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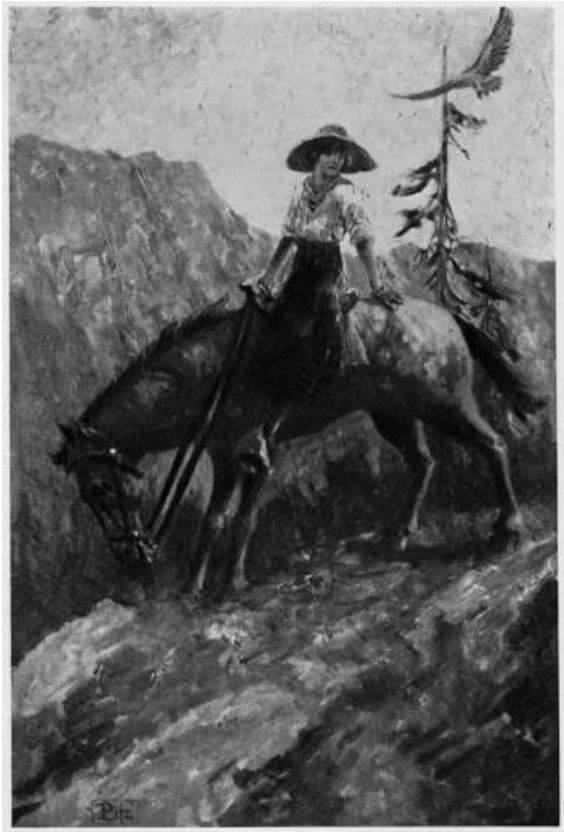

THE PONY PUT HER TWO FOREFEET OVER THE EDGE OF THE DESCENT.

Across the Mesa

By
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Across the Mesa

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CHAPTER I

WHY NOT?

Polly Street drove her little electric down Michigan Boulevard, with bitterness in her heart.

It was a cold wet day in the early spring of 1920, and Chicago was doing her best to show her utter indifference to anyone's opinion as to what spring weather ought to be. It was the sort of day when, if you had any ambition left after a dreary winter, you began to plot desperate things.

Polly hated driving the electric—her soul yearned for a gas car. Mrs. Street, however, did not like a gas car without a man to drive it; the son of the family was in Athens, Mexico, at a coal mine; and Mr. Street, Sr., considered that his income did not run to a chauffeur at the present scale of wage. Therefore, Polly tried to forget her prejudice and to imagine that the neat little car was a real machine.

Second among her grievances was the fact that this was Bob's wedding day and she, his adored and adoring sister, was not with him. Bob had been engaged for some months to a girl in Douglas, Arizona. The date of the wedding had been set twice and each time difficulties in Mexico had made it seem unwise either that Bob should leave Athens, where he held the position of superintendent of one of Fiske, Doane & Co.'s mines, or that the bride should venture into the disturbed region.

This time they expected, as Bob wrote, to "pull it off on schedule." Polly had hoped either to go to Douglas for the wedding or to have the bride and groom in Chicago; but Father had been unable to get away, Mother hadn't been well, and the trip had been given up. Then the young couple planned to go immediately to Athens without the formality of a honeymoon. To quote Bob again: "People go on honeymoons to be lonesome, and if anybody can find a better place to be lonesome in than Athens, let him trot it out."

The third grievance held an element of publicity particularly galling to a young lady who was known to her friends not only as a daring horsewoman, a crack swimmer and a golf champion, but as a bit of a belle besides. She and Joyce Henderson had agreed a week ago to break their engagement. The engagement had been a mistake—both young people admitted it frankly to each other. The irritating part of it was that Joyce was admitting it to the world.

Instead of taking the matter seriously and considering himself, outwardly at least, as the victim of an unhappy love affair, Joyce had escorted another girl, who shall be nameless, for she does not enter this story except as an element of conflict, to the Mandarin Ball. Now the Mandarin Ball is not the frivolous affair that its name suggests, but a perennial of deep importance, a function to which young men are in the habit of taking their wives, their fiancées, or the girls they rather hope may be their fiancées. It is one of the few social affairs left of the old order.

Thus you can see that it was a pointed action on Joyce's part; an indication that he regarded himself as a free man, and after the habit of free men was about to put on new chains. It was humiliating, to say the least. During the war the engagement had seemed quite natural, quite a part of things. All the young people were engaged—except those who were married.

"That, at least, I had sense enough not to do!" raged Polly, as she narrowly missed a pedestrian's heel.

It is hard for older people to realize how important it is at twenty-three to be doing exactly what others are doing; the absolute anguish of being the only man in the A. E. F. without a wife or sweetheart, or the only girl at home without a soldier husband or lover. A bit of such understanding would make clear not only the number of divorces and broken engagements which resulted from the war and had their share in the production of the unrest of the times, but would also elucidate a good many other happenings to youth.

So much for Polly Street and Joyce Henderson, who were fortunate enough to find out before marriage that they were unsuited for each other. Polly, however, preferred to look upon the dark side. Joyce had behaved like a cad.

"And the worst of it is that everybody will say it serves me right," she went on to herself, "just because I've flirted a bit here and there. It's not my fault if people never turn out as I expect them to. I guess I'm like Grandfather Street was in his religion. He thought the Baptists were wonderful until he joined them and then the Presbyterians looked more interesting to him. After he'd been with them a while he couldn't see how anybody could be a Presbyterian, so he joined the Unitarians. People thought he was a turncoat, but he wasn't—he was just a sort of religious Mormon. One church wasn't enough for him.

"Oh dear, I wish I'd gone to Douglas alone! Bob would understand. I believe I'll go to Athens. Why not? It's safe enough or Emma's parents wouldn't let her go. Of course it's a bit soon after their wedding, but I'll be tactful and keep out of their way."

The light of determination was in Polly's dark eyes. They were big lovely eyes that looked at you wistfully from under arched brows. They seldom laughed or twinkled and the nose that kept them company was equally sedate, being purely aquiline, but a mouth with dimpled corners upset the scheme entirely, while ripples of golden brown hair completed the picture of a healthy, happy youngster—not radiantly beautiful but what people like to call "winsome," which is after all as good a word as most.

She parked the electric on the Lake Front and crossed the Boulevard. The policeman on the crossing nodded to her and she smiled at him. Polly had what her father called a "stand in" with the force. It was unnecessary, for she was a good driver when her feelings were not agitated, but there was something about policemen that appealed to her. They were so big and pink and forceful that you felt rather important when they nodded to you—a bit after the fashion of a man who is recognized by the head waiter.

She was still smiling when she entered the building in which was located a club to which she belonged. It was a serious-minded club of clever women, and most people had been amused when Polly Street joined it. Nobody expected serious-minded things of Polly, though here and there someone was willing to admit that she was "clever enough in her way."

