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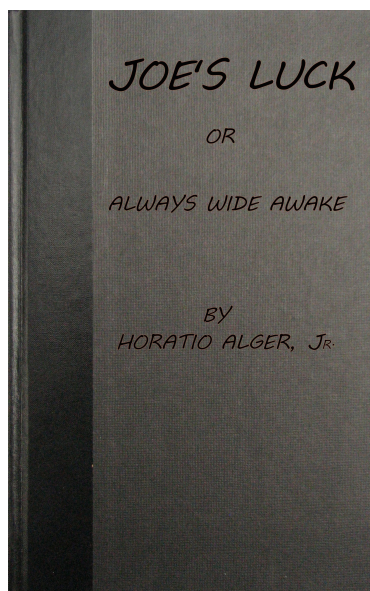
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOE'S LUCK; OR, ALWAYS WIDE AWAKE ***



JOE'S LUCK
OR
ALWAYS WIDE AWAKE

BY
HORATIO ALGER, JR.

AUTHOR OF
"TONY THE TRAMP," "SLOW AND SURE," "THE CASH BOY,"
"MAKING HIS WAY," "JACK'S WARD," "DO AND DARE,"
"FACING THE WORLD," "STRONG AND STEADY,"
"STRIVE AND SUCCEED," ETC.

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1913

JOE'S LUCK

CHAPTER I INTRODUCES JOE

"Come here, you Joe, and be quick about it!"

The boy addressed, a stout boy of fifteen, with an honest, sun-browned face, looked calmly at the speaker.

"What's wanted?" he asked.

"Brush me off, and don't be all day about it!" said Oscar Norton impatiently.

Joe's blue eyes flashed indignantly at the tone of the other.

"You can brush yourself off," he answered independently.

"What do you mean by your impudence?" demanded Oscar angrily. "Have you turned lazy all at once?"

"No," said Joe firmly, "but I don't choose to be ordered round by you."

"What's up, I wonder? Ain't you our servant?"

"I am not your servant, though your father is my employer."

"Then you are bound to obey me—his son."

"I don't see it."

"Then you'd better, if you know what's best for yourself. Are you going to brush me off?"

"No."

"Look out! I can get my father to turn you off."

"You may try if you want to."

Oscar, much incensed, went to his father to report Joe's insubordination. While he is absent, a few words of explanation will enlighten the reader as to Joe's history and present position.

Joe Mason was alone in the world. A year previous he had lost his father, his only remaining parent, and when the father's affairs were settled and funeral expenses paid there was found to be just five dollars left, which was expended for clothing for Joe.

In this emergency Major Norton, a farmer and capitalist, offered to provide Joe with board and clothes and three months' schooling in the year in return for his services. As nothing else offered, Joe accepted, but would not bind himself for any length of time. He was free to go whenever he pleased.

Now there were two disagreeable things in Joe's new place. The first was the parsimony of Major Norton, who was noted for his stingy disposition, and the second was the overbearing manners of Oscar, who lost no opportunity to humiliate Joe and tyrannize over him so far as Joe's independent spirit would allow. It happened, therefore, that Joe was compelled to work hard, while the promised clothing was of the cheapest and shabbiest description. He was compelled to go to school in patched shoes and a ragged suit, which hurt his pride as he compared himself with Oscar, who was carefully and even handsomely dressed. Parsimonious as his father was, he was anxious that his only boy should appear to advantage.

On the very day on which our story begins Oscar had insulted Joe in a way which excited our hero's bitter indignation.

This is the way it happened:

Joe, who was a general favorite on account of his good looks and gentlemanly manners, and in spite of his shabby attire, was walking home with Annie Raymond, the daughter of the village physician, when Oscar came up.

He was himself secretly an admirer of the young lady, but had never received the least encouragement from her. It made him angry to see his father's drudge walking on equal terms with his own favorite, and his coarse nature prompted him to insult his enemy.

"Miss Raymond," he said, lifting his hat mockingly, "I congratulate you on the beau you have picked up."

Annie Raymond fully appreciated his meanness, and answered calmly:

"I accept your congratulations, Mr. Norton."

This answer made Oscar angry and led him to go further than he otherwise would.

"You must be hard up for an escort, when you accept such a ragamuffin as Joe Mason."

Joe flushed with anger.

"Oscar Norton, do you mean to insult Miss Raymond or me," he demanded.

"So you are on your high horse!" said Oscar sneeringly.

"Will you answer my question?"

"Yes, I will. I certainly don't mean to insult Miss Raymond, but I wonder at her taste in choosing my father's hired boy to walk with."

"I am not responsible to you for my choice, Oscar Norton," said Annie Raymond, with dignity. "If my escort is poorly dressed, it is not his fault, nor do I think the less of him for it."

"If your father would dress me better, I should be very glad of it," said Joe. "If I am a ragamuffin, it is his fault."

"I'll report that to him," said Oscar maliciously.

"I wish you would. It would save me the trouble of asking him for better clothes."

"Suppose we go on," said Annie Raymond.

"Certainly," said Joe politely.

And they walked on, leaving Oscar discomfited and mortified.

"What a fool Annie Raymond makes of herself" he muttered. "I should think she'd be ashamed to go round with Joe Mason."

Oscar would have liked to despise Annie Raymond, but it was out of his power. She was undoubtedly the belle of the school, and he would have been proud to receive as much notice from her as she freely accorded to Joe. But the young lady had a mind and a will of her own, and she had seen too much to dislike in Oscar to regard him with favor, even if he were the son of a rich man, while she had the good sense and discrimination to see that Joe, despite his ragged garb, possessed sterling good qualities.

When Oscar got home he sought his father.

"Father," said he, "I heard Joe complaining to Annie Raymond that you didn't dress him decently."

Major Norton looked annoyed.

"What does the boy mean?" he said. "What does he expect?"

"He should be dressed as well as I am," said Oscar maliciously.

"Quite out of the question," said the major hastily. "Your clothes cost a mint of money."

"Of course, you want me to look well, father. I am your son, and he is only your hired boy."

"I don't want folks to talk," said the major, who was sensitive to public opinion. "Don't you think his clothes are good enough?"

"Of course they are; but I'll tell you what, father," said Oscar, with a sudden idea, "you know that suit of mine that I got stained with acid?"

"Yes, Oscar," said the major gravely. "I ought to remember it. It cost me thirty-four dollars, and you spoiled it by your carelessness."

"Suppose you give that to Joe?" suggested Oscar.

"He's a good deal larger than you. It wouldn't fit him; and, besides, it's stained."

"What right has a hired boy to object to a stain? No matter if it is too small, he has no right to be particular."

"You are right, Oscar," said the major, who was glad to be saved the expense of a new suit for Joe. Even he had been unpleasantly conscious that Joe's appearance had become discreditable to him. "You may bring it down, Oscar," he said.

"I dare say Joe won't like the idea of wearing it, but a boy in his position has no right to be proud."

"Of course not," returned the major, his ruling passion gratified by the prospect of saving the price of a suit. "When Joseph comes home—at any rate, after he is through with his chores—you may tell him to come in to me."

"All right, sir."

Before Oscar remembered this message, the scene narrated at the commencement of the chapter occurred. On his way to complain to his father, he recollected the message, and, retracing his steps, said to Joe:

"My father wants to see you right off."

This was a summons which Joe felt it his duty to obey. He accordingly bent his steps to the room where Major Norton usually sat.

CHAPTER II

THE STAINED SUIT

"Oscar tells me that you wish to see me, sir," said Joe, as he entered the presence of his pompous employer.

Major Norton wheeled round in his armchair and looked at Joe over his spectacles. He looked at Joe's clothes, too, and it did strike him forcibly that they were very shabby. However, there was Oscar's stained suit; which was entirely whole and of excellent cloth. As to the stains, what right had a boy like Joe to be particular?

"Ahem!" said the major, clearing his throat. "Oscar tells me that you are not satisfied with the clothes I have I given you."

"He has told you the truth, Major Norton," replied Joe bluntly. "If you will look for yourself, I think you will see why I am dissatisfied."

"Joseph," said the major, in a tone of disapproval, "you are too free spoken. I understand you have been complaining to Doctor Raymond's daughter of the way I dress you."

"Did Oscar tell you the way that happened?" inquired Joe.

"I apprehend he did not."

"When I was walking home with Miss Annie Raymond, Oscar came up and insulted me, calling me a ragamuffin. I told him that, if I was a ragamuffin, it was not my fault."

Major Norton looked disturbed.

"Oscar was inconsiderate," he said. "It seems to me that your clothes are suitable to your station in life. It is not well for a boy in your circumstances to be 'clothed in purple and fine linen,' as the Scriptures express it. However, perhaps it is time for you to have another suit."

Joe listened in astonishment. Was it possible that Major Norton was going to open his heart and give him what he had long secretly desired?

Our hero's delusion was soon dissipated.

Major Norton rose from his seat, and took from a chair near-by a stained suit, which had not yet attracted Joe's attention.

"Here is a suit of Oscar's," he said, "which is quite whole and almost new. Oscar only wore it a month. It cost me thirty-four dollars!" said the major impressively.

He held it up, and Joe recognized it at once.

"Isn't it the suit Oscar got stained?" he asked abruptly.

"Ahem! Yes; it is a little stained, but that doesn't injure the texture of the cloth."

As he held it up the entire suit seemed to have been sprinkled with acid, which had changed the color in large, patches in different parts. The wearer would be pretty sure to excite an unpleasant degree of attention.

Joe did not appear to be overwhelmed with the magnificence of the gift.

"If it is so good, why don't Oscar wear it?" he asked.

Major Norton regarded Joe with displeasure.

"It cannot matter to you how Oscar chooses to dress," he said. "I apprehend that you and he are not on a level."

"He is your son, and I am your hired boy," said Joe. "I admit that. But I don't see how you can ask me to wear a suit like that."

"I apprehend that you are unsuitably proud, Joseph."

"I hope not, sir; but I don't want to attract everybody's notice as I walk the streets. If I had stained the suit myself, I should have felt bound to wear it, but it was Oscar's carelessness that destroyed its appearance, and I don't think I ought to suffer for that. Besides, it is much too small for me. Let me show you."

Joe pulled off his coat and put on the stained one. The sleeves were from two to three inches too short, and it was so far from meeting in front, on account of his being much broader than Oscar, that his shoulders seemed drawn back to meet each other behind.

"It doesn't exactly fit," said the major; "but it can be let out easily. I will send it to Miss Pearce—the village tailoress—to fix it over for you."

"Thank you, Major Norton," said Joe, in a decided tone, "but I hope you won't go to that expense, for I shall not be willing to wear it under any circumstances."

"I cannot believe my ears," said Major Norton, with dignified displeasure. "How old are you, Joseph?"

"Fifteen, sir."

"It is not fitting that you, a boy of fifteen, should dictate to your employer."

"I don't wish to, Major Norton, but I am not willing to wear that suit."

"You are too proud. Your pride needs taking down."

"Major Norton," said Joe firmly, "I should like to tell you how I feel. You are my employer, and I am your hired boy. I try to do my duty by you."

"You are a good boy to work, Joseph. I don't complain of that."

"You agreed to give me board and clothing for my services."

"So I have."

"Yes, sir; but you have dressed me in such a way that I attract attention in the street for my shabbiness. I don't think I am very proud, but I have been mortified! more than once when I saw people looking at my patched clothes and shoes out at the toes. I think if I work faithfully I ought to be dressed decently."

"Joseph," said Major Norton uneasily, "you look at the thing too one-sided. You don't expect me to dress you like Oscar?"

"No, sir; I don't. If you would spend half as much for my clothes as you do for Oscar's I would be contented."

"It seems to me you are very inconsistent. Here is a suit of clothes that cost me thirty-four dollars, which I offer you, and you decline."

"You know why well enough, sir," said Joe, "You did not tell me you intended to dress me in Oscar's castoff clothes, too small, and stained at that. I would rather wear the patched suit I have on till it drops to pieces than wear this suit."

"You can go, Joseph," said Major Norton, in a tone of annoyance. "I did not expect to find you so unreasonable. If you do not choose to take what I offer you, you will have to go without."

"Very well, sir."

Joe left the room, his face flushed and his heart full of indignation at the slight which had been attempted on him.

"It is Oscar's doings, I have no doubt," he said to himself. "It is like his meanness. He meant to mortify me."

If there had been any doubt in Joe's mind, it would soon have been cleared up. Oscar had been lying in wait for his appearance, and managed to meet him as he went out into the yard.

"Where are your new clothes?" he asked mockingly.

"I have none," answered Joe.

"Didn't my father give you a suit of mine?"

"He offered me the suit which you stained so badly with acid."

"Well, it's pretty good," said Oscar patronizingly. "I only wore it about a month."

"Why don't you wear it longer?"

"Because it isn't fit for me to wear," returned Oscar.

"Nor for me," said Joe.

"You don't mean to say you've declined?" exclaimed Oscar, in surprise.

"That is exactly what I have done."

"Why?"

"You ought to know why."

"It is better than the one you have on."

"It is too small for me. Besides, it would attract general attention."

"Seems to me somebody is getting proud," sneered Oscar. "Perhaps you think Annie Raymond wouldn't walk with you in that suit?"

"I think it would make no difference to her," said Joe. "She was willing to walk with me in this ragged suit."

"I don't admire her taste."

"She didn't walk with my clothes; she walked with me."

"A hired boy!"

"Yes, I am a hired boy; but I don't get very good pay."

"You feel above your business, that's what's the matter with you."

"I hope some time to get higher than my business," said Joe. "I mean to rise in the world, if I can."

Oscar shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you would like to be a wealthy merchant, or a member of Congress," he said.

"I certainly should."

Oscar burst into a sneering laugh, and left Joe alone.

Joe's work was done, and, being left free to do as he liked, he strolled over to the village store.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURNED CALIFORNIAN

The village store, in the evening, was a sort of village club-house, where not only the loungers, but a better class, who desired to pass the evening socially, were wont to congregate. About the center of the open space was a large box-stove, which in winter was kept full of wood, oftentimes getting red-hot, and around this sat the villagers. Some on wooden chairs, some on a wooden settee, with a broken back, which was ranged on one side.

Joe frequently came here in the evening to pass a social hour and kill time. At the house of Major Norton he had no company. Oscar felt above him, and did not deign to hold any intercourse with his father's drudge, while the housekeeper—Major Norton being a widower—was busy about her own special work, and would have wondered at Joe if he had sought her company. I make this explanation because I do not wish it to be understood that Joe was a common village loungee, or loafer.

When Joe entered the store he found the usual company present, but with one addition.

This was Seth Larkin, who had just returned from California, whither he had gone eighteen months before, and was, of course, an object of great attention, and plied with numerous questions by his old acquaintances in regard to the land of promise in the far West, of which all had heard so much.

It was in the fall of the year 1851, and so in the early days of California.

Seth was speaking as Joe entered.

"Is there gold in California?" repeated Seth, apparently in answer to a question. "I should say there was. Why, it's chock full of it. People haven't begun to find out the richness of the country. It's the place for a poor man to go if he wants to become rich. What's the prospects here? I ask any one of you. A man may go working and plodding from one year's end to another and not have ten dollars at the end of it. There's some here that know that I speak the truth."

"How much better can a man do in California?" asked Daniel Tompkins.

"Well, Dan," said Seth, "it depends on the kind of man he is. If he's a man like you, that spends his money for rum as fast as he gets it, I should say it's just as well to stay here. But if he's willing to work hard, and to put by half he makes, he's sure to do well, and he may get rich. Why, I knew a man that landed in California the same day that I did, went up to the mines, struck a vein, and—well, how much do you think that man is worth to-day?"

"A thousand dollars?" suggested Dan Tompkins.

"Why, I'm worth more than that myself, and I wasn't lucky, and had the rheumatism for four months. You'll have to go higher."

"Two thousand?" guessed Sam Stone.

"We don't make much account of two thousand dollars in the mines, Sam," said Seth.

"It's of some account here," said Sam. "I've been workin' ten years, and I ain't saved up a third of it."

"I don't doubt it," said Seth; "and it ain't your fault, either. Money's scarce round here, and farmin' don't pay. You know what I was workin' at before I went out—in a shoe shop. I just about made a poor livin', and that was all. I didn't have money enough to pay my passage out, but I managed to borrow it. Well, it's paid now, and I've got something left."

"You haven't told us yet how much the man made that you was talkin' about," said Tom Sutter. "It couldn't be five thousand dollars, now, could it?"

"I should say it could," said Seth.

"Was it any more?" inquired Dan Tompkins.

"Well, boys, I s'pose I may as well tell you, and you may b'lieve it or not, just as you like. That man is worth twenty thousand dollars to-day."

There was a chorus of admiring ejaculations.

"Twenty thousand dollars! Did you ever hear the like?"

"Mind, boys, I don't say it's common to make so much money in so short a time. There isn't one in ten does it, but some make even more. What I do say is, that a feller that's industrious, and willin' to work, an' rough it, and save what he makes, is sure to do well, if he keeps well. That's all a man has a right to expect, or to hope for."

"To be sure it is."

"What made you come home, Seth, if you were gettin' on so well?" inquired one.

"That's a fair question," said Seth, "and I'm willin' to answer it. It was because of the rheumatics. I had 'em powerful bad at the mines, and I've come home to kinder recuperate, if that's the right word. But I'm goin' back ag'in, you may bet high on that. No more work in the shoe shop for me at the old rates. I don't mean that I'd mind bein' a manufacturer on a big scale. That's a little more stiddy and easy than bein' at the mines, but that takes more capital than I've got."

"How much does it cost to go out there?" asked Dan Tompkins.

"More money than you can scare together, Dan. First-class, nigh on to three hundred dollars, I believe."

This statement rather dampened the ardor of more than one of the listeners. Three hundred dollars, or even two, were beyond the convenient reach of most of those present. They would have to mortgage their places to get it.

"You can go second-class for a good deal less, and you can go round the Horn pretty cheap," continued Seth.

"How far away is Californy?" inquired Sam Stone.

"By way of the isthmus, it must be as much as six thousand miles, and it's twice as fur, I reckon, round the Horn. I don't exactly know the distance."

"Then it's farther away than Europe," said Joe, who had been listening with eager interest.

"Of course it is," said Seth. "Why, that's Joe Mason, isn't it? How you've grown since I saw you."

"Do you think I have?" said Joe, pleased with the assurance.

"To be sure you have. Why, you're a big boy of your age. How old are you?"

"Fifteen—nearly sixteen."

"That's about what I thought. Where are you livin' now, Joe?"

"I'm working for Major Norton."

Seth burst into a laugh.

"I warrant you haven't made your fortune yet, Joe," he said.

"I haven't made the first start yet toward it."

"And you won't while you work for the major. How much does he pay you?"

"Board and clothes."

"And them are the clothes?" said Seth, surveying Joe's appearance critically.

"Yes."

"I guess the major's tailor's bill won't ruin him, then. Are they the best you've got?"

"No; I've got a better suit for Sunday."

"Well, that's something. You deserve to do better, Joe."

"I wish I could," said Joe wistfully. "Is there any chance for a boy in California, Mr. Larkin?"

"Call me Seth. It's what I'm used to. I don't often use the handle to my name. Well, there's a chance for a boy, if he's smart; but he's got to work."

"I should be willing to do that."

"Then, if you ever get the chance, it won't do you any harm to try your luck."

"How much did you say it costs to get there?"

"Well, maybe you could get there for a hundred dollars, if you wasn't particular how you went."

A hundred dollars! It might as well have been ten thousand, as far as Joe was concerned. He received no money wages, nor was he likely to as long as he remained in the major's employ. There was a shoe shop in the village, where money wages were paid, but there was no vacancy; and, even if there were, Joe was quite unacquainted with the business, and it would be a good while before he could do any more than pay his expenses.

Joe sighed as he thought how far away was the prospect of his being able to go to California. He could not help wishing that he were the possessor of the magic carpet mentioned in the Arabian tale, upon which the person seated had only to wish himself to be transported anywhere, and he was carried there in the twinkling of an eye.

Joe walked home slowly, dreaming of the gold-fields on the other side of the continent, and wishing he were there.

CHAPTER IV

JOE'S LEGACY

The next day was Saturday. There was no school, but this did not lighten Joe's labors, as he was kept at work on the farm all day.

He was in the barn when Deacon Goodwin, a neighbor, drove up.

Oscar was standing in front of the house, whittling out a cane from a stick he had cut in the woods.

"Is Joe Mason at home?" the deacon inquired.

Oscar looked up in surprise. Why should the deacon want Joe Mason?

"I suppose he is," drawled Oscar.

"Don't you know?"

"Probably he is in the barn," said Oscar indifferently.

"Will you call him? I want to see him on business."

Oscar was still more surprised. He was curious about the business, but his pride revolted at the idea of being sent to summon Joe.

"You'll find him in the barn," said he.

"I don't want to leave my horse," said the deacon. "I will take it as a favor if you will call him."

Oscar hesitated. Finally he decided to go and then return to hear what business Joe and the deacon had together. He rather hoped that Joe had been trespassing on the deacon's grounds, and was to be reprimanded.

He opened the barn door and called out:

"Deacon Goodwin wants you out at the gate."

Joe was as much surprised as Oscar.

He followed Oscar to the front of the house and bade the deacon good morning.

"Oscar tells me you want to see me," he said.

"Yes, Joe. Do you remember your Aunt Susan?"

"My mother's aunt?"

"Yes; she's dead and buried."

"She was pretty old," said Joe.

"The old lady had a small pension," continued the deacon, "that just about kept her, but she managed to save a little out of it. When the funeral expenses were paid it was found that there were fifty-six dollars and seventy-five cents over."

"What's going to be done with it?" he inquired.

"She's left it to you," was the unexpected reply, "You was the nearest relation she had, and it was her wish that whatever was left should go to you."

"I'm very much obliged to her. I didn't expect anything. I had almost forgotten I had a great-aunt."

"The money has been sent to me, Joe," continued the deacon. "I'm ready to pay it over to you when you want it, but I hope you won't spend it foolishly."

"I don't think I shall, Deacon Goodwin."

"It wouldn't take long to spend it, Joe," said the deacon. "Do you want me to keep it for you?"

"I don't know," said Joe; "I haven't had time to think. I'll come round to-night and see you."

"Very well, Joseph. G'lang, Dobbin!" and the deacon started his old horse, who had completed his quarter century, along the road.

Oscar had listened, not without interest, to the conversation. Though he was the son of a rich man, he had not at command so large a sum as his father's hired boy had fallen heir to. On the whole, he respected Joe rather more than when he was altogether penniless.

"You're in luck, Joe," said he graciously.

"Yes," said Joe. "It's very unexpected."

"You might buy yourself a new suit of clothes."

"I don't intend to do that."

"Why not? You were wishing for one yesterday."

"Because it is your father's place to keep me in clothes. That's the bargain I made with him."

"Perhaps you are right," said Oscar.

"I'll tell you what you can do," he said, after a pause.

"What?"

"You might buy a boat."

"I shouldn't have any time to use it."

"You might go out with it in the evening. I would look after it in the daytime."

No doubt this arrangement would be satisfactory to Oscar, who would reap all the advantage, but Joe did not see it in a favorable light.

"I don't think I should care to buy a boat," he said.

"What do you say to buying a revolver?"

"I think it would be better to put it on interest."

"You'd better get the good of it now. You might die and then what use would the money be?"

On the way to the deacon's Joe fell in with Seth Larkin.

"Well, my boy, where are you bound?" asked Seth.

"To collect my fortune," said Joe.

Seth asked for an explanation and received it.

"I'm glad for you and I wish it were more."

"So do I," said Joe.

"What for? Anything particular?"

"Yes; if it was enough, I would go to California."

"And you really want to go?"

"Yes. I suppose fifty dollars wouldn't be enough?"

"No; it wouldn't," said Seth; "but I'll tell you what you could do."

"What?"

"Go to New York and keep yourself till you got a chance to work your passage round the Horn."

"So I might," said Joe, brightening up.

"It wouldn't be easy, but you wouldn't mind that."

"No; I wouldn't mind that."

"Well, if you decide to go, come round and see me to-morrow, and I'll give you the best advice I can."

The deacon opposed Joe's plan, but in vain. Our hero had made up his mind. Finally the old man counted out the money and Joe put it in an old wallet.

The next thing was to give Major Norton warning.

"Major Norton," said Joe, "I should like to have you get another boy in my place."

"What, Joe?" exclaimed the major.

"I am going to leave town."

"Where are you going?" asked his employer.

"First to New York and afterwards to California."

"Well, I declare! Is it because you ain't satisfied with your clothes?"

"No, sir. I don't see much prospect for me if I stay here and I have heard a good deal about California."

"But you haven't got any money."

"I have almost sixty dollars."

"Oh, yes; Oscar told me. You'd better stay here."

"No, sir; I have made up my mind."

"You'll come back in a month without a cent."

"If I do, I'll go to work again for you."

Monday morning came. Clad in his Sunday suit of cheap and rough cloth, Joe stood on the platform at the depot. The cars came up, he jumped aboard, and his heart beat with exultation as he reflected that he had taken the first step toward the Land of Gold.

CHAPTER V AT THE COMMERCIAL HOTEL

Joe had never been in New York and when he arrived the bustle and confusion at first bewildered him.

"Have a hack, young man?" inquired a jehu.

"What'll you charge?"

"A dollar and a half, and half-a-dollar for your baggage."

"This is all the baggage I have," said Joe, indicating a bundle tied in a red cotton handkerchief.

"Then, I'll only charge a dollar and a half," said the hackman.

"I'll walk," said Joe. "I can't afford to pay a dollar and a half."

"You can't walk; it's too far."

"How far is it?"

"Ten miles, more or less," answered the hackman.

"Then I shall save fifteen cents a mile," said Joe, not much alarmed, for he did not believe the statement.

"If you lose your way, don't blame me."

Joe made his way out of the crowd, and paused at the corner of the next street for reflection. Finally he stopped at an apple and peanut stand, and, as a matter of policy, purchased an apple.

"I am from the country," he said, "and I want to find a cheap hotel. Can you recommend one to me?"

"Yes," said the peanut merchant. "I know of one where they charge a dollar a day."

"Is that cheap? What do they charge at the St. Nicholas?"

"Two dollars a day."

"A day?" asked Joe, in amazement.

It must be remembered that this was over fifty years ago. Joe would have greater cause to be startled at the prices now asked at our fashionable hotels.

"Well, you can go to the cheap hotel."

"Where is it?"

The requisite directions were given. It was the Commercial Hotel, located in a down-town street.

The Commercial Hotel, now passed away, or doing business under a changed name, was not a stylish inn.

It was rather dark and rather dingy, but Joe did not notice that particularly. He had never seen a fine hotel, and this structure, being four stories in height above the offices, seemed to him rather imposing than otherwise.

He walked up to the desk, on which was spread out, wide open, the hotel register. Rather a dissipated-looking clerk stood behind the counter, picking his teeth.

"Good morning, sir," said Joe politely. "What do you charge to stay here?"

"A dollar a day," answered the clerk.

"Can you give me a room?"

"I guess so, my son. Where is your trunk?"

