go out when Jones appeared at his hotel.

"I would like to see you a few minutes, Mr. Orton," said the man respectfully.

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"You must come some other time, Jones," said Campbell, carelessly; "I've got an engagement."

"I must see you now, sir," said Jones, still respectfully, but in a resolute tone.

"Must'?" repeated Orton Campbell, arching his brows. "You are impertinent."

"Call me what you please," said Jones, doggedly; "I'm not to be put off."

"What do you mean?" demanded his employer, angrily.

"You know well enough. I want the money you are owing me."

"You seem to be in a hurry," said Campbell, with a sneer.

"You don't," retorted Jones. "All I ask is that you will keep your promise."

"What promise do you refer to?"

"What promise do I refer to? You said if I would join you in *kidnapping*--"

"Hush!" said Orton looking around, apprehensive of listeners.

"The young lady," Jones continued, "you would pay me the seven hundred dollars you owed me, and two hundred dollars extra for my help."

Now, Orton Campbell knew very well that he had made this promise, but the payment of nine hundred dollars he dreaded as much as some of my readers would dread the extraction of half a dozen teeth. He had got all he needed from Jones, and he decided that it would be safe to throw him off. It might be dishonorable, but for that he cared little.

"I suppose you have my promise in writing, Jones?" he said, with a sneer.

"No, I haven't, Mr. Campbell."

"Then you can't prove that I owe you anything, I take it."

"You don't mean to say, Mr. Orton, you'd cheat a poor man out of his hard-earned money?" ejaculated Jones, who, in spite of his knowledge of his employer's character, could hardly believe his ears.

"I never intended to give you such an enormous sum for the little you have done for me."

"Didn't you promise it, sir?" demanded Jones, exasperated.

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"Not that I remember," answered Campbell, coolly. "I should have been a fool to promise so large a sum. I paid your expenses out to California and three hundred dollars. That, I take it, is pretty liberal pay for your services for a month."

"I'll have justice if I live!" said Jones, furiously.

He looked so threatening that Orton Campbell thought it might be best to placate him, even at the expense of a small extra sum. "Don't be a fool, Jones," he said. "You know very well that your demands are beyond all reason. I've treated you very liberally already, but I don't mind doing a little more. I'll go so far as to give you fifty dollars down, and a further sum of one hundred dollars on my wedding-day if I marry Florence Douglas, if you'll be content with that."

"I won't be content with it, Orton Campbell," said Jones, indignantly; "I won't be content with anything less than the full sum you promised me. You'd better pay me at once, or you may see trouble."

Orton Campbell should have known that it was dangerous to trifle with a man so thoroughly roused as Jones was, but his love of money and dislike to part with it overcame every other consideration, and he said, "You've refused my offer, and I have done with you. You needn't come near me again."

"Do you mean this?" asked Jones, slowly.

"Of course I do. You have served my purpose, and been paid. I have offered you more, and you have refused it. That ends everything."

"I understand you now, Orton Campbell."

"*Mr.* Campbell, if you please," interrupted Campbell, haughtily.

"*Mr.* Campbell, then; and I am sorry I didn't know you better before, but it isn't too late yet."

"That's enough: you can go."

As Jones walked away Campbell asked himself, "What is the fellow going to do, I wonder? I suppose he will try to annoy me. Never mind: I have saved nine hundred dollars. That will more than cover all the damage he can do me."

It was about the same hour that a party of three, dusty and shabby, entered San Francisco, and made their way to a respectable but not prominent hotel.

"We look like three tramps, Ben," said Bradley. "Anywhere but in San Francisco I don't believe we could get lodged in any respectable hotel, but they'll know at once that we are from the mines, and may have a good store of gold-dust in spite of our looks."

"If my friends at home could see me now," said Ben, laughingly, "they wouldn't think I had found my trip to California profitable. It would give my friend Sam Sturgis a good deal of pleasure to think that I was a penniless adventurer."

"He might be disappointed when he heard that you were worth not far from a thousand dollars, Ben."

"He certainly would be. On the other hand, Uncle Job would be delighted. I wish I could walk into his little cottage and tell him all about it."

"When you go home, Ben, you must have more money to carry than you have now. A thousand dollars are all very well, but they are not quite enough to start business on."

"A year ago I should have felt immensely rich on a thousand dollars," said Ben, thoughtfully.

"No doubt; but you are young enough to wait a little longer. After our friend Dewey has seen his young lady and arranged matters we'll dust back to our friends, the miners who came near giving us a ticket to the next world, and see whether fortune won't favor us a little more."

"Agreed!" said Ben; "I shall be ready.--Shall you call on Miss Douglas this evening, Mr. Dewey?" asked Ben.

"Yes," answered Dewey. "I cannot bear to feel that I am in the same city and refrain from seeing her."

"Will she know you in your present rig?" suggested Bradley.

"I shall lose no time in buying a new outfit," said Dewey. "There must be shops where all articles of dress can be obtained ready-made."

"I was afraid you were going as you are," said Bradley. "Of course she'd be glad to see you, but she might be sensitive about her friends; and that wouldn't be agreeable to you, I'm thinkin'."

"I thank you for your kind suggestion, my good friend," said Dewey; "no doubt you are right."

Richard Dewey swallowed a hasty supper, and then sought the clothing shops, where he had no difficulty in procuring a ready-made outfit. So many persons came from the mines in his condition, desiring similar accommodation, that he was not required to go far to secure what he wanted.

Then, having obtained from Ben the proper directions, he took his way to the house of Mrs. Armstrong, which he reached about eight o'clock.

"Can I see Miss Florence Douglas?" he asked.

Mrs. Armstrong, hearing the request, came herself to the door. She was feeling anxious about the prolonged absence of her young friend.

"May I ask your name, sir?" she inquired.

"Richard Dewey."

"Richard Dewey?" repeated Mrs. Armstrong, in amazement. "Why, I thought you were sick in bed!"

"What made you think so?" asked Dewey, in equal amazement.

"Your own note. Miss Douglas, on receiving it, went away at once with the messenger, and has not returned."

"I have sent no note, and no messenger has come from me. I don't understand you," said Richard Dewey, bewildered.

It was soon explained, and the bitter disappointment of Dewey may well be imagined. This feeling was mingled with one of apprehension for the personal safety of the young lady.

"This is indeed alarming," he ejaculated. "Who can have planned such an outrage?"

"I will tell you, sir," said a voice.