Finding the writing-room empty, Polly sat down to write a letter. Several times in her career she had decided upon courses of procedure which had seemed to her eminently practical, only to be talked out of them by her family. This time she would take no such chances. She would write to Bob, and Bob, being much like her, understood her—as well at any rate as any brother understands a sister. Then she would go over to the bank and get some money on her Liberty

Bonds. Polly was as usual broke, Mr. Street being a man who provided credit liberally for his family but who had learned from experience that money was safer in his own hands.

A trip to the ticket office to make reservations and the thing would be done. A vague remembrance that Mexico was a place which demanded passports upon entrance came into her mind but was dismissed airily. Father would attend to that. The fact that Mexico was a troublous region where an American girl might meet with a good many disagreeable adventures was as airily dismissed. All that anyone needed to go anywhere, according to Polly's simple code, was common sense and money. The first she had, the second she intended to get, so why worry?

As she sat at the writing-table a slightly martial air came over Polly. Bob must be made to understand the situation. Because a man took it upon himself to dwell in or on a coal mine, Polly was never quite sure of the phrase, in the remote Southwest, he was not absolved from all family duties. The fact that he had married the handsomest girl in Arizona and was indulging in a honeymoon need not prevent an oppressed sister from demanding sympathy. She wrote rapidly.

"Dear Bob:

"I know it's awfully nervy of me to drop in on you and Emma right at the beginning of your honeymoon, but I am coming just the same. Joyce Henderson has behaved atrociously to me. I'll explain when I see you. You needn't show this to Emma; you can read her scraps of it."

Polly paused. A mental picture of Emma, demure and pretty, came before her. Bob Street was a lucky man to have found a girl like Emma. A dreamy look succeeded the martial one. Visions of a flower-bedecked hacienda—was that what they called them, it didn't sound exactly right—surrounded by peons dozing in the sun succeeded the dimpled vision of Emma. Polly drew her ideas of Mexico entirely from the movies, Bob's short letters being quite lacking in atmosphere. She saw herself leaning over a balcony, listening to the strains of a mandolin, played by a tall, slim youth, who resembled a composite photograph of several of her favorite movie idols. Poor Joyce Henderson, how unimportant he seemed by the side of that radiant vision! Polly scribbled furiously.

CHAPTER II

ATHENS

In the northern part of Mexico, in the state of Sonora, lies the little mining town of Athens, ironically named by someone whose sense of beauty was offended by the yellow stretches of desert sand, broken by hills, dotted here and there by cactus and mesquite, and frowned upon by gaunt and angular mountains.

Athens, when the mining industry was running full time, was a busy if not a beautiful spot. Its row of shacks housed workers, male and a few female, to a generous number, while its busy little train of cars—for Athens owned a tiny spur of railroad connecting with the neighboring town of Conejo and operated for reasons germane to the coal industry—gave it, if you were very temperamental, something of the air of a metropolis seen through a diminishing glass.

The plant and offices which boasted two stories, and the general merchandise store which was long and rambling, were larger than the shacks; otherwise Athens was a true democracy. The company house in which the superintendent, the manager and the chief engineer "bached" only differed from the others by an added cleanliness, for Mrs. Van Zandt, the energetic woman who ran the boarding-house, gave an eye to its welfare. The little houses were arranged in one long street and that street was Athens.

Several days after the invasion of Athens suggested itself to Miss Polly Street in far-off Chicago, a prominent citizen strode from the offices in the direction of the boarding-house. He moved with decision, for he was hungry, and Mrs. Van Zandt was fastidious as to hours. The office force ate its supper at six, and the fact that Marc Scott was the assistant superintendent and, in the absence of the superintendent on affairs matrimonial, in charge altogether, was no reason in the eyes of Mrs. Van Zandt why he should be late to his meals.

Scott paused outside the boarding-house to look into the distance where an accustomed but always interesting sight met his eyes. Away in the distance, between two foothills, appeared the tiny thread of smoke which marked the approach of the little train from Conejo. It was fascinating to watch it; at first so indistinct, then plainer, and finally to see the little engine puffing its way along, dragging the small cars. There would be no one on it but the train gang and nothing more exciting than the mail, but its bi-weekly arrival never lost interest for Marc Scott.

"Johnson's late to-night," he muttered, and pushed open the door which led immediately to the dining-room. Three men had just begun eating. There was Henry Hard, the chief engineer; Jimmy Adams, the bookkeeper, and Jack Williams, who ran the company store; they, with young Street, Scott, the doctor—who a month ago had taken an ailing wife back to Cincinnati—and the

train gang, formed the little group of Americans who had held the mining camp together.

While their location had been freer from trouble than many parts of Mexico, both in regard to bandit and federal persecution, they had borne a part in the general unrest. Once the town had been attacked by Indians; another time, lying in the path of one of Villa's hurried retreats, it had endured a week-end visit from that gentleman, after which horses and canned goods had been scarce for a while.

The worst trouble they had had, however, had been with labor. They worked the mine with Mexicans, and the Mexicans were an uncertain quantity. Athens was too far from the border to admit of hiring labor from the other side and allowing it to go back and forth, and the men they got were a discouraged lot, ready to abandon the job for anything that came up, from joining the newest bandit to enlisting in the army. Fighting seemed their *metier* and most of them preferred it to the monotony of working a mine. A few who were married and had hungry families stayed longer than the rest but it was always a problem.

Just now the mine was running three days a week and no one knew when orders would come to shut down entirely. There were the usual rumors afloat in regard to the coming election in July and a good many people who had seen other elections in Mexico expected trouble. The Athens people were looking to Street's return for news from headquarters, but already several days had gone by since the wedding and they had heard nothing.

The men looked up and nodded as Scott entered and Mrs. Van Zandt, peering in from the kitchen through a square hole which served as a means of communication, brought him his coffee. Mrs. Van Zandt had a weak spot in her heart for Marc Scott—most women and children had. One did not at first see why. He was not good looking, except that he was well made and well kept; not particularly pleasing in his manner, being given to an abruptness of speech which most people found disconcerting; and he liked his own way more than is conducive to social harmony.

He was, however, straight as a die; was afraid of few things and no persons; and if he liked you, he had an especial manner for you which took the edge off his gruffness so that you wondered why you had ever thought him disagreeable. His hair and skin were as brown as each other, which was saying a good deal; his eyes were gray; his teeth white and strong; and he had the healthy look of a man who lives in the open, bathes a good deal and does not overeat.

"Late as usual," remarked Mrs. Van Zandt, pessimistically, as she set the coffee down beside him. "The less a man has to do in this world, the harder it seems to be for him to get to his meals on time."

"Ain't it the truth?" remarked Adams, with feeling. He was a short, chubby youngster, with a twinkling blue eye. "If it was me, I could whistle for my supper, but seeing it's him, he gets fed up, the beggar!"

"Too bad about you!" sniffed Mrs. Van Zandt. "I thought you'd cut out that second cup of coffee?"

"I'm aiming to cut it out during the heated term," was the cheerful reply. "There's something about your coffee, Mrs. Van, that's like some folks—refuses to be cut."