"I haven't got any."

"Haven't you got any baggage?"

"Here it is."

The clerk looked rather superciliously at the small bundle.

"Then you'll have to pay in advance."

"All right," said Joe. "I'll pay a day in advance."

A freckle-faced boy was summoned, provided with the key of No. 161, and Joe was directed to follow him.

"Shall I take your bundle?" he asked.

"No, thank you. I can carry it myself."

They went up-stairs, until Joe wondered when they were going to stop. Finally the boy paused at the top floor, for the very good reason that he could get no higher, and opened the door of 161.

"There you are," said the boy. "Is there anything else you want?"

"No, thank you."

"I'm sorry there ain't a bureau to keep your clothes," said the freckle-faced boy, glancing at Joe's small bundle with a smile.

"It is inconvenient," answered Joe, taking the joke.

"You wouldn't like some hot water for shaving, would you?" asked the boy, with a grin.

"You can have some put on to heat and I'll order it when my beard is grown," said Joe good-naturedly.

"All right. I'll tell 'em to be sure and have it ready in two or three years."

"That will be soon enough. You'd better order some for yourself at the same time."

"Oh, I get in hot water every day."

The freckle-faced boy disappeared, and Joe sat down on the bed, to reflect a little on his position and plans.

So here he was in New York, and on the way to California, too—that is, he hoped so. How much can happen in a little while. Three days before he had not dreamed of any change in his position.

"I hope I shan't have to go back again to Oakville. I won't go unless I am obliged to," he determined.

He washed his hands and face, and went down-stairs. He found that dinner was just ready. It was not a luxurious meal, but, compared with the major's rather frugal table, there was great variety and luxury. Joe did justice to it.

"Folks live better in the city than they do in the country," he thought; "but, then, they have to pay for it. A dollar a day! Why, that would make three hundred and sixty-five dollars a year!"

This to Joe seemed a very extravagant sum to spend on one person's board and lodging.

"Now," thought Joe, after dinner was over, "the first thing for me to find out is when the California steamer starts and what is the lowest price I can go for."

In the barroom Joe found a file of two of the New York daily papers, and began to search for the advertisement of the California steamers.

At last he found it.

The steamer was to start in three days. Apply for passage and any information at the company's offices.

"I'll go right down there, and find out whether I've got money enough to take me," Joe decided.

CHAPTER VI

JOE BUYS A TICKET

The office of the steamer was on the wharf from which it was to start. Already a considerable amount of freight was lying on the wharf ready to be loaded. Joe made his way to the office.

"Well, boy, what's your business?" inquired a stout man with a red face, who seemed to be in charge.

"Is this the office of the California steamer, sir?"

"Yes."

"What is the lowest price for passage?"

"A hundred dollars for the steerage."

When Joe heard this his heart sank within him. It seemed to be the death-blow to his hopes. He had but fifty dollars, or thereabouts, and there was no chance whatever of getting the extra fifty.

"Couldn't I pay you fifty dollars now and the rest as soon as I can earn it in California?" he pleaded.

"We don't do business in that way."

"I'd be sure to pay it, sir, if I lived," said Joe. "Perhaps you think I am not honest."

"I don't know whether you are or not," said the agent cavalierly. "We never do business in that way."

Joe left the office not a little disheartened.

"I wish it had been a hundred dollars Aunt Susan left me," he said to himself.

Joe's spirits were elastic, however. He remembered that Seth had never given him reason to suppose that the money he had would pay his passage by steamer. He had mentioned working his passage in a sailing-vessel round the Horn. Joe did not like that idea so well, as the voyage would probably last four months, instead of twenty-five days, and so delay his arrival.

The afternoon slipped away almost without Joe's knowledge. He walked about, here and there, gazing with curious eyes at the streets, and warehouses, and passing vehicles, and thinking what a lively place New York was, and how different life was in the metropolis from what it had been to him in the quiet country town which had hitherto been his home. Somehow it seemed to wake Joe up, and excite his ambition, to give him a sense of power which he had never felt before.

"If I could only get a foothold here," thought Joe, "I should be willing to work twice as hard as I did on the farm."

This was what Joe thought. I don't say that he was correct. There are many country boys who make a mistake in coming to the city. They forsake quiet, comfortable homes, where they have all they need, to enter some city counting-room, or store, at starvation wages, with, at best, a very remote prospect of advancement and increased risk of falling a prey to temptation in some of the many forms which it assumes in a populous town. A boy needs to be strong, and self-reliant, and willing to work if he comes to the city to compete for the prizes of life. As the story proceeds, we shall learn whether Joe had these necessary qualifications.

When supper was over he went into the public room of the Commercial Hotel, and took up a paper to read. There was a paragraph about California, and some recent discoveries there, which he read with avidity.

Though Joe was not aware of it, he was closely observed by a dark-complexioned man, dressed in rather a flashy manner. When our hero laid down the paper this man commenced a conversation.

"I take it you are a stranger in the city, my young friend?" he observed, in an affable manner.

"Yes, sir," answered Joe, rather glad to have some one to speak to. "I only arrived this morning."

"Indeed! May I ask from what part of the country you come?"

"From Oakville, New Jersey."

"Indeed! I know the place. It is quite a charming town."

"I don't know about that," said Joe. "It's pretty quiet and dull—nothing going on."

"So you have come to the city to try your luck?"

"I want to go to California."

"Oh, I see—to the gold-diggings."

"Have you ever been there, sir?"

"No; but I have had many friends go there. When do you expect to start?"

"Why, that is what puzzles me," Joe replied frankly. "I may not be able to go at all."

"Why not?"

"I haven't got money enough to buy a ticket."

"You have got some money, haven't you?"

"Yes—I have fifty dollars; but I need that a hundred dollars is the lowest price for a ticket."

"Don't be discouraged, my young friend," said the stranger, in the most friendly manner. "I am aware that the ordinary charge for a steerage ticket is one hundred dollars, but exceptions are sometimes made."

"I don't think they will make one in my case," said Joe. "I told the agent I would agree to pay the other, half as soon as I earned it, but he said he didn't do business in that way."

"Of course. You are a stranger to him, don't you see? That makes all the difference in the world. Now, I happen to be personally acquainted with him. I am sure he would do me a favor. Just give me the fifty dollars, and I'll warrant I'll get the ticket for you."

Joe was not wholly without caution, and the thought of parting with his money to a stranger didn't strike him favorably. Not that he had any doubts as to his new friend's integrity, but it didn't seem businesslike.

"Can't I go with you to the office?" he suggested.

"I think I can succeed better in the negotiation if I am alone," said the stranger. "I'll tell you what—you needn't hand me the money, provided you agree to take the ticket off my hands at fifty dollars if I secure it."

"Certainly I will, and be very thankful to you."

"I always like to help young men along," said the stranger benevolently. "I'll see about it tomorrow. Now, where can I meet you?"

"In this room. How will that do?"

"Perfectly. I am sure I can get the ticket for you. Be sure to have the money ready."

"I'll be sure," said Joe cheerfully.

"And hark you, my young friend," continued the stranger, "don't say a word to any one of what I am going to do for you, or I might have other applications, which I should be obliged to refuse."

"Very well, sir. I will remember."

Punctually at four the next day the stranger entered the room, where Joe was already awaiting him.

"Have you succeeded?" asked Joe eagerly.

The stranger nodded.

"Let us go up to your room and complete our business. For reasons which I have already mentioned, I prefer that the transaction should be secret."

"All right, sir."

Joe got his key, and led the way up-stairs.

"I had a little difficulty with the agent," said the stranger; "but finally he yielded, out of old friendship." He produced a large card, which read thus:

CALIFORNIA STEAMSHIP COMPANY.
THE BEARER
Is Entitled to One Steerage Passage
FROM
NEW YORK TO SAN FRANCISCO
STEAMER COLUMBUS.

Below this was printed the name of the agent. Joe paid over the money joyfully.

"I am very much obliged to you," he said gratefully.

"Don't mention it," said the stranger, pocketing the fifty dollars. "Good day! Sorry to leave you, but I am to meet a gentleman at five."

He went down-stairs, and left Joe alone.

CHAPTER VII

JOE GETS INTO TROUBLE

"How lucky I have been," thought Joe, in the best of spirits. "There wasn't one chance in ten of my succeeding, and yet I have succeeded. Everything has turned out right. If I hadn't met this man, I couldn't have got a ticket at half price."

Joe found that after paying his hotel expenses, he should have a dollar left over. This would be rather a small sum to start with in California, but Joe didn't trouble himself much about that.

In the course of the day Joe found himself in the upper part of the Bowery. It seemed to him a very lively street, and he was much interested in looking in at the shop windows as he passed.

He was standing before a window, when a stone from some quarter struck the pane and shattered it in pieces.

Joe was startled, and was gazing at the scene of havoc in bewilderment, when a stout German, the proprietor, rushed out and seized him by the collar.

"Aha! I have you, you young rascal!" he exclaimed furiously. "I'll make you pay for this!"

By this time Joe had recovered his senses.

"Let me alone!" he exclaimed.

"I let you know!" exclaimed the angry man. "You break my window! You pay me five dollar pretty quick, or I send you to prison!"

"I didn't break your window! It's a lie!"

"You tell me I lie?" shouted the angry German. "First you break my window, then you tell me I lie! You, one bad boy—you one loafer!"

"I don't know who broke your window," said Joe, "but I tell you I didn't. I was standing here, looking in, when, all at once, I heard a crash."

"You take me for one fool, perhaps," said his captor, puffing with excitement. "You want to get away, hey?"

"Yes, I do."

"And get no money for my window?"

By this time a crowd had collected around the chief actors in this scene. They were divided in opinion.

"Don't he look wicked, the young scamp?" said a thin-visaged female with a long neck.

"Yes," said her companion. "He's one of them street rowdies that go around doin' mischief. They come around and pull my bell, and run away, the villians!"

"What's the matter, my boy?" asked a tall man with sandy hair, addressing himself to Joe in a friendly tone.

"This man says I broke his window."

"How was it? Did you break it?"

"No, sir. I was standing looking in, when a stone came from somewhere and broke it."

"Look here, sir," said the sandy-haired man, addressing himself to the German, "what reason have you for charging this boy with breaking your window?"

"He stood shoost in front of it," said the German.

"If he had broken it, he would have run away. Didn't that occur to you?"

"Some one broke mine window," said the German.

"Of course; but a boy who threw a stone must do so from a distance, and he wouldn't be likely to run up at once to the broken window."

"Of course not. The man's a fool!" were the uncomplimentary remarks of the bystanders, who a minute before had looked upon Joe as undoubtedly guilty.

"You've got no case at all," said Joe's advocate. "Let go the boy's collar, or I shall advise him to charge you with assault and battery."

"Maybe you one friend of his?" said the German.

"I never saw the boy before in my life," said the other, "but I don't want him falsely accused."

"Somebody must pay for my window."

"That's fair; but it must be the boy or man that broke it, not my young friend here, who had no more to do with it than myself. I sympathize with you, and wish you could catch the scamp that did it."

At that moment a policeman came up.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"My window was broke—dat's what's de matter."

"Who broke it?" asked the policeman.

"I caught dat boy standing outside," pointing to Joe.

"Aha, you young rascal! I've caught you, have I? I've had my eye on you for weeks!"

And Joe, to his dismay, found himself collared anew.

"I've only been in the city two days," said Joe.

"Take him to jail!" exclaimed the German.

And the policeman was about to march off poor Joe, when a voice of authority stayed him.

"Officer, release that boy!" said the sandy-haired man sternly.

"I'll take you along, too, if you interfere."

"Release that boy!" repeated the other sternly; "and arrest the German for assault and battery. I charge him with assaulting this boy!"

"Who are you?" demanded the officer insolently.

"My name is —, and I am one of the new police commissioners," said the sandy-haired man quietly.

Never was there a quicker change from insolence to fawning.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," said the officer, instantly releasing Joe. "I didn't know you."

"Nor your duty, either, it appears," said the commissioner sternly. "Without one word of inquiry into the circumstances, you were about to arrest this boy. A pretty minister of justice you are!"

"Shall I take this man along, sir?" asked the policeman, quite subdued.

At this suggestion the bulky Teuton hurried into his shop, trembling with alarm. With great difficulty he concealed himself under the counter.

"You may let him go this time. He has some excuse for his conduct, having suffered loss by the breaking of his window. As for you, officer, unless you are more careful in future, you will not long remain a member of the force."

The crowd disappeared, only Joe and his advocate remaining behind.

"I am grateful to you, sir, for your kindness," said Joe. "But for you I should have been carried to the station-house."

"It is fortunate I came along just as I did. Are you a stranger in the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must be careful not to run into danger. There are many perils in the city for the inexperienced."

"Thank you, sir. I shall remember your advice."

The next day, about two hours before the time of sailing, Joe went down to the wharf.

As he was going on board a man stopped him.

"Have you got a ticket?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Joe, "a steerage ticket. There it is."

"Where did you get this?" asked the man.

Joe told him.

"How much did you pay for it?"

"Fifty dollars."

"Then you have lost your money, for it is a bogus ticket. You can't travel on it."

Joe stared at the other in blank dismay. The earth seemed to be sinking under him. He realized that he had been outrageously swindled, and that he was farther from going to California than ever.

CHAPTER VIII

JOE'S LUCK CHANGES

The intelligence that his ticket was valueless came to Joe like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. The minute before he was in high spirits—his prospects seemed excellent and his path bright.

"What shall I do?" he ejaculated.

"I can't tell you," said the officer. "One thing is clear—you can't go to California on that ticket."

Poor Joe! For the moment hope was dead within his breast. He had but one dollar left and that was only half the amount necessary to carry him back to the village where we found him at the commencement of our story. Even if he were able to go back, he felt he would be ashamed to report the loss of his money. The fact that he had allowed himself to be swindled mortified him not a little. He would never hear the last of it if he returned to Oakville.

"No; I wouldn't go back if I could," he decided.

"Wouldn't I like to get hold of the man that sold me the ticket!"

He had hardly given mental expression to this wish when it was gratified. The very man passed him and was about to cross the gangplank into the steamer. Joe's eyes flashed, and he sprang forward and seized the man by the arm.

The swindler's countenance changed when he recognized Joe, but he quickly decided upon his course.

"What do you want, Johnny?" he asked composedly.

"What do I want? I want my fifty dollars back."

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"You sold me a bogus ticket for fifty dollars," said Joe stoutly. "Here it is. Take it back and give me my money."

"The boy must be crazy," said the swindler.

"Did you sell him that ticket?" inquired the officer.

"Never saw him before in my life."

"Ain't you mistaken, boy?" asked the officer.

"No, sir. This is the very man."

"Have you any business here?" asked the officer.

"Yes," said the man; "I've taken a steerage ticket to San Francisco. Here it is."

"All right. Go in."

He tore himself from Joe's grasp and went on board the steamer. Our hero, provoked, was about to follow him, when the officer said:

"Stand back! You have no ticket."

"That man bought his ticket with my money."

"That is nothing to me," said the officer. "It may be so, or you may be mistaken."

"I am not mistaken," said Joe.

"You can report it to the police—that is, if you think you can prove it. Now, stand back!"

Poor Joe! He had been worsted in the encounter with this arch-swindler. He would sail for San Francisco on the Columbus. Perhaps he would make his fortune there, while Joe, whom he had so swindled, might, within three days, be reduced to beggary.

Joe felt that his confidence in human nature was badly shaken. Injustice and fraud seemed to have the best of it in this world, so far as his experience went, and it really seemed as if dishonesty were the best policy. It is a hard awakening for a trusting boy, when he first comes in contact with selfishness and corruption.

Joe fell back because he was obliged to. He looked around, hoping that he might somewhere see a policeman, for he wanted to punish the scoundrel to whom he owed his unhappiness and loss. But, as frequently happens, when an officer is wanted none is to be seen.

Joe did not leave the wharf. Time was not of much value to him, and he decided that he might as well remain and see the steamer start on which he had fondly hoped to be a passenger.

Meanwhile, the preparations for departure went steadily forward. Trunks arrived and were conveyed on board; passengers, accompanied by their friends, came, and all was hurry and bustle.

Two young men, handsomely dressed and apparently possessed of larger means than the great majority of the passengers, got out of a hack and paused close to where Joe was standing.

"Dick," said one, "I'm really sorry you are not going with me. I shall feel awfully lonely without you."

"I am very much disappointed, Charlie, but duty will keep me at home. My father's sudden,

alarming sickness has broken up all my plans.”

“Yes, Dick, of course you can’t go.”

“If my father should recover, in a few weeks, I will come out and join you, Charlie.”

“I hope you may be able to, Dick. By the way, how about your ticket?”

“I shall have to lose it, unless the company will give me another in place of it.”

“They ought to do it.”

“Yes, but they are rather stiff about it. I would sell it for a hundred dollars.”

Joe heard this and his heart beat high.

He pressed forward, and said eagerly:

“Will you sell it to me for that?”

The young man addressed as Dick looked, in surprise, at the poorly dressed boy who had addressed him.

“Do you want to go to California?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” said Joe. “I am very anxious to go.”

“Do I understand you to offer a hundred dollars for my ticket?”

“Yes, sir; but I can’t pay you now.”

“When do you expect to be able to pay me, then?”

“Not till I’ve earned the money in California.”

“Have you thought before of going?”

“Yes, sir. Until an hour ago I thought that it was all arranged that I should go. I came down here and found that the ticket I had bought was a bogus one, and that I had been swindled out of my money.”

“That was a mean trick,” said Dick Scudder indignantly. “Do you know the man that cheated you?”

“Yes; he is on board the steamer.”

“How much money have you got left?”

“A dollar.”

“Only a dollar? And you are not afraid to land in California with this sum?”

“No, sir. I shall go to work at once.”

“Charlie,” said Dick, turning to his friend, “I will do as you say. Are you willing to take this boy into your stateroom in my place?”

“Yes,” said Charles Folsom promptly. “He looks like a good boy. I accept him as my roommate.”

“All right,” said the other. “My boy, what is your name?”

“Joe Mason.”

“Well, Joe, here is my ticket. If you are ever able to pay a hundred dollars for this ticket, you may pay it to my friend, Charles Folsom. Now, I advise you both to be getting aboard, as it is nearly time for the steamer to sail. I won’t go on with you, Charlie, as I must go back to my father’s bedside.”

“Good-by, sir. God bless you!” said Joe gratefully. “Good-by, Joe, and good luck!”

As they went over the plank, the officer, recognizing Joe, said roughly:

“Stand back, boy! Didn’t I tell you you couldn’t go aboard without a ticket?”

“Here is my ticket,” said Joe.

“A first-class ticket!” exclaimed the officer, in amazement. “Where did you get it?”

“I bought it,” answered Joe.

“I shall go to California, after all!” thought our hero exultingly.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST DAY ON BOARD

"We will look up our stateroom first, Joe," said his new friend. "It ought to be a good one."

The stateroom proved to be No. 16, very well located and spacious for a stateroom. But to Joe it seemed very small for two persons. He was an inexperienced traveler and did not understand that life on board ship is widely different from life on shore. His companion had been to Europe and was used to steamer life.

"I think, Joe," said he, "that I shall put you in the top berth. The lower berth is considered more desirable, but I claim it on the score of age and infirmity."

"You don't look very old, or infirm," said Joe.

"I am twenty-three. And you?"

"Fifteen—nearly sixteen."

"I have a stateroom trunk, which will just slip in under my berth. Where is your luggage?"

Joe looked embarrassed.

"I don't know but you will feel ashamed of me," he said; "but the only extra clothes I have are tied up in this handkerchief."

Charles Folsom whistled.

"Well," said he, "you are poorly provided. What have you got inside?"

"A couple of shirts, three collars, two handkerchiefs, and a pair of stockings."

"And you are going a journey of thousands of miles! But never mind," he said kindly. "I am not much larger than you, and, if you need it, I can lend you. Once in California, you will have less trouble than if you were loaded down with clothes. I must get you to tell me your story when there is time."

They came on deck just in time to see the steamer swing out of the dock.

There were some of the passengers with sober faces. They had bidden farewell to friends and relatives whom they might not see for years—perhaps never again. They were going to a new country, where hardships undoubtedly awaited them, and where they must take their chances of health and success. Some, too, feared seasickness, a malady justly dreaded by all who have ever felt its prostrating effects. But Joe only felt joyful exhilaration.

"You look happy, Joe," said young Folsom.

"I feel so," said Joe.

"Are you hoping to make your fortune in California?"

"I am hoping to make a living," said Joe.

"Didn't you make a living here at home?"

"A poor living, with no prospects ahead. I didn't mind hard work and poor clothes, if there had been a prospect of something better by and by."

"Tell me your story. Where were you living?" Charles Folsom listened attentively.

"Major Norton didn't appear disposed to pamper you, or bring you up in luxury, that's a fact. It would have been hard lines if, on account of losing your aunt's legacy, you had been compelled to go back to Oakville."

"I wouldn't have gone," said Joe resolutely.

"What would you have done?"

"Stayed in New York, and got a living somehow, even if I had to black boots in the street."

"I guess you'll do. You've got the right spirit. It takes boys and men like you for pioneers."

Joe was gratified at his companion's approval.

"Now," said Folsom, "I may as well tell you my story. I am the son of a New York merchant who is moderately rich. I entered the counting-room at seventeen, and have remained there ever since, with the exception of four months spent in Europe."

"If you are rich already, why do you go out to California?" asked Joe.

"I am not going to the mines; I am going to prospect a little for the firm. Some day San Francisco will be a large city. I am going to see how soon it will pay for our house to establish a branch there."

"I see," said Joe.

"I shall probably go out to the mines and take a general survey of the country; but, as you see, I do not go out to obtain employment."

"It must be jolly not to have to work," said Joe, "but to have plenty of money to pay your expenses."

"Well, I suppose it is convenient. I believe you haven't a large cash surplus?"

"I have a dollar."

"You've got some pluck to travel so far away from home with such a slender capital, by Jove!"

"I don't know that it's pluck. It's necessity."

"Something of both, perhaps. Don't you feel afraid of what may happen?"

"No," said Joe. "California is a new country, and there must be plenty of work. Now, I am willing to work and I don't believe I shall starve."

"That's the way to feel, Joe. At the worst, you have me to fall back upon. I won't see you suffer."

"It is very lucky for me. I hope I shan't give you any trouble."

"If you do, I'll tell you of it," said Folsom, laughing. "The fact is, I feel rather as if I were your guardian. An odd feeling that, as hitherto I have been looked after by others. Now it is my turn to assume authority."

"You will find me obedient," said Joe, smiling. "Seriously, I am so inexperienced in the way of the world that I shall consider it a great favor if you will give me any hints you may think useful to me."

Folsom became more and more pleased with his young charge. He saw that he was manly, amiable, and of good principles, with only one great fault—poverty—which he was quite willing to overlook.

They selected their seats in the saloon, and were fortunate enough to be assigned to the captain's table. Old travelers know that those who sit at this table are likely to fare better than those who are farther removed.

While Folsom was walking the deck with an old friend, whom he had found among the passengers, Joe went on an exploring expedition.

He made his way to that portion of the deck appropriated to the steerage passengers. Among them his eye fell on the man who swindled him.

"You here!" exclaimed the fellow in amazement.

"Yes," said Joe, "I am here."

"I thought you said your ticket wasn't good?"

"It wasn't, as you very well know."

"I don't know anything about it. How did you smuggle yourself aboard?"

"I didn't smuggle myself aboard at all. I came on like the rest of the passengers."

"Why haven't I seen you before?"

"I am not a steerage passenger. I am traveling first-class."

"You don't mean it!" ejaculated the fellow, thoroughly astonished. "You told me you hadn't any more money."

"So I did, and that shows that you were the man that sold me the bogus ticket."

"Nothing of the kind," said the other, but he seemed taken aback by Joe's charge. "Well, all I can say is, that you know how to get round. When a man or boy can travel first-class without a cent of money, he'll do."

"I wouldn't have come at all if I had had to swindle a poor boy out of his money," said Joe.

Joe walked off without receiving an answer. He took pains to ascertain the name of the man who had defrauded him. He was entered on the passenger-list as Henry Hogan.

CHAPTER X

THE DETECTED THIEF

"Do you expect to be seasick, Joe?"

"I don't know, Mr. Folsom. This is the first time I have ever been at sea."

"I have crossed the Atlantic twice, and been sick each time. I suppose I have a tendency that way."

"How does it feel?" asked Joe curiously.

Folsom laughed.

"It cannot be described," he answered.

"Then I would rather remain ignorant," said Joe.

"You are right. This is a case where ignorance is bliss decidedly."

Twenty-four hours out Folsom's anticipations were realized. He experienced nausea and his head swam.

Returning from a walk on deck, Joe found his guardian lying down in the stateroom.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Folsom?"

"Nothing but what I expected. The demon of the sea has me in his gripe."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing at present, Joe. What art can minister to a stomach diseased? I must wait patiently, and it will wear off. Don't you feel any of the symptoms?"

"Oh, no—I feel bully," said Joe. "I've got a capital appetite."

"I hope you will be spared. It would be dismal for both of us to be groaning with seasickness."

"Shall I stay with you?"

"No—go on deck. That is the best way to keep well. My sickness won't last more than a day or two."

The young man's expectations were realized. After forty-eight hours he recovered from his temporary indisposition and reappeared on deck.

He found that his young companion, had made a number of acquaintances, and had become a general favorite through his frank and pleasant manners.

"I think you'll get on, Joe," said he. "You make friends easily."

"I try to do it," said Joe modestly.

"You are fast getting over your country greenness. Of course you couldn't help having a share of it, having never lived outside of a small country village."

"I am glad you think so, Mr. Folsom. I suppose I was very green and I haven't got over it yet, but in six months I hope to get rid of it wholly."

"It won't take six months at the rate you are advancing."

Day succeeded day and Joe was not sick at all. He carried a good appetite to every meal and entered into the pleasures of sea life with zest. He played shuffle-board on deck, guessed daily the ship's run, was on the alert for distant sails, and managed in one way or another to while away the time cheerfully.

They had got into the Gulf of Mexico, when, one day, there was an unwonted commotion in the steerage.

A poor German had lost forty dollars, the entire capital he was carrying with him to the new country.

"Some tief has rob me," he complained, in accents of mingled grief and anger. "He has rob me of all my gold. He has not left me one cent."

"When did you miss the money?" inquired the first officer.

"Just now," said the poor German.

"When did you see it last?"

"Last night when I went to mine bed."

"Did you take off your clothes?"

"No."

"What men sleep near you?"

The German pointed to two. The first was a German.

"But he would not rob me. He is mine friend," he said. "He is Fritz."

"Who is the other man?"

The German pointed to Henry Hogan, the same man who had defrauded Joe.

"The man's a fool," said Hogan. "Does he mean to say a gentleman like me would steal his paltry money?"

"He hasn't said so," said the first officer quietly. "He only said that you slept near him."

"He'd better not accuse me," blustered Hogan.

The officer was a judge of human nature, and Hogan's manner and words made him suspect that he was really the guilty party.

"My man," said he, "you are making a fuss before you are accused. No charge has been made against you. The man's money has been taken, and some one must have taken it."