Turning quickly, Richard Dewey's glance rested upon Jones.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JONES CHECKMATES ORTON CAMPBELL.

"Who are you?" inquired Richard Dewey, not favorably impressed by the appearance of the man who addressed him.

"You wouldn't know if I should tell you," said Jones; "so I may as well say that I came out to San Francisco with Orton Campbell."

"Orton Campbell in the city?" exclaimed Dewey, apprehensively. "Had he anything to do with the disappearance of Miss Douglas?"

"Everything, sir; but I can't tell you about it in the street. I will go with you to your hotel."

"Tell me on the way," said Richard Dewey. "First, has any harm befallen Florence--Miss Douglas?"

"None as yet."

"Is any threatened?"

"The loss of her liberty; but I will help you to thwart Orton Campbell."

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Jones told the story, which need not be repeated here, as it is already known to the reader. He had difficulty in restraining Mr. Dewey from starting out instantly to the rescue of the young lady, but on his representing that she was safe, and that it would be soon enough to go out in the morning, Richard Dewey yielded.

A little before eight o'clock, Jones, driving the same carriage in which he had conveyed Florence to her place of captivity, halted in front of Mrs. Bradshaw's dwelling.

"Remain in the carriage, Mr. Dewey," he said, "and I will see if I can't secure the young lady without any fuss."

"Won't it be better for me to accompany you?"

"I think not, sir. Mrs. Bradshaw knows I am the one who brought Miss Douglas here, and she will think it is all right. Stay!" he continued, with a sudden thought. "I have an idea. Mr. Campbell told Mrs. Bradshaw that the young lady was insane. I will make her think that you are the doctor from the asylum come to take Miss Douglas back with you."

"Did Orton Campbell really intend such an outrage?" asked Richard Dewey, in a tone of horror.

"Yes, if Miss Douglas wouldn't consent to marry him."

"Go, then, and lose no time."

Jones knocked at the door, which was opened by Mrs. Bradshaw in person. She naturally regarded Jones with surprise, not anticipating so early a call.

"How is Miss Douglas?" he asked.

"Very contrary," answered the landlady. "I can't get her to eat. It's my belief she means to starve herself."

"It's a crazy freak," said Jones, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, I've come to take her away."

"To take her away--so soon?" asked Mrs. Bradshaw, in surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Orton thought it best."

"Is he with you?"

"No."

"I think I see some one in the carriage."

"To be sure. It's the mad doctor from the asylum. Don't let Miss Douglas know it," continued Jones, lowering his voice, "or she wouldn't consent to go with us."

"I see," answered the landlady, nodding. "Do you want to go up now?"

"Yes; let me see her alone, so that I can tell her a story which will quiet her suspicions."

"Mr. Campbell hasn't paid me all he promised yet," said Mrs. Bradshaw, rather uneasily.

"Oh, that's all right," said Jones. "He never forgets his promise--and seldom keeps it," he said to himself.

Florence was sitting on the lounge in her room in rather a despondent state of mind when the door opened, and she looked up, expecting to see Orton Campbell.

Jones closed the door behind him, and then, putting his hand over his lips, said, "Miss Douglas, I bring you good news."

"Are you not the man who brought me out here yesterday?"

"The same one."

"Then how have you the face to show yourself in my presence?"

"Because I am come to free you from your imprisonment."

Florence started to her feet in some excitement. "If this were true!" she exclaimed. "But no; you are an agent of Orton Campbell, and this is some new trick of his."

"I was an agent of Orton Campbell, but he deceived me, and I am his enemy."

"Is he with you?" asked Florence, suspiciously.

"No; but in the carriage outside is one whom you will be glad to meet."

"Who is it?"

"Richard Dewey."

"You brought me a note from him which he never wrote. How do you expect me to believe you now?"

"If he is not there, don't get into the carriage. Not a word to Mrs. Bradshaw. She is in the employ of Mr. Campbell, who represented you as insane, and I told her that Mr. Dewey, whom I did not dare to bring in, was a doctor from the insane asylum."

"Are you sure you are not deceiving me?" said Florence, earnestly.

"I am on the square, miss, but you can easily convince yourself by coming down stairs. If you prefer to remain here till nine o'clock, when Orton Campbell will be here, you can do so."

"No, no! anything better than that!"

Mrs. Bradshaw watched the exit of her guest with a peculiar look. "She little knows where she's going," thought the woman. "Well, if she's crazy, it's the best place for her."

As may easily be imagined, there was scant leave-taking. Florence was eager to leave this shabby cabin, where she had passed a night of anxious solicitude.

She approached the carriage, and Jones opened the door. She looked in, and saw Dewey, who said in a low

voice, "Get in at once, Florence, but keep silent till we are on our way."

An expression of joy came over her face as she saw this most convincing proof of her driver's good faith. He mounted the box and drove rapidly off.

On their way back to San Francisco the two who had been so long separated had ample time to compare notes and form plans for the future.

"Florence," said Richard Dewey, "after this treachery of Orton Campbell there is but one way of safety for you."

"And what is that?"

"Let me become your legal protector, and at once. When we are married your guardian will be powerless. He will have me to deal with then, not a defenceless girl."

"But, Richard, this seems so sudden!"

"It ought not to, Florence. Have we not waited for each other long enough? Have we not been separated long enough? I am not much richer than when I left you--not so rich," he added, smiling, "as your other suitor, Orton Campbell."

"I will marry you if only to get rid of him, Richard," said Florence, impetuously.

"I won't quarrel with your motives, since you consent."

So it happened that on their arrival in San Francisco they directed Jones to drive to the house of a clergyman, and were speedily united in marriage, the clergyman's wife and daughter being witnesses. Circumstances compelled them to dispense with the usual "cards and cake."

At nine o'clock, Orton Campbell, secure of his prey, drove up to Mrs. Bradshaw's door and leisurely descended.

"Well, and how is Miss Douglas this morning?" he asked of the astonished landlady.

"How is she? She's gone."

"What!" ejaculated Orton, furiously; "you have dared to let her escape?"

"You sent for her yourself. She went away with the mad doctor."

"The mad doctor? I don't know anything about any mad doctor. Woman, you are deceiving me."

"Don't call me *woman*!" said Mrs. Bradshaw, offensively, putting her arms akimbo. "I'm no more a woman than you are."

"Then you'd better dress differently," sneered Campbell. "Tell me what all this means."

"The man that drove the lady out here yesterday came here more than an hour ago and said you had sent for her. He said there was a doctor in the carriage who would take her to the asylum. That corresponded with what you told me, and I let her go."