"Humph!" Mrs. Van was not inaccessible to flattery. "Dolores," this to a black-haired girl whose face appeared at the hole. "You can cut the pies like I told you—in fours. If that girl stays with me another month I'll make something out of her; but, Lord, why should I think she'll stay? They never do. Mexicans must be born with an itch for travel."

"I notice," suggested Hard, "that in the haunts of civilization they are cutting pies in sixes." Hard was a Bostonian—tall, spare, and muscular. He came of a fine old Massachusetts family, and his gray eyes, surrounded by a dozen kindly little wrinkles, his clean-cut mouth, wide but firm and thin lipped, showed marks of breeding absent in the other men.

"Hush, don't tell her!" growled Adams. "A woman just naturally can't help trying to follow the styles, and I can use more pie than a sixth, let me tell you."

Mrs. Van, having attended to the distribution of the pie, sat down at the foot of the table for a bit of conversation. She was a good-looking woman with dark hair and eyes, and features which, though they were hard, were not disagreeable. Her figure was restrained with much care from its inclination to over fleshiness. Mrs. Van scorned the sort of woman who let herself get fat and fought the enemy daily. I could not possibly tell you her age, for no one but herself knew it. It might be thirty-five and on the other hand it might easily be ten or fifteen years more.

She had led a roving life, beginning somewhere in the Middle West, carrying on for a time in the East, where it involved a bit of stage life to which she loved to refer. There had been a short spasm of matrimony, not entirely satisfactory, the late Van Zandt having had his full share of his sex's weaknesses, and a final career of keeping a boarding-house in New York. After that she had drifted West and finally into Mexico. She had been a veritable godsend to the Athens mining company which had undergone the agonies of native cooking until the digestions of the American portion of the working force were in a condition resembling half extinct craters.

"What I'm wonderin' is if Bob Street and his girl got married or not and when they're coming home," she remarked as she sat down. One of Mrs. Van's little peculiarities, saved probably from the wreck of her theatrical career, was a tendency toward calling people by their first names when they were not there to protect themselves and sometimes even when they were.

"If they've got any sense at all they'll wait," said Scott, placidly. "This is no time to be bringin'

more women into the country."

"That's so," agreed Williams, a confirmed bachelor. "It was good luck the Doc took his wife and kids off when he did. There'll be trouble here when them elections is held."

"Pick up your skirts and run, Mrs. Van!" suggested Adams. "You may be cooking for a Mexicano yet."

"If I do he'll know it," was the prompt reply. "I ain't the runnin' kind. Anybody who's staved off the landlord in New York as many times as I have ain't going to worry about Mexicans. What I think those young folks ought to do is to go East for their honeymoon."

"They can't," replied Adams, with a grin. "It wouldn't look sporting for the Supe to leave his underlings without protection in such a crisis."

"I like Bob Street as well as any young chap I know," said Mrs. Van Zandt, meditatively, "but I don't know as I'd want him standin' between me and Angel Gonzales—if Angel was much mad." Angel Gonzales was a local bandit; a man of many crimes and much history. "But, of course, it wouldn't look well for the Sup'rintendent to run away."

"Street's not the running kind, either; don't fool yourself about that," remarked Scott, quietly.

"He's a good kid. I don't care if he is a rich man's son," said Adams with sincerity. "If my Dad had money I wouldn't be keeping books, you bet."

"No, son, you'd be playing the ponies up at Juarez," responded Hard, cheerfully.

"Not ponies, Henry dear, roulette," replied Jimmy, pleasantly. "Me and Mrs. Van are going to get spliced just as soon as the Ouija board tells her the winning system."

"It's all very well for you to make fun of things you don't know any more about than a baby, Jim Adams." Mrs. Van's scorn was intense. "If you'd read that article I showed you in the magazine about the man that talked to his mother-in-law by the Ouija——"

"Mother-in-law? Great guns, is that the best the thing can do?"

The reply was cut short by the entrance of the train gang, hot and hungry, clamoring for food.

"How's Conejo?"

"Sand-storm. Windy as a parson. Say, you fellows eat up all the pie?" Conversation was suspended while the demands of hunger were satisfied, and Scott distributed the mail which the late comers had brought.

"From Bob?" Hard looked up from his Boston paper as Scott grunted over his letter. Scott nodded and then as the others looked their curiosity, he read the brief note aloud.

"Dear Scotty:

"Have just had a summons from the directors to go East at once; guess they're uneasy about something they've heard and want first-hand information. Emma and I are starting for Chicago to-morrow. Open all mail and wire anything important.

"Bob."

"Just what I said they'd ought to do," breathed Mrs. Van, happily. "Well, that girl's got a good husband—I'll say she has."

"Directors would be a heap more uneasy if they knew what we know," remarked Williams, sententiously. "Hear anything more about the Chihuahua troops bein' ordered in, Johnson?"

"Nope," replied the engineer, his mouth full of pie. "Everybody crawled into their holes in Conejo. Didn't you never see a sand-storm, Jack?"

"I wish I'd known he was going to Chicago. I'd have asked him to look in on my girl," said Jimmy, folding up his letter. "I don't like the way she writes—all jazz and picture shows. Some cuss is trying to cut me out with her."

"More likely she's heard about you and the little Mexican over to Conejo," remarked the fireman, unsympathetically.

"If you'd had her address she sure would have," replied Adams, promptly. "That Mexican girl ——"

"Yes, we remember her. She was a looker but she used too much powder—they all do." Hard's voice was judicial. "She always reminded me of a chocolate cake caught out in a snow-storm."

"Hush up!" Mrs. Van's voice was tragic. "Do you want Dolores to get mad and quit? They've got their feelings same as we have. I guess I've got to catch a deaf and dumb one if I want to keep her on this place!"

Marc Scott sat in his place, a pile of letters before him, when the others had gone, and Mrs. Van was helping Dolores with the dishes.

"Say, Mrs. Van, when you get through with those dishes come outside a minute; I want to talk to you," he said as he threw open the door.

The shack boasted no veranda, but there were three small steps. Scott seated himself on the top one and rolled a cigarette. The air was chilly. The sun had sunk behind the mountains and outlined their rugged shapes with golden lines against the purple. Everything was very still—there was not a sound except for the faint strains of the victrola, which Jimmy Adams always

played for an hour after supper. A few figures moved about in and out of the other cabins; not many—for the working force was light these days. A light in the store showed that Williams was keeping open house as usual.

The door opened and Mrs. Van came out and sat beside him on the step.

“Well?” she said, quietly, “what’s the matter?”

“I’m in the deuce of a mess,” replied Scott.

“You mean Indians?”

“Worse than that—it’s a woman, Mrs. Van.”

“A woman!” Mrs. Van was plainly shocked. “My land, Marc Scott, you ain’t been foolin’ with that heathen in the kitchen?”