"I don't believe he ever had any," said Hogan.

"Can you prove that you had the money?" asked the officer, addressing the German. "Has any one on board seen it in your possession?"

An Irishman named Riley came forward.

"That can I do," said he. "It was only yesterday morning that I saw the man counting his money."

"In what denomination was the money?"

Pat Riley scratched his head.

"Sure I didn't know that money belonged to any denomination, sir."

The officer smiled.

"I mean, was it in five, or ten, or twenty dollar pieces."

"There was four tens, sir—four gould eagles."

"Is that right?" inquired the officer, turning to the German.

"Yes, sir, that's what I had."

"Then," said the officer, "it seems clearly proved that our German friend here had the money he claims. Now, I suggest that the two men he has said occupied bunks nearest to him shall be searched. But first, if the man who has taken the money will come forward voluntarily and return the same, I will guarantee that he shall receive no punishment."

He paused for a brief space and looked at Hogan.

Hogan seemed uneasy, but stolid and obstinate.

"Since my offer is not accepted," said the officer, "let the two men be searched."

Fritz, the young German, came forward readily.

"I am ready," he said.

"I am not," said Hogan. "I protest against this outrage. It is an infringement of my rights as an American citizen. If any one dares to lay hands on me, I will have him arrested as soon as we reach California."

His threat produced no effect upon the officer. At a signal two sailors seized him, and, despite his struggles, turned his pockets inside out.

Among the contents were found four gold eagles.

"It is my money!" exclaimed the poor German.

"You lie! The money is mine!" said Hogan furiously.

"There was a cross, which I scratched with a pin, on one piece," said the German. "Look! see if it is there."

Examination was made, and the scratch was found just as he described it.

"The money evidently belongs to the German," said the officer. "Give it to him."

"You are robbing me of my money," said Hogan.

"Look here, my friend, you had better be quiet," said the officer significantly, "or I will have you tied up to keep out of mischief. You are getting off very well as it is. I have no doubt you have been up to other dishonest tricks before this one."

"That is true, sir," said Joe, speaking up for the first time. "This is the same man who sold me a bogus ticket, two days before we sailed, for fifty dollars."

"It's a lie!" said Hogan. "I'll be even with you some time, boy, for that lie of yours."

"I don't care for the threats of such a scoundrel as you are," said Joe undauntedly.

"Look out for him, Joe," said Folsom. "He will try to do you a mischief some time."

He would have been confirmed in his opinion had he observed the glance of hatred with which the detected thief followed his young ward.

CHAPTER XI

JOE ARRIVES IN SAN FRANCISCO

At the isthmus they exchanged steamers, crossing the narrow neck of land on the backs of mules. To-day the journey is more rapidly and comfortably made in a railroad-car. Of the voyage on the Pacific nothing need be said. The weather was fair, and it was uneventful.

It was a beautiful morning in early September when they came in sight of the Golden Gate, and, entering the more placid waters of San Francisco Bay, moored at a short distance from the town.

"What do you think of it, Joe?" asked Charles Folsom.

"I don't know," said Joe slowly. "Is this really San Francisco?"

"It is really San Francisco."

"It doesn't seem to be much built up yet," said Joe.

In fact, the appearance of the town would hardly suggest the stately capital of to-day, which looks out like a queen on the bay and the ocean, and on either side opens her arms to the Eastern and Western continents. It was a town of tents and one-story cabins, irregularly and picturesquely scattered over the hillside, with here and there a sawmill, where now stand some of the most prominent buildings of the modern city. For years later there was a large mound of sand where now the stately Palace Hotel covers two and a half acres. Where now stand substantial business blocks, a quarter of a century since there appeared only sandy beaches or mud-flats, with here and there a wooden pier reaching out into the bay. Only five years before the town contained but seventy-nine buildings—thirty-one frame, twenty-six adobe, and the rest shanties. It had grown largely since then, but even now was only a straggling village, with the air of recent settlement.

"You expected something more, Joe, didn't you?"

"Yes," admitted Joe.

"You must remember how new it is. Ten years, nay, five, will work a great change in this straggling village. We shall probably live to see it a city of a hundred thousand inhabitants."

The passengers were eager to land. They were tired of the long voyage and anxious to get on shore. They wanted to begin making their fortunes.

"What are your plans, Joe?" asked Charles Folsom.

"I shall accept the first job that offers," said Joe. "I can't afford to remain idle long with my small capital."

"Joe," said the young man seriously, "let me increase your capital for you. You can pay me back, you know, when it is convenient. Here, take this gold piece."

Our young hero shook his head.

"Thank you, Mr. Folsom," he said, "you are very kind, but I think it will be better for me to shift on what I have. Then I shall have to go to work at once, and shall get started in my new career."

"Suppose you can't find work?" suggested Folsom.

"I will find it," said Joe resolutely.

"Perhaps we might take lodgings together, Joe."

"I can't afford it," said Joe. "You're a gentleman of property, and I'm a poor boy who has his fortune to make. For the present I must expect to rough it."

"Well, Joe, perhaps you are right. At any rate, I admire your pluck and independent spirit."

There was a motley crowd collected on the pier and on the beach when Joe and his friend landed. Rough, bearded men, in Mexican sombreros and coarse attire—many in shirt-sleeves and with their pantaloons tucked in their boots—watched the new arrivals with interest.

"You needn't feel ashamed of your clothes, Joe," said Folsom, with a smile. "You are better dressed than the majority of those we see."

Joe looked puzzled.

"They don't look as if they had made their fortunes," he said.

"Don't judge by appearances. In a new country people are careless of appearances. Some of these rough fellows, no doubt, have their pockets full of gold."

At this moment a rough-looking fellow stepped forward and said heartily:

"Isn't this Charles Folsom?"

"Yes," answered Folsom, puzzled.

"You don't remember me?" said the other, laughing.

"Not I."

"Not remember Harry Carter, your old chum?"

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Folsom, surveying anew the rough figure before him. "You don't mean to say you are Harry Carter?"

"The same, at your service."

"What a transformation! Why, you used to be rather a swell and now——"

"Now I look like a barbarian."

"Well, rather," said Folsom, laughing.

"You want me to explain? Such toggery as I used to wear would be the height of folly at the mines."

"I hope you have had good luck," said Folsom.

"Pretty fair," said Carter, in a tone of satisfaction. "My pile has reached five thousand dollars."

"And how long have you been at work?"

"A year. I was a bookkeeper in New York on a salary of fifteen hundred dollars a year. I used to spend all my income—the more fool I—till the last six months, when I laid by enough to bring me out here."

"Then you have really bettered yourself?"

"I should say so. I could only save up five hundred dollars a year at the best in New York. Here I have crowded ten years into one."

"In spite of your large outlay for clothes?"

"I see you will have your joke. Now, what brings you out here? Are you going to the mines?"

"Presently, but not to dig. I came to survey the country."

"Let me do what I can for you."

"I will. First, what hotel shall I go to?"

"There is the Leidesdorff House, on California Street. I'll lead you there."

"Thank you. Will you come, Joe?"

"Yes, I will go to find out where it is."

The three bent their steps to the hotel referred to. It was a shanty compared with the magnificent hotels which now open their portals to strangers, but the charge was ten dollars a day and the fare was of the plainest.

"I guess I won't stop here," said Joe, "My money wouldn't keep me here more than an hour or two."

"At any rate, Joe, you must dine with me," said Folsom. "Then you may start out for yourself."

"You must dine with me, both of you," said Carter.

Folsom saw that he was in earnest, and accepted.

The dinner was plain but abundant, and all three did justice to it. Joe did not know till afterward that the dinner cost five dollars apiece.

After dinner the two friends sat down to talk over old times and mutual friends, but Joe felt that there was no time for him to lose. He had his fortune to make. Still more important, he had his living to make, and in a place where dollars were held as cheap as dimes in New York or Boston.

So, emerging into the street, with his small bundle under his arm, he bent his steps as chance directed.

CHAPTER XII

JOE FINDS A JOB

Joe knew nothing about the streets or their names. Chance brought him to Clay Street, between what is now Montgomery and Kearny Streets. Outside of a low wooden building, which appeared to be a restaurant, was a load of wood.

"I wonder if I couldn't get the chance to saw and split that wood?" thought Joe.

It would not do to be bashful. So he went in.

A stout man in an apron was waiting on the guests. Joe concluded that this must be the proprietor.

"Sit down, boy," said he, "if you want some dinner."

"I've had my dinner," said Joe. "Don't you want that wood outside sawed and split?"

"Yes."

"Let me do it."

"Go ahead."

There was a saw and saw-horse outside. The work was not new to Joe, and he went at it vigorously. No bargain had been made, but Joe knew so little of what would be considered a fair price that in this first instance he chose to leave it to his employer.

As he was at work Folsom and his friend passed by.

"Have you found a job already?" said Folsom.

"Yes, sir."

"You have kept your promise, Joe. You said you would take the first job that offered."

"Yes, Mr. Folsom; I meant what I said."

"Come round to the Leidesdorff House this evening and tell me how you made out."

"Thank you, sir, I will."

"That seems a smart boy," said Carter.

"Yes, he is. Help him along if you have a chance."

"I will. I like his pluck."

"He has no false pride. He is ready to do anything."

"Everybody is here. You know Jim Graves, who used to have his shingle up as a lawyer on Nassau Street?"

"Yes. Is he here?"

"He has been here three months. What do you think he is doing?"

"I couldn't guess."

"I don't think you could. He has turned drayman." Charles Folsom gazed at his friend in wonder.

"Turned drayman!" he exclaimed. "Is he reduced to that?"

"Reduced to that! My dear fellow, you don't understand the use of language. Graves is earning fifteen dollars a day at his business, and I don't believe he made that in New York in a month."

"Well, it is a strange state of society. Does he mean to be a drayman all his life?"

"Of course not. A year hence he may be a capitalist, or a lawyer again. Meanwhile he is saving money."

"He is a sensible man, after all; but, you see, Carter, it takes time to adjust my ideas to things here. The first surprise was your rough appearance."

"There is one advantage my rough life has brought me," said Carter. "It has improved my health. I was given to dyspepsia when I lived in New York. Now I really believe I could digest a tenpenny nail, or—an eating-house mince pie, which is more difficult."

"You have steep hills in San Francisco."

"Yes, it is something of a climb to the top of Clay Street Hill. When you get to the top you get a fine view, though."

Now the hill may be ascended in cars drawn up the steeply graded sides by an endless rope running just below the surface. No such arrangement had been thought of then. Folsom gave out when he had completed half the ascent.

"I'll be satisfied with the prospect from here," he said.

Meanwhile Joe kept steadily at his task.

"It will take me three hours and a half, possibly four," he said to himself, after a survey of the pile. "I wonder what pay I shall receive."

While thus employed many persons passed him.

One among them paused and accosted him.

"So you have found work already?" he said.

Looking up, Joe recognized Harry Hogan, the man who had swindled him. He didn't feel inclined to be very social with this man.

"Yes," said he coldly.

"Rather strange work for a first-class passenger."

He envied Joe because he had traveled first-class, while he had thought himself fortunate, with the help his dishonesty gave him, in being able to come by steerage.

"It is very suitable employment for a boy who has no money," said Joe.

"How much are you going to be paid for the job?" asked Hogan, with sudden interest, for ten dollars constituted his only remaining funds.

If his theft on shipboard had not been detected he would have been better provided.

"I don't know," said Joe shortly.

"You didn't make any bargain, then?"

"No."

"What are you going to do next?" inquired Hogan.

"I don't know," said Joe.

Hogan finally moved off.

"I hate that boy," he soliloquized. "He puts on airs for a country boy. So he's getting too proud to talk to me, is he? We'll see, Mr. Joseph Mason."

Joe kept on till his task was completed, put on his coat and went into the restaurant.

It was the supper-hour.

"I've finished the job," said Joe, in a businesslike tone.

The German took a look at Joe's work.

"You did it up good," he said. "How much you want?"

"I don't know. What would be a fair price?"

"I will give you some supper and five dollars."

Joe could hardly believe his ears. Five dollars and a supper for four hours' work! Surely he had come to the Land of Gold in very truth.

"Will dat do?"

"Oh, yes," said Joe. "I didn't expect so much."

"You shouldn't tell me dat. It isn't business."

Joe pocketed the gold piece which he received with a thrill of exultation. He had never received so much in value for a week's work before. Just then a man paid two dollars for a very plain supper.

"That makes my pay seven dollars," said Joe to himself. "If I can get steady work, I can get rich very quick," he thought.

There was one thing, however, that Joe did not take into account. If his earnings were likely to be large, his expenses would be large, too. So he might receive a good deal of money and not lay up a cent.

"Shall you have any more work to do?" asked Joe.

"Not shoost now," answered the German. "You can look round in a week. Maybe I have some then."

CHAPTER XIII

JOE'S HOTEL

Before going to the Leidesdorff House to call upon his friend Folsom, Joe thought he would try to make arrangements for the night.

He came to the St. Francis Hotel, on the corner of Dupont and Clay Streets. There was an outside stair that led to the balcony that ran all round the second story. The doors of the rooms opened upon this balcony.

A man came out from the office.

"Can I get lodging here?" asked Joe.

"Yes."

"How much do you charge?"

"Three dollars."

"He must take me for a millionaire," thought Joe.

"I can't afford it," he said.

As Joe descended the stairs he did not feel quite so rich. Six dollars won't go far when lodging costs three dollars and supper two.

Continuing his wanderings, Joe came to a tent, which seemed to be a hotel in its way, for it had "Lodgings" inscribed on the canvas in front.

"What do you charge for lodgings?" Joe inquired.

"A dollar," was the reply.

Looking in, Joe saw that the accommodations were of the plainest. Thin pallets were spread about without pillows. Joe was not used to luxury but to sleep here would be roughing it even for him. But he was prepared to rough it, and concluded that he might as well pass the night here.

"All right!" said he. "I'll be round by and by."

"Do you want to pay in advance to secure your bed?"

"I guess not; I'll take the risk."

Joe went on to the Leidesdorff Hotel and was cordially received by Mr. Folsom.

"How much have you earned to-day, Joe?"

"Five dollars and my supper."

"That's good. Is the job finished?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have nothing in view for to-morrow?"

"No, sir; but I guess I shall run across a job."

"Where are you going to spend the night?"

"In a tent a little way down the street."

"How much will they charge you?"

"One dollar."

"I wish my bed was large enough to hold two; you should be welcome to a share of it. But they don't provide very wide bedsteads in this country."

Mr. Folsom's bed was about eighteen inches wide.

"Thank you, sir," said Joe; "I shall do very well in the tent, I am sure."

"I am thinking of making a trip to the mines with my friend Carter," continued Folsom. "Very likely we shall start to-morrow. Do you want to go with us?"

"I expect to go to the mines," said Joe, "but I think I had better remain awhile in San Francisco, and lay by a little money. You know I am in debt."

"In debt?"

"Yes, for my passage. I should like to pay that off."

"There is no hurry about it, Joe."

"I'd like to get it off my mind, Mr. Folsom."

About nine o'clock Joe left the hotel and sought the tent where he proposed to pass the night. He was required to pay in advance, and willingly did so.

CHAPTER XIV

JOE'S SECOND DAY

Joe woke up at seven o'clock the next morning. Though his bed was hard, he slept well, for he was fatigued. He stretched himself and sat up on his pallet. It is needless to say that he had not undressed. Three or four men were lying near him, all fast asleep except one, and that one he recognized as Henry Hogan.

"Halloo!" said Hogan. "You here?"

"Yes," said Joe, not overpleased at the meeting.

"We seem to keep together," said Hogan, with a grin.

"So it seems," said Joe coldly.

Hogan, however, seemed disposed to be friendly.

"Pretty rough accommodations for the money."

"It doesn't make so much difference where money is earned easily."

"How much money did you make yesterday?"

Joe's first thought was to tell him it was none of his business, but he thought better of it.

"I made seven dollars," said he, rather proudly.

"Pretty good, but I beat you," said Hogan.

"How much did you make?"

"I'll show you."

Hogan showed five half-eagles.

"I made it in ten minutes," he said.

Joe was decidedly mystified.

"You are fooling me," he said.

"No, I am not. I made it at the gaming-table."

"Oh!" said Joe, a little startled, for he had been brought up to think gambling wicked.

"Better come and try your luck with me," said Hogan. "It is easier and quicker than sawing wood."

"Perhaps it is," said Joe, "but I'd rather saw wood."

"I suspect you are a young Puritan."

"Perhaps I am," said Joe. "At any rate, I don't mean to gamble."

"Just as you like. I can't afford to be so particular."

"You don't seem to be very particular," said Joe.

"What do you mean?" inquired Hogan suspiciously.

"You know well enough," said Joe. "You know the way you had of getting money in New York. You know the way you tried to get it on board the steamer."

"Look here, young fellow," said Hogan menacingly, "I've heard enough of this. You won't find it safe to run against me. I'm a tough customer, you'll find."

"I don't doubt it," said Joe.

"Then just be careful, will you? I ain't going to have you slander me and prejudice people against me, and I mean to protect myself. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do, Mr. Hogan, but I don't feel particularly alarmed."

Joe got up and went out in search of breakfast. He thought of the place where he took supper but was deterred from going there by the high prices.

"I suppose I shall have to pay a dollar for my breakfast," he thought, "but I can't afford to pay two. My capital is reduced to five dollars and I may not be able to get anything to do to-day."

Joe finally succeeded in finding a humble place where for a dollar he obtained a cup of coffee, a plate of cold meat, and as much bread as he could eat.

"I shall have to make it do with two meals a day," thought our hero. "Then it will cost me three dollars a day to live, including lodging, and I shall have to be pretty lucky to make that."

After breakfast Joe walked about the streets, hoping that something would turn up. But his luck did not seem to be so good as the day before. Hour after hour passed and no chance offered itself. As he was walking along feeling somewhat anxious, he met Hogan.

"Lend me a dollar," said Hogan quickly. "I'm dead broke."

"Where has all your money gone?" asked Joe.

"Lost it at faro. Lend me a dollar and I'll win it all back."

"I have no money to spare," said Joe decidedly.

"Curse you for a young skinflint!" said Hogan, scowling. "I'll get even with you yet."

CHAPTER XV THE FOILED ASSASSIN

About four o'clock Joe went into a restaurant and got some dinner. In spite of his wish to be economical, his dinner bill amounted to a dollar and a half, and now his cash in hand was reduced to two dollars and a half.

Joe began to feel uneasy.

"This won't do," he said to himself. "At this rate I shall soon be penniless. I must get something to do."

In the evening he strolled down Montgomery Street to Telegraph Hill. It was not a very choice locality, the only buildings being shabby little dens, frequented by a class of social outlaws who kept concealed during the day but came out at night—a class to which the outrages frequent at this time were rightly attributed.

Joe was stumbling along the uneven path, when all at once he found himself confronted by a tall fellow wearing a slouched hat. The man paused in front of him, but did not say a word. Finding that he was not disposed to move aside, Joe stepped aside himself. He did not as yet suspect the fellow's purpose. He understood it, however, when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Quick, boy, your money!" said the ruffian.

Having but two dollars and a half, Joe naturally felt reluctant to part with it, and this gave him the courage to object.

"I've got none to spare," he said and tried to tear himself away.

His resistance led the fellow to suspect that he had a considerable sum with him. Joe felt himself seized and carried into a den close by, which was frequented by thieves and desperate characters.

There was a counter, on which was set a dim oil-lamp. There were a few bottles in sight, and a villainous-looking fellow appeared to preside over the establishment. The latter looked up as Joe was brought in.

"Who have you there?" asked the barkeeper.

"A young cove as don't want to part with his money."

"You'd better hand over what you've got, young 'un."

Joe looked from one to the other and thought he had never seen such villainous faces before.

"What are you lookin' at?" demanded his captor suspiciously, "You want to know us again, do you? Maybe you'd like to get us hauled up, would you?"

"I don't want ever to set eyes on you again."

"That's the way to talk. As soon as our business is over, there ain't no occasion for our meetin' again. Don't you go to point us out, or——"

He didn't finish the sentence, but whipped out a long knife, which made any further remarks unnecessary.

Under the circumstances, resistance would be madness and Joe drew out his money.

"Is that all you've got?" demanded the thief.

"Every cent," said Joe. "It won't leave me anything to pay for my night's lodging."

"Then you can sleep out. I've done it many a time. But I'll take the liberty of searching you, and seeing if you tell the truth or not."

"Just as you like," said Joe.

Joe was searched, but no more money was found.

"The boy's told the truth," said his captor. "Two dollars and a half is a pretty small haul."

"I am sorry, gentlemen, that I haven't anything more. It isn't my fault, for I've tried hard to get something to do to-day, and couldn't."

"You're a cool customer," said the barkeeper.

"I expect to be to-night, for I shall have to sleep out."

"You can go," said his captor, as he opened the door of the den; "and don't come round here again, unless you've got more money with you."

"I don't think I shall," said Joe.

When Joe found himself penniless, he really felt less anxious than when he had at least money enough to pay for lodging and breakfast. Having lost everything, any turn of fortune must be for the better.

"Something has got to turn up pretty quick," thought Joe. "It's just as well I didn't get a job to-day. I should only have had more money to lose."

He had not walked a hundred feet when his attention was called to the figure of a gentleman

walking some rods in front of him. He saw it but indistinctly, and would not have given it a second thought had he not seen that the person, whoever he might be, was stealthily followed by a man who in general appearance resembled the rascal who had robbed him of his money. The pursuer carried in his hand a canvas bag filled with sand. This, though Joe did not know it, was a dangerous weapon in the hands of a lawless human. Brought down heavily upon the head of an unlucky traveler, it often produced instant death, without leaving any outward marks that would indicate death from violence.

Though Joe didn't comprehend the use of the sand-bag, his own recent experience and the stealthy movement of the man behind convinced him that mischief was intended. He would have been excusable if, being but a boy and no match for an able-bodied ruffian, he had got out of the way. But Joe had more courage than falls to the share of most boys of sixteen. He felt a chivalrous desire to rescue the unsuspecting stranger from the peril that menaced him.

Joe, too, imitating the stealthy motion of the pursuer, swiftly gained upon him, overtaking him just as he had the sand-bag poised aloft, ready to be brought down upon the head of the traveler.

With a cry, Joe rushed upon the would-be assassin, causing him to stumble and fall, while the gentleman in front turned round in amazement.

Joe sprang to his side.

"Have you a pistol?" he said quickly.

Scarcely knowing what he did, the gentleman drew out a pistol and put it in Joe's hand. Joe cocked it, and stood facing the ruffian.

The desperado was on his feet, fury in his looks and a curse upon his lips. He swung the sand-bag aloft.

"Curse you!" he said. "I'll make you pay for this!"

"One step forward," said Joe, in a clear, distinct voice, which betrayed not a particle of fear, "and I will put a bullet through your brain!"

The assassin stepped back. He was a coward, who attacked from behind. He looked in the boy's resolute face, and he saw he was in earnest.

"Put down that weapon, you whipper-snapper!"

"Not much!" answered Joe.

"I've a great mind to kill you!"

"I've no doubt of it," said our hero; "but you'd better not attack me. I am armed, and I will fire if you make it necessary. Now, turn round and leave us."

"Will you promise not to shoot?"

"Yes, if you go off quietly."

The order was obeyed, but not very willingly.

When the highwayman had moved off, Joe said:

"Now, sir, we'd better be moving, and pretty quickly, or the fellow may return, with some of his friends, and overpower us. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Waverly House."

"That is near-by. We will go there at once."

They soon reached the hotel, a large wooden building on the north side of Pacific Street.

Joe was about to bid his acquaintance good night but the latter detained him.

"Come in, my boy," he said. "You have done me a great service. I must know more of you."

CHAPTER XVI

JOE'S NEW FRIEND

"Come up to my room," said the stranger.

He obtained a candle at the office, gas not being used in San Francisco at that time, and led the way to a small chamber on the second floor.

"Now, sit down, my boy, and tell me your name."

"Joseph Mason."

"How long have you been here?"

"Less than a week."

"I only arrived yesterday. But for your help, my residence might have been a brief one."

"I am glad I have been able to be of service to you."

"You were a friend in need, and a friend in need is a friend indeed. It is only fair that I should be a friend to you. It's a poor rule that doesn't work both ways."

Joe was favorably impressed with the speaker's appearance. He was a man of middle height, rather stout, with a florid complexion, and an open, friendly face.

"Thank you, sir," he said, "I need a friend, and shall be glad of your friendship."

"Then here's my hand. Take it, and let us ratify our friendship."

Joe took the proffered hand and shook it cordially.

"My name is George Morgan," said the stranger. "I came from Philadelphia. Now we know each other. Where are you staying?"

Joe's face flushed and he looked embarrassed.

"Just before I came up with you," he answered, thinking frankness best, "I was robbed of two dollars and a half, all the money I had in this world. I shall have to stop in the streets to-night."

"Not if I know it," said Morgan emphatically. "This bed isn't very large, but you are welcome to a share of it. To-morrow we will form our plans."

"Shan't I inconvenience you, sir?" asked Joe.

"Not a bit," answered Morgan heartily.

"Then I will stay, sir, and thank you. After the adventure I have had to-night, I shouldn't enjoy being out in the streets."

"Tell me how you came to be robbed. Was it by the same man who made the attack upon me?"

"No, sir. I wish it had been, as then I should feel even with him. It was a man that looked very much like him, though."

Joe gave an account of the robbery, to which his new friend listened with attention.

"Evidently," he said, "the street we were in is not a very safe one. Have you had any supper?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Luckily, I got that and paid for it before I had my money taken."

"Good. Now, as I am tired, I will go to bed, and you can follow when you feel inclined."

"I will go now, sir. I have been walking the streets all day, in search of work, and, though I found none, I am tired, all the same."

They woke up at seven o'clock.

"How did you rest, Joe?" asked George Morgan.

"Very well, sir."

"Do you feel ready for breakfast?"

"As soon as I can earn money enough to pay for it."

"Don't trouble yourself about that. You are going to breakfast with me."

"You are very kind, Mr. Morgan, but I wish you had some work for me to do, so that I could pay you."

"That may come after awhile. It might not be safe to delay your breakfast till you could pay for it. Remember, you have done me a great service, which fifty breakfasts couldn't pay for."

"Don't think of that, Mr. Morgan," said Joe modestly. "Anybody would do what I did."

"I am not sure whether everybody would have the courage. But you must leave me to show my appreciation of your services in my own way."

They took breakfast in the hotel and walked out.

Though it was early, the town was already astir. People got up early in those days. Building was going on here and there. Draymen were piloting heavy loads through the streets—rough enough in general appearance, but drawn from very unlikely social grades.

"By Jove!" said Morgan, in surprise, his glance resting on a young man of twenty-five, who was

in command of a dray. "Do you hear that drayman?"

"Is he a foreigner?" asked Joe. "I don't understand what he is saying."

"He is talking to his horse in Greek, quoting from Homer. Look here, my friend!" he said, hailing the drayman.

"What is it, sir?" said the young man courteously.

"Didn't I hear you quoting Greek just now?"