"That scoundrel Jones!" exclaimed Orton Campbell. "So this is his revenge? I must go back to the city at once and circumvent him if I can."

He was about to go when Mrs. Bradshaw said, "Before you go you'd better pay me what you promised."

"I won't pay you a cent," said Campbell, angrily.

"Jack!"

The word spoken by the woman brought a rough-looking man to the carriage-door.

"This man says he won't pay me a cent, Jack," said Mrs. Bradshaw.

"You'd better reconsider that, stranger," said Jack, pulling out a revolver and fingering it significantly.

"I owe her nothing," said Orton Campbell, surveying the revolver uneasily. "If she had kept the young lady here, it would have been different."

"If there's a trick been played on you, my wife ain't goin' to suffer by it. She's earned the money, stranger, and I'll give you just two minutes to pay it over."

Orton Campbell read something in the man's face that convinced him he was not to be trifled with. With many an inward groan he drew out one hundred dollars from his purse and handed it over.

"That's all right, stranger," said Jack, coolly. "I thought you'd be reasonable. Short reckonings make long friends."

With a muttered imprecation Orton Campbell sharply ordered his driver to turn the horses' heads toward San Francisco and make his way there as quickly as possible. His thoughts were by no means pleasant company. He had just been forced to pay out a considerable sum without value received, and was beginning to think the sum paid to Jones also money thrown away.



CHAPTER XXIX.

A WEDDING RECEPTION.

Orton Campbell cursed his folly in arousing the hostility of Jones. He concluded that the latter had released Florence in order to obtain a hold upon him, and would be ready to assist him again if satisfactorily paid. In that event all was not lost. It was necessary to see Jones as early as possible and make matters right with him.

He was not quite clear as to where Jones could be found, but concluded that he had carried Florence back to her boarding-house. He therefore ordered his driver to proceed at once to the house of Mrs. Armstrong. He hastily descended from the carriage and rang the bell.

It was answered by Mrs. Armstrong in person, who regarded him with no very friendly eye.

Orton Campbell, knowing his own treachery, and conscious that it was also known to the lady before ^{him} asked, in some embarrassment, "Is Miss Douglas here?"

"No, sir."

Orton Campbell looked surprised. "I--I thought she might be here," he stammered.

"Were you the person who lured her from my house yesterday by a false letter?" demanded Mrs. Armstrong, sternly.

"No," answered Campbell, unblushingly; "it was an agent of mine, who has deceived and betrayed me."

"Then, you had nothing to do with the disappearance of the young lady?"

"Certainly not," answered Orton Campbell, boldly. "I assure you it has given me great concern, and I have been riding hither and thither this morning in search of her."

"Won't you come in, sir? Perhaps we may be able to throw some light on this mystery."

"She believes me," thought Orton Campbell, congratulating himself on the effect of his duplicity.--"Certainly," he answered; "I shall be most happy to do so."

He was ushered into the parlor, into which, five minutes later, entered Florence, Richard Dewey, and ^{Pa} 231] gentleman of clerical appearance.

"Miss Douglas!" exclaimed Orton Campbell, in astonishment.--"I thought you said," turning to Mrs. Armstrong, "that Miss Douglas was not here?"

"I am not Miss Douglas," said Florence, quietly.

"I don't understand you."

"Perhaps I can explain the mystery," said Richard Dewey, coming forward.

"I wish you would, if you can," said Orton Campbell, with a sneer.

"This young lady is my wife."

"Your wife? And who are you?"

"Richard Dewey, at your service."

Orton Campbell had never known Dewey well, and his life at the mines had so changed his appearance that it was not surprising he did not recognize him.

"Is this true?" he asked, in visible dismay. "When were you married?"

"Half an hour since, by this gentleman;" and Richard Dewey waved his hand in the direction of the clerical gentleman already referred to.

"You have done a good stroke of business, sir," said Campbell, with a sneer and a look of baffled hatred. "The lady's fortune makes her a good match."

"So you evidently thought, sir," answered Dewey. "Your unscrupulous methods have not succeeded, and I beg to warn you that the lady now has a protector who will punish any such persecution as that with which you have recently visited her."

"You are quite mistaken. My agent--"

"Only followed your instructions," said an unexpected voice, as Jones, who was within hearing, now entered from the adjoining room. "Mr. Orton, I have confessed all, so you needn't try to humbug this gentleman."

"You are a scoundrel," said Campbell, wrathfully, excited by the appearance of the man who, in return for being cheated, had betrayed him.

"Then there's a pair of us, Mr. Campbell," said he, coolly. "I admit that I behaved like a rascal, but I've tried to set matters right."

"You can find your way back to New York as you can; I have done with you," said Campbell, hardly conscious that this very remark betrayed him.

"Mr. Dewey has kindly offered to take me back with him," said Jones, not at all disturbed by this notice.

"If you are going back by the next steamer, Mr. Campbell," said Richard Dewey, "I will thank you to apprise your father of his ward's marriage, and ask him to arrange for the surrender of her property at the proper time."

"You may attend to your own messages, sir," said Orton, irritably. "I will have nothing to do with them."

Without any further words he hurried out of the house, and drove at once to the office of the steamship company, where he secured passage by the earliest vessel eastward bound.

That same evening Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dewey held an informal reception at their boarding-house.

It was not largely attended, for Florence had made but few acquaintances during her stay in the city. Uncertain as her prospects were, she had thought it best to keep aloof from her friends, who might possibly make known her residence to her guardian. Among those present, however, were Richard Dewey's tried friends, Bradley and Ben Stanton.

Bradley tried to excuse himself, on the ground that he was only a rough miner and not accustomed to society, but his objection was overruled both by Florence and her husband.

"You are a true friend, Mr. Bradley," said Florence, gratefully, "and I should miss you more than any one else except my young friend and cousin, Ben."

"Ben's different from what I am," said Bradley. "He ain't such a rough specimen."

"I'm only a miner, like you," said Ben. "I am a country boy and not used to society, but I don't believe Cousin Ida will care for that."

"Cousin Ida" was the name by which Ben had been instructed to call Florence when she came out to California under his escort.

The upshot of it all was that both Bradley and Ben were present at the bride's reception, and were made so thoroughly at home by Mrs. Richard Dewey that neither felt in the least awkward.

Two weeks later Richard Dewey and his wife sailed for New York, but Ben and Bradley remained behind.