Scott chuckled. “Listen, Mrs. Van, I oughtn’t to string you like that—it is a woman, though. You heard me read that letter of Bob’s?”

“Yes.”

“He said to read the mail.”

“Well, haven’t you?”

“Yes, and the first one I tumbled into feet foremost was a confidential one from his sister. She says she’s coming down here. She thinks he’s here.”

“What? You mean here? Athens?”

“That’s what she says. The letter’s been lying over at Conejo since Tuesday and the chances are she’s there by this time.”

“But——”

“Oh, that ain’t the worst. It was a confidential letter. She said——” Scott paused in embarrassment.

“I’m not telling you this for fun, Mrs. Van Zandt, but because I don’t know what to do. You’re a lady——”

“Oh, go on, what’s the matter with you? I guess if you know it it ain’t going to hurt me. Has she run off with somebody, or has her Pa lost his money, or what?”

“I’ll show you.” Scott fished out Polly’s letter apologetically. “I stopped reading it directly I saw it was confidential,” he continued, “but I got this much at one swallow.”

“Dear Bob:

“I know it’s awfully nervy of me to drop in on you and Emma right at the beginning of your honeymoon, but I am coming just the same. Joyce Henderson has behaved atrociously to me.”

“That’s all I read,” concluded Scott, penitently. “Joyce Henderson is the fellow she’s engaged to—Bob told me that. I had to look at the end to see if she said when she was coming, and by George, if she started when she said she was going to, she ought to be in Conejo right now.”

“Now!!”

“What we’re going to do with her, I don’t know, do you?”

“She and the wedding couple have just crossed each other!”

“Looks like it. Look here, Mrs. Van, what am I going to do? If I don’t look her up, God knows what’ll happen to her over in Conejo, unless she has sense enough to go to the Morgans. If I do, she’s going to raise merry heck because I read that letter about the fellow jilting her. Now I thought maybe if you’d let on that you read it—a girl wouldn’t mind another woman’s knowing a thing like that as much as she would a man.”

Mrs. Van Zandt surveyed Scott pityingly.

“It always seems so queer to me that a man can have so much muscle and so little horse sense,” she said at length.

“But——”

“There ain’t any use my explaining; you wouldn’t get me,” she went on, impatiently. “But here’s something even you can understand. I’d look nice opening the boss’s mail, wouldn’t I? Now you’ve read the worst of it you might as well dip into it far enough to find out just when she’s coming. Somebody’ll have to drive over to Conejo for her as long as the machine’s busted.”

“I’ve read all I’m going to,” said Scott, doggedly. “You can do the finding out.”

Mrs. Van Zandt grunted, arranged a pair of eyeglasses which sat uneasily on a nose ill adapted to them, and glanced at the letter. She gave a sigh of relief.

“She says she’s going straight to the Morgans’ when she gets to Conejo. Bob’s told her about them. Prob’ly Morgan’ll run her over in his car. She ain’t very definite about time; don’t seem to know just how long she’ll be detained at the border.”

“Unless they’re all fools up there she’ll be detained some time,” said Scott, disgustedly. “Well, I’ll go and get the Morgans on the wire and see if they’ve seen anything of her,” and he strode away toward the office.

Mrs. Van Zandt sat watching him as he swung down the street. The sun's gilding had faded from the mountains and it was growing dark. Here and there a star peeped out as though to commiserate Athens upon its loneliness.

"It is lonely," Mrs. Van said to herself. "I don't know as I ever felt it so much before. I hope it don't mean that we're going to have trouble. Sometimes I think I must be psychic—I seem to sense things so. Wish that girl had stayed at home, but, Lord, I'd of done the same thing at her age. That's a youngster's first idea when things go wrong—to run away. As though you could run away from things!"

The lady shook her head pessimistically and drew her sweater more closely about her as the air grew chillier. A short plump figure with a shawl wrapped around its head came out from the back of the house and melted into the darkness.

"Is that you, Dolores?"

"Si. The deeshes all feenish," said Dolores, promptly.

"Did you wash out the dish towels?"

"Si. All done. I go to bed." Dolores disappeared.

"You're a liar," breathed Mrs. Van, softly. "You ain't goin' to bed, you're goin' to set and spoon with that good-looking cousin of yours. Well, go to it. You're only young once and this country'd drive a woman to most anything." Her eyes twinkled humorously. When Mrs. Van's eyes twinkled you forgot that her face was hard.

"My, but they're hittin' it up on Broadway about this time! Let's see—it'll be about eleven—the theatres just lettin' out, crowds going up and down and pouring into restaurants. Say, ain't it queer the difference in people's lives? There's them sitting on plush and eating lobster, and here's me looking into emptiness and half expecting to see a Yaqui grinning at me from behind a bush! Hullo, you back?"

Scott, accompanied by Hard, came down the street again. Both seemed disturbed.

"Well," remarked the former, grimly. "She's started."

"Started?" Mrs. Van rose. "What do you mean by that?"

"I got Jack Morgan's mother on the 'phone," said Scott. "Seems she'd been trying to get us. The girl got into Conejo about six—just after our train pulled out—tried to get us on the 'phone and couldn't; so she got a machine and is on the way over."

"Got a machine!" Mrs. Van gasped. "Are the Morgans crazy?"

"Jack and his wife have gone over to Mescal with their car and there's nobody home but the old lady and the youngsters. Old lady Morgan's deaf and hollers over the wire so I couldn't get much of what she said," continued Scott, ruefully. "I made up my mind that she'd got old Mendoza to bring her over in his Ford. Guess it's up to me to harness up and go over to meet them."

"I should say so. That girl must be scared to death if nothing worse has happened to her."

"Nothing worse will happen to her with Mendoza—unless he runs her into an arroyo. Mendoza's principles are better than his eyesight. But, believe me, she deserves to be scared. It might put a little sense into her."

"Shall I drive over with you?" queried Hard.

"No, but you might help Mrs. Van move our things down to Jimmy's. I thought we'd put her in our shack, Mrs. Van, and you could come up and stay with her." And Scott swung off into the direction of the corral.

The other two proceeded to the company house, as the superintendent's quarters were called.

"Well," said the lady, as they began to pack the two men's belongings, "I expected to get this house ready for a bride and groom but I must say I wasn't looking for a lone woman. And yet if I'd had my wits about me I might have known. Only last night Dolores and me were running the Ouija and it says—look out for trouble—just as plain as that!"

"I shouldn't call her anything as bad as that," said Hard, crossing to where the photograph of Polly Street hung over the fireplace.

The picture showed a small girl, probably about ten or eleven; a fat little girl with chubby legs only half covered with socks, and with dimples in the knees; a little girl with very wide open eyes and a plump face, a firmly shaped mouth and a serious expression; a little girl with frizzly hair and freckles that the photographer had failed to retouch, in a costume consisting of a short skirt, middy, and tam-o'-shanter.

"I wouldn't call her a trouble maker," said Hard, laughing, "unless she's changed a lot in ten years."