"Yes, sir."

"How happens it that a classical scholar like you finds himself in such a position?"

The young man smiled.

"How much do you think I am earning?"

"I can't guess. I am a stranger in this city."

"Twenty dollars a day."

"Capital! I don't feel as much surprised as I did. Are you a college graduate?"

"Yes, sir. I was graduated at Yale. Then I studied law and three months since I came out here. It takes time to get into practise at home and I had no resources to fall back upon. I raised money enough to bring me to California and came near starving the first week I was here. I couldn't wait to get professional work, but I had an offer to drive a dray. I am a farmer's son and was accustomed to hard work as a boy. I accepted the offer and here I am. I can lay up half my earnings and am quite satisfied."

"But you won't be a drayman all your life?"

"Oh, no, sir. But I may as well keep at it till I can get into something more to my taste."

And the young lawyer drove off.

"It's a queer country," said Morgan. "It's hard to gauge a man by his occupation here, I see."

"I wish I could get a dray to drive," said Joe.

"You are not old enough or strong enough yet. I am looking for some business myself, Joe, but I can't at all tell what I shall drift into. At home I was a dry-goods merchant. My partner and I disagreed and I sold out to him. I drew ten thousand dollars out of the concern, invested four-fifths of it, and have come out here with the remainder, to see what I can do."

"Ten thousand dollars! What a rich man you must be!" said Joe.

"In your eyes, my boy. As you get older, you will find that it will not seem so large to you. At any rate, I hope to increase it considerably."

They were walking on Kearny Street, near California Street, when Joe's attention was drawn, to a sign:

THIS RESTAURANT FOR SALE

It was a one-story building, of small dimensions, not fashionable, nor elegant in its appointments, but there wasn't much style in San Francisco at that time.

"Would you like to buy out the restaurant?" asked Morgan.

"I don't feel like buying anything out with empty pockets," said Joe.

"Let us go in."

The proprietor was a man of middle age.

"Why do you wish to sell out?" asked Morgan.

"I want to go to the mines. I need an out-of-door life and want a change."

"Does this business pay?"

"Sometimes I have made seventy-five dollars profit in a day."

"How much do you ask for the business?"

"I'll take five hundred dollars, cash."

"Have you a reliable cook?"

"Yes. He knows his business."

"Will he stay?"

"For the present. If you want a profitable business, you will do well to buy."

"I don't want it for myself. I want it for this young man."

"For this boy?" asked the restaurant-keeper, surprised.

Joe looked equally surprised.

CHAPTER XVII

JOE STARTS IN BUSINESS

"Do you think you can keep a hotel, Joe?" asked Morgan.

"I can try," said Joe promptly.

"Come in, gentlemen," said the restaurant-keeper.

"We can talk best inside."

The room was small, holding but six tables. In the rear was the kitchen.

"Let me see your scale of prices," said Morgan.

It was shown him.

"I could breakfast cheaper at Delmonico's," he said.

"And better," said the proprietor of the restaurant; "but I find people here willing to pay big prices, and, as long as that's the case, I should be a fool to reduce them. Yes, there's a splendid profit to be made in the business. I ought to charge a thousand dollars, instead of five hundred."

"Why don't you?" asked Morgan bluntly.

"Because I couldn't get it. Most men, when they come out here, are not content to settle down in the town. They won't be satisfied till they get to the mines."

"That seems to be the case with you, too."

"It isn't that altogether. My lungs are weak and confinement isn't good for me. Besides, the doctors say the climate in the interior is better for pulmonary affections."

"What rent do you have to pay?"

"A small ground-rent. I put up this building myself."

"How soon can you give possession?"

"Right off."

"Will you stay here three days, to initiate my young friend into the mysteries of the business?"

"Oh, yes; I'll do that willingly."

"Then I will buy you out."

In five minutes the business was settled.

"Joe," said Morgan, "let me congratulate you. You are now one of the business men of San Francisco."

"It seems like a dream to me, Mr. Morgan," said Joe. "This morning when I waked up I wasn't worth a cent."

"And now you own five hundred dollars," said Mr. Morgan, laughing.

"That wasn't exactly the way I thought of it, sir, but are you not afraid to trust me to that amount?"

"No, I am not, Joe," said Morgan seriously. "I think you are a boy of energy and integrity. I don't see why you shouldn't succeed."

"Suppose I shouldn't?"

"I shall not trouble myself about the loss. In all probability, you saved my life last evening. That is worth to me many times what I have invested for you."

"I want to give you my note for the money," said Joe. "If I live, I will pay you, with interest."

"I agree with you. We may as well put it on a business basis."

Papers were drawn up, and Joe found himself proprietor of the restaurant. He lost no opportunity of mastering the details of the business. He learned where his predecessor obtained his supplies, what prices he paid, about how much he required for a day's consumption, and what was his scale of prices.

"Do you live here, Mr. Brock?" asked Joe.

"Yes; I have a bed, which I lay in a corner of the restaurant. Thus I avoid the expense of a room outside, and am on hand early for business."

"I'll do the same," said Joe promptly.

"In that way you will have no personal expenses, except clothing and washing," said Brock.

"I shall be glad to have no bills to pay for board," said Joe. "That's rather a steep item here."

"So it is."

"I don't see but I can save up pretty much all I make," said Joe.

"Certainly you can."

In two days Joe, who was naturally quick and whose natural shrewdness was sharpened by his personal interest, mastered the details of the business, and felt that he could manage alone.

"Mr. Brock," said he, "you promised to stay with me three days, but I won't insist upon the third day. I think I can get along well without you."

"If you can, I shall be glad to leave you at once. The fact is, a friend of mine starts for the mines to-morrow, and I would like to accompany him. I asked him to put it off a day, but he thinks he can't."

"Go with him, by all means. I can get along."

So, on the morning of the third day, Joe found himself alone.

At the end of the first week he made a careful estimate of his expenses and receipts, and found, to his astonishment, that he had cleared two hundred dollars. It seemed to him almost incredible, and he went over the calculations again and again. But he could figure out no other result.

"Two hundred dollars in one week!" he said to himself. "What would Oscar say to that? It seems like a fairy tale."

Joe did not forget that he was five hundred dollars in debt. He went to George Morgan, who had bought out for himself a gentlemen's furnishing store, and said:

"Mr. Morgan, I want to pay up a part of that debt."

"So soon, Joe? How much do you want to pay?"

"A hundred and fifty dollars."

"You don't mean to say that you have cleared that amount?" said Morgan, in amazement.

"Yes, sir, and fifty dollars more."

"Very well. I will receive the money. You do well to wipe out your debts as soon as possible."

Joe paid over the money with no little satisfaction.

Without going too much into detail, it may be stated that at the end of a month Joe was out of debt and had three hundred dollars over. He called on the owner of the land to pay the monthly ground-rent.

"Why don't you buy the land, and get rid of the rent?" asked the owner.

"Do you want to sell?" asked Joe.

"Yes; I am about to return to the East."

"What do you ask?"

"I own two adjoining lots. You may have them all for a thousand dollars."

"Will you give me time?"

"I can't. I want to return at once, and I must have the cash."

A thought struck Joe.

"I will take three hours to consider," said Joe.

He went to George Morgan and broached his business.

"Mr. Morgan," he said, "will you lend me seven hundred dollars?"

"Are you getting into pecuniary difficulties, Joe?" asked Morgan, concerned.

"No, sir; but I want to buy some real estate."

"Explain yourself."

Joe did so.

"It is the best thing you can do," said Morgan, "I will lend you the money."

"I hope to repay it inside of two months," said Joe.

"I think you will, judging from what you have done already."

In two hours Joe had paid over the entire amount, for it will be remembered that he had three hundred dollars of his own, and was owner of three city lots.

"Now," thought he, "I must attend to business, and clear off the debt I have incurred. I shan't feel as if the land is mine till I have paid for it wholly."

Joe found it a great advantage that he obtained his own board and lodging free. Though wages were high, the necessary expenses of living were so large that a man earning five dollars a day was worse off oftentimes than one who was earning two dollars at the East.

"How shall I make my restaurant more attractive?" thought Joe.

He decided first that he would buy good articles and insist upon as much neatness as possible about the tables. At many of the restaurants very little attention was paid to this, and visitors who had been accustomed to neatness at home were repelled.

Soon Joe's dining-room acquired a reputation, and the patronage increased. At the end of the third month he had not only paid up the original loan of seven hundred dollars, but was the owner of the three lots, and had four hundred dollars over. He began to feel that his prosperity was founded on a solid basis.

One day about this time, as he was at the desk where he received money from his patrons as

they went out, his attention was drawn to a rough fellow, having the appearance of a tramp, entering at the door. The man's face seemed familiar to him, and it flashed upon him that it was Henry Hogan, who had defrauded him in New York.

The recognition was mutual.

"You here?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"So it seems," said Joe.

"Is it a good place?"

"I like it."

"Who's your boss?"

"Myself."

"You don't mean to say this is your own place?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated Hogan, staring stupidly at Joe.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. HOGAN'S PROPOSAL

Joe enjoyed Hogan's amazement. He felt rather proud of his rapid progress. It was not four months since, a poor, country boy, he had come up to New York, and fallen a prey to a designing sharper. Now, on the other side of the continent, he was master of a business and owner of real estate.

The day has passed for such rapid progress. California is no longer a new country, and the conditions of living closely approximate those in the East. I am careful to say this because I don't wish to mislead my young readers. Success is always attainable by pluck and persistency, but the degree is dependent on circumstances.

"How have you made out?" asked Joe of his visitor.

"I've had hard luck," grumbled Hogan, "I went to the mines, but I wasn't lucky."

"Was that the case with other miners?" asked Joe, who had a shrewd suspicion that Hogan's ill-luck was largely the result of his laziness and want of application.

"No," said Hogan. "Other men around me were lucky, but I wasn't."

"Perhaps your claim was a poor one."

"It was, as long as I had anything to do with it," said Hogan. "I sold it out for a trifle and the next day the other man found a nugget. Wasn't that cursed hard?" he grumbled.

"You ought to have kept on. Then you would have found the nugget."

"No, I shouldn't. I am too unlucky. If I had held on, it wouldn't have been there. You've got on well. You're lucky."

"Yes; I have no reason to complain. But I wasn't lucky all the time. I was robbed of every cent of money, when I met a good friend, who bought this business for me."

"Does it pay?" asked the other eagerly.

"Yes, it pays," said Joe cautiously.

"How much do you make, say, in a week?" asked Hogan, leaning his elbows on the counter and looking up in Joe's face.

"Really, Mr. Hogan," said Joe, "I don't feel called upon to tell my business to others."

"I thought maybe you'd tell an old friend," said Hogan.

Joe could not help laughing at the man's matchless impudence.

"I don't think you have treated me exactly like a friend, Mr. Hogan," he said. "You certainly did all you could to prevent my coming to California."

"There's some mistake about that," said Hogan.

"You're under a misapprehension; but I won't go into that matter now. Will you trust me for my supper?"

"Yes," said Joe promptly. "Sit down at that table."

The man had treated him badly, but things had turned out favorably for Joe, and he would not let Hogan suffer from hunger, if he could relieve him.

Hogan needed no second invitation. He took a seat at a table near-by, and ate enough for two men, but Joe could not repeat the invitation he had given. He felt that he could not afford it.

It was rather late when Hogan sat down. When he finished, he was the only one left in the restaurant, except Joe. He sauntered up to the desk.

"You've got a good cook," said Hogan, picking his teeth with a knife.

"Yes," answered Joe. "I think so."

"You say the business pays well?"

"Yes; it satisfies me."

"Are you alone? Have you no partner?"

"You could do better with one. Suppose you take me into business with you?"

Joe was considerably surprised at this proposition from a man who had swindled him.

"How much capital can you furnish?" he asked.

"I haven't got any money. I'm dead broke," said Hogan, "but I can give my services. I can wait on the table. I'll do that, and you can give me my board and one-third of the profits. Come, now, that's a good offer. What do you say?"

Joe thought it best to be candid.

"I don't want any partner, Mr. Hogan," he said; "and I may as well tell you, I don't think I should care to be associated with you if I did."

"Do you mean to insult me?" asked Hogan, scowling.

"No; but I may as well be candid."

"What's the matter with me?" asked Hogan roughly.

"I don't like the way you do business," said Joe.

"Look here, young one, you put on too many airs just because you're keepin' a one-horse restaurant," said Hogan angrily.

"If it's a one-horse restaurant, why do you want to become my partner?" retorted Joe coolly.

"Because I'm hard up—I haven't got a cent."

"I'm sorry for you; but a man needn't be in that condition long here."

"Where do you sleep?" asked Hogan suddenly.

"Here. I put a bed on the floor in one corner, and so am on hand in the morning."

"I say," Hogan continued insinuatingly, "won't you let me stay here to-night?"

"Sleep here?"

"Yes."

"I'd rather not, Mr. Hogan."

"I haven't a cent to pay for a lodging. If you don't take me in, I shall have to stay in the street all night."

"You've slept out at the mines, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then you can do it here."

"You're hard on a poor man," whined Hogan. "It wouldn't cost you anything to let me sleep here."

"No, it wouldn't," said Joe; "but I prefer to choose my own company at night."

"I may catch my death of cold," said Hogan.

"I hope not; but I don't keep lodgings," said Joe firmly.

"You haven't any feeling for an unlucky man."

"I have given you your supper, and not stinted you in any way. What you ate would cost two dollars at my regular prices. I wasn't called to do it, for you never did me any service, and you are owing me to-day fifty dollars, which you cheated me out of when I was a poor boy. I won't let you lodge here, but I will give you a breakfast in the morning, if you choose to come round. Then you will be strengthened for a day's work, and can see what you can find to do."

Hogan saw that Joe was in earnest and walked out of the restaurant, without a word.

When Joe was about to close his doors for the night his attention was drawn to a man who was sitting down on the ground, a few feet distant, with his head buried between his two hands, in an attitude expressive of despondency.

Joe was warm-hearted and sympathetic, and, after a moment's hesitation, addressed the stranger.

"Is anything the matter with you, sir?" he asked. "Don't you feel well?"

The man addressed raised his head. He was a stout, strongly built man, roughly dressed, but had a look which inspired confidence.

"I may as well tell you, boy," he answered, "though you can't help me. I've been a cursed fool, that's what's the matter."

"If you don't mind telling me," said Joe gently, "perhaps I can be of service to you."

The man shook his head.

"I don't think you can," he said, "but I'll tell you, for all that. Yesterday I came up from the mines with two thousand dollars. I was about a year getting it together, and to me it was a fortune. I'm a shoemaker by occupation, and lived in a town in Massachusetts, where I have a wife and two young children. I left them a year ago to go to the mines. I did well, and the money I told you about would have made us all comfortable, if I could only have got it home."

"Were you robbed of it?" asked Joe, remembering his own experience.

"Yes; I was robbed of it, but not in the way you are thinking of. A wily scoundrel induced me to enter a gambling-den, the Bella Union, they call it. I wouldn't play at first, but soon the fascination seized me. I saw a man win a hundred dollars, and I thought I could do the same, so I began, and won a little. Then I lost, and played on to get my money back. In just an hour I was cleaned out of all I had. Now I am penniless, and my poor family will suffer for my folly."

He buried his face in his hands once more and, strong man as he was, he wept aloud.

"Have you had any supper, sir?" said Joe compassionately.

"No; but I have no appetite."

"Have you any place to sleep?"

"No."

"Then I can offer you a supper and a night's lodging. Don't be discouraged. In the morning we can talk the matter over, and see what can be done."

The stranger rose and laid his hand on Joe's arm.

"I don't know how it is," he said, "but your words give me courage. I believe you have saved my life. I have a revolver left and I had a mind to blow my brains out."

"Would that have helped you or your family?"

"No, boy. I was a fool to think of it. I'll accept your offer, and to-morrow I'll see what I can do. You're the best friend I've met since I left home."

CHAPTER XIX THE UNLUCKY MINER

Joe brought out some cold meat and bread and butter, and set it before his guest.

"The fire's gone out," he said, "or I would give you some tea. Here is a glass of milk, if you like it."

"Thank you, boy," said his visitor. "Milk is good enough for anybody. One thing I can say, I've steered clear of liquor. A brother of mine was intemperate and that was a warning to me. I took credit to myself for being a steady-going man, compared with many of my acquaintances out at the mines. But it don't do to boast. I've done worse, perhaps. I've gambled away the provision I had made for my poor family."

"Don't take it too hard," said Joe, in a tone of sympathy. "You know how it is out here. Down to-day and up to-morrow."

"It'll take me a long time to get up to where I was," said the other; "but it's my fault, and I must make the best of it."

Joe observed, with satisfaction, that his visitor was doing ample justice to the supper spread before him. With a full stomach, he would be likely to take more cheerful views of life and the future. In this thought Joe proved to be correct.

"I didn't think I could eat anything," said the miner, laying down his knife and fork, twenty minutes later, "but I have made a hearty supper, thanks to your kindness. Things look a little brighter to me now. I've had a hard pullback, but all is not lost. I've got to stay here a year or two longer, instead of going back by the next steamer; but I must make up my mind to that. What is your name, boy?"

"Joe Mason."

"You've been kind to me, and I won't forget it. It doesn't seem likely I can return the favor, but I'll do it if ever I can. Good night to you."

"Where are you going?" asked Joe, surprised, as the miner walked to the door.

"Out into the street."

"But where do you mean to pass the night?"

"Where a man without money must—in the street."

"But you mustn't do that."

"I shan't mind it. I've slept out at the mines many a night."

"But won't you find it more comfortable here?"

"Yes; but I don't want to intrude. You've given me a good supper and that is all I can expect."

"He doesn't seem much like Hogan," thought Joe.

"You are welcome to lodge here with me," he said. "It will cost you nothing and will be more comfortable for you."

"You don't know me, Joe," said the miner. "How do you know but I may get up in the night and rob you?"

"You could, but I don't think you will," said Joe. "I am not at all afraid of it. You look like an honest man."

The miner looked gratified.

"You shan't repent your confidence, Joe," he said.

"I'd rather starve than rob a good friend like you. But you mustn't trust everybody."

"I don't," said Joe. "I refused a man to-night—a man named Hogan."

"Hogan?"

"Yes."

"What does he look like?"

Joe described him.

"It's the very man," said the miner.

"Do you know him, then?"

"Yes; he was out at our diggings. Nobody liked him, or trusted him. He was too lazy to work, but just loafed around, complaining of his luck. One night I caught him in my tent, just going to rob me. I warned him to leave the camp next day or I'd report him, and the boys would have strung him up. That's the way they treat thieves out there."

"It doesn't surprise me to hear it," said Joe. "He robbed me of fifty dollars in New York."

"He did? How was that?"

Joe told the story.

"The mean skunk!" ejaculated Watson—for this Joe found to be the miner's name. "It's mean enough to rob a man, but to cheat a poor boy out of all he has is a good deal meaner. And yet you gave him supper?"

"Yes. The man was hungry; I pitied him."

"You're a better Christian than I am. I'd have let him go hungry."

Both Joe and the miner were weary and they soon retired, but not to uninterrupted slumber. About midnight they were disturbed, as the next chapter will show.

CHAPTER XX

HOGAN MEETS A CONGENIAL SPIRIT

When Hogan left Joe's presence he was far from feeling as grateful as he ought for the kindness with which our hero had treated him. Instead of feeling thankful for the bountiful supper, he was angry because Joe had not permitted him to remain through the night. Had he obtained this favor, he would have resented the refusal to take him into partnership. There are some men who are always soliciting favors, and demanding them as a right, and Hogan was one of them.

Out in the street he paused a minute, undecided where to go. He had no money, as he had truly said, or he would have been tempted to go to a gambling-house, and risk it on a chance of making more.

"Curse that boy!" he muttered, as he sauntered along in the direction of Telegraph Hill. "Who'd have thought a green country clodhopper would have gone up as he has, while an experienced man of the world like me is out at the elbows and without a cent!"

The more Hogan thought of this, the more indignant he became.

He thrust both hands into his pantaloons pockets, and strode moodily on.

"I say it's a cursed shame!" he muttered. "I never did have any luck, that's a fact. Just see how luck comes to some. With only a dollar or two in his pocket, this Joe got trusted for a first-class passage out here, while I had to come in the steerage. Then, again, he meets some fool, who sets him up in business. Nobody ever offered to set me up in business!" continued Hogan, feeling aggrieved at Fortune for her partiality. "Nobody even offered to give me a start in life. I have to work hard, and that's all the good it does."

The fact was that Hogan had not done a whole day's work for years. But such men are very apt to deceive themselves and possibly he imagined himself a hard-working man.

"It's disgusting to see the airs that boy puts on," he continued to soliloquize. "It's nothing but luck. He can't help getting on, with everybody to help him. Why didn't he let me sleep in his place to-night? It wouldn't have cost him a cent."

Then Hogan drifted off into calculations of how much money Joe was making by his business. He knew the prices charged for meals and that they afforded a large margin of profit.

The more he thought of it, the more impressed he was with the extent of Joe's luck.

"The boy must be making his fortune," he said to himself. "Why, he can't help clearing from one to two hundred dollars a week—perhaps more. It's a money-making business, there's no doubt of it. Why couldn't he take me in as partner? That would set me on my legs again, and in time I'd be rich. I'd make him sell out, and get the whole thing after awhile."

So Hogan persuaded himself into the conviction that Joe ought to have accepted him as partner, though why this should be, since his only claim rested on his successful attempt to defraud him in New York, it would be difficult to conjecture.

Sauntering slowly along, Hogan had reached the corner of Pacific Street, then a dark and suspicious locality in the immediate neighborhood of a number of low public houses of bad reputation. The night was dark, for there was no moon.

Suddenly he felt himself seized in a tight grip, while a low, stern voice in his ear demanded:

"Your money, and be quick about it!"

Hogan was not a brave man, but this demand, in his impecunious condition, instead of terrifying him, struck his sense of humor as an exceedingly good joke.

"You've got the wrong man!" he chuckled.

"Stop your fooling, and hand over your money, quickly!" was the stern rejoinder.

"My dear friend," said Hogan, "if you can find any money about me, it's more than I can do myself."

"Are you on the square?" demanded the other suspiciously.

"Look at me, and see."

The highwayman took him at his word. Lighting a match, he surveyed his captive.

"You don't look wealthy, that's a fact," he admitted. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know. I haven't got any money, nor any place to sleep."

"Then you'd better be leaving this place, or another mistake may be made."

"Stop!" said Hogan, with a sudden thought. "Though I haven't any money, I can tell you where we can both find some."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"Come in here, then, and come to business."

He led Hogan into a low shanty on Pacific Street, and, bidding him be seated on a broken

settee, waited for particulars.

CHAPTER XXI READY FOR MISCHIEF

Though Hogan was a scamp in the superlative degree, the burly ruffian who seated himself by his side looked the character much better. He was not a man to beat about the bush. As he expressed it, he wanted to come to business at once.

"What's your game, pard?" he demanded. "Out with it."

Hogan's plan, as the reader has already surmised, was to break into Joe's restaurant and seize whatever money he might be found to have on the premises. He recommended it earnestly, for two reasons. First, a share of the money would be welcome; and, secondly, he would be gratified to revenge himself upon the boy, whom he disliked because he had injured him.

Jack Rafferty listened in silence.

"I don't know about it," he said. "There's a risk."

"I don't see any risk. We two ought to be a match for a boy."

"Of course we are. If we wasn't I'd go hang myself up for a milksop. Are you sure there's no one else with him?"

"Not a soul."

"That's well, so far; but we might be seen from the outside."

"We can keep watch."

"Do you think the boy's got much money about him?"

"Yes; he's making money hand over fist. He's one of those mean chaps that never spend a cent, but lay it all by. Bah!"

So Hogan expressed his contempt for Joe's frugality.

"All the better for us. How much might there be now, do you think?"

"Five hundred dollars, likely."

"That's worth risking something for," said Jack thoughtfully.

"We'll share alike?" inquired Hogan anxiously.

"Depends on how much you help about gettin' the money," said Jack carelessly.

Hogan, who was not very courageous, did not dare push the matter though he would have liked a more definite assurance. However, he had another motive besides the love of money, and was glad to have the cooperation of Rafferty, though secretly afraid of his ruffianly accomplice.

It was agreed to wait till midnight. Till then both men threw themselves down and slept.

As the clock indicated midnight, Rafferty shook Hogan roughly.

The latter sat up and gazed, in terrified bewilderment, at Jack, who was leaning over him, forgetting for the moment the compact into which he had entered.

"What do you want?" he ejaculated.

"It's time we were about our business," growled Jack.

"It's struck twelve."

"All right!" responded Hogan, who began to feel nervous, now that the crisis was at hand.

"Don't sit rubbing your eyes, man, but get up."

"Haven't you got a drop of something to brace me up?" asked Hogan nervously.

"What are you scared of, pard?" asked Rafferty contemptuously.

"Nothing," answered Hogan, "but I feel dry."

"All right. A drop of something will warm us both up."

Jack went behind the counter, and, selecting a bottle of rot-gut whisky, poured out a stiff glassful apiece.

"Drink it, pard," he said.

Hogan did so, nothing loath.

"That's the right sort," he said, smacking his lips. "It's warming to the stomach."

So it was and a frequent indulgence in the vile liquid would probably have burned his stomach and unfitted it for service. But the momentary effect was stimulating, and inspired Hogan with a kind of Dutch courage, which raised him in the opinion of his burly confederate.

"Push ahead, pard," said he. "I'm on hand."

"That's the way to talk," said Rafferty approvingly. "If we're lucky, we'll be richer before morning."

Through the dark streets, unlighted and murky, the two confederates made their stealthy way, and in five minutes stood in front of Joe's restaurant.

CHAPTER XXII CHECKMATED

Everything looked favorable for their plans. Of course, the restaurant was perfectly dark, and the street was quite deserted.

"How shall we get in?" asked Hogan of his more experienced accomplice.

"No trouble—through the winder."

Rafferty had served an apprenticeship at the burglar's trade, and was not long in opening the front window. He had no light and could not see that Joe had a companion. If he had discovered this, he would have been more cautious.

"Go in and get the money," said he to Hogan.

He thought it possible that Hogan might object, but the latter had a reason for consenting. He thought he might obtain for himself the lion's share of the plunder, while, as to risk, there would be no one but Joe to cope with, and Hogan knew that in physical strength he must be more than a match for a boy of sixteen.

"All right!" said Hogan. "You stay at the window and give the alarm if we are seen."

Rafferty was prompted by a suspicion of Hogan's good faith in the proposal he made to him. His ready compliance lulled this suspicion, and led him to reflect that, perhaps, he could do the work better himself.

"No," said he. "I'll go in and you keep watch at the winder."

"I'm willing to go in," said Hogan, fearing that he would not get his fair share of the plunder.

"You stay where you are, pard!" said Rafferty, in a tone of command. "I'll manage this thing myself."

"Just as you say," said Hogan, slightly disappointed.

Rafferty clambered into the room, making as little noise as possible. He stood still a moment, to accustom his eyes to the darkness. His plan was to discover where Joe lay, wake him up, and force him, by threats of instant death as the penalty for non-compliance, to deliver up all the money he had in the restaurant.