"Come with us, Ben," said Florence. "I don't like to leave you behind."

"Thank you, Miss Florence--I mean Mrs. Dewey," said the boy--"but I am not ready to go yet."

"Don't let the thought of money keep you here, Ben. I am rich, or I shall be in a few months, when my guardian surrenders his trust, and I will take care that you are well provided for."

"Thank you again," said Ben; "but I've promised to go back to the mines. I've got a claim reserved for me, and so has Bradley. We'll go back now and try to gather a little more gold-dust."

"But you'll let us see you in New York before long?"

"Yes, I shall go home in a few months, even if I come back again later. I want to see Uncle Job and Cousin Jennie, and all my old friends, not forgetting Sam Sturgis," added Ben, smiling.

"We must be content with that, I suppose," said the young lady. "I hope you will have good luck, but even if you don't, remember that you have two friends who will only be too glad to be of service to you.--Please consider, Mr. Bradley, that this is said to you also."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Jake Bradley, awkwardly, for with all his good traits he was not quite at ease in the society of ladies.

Ben and Bradley saw the young couple off on the steamer, and then prepared to go back to the mines.

"It's made me feel kind of lonesome to part with Dick Dewey," said Bradley, thoughtfully. "He's a whole-souled feller, and he's 'struck it rich' in a wife."

"That's so, Jake."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NUGGET.

Ben and Bradley made their way back to Golden Gulch by easy stages. They reached the Gulch about sunset, and were welcomed in such noisy style by the miners that it might almost be called an ovation.

"We reckoned you'd come," said one of the leaders. "You look like you'd keep your promise."

"I hope there ain't any hosses been stole since we went away," said Bradley, jocosely. "Ben and I ain't quite ready to hand in our checks."

"We wouldn't hold you responsible if there had been," was the reply.

"That makes me feel a little easier in mind," said Bradley. "It may be pleasant to hang from a branch with a noose round your neck, but I don't want to try it."

The miners were just preparing to take their evening meal, and Ben and his friend were invited to share their hospitality. After supper pipes were produced, and Bradley was called upon to bring forth his budget of news. In the little mining-settlement, far from the great world, a man who could give the latest news from the city or produce a late paper from any of the Eastern cities was hailed as a public benefactor.

So it was at an unusually late hour that our friends and the miners retired to rest.

The next morning the two new-comers were shown the claims which had been set aside for them. They were eligibly located, and already had a commercial value, but were bestowed out of good-will, without a cent of compensation.

Bradley and Ben got to work at once. They had had their vacation, and were ready to settle down to business. They were stimulated to effort by the success of some of their fellow miners. Ben's next neighbor had already gathered nearly three thousand dollars' worth of gold-dust, and it was quite within the limits of probability that our young hero might be as successful.

"If I fail it won't be for lack of trying," thought Ben.

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Three thousand dollars, in addition to the thousand he already had, would make him feel rich. Some of my readers, who have been luxuriously reared, will be surprised to hear this. But Ben had always been used to small things. He had been brought up in a small country town, where a dollar counts for a good deal more than it does in the city, and where a man possessing ten thousand dollars is thought to be independently rich. His uncle Job, who was thrifty and industrious, and generally, through careful economy, had a little money in the savings bank, was probably worth, at the outside, fifteen hundred dollars.

No wonder, then, that the prospect of being worth four thousand dollars dazzled our young hero and stimulated him to unwonted effort.

Neither of our two friends got on fast. They averaged perhaps fifty dollars a week each, but out of this their expenses had to be paid, and these, on account of the high price of all articles of necessity, were rather heavy. Still, the end of each week found both richer, and they were contented.

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It was the aim of every miner to "strike it rich." Each had a dream of some day cutting a rich vein or finding a nugget of extraordinary size which should compress into one day the profits of a year or two of ordinary success. But such lucky finds were not numerous. As in ordinary life, the large prizes are rare, and average success is the rule. But the general hope was kept up by occasional lucky strokes.

"Ben," said Bradley, one day in excitement, returning from a visit to the claims half a mile distant on the other side of a hilly ridge, "I've got great news."

"What is it, Jake?"

"Perkins has just found a nugget that must contain five hundred dollars' worth of gold."

"You don't say so, Jake?"

"Fact; I just saw it."

"I hope there's more of them 'round here."

"So do I. That's a find worth having."

The discovery made a sensation at Golden Gulch. It excited the hope of all, and stimulated labor. What had fallen to Perkins might chance to any one of his comrades.

So, as the miners sat round their roaring fire--for it was getting chilly in the evening--one and another discussed the interesting question, "What would I do if I could find a nugget?" Various, of course, were the answers. One would go home and start a dry-goods store (he had been a dry-goods clerk in Philadelphia); another would buy the old Stuart place and get married; another would pay off a mortgage on the old homestead, and so on.

"What would you do, Ben?" asked Bradley.

"I would go home by the next steamer, and buy Uncle Job the three-acre lot he has been wanting so long, and buy new dresses for aunt and Jennie. But it isn't much use forming plans till the nugget is found."

"That's so, Ben; but you are as likely to find it as the next man."

"I will hope for it, at any rate."

Though Ben's prospects were excellent, and he had met with unusual success, his thoughts often wandered back to the quiet village where the years of his boyhood had been chiefly passed. From time to time he was disturbed by the thought that something might have happened to his uncle's family, of whom he had heard little or nothing since he went away. He afterward learned that letters had been sent which he had not received. He was not exactly homesick, but he felt keenly the lack of news from home.

In spite of this, however, he worked on with energy and industry. He felt that every dollar he earned brought nearer the day when he would feel justified in turning his back upon the gold-fields of California and wending his homeward way to Hampton.

Meanwhile, Ben did not neglect to do what he could for the general entertainment. It has already been mentioned that he could sing very creditably, and his talent was very often called into requisition in the evening. Ben was obliging, and, finding he could give pleasure, he generally complied with the request of the miners and rehearsed such songs as he knew, so that he was considered a decided acquisition by the little company, and his popularity was unbounded.

"I've been thinkin', Ben," said Bradley, one Sunday when they were taking a walk together, "that if there was any offices to be filled you'd stand a good show of bein' elected."

"What makes you think so, Jake?"

"You're the most popular man in the camp--leastways, boy."

"I can easily believe that, Jake, as I am the only boy."

"Well, there's no one ahead of you, man or boy."

"I am glad if that is so," said Ben, modestly. "It is chiefly because I am a boy."