CHAPTER III

EN ROUTE

To say that the days which followed Miss Street's unconventional decision passed in a whirl is to be both trite and truthful. In fact, it was not until she had crossed the border that she found leisure to reflect.

To begin with, the parents had been difficult, as good parents usually are when youth begins to chafe at restriction, especially if youth happens to belong to the weaker but no longer the less adventurous sex. The Streets were easy-going people who liked to live by the way. They were not ambitious and they were not adventurous and they hated letting go of their children. It was bad enough to have a son marooned in a mining camp without losing a daughter in the same way. Only downright persuasion by the daughter, combined with remembrance of quite unalarming letters from the son resulted in the desired permission.

"After all, if Emma's parents let her go down there, I suppose we needn't be afraid," said Mrs. Street, who disliked argument.

"In my opinion, Emma's parents are fools," replied Mr. Street, sternly. "Or else, like us, they've raised a daughter they can't control."

"I wouldn't put it that way, Elbridge!"

"I would. You might as well look things in the face." 31

"But, Father, you know Bob's part of the country has been very calm; and I never get a chance to do anything interesting! You sat down on me when I wanted to drive a motor truck in France ——"

Any father can continue this lament from memory. The discussion had ended as discussions with spoiled children usually end. There had been a hurried packing and the familiar trip across the continent. It was only when she alighted at a border town and after some anxious hours waiting to have her passports viséd and her transportation arranged, embarked on the shabby south-bound train on the other side, that Polly fully realized the expedition to which she was committed.

Up to this time her thoughts had been of the life she was leaving, and, it must be admitted, of Joyce Henderson. From Illinois to Texas she told herself exactly what she thought of a man who could so boldly and plainly and with such an evident relief accept his dismissal at the hands of the girl he had claimed to love; but by the time the train had jogged through miles of queer brownish yellow country, dotted with mesquite and punctured with cactus, relieved here and there by foothills, and frowned upon by distant mountains, her meditations assumed a more cheerful complexion.

The outlook, monotonous as it was, fascinated her. There were adobe houses with brown youngsters playing in the scanty shade, much as one sees them in New Mexico and Arizona; there were uprooted rails and the ruins of burned cars—evidences of civil war unknown on our 32
side of the line. There was a strong wind blowing—the early spring wind of the Southwest, but the sun shone hotly and one felt stuffy and uncomfortable in the car. The sand which was caught up by the wind blew in one's face and down one's throat and made closed windows a necessity.

There were a good many people traveling, for a country in a reputedly unsettled condition, Polly thought, and wished that she could understand the fragments of conversation that she heard.

"Why didn't I take Spanish instead of French at school? I always seem to have chosen the most useless things to study! I wish I knew what those two fat women without any hats on are talking about—me, I suppose, for they keep looking over here. That man is American—or English. If I were Bob, I'd amble over and get up a conversation with him and find out all the interesting things I'm missing. I'll bet he owns a mine down here somewhere. How fascinating!"

Polly's imagination immediately forsook the American and indulged in a rosy picture of herself as the owner of a mine—a gold mine—coal was too unromantic. She saw herself in a short skirt and a sombrero superintending the exertions of a number of dusky workers who were loading neat little gold bars on the backs of patient burros.

This delightful picture occupied her fully until the train stopped and she had to get out. This train did not go all the way to Conejo, but left one at a junction called Pecos where twice a week if convenient for all parties a smaller train rattled its way across the plain and into the 33
mountains among which Conejo nestled. It is not necessary to describe Pecos; its only reason for existence was the fact that it owned and operated a smelter.

This second train was the shortest that Polly had ever seen. It consisted of an engine, two coal cars, a baggage car, and one passenger coach—this last very dirty as to floor and windows and very creaky as to joints. There were on this occasion but four passengers beside Polly; the two fat ladies, who were, if she had only known it, members of the first families of Conejo; an old man who sat in a corner and read a German paper; and a young Mexican, well dressed and of a gentlemanly appearance, who sat across the narrow aisle from Polly, smoking innumerable cigarettes and glancing at her whenever he thought she was not looking.

Polly, however, was too much interested in the changes of scenery to notice anything as ordinary as a good-looking young man. The country was changing, gradually, but still unmistakably changing, from a desert, flat and stifling, to a region of small hills and valleys; still brownish yellow, but with the monotony of mesquite varied by live oaks, and in some cases by

shallow little streams along whose banks grew cottonwoods, their green foliage restful to the eye weary of desert bareness.

Many of the cacti were in their beautiful bloom and gave to the country the needed dash of color. Occasionally one saw small herds of cattle feeding off the short stubby vegetation. They were drawing near the mountains, whose gauntness seemed less when approached. 34

“They’re like ugly people—grow better looking as you get to know them,” mused Polly. “Oh, my gracious, what’s the matter now?” The puffing little engine had given up trying to make the steep grade it had been negotiating, and had stopped with one last desperate wheeze. No one seemed surprised. The fat ladies went on talking and the old man continued to read his paper. The trainmen were outside, doing something, Polly couldn’t make out what, perhaps only talking about doing something. “Oh, dear, I wonder what has happened!”

In her excitement she must have said it aloud, for the young man across the way sprang to his feet and was at her side instantly. A keen observer might have drawn the conclusion that he had been waiting for some such opportunity.

“I beg pardon, señorita, but it is that the engine cannot make the grade,” he volunteered, politely, in English almost without an accent—or perhaps I should say with an intonation English rather than American, though with a slightly Latin arrangement of phrase.

“Oh, I see,” Polly replied blankly. The young man had been rather sudden, and he continued to stand in a disconcerting way, hat in hand, in the aisle. He appeared to be very young, hardly more than nineteen, Polly thought, and handsome in a dark way. He had large dark eyes, very white teeth, a smooth olive skin without the mustache which so many Spaniards wear, and a rather prominent under jaw and chin. 35

“You see,” he continued, “they take the first car over to Conejo and then come back for us.”

“Do you mean to say that they’ll leave us here, perched on the side of this hill, while they run off with the engine?” demanded Polly, eyeing the trainmen indignantly. In fact, she was so busy being indignant with them that she omitted to notice that the young man had slipped into the seat opposite her. That fact, however, had not escaped the fat ladies in the rear, one of whom said to the other in shocked Spanish:

“It is Juan Pachuca!”

“So it is,” replied the other. “I had thought him in the South.”

“Who knows where he is? A wicked person, my dear, a very wicked person. My sister’s husband says he will get himself shot before he finishes.”

“Undoubtedly,” said the other, placidly. “So many young men are being shot these days. I thought that young woman was an actress—now I am sure of it.”

“Yes,” replied Juan Pachuca to Polly’s question. “But do not be alarmed. They will come back in a couple of hours.”

“A couple of hours!” The girl’s voice was horrified. “But I expected to be in Conejo in a couple of hours. I’m in a hurry.”

“One should never be in a hurry in Mexico, señorita, it does not—what is it you say—it does not pay.”