Now, it happened that Joe and his guest slept in opposite corners of the room. Rafferty discovered Joe, but was entirely ignorant of the presence of another person in the apartment.

Joe waked on being rudely shaken.

"Who is it?" he muttered drowsily.

"Never mind who it is!" growled Jack in his ear. "It's a man that'll kill you if you don't give up all the money you've got about you!"

Joe was fully awake now, and realized the situation. He felt thankful that he was not alone, and it instantly flashed upon him that Watson had a revolver. But Watson was asleep. To obtain time to form a plan, he parleyed a little.

"You want my money?" he asked, appearing to be confused.

"Yes—and at once! Refuse, and I will kill you!"

I won't pretend to deny that Joe's heart beat a little quicker than its wont. He was thinking busily. How could he attract Watson's attention?

"It's pretty hard, but I suppose I must," he answered.

"That's the way to talk."

"Let me get up and I'll get it."

Joe spoke so naturally that Rafferty suspected nothing. He permitted our hero to rise, supposing that he was going for the money he demanded.

Joe knew exactly where Watson lay and went over to him. He knelt down and drew out the revolver from beneath his head, at the same time pushing him, in the hope of arousing him. The push was effectual. Watson was a man whose experience at the mines had taught him to rouse at once. He just heard Joe say:

"Hush!"

"What are you so long about?" demanded Rafferty suspiciously.

"I've got a revolver," said Joe unexpectedly; "and, if you don't leave the room, I'll fire!"

With an oath, Rafferty, who was no coward, sprang upon Joe, and it would have gone hard with him but for Watson. The latter was now broad awake. He seized Rafferty by the collar, and, dashing him backward upon the floor, threw himself upon him.

"Two can play at that game!" said he. "Light the candle, Joe."

"Help, pard!" called Rafferty.

But Hogan, on whom he called, suspecting how matters stood, was in full flight.

The candle was lighted, and in the struggling ruffian Joe recognized the man who, three months before, had robbed him of his little all.

CHAPTER XXIII

NOT WHOLLY BLACK

"I know this man, Mr. Watson," said Joe.

"Who is he?"

"He is the same man who robbed me of my money one night about three months ago—the one I told you of."

For the first time, Rafferty recognized Joe.

"There wasn't enough to make a fuss about," he said. "There was only two dollars and a half."

"It was all I had."

"Let me up!" said Rafferty, renewing his struggles.

"Joe, have you got a rope?" asked Watson.

"Yes."

"Bring it here, then. I can't hold this man all night."

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded Rafferty uneasily.

"Tie you hand and foot till to-morrow morning and then deliver you over to the authorities."

"No, you won't!"

He made a renewed struggle, but Watson was a man with muscles of iron, and the attempt was unsuccessful.

It was not without considerable difficulty, however, that the midnight intruder was secured. When, at length, he was bound hand and foot, Watson withdrew to a little distance. Joe and he looked at Rafferty, and each felt that he had seldom seen a more brutal face.

"Well," growled Rafferty, "I hope you are satisfied?"

"Not yet," returned Watson. "When you are delivered into the hands of the authorities we shall be satisfied."

"Oh, for an hour's freedom!" muttered Jack Rafferty, expressing his thoughts aloud.

"What use would you make of it?" asked Watson, in a tone of curiosity.

"I'd kill the man that led me into this trap!"

Watson and Joe were surprised.

"Was there such a man. Didn't you come here alone?"

"No; there was a man got me to come. Curse him, He told me I would only find the boy here!"

"What has become of him?"

"He ran away, I reckon, instead of standing by me."

"Where was he?"

"At the winder."

"Could it have been Hogan?" thought Joe.

"I think I know the man," said our hero. "I'll describe the man I mean and you can tell me if it was he."

He described Hogan as well as he could.

"That's the man," said Rafferty. "I wouldn't peach if he hadn't served me such a mean trick. What's his name?"

"His name is Hogan. He came over on the same steamer with me, after robbing me of fifty dollars in New York. He has been at the mines, but didn't make out well. This very afternoon I gave him supper—all he could eat—and charged him nothing for it. He repays me by planning a robbery."

"He's a mean skunk," said Watson bluntly.

"You're right, stranger," said Rafferty. "I'm a scamp myself, but I'll be blowed if I'd turn on a man that fed me when I was hungry."

The tones were gruff but the man was evidently sincere.

"You're better than you look," said Watson, surprised to hear such a sentiment from a man of such ruffianly appearance.

Jack Rafferty laughed shortly.

"I ain't used to compliments," he said, "and I expect I'm bad enough, but I ain't all bad. I won't turn on my pal, unless he does it first, and I ain't mean enough to rob a man that's done me a good turn."

"No, you ain't all bad," said Watson. "It's a pity you won't make up your mind to earn an honest living."

"Too late for that, I reckon. What do you think they'll do with me?"

In those days punishments were summary and severe. Watson knew it and Joe had seen something of it. Our hero began to feel compassion for the foiled burglar. He whispered in Watson's ear. Watson hesitated, but finally yielded.

"Stranger," said he, "the boy wants me to let you go."

"Does he?" inquired Rafferty, in surprise.

"Yes. He is afraid it will go hard with you if we give you up."

"Likely it will," muttered Rafferty, watching Watson's face eagerly, to see whether he favored Joe's proposal.

"Suppose we let you go—will you promise not to make another attempt upon this place?"

"What do you take me for? I'm not such a mean cuss as that."

"One thing more—you won't kill this man that brought you here?"

"If I knowed it wasn't a trap he led me into. He told me there was only the boy."

"He thought so. I don't belong here. The boy let me sleep here out of kindness. Hogan knew nothing of this. I didn't come till after he had left."

"That's different," said Rafferty; "but he shouldn't have gone back on me."

"He is a coward, probably."

"I guess you're right," said Rafferty contemptuously.

"You promise, then?"

"Not to kill him? Yes."

"Then we'll let you go."

Watson unloosed the bonds that confined the prisoner. Rafferty raised himself to his full height and stretched his limbs.

"There—I feel better," he said. "You tied the rope pretty tight."

"I found it necessary," said Watson, laughing. "Now, Joe, if you will open the door, this gentleman will pass out."

Rafferty turned to Joe, as he was about to leave the restaurant.

"Boy," said he, "I won't forget this. I ain't much of a friend to boast of, but I'm your friend. You've saved me from prison, and worse, it's likely; and, if you need help any time, send for me. If I had that money I took from you I'd pay it back."

"I don't need it," said Joe. "I've been lucky, and am doing well. I hope you'll make up your mind to turn over a new leaf. If you do, and are ever hard up for a meal, come to me, and you shall have it without money and without price."

"Thank you, boy," said Rafferty. "I'll remember it."

He strode out of the restaurant, and disappeared in the darkness.

"Human nature's a curious thing, Joe," said Watson. "Who would have expected to find any redeeming quality in such a man as that?"

"I would sooner trust him than Hogan."

"So would I. Hogan is a mean scoundrel, who is not so much of a ruffian as this man only because he is too much of a coward to be."

"I am glad we let him go," said Joe.

"I am not sure whether it was best, but I knew we should have to be awake all night if we didn't. He could have loosened the knots after awhile. He won't trouble you any more."

"I wish I felt as sure about Hogan," said Joe.

"Hogan is a coward. I advise you to keep a revolver constantly on hand. He won't dare to break in by himself."

The next morning, after breakfast, Watson prepared to go out in search of work.

"I must begin at the bottom of the ladder once more," he said to Joe. "It's my own fault, and I won't complain. But what a fool I have been! I might have gone home by the next steamer if I hadn't gambled away all my hard earnings."

"What sort of work shall you try to get?"

"Anything—I have no right to be particular. Anything that will pay my expenses and give me a chance to lay by something for my family at home."

"Mr. Watson," said Joe suddenly, "I've been thinking of something that may suit you. Since I came to San Francisco I have never gone outside. I would like to go to the mines."

"You wouldn't make as much as you do here."

"Perhaps not; but I have laid by some money and I would like to see something of the country. Will you carry on the restaurant for me for three months, if I give you your board and half of the profits?"

"Will I? I should think myself very lucky to get the chance."

"Then you shall have the chance."

"How do you know that I can be trusted?" asked Watson.

"I haven't known you long," said Joe, "but I feel confidence in your honesty."

"I don't think you'll repent your confidence. When do you want to go?"

"I'll stay here a few days, till you get used to the business, then I will start."

"I was lucky to fall in with you," said Watson. "I didn't want to go back to the mines and tell the boys what a fool I have been. I begin to think there's a chance for me yet."

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. BICKFORD, OF PUMPKIN HOLLOW

It may be thought that Joe was rash in deciding to leave his business in the hands of a man whose acquaintance he had made but twelve hours previous. But in the early history of California friendships ripened fast. There was more confidence between man and man, and I am assured that even now, though the State is more settled and as far advanced in civilization and refinement as any of her sister States on the Atlantic coast, the people are bound together by more friendly ties, and exhibit less of cold caution than at the East. At all events, Joe never dreamed of distrusting his new acquaintance. A common peril, successfully overcome, had doubtless something to do in strengthening the bond between them.

Joe went round to his friend Mr. Morgan and announced his intention.

"I don't think you will make money by your new plan, Joe," said Morgan.

"I don't expect to," said Joe, "but I want to see the mines. If I don't succeed, I can come back to my business here."

"That is true. I should like very well to go, too."

"Why won't you, Mr. Morgan?"

"I cannot leave my business as readily as you can. Do you feel confidence in this man whom you are leaving in charge?"

"Yes, sir. He has been unlucky, but I am sure he is honest."

"He will have considerable money belonging to you by the time you return—that is, if you stay any length of time."

"I want to speak to you about that, Mr. Morgan. I have directed him to make a statement to you once a month, and put in your hands what money comes to me—if it won't trouble you too much."

"Not at all, Joe. I shall be glad to be of service to you."

"If you meet with any good investment for the money while I am away, I should like to have you act for me as you would for yourself."

"All right, Joe."

Joe learned from Watson that the latter had been mining on the Yuba River, not far from the town of Marysville. He decided to go there, although he might have found mines nearer the city. The next question was, How should he get there, and should he go alone?

About this time a long, lank Yankee walked into the restaurant, one day, and, seating himself at a table, began to inspect the bill of fare which Joe used to write up every morning. He looked disappointed.

"Don't you find what you want?" inquired Joe.

"No," said the visitor. "I say, this is a queer country. I've been hankerin' arter a good dish of baked beans for a week, and ain't found any."

"We sometimes have them," said Joe. "Come here at one o'clock, and you shall be accommodated."

The stranger brightened up.

"That's the talk," said he. "I'll come."

"Have you just come out here?" asked Joe curiously.

"A week ago."

"Are you a Southerner?" asked Joe demurely.

"No, I guess not!" said the Yankee, with emphasis.

"I was raised in Pumpkin Hollow, State of Maine. I was twenty-one last first of April, but I ain't no April fool, I tell you. Dad and me carried on the farm till I began to hear tell of Californy. I'd got about three hundred dollars saved up and I took it to come out here."

"I suppose you've come out to make your fortune?"

"Yes, sir-ee, that's just what I come for."

"How have you succeeded so far?"

"I've succeeded in spendin' all my money, except fifty dollars. I say, it costs a sight to eat and drink out here. I can't afford to take but one meal a day, and then I eat like all possessed."

"I should think you would, Mr.—"

"Joshua Bickford—that's my name when I'm to hum."

"Well, Mr. Bickford, what are your plans?"

"I want to go out to the mines and dig gold. I guess I can dig as well as anybody. I've had experience in diggin' ever since I was ten year old."

"Not digging gold, I suppose?"

"Diggin' potatoes, and sich."

"I'm going to the mines myself, Mr. Bickford. What do you say to going along with me?"

"I'm on hand. You know the way, don't you?"

"We can find it, I have no doubt. I have never been there, but my friend Mr. Watson is an experienced miner."

"How much gold did you dig?" asked Joshua bluntly.

"Two thousand dollars," answered Watson, not thinking it necessary to add that he had parted with the money since at the gaming-table.

"Two thousand dollars?" exclaimed Joshua, duly impressed. "That's a heap of money!"

"Yes; it's a pretty good pile."

"I'd like to get that much. I know what I'd do."

"What would you do, Mr. Bickford?"

"I'd go home and marry Sukey Smith, by gosh!"

"Then I hope you'll get the money, for Miss Smith's sake."

"There's a feller hangin' round her," said Joshua, "kinder slick-lookin', with his hair parted in the middle; he tends in the dry-goods store; but, if I come home with two thousand dollars, she'll have me, I guess. Why, with two thousand dollars I can buy the farm next to dad's, with a house with five rooms into it, and a good-sized barn. I guess Sukey wouldn't say no to me then, but would change her name to Bickford mighty sudden."

"I hope you will succeed in your plans, Mr. Bickford."

"Seems to me you're kinder young to be out here," said Bickford, turning his attention to Joe.

"Yes; I am not quite old enough to think of marrying."

"Have you got money enough to get out to the mines?" asked Joshua cautiously.

"I think I can raise enough," said Joe, smiling.

"My young friend is the owner of this restaurant," said Watson.

"You don't say! I thought you hired him."

"No. On the contrary, I am in his employ. I have agreed to run the restaurant for him while he is at the mines."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Bickford, surveying our hero with curiosity. "Have you made much money in this eating-house?"

"I've done pretty well," said Joe modestly. "I own the building and the two adjoining lots."

"You don't say! How old be you?"

"Sixteen."

"You must be all-fired smart!"

"I don't know about that, Mr. Bickford. I've been lucky and fallen in with good friends."

"Well, I guess Californy's the place to make money. I ain't made any yet, but I mean to. There wasn't no chance to get ahead in Pumpkin Hollow. I was workin' for eight dollars a month and board."

"It would be a great while before you could save up money to buy a farm out of that, Mr. Bickford."

"That's so."

"My experience was something like yours. Before I came out here I was working on a farm."

"Sho!"

"And I didn't begin to get as much money as you. I was bound out to a farmer for my board and clothes. The board was fair but the clothes were few and poor."

"You don't say!"

"I hope you will be as lucky as I have been."

"How much are you worth now?" asked Joshua curiously.

"From one to two thousand dollars, I expect."

"Sho! I never did! How long have you been out here?"

"Three months."

"Je-rusalem! That's better than stayin' to hum."

"I think so."

By this time Mr. Bickford had completed his breakfast and in an anxious tone he inquired:

"What's the damage?"

"Oh, I won't charge you anything, as you are going to be my traveling companion," said Joe.

"You're a gentleman, by gosh!" exclaimed Mr. Bickford, in unrestrained delight.

"Come in at one o'clock and you shall have some of your favorite beans and nothing to pay. Can you start for the mines to-morrow?"

"Yes—I've got nothin' to prepare."

"Take your meals here till we go."

"Well, I'm in luck," said Bickford. "Victuals cost awful out here and I haven't had as much as I wanted to eat since I got here."

"Consider yourself my guest," said Joe, "and eat all you want to."

It may be remarked that Mr. Bickford availed himself of our young hero's invitation, and during the next twenty-four hours stowed away enough provisions to last an ordinary man for half a week.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN FROM PIKE COUNTY

Four days later Joe and his Yankee friend, mounted on mustangs, were riding through a cañon a hundred miles from San Francisco. It was late in the afternoon, and the tall trees shaded the path on which they were traveling. The air was unusually chilly and after the heat of midday they felt it.

"I don't feel like campin' out to-night," said Bickford. "It's too cool."

"I don't think we shall find any hotels about here," said Joe.

"Don't look like it. I'd like to be back in Pumpkin Hollow just for to-night. How fur is it to the mines, do you calc'late?"

"We are probably about half-way. We ought to reach the Yuba River inside of a week."

Here Mr. Bickford's mustang deliberately stopped and began to survey the scenery calmly.

"What do you mean, you pesky critter?" demanded Joshua.

The mustang turned his head and glanced composedly at the burden he was carrying.

"G'lang!" said Joshua, and he brought down his whip on the flanks of the animal.

It is not in mustang nature to submit to such an outrage without expressing proper resentment. The animal threw up its hind legs, lowering its head at the same time, and Joshua Bickford, describing a sudden somersault, found himself sitting down on the ground a few feet in front of his horse, not seriously injured, but considerably bewildered.

"By gosh!" he ejaculated.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to dismount, Mr. Bickford?" asked Joe, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

"Because I didn't know it myself," said Joshua, rising and rubbing his jarred frame.

The mustang did not offer to run away, but stood calmly surveying him as if it had had nothing to do with his rider's sudden dismounting.

"Darn the critter! He looks just as if nothing had happened," said Joshua. "He served me a mean trick."

"It was a gentle hint that he was tired," said Joe.

"Darn the beast! I don't like his hints," said Mr. Bickford.

He prepared to mount the animal, but the latter rose on its hind legs and very clearly intimated that the proposal was not agreeable.

"What's got into the critter?" said Joshua.

"He wants to rest. Suppose we rest here for half-an-hour, while we loosen check-rein and let the horses graze."

"Just as you say."

Joshua's steed appeared pleased with the success of his little hint and lost no time in availing himself of the freedom accorded him.

"I wish I was safe at the mines," said Joshua. "What would dad say if he knowed where I was, right out here in the wilderness? It looks as we might be the only human critters in the world. There ain't no house in sight, nor any signs of man's ever bein' here."

"So we can fancy how Adam felt when he was set down in Paradise," said Joe.

"I guess he felt kinder lonely."

"Probably he did, till Eve came. He had Eve, and I have you for company."

"I guess Eve wasn't much like me," said Joshua, with a grin.

He was lying at full length on the greensward, looking awkward and ungainly enough, but his countenance, homely as it was, looked honest and trustworthy, and Joe preferred his company to that of many possessed of more outward polish. He could not help smiling at Mr. Bickford's remark.

"Probably Eve was not as robust as you are," he replied, "I doubt if she were as tall, either. But as to loneliness, it is better to be lonely than to have some company."

"There ain't no suspicious characters round, are there?" inquired Joshua anxiously.

"We are liable to meet them—men who have been unsuccessful at the mines and who have become desperate in consequence, and others who came out here to prey upon others. That's what I hear."

"Do you think we shall meet any of the critters?" asked Joshua.

"I hope not. They wouldn't find it very profitable to attack us. We haven't much money."

"I haven't," said Joshua. "I couldn't have got to the mines if you hadn't lent me a few dollars."

"You have your animal. You can sell him for something."

"If he agrees to carry me so far," said Mr. Bickford, gazing doubtfully at the mustang, who was evidently enjoying his evening repast.

"Oh, a hearty meal will make him good-natured. That is the way it acts with boys and men, and animals are not so very different."

"I guess you're right," said Joshua. "When I wanted to get a favor out of dad, I always used to wait till the old man had got his belly full. That made him kinder good-natured."

"I see you understand human nature, Mr. Bickford," said Joe.

"I guess I do," said Joshua complacently. "Great Jehoshaphat, who's that?"

Joe raised his head and saw riding toward them a man who might have sat for the photograph of a bandit without any alteration in his countenance or apparel. He wore a red flannel shirt, pants of rough cloth, a Mexican sombrero, had a bowie-knife stuck in his girdle, and displayed a revolver rather ostentatiously. His hair, which he wore long, was coarse and black, and he had a fierce mustache.

"Is he a robber?" asked Joshua uneasily.

"Even if he is," said Joe, "we are two to one. I dare say he's all right, but keep your weapon ready."

Though Joe was but a boy and Bickford a full-grown man, from the outset he had assumed the command of the party, and issued directions which his older companion followed implicitly. The explanation is that Joe had a mind of his own, and decided promptly what was best to be done, while his long-limbed associate was duller witted and undecided.

Joe and Joshua maintained their sitting position till the stranger was within a rod or two, when he hailed them.

"How are ye, strangers?" he said.

"Pretty comfortable," said Joshua, reassured by his words. "How fare you?"

"You're a Yank, ain't you?" said the newcomer, disregarding Joshua's question.

"I reckon so. Where might you hail from?"

"I'm from Pike County, Missouri," was the answer. "You've heard of Pike, hain't you?"

"I don't know as I have," said Mr. Bickford.

The stranger frowned.

"You must have been born in the woods not to have heard of Pike County," he said. "The smartest fighters come from Pike. I kin whip my weight in wildcats, am a match for a dozen Indians to onst, and can tackle a lion without flinchin'."

"Sho!" said Joshua, considerably impressed.

"Won't you stop and rest with us?" said Joe politely.

"I reckon I will," said the Pike man, getting off his beast. "You don't happen to have a bottle of whisky with you, strangers?"

"No," said Joe.

The newcomer looked disappointed.

"I wish you had," said he. "I feel as dry as a tinder-box. Where might you be travelin'?"

"We are bound for the mines on the Yuba River."

"That's a long way off."

"Yes, it's four or five days' ride."

"I've been there, and I don't like it. It's too hard work for a gentleman."

This was uttered in such a magnificent tone of disdain that Joe was rather amused at the fellow. In his red shirt and coarse breeches, and brown, not overclean skin, he certainly didn't look much like a gentleman in the conventional sense of that term.

"It's all well enough to be a gentleman if you've got money to fall back on," remarked Joshua sensibly.

"Is that personal?" demanded the Pike County man, frowning and half rising.

"It's personal to me," said Joshua quietly.

"I accept the apology," said the newcomer, sinking back upon the turf.

"I hain't apologized, as I'm aware," said Joshua, who was no craven.

"You'd better not rile me, stranger," said the Pike man fiercely. "You don't know me, you don't. I'm a rip-tail roarer, I am. I always kill a man who insults me."

"So do we," said Joe quietly.

The Pike County man looked at Joe in some surprise. He had expected to frighten the boy with his bluster, but it didn't seem to produce the effect intended.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DESPERADO

Mr. Bickford also seemed a little surprised at Joe's coolness. Though not a coward in the face of danger, he had been somewhat impressed by the fierce aspect of the man from Pike County, and really looked upon him as a reckless daredevil who was afraid of nothing. Joe judged him more truly. He decided that a man who boasted so loudly was a sham. If he had talked less, he would have feared him more.

After his last bloodthirsty declaration the man from Pike County temporarily subsided.

He drew out from his pocket a greasy pack of cards, and after skilfully shuffling them inquired:

"What do you say, strangers, to a little game to pass away the time?"

"I never played keards in my life," said Joshua Bickford.

"Where was you raised?" demanded the Pike man contemptuously.

"Pumpkin Hollow, State o' Maine," said Joshua. "Dad's an orthodox deacon. He never let any of us play keards. I don't know one from t'other."

"I'll learn you," said the Pike man condescendingly. "Suppose we have a game of poker?"

"Ain't that a gambling' game?" inquired Joshua.

"We always play for something," said the Pike man. "It's dern foolishness playin' for nothing. Shall we have a game?"

He looked at Joe as he spoke.

"I don't care to play," said our hero. "I don't know much about cards, and I don't want to play for money."

"That's dern foolishness," said the stranger, whose object it was to clean out his new friends, being an expert gambler.

"Perhaps it is," said Joe, "but I only speak for myself. Mr. Bickford may feel differently."

"Will you take a hand, Bickford?" asked the Pike man, thinking it possible that Joshua might have some money of which he could relieve him.

"You kin show me how to play if you want to," said Joshua, "but I won't gamble any."

The Pike man put up his pack of cards in disgust.

"Derned if I ever met sich fellers!" he said. "You're Methodists, ain't you?"

"We generally decline doing what we don't want to do," said Joe.

"Look here, boy," blustered the Pike man, "I reckon you don't know me. I'm from Pike County, Missouri, I am. I'm a rip-tail roarer, I am. I kin whip my weight in wildcats."

"You told us that afore," said Joshua placidly.

"Derned if I don't mean it, too!" exclaimed the Pike County man, with a fierce frown. "Do you know how I served a man last week?"

"No. Tell us, won't you?" said Joshua.

"We was ridin' together over in Alameda County. We'd met permiscuous, like we've met to-day. I was tellin' him how four b'ars attacked me once, and I fit 'em all single-handed, when he laughed, and said he reckoned I'd been drinkin' and saw double. If he'd knowed me better, he wouldn't have done it."

"What did you do?" asked Joshua, interested.

Joe, who was satisfied that the fellow was romancing, did not exhibit any interest.

"What did I do?" echoed the Pike County man fiercely. "I told him he didn't know the man he insulted. I told him I was from Pike County, Missouri, and that I was a rip-tail roarer."

"And could whip your weight in wildcats," suggested Joe.

The Pike man appeared irritated.

"Don't interrupt me, boy," he said. "It ain't healthy."

"After you'd made them remarks what did you do?" inquired Joshua.

"I told him he'd insulted me and must fight. I always do that."

"Did he fight?"

"He had to."

"How did it come out?"

"I shot him through the heart," said the man from Pike County fiercely. "His bones are bleaching in the valley where he fell."

"Sho!" said Joshua.

The Pike County man looked from one to the other to see what effect had been produced by his blood-curdling narration. Joshua looked rather perplexed, as if he didn't quite know what to

think, but Joe seemed tranquil.

"I think you said it happened last week," said Joe.

"If I said so, it is so," said the Pike man, who in truth did not remember what time he had mentioned.

"I don't question that. I was only wondering how his bones could begin to bleach so soon after he was killed."

"Just so," said Joshua, to whom this difficulty had not presented itself before.

"Do you doubt my word, stranger?" exclaimed the Pike man, putting his hand to his side and fingering his knife.

"Not at all," said Joe. "But I wanted to understand how it was."

"I don't give no explanations," said the Pike man haughtily, "and I allow no man to doubt my word."

"Look here, my friend," said Joshua, "ain't you rather cantankerous?"

"What's that?" demanded the other suspiciously.

"No offense," said Joshua, "but you take a feller up so we don't know exactly how to talk to you."

"I take no insults," said the Pike man. "Insults must be washed out in blood."

"Soap-suds is better than blood for washin' purposes," said Joshua practically. "Seems to me you're spoilin' for a fight all the time."

"I allow I am," said the Pike man, who regarded this as a compliment. "I was brought up on fightin'. When I was a boy I could whip any boy in school."

"That's why they called you a rip-tail roarer, I guess," said Joshua.

"You're right, stranger," said the Pike man complacently.

"What did you do when the teacher give you a lickin'?" asked Mr. Bickford.

"What did I do?" yelled the Pike County man, with a demoniac frown.

"Exactly so."

"I shot him!" said the Pike man briefly.

"Sho! How many teachers did you shoot when you was a boy?"

"Only one. The rest heard of it and never dared touch me."

"So you could play hookey and cut up all you wanted to?"

"You're right, stranger."

"They didn't manage that way at Pumpkin Hollow," said Mr. Bickford. "Boys ain't quite so handy with shootin'-irons. When the master flogged us we had to stand it."

"Were you afraid of him?" asked the Pike man disdainfully.

"Well, I was," Joshua admitted. "He was a big man with arms just like flails, and the way he used to pound us was a caution."

"I'd have shot him in his tracks," said the Pike man fiercely.