"Boys are not always popular. It depends a good deal on the kind of boy."

So the reader will get some idea of Ben's life at the mines and the estimation in which he was held by his

comrades. It was not very exciting nor very eventful, but there was to be a change.

One day his pick struck something hard. It might be a rock which would need to be removed. He dug round it patiently, but when he wished to lift it after it was loosened, he found it necessary to summon Bradley to his assistance.

"Why, Ben!" exclaimed Bradley, in excitement, "this isn't a rock; it is a nugget, and a bouncer."

"A nugget!" repeated Ben, incredulously.

"Yes; look here!" and Bradley pointed out the indubitable signs of its value. "Yes, Ben, your fortune has come at last."

"How much is it worth?" demanded Ben, almost breathless with excitement and exhilaration.

"How much? Three thousand dollars at least."

"Then I can go home."

"Yes, Ben, you're got your pile."

It may as well be stated here that Bradley's guess was not far out of the way. The nugget, when it reached San Francisco, was found to amount to three thousand seven hundred dollars.

To the credit of the miners of Golden Gulch, it must be said that all rejoiced in Ben's success. No one's good luck would have excited so little envy or jealousy as that of the boy who had worked by their side for months, and done so much by his good-humor and musical gifts to cheer up and entertain them. When he was ready to start for the city on his homeward journey all joined in wishing him a pleasant journey and the best of luck in the years to come.

Ben was not obliged to travel alone. Bradley decided not only to accompany him to San Francisco, but to sail to New York in his company.

"I've never seen York," he said, "and I never shall see it if I don't go now. So, if you don't mind, Ben, I'll go along with you."

"Mind, Jake? There's nothing I shall like better."

While they are on the steamer homeward bound events have transpired in Ben's old home which require to be noted.



CHAPTER XXXI.

JOB STANTON'S MISTAKE.

There had not been many changes in the little town of Hampton since Ben left it. It was one of those quiet New England villages where life moves slowly, and a death or a marriage is an event.

Uncle Job still lived in his plain little cottage with his wife and daughter, and still plied his humble task as the village cobbler, essaying sometimes to make shoes when there were none to be repaired. There was a plat of land belonging to his house rather more than an acre in extent, but land was cheap in Hampton, and it is doubtful whether both house and lot would have brought, if thrown into the market, over one thousand dollars. Uncle Job had at one time about a hundred dollars in the savings bank in a neighboring town--a fund to draw from in an emergency--and this money with his plain home constituted his entire wealth. [Pg 247]

Eleven hundred dollars all told! It was not a very brilliant result for forty years' labor, beginning with the days of his boyhood; but Job Stanton was not ambitious, and he actually felt well-to-do. He earned enough to supply the simple wants of his family, and had something over, and this satisfied him.

But one day a strong temptation came to Job Stanton, and he yielded to it.

A trader came riding over from a neighboring town and called on Uncle Job. The good man thought he had come to order a new pair of shoes, and felt flattered that such a dashing man should have gone so far out of his way to patronize him.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Richmond," he said. "Won't you set down?"

He should have said *sit*, but Job Stanton's educational advantages had been very limited.

"I don't care if I do. Snug place you've got here, Mr. Stanton."

"It's very plain and humble, but it's home, and I set by it," answered Job, who was busily engaged in tapping a shoe belonging to Eliphalet Nourza, a farm-laborer.

"I've come over to see you on a little business, Mr. Stanton," said the trader, affably.

"Jest so!" returned Uncle Job cheerfully, glancing over his spectacles at the trader's shoes to see if they looked much worn. "Want a pair of new shoes, I reckon?"

"I shall need a new pair soon," said Richmond, "but that isn't exactly what I meant."

It flashed across Job Stanton's mind that his visitor might be going to make him an offer for the old place, but he felt that he could not bear to part with it. He had lived there ever since he was married, thirty-five years ago, and there Jennie, the child of his old age, had been born.

But the trader's next sentence relieved him of this thought.

"The fact is, Uncle Job," proceeded the trader, adopting the title by which the shoemaker was generally known in Hampton, "I've got a favor to ask of you."

"A favor to ask of me?" repeated Job, looking up with some surprise at the well-dressed merchant, [Pg 249] who seemed by his presence to honor the homely little shop.

"Yes," continued Richmond, with gravity; "I want you to indorse my note for five hundred dollars."

"What made you come to me?" asked Job Stanton in surprise. "I am not a capitalist; I am a poor man."

"Oh, well, you're good for five hundred dollars."

"Yes," answered Job with some complacency; "my place here is worth twice that, let alone the money I've got in the savings bank."

"Of course it is."

"Still, I don't want to run no risk. You'd better go to some moneyed man--like Major Sturgis, for instance."

"Why, the fact is, Uncle Job, it's the major that lets me have the money on my note, but he stipulated that I should have an indorser, and he particularly mentioned you."

"That's cur'us!" said Job. "Why should he think of me?"

"Oh, he knew you were a reliable man."

"How does it happen that you need money?" asked Job, bluntly. "Isn't your business good?"

"That's just it," said Richmond, glibly. "It's so good that I've got to extend my stock, and that takes money. I'm turning money over all the time, and it won't be long before I am able to retire."

"I'm glad of that, but I don't quite understand, if that's so, why you're short of funds."

"It's clear you are not a business-man," said Richmond, laughing, "but I think I can explain to you how it is."

He did explain, and the explanation seemed very plausible, yet Job Stanton, who was a cautious man, hesitated.

This brought the trader to his closing argument: "You mustn't think, Uncle Job, that I expect this service for nothing. I am ready to pay you ten dollars for the accommodation, and to order a pair of shoes at your own price."

"That's handsome!" said Job; "and all I've got to do is to sign my name?"

"Just so. It's a mere formality. I shall have the money to pay the note twice over before it comes due."

"Then I wonder the major wants an indorser."

"Oh, it's his invariable custom. 'I know it isn't necessary, Mr. Richmond,' he told me, 'but it's my rule, and I won't break over it, even in your case. If you will get Job Stanton to indorse for you, it will be perfectly satisfactory. I know he is a poor man, but then it's only a form.'"

"Well, I don't know," said Job, doubtfully. "If Ben was here I would ask him."

"You mean your nephew, don't you?"

"Yes, the boy that went to California."

"I'm glad you mentioned him. As soon as he gets back send him to me and I'll give him a place in my store. I've heard he's very smart."