“Apparently.” Polly replied coolly, realizing suddenly that this good-looking boy was regarding the conversation as a thing established. 36

The stranger was correct in his guess. Uncoupled from the rest of the train, their coach remained poised uncomfortably half-way up the hill, while the engine, still puffing and wheezing like a stout man going upstairs, pulled the open cars and the baggage car up the grade and, disappearing through a gap in the hill, became only a faint noise and a trail of thin smoke. Polly laughed in spite of herself and the young man responded with a smile that revealed two dazzling rows of teeth.

“*Mañana*!” he laughed. “So we say down here and so we do. You find it amusing, señorita, after your country?”

“It’s different, you must admit. We at least aim to reach places on time.”

“Yes, that is the difference—you aim, we do not,” replied the other, thoughtfully. “Some day—but perhaps the señorita will get out and have a breath of fresh air? There is, alas, plenty of time.”

A mischievous impulse seized the girl. She felt as she used to feel when as a small, fat, freckled youngster she had sat still as long as she possibly could in school and then despite the teacher’s stern eye her nervous energy had got the better of her.

“After all he’s only a boy,” she told herself. “I’ll bet he isn’t any older than my freshmen cousins. What’s the harm?”

Outside the sun was hot but the wind was fresh and cool.

“Through that cut in the mountains and around a curve is Conejo,” said Juan Pachuca, as Polly, glad to be out of the hot car, drew long breaths of the splendid air. “You have friends there?” 37

“In Conejo? Oh no, my brother lives in Athens. That’s where I am going. He is superintendent of a coal mine there.”

“Athens? That is some distance from Conejo. Of course your brother will meet you?”

“Of course,” replied Polly, with the faith of the American girl in the male of the species. “They have a little coal train that runs to Conejo and he’ll probably come in on that.”

“I think you must be Señorita Street?” mused the young man.

“Oh,” Polly dimpled pleasantly. “You know Bob then?”

Juan Pachuca’s dark eyes smiled. “Not exactly—but I have met him. Me, I have a place south of Conejo—quite a long way—I am what you might call a long-distance neighbor. My name is Pachuca—Juan Pachuca.”

“I see. Are you in the mining business, too?”

“Not now. Oh, I have mining property, but further south. My people live in Mexico City. In Sonora I have a small ranch.”

“You speak English rather wonderfully, you know, señor,” said the girl. “But more like an Englishman than an American.”

“It is very likely. My sister—she is much older than I—married an Englishman, and her children had English governesses. When I was young I had my lessons with them.” 38

So from one thing to another the conversation ran, very much as it does with two young people of any nationalities, granted a common language. Polly talked a good deal about Bob. Juan Pachuca seemed interested in all the details that she could give him about the mine. His manner was very respectful. If he had not met many American girls he had evidently heard much about them, for he did not seem to misunderstand the situation as many Latins would have done. Before the girl had realized it the two hours were over and the little engine reappeared.

Conejo should, I believe, be called a town. The people who live in it always dignify it by that name and they probably have a reason for so doing. To one holding advanced ideas as to towns, it seems at a first glance to be only a collection of pinkish looking adobes which on inspection turn out to be a church, a store, a jail, a saloon, a hotel—at which no one stays who has a friend to take him in—and some private houses. It is Juarez without the bull ring, the racetrack or the gambling places.

It is situated rather flatly between two ranges of mountains and when Polly Street landed there at about six o’clock—a trying hour in itself—it was in the grip of a sand-storm. One’s first sand-storm is always a surprise. It looks so innocent from behind a window pane; just sand—blowing about rather swiftly, whirling in spirals, beating against the glass, piling itself up in drifts—an interesting sight but not a terrifying one.

Polly had been a little surprised to see the fat ladies array themselves in goggles before descending from the train, and had laughingly refused an offer of his own from Juan Pachuca, who promptly put them on himself. But when she alighted from the train onto the platform which extended from the rear end of the general merchandise store, and which served as station, waiting parlor and baggage-room, she gasped in dismay. It was as though thousands of tiny pieces of glass had struck her in the face and throat. 39

Before she could get her breath they struck her again and again; sharp, vindictive, piercing little particles they were. She shut her eyes and put her hands to her bare throat to protect it. Suddenly she felt a hand on her arm and Juan Pachuca’s voice said:

“Keep them shut and let me lead you. I told you what sand-storms were—you’d better have taken the goggles.”

Polly succumbed and felt herself being led along the platform.

“There, we’re in the store,” said the young man. “Rather nasty, eh?”

“Awful! I never felt anything like it,” gasped the girl, shaking the sand from her clothes. “And it isn’t sand, it’s gravel. No wonder you wear goggles!”

“I find them most convenient for many purposes,” was the reply.

Polly noticed that he still had them on though they were in the store. They gave him a queer, oldish appearance and quite spoiled his good looks. Polly herself was beginning to feel disturbed. She wanted Bob and she wanted him immediately. She looked about her anxiously. 40

The store was larger than it appeared from without and carried a varied line of goods piled up on shelves or displayed on counters. On one side, it seemed to be a grocery store; on the other, dry-goods, shoes, and hats were set forth, while in the rear were saddles, bridles and other paraphernalia in leather. A big stove in the middle of the room gave out a cheerful warmth, for the air was growing very cool as the sun went down.

There were a few people, Mexicans and Indians, in the place and they all stared curiously at the pretty American. Polly did not realize, though she was not in the habit of underrating her attractions, how very noticeable she was in that environment, as she stood there, her tan traveling coat thrown open showing her dainty white waist, her short, trim skirt with its big plaid squares, and her neat brown silk stockings and oxfords. Conejo had not seen her like in many moons and it stared its full.

“I think Bob would be at the station. If I could go there——” Polly began, with a little lump in her throat.

“This is the station,” said Pachuca. “It is Jacob Swartz’ store and the station as well.”

“Then something has happened to my letter. He never would have disappointed me like this,” said the girl, despairingly.

“That is quite possible. If you would let me serve you in this matter, señorita? I have a car at the house of a friend just out of town. I am driving to my ranch in it to-morrow. If you would let me drive you to Athens——”

“Drive in an open car in that?” the girl pointed to the whirling sand outside. “How could we?”

“Easily. Once on our way into the mountains we will leave it behind us.”

“Oh, thank you very much, señor, you’re very kind, but if Bob doesn’t come I can go to some friends of his, English people, the Morgans, and they will drive me over in the morning.” She was conscious of a sudden desire to get away from this polite youth who stuck so tightly. It was all very well to let him amuse her on the train—that was adventure; but to drive with him through a strange country at night would be pure madness. She thought he stiffened a bit at her words.

“English people? Oh, yes, undoubtedly that will be wise. Swartz can probably tell you where to find them.”

“Yes, of course.” Polly was glad to see that he was going to leave her. “Thank you again, señor, for your kindness.”