"You'd have got a wallop in' fust, I reckon," said Joshua.

"Do you mean to insult me?" demanded the Pike man.

"Oh, lay down, and don't be so cantankerous," said Joshua. "You're allus thinkin' of bein' insulted."

"We may as well be going," said Joe, who was thoroughly disgusted with their new companion.

"Just as you say, Joe," said Joshua. "Here, you pesky critter, come and let me mount you."

The mustang realized Joe's prediction. After his hearty supper he seemed to be quite tractable and permitted Mr. Bickford to mount him without opposition.

Joe also mounted his horse.

"I'll ride along with you if you've no objections," said the Pike man. "We kin camp together to-night."

So saying, he too mounted the sorry-looking steed which he had recently dismounted.

Joe was not hypocrite enough to say that he was welcome. He thought it best to be candid.

"If you are quite convinced that neither of us wishes to insult you," he said quietly, "you can join us. If you are bent on quarreling, you had better ride on by yourself."

The Pike man frowned fiercely.

"Boy," he said, "I have shot a man for less than that."

"I carry a revolver," said Joe quietly, "but I shan't use it unless it is necessary. If you are so easily offended, you'd better ride on alone."

This the Pike man did not care to do.

“You’re a strange boy,” he said, “but I reckon you’re on the square. I’ll go along with you.”
“I would rather you’d leave us,” thought Joe, but he merely said: “Very well.”

CHAPTER XXVII

TWO TRAGIC STORIES

They rode on for about an hour and a half. Joshua's steed, placated by his good supper, behaved very well. Their ride was still through the cañon. Presently it became too dark for them to proceed.

"Ain't we gone about fur enough for to-night?" asked Joshua.

"Perhaps we have," answered Joe.

"Here's a good place to camp," suggested the man from Pike County, pointing to a small grove of trees to the right.

"Very well; let us dismount," said Joe. "I think we can pass the night comfortably."

They dismounted, and tied their beasts together under one of the trees. They then threw themselves down on a patch of greensward near-by.

"I'm gettin' hungry," said Joshua. "Ain't you, Joe?"

"Yes, Mr. Bickford. We may as well take supper."

Mr. Bickford produced a supper of cold, meat and bread, and placed it between Joe and himself.

"Won't you share our supper?" said Joe to their companion.

"Thank ye, stranger, I don't mind if I do," answered the Pike man, with considerable alacrity. "My fodder give out this mornin', and I hain't found any place to stock up."

He displayed such an appetite that Mr. Bickford regarded him with anxiety. They had no more than sufficient for themselves, and the prospect of such a boarder was truly alarming.

"You have a healthy appetite, my friend," he said.

"I generally have," said the Pike man. "You'd orter have some whisky, strangers, to wash it down with."

"I'd rather have a good cup of coffee sweetened with 'lasses, sech as marm makes to hum," remarked Mr. Bickford.

"Coffee is for children, whisky for strong men," said the Roarer.

"I prefer the coffee," said Joe.

"Are you temperance fellers?" inquired the Pike man contemptuously.

"I am," said Joe.

"And I, too," said Joshua.

"Bah!" said the other disdainfully; "I'd as soon drink skim-milk. Good whisky or brandy for me."

"I wish we was to your restaurant, Joe," said Joshua. "I kinder hanker after some good baked beans. Baked beans and brown bread are scrumptious. Ever eat 'em, stranger?"

"No," said the Pike man; "none of your Yankee truck for me."

"I guess you don't know what's good," said Mr. Bickford. "What's your favorite vittles?"

"Bacon and hominy, hoe-cakes and whisky."

"Well," said Joshua, "it depends on the way a feller is brung up. I go for baked beans and brown bread, and punkin pie—that's goloptious. Ever eat punkin pie, stranger?"

"Yes."

"Like it?"

"I don't lay much on it."

Supper was over and other subjects succeeded. The Pike County man became social.

"Strangers," said he, "did you ever hear of the affair I had with Jack Scott?"

"No," said Joshua. "Spin it off, will you?"

"Jack and me used to be a heap together. We went huntin' together, camped out for weeks together, and was like two brothers. One day we was ridin' out, when a deer started up fifty rods ahead. We both raised our guns and shot at him. There was only one bullet into him, and I knowed that was mine."

"How did you know it?" inquired Joshua.

"Don't you get curious, stranger. I knowed it, and that was enough. But Jack said it was his. 'It's my deer,' he said, 'for you missed your shot.' 'Look here, Jack,' said I, 'you're mistaken. You missed it. Don't you think I know my own bullet?' 'No, I don't,' said he. 'Jack,' said I calmly, 'don't talk that way. It's dangerous.' 'Do you think I'm afraid of you?' he said, turning on me. 'Jack,' said I, 'don't provoke me. I can whip my weight in wildcats.' 'You can't whip me,' said he. That was too much for me to stand. I'm the Rip-tail Roarer from Pike County, Missouri, and no man can insult me and live. 'Jack,' said I, 'we've been friends, but you've insulted me, and it must be washed out in blood.' Then I up with my we'pon and shot him through the head."

"Sho!" said Joshua.

"I was sorry to do it, for he was my friend," said the Pike County man, "but he disputed my word, and the man that does that may as well make his will if he's got any property to leave."

Here the speaker looked to see what effect was produced upon his listeners. Joe seemed indifferent. He saw through the fellow, and did not credit a word he said. Joshua had been more credulous at first, but he, too, began to understand the man from Pike County. The idea occurred to him to pay him back in his own coin.

"Didn't the relatives make any fuss about it?" he inquired. "Didn't they arrest you for murder?"

"They didn't dare to," said the Pike man proudly. "They knew me. They knew I could whip my weight in wildcats and wouldn't let no man insult me."

"Did you leave the corpse lyin' out under the trees?" asked Joshua.

"I rode over to Jack's brother and told him what I had done, and where he'd find the body. He went and buried it."

"What about the deer?"

"What deer?"

"The deer you killed and your friend claimed?"

"Oh," said the Pike man, with sudden recollection, "I told Jack's brother he might have it."

"Now, that was kinder handsome, considerin' you'd killed your friend on account of it."

"There ain't nothin' mean about me," said the man from Pike County.

"I see there ain't," said Mr. Bickford dryly. "It reminds me of a little incident in my own life. I'll tell you about it, if you hain't any objection."

"Go ahead. It's your deal."

"You see, the summer I was eighteen, my cousin worked for dad hayin' time. He was a little older'n me, and he had a powerful appetite, Bill had. If it wasn't for that, he'd 'a' been a nice feller enough, but at the table he always wanted more than his share of wittles. Now, that ain't fair, no ways—think it is, stranger?"

"No! Go ahead with your story."

"One day we sat down to dinner. Marm had made some apple-dumplin' that day, and 'twas good, you bet. Well, I see Bill a-eyin' the dumplin' as he shoveled in the meat and pertaters, and I knowed he meant to get more'n his share. Now, I'm fond of dumplin' as well as Bill, and I didn't like it. Well, we was both helped and went to eatin'. When I was half through I got up to pour out some water. When I cum back to the table Bill had put away his plate, which he had cleaned off, and was eatin' my dumplin'."

"What did you say?" inquired the gentleman from Pike, interested.

"I said: 'Bill, you're my cousin, but you've gone too fur.' He luffed, and we went into the field together to mow. He was just startin' on his swath when I cum behind him and cut his head clean off with my scythe."

Joe had difficulty in suppressing his laughter, but Mr. Bickford looked perfectly serious.

"Why, that was butchery!" exclaimed the Pike man, startled. "Cut off his head with a scythe?"

"I hated to, bein' as he was my cousin," said Joshua, "but I couldn't have him cum any of them tricks on me. I don't see as it's any wuss than shootin' a man."

"What did you do with his body?" asked Joe, commanding his voice.

"Bein' as 'twas warm weather, I thought I'd better bury him at once."

"Were you arrested?"

"Yes, and tried for murder, but my lawyer proved that I was crazy when I did it, and so I got off."

"Do such things often happen at the North?" asked the Pike County man.

"Not so often as out here and down South, I guess," said Joshua. "It's harder to get off. Sometimes a man gets hanged up North for handlin' his gun too careless."

"Did you ever kill anybody else?" asked the Pike man, eying Joshua rather uneasily.

"No," said Mr. Bickford. "I shot one man in the leg and another in the arm, but that warn't anything serious."

It was hard to disbelieve Joshua, he spoke with such apparent frankness and sincerity. The man from Pike County was evidently puzzled, and told no more stories of his own prowess. Conversation, died away, and presently all three were asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE EVENTS OF A NIGHT

The Pike County man was the first to fall asleep. Joe and Mr. Bickford lay about a rod distant from him. When their new comrade's regular breathing, assured Joe that he was asleep, he said:

"Mr. Bickford, what do you think of this man who has joined us?"

"I think he's the biggest liar I ever set eyes on," said Joshua bluntly.

"Then you don't believe his stories?"

"No—do you?"

"I believe them as much as that yarn of yours about your Cousin Bill," returned Joe, laughing.

"I wanted to give him as good as he sent. I didn't want him to do all the lyin'."

"And you a deacon's son!" exclaimed Joe, in comic expostulation.

"I don't know what the old man would have said if he'd heard me, or Cousin Bill, either."

"Then one part is true—you have a Cousin Bill?"

"That isn't the only part that's true; he did help me and dad hayin'."

"But his head is still safe on his shoulders?"

"I hope so."

"I don't think we can find as much truth in the story of our friend over yonder."

"Nor I. If there was a prize offered for tall lyin' I guess he'd stand a good chance to get it."

"Do you know, Joshua, fire-eater as he is, I suspect that he is a coward."

"You do?"

"Yes, and I have a mind to put him to the test."

"How will you do it?"

"One day an old hunter came into my restaurant, and kept coming for a week. He was once taken prisoner by the Indians, and remained in their hands for three months. He taught me the Indian war-whoop, and out of curiosity I practised it till I can do it pretty well."

"What's your plan?"

"To have you fire off your gun so as to wake him up. Then I will give a loud war-whoop and see how it affects the gentleman from Pike County."

"He may shoot us before he finds out the deception."

"It will be well first to remove his revolver to make all safe. I wish you could give the war-whoop, too. It would make a louder noise."

"How do you do it?"

Joe explained.

"I guess I can do it. You start it, and I'll j'in in, just as I used to do in singin' at meetin'. I never could steer through a tune straight by myself, but when the choir got to goin', I helped 'em all I could."

"I guess you can do it. Now let us make ready."

The Pike County man's revolver was removed while he was unconsciously sleeping. Then Joshua and our hero ensconced themselves behind trees, and the Yankee fired his gun.

The Pike man started up, still half asleep and wholly bewildered, when within a rod of him he heard the dreadful war-whoop. Then another more discordant voice took up the fearful cry. Joshua did very well considering that it was his first attempt.

Then the man from Pike County sprang to his feet. If it had been daylight, his face would have been seen to wear a pale and scared expression. It did not appear to occur to him to make a stand against the savage foes who he felt convinced were near at hand. He stood not on the order of going, but went at once. He quickly unloosed his beast, sprang upon his back, and galloped away without apparently giving a thought to the companions with whom he had camped out.

When he was out of hearing Joe and Bickford shouted with laughter.

"You see I was right," said Joe. "The man's a coward."

"He seemed in a hurry to get away," said Joshua dryly. "He's the biggest humbug out."

"I thought so as soon as he began to brag so much."

"I believed his yarns at first," admitted Joshua. "I thought he was rather a dangerous fellow to travel with."

"He looked like a desperado, certainly," said Joe, "but appearances are deceitful. It's all swagger and no real courage."

"Well, what shall we do now, Joe?"

"Lie down again and go to sleep."

"The man's gone off without his revolver."

"He'll be back for it within a day or two. We shall be sure to fall in with him again. I shan't lose my sleep worrying about him."

The two threw themselves once more on the ground, and were soon fast asleep.

Joe proved to be correct in his prediction concerning the reappearance of their terrified companion.

The next morning, when they were sitting at breakfast—that is, sitting under a tree with their repast spread out on a paper between them—the man from Pike County rode up. He looked haggard, as well he might, not having ventured to sleep for fear of the Indians, and his horse seemed weary and dragged out.

"Where have you been?" asked Mr. Bickford innocently.

"Chasin' the Indians," said the Rip-tail Roarer, swinging himself from his saddle.

"Sho! Be there any Indians about here?"

"Didn't you hear them last night?" inquired the man from Pike.

"No."

"Nor you?" turning to Joe.

"I heard nothing of any Indians," replied Joe truthfully.

"Then all I can say is, strangers, that you sleep uncommon sound."

"Nothing wakes me up," said Bickford. "What about them Indians? Did you raily see any?"

"I rather think I did," said the man from Pike. "It couldn't have been much after midnight when I was aroused by their war-whoop. Starting up, I saw twenty of the red devils riding through the cañon."

"Were you afraid?"

"Afraid!" exclaimed the man from Pike contemptuously. "The Rip-tail Roarer knows not fear. I can whip my weight in wildcats——"

"Yes, I know you can," interrupted Joshua. "You told us so yesterday."

The man from Pike seemed rather annoyed at the interruption, but as Mr. Bickford appeared to credit his statement he had no excuse for quarreling.

He proceeded.

"Instantly I sprung to the back of my steed and gave them chase."

"Did they see you?"

"They did."

"Why didn't they turn upon you? You said there were twenty of them."

"Why?" repeated the Pike man boastfully. "They were afraid. They recognized me as the Rip-tail Roarer. They knew that I had sent more than fifty Indians to the happy hunting-grounds, and alone as I was they fled."

"Sho!"

"Did you kill any of them?" asked Joe.

"When I was some distance on my way I found I had left my revolver behind. Did you find it, stranger?"

"There it is," said Joshua, who had replaced it on the ground close to where the Pike man had slept.

He took it with satisfaction and replaced it in his girdle.

"Then you didn't kill any?"

"No, but I drove them away. They won't trouble you any more."

"That's a comfort," said Joshua.

"Now, strangers, if you've got any breakfast to spare, I think I could eat some."

"Set up, old man," said Mr. Bickford, with his mouth full.

The man from Pike did full justice to the meal. Then he asked his two companions, as a favor, not to start for two hours, during which he lay down and rested.

The three kept together that day, but did not accomplish as much distance as usual, chiefly because of the condition of their companion's horse.

At night they camped out again. In the morning an unpleasant surprise awaited them. Their companion had disappeared, taking with him Joshua's horse and leaving instead his own sorry

nag. That was not all. He had carried off their bag of provisions, and morning found them destitute of food, with a hearty appetite and many miles away, as they judged, from any settlement.

"The mean skunk!" said Joshua. "He's cleaned us out. What shall we do?"

"I don't know," said Joe seriously.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN CHINAMAN

The two friends felt themselves to be in a serious strait. The exchange of horses was annoying, but it would only lengthen their journey a little. The loss of their whole stock of provisions could not so readily be made up.

"I feel holler," said Joshua. "I never could do much before breakfast. I wish I'd eat more supper. I would have done it, only I was afraid, by the way that skunk pitched into 'em, we wouldn't have enough to last."

"You only saved them for him, it seems," said Joe. "He has certainly made a poor return for our kindness."

"If I could only wring his neck, I wouldn't feel quite so hungry," said Joshua.

"Or cut his head off with a scythe," suggested Joe, smiling faintly.

"Danged if I wouldn't do it," said Mr. Bickford, hunger making him bloodthirsty.

"We may overtake him, Mr. Bickford."

"You may, Joe, but I can't. He's left me his horse, which is clean tuckered out, and never was any great shakes to begin with. I don't believe I can get ten miles out of him from now till sunset."

"We must keep together, no matter how slow we go. It won't do for us to be parted."

"We shall starve together likely enough," said Joshua mournfully.

"I've heard that the French eat horse-flesh. If it comes to the worst, we can kill your horse and try a horse-steak."

"It's all he's fit for, and he ain't fit for that. We'll move on for a couple of hours and see if somethin' won't turn up. I tell you, Joe, I'd give all the money I've got for some of marm's johnny-cakes. It makes me feel hungrier whenever I think of 'em."

"I sympathize with you, Joshua," said Joe. "We may as well be movin' on, as you suggest. We may come to some cabin, or party of travelers."

So they mounted their beasts and started. Joe went ahead, for his animal was much better than the sorry nag which Mr. Bickford bestrode. The latter walked along with an air of dejection, as if life were a burden to him.

"If I had this critter at home, Joe, I'll tell you what I'd do with him," said Mr. Bickford, after a pause.

"Well, what would you do with him?"

"I'd sell him to a sexton. He'd be a first-class animal to go to funerals. No danger of his runnin' away with the hearse."

"You are not so hungry but you can joke, Joshua."

"It's no joke," returned Mr. Bickford. "If we don't raise a supply of provisions soon, I shall have to attend my own funeral. My mind keeps running on them johnny-cakes."

They rode on rather soberly, for the exercise and the fresh morning air increased their appetites, which were keen when they started.

Mr. Bickford no longer felt like joking, and Joe at every step looked anxiously around him, in the hope of espying relief.

On a sudden, Mr. Bickford rose in his stirrups and exclaimed in a tone of excitement:

"I see a cabin!"

"Where?"

"Yonder," said the Yankee, pointing to a one-story shanty, perhaps a quarter of a mile away.

"Is it inhabited, I wonder?"

"I don't know. Let us go and see."

The two spurred their horses, and at length reached the rude building which had inspired them with hope. The door was open, but no one was visible.

Joshua was off his horse in a twinkling and peered in.

"Hooray!" he shouted in rejoicing accents. "Breakfast's ready."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I've found something to eat."

On a rude table was an earthen platter full of boiled rice and a stale loaf beside it.

"Pitch in, Joe," said Joshua. "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"This food belongs to somebody. I suppose we have no right to it."

"Right be hanged. A starving man has a right to eat whatever he can find."

"Suppose it belongs to a fire-eater, or a man from Pike County?"

"We'll eat first and fight afterward."

Joe did not feel like arguing the matter. There was an advocate within him which forcibly emphasized Joshua's arguments, and he joined in the banquet.

"This bread is dry as a chip," said Mr. Bickford. "But no matter. I never thought dry bread would taste so good. I always thought rice was mean vittles, but it goes to the right place just now."

"I wonder if any one will have to go hungry on our account?" said Joe.

"I hope not, but I can't help it," returned Mr. Bickford. "Necessity's the fust law of nature, Joe. I feel twice as strong as I did twenty minutes ago."

"There's nothing like a full stomach, Joshua. I wonder to whom we are indebted for this repast?"

Joe was not long in having his query answered. An exclamation, as of one startled, called the attention of the two friends to the doorway, where, with a terrified face, stood a Chinaman, his broad face indicating alarm.

"It's a heathen Chinee, by gosh!" exclaimed Joshua.

Even at that time Chinese immigrants had begun to arrive in San Francisco, and the sight was not wholly new either to Joshua or Joe.

"Good morning, John," said our young hero pleasantly.

"Good morning, heathen," said Mr. Bickford. "We thought we'd come round and make you a mornin' call. Is your family well?"

The Chinaman was reassured by the friendly tone of his visitors, and ventured to step in. He at once saw that the food which he had prepared for himself had disappeared.

"Melican man eat John's dinner," he remarked in a tone of disappointment.

"So we have, John," said Mr. Bickford. "The fact is, we were hungry—hadn't had any breakfast."

"Suppose Melican man eat—he pay," said the Chinaman.

"That's all right," said Joe; "we are willing to pay. How much do you want?"

The Chinaman named his price, which was not unreasonable, and it was cheerfully paid.

"Have you got some more bread and rice, John?" asked Mr. Bickford. "We'd like to buy some and take it along."

They succeeded in purchasing a small supply—enough with economy to last a day or two. This was felt as a decided relief. In two days they might fall in with another party of miners or come across a settlement.

They ascertained on inquiry that the Chinaman and another of his nationality had come out like themselves to search for gold. They had a claim at a short distance from which they had obtained a small supply of gold. The cabin they had found in its present condition. It had been erected and deserted the previous year by a party of white miners, who were not so easily satisfied as the two Chinamen.

"Well," said Joshua, after they had started on their way, "that's the first time I ever dined at a Chinee hotel."

"We were lucky in coming across it," said Joe.

"The poor fellow looked frightened when he saw us gobblin' up his provisions," said Mr. Bickford, laughing at the recollection.

"But we left him pretty well satisfied. We didn't treat him as the gentleman from Pike treated us."

"No—I wouldn't be so mean as that darned skunk. It makes me mad whenever I look at this consumptive hoss he's left behind."

"You didn't make much out of that horse trade, Mr. Bickford."

"I didn't, but I'll get even with him some time if we ever meet again."

"Do you know where he was bound?"

"No—he didn't say."

"I dare say it'll all come right in the end. At any rate, we shan't starve for the next forty-eight hours."

So in better spirits the two companions kept on their way.

CHAPTER XXX ON THE YUBA RIVER

On the following day Joe and his comrade fell in with a party of men who, like themselves, were on their way to the Yuba River. They were permitted to join them, and made an arrangement for a share of the provisions. This removed all anxiety and insured their reaching their destination without further adventure.

The banks of the Yuba presented a busy and picturesque appearance. On the banks was a line of men roughly clad, earnestly engaged in scooping out gravel and pouring it into a rough cradle, called a rocker. This was rocked from side to side until the particles of gold, if there were any, settled at the bottom and were picked out and gathered into bags. At the present time there are improved methods of separating gold from the earth, but the rocker is still employed by Chinese miners.

In the background were tents and rude cabins, and there was the unfailing accessory of a large mining-camp, the gambling tent, where the banker, like a wily spider, lay in wait to appropriate the hard-earned dust of the successful miner.

Joe and his friend took their station a few rods from the river and gazed at the scene before them.

"Well, Mr. Bickford," said Joe, "the time has come when we are to try our luck."

"Yes," said Joshua. "Looks curious, doesn't it? If I didn't know, I'd think them chaps fools, stoopin' over there and siftin' mud. It 'minds me of when I was a boy and used to make dirt pies."

"Suppose we take a day and look round a little. Then we can find out about how things are done, and work to better advantage."

"Just as you say, Joe, I must go to work soon, for I hain't nary red."

"I'll stand by you, Mr. Bickford."

"You're a fust-rate feller, Joe. You seem to know just what to do."

"It isn't so long since I was a greenhorn and allowed myself to be taken in by Hogan."

"You've cut your eye-teeth since then."

"I have had some experience of the world, but I may get taken in again."

Joe and his friend found the miners social and very ready to give them information.

"How much do I make a day?" said one in answer to a question from Joshua. "Well, it varies. Sometimes I make ten dollars, and from that all the way up to twenty-five. Once I found a piece worth fifty dollars. I was in luck then."

"I should say you were," said Mr. Bickford. "The idea of findin' fifty dollars in the river. It looks kind of strange, don't it, Joe?"

"Are any larger pieces ever found here?" asked Joe.

"Sometimes."

"I have seen larger nuggets on exhibition in San Francisco, worth several hundred dollars. Are any such to be found here?"

"Generally they come from the dry diggings. We don't often find such specimens in the river washings. But these are more reliable."

"Can a man save money here?"

"If he'll be careful of what he gets. But much of our dust goes there."

He pointed, as he spoke, to a small cabin, used as a store and gambling den at one and the same time. There in the evening the miners collected, and by faro, poker, or monte managed to lose all that they had washed out during the day.

"That's the curse of our mining settlement," said their informant. "But for the temptations which the gaming-house offers, many whom you see working here would now be on their way home with a comfortable provision for their families. I never go there, but then I am in the minority."

"What did you used to do when you was to hum?" inquired Joshua, who was by nature curious and had no scruples about gratifying his curiosity.

"I used to keep school winters. In the spring and summer I assisted my father on his farm down in Maine."

"You don't say you're from Maine? Why, I'm from Maine myself," remarked Joshua.

"Indeed! Whereabouts in Maine did you live?"

"Pumpkin Hollow."

"I kept school in Pumpkin Hollow one winter."

"You don't say so? What is your name?" inquired Joshua earnestly.

"John Kellogg."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Mr. Bickford, excited.

"Why, I used to go to school to you, Mr. Kellogg."

"It is nine years ago, and you must have changed so much that I cannot call you to mind."

"Don't you remember a tall, slab-sided youngster of thirteen, that used to stick pins into your chair for you to set on?"

Kellogg smiled.

"Surely you are not Joshua Bickford?" he said.

"Yes, I am. I am that same identical chap."

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Bickford," said his old school-teacher, grasping Joshua's hand cordially.

"It seems kinder queer for you to call me Mr. Bickford."

"I wasn't so ceremonious in the old times," said Kellogg.

"No, I guess not. You'd say, 'Come here, Joshua,' and you'd jerk me out of my seat by the collar. 'Did you stick that pin in my chair?' That's the way you used to talk. And then you'd give me an all-fired lickin'."

Overcome by the mirthful recollections, Joshua burst into an explosive fit of laughter, in which presently he was joined by Joe and his old teacher.

"I hope you've forgiven me for those whippings, Mr. Bickford."

"They were jest what I needed, Mr. Kellogg. I was a lazy young rascal, as full of mischief as a nut is of meat. You tanned my hide well."

"You don't seem to be any the worse for it now."

"I guess not. I'm pretty tough. I say, Mr. Kellogg," continued Joshua, with a grin, "you'd find it a harder job to give me a lickin' now than you did then."

"I wouldn't undertake it now. I am afraid you could handle me."

"It seems cur'us, don't it, Joe?" said Joshua. "When Mr. Kellogg used to haul me round the schoolroom, it didn't seem as if I could ever be a match for him."

"We change with the passing years," said Kellogg, in a moralizing tone, which recalled his former vocation. "Now you are a man, and we meet here on the other side of the continent, on the banks of the Yuba River. I hope we are destined to be successful."

"I hope so, too," said Joshua, "for I'm reg'larly cleaned out."

"If I can help you any in the way of information, I shall be glad to do so."

Joe and Bickford took him at his word and made many inquiries, eliciting important information.

The next day they took their places farther down the river and commenced work.

Their inexperience at first put them at a disadvantage. They were awkward and unskilful, as might have been expected. Still, at the end of the first day each had made about five dollars.

"That's something," said Joe.

"If I could have made five dollars in one day in Pumpkin Hollow," said Mr. Bickford, "I would have felt like a rich man. Here it costs a feller so much to live that he don't think much of it."

"We shall improve as we go along. Wait till to-morrow night."

The second day brought each about twelve dollars, and Joshua felt elated.

"I'm gettin' the hang of it," said he. "As soon as I've paid up what I owe you, I'll begin to lay by somethin'."

"I don't want you to pay me till you are worth five hundred dollars, Mr. Bickford. The sum is small, and I don't need it."

"Thank you, Joe. You're a good friend. I'll stick by you if you ever want help."

In the evening the camp presented a lively appearance.

When it was chilly, logs would be brought from the woods, and a bright fire would be lighted, around which the miners would sit and talk of home and their personal adventures and experiences. One evening Mr. Bickford and Joe were returning from a walk, when, as they approached the camp-fire, they heard a voice that sounded familiar, and caught these words:

"I'm from Pike County, Missouri, gentlemen. They call me the Rip-tail Roarer. I can whip my weight in wildcats."