"So he is," said Job, "and I'd like to have him with you, so that he could come to see us once in a while. There ain't no openin' in Hampton."

"Of course not."

"And you'll give Ben a place when he gets home?"

"Certainly; that is, if you indorse my note. I am ready to pay you the ten dollars down."

He drew a crisp bank-note for ten dollars from his pocket, and Job Stanton yielded, for it was a great deal of money to him. I think, however, that he was more influenced by the prospect of obtaining a good place for Ben that would keep him from wandering farther away from home. If he had been shrewder, it would have occurred to him that a prosperous business-man, such as Richmond claimed to be, was unusually anxious for a small accommodation. However, to him five hundred dollars represented a large sum, and it didn't seem at all strange.

So Uncle Job took off his leather apron, ushered his visitor into the sitting-room, and sitting down at the table indorsed the note.

"Thank you," said Richmond. "Here is the ten."

"I don't know as I ought to ask you so much," said Job, with conscientious scruples.

"Oh, that's all right. Now, I'll go into the shop, and you may take my measure for a pair of shoes."

"This has been a lucky day for me," thought Job Stanton. "I've got ten dollars for writing my name, and it isn't often I earn as much as that in a week."

The trader seemed equally pleased, and the two parted in mutual good spirits.

The note was for three months, or ninety days, and Job Stanton thought no more about it. Why should he? Richmond had expressly told him that it was a mere form, and he supposed that this was the case. The ten dollars went to buy new dresses--not very expensive, of course--for his wife and Jennie, and that seemed to be the end of it.

But Job was destined to be undeceived, and that very rudely.

One day he was surprised by a call from his dignified fellow-townsmen, Major Sturgis.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stanton," said the major, condescendingly.

"Good-morning, major. I hope your family are quite well."

"Quite well, I thank you."

"What's he come about?" thought Job, wonderingly.

"You indorsed a note for Richmond, the dry-goods man, three months since."

"So I did. Is it really three months?"

"Close upon it, Mr. Stanton. I regret to say that I shall be obliged to call upon you to pay it."

"Me! to pay it!" ejaculated Uncle Job, thunderstruck. "Why, I only indorsed it."

"Precisely. That means that you are to pay it if Richmond doesn't."

"But he will pay it," said the poor shoemaker, eagerly. "He said it was only a matter of form."

"Then he deceived you. I have just received a note from him telling me to look to you."



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HOUSE IS MORTGAGED.

Job Stanton would not have been more utterly overwhelmed if he had seen his treasured home reduced to ashes before his eyes. That he should be responsible for a debt of five hundred dollars seemed to him almost incredible. The trader's representation that indorsing the note was only a matter of form he had accepted as strictly true.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked the major, impatiently.

"Goin' to do about it?" ejaculated Job.

"Certainly. When a man indorses a note he knows that he may be called upon to pay, and of course has some plan for doing it."

"I don't know what to do," said the poor shoemaker, sadly. "I can't pay the note."

"Humph! There seems to be only one thing to do, then."

"What is it?"

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"You must sell or mortgage your place."

"What! sell or mortgage my house? I can't do that, Major Sturgis."

"Very well. I won't insist on it if you can pay the note in any other way."

"Heaven knows I can't."

"Then, Mr. Stanton," said the major, sharply, "it's time to speak plainly. Unless you do as I suggest, I shall attach your property and compel you to raise the money in the way I indicate."

Job Stanton was mortally afraid of legal proceedings, and after a while he acceded to the major's proposal, which was himself to accept a mortgage for the sum of five hundred dollars secured upon the place. His wife, who had to be told, wept bitterly, for it seemed to her as if they were parting with their main reliance. But Major Sturgis carried his point, and walked off triumphant.

And now for the major's motive, for he had one, and he had artfully made use of Richmond to forward his plan: He was desirous of getting possession of the poor shoemaker's house and land, having in view ^[Pg 257] the purchase of the lot adjoining. Then he would move the house off, throw down the fence between the two lots, build a nice dwelling, and rent it to a city friend who wished to spend his summers in Hampton. He knew very well that Job Stanton wouldn't listen to a proposition for selling his house, and he therefore tried to accomplish by stratagem what he could not fairly.

"Pa, you are looking in good spirits," said Sam Sturgis when his father came home.

"I don't feel so," said the major, hypocritically. "I have had to do a very disagreeable thing this morning."

"What was it?" Sam asked, his curiosity being excited.

"Mr. Richmond the trader owed me a note for five hundred dollars, indorsed by Job Stanton, and as he did not pay it, I had to call on Stanton."

"He couldn't pay--he's too poor," said Sam.

"Not in money, but he owns his place. I have accepted a mortgage for six months' time on his house and lot."

"Suppose he doesn't pay when the time comes?"

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"I am afraid I shall have to foreclose the mortgage."

"And he'll have to leave, won't he?"

"Unless he can raise the money some other way."

"There isn't any other way, is there?"

"Richmond might hand over the money by that time."

"Do you think he will?"

"He ought to, but I don't think there is much chance of it."

"Ben will be rather astonished when he comes home and finds his uncle has lost his place."

"Yes, I suppose he will."

"I sha'n't be sorry for him. He puts on a good many airs, considering how poor he is. I wish I knew how he is getting along in California."

"He may get a living there, but that is about all," said the major. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if his uncle came to me for money to get him home."

"You wouldn't let him have it, would you, pa?"

"I might," answered Major Sturgis, "if he would surrender the place to me without putting me to inconvenience."

"Would you take Ben for my servant, pa, in that case?"

"Why do you want him for a servant?"

"I want to humble his pride," answered Sam, with a gleam of something like hatred in his eyes.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BLOW ABOUT TO FALL

All this happened soon after Ben went away. His uncle did not write him of it, for he knew it would trouble the boy, and it could do no good. "No, wife," he said; "Ben will have a hard row of his own to hoe. He mustn't have any part nor lot in our troubles."

"It's very hard, Job, at our time of life," said Mrs. Stanton, despondently.

"So it is, wife, but it may turn out for the best, after all. I haven't given up hope that Mr. Richmond will pay the sum, so that I can take up the mortgage. I'm goin' to see him about it to-morrow."

Uncle Job left his work the next day, and walked five miles to the store of the man who had brought this calamity upon him.

"I've come to see you, Mr. Richmond," he said, wiping his forehead with his red cotton handkerchief, "about that money I've had to pay."

"Oh yes," said Richmond, with his usual suavity. "I'm very sorry it happened so."