“It has been a great pleasure,” and the young man was gone.

Polly clenched her hands nervously. Where, oh, where was Bob? Why hadn’t she telegraphed instead of trusting to a letter? At this juncture her glance fell upon a small counter over which the sign P. O. was displayed. Behind the counter sat a stout man in spectacles—Jacob Swartz, undoubtedly. Polly accosted him timidly.

“Has anyone been in from Athens to-day?” she said.

“Athens? Sure, dere train come up dis morning; dey wendt back an hour ago.”

“Was Mr. Street here—Mr. Robert Street?”

“No, joost the train gang. Dey wendt back when dey got dere mail.”

“Do—do they come every day for the mail?”

“No, joost twice a week. Dere mail ain’t so heavy it can’t wait dat long.” Swartz peered benevolently over his spectacles.

“I’m Mr. Street’s sister. I wrote him I was coming, but I suppose if he only gets his mail twice a week he hasn’t had my letter.” Polly bit her lip impatiently. “I want to go over to the Morgans—Mr. Jack Morgan. Can you show me where they live?”

“Sure can I,” replied Swartz, lumbering to his feet. “You can from the door see it.”

Polly followed him in relief, when suddenly the door opened and a little old lady literally blew in. She stamped her feet as though it were snow instead of sand that clung to her, and disengaged her head from the thick white veil in which she had wrapped it.

“Mein Gott, it is old lady Morgan, herself,” said Swartz, nudging Polly, pleasantly.

“What’s that? Somebody wanting me?” replied the lady, still occupied with the veil. “Where’s that tea I told you to send me this morning, Swartz? A fine thing to make me come out in all this for a pound of tea, just because I’ve nobody to send and two sick children on my hands! What? Oh, I can’t hear you! Who d’you say wants me?”

She was a thin, bent old lady with straggly gray hair and a very sharp penetrating voice. Polly felt the lump in her throat growing larger. Was this the jolly pretty Mrs. Jack Morgan that Bob had written about so often?

“Dis young voman——” began Swartz, heavily.

Polly stepped forward.

“Mrs. Morgan, this is Bob Street’s sister. He has often written us about you and your husband.”

“Husband? She ain’t got no husband,” interrupted Mr. Swartz, heatedly. “Ain’t I told you dis iss de old lady—Jack Morgan’s mother?”

“I’m a little hard of hearing, my dear. Who did you say you were?” asked Jack Morgan’s mother, patiently.

Polly repeated her explanation, adding a few more particulars, all as loudly as possible. They had now an interested audience of Mexicans and Indians, male and female, old and young, who found the scene none the less attractive because they did not understand it.

“Well, I suppose he didn’t get your letter,” said Mrs. Morgan. “Jack and his wife have gone over to spend a few days with some friends in Mescal or they’d run you over in the car.” There was a pause as Polly digested this unwelcome bit of news, then the old lady continued: “They’d only been gone two days when both the children came down with mumps, and my Mexican woman’s husband had to take that time to join the army, so, of course, she had to leave. If things weren’t so messed up I’d take you home with me——”

“Oh, no,” said Polly, promptly. “I couldn’t think of it. If I could just get somebody to drive me over——” Both she and Mrs. Morgan looked at Swartz.

“Mendoza might if he ain’t drunk—sometimes he ain’t,” volunteered that gentleman.

“Oh, no, I don’t think I’d like him,” shivered Polly. “Isn’t there anybody else?”

“Nobody with a car,” replied Mrs. Morgan. “It’d take you till morning to drive over—the roads are awful. Mendoza is a very decent old thing. You go and see if you can get him, Swartz,” and Swartz lumbered away. Old lady Morgan understood how to make herself obeyed. “Have you tried to get Athens on the ’phone?”

“Telephone?” A smile broke over Polly’s unhappy face. “Why, I never thought of that.”

“Good heavens, child, where do you think you are? Here, I’ll get them for you.”

She led the way to the office.

“I haven’t seen your brother since he went up to Douglas to get married,” she said. “Didn’t know they’d come home.”

“Oh, yes, they must be home,” said Polly, an awful doubt coming into her mind. “They—they must be home!”

Mrs. Morgan seized the receiver and began exchanging insults with the invisible Central. After several minutes she gave up the effort.

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“It’s no use, I can’t raise them—our service is dreadful down here,” she said. “Now, I’ll tell you what to do. I’ve got to run home before the baby wakes up; if he can’t get Mendoza, you come on down to the house and stay the night with me. See, it’s the last house—got a Union Jack flying from it. If I don’t see you in half an hour I’ll know you’ve gone with Mendoza. You needn’t be afraid of him—he’s half dead but he can drive a Ford,” and the voluble old lady was gone.

Polly wondered for a moment whether she most wanted to laugh or cry. Homesickness and fatigue suggested the latter, but a wild sense of humor poised between the decrepit Mendoza and the deaf Mrs. Morgan won the day. Polly chuckled. Then realizing that it was nearly seven and that she had had nothing to eat since noon, she went to the counter and bought of a Mexican youth, evidently a helper, some crackers. They were in a box and looked a degree cleaner than anything else. The population had wearied of the American lady and had gone its various ways. Polly sat forlornly on a high stool and munched her crackers until Swartz returned.

“No good,” he said. “Mendoza’s sick and he won’t let nobody else drive de car. You better go stay mit de old lady.”

“All right,” said the girl, rising. “I suppose I can leave my trunk on your back porch?”

“Vy not? Ain’t it der station? Vere should you leaf it?” replied Swartz, hospitably.

Polly stepped out of the front door. The sand blizzard was undoubtedly on the wane. The wind was less violent but much cooler. The sun had dropped behind the mountains and the dusk was descending upon the little Mexican town. A few of the houses showed a light, but more of them were dark. The Morgan house, a very long way down the street, it seemed to the girl, was lit and she started to go toward it. A sense of desolation, a forlornness greater than she had ever known in all her short life descended upon her. She swallowed quickly and increased her pace. It wasn’t fear, she reflected, it was worse than fear; it was the awful loneliness of one who had never been really alone in her life.

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“It’s the first night at boarding-school multiplied by a thousand,” she sobbed softly. “Oh, why did I come to this awful place? I simply can’t stay all night with that deaf woman and those mumpy children! I——”

She jumped back in time to avoid an automobile which seemed to flash out of nothingness at her elbow. As she stood looking after it a wild hope came into her head that it might be Bob after all. The car stopped and a man jumped out.

“Is it you, señorita?” he exclaimed, “alone and in the dark?”

It was Juan Pachuca. Polly sighed, disappointed to tears. She tried to explain the situation.

“But in two hours I will have you in Athens,” he begged. “Or is it that you wish to stay with these people?”

“Of course I don’t wish to stay! The children have the mumps and the poor old lady is nearly wild.”

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“Come. Give me that bag. So—I thought all Americans were sensible people!” And before Polly could object she found herself seated in the car with Juan Pachuca driving silently at her side.