"By gosh!" exclaimed Joshua, "if it ain't that skunk from Pike. I mean to tackle him."

CHAPTER XXXI

JUDGE LYNCH PRONOUNCES SENTENCE

The gentleman from Pike was sitting on a log, surrounded by miners, to whom he was relating his marvelous exploits. The number of Indians, grizzly bears, and enemies generally, which, according to his account, he had overcome and made way with, was simply enormous. Hercules was nothing to him. It can hardly be said that his listeners credited his stories. They had seen enough of life to be pretty good judges of human nature, and regarded them as romances which served to while away the time.

"It seems to me, my friend," said Kellogg, who, it will be remembered, had been a schoolmaster, "that you are a modern Hercules."

"Who's he?" demanded the Pike man suspiciously, for he had never heard of the gentleman referred to.

"He was a great hero of antiquity," exclaimed Kellogg, "who did many wonderful feats."

"That's all right, then," said the Pike man. "If you're friendly, then I'm friendly. But if any man insults me he'll find he's tackled the wrong man. I can whip my weight in wildcats——"

Here he was subjected to an interruption.

Mr. Bickford could no longer suppress his indignation when at a little distance he saw his mustang, which this treacherous braggart had robbed him of, quietly feeding.

"Look here, old Rip-tail, or whatever you call yourself, I've got an account to settle with you."

The Pike man started as he heard Mr. Bickford's voice, which, being of a peculiar nasal character, he instantly recognized. He felt that the meeting was an awkward one, and he would willingly have avoided it. He decided to bluff Joshua off if possible, and, as the best way of doing it, to continue his game of brag.

"Who dares to speak to me thus?" he demanded with a heavy frown, looking in the opposite direction. "Who insults the Rip-tail Roarer?"

"Look this way if you want to see him," said Joshua. "Put on your specs if your eyes ain't good."

The man from Pike could no longer evade looking at his late comrade. He pretended not to know him.

"Stranger," said he, with one hand on the handle of his knife, "are you tired of life?"

"I am neither tired of life nor afraid of you," said Joshua manfully.

"You don't know me, or——"

"Yes, I do. You're the man that says he can whip his weight in wildcats. I don't believe you dare to face your weight in tame cats."

"Sdeath!" roared the bully. "Do you want to die on the spot?"

"Not particularly, old Rip-tail. Don't talk such nonsense. I'll trouble you to tell me why you stole my horse on the way out here."

"Let me get at him," said the Pike man in a terrible voice, but not offering to get up from the log.

"Nobody henders your gettin' at me," said Mr. Bickford composedly. "But that ain't answerin' my question."

"If I didn't respect them two gentlemen too much, I'd shoot you where you stand," said the Pike man.

"I've got a shootin'-iron myself, old Rip-tail, and I'm goin' to use it if necessary."

"What have you to say in answer to this man's charge?" asked one of the miners, a large man who was looked upon as the leader of the company. "He charges you with taking his horse."

"He lies!" said the man from Pike.

"Be keerful, old Rip-tail," said Mr. Bickford in a warning tone. "I don't take sass any more than you do."

"I didn't steal your horse."

"No, you didn't exactly steal it, but you took it without leave and left your own bag of bones in his place. But that wasn't so bad as stealin' all our provisions and leavin' us without a bite, out in the wilderness. That's what I call tarnation mean."

"What have you to say to these charges?" asked the mining leader gravely.

"Say? I say that man is mistaken. I never saw him before in my life."

"Well, that's cheeky," said Joshua, aghast at the man's impudence. "Why, I know you as well as if we'd been to school together. You are the Rip-tail Roarer. You are from Pike County, Missouri, you are. You can whip your weight in wildcats. That's he, gentlemen. I leave it to you."

In giving the description, Joshua imitated the boastful accents of his old comrade with such success that the assembled miners laughed and applauded.

"That's he! You've got him!" they cried.

"Just hear that, old Rip-tail," said Mr. Bickford. "You see these gentlemen here believe me and they don't believe you."

"There's a man in this here country that looks like me," said the Pike man, with a lame excuse. "You've met him, likely."

"That won't go down, old Rip-tail. There ain't but one man can whip his weight in wildcats and tell the all-firedest yarns out. That's you, and there ain't no gettin' round it."

"This is a plot, gentlemen," said the man from Pike, glancing uneasily at the faces around him, in which he read disbelief of his statements. "My word is as good as his."

"Maybe it is," said Mr. Bickford. "I'll call another witness. Joe, jest tell our friends here what you know about the gentleman from Pike. If I'm lyin', say so, and I'll subside and never say another word about it."

"All that my friend Bickford says is perfectly true," said Joe modestly. "This man partook of our hospitality and then repaid us by going off early one morning when we were still asleep, carrying off all our provisions and exchanging his own worn-out horse for my friend's mustang, which was a much better animal."

The man from Pike had not at first seen Joe. His countenance fell when he saw how Mr. Bickford's case was strengthened, and for the moment he could not think of a word to say.

"You are sure this is the man, Joe?" asked, the leader of the miners.

"Yes, I will swear to it. He is not a man whom it is easy to mistake."

"I believe you. Gentlemen," turning to the miners who were sitting or standing about him, "do you believe this stranger or our two friends?"

The reply was emphatic, and the man from Pike saw that he was condemned.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising, "you are mistaken, and I am the victim of a plot. It isn't pleasant to stay where I am suspected, and I'll bid you good evening."

"Not so fast!" said the leader, putting his hand heavily on his shoulder. "You deserve to be punished, and you shall be. Friends, what shall we do with him?"

"Kill him! String him up!" shouted some.

The Rip-tail Roarer's swarthy face grew pale as he heard these ominous words. He knew something of the wild, stern justice of those days. He knew that more than one for an offense like his had expiated his crime with his life.

"It seems to me," said the leader, "that the man he injured should fix the penalty. Say you so?"

"Aye, aye!" shouted the miners.

"Will you two," turning to Joe and Bickford, "decide what shall be done with this man? Shall we string him up?"

The Pike man's nerve gave way.

He flung himself on his knees before Joshua and cried:

"Mercy! mercy! Don't let them hang me!"

Joshua was not hard-hearted. He consulted with Joe and then said:

"I don't want the critter's life. If there was any wildcats round, I'd like to see him tackle his weight in 'em, as he says he can. As there isn't, let him be tied on the old nag he put off on me, with his head to the horse's tail, supplied with one day's provisions, and then turned loose!"

This sentence was received with loud applause and laughter.

The horse was still in camp and was at once brought out. The man from Pike was securely tied on as directed, and then the poor beast was belabored with whips till he started off at the top of his speed, which his old owner, on account of his reversed position, was unable to regulate. He was followed by shouts and jeers from the miners, who enjoyed this act of retributive justice.

"Mr. Bickford, you are avenged," said Joe.

"So I am, Joe. I'm glad I've got my hoss back; but I can't help pityin' poor old Rip-tail, after all. I don't believe he ever killed a wildcat in his life."

CHAPTER XXXII

TAKING ACCOUNT OF STOCK

Three months passed. They were not eventful. The days were spent in steady and monotonous work; the nights were passed around the camp-fire, telling and hearing stories and talking of home. Most of their companions gambled and drank, but Mr. Bickford and Joe kept clear of these pitfalls.

"Come, man, drink with me," more than once one of his comrades said to Joshua.

"No, thank you," said Joshua.

"Why not? Ain't I good enough?" asked the other, half offended.

"You mean I'm puttin' on airs 'cause I won't drink with you? No, sir-ree. There isn't a man I'd drink with sooner than with you."

"Come up, then, old fellow. What'll you take?"

"I'll take a sandwich, if you insist on it."

"That's vittles. What'll you drink?"

"Nothing but water. That's strong enough for me."

"Danged if I don't believe you're a minister in disguise."

"I guess I'd make a cur'us preacher," said Joshua, with a comical twist of his features. "You wouldn't want to hear me preach more'n once."

In this way our friend Mr. Bickford managed to evade the hospitable invitations of his comrades and still retain their good-will—not always an easy thing to achieve in those times.

Joe was equally positive in declining to drink, but it was easier for him to escape. Even the most confirmed drinkers felt it to be wrong to coax a boy to drink against his will.

There was still another—Kellogg—who steadfastly adhered to cold water, or tea and coffee, as a beverage. These three were dubbed by their companions the "Cold-Water Brigade," and accepted the designation good-naturedly.

"Joshua," said Joe, some three months after their arrival, "have you taken account of stock lately?"

"No," said Joshua, "but I'll do it now."

After a brief time he announced the result.

"I've got about five hundred dollars, or thereabouts," he said.

"You have done a little better than I have."

"How much have you?"

"About four hundred and fifty."

"I owe you twenty-five dollars, Joe. That'll make us even."

Joshua was about to transfer twenty-five dollars to Joe, when the latter stayed his hand.

"Don't be in a hurry, Mr. Bickford," he said. "Wait till we get to the city."

"Do you know, Joe," said Joshua, in a tone of satisfaction, "I am richer than I was when I sot out from home?"

"I am glad to hear it, Mr. Bickford. You have worked hard, and deserve your luck."

"I had only three hundred dollars then; now I've got four hundred and seventy-five, takin' out what I owe you."

"You needn't take it out at all."

"You've done enough for me, Joe. I don't want you to give me that debt."

"Remember, Joshua, I have got a business in the city paying me money all the time. I expect my share of the profits will be more than I have earned out here."

"That's good. I wish I'd got a business like you. You'd be all right even if you only get enough to pay expenses here."

"That's so."

"I am getting rather tired of this place, Mr. Bickford," said Joe, after a little pause.

"You don't think of going back to the city?" asked Joshua apprehensively.

"Not directly, but I think I should like to see a little more of California. These are not the only diggings."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I haven't considered yet. The main thing is, will you go with me?"

"We won't part company, Joe."

"Good! Then I'll inquire, and see what I can find out about other places. This pays fairly, but

there is little chance of getting nuggets of any size hereabouts.”

“I’d just like to find one worth two thousand dollars. I’d start for home mighty quick, and give Sukey Smith a chance to become Mrs. Bickford.”

“Success to you!” said Joe, laughing.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A STARTLING TABLEAU

Joe finally decided on some mines a hundred miles distant in a southwesterly direction. They were reported to be rich and promising.

"At any rate," said he, "even if they are no better than here, we shall get a little variety and change of scene."

"That'll be good for our appetite."

"I don't think, Mr. Bickford, that either of us need be concerned about his appetite. Mine is remarkably healthy."

"Nothing was ever the matter with mine," said Joshua, "as long as the provisions held out."

They made some few preparations of a necessary character. Their clothing was in rags, and they got a new outfit at the mining store. Each also provided himself with a rifle. The expense of these made some inroads upon their stock of money, but by the time they were ready to start they had eight hundred dollars between them, besides their outfit, and this they considered satisfactory.

Kellogg at first proposed to go with them, but finally he changed his mind.

"I am in a hurry to get home," he said, "and these mines are a sure thing. If I were as young as you, I would take the risk. As it is, I had better not. I've got a wife and child at home, and I want to go back to them as soon as I can."

"You are right," said Joe.

"I've got a girl at home," said Joshua, "but I guess she'll wait for me."

"Suppose she don't," suggested Joe.

"I shan't break my heart," said Mr. Bickford. "There's more than one girl in the world."

"I see you are a philosopher, Mr. Bickford," said his old schoolmaster.

"I don't know about that, but I don't intend to make a fool of myself for any gal. I shall say, 'Sukey, here I am; I've got a little money, and I'm your'n till death if you say so. If you don't want me, I won't commit susan-cide."

"That's a capital joke, Joshua," said Joe. "Her name is Susan, isn't it?"

"Have I made a joke? Waal, I didn't go to do it."

"It is unconscious wit, Mr. Bickford," said Kellogg.

"Pooty good joke, ain't it?" said Joshua complacently. "Susan-cide, and her name is Susan. Ho! ho! I never thought on't."

And Joshua roared in appreciation of the joke which he had unwittingly perpetrated, for it must be explained that he thought susan-cide the proper form of the word expressing a voluntary severing of the vital cord.

Years afterward, when Joshua found himself the center of a social throng, he was wont to say, "Ever heard that joke I made about Susan?" and then he would cite it amid the plaudits of his friends.

Mr. Bickford and Joe had not disposed of their horses. They had suffered them to forage in the neighborhood of the river, thinking it possible that the time would come when they would require them.

One fine morning they set out from the camp near the banks of the Yuba and set their faces in a southwesterly direction. They had made themselves popular among their comrades, and the miners gave them a hearty cheer as they started.

"Good luck, Joe! Good luck, old man!" they exclaimed heartily.

"The same to you, boy!"

So with mutual good feeling they parted company.

"We ain't leavin' like our friend from Pike County," said Mr. Bickford. "I often think of the poor critter trottin' off with face to the rear."

"I hope we shan't meet him or any of his kind," said Joe.

"So do I. He'd better go and live among the wildcats."

"He is some like them. He lives upon others."

It would only be wearisome to give a detailed account of the journey of the two friends. One incident will suffice.

On the fourth day Joe suddenly exclaimed in excitement:

"Look, Joshua!"

"By gosh!"

The exclamation was a natural one. At the distance of forty rods a man was visible, his hat off,

his face wild with fear, and in dangerous proximity a grizzly bear of the largest size doggedly pursuing him.

“It’s Hogan!” exclaimed Joe in surprise. “We must save him.”

CHAPTER XXXIV A GRIZZLY ON THE WAR-PATH

It may surprise some of my young friends to learn that the grizzly bear is to be found in California. Though as the State has increased in population mostly all have been killed off, even now among the mountains they may be found, and occasionally visit the lower slopes and attack men and beasts.

Hogan had had the ill-luck to encounter one of these animals.

When he first saw the grizzly there was a considerable space between them. If he had concealed himself, he might have escaped the notice of the beast, but when he commenced running the grizzly became aware of his presence and started in pursuit.

Hogan was rather dilapidated in appearance. Trusting to luck instead of labor, he had had a hard time, as he might have expected. His flannel shirt was ragged and his nether garments showed the ravages of time. In the race his hat had dropped off and his rough, unkempt hair was erect with fright. He was running rapidly, but was already showing signs of exhaustion. The bear was getting over the ground with clumsy speed, appearing to take it easily, but overhauling his intended victim slowly, but surely.

Joe and Bickford were standing on one side, and had not yet attracted the attention of either party in this unequal race.

"Poor chap!" said Joshua. "He looks most tuckered out. Shall I shoot?"

"Wait till the bear gets a little nearer. We can't afford to miss. He will turn on us."

"I'm in a hurry to roll the beast over," said Joshua. "It's a cruel sight to see a grizzly hunting a man."

At this moment Hogan turned his head with the terror-stricken look of a man who felt that he was lost.

The bear was little more than a hundred feet behind him and was gaining steadily. He was already terribly fatigued—his breathing was reduced to a hoarse pant. He was overcome by the terror of the situation, and his remaining strength gave way. With a shrill cry he sank down upon the ground, and, shutting his eyes, awaited the attack.

The bear increased his speed.

"Now let him have it!" said Joe in a sharp, quick whisper.

Mr. Bickford fired, striking the grizzly in the face.

Bruin stood still and roared angrily. He wagged his large head from one side to the other, seeking by whom this attack was made.

He espied the two friends, and, abandoning his pursuit of Hogan, rolled angrily toward them.

"Give it to him quick, Joe!" exclaimed Bickford. "He's making for us."

Joe held his rifle with steady hand and took deliberate aim. It was well he did, for had he failed both he and Bickford would have been in great peril.

His faithful rifle did good service.

The bear tumbled to the earth with sudden awkwardness. The bullet had reached a vital part and the grizzly was destined to do no more mischief.

"Is he dead, or only feigning?" asked Joe prudently.

"He's a gone coon," said Joshua. "Let us go up and look at him."

They went up and stood over the huge beast. He was not quite dead. He opened his glazing eyes, made a convulsive movement with his paws as if he would like to attack his foes, and then his head fell back and he moved no more.

"He's gone, sure enough," said Bickford. "Good-by, old grizzly. You meant well, but circumstances interfered with your good intentions."

"Now let us look up Hogan," said Joe.

The man had sunk to the ground utterly exhausted, and in his weakness and terror had fainted.

Joe got some water and threw it in his face.

He opened his eyes and drew a deep breath. A sudden recollection blanched his face anew, and he cried:

"Don't let him get at me!"

"You're safe, Mr. Hogan," said Joe. "The bear is dead."

"Dead! Is he really dead?"

"If you don't believe it, get up and look at him," said Bickford.

"I can't get up—I'm so weak."

"Let me help you, then. There—do you see the critter?"

Hogan shuddered as he caught sight of the huge beast only twenty-five feet distant from him.

"Was he as near as that?" he gasped.

"He almost had you," said Bickford. "If it hadn't been for Joe and me, he'd have been munchin' you at this identical minute. Things have changed a little, and in place of the bear eatin' you you shall help eat the bear."

By this time Hogan, realizing that he was safe, began to recover his strength. As he did so he became angry with the beast that had driven him such a hard race for life. He ran up to the grizzly and kicked him.

"Take that!" he exclaimed with an oath. "I wish you wasn't dead, so that I could stick my knife into you."

"If he wasn't dead you'd keep your distance," said Joshua dryly. "It don't require much courage to tackle him now."

Hogan felt this to be a reflection upon his courage.

"I guess you'd have run, too, if he'd been after you," he said.

"I guess I should. Bears are all very well in their place, but I'd rather not mingle with 'em socially. They're very affectionate and fond of hugging, but if I'm going to be hugged I wouldn't choose a bear."

"You seem to think I was a coward for runnin' from the bear."

"No, I don't. How do I know you was runnin' from the bear? Maybe you was only takin' a little exercise to get up an appetite for dinner."

"I am faint and weak," said Hogan. "I haven't had anything to eat for twelve hours."

"You shall have some food," said Joe. "Joshua, where are the provisions? We may as well sit down and lunch."

"Jest as you say, Joe. I most generally have an appetite."

There was a mountain spring within a stone's throw. Joshua took a tin pail and brought some of the sparkling beverage, which he offered first to Hogan.

Hogan drank greedily. His throat was parched and dry, and he needed it.

He drew a deep breath of relief.

"I feel better," said he. "I was in search of a spring when that cursed beast spied me and gave me chase."

They sat down under the shade of a large tree and lunched.

"What sort of luck have you had since you tried to break into my restaurant, Mr. Hogan?" asked Joe.

Hogan changed color. The question was an awkward one.

"Who told you I tried to enter your restaurant?" he asked.

"The man you brought there."

"That wasn't creditable of you, Hogan," said Joshua, with his mouth full. "After my friend Joe had given you a supper and promised you breakfast, it was unkind to try to rob him. Don't you think so yourself?"

"I couldn't help it," said Hogan, who had rapidly decided on his defense.

"Couldn't help it?" said Joe in a tone of inquiry. "That's rather a strange statement."

"It's true," said Hogan. "The man forced me to do it."

"How was that?"

"He saw me comin' out of the restaurant a little while before, and when he met me, after trying to rob me and finding that it didn't pay, he asked me if I was a friend of yours. I told him I was. Then he began to ask if you slept there at night and if anybody was with you. I didn't want to answer, but he held a pistol at my head and forced me to. Then he made me go with him. I offered to get in, thinking I could whisper in your ear and warn you, but he wouldn't let me. He stationed me at the window and got in himself. You know what followed. As soon as I saw you were too strong for him I ran away, fearing that he might try to implicate me in the attempt at robbery."

Hogan recited this story very glibly and in a very plausible manner.

"Mr. Hogan," said Joe, "if I didn't know you so thoroughly, I might be disposed to put confidence in your statements. As it is, I regret to say I don't believe you."

"Hogan," said Joshua, "I think you're one of the fust romancers of the age. If I ever start a story-paper I'll engage you to write for me."

"I am sorry you do me so much injustice, gentlemen," said Hogan, with an air of suffering innocence. "I'm the victim of circumstances."

"I expect you're a second George Washington. You never told a lie, did you?"

"Some time you will know me better," said Hogan.

"I hope not," said Joe. "I know you better now than I want to."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE NEW DIGGINGS

When lunch-was over, Joe said:

"Good day, Mr. Hogan. Look out for the grizzlies, and may you have better luck in future."

"Yes, Hogan, good-by," said Joshua. "We make over to you all our interest in the bear. He meant to eat you. You can revenge yourself by eatin' him."

"Are you going to leave me, gentlemen?" asked Hogan in alarm.

"You don't expect us to stay and take care of you, do you?"

"Let me go with you," pleaded Hogan. "I am afraid to be left alone in this country. I may meet another grizzly, and lose my life."

"That would be a great loss to the world," said Mr. Bickford, with unconcealed sarcasm.

"It would be a great loss to me," said Hogan.

"Maybe that's the best way to put it," observed Bickford. "It would have been money in my friend Joe's pocket if you had never been born."

"May I go with you?" pleaded Hogan, this time addressing himself to Joe.

"Mr. Hogan," said Joe, "you know very well why your company is not acceptable to us."

"You shall have no occasion to complain," said Hogan earnestly.

"Do you want us to adopt you, Hogan?" asked Joshua.

"Let me stay with you till we reach the nearest diggings. Then I won't trouble you any more."

Joe turned to Bickford.

"If you don't object," he said, "I think I'll let him come."

"Let the critter come," said Bickford. "He'd be sure to choke any grizzly that tackled him. For the sake of the bear, let him come."

Mr. Hogan was too glad to join the party, on any conditions, to resent the tone which Mr. Bickford employed in addressing him. He obtained his suit, and the party of three kept on their way.

As they advanced the country became rougher and more hilly. Here and there they saw evidences of "prospecting" by former visitors. They came upon deserted claims and the sites of former camps. But in these places the indications of gold had not been sufficiently favorable to warrant continued work, and the miners had gone elsewhere.

At last, however, they came to a dozen men who were busily at work in a gulch. Two rude huts near-by evidently served as their temporary homes.

"Well, boys, how do you find it?" inquired Bickford, riding up.

"Pretty fair," said one of the party.

"Have you got room for three more?"

"Yes—come along. You can select claims alongside and go to work if you want to."

"What do you say, Joe?"

"I am in favor of it."

"We are going to put up here, Hogan," said Mr. Bickford. "You can do as you've a mind to. Much as we value your interestin' society, we hope you won't put yourself out to stay on our account."

"I'll stay," said Hogan.

Joe and Joshua surveyed the ground and staked out their claims, writing out the usual notice and posting it on a neighboring tree. They had not all the requisite tools, but these they were able to purchase at one of the cabins.

"What shall I do?" asked Hogan. "I'm dead broke. I can't work without tools, and I can't buy any."

"Do you want to work for me?" asked Joshua.

"What'll you give?"

"That'll depend on how you work. If you work stiddy, I'll give you a quarter of what we both make. I'll supply you with tools, but they'll belong to me."

"Suppose we don't make anything," suggested Hogan.

"You shall have a quarter of that. You see, I want to make it for your interest to succeed."

"Then I shall starve."

The bargain was modified so that Hogan was assured of enough to eat, and was promised, besides, a small sum of money daily, but was not to participate in the gains.

"If we find a nugget, it won't do you any good. Do you understand, Hogan?"

"Yes, I understand."

He shrugged his shoulders, having very little faith in any prospective nuggets.

"Then we understand each other. That's all I want."

On the second day Joe and Mr. Bickford consolidated their claims and became partners, agreeing to divide whatever they found. Hogan was to work for them jointly.

They did not find their hired man altogether satisfactory. He was lazy and shiftless by nature, and work was irksome to him.

"If you don't work stiddy, Hogan," said Joshua, "you can't expect to eat stiddy, and your appetite is pretty reg'lar, I notice."

Under this stimulus Hogan managed to work better than he had done since he came out to California, or indeed for years preceding his departure. Bickford and Joe had both been accustomed to farm work and easily lapsed into their old habits.

They found they had made a change for the better in leaving the banks of the Yuba. The claims they were now working paid them better.

"Twenty-five dollars to-day," said Joshua, a week after their arrival. "That pays better than hoeing pertaters, Joe."

"You are right, Mr. Bickford. You are ten dollars ahead of me. I am afraid you will lose on our partnership."

"I'll risk it, Joe."

Hogan was the only member of the party who was not satisfied.

"Can't you take me into partnership?" he asked.

"We can, but I don't think we will, Hogan," said Mr. Bickford.

"It wouldn't pay. If you don't like workin' for us, you can take a claim of your own."

"I have no tools."

"Why don't you save your money and buy some, instead of gamblin' it away as you are doin'?"

"A man must have amusement," grumbled Hogan. "Besides, I may have luck and win."

"Better keep clear of gamblin', Hogan."

"Mr. Hogan, if you want to start a claim of your own, I'll give you what tools you need," said Joe.

Upon reflection Hogan decided to accept this offer.

"But of course you will have to find your own vittles now," said Joshua.

"I'll do it," said Hogan.

The same day he ceased to work for the firm of Bickford & Mason, for Joe insisted on giving Mr. Bickford the precedence as the senior party, and started on his own account.

The result was that he worked considerably less than before. Being his own master, he decided not to overwork himself, and in fact worked only enough to make his board. He was continually grumbling over his bad luck, although Joshua told him plainly that it wasn't luck, but industry, he lacked.

"If you'd work like we do," said Bickford, "you wouldn't need to complain. Your claim is just as good as ours, as far as we can tell."

"Then let us go in as partners," said Hogan.

"Not much. You ain't the kind of partner I want."

"I was always unfortunate," said Hogan.

"You were always lazy, I reckon. You were born tired, weren't you?"

"My health ain't good," said Hogan. "I can't work like you two."

"You've got a healthy appetite," said Mr. Bickford. "There ain't no trouble there that I can see."

Mr. Hogan had an easier time than before, but he hadn't money to gamble with unless he deprived himself of his customary supply of food, and this he was reluctant to do.

"Lend me half-an-ounce of gold-dust, won't you?" he asked of Joe one evening.

"What do you want it for—to gamble with?"

"Yes," said Hogan. "I dreamed last night that I broke the bank. All I want is money enough to start me."

"I don't approve of gambling, and can't help you."

Hogan next tried Mr. Bickford, but with like result.

"I ain't quite such a fool, Hogan," said the plain-spoken Joshua.

About this time a stroke of good luck fell to Joe. About three o'clock one afternoon he unearthed a nugget which, at a rough estimate, might be worth five hundred dollars.

Instantly all was excitement in the mining-camp, not alone for what he had obtained, but for the promise of richer deposits. Experienced miners decided that he had struck upon what is popularly called a "pocket," and some of these are immensely remunerative.

"Shake hands, Joe," said Bickford. "You're in luck."

"So are you, Mr. Bickford. We are partners, you know."

In less than an hour the two partners received an offer of eight thousand dollars for their united claim, and the offer was accepted.

Joe was the hero of the camp. All were rejoiced at his good fortune except one. That one was Hogan, who from a little distance, jealous and gloomy, surveyed the excited crowd.