"It seems to me you didn't treat me just right," said poor Job.

"Such things will happen, you know, Mr. Stanton."

"But you said it was only a matter of form signin' the note?"

"Of course I so regarded it. I could have sworn I should be ready to pay when the note became due. You see, there was money owing to me that I couldn't collect."

"Didn't you know that was likely to happen when you tempted me to indorse the note?"

"It wasn't likely to happen, but it was possible. My plans miscarried, as any man's are liable to. If you were more used to business, Uncle Job, you'd see that I hadn't acted wrong in the matter."

"I don't understand the ways of business men, but I know you've done me a grievous wrong, John Richmond," said Job Stanton, gravely. "I've come to ask if you can pay me back a part of that money."^[P. 262]

"Well, I can't do it this morning. I've got two payments to make. You don't look at it in the right light, Uncle Job."

"I want my money," said the old man. "When can you give it to me?"

"Since you push me so hard, I can only say I don't know," said Richmond, dropping his soft tones and looking angry.

"Is that all the satisfaction you are goin' to give me? Don't you ever mean to pay me that money you've made me pay out on your account, mortgaging my house and risking my home?"

"Of course I shall pay you some time, but I can't say exactly when," said the trader, brusquely.

"Will you sign a note for the money at three months or six months, John Richmond?"

"No, I won't. You'll have to wait, Uncle Job, till I get ready to pay you; that's all about it. I may be ready next week, or it may not be till next month. A business-man can't always foresee how he'll be situated at any definite time."

With this poor consolation Job Stanton had to rest content. He looked around him and saw every evidence of prosperity. Several customers were in the store, and the two clerks seemed to have as much as they could do. He saw money paid over for purchases in considerable amounts, and he felt that a part of it might be

spared as a partial payment to him; but it was of no avail, and he turned sadly away.

The next week passed, and the next month passed, and Job Stanton waited vainly for a payment on account from John Richmond. He didn't like to judge the trader harshly, but it did seem as if he was quite indifferent in the matter. Another month passed, and Job made another visit to the store of his prosperous debtor. Richmond wasted few words on him.

"Uncle Job," he said, "it's no use your coming over here. I'll send you the money when I can spare it."

Finally, six months passed, the mortgage became due, and Job received a notice from Major Sturgis that he wanted his money.

"If you can't raise it," said the major, "I am willing to cancel the note, give you two hundred and fifty dollars, and take a deed of the place."

"That is only allowing seven hundred and fifty dollars for it," said poor Job.

"It's all it is worth," said the rich man, coldly. "If you prefer to put it up at auction, I am willing, but you may in that case get less. I'll give you three days to decide."

There was great sorrow in Job Stanton's house that evening. Six months before he had considered himself well-to-do. Now, at the age of sixty, poverty and destitution stared him in the face.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Do you think we shall have to give up the house, Job?" asked Mrs. Stanton, anxiously.

"I see no other way," said Job, mournfully. "I can't raise five hundred dollars anywhere."

"Have you been to Deacon Pitkin?"

"Yes, but the deacon says he's just put out what money he had, and can't accommodate me."

"It's hard!" said Mrs. Stanton, with sad brevity.

"Yes, it is hard!" assented Job. "I did hope the Lord would show us a way of deliverance, but it seems likely that the sorrow must come upon us."

"How meanly Major Sturgis and that man Richmond have behaved! I can't help feeling that they will be come up with sooner or later," said Mrs. Stanton, who, mild as she generally was, could not help feeling²⁶⁶ exasperated.

"I do think they've been inconsiderate," Job admitted.

"Inconsiderate! Their conduct has been contemptible. The major don't need the money. He could just as well let us stay here."

While this conversation was going on Ben and his friend Bradley were approaching the little cottage.

Full of joyful memories, Ben lifted the latch and walked into the presence of his uncle and aunt. Nothing but his return could have chased the mournful expression from their faces.

"Why, it's Ben come back!" exclaimed his aunt, joyfully.

"Well, I declare, so it is!" answered Job Stanton, hurrying forward and grasping the hand of his boy after his aunt had embraced him.

"How you've grown, Ben!" said his aunt, admiringly.

"Yes, Aunt Clarissa, I've grown four inches," said Ben, proudly. "But I've brought a friend with me.--Jake, come in."

And then Bradley was introduced to Job and his wife, and was cordially welcomed by both. [Pg 267]

"You're lucky to come while we've got a home to welcome you to," said Job, his face again saddening.

"Why, Uncle Job, you're not thinking of selling the house, are you?"

Then the whole story came out.

Ben listened attentively, and when his uncle had finished he said, "That Richmond is a first-class rascal."

"And I'd like to give him a first-class kick," said Bradley, indignantly.

"That wouldn't mend matters," said Job, shaking his head. "It wouldn't pay off the mortgage."

"You say the mortgage amounts to five hundred dollars, Uncle Job?"

"Yes. Then there's six months' interest, at six per cent., makes fifteen dollars more."

"When do you expect Major Sturgis to call?"

"This morning. It's almost time for him."

"I met Sam on my way here," said Ben. "He told me I'd come just in the nick of time. I didn't know what he meant, but I know now."

"The major offers to buy the house, paying me two hundred and fifty dollars over and above the note."

"Why, that's robbery!" said Ben, indignantly.

"So it is, Ben; but what can I do?"

"I think," said Ben, smiling, "you'd better borrow five hundred and fifteen dollars of your rich nephew."

"What do you mean, Ben?" asked Job, in surprise.

"I mean this, Uncle Job--that I'll lend you the money to pay up this shark."

"You don't mean to say you've got money enough?" ejaculated Uncle Job.

"Yes, I do, uncle, and a little over. I'll prove it to you."

He produced a wallet, from which he drew out five one-hundred-dollar bills and three fives.

"Take them, uncle, and ask me questions afterward, for I see through the window that the major is coming."

Indeed, a knock was heard directly, and Job, answering it himself, ushered in the stately figure of Major Sturgis.

The major looked around him in surprise, finding more persons than he expected to see.

"Don't you remember Ben, Major Sturgis?" asked Job.

"When did you come home, Benjamin," asked the major, taken by surprise.

"I have just arrived, sir."

"Tired of California, eh?"

"For the present, yes, sir."

"I think my son Sam wishes to see you. He thinks of offering you a place."

Ben bowed and smiled. He understood what sort of a place Sam was likely to offer.

"Well, Mr. Stanton," asked the major, pompously, "have you decided to accept my offer for the house?"