CHAPTER XXXVI HOGAN'S DISCONTENT

"Why don't luck come to me?" muttered Hogan to himself. "That green country boy has made a fortune, while I, an experienced man of the world, have to live from hand to mouth. It's an outrage!"

The parties to whom Joe and his partner sold their claim were responsible men who had been fortunate in mining and had a bank-account in San Francisco.

"We'll give you an order on our banker," they proposed.

"That will suit me better than money down," said Joe. "I shall start for San Francisco tomorrow, having other business there that I need to look after."

"I'll go too, Joe," said Joshua. "With my share of the purchase-money and the nugget, I'm worth, nigh on to five thousand dollars. What will dad say?"

"And what will Susan Smith say?" queried Joe.

Joshua grinned.

"I guess she'll say she's ready to change her name to Bickford," said he.

"You must send me some of the cake, Mr. Bickford."

"Just wait, Joe. The thing ain't got to that yet. I tell you, Joe, I shall be somebody when I get home to Pumpkin Hollow with that pile of money. The boys'll begin to look up to me then. I can't hardly believe it's all true. Maybe I'm dreamin' it. Jest pinch my arm, will you?"

Joe complied with his request.

"That'll do, Joe. You've got some strength in your fingers. I guess it's true, after all."

Joe observed with some surprise that Hogan did not come near them. The rest, without exception, had congratulated them on their extraordinary good luck.

"Seems to me Hogan looks rather down in the mouth," said Joe to Bickford.

"He's mad 'cause he didn't find the nugget. That's what's the matter with him. I say, Hogan, you look as if your dinner didn't agree with you."

"My luck don't agree with me."

"You don't seem to look at things right. Wasn't you lucky the other day to get away from the bear?"

"I was unlucky enough to fall in with him."

"Wasn't you lucky in meetin' my friend Joe in New York, and raisin' money enough out of him to pay your passage out to Californy?"

"I should be better off in New York. I am dead broke."

"You'd be dead broke in New York. Such fellers as you always is dead broke."

"Do you mean to insult me, Mr. Bickford?" demanded Hogan irritably.

"Oh, don't rare up, Hogan. It won't do no good. You'd ought to have more respect for me, considerin' I was your boss once."

"I'd give something for that boy's luck."

"Joe's luck? Well, things have gone pretty well with him; but that don't explain all his success—he's willin' to work."

"So am I."

"Then go to work on your claim. There's no knowin' but there's a bigger nugget inside of it. If you stand round with your hands in your pockets, you'll never find it."

"It's the poorest claim in the gulch," said Hogan discontentedly.

"It pays the poorest because you don't work half the time."

Hogan apparently didn't like Mr. Bickford's plainness of speech. He walked away moodily, with his hands in his pockets. He could not help contrasting his penniless position with the enviable position of the two friends, and the devil, who is always in wait for such moments, thrust an evil suggestion into his mind.

It was this:

He asked himself why could he not steal the nugget which Joe had found?

"He can spare it, for he has sold the claim for a fortune," Hogan reasoned. "It isn't fair that he should have everything and I should have nothing. He ought to have made me his partner, anyway. He would if he hadn't been so selfish. I have just as much right to a share in it as this infernal Yankee. I'd like to choke him."

This argument was a very weak one, but a man easily persuades himself of what he wants to do.

"I'll try for it," Hogan decided, "this very night."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE NUGGET IS STOLEN

At this time Joe and Joshua were occupying a tent which they had purchased on favorable terms of a fellow miner.

They retired in good season, for they wished to start early on their journey on the following morning.

"I don't know as I can go to sleep," said Joshua. "I can't help thinkin' of how rich I am, and what dad and all the folks will say."

"Do you mean to go home at once, Mr. Bickford?"

"Jest as soon as I can get ready. I'll tell you what I am goin' to do, Joe. I'm goin' to buy a tip-top suit when I get to Boston, and a gold watch and chain, and a breast-pin about as big as a saucer. When I sail into Pumpkin Holler in that rig folks'll look at me, you bet. There's old Squire Pennyroyal, he'll be disappointed for one."

"Why will he be disappointed?"

"Because he told dad I was a fool to come out here. He said I'd be back in rags before a year was out. Now, the old man thinks a good deal of his opinion, and he won't like it to find how badly he's mistaken."

"Then he would prefer to see you come home in rags?"

"You bet he would."

"How about Susan? Ain't you afraid she has married the store clerk?"

Joshua looked grave for a moment.

"I won't say but she has," said he; "but if she has gone and forgotten about me jest because my back is turned, she ain't the gal I take her for, and I won't fret my gizzard about her."

"She will feel worse than you when she finds you have come back with money."

"That's so."

"And you will easily find some one else," suggested Joe.

"There's Sophrony Thompson thinks a sight of me," said Mr. Bickford. "She's awful jealous of Susan. If Susan goes back on me, I'll call round and see Sophrony."

Joe laughed.

"I won't feel anxious about you, Joshua," he said, "since I find you have two girls to choose between."

"Not much danger of breakin' my heart. It's pretty tough."

There was a brief silence.

Then Joshua said:

"What are your plans, Joe? Shall you remain in San Francisco?"

"I've been thinking, Mr. Bickford, that I would like to go home on a visit. If I find that I have left my business in good hands in the city, I shall feel strongly tempted to go home on the same steamer with you."

"That would be hunky," said Bickford, really delighted. "We'd have a jolly time."

"I think we would. But, Mr. Bickford, I have no girls to welcome me home, as you have."

"You ain't old enough yet, Joe. You're a good-lookin' feller, and when the time comes I guess you can find somebody."

"I don't begin to trouble myself about such things yet," said Joe, laughing. "I am only sixteen."

"You've been through considerable, Joe, for a boy of sixteen. I wish you'd come up to Pumpkin Holler and make me a visit when you're to home."

"Perhaps I can arrange to be present at your wedding, Mr. Bickford—that is, if Susan doesn't make you wait too long."

While this conversation was going on the dark figure of a man was prowling near the tent.

"Why don't the fools stop talking and go to sleep," muttered Hogan. "I don't want to wait here all night." His wish was gratified.

The two friends ceased talking and lay quite still. Soon Joe's deep, regular breathing and Bickford's snoring convinced the listener that the time had come to carry out his plans.

With stealthy step he approached the tent, and stooping over gently removed the nugget from under Joshua's head. There was a bag of gold-dust which escaped his notice. The nugget was all he thought of.

With beating heart and hasty step the thief melted into the darkness, and the two friends slept on unconscious of their loss.

CHAPTER XXXVIII HOGAN'S FATE

The sun was up an hour before Joe and Bickford awoke. When Joe opened his eyes he saw that it was later than the hour he intended to rise. He shook his companion.

"Is it mornin'?" asked Bickford drowsily.

"I should say it was. Everybody is up and eating breakfast. We must prepare to set out on our journey."

"Then it is time—we are rich," said Joshua, with sudden remembrance. "Do you know, Joe, I hain't got used to the thought yet. I had actually forgotten it."

"The sight of the nugget will bring it to mind."

"That's so."

Bickford felt for the nugget, without a suspicion that the search would be in vain.

Of course he did not find it.

"Joe, you are trying to play a trick on me," he said. "You've taken the nugget."

"What!" exclaimed Joe, starting. "Is it missing?"

"Yes, and you know all about it. Where have you put it, Joe?"

"On my honor, Joshua, I haven't touched it," said Joe seriously. "Where did you place it?"

"Under my head—the last thing before I lay down."

"Are you positive of it?"

"Certain, sure."

"Then," said Joe, a little pale, "it must have been taken during the night."

"Who would take it?"

"Let us find Hogan," said Joe, with instinctive suspicion. "Who has seen Hogan?"

Hogan's claim was in sight, but he was not at work. Neither was he taking breakfast.

"I'll bet the skunk has grabbed the nugget and cleared out," exclaimed Bickford, in a tone of conviction.

"Did you hear or see anything of him during the night?"

"No—I slept too sound."

"Is anything else taken?" asked Joe. "The bag of dust—"

"Is safe. It's only the nugget that's gone."

The loss was quickly noised about the camp. Such an incident was of common interest. Miners lived so much in common—their property was necessarily left so unguarded—that theft was something more than misdemeanor or light offense. Stern was the justice which overtook the thief in those days. It was necessary, perhaps, for it was a primitive state of society, and the code which in established communities was a safeguard did not extend its protection here.

Suspicion fell upon Hogan at once. No one of the miners remembered to have seen him since rising.

"Did any one see him last night?" asked Joe.

Kellogg answered.

"I saw him near your tent," he said. "I did not think anything of it. Perhaps if I had been less sleepy I should have been more likely to suspect that his design was not a good one."

"About what hour was this?"

"It must have been between ten and eleven o'clock."

"We did not go to sleep at once. Mr. Bickford and I were talking over our plans."

"I wish I'd been awake when the skunk come round," said Bickford. "I'd have grabbed him so he'd thought an old grizzly'd got hold of him."

"Did you notice anything in his manner that led you to think he intended robbery?" asked Kellogg.

"He was complainin' of his luck. He thought Joe and I got more than our share, and I'm willin' to allow we have; but if we'd been as lazy and shif'less as Hogan we wouldn't have got down to the nugget at all."

An informal council was held, and it was decided to pursue Hogan. As it was uncertain in which direction he had fled, it was resolved to send out four parties of two men each to hunt him. Joe and Kellogg went together, Joshua and another miner departed in a different direction, and two other pairs started out.

"I guess we'll fix him," said Mr. Bickford. "If he can dodge us all, he's smarter than I think he is."

Meanwhile Hogan, with the precious nugget in his possession, hurried forward with feverish haste. The night was dark and the country was broken. From time to time he stumbled over some obstacle, the root of a tree or something similar, and this made his journey more arduous.

"I wish it was light," he muttered.

Then he revoked his wish. In the darkness and obscurity lay his hopes of escape.

"I'd give half this nugget if I was safe in San Francisco," he said to himself.

He stumbled on, occasionally forced by his fatigue to sit down and rest.

"I hope I'm going in the right direction, but I don't know," he said to himself.

He had been traveling with occasional rests for four hours when fatigue overcame him. He lay down to take a slight nap, but when he awoke the sun was up.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed in alarm. "I must have slept for some hours. I will eat something to give me strength, and then I must hurry on."

He had taken the precaution to take some provisions with him, and he began to eat them as he hurried along.

"They have just discovered their loss," thought Hogan. "Will they follow me, I wonder? I must be a good twelve miles away, and this is a fair start. They will turn back before they have come as far as this. Besides, they won't know in what direction I have come."

Hogan was mistaken in supposing himself to be twelve miles away. In reality, he was not eight. During the night he had traveled at disadvantage, and taken a round-about way without being aware of it. He was mistaken also in supposing that the pursuit would be easily abandoned. Mining communities could not afford to condone theft, nor were they disposed to facilitate the escape of the thief. More than once the murderer had escaped, while the thief was pursued relentlessly. All this made Hogan's position a perilous one. If he had been long enough in the country to understand the feeling of the people, he would not have ventured to steal the nugget.

About eleven o'clock Hogan sat down to rest. He reclined on the greensward near the edge of a precipitous descent. He did not dream that danger was so close till he heard his name called and two men came running toward him. Hogan, starting to his feet in dismay, recognized Crane and Peabody, two of his late comrades.

"What do you want?" he faltered, as they came within hearing.

"The nugget," said Crane sternly.

Hogan would have denied its possession if he could, but there it was at his side.

"There it is," he said.

"What induced you to steal it?" demanded Crane.

"I was dead broke. Luck was against me. I couldn't help it."

"It was a bad day's work for you," said Peabody. "Didn't you know the penalty attached to theft in the mining-camps?"

"No," faltered Hogan, alarmed at the stern looks of his captors. "What is it?"

"Death by hanging," was the terrible reply.

Hogan's face blanched, and he sank on his knees before them.

"Don't let me be hung!" he entreated. "You've got the nugget back. I've done no harm. No one has lost anything by me."

"Eight of us have lost our time in pursuing you. You gave up the nugget because you were forced to. You intended to carry it away."

"Mercy! mercy! I'm a very unlucky man. I'll go away and never trouble you again."

"We don't mean that you shall," said Crane sternly. "Peabody, tie his hands; we must take him back with us."

"I won't go," said Hogan, lying down. "I am not going back to be hung."

It would obviously be impossible to carry a struggling man back fifteen miles, or more.

"We must hang you on the spot then," said Crane, producing a cord. "Say your prayers; your fate is sealed."

"But this is murder!" faltered Hogan, with pallid lips.

"We take the responsibility."

He advanced toward Hogan, who now felt the full horrors of his situation. He sprang to his feet, rushed in frantic fear to the edge of the precipice, threw up his arms, and plunged headlong. It was done so quickly that neither of his captors was able to prevent him.

They hurried to the precipice and looked over. A hundred feet below, on a rough rock, they saw a shapeless and motionless figure, crushed out of human semblance.

"Perhaps it is as well," said Crane gravely. "He has saved us an unwelcome task."

The nugget was restored to its owners, to whom Hogan's tragical fate was told.

"Poor fellow!" said Joe soberly. "I would rather have lost the nugget."

“So would I,” said Bickford. “He was a poor, shif’less critter; but I’m sorry for him.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

HOW JOE'S BUSINESS PROSPERED

Joe and his friend Bickford arrived in San Francisco eight days later without having met with any other misadventure or drawback. He had been absent less than three months, yet he found changes. A considerable number of buildings had gone up in different parts of the town during his absence.

"It is a wonderful place," said Joe to his companion.

"It is going to be a great city some day."

"It's ahead of Pumpkin Holler already," said Mr. Bickford, "though the Holler has been goin' for over a hundred years."

Joe smiled at the comparison. He thought he could foresee the rapid progress of the new city, but he was far from comprehending the magnificent future that lay before it. A short time since, the writer of this story ascended to the roof of the Palace Hotel, and from this lofty elevation, a hundred and forty feet above the sidewalk, scanned with delighted eyes a handsome and substantial city, apparently the growth of a century, and including within its broad limits a population of three hundred thousand souls. It will not be many years before it reaches half-a-million, and may fairly be ranked among the great cities of the world.

Of course Joe's first visit was to his old place of business. He received a hearty greeting from Watson, his deputy.

"I am glad to see you, Joe," said he, grasping our hero's hand cordially. "When did you arrive?"

"Ten minutes ago. I have made you the first call."

"Perhaps you thought I might have 'vamosed the ranch,'" said Watson, smiling, "and left you and the business in the lurch."

"I had no fears on that score," said Joe. "Has business been good?"

"Excellent. I have paid weekly your share of the profits to Mr. Morgan."

"Am I a millionaire yet?" asked Joe.

"Not quite. I have paid Mr. Morgan on your account"—here Watson consulted a small account-book—"nine hundred and twenty-five dollars."

"Is it possible?" said Joe, gratified. "That is splendid."

"Then you are satisfied?"

"More than satisfied."

"I am glad of it. I have made the same for myself and so have nearly half made up the sum which I so foolishly squandered at the gaming-table."

"I am glad for you, Mr. Watson."

"How have you prospered at the mines?"

"I have had excellent luck."

"I don't believe you bring home as much money as I have made for you here."

"Don't bet on that, Mr. Watson, for you would lose."

"You don't mean to say that you have made a thousand dollars?" exclaimed Watson, surprised.

"I have made five thousand dollars within a hundred or two."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Watson. "You beat everything for luck, Joe."

"So he does," said Bickford, who felt that it was time for him to speak. "It's lucky for me that I fell in with him. It brought me luck, too, for we went into partnership together."

"Have you brought home five thousand dollars, too?" asked Watson.

"I've got about the same as Joe, and now I'm going home to marry Susan Smith if she'll have me."

"She'll marry a rich miner, Mr. Bickford. You needn't be concerned about that."

"I feel pretty easy in mind," said Joshua.

"How soon do you sail?"

"When does the next steamer go?"

"In six days."

"I guess it'll carry me."

Watson turned to Joe.

"I suppose you will now take charge of your own business?" said he. "I am ready to hand over my trust at any minute."

"Would you object to retaining charge for—say for four months to come?" asked Joe.

"Object? I should be delighted to do it. I couldn't expect to make as much money any other

way.”

“You see, Mr. Watson, I am thinking of going home myself on a visit. I feel that I can afford it, and I should like to see my old friends and acquaintances under my new and improved circumstances.”

Watson was evidently elated at the prospect of continued employment of so remunerative a character.

“You may depend upon it that your interests are safe in my hands,” said he. “I will carry on the business as if it were my own. Indeed, it will be for my interest to do so.”

“I don’t doubt it, Mr. Watson. I have perfect confidence in your management.”

Joe’s next call was on his friend Morgan, by whom also he was cordially welcomed.

“Have you called on Watson?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Then he has probably given you an idea of how your business has gone on during your absence. He is a thoroughly reliable man, in my opinion. You were fortunate to secure his services.”

“So I think.”

“Have you done well at the mines?” asked Mr. Morgan doubtfully.

“You hope so, but you don’t feel confident?” said Joe, smiling.

“You can read my thoughts exactly. I don’t consider mining as reliable as a regular business.”

“Nor I, in general, but there is one thing you don’t take into account.”

“What is that?”

Mr. Bickford answered the question.

“Joe’s luck.”

“Then you have been lucky?”

“How much do you think I have brought home?”

“A thousand dollars?”

“Five times that sum.”

“Are you in earnest?” asked Mr. Morgan, incredulous.

“Wholly so.”

“Then let me congratulate you—on that and something else.”

“What is that?”

“The lots you purchased, including the one on which your restaurant is situated, have more than doubled in value.”

“Bully for you, Joe!” exclaimed Mr. Bickford enthusiastically.

“It never rains but it pours,” said Joe, quoting an old proverb. “I begin to think I shall be rich some time, Mr. Morgan.”

“It seems very much like it.”

“What would you advise me to do, Mr. Morgan—sell out the lots at the present advance?”

“Hold on to them, Joe. Not only do that, but buy more. This is destined some day to be a great city. It has a favorable location, is the great mining center, and the State, I feel convinced, has an immense territory fit for agricultural purposes. Lots here may fluctuate, but they will go up a good deal higher than present figures.”

“If you think so, Mr. Morgan, I will leave in your hands three thousand dollars for investment in other lots. This will leave me, including my profits from the business during my absence, nearly three thousand dollars more, which I shall take East and invest there.”

“I will follow your instructions, Joe, and predict that your real estate investments will make you rich sooner than you think.”

“Joe,” said Bickford, “I’ve a great mind to leave half of my money with Mr. Morgan to be invested in the same way.”

“Do it, Mr. Bickford. That will leave you enough to use at home.”

“Yes—I can buy a farm for two thousand dollars and stock it for five hundred more. Besides, I needn’t pay more than half down, if I don’t want to.”

“A good plan,” said Joe.

“Mr. Morgan, will you take my money and invest it for me just like Joe’s? Of course I want you to take a commission for doing it.”

“With pleasure, Mr. Bickford, more especially as I have decided to open a real estate office in addition to my regular business. You and Joe will be my first customers. I shouldn’t wonder if the two or three thousand dollars you leave with me should amount in ten years to ten thousand.”

"Ten thousand!" ejaculated Joshua, elated. "Won't I swell round Pumpkin Holler when I'm worth ten thousand dollars!"

Six days later, among the passengers by the steamer for Panama, were Joseph Mason and Joshua Bickford.

CHAPTER XL

JOE'S WELCOME HOME

On arriving in New York both Joe and Mr. Bickford bought new suits of clothes. Mr. Bickford purchased a blue dress suit, resplendent with brass buttons, and a gold watch and chain, which made a good deal of show for the money. His tastes were still barbaric, and a quiet suit of black would not have come up to his idea of what was befitting a successful California miner.

He surveyed himself before the tailor's glass with abundant satisfaction.

"I guess that'll strike 'em at home, eh, Joe?" he said.

"You look splendid, Mr. Bickford."

"Kinder scrumptious, don't I?"

"Decidedly so."

"I say, Joe, you'd better have a suit made just like this."

Joe shuddered at the thought. In refinement of taste he was decidedly ahead of his friend and partner.

"I'm going to buy a second-hand suit," he said.

"What!" ejaculated Joshua.

Joe smiled.

"I knew you'd be surprised, but I'll explain. I want people to think at first that I have been unlucky."

"Oh, I see," said Joshua, nodding; "kinder take 'em in."

"Just so, Mr. Bickford."

"Well, there is something in that."

"Then I shall find out who my true friends are."

"Just so."

It is not my purpose to describe Mr. Bickford's arrival in Pumpkin Hollow, resplendent in his new suit. Joshua wouldn't have changed places with the President of the United States on that day. His old friends gathered about him, and listened open-mouthed to his stories of mining life in California and his own wonderful exploits, which lost nothing in the telling. He found his faithful Susan unmarried, and lost no time in renewing his suit. He came, he saw, he conquered!

In four weeks Susan became Mrs. Bickford, her husband became the owner of the farm he coveted, and he at once took his place among the prominent men of Pumpkin Hollow. In a few years he was appointed justice of the peace, and became known as Squire Bickford. It may be as well to state here, before taking leave of him, that his real estate investments in San Francisco proved fortunate, and in ten years he found himself worth ten thousand dollars. This to Joshua was a fortune, and he is looked upon as a solid man in the town where he resides.

We now turn to Joe.

Since his departure nothing definite had been heard of him. Another boy had taken his place on Major Norton's farm, but he was less reliable than Joe.

"I am out of patience with that boy. I wish I had Joe back again."

"Have you heard anything of Joe since he went away?" inquired Oscar.

"Not a word."

"I don't believe he went to California at all."

"In that case we should have heard from him."

"No, Joe's proud—poor and proud!" said Oscar. "I guess he's wished himself back many a time, but he's too proud to own it."

"Joe was good to work," said the major.

"He was too conceited. He didn't know his place. He thought himself as good as me," said Oscar arrogantly.

"Most people seemed to like Joe," said the major candidly.

"I didn't," said Oscar, tossing his head. "If he'd kept in his place and realized that he was a hired boy, I could have got along well enough with him."

"I wish he would come back," said the major. "I would take him back."

"I dare say he's had a hard time and would be humbler now," said Oscar.

At this moment a knock was heard at the door, and just afterward Joe entered.

He wore a mixed suit considerably the worse for wear and patched in two or three places.

There was a rip under the arm, and his hat, a soft felt one, had become shapeless from long and apparently hard usage. He stood in the doorway, waiting for recognition.

"How do you do, Joe?" said Major Norton cordially. "I am glad to see you."

Joe's face lighted up.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

"Shake hands, Joe."

Major Norton was mean in money matters, but he had something of the gentleman about him.

Oscar held aloof.

"How do you do, Oscar?"

"I'm well," said Oscar. "Have you been to California?"

"Yes."

"You don't seem to have made your fortune," said Oscar superciliously, eying Joe's shabby clothing.

"I haven't starved," said Joe.

"Where did you get that suit of clothes?" asked Oscar.

"I hope you'll excuse my appearance," said Joe.

"Well, Joe, do you want to come back to your old place?" asked Major Norton. "I've got a boy, but he doesn't suit me."

"How much would you be willing to pay me, Major Norton?"

The major coughed.

"Well," said he, "I gave you your board and clothes before. That's pretty good pay for a boy."

"I'm older now."

"I'll do the same by you, Joe, and give you fifty cents a week besides."

"Thank you for the offer, Major Norton. I'll take till to-morrow to think of it."

"You'd better accept it now," said Oscar. "Beggars shouldn't be choosers."

"I am not a beggar, Oscar," said Joe mildly.

"You look like one, anyway," said Oscar bluntly.

"Oscar," said Major Norton, "if Joe has been unlucky, you shouldn't throw it in his teeth."

"He went off expecting to make his fortune," said Oscar, in an exulting tone. "He looks as if he had made it. Where are you going?"

"I am going to look about the village a little. I will call again."

After Joe went out Oscar said:

"It does me good to see Joe come in rags. Serves him right for putting on airs."

On the main street Joe met Annie Raymond.

"Why, Joe!" she exclaimed, delighted. "Is it really you?"

"Bad pennies always come back," said Joe.

"Have you—— I am afraid you have not been fortunate," said the young lady, hesitating as she noticed Joe's shabby clothes.

"Do you think less of me for that?"

"No," said Annie Raymond warmly. "It is you I like, not your clothes. You may have been unfortunate, but I am sure you deserved success."

"You are a true friend, Miss Annie, so I don't mind telling you that I was successful."

Annie Raymond looked astonished.

"And these clothes—" she began.

"I put on for Oscar Norton's benefit. I wanted to see how he would receive me. He evidently rejoiced at my bad fortune."

"Oscar is a mean boy. Joe, you must come to our house to supper."

"Thank you, I will; but I will go round to the hotel and change my clothes."

"Never mind."

"But I do mind. I don't fancy a shabby suit as long as I can afford to wear a good one."

Joe went to the hotel, took off his ragged clothes, put on a new and stylish suit which he recently had made for him, donned a gold watch and chain, and hat in the latest style, and thus dressed, his natural good looks were becomingly set off.

"How do I look now?" he asked, when he met Miss Annie Raymond at her own door.

"Splendidly, Joe. I thought you were a young swell from the city."

After supper Annie said, her eyes sparkling with mischief:

"Suppose we walk over to Major Norton's and see Oscar."

"Just what I wanted to propose."

Oscar was out in the front yard, when he caught sight of Joe and Annie Raymond approaching. He did not at first recognize Joe, but thought, like the young lady, that it was some swell from the city.

"You see I've come again, Oscar," said Joe, smiling.

Oscar could not utter a word. He was speechless with astonishment.

"I thought you were poor," he uttered, at last.

"I have had better luck than you thought."

"I suppose you spent all your money for those clothes."

"You are mistaken, Oscar. I am not so foolish. I left between two and three thousand dollars in a New York bank, and I have more than twice that in San Francisco."

"It isn't possible!" exclaimed Oscar, surprised and disappointed.

"Here is my bank-book; you can look at it," and Joe pointed to a deposit of twenty-five hundred dollars. "I don't think, Oscar, it will pay me to accept your father's offer and take my old place."

"I don't understand it. How did you do it?" asked the bewildered Oscar.

"I suppose it was my luck," said Joe.

"Not wholly that," said Annie Raymond. "It was luck and labor."

"I accept the amendment, Miss Annie."

Oscar's manner changed at once. Joe, the successful Californian, was very different from Joe, the hired boy. He became very attentive to our hero, and before he left town condescended to borrow twenty dollars of him, which he never remembered to repay. He wanted to go back to California with Joe, but his father would not consent.

When Joe returned to San Francisco, by advice of Mr. Morgan he sold out his restaurant to Watson and took charge of Mr. Morgan's real estate business. He rose with the rising city, became a very rich man, and now lives in a handsome residence on one of the hills that overlook the bay. He has an excellent wife—our old friend, Annie Raymond—and a fine family of children. His domestic happiness is by no means the smallest part of Joe's luck.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOE'S LUCK; OR, ALWAYS WIDE AWAKE ***

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