"No, major. Your offer is too small."

"You are quite at liberty to look around for a higher bid, or rather you were. Now it is too late."

"Just so, major. On the whole I don't think I want to sell."

"Don't want to sell?" repeated the major, frowning; "you will have to sell."

"Why will Uncle Job have to sell?" demanded Ben, irritated by the major's tone.

"Young man," said the major, grandly, "this is not a matter with which you have anything to do. Your uncle and I can arrange it between ourselves."

"Still, I shall advise Uncle Job to pay the mortgage, though he was swindled into agreeing to it."

"I apprehend," sneered the major, "he will have some difficulty in paying me five hundred and fifteen dollars."

"I guess I can manage to do it, major," said Job, mildly.

"I don't believe you," said the major, hastily.

"Have you got the mortgage with you?" asked Job.

"Yes; here it is."

"And here is your money," said the shoemaker, producing the bills.

Major Sturgis received them in amazement bordering upon stupefaction, and counted them over three times.

"I guess they're all right," said Job.

"Where did you get them?" inquired the major, unable to control his curiosity.

"I guess that doesn't matter so long as they're good," answered Job. "Still, I've no objection to tellin' you that it's Ben's money that he's kindly lent to me."

"Did you bring this from California?" asked the major, turning to our hero.

"Yes, sir," answered Ben.

"Have you any more?"

"I've got enough more, so that I don't expect to need the situation Sam thought of offering me."

When Major Sturgis left the cottage his grand air had passed off, and he looked disappointed and mortified. Sam's spirits, too, were perceptibly dashed when he learned that the boy he disliked had been successful in California.

"That settles the major," said Ben. "This afternoon I will see what I can do in the case of Richmond."

"You can't do anything, Ben," said his aunt. "Leave him to the reproaches of his own conscience."

"He hasn't got any conscience, Aunt Clarissa," said Ben.--"Jake, will you ride over with me to the next town this afternoon?"

"I shall be glad to, Ben."

Ben went at once to the office of an able lawyer, engaged his services, and put the matter into his hands. The result was, that John Richmond received a note by messenger summoning him to the lawyer's office. He at first tried to bluster, then to temporize, but the lawyer was stern and threatened to exhaust the resources of the law in behalf of his clients. Like most bullies, Richmond was a coward, and ended by giving a note for the full amount, with interest, at thirty days.

"You had better leave this note with me," said the lawyer to Ben; "I will collect it when due."

And he did. With a crestfallen air John Richmond had to confess himself defeated in his mean attempt at swindling, for he had obtained Uncle Job's indorsement with the deliberate intention of leaving him to pay the note, supposing that the old man would be too timid to do anything about it.

Ben remained in Hampton a week. During that time he bought the three-acre lot adjoining--the major having given up the purchase when his plan of getting possession of Job Stanton's little property fell through--and gave it to his uncle. This made Job feel like a rich man, and he only accepted it on Ben's assurance that he had plenty more money.

At the end of a week Ben received a letter from Richard Dewey, informing him that he proposed to go into business for himself in the city of New York, and was anxious to engage Ben as a clerk. This offer was too good to refuse. So Ben, a month later, found himself in a responsible business position. As his employer within a few months came into possession of his wife's large fortune, which her guardian was reluctantly obliged to surrender, he was not hampered by lack of capital, but within a year had his business securely

established.

Ten years have passed. Ben is now junior partner, and enjoys a high reputation for business ability. A year since he married his cousin Jennie, and in so doing has made a wise choice. He lives in the city, but Uncle Job and his wife still live in Hampton, though Job is no longer compelled to work for a livelihood. He has given up his shop, and confines himself to the cultivation of his small tract of land. Though now seventy, his eye is not dim nor his natural force abated.

Major Sturgis is dead, and Sam, it is understood, has wasted a considerable portion of the handsome property that was left him. It is quite possible that he may end in poverty and destitution, and be forced at last to work for a living. This he would regard as a misfortune, but it will probably be a blessing in disguise, for the necessity of honest labor is generally a salutary restraint.

Bradley has gone back to California. His son is now with him, and both are prosperous. Richard Dewey and his wife are rich and happy (the two do not always go together), and have four children, the second of whom, a boy, is named Benjamin Stanton Dewey, in honor of our hero.

I have endeavored to ascertain what became of our Mongolian friend, Ki Sing, but without entire success. My impression is, that he started a laundry in San Francisco, made enough money for a Chinaman to retire upon, and went back to his native land to live in competence, the happy husband of a high-born Chinese maiden with incredibly small feet. Doubtless, he has more than once retailed to wondering ears the account of his adventures and perils when he, as well as Ben, visited California "in search of fortune."

THE END.

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[Transcriber's Note: The advertisement for "Famous Alger Books" has been moved from its position before the main text to the rear of the book. In addition, the following corrections have been made to the original text.

In Chapter V, an apostrophe following "I don't see anything that looks like a cabin," has been changed to a quotation mark.

In Chapter VI, "Here's the cord, Tom, Tie his hands and feet" has been changed to "Here's the cord, Tom, tie his hands and feet".

In Chapter IX, "these fellows have tied me hand and foot" has been changed to "these fellows have tied me hand and foot"; a missing period has been inserted after "'It'll do as far as it goes, Mosely," said Bradley"; a superfluous quotation mark has been removed following "echoed Tom Hadley from the other tree."

In Chapter XII, "I thought that too, Ben?" has been changed to "I thought that too, Ben."; an apostrophe preceding "there was an old farmer, Deacon Pitkins" has been changed to a quotation mark.

In Chapter XIII, "My legs get cramped when I am on horsback too long." has been changed to "My legs get cramped when I am on horseback too long."

In Chapter XVI, a superfluous quotation mark has been removed preceding "There's some of us want to see you."

In Chapter XVIII, a missing quotation mark has been added preceding "We will make your share equal to that of the luckiest miner among us."

In Chapter XXI, a missing quotation mark has been added preceding "Her fortune amounts to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, does it not?"; a missing period has been inserted after "muttered the merchant".

In Chapter XXXI, "So Uncle Joe took off his leather apron" has been changed to "So Uncle Job took off his leather apron".

In Chapter XXXIII, a missing period has been inserted after "All this happened soon after Ben went away"; "red cotton handkerkerchief" has been changed to "red cotton handkerchief".

In Chapter XXXIV, "Why, Uncle Ben" has been changed to "Why, Uncle Job".]

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