48

CHAPTER IV

JUAN PACHUCA

About half an hour after his conversation with Mrs. Van Zandt, Marc Scott drove the buckboard with its two lively horses out on the Conejo road. Beside him sat a blond dog of mixed genealogy answering to the name of “Yellow.” Scott had put on a coat over his flannel shirt, tucked his trousers into a pair of riding boots, and replaced his sombrero with a soft cloth hat. These changes having been made in honor of the visitor, he felt that his duty had been fulfilled and he addressed Yellow ruminatively:

“Well, I expect we got to brush up a bit on our manners if we’re going to have a young lady around, eh, Yellow? Going to be some strain on us both, I’ll say. Funny idea to run off to a place like this just because you’ve quarreled with your young man! Got the temper that goes with red hair, I guess. I remember a red-haired girl I used to know in Detroit——” A grin succeeded the worried look on Scott’s face; evidently the adventure with the red-haired girl had had its humorous side.

“Well, get up, Romeo, we’ve got to reach that girl before Mendoza dumps her in the ditch and gets her mussed up or the boss’ll fire us both.”

Romeo, a good-looking gray, with an excitable nature, snorted as he felt the touch of the whip and dragged his gentler mate into a lively trot. A new moon, clear cut and beautiful, was rising behind them, over the tall mountains, making the valley—so bare by day—lovely and mysterious in its half light. 49

“No kind of a night to be driving around with a dog, Yellow,” remarked the driver, reproachfully. “Men and moonlight are made for better things.”

The horses trotted briskly; they were covering ground rapidly. They ought, Marc figured, to meet the machine this side of Junipero Hill, a steep and cruel grade which he would be glad to spare his horses if he could. If Mendoza was making any sort of speed he ought to have come that far. He began to watch for the lights of the machine. The girl must be plucky, even if she was foolish, to dare a trip like this with a strange Mexican.

Well, he was glad Bob’s sister was nervy; he liked nervy girls and he liked Bob. Usually fellows who came out from college and took positions over other men’s heads made fools of themselves; but Bob was not a fool. He was a decent, likable young chap, who knew he had been luckier than the next fellow and who took no advantage of it.

“Which is more than you can say of most rich men’s sons,” soliloquized Scott. “But then why should you expect sense from a rich man’s son? Where’d they get it? It’s hard knocks gives a man sense—if he’s ever going to get it, which most of them ain’t!”

There was loneliness in the air. Scott, who was temperamental, as out-of-doors men often are, felt it keenly. It brought before him more clearly the loneliness of his own life, a life spent in out-of-the-way places, largely among men; a life with no roots, he sometimes felt. Yet he would not have traded his freedom, he would have told you, for any woman, for a home or for children. To be foot loose, to go where fancy called him, to have no ties—no clogs upon his precious liberty, that was what he loved. 50

He was fond of women, too. He liked being with them and he liked measuring each one he met with his ideal, a hazy creature who probably did not exist. Well, he rather hoped she didn’t, or if she did that he would never meet her. He had known too many men who had traded their freedom for a home and a fireside and who, once bound, had never been able to go back to the old life. It had not always been the women who had held them, either; the men themselves had seemed to change—to deteriorate, Scott would have said—to have lost the energy and the vigor that made life worth while. You cannot get anything for nothing and you paid for the happiness you might find in marriage with the loss of the one thing which was to him the most important thing in all life—liberty.

So they jogged along, Scott whistling to keep himself company. Occasionally, Yellow would insist upon getting out for a run, but he seemed glad to return. After a while it began to seem odd to Scott that he did not see the lights of Mendoza’s car. Even a cautious driver should have made the distance by this time. 51

Suddenly, an idea popped into his head—one of those clammy ideas, which come instantly, and come with a chill; ideas that are positively physical in the way in which they affect one. Suppose it was Mendoza’s car with someone else driving it? Someone of the score of half-breeds who hung around the livery stable where the car was kept? Scott leaned over and laid the whip on the innocent Romeo.

“My God, horse, we’ve got to go some the rest of the way! If——”

He did not finish the sentence. They had reached the top of a hill and he put on the brake as they started down. At the foot of the hill stood an automobile—not Mendoza’s shabby little Ford—but a big car with two large headlights. It was turned across the road and not a soul was in sight. Scott took his foot off the brake and with a muttered curse let the buckboard rattle down the hill.

Polly’s first sensation, as she sank into the comfortable seat next the driver and buried her face in the collar of her coat, was one of intense relief. This was something that seemed like home. She felt herself being whirled up the streets of Conejo with the feeling of one who is escaping, the flight being for the time of more importance than the fashion in which one flies.

“I think you will be cold,” said a polite voice at her elbow. “Wait—I have a robe.” And a blanket

which smelled of the stable rather than of the garage was wrapped carefully around her. “In a few moments we shall be out of this sand.” 52

For a while they rode in silence, then the girl said, apologetically:

“I am so sorry. I didn’t want you to go to all this trouble—but I couldn’t stay in that awful place when Bob is so near!”

“If you think Conejo is bad I wonder what you would think of some of our towns further south? They are ruins.”

“Ruins?”

“Ten years of revolution—they do not improve a country.”

Polly did not reply. She peeped out of her collar and saw that Pachuca’s prophecy was fulfilled. They had ridden out of the area of the sand-storm and were getting into the foothills where the air was cold and clear. They faced the new moon which gave an eerie look to everything—the distant mountains, the foothills with their weird patches of vegetation, tall cacti and dark looking arroyos. Far, far in their rear could be seen the few feeble lights of Conejo. It began to dawn upon an awed Polly that she was doing not an unconventional but a distinctly risky thing.

What did she know about this good-looking boy who sat beside her, guiding the car so expertly through the ruts and chuck holes that chopped up the road? Suppose he turned out to be—she caught her breath angrily! He was no common Mexican but a gentleman and one was not afraid of men of one’s own class, she told herself. She would not be afraid. She hated people who were afraid. She was having a wonderful experience; the sort of an experience that girls read about but didn’t have, and she was going to enjoy it. 53

“I forgot to ask you if you had anything to eat,” said Juan Pachuca. “You didn’t, did you?”

“I had crackers,” said Polly. “What did you have?”

“I was more fortunate. I found my friend at dinner,” replied the young man.

“Where were you going when you met me?”

“Eventually to my ranch, but first to find you. I did not think you would stay with the Señora Morgan.”

Polly laughed in spite of herself.

“I couldn’t,” she confessed. “Do you know, she seemed to think it doubtful that Bob and Emma had come back to Athens? I wonder why?”

“Perhaps,” replied the Mexican, “she thought the country not quite safe for a young lady.”

“But I thought things were settling down?”

“There will be no settling down until after the elections.”

“The elections?”

“You would not understand. Americans never do.”

“Perhaps some of us might if you gave us a chance; but when you go rearing and pitching around, killing us and raiding border towns like that murderous Villa——”

“In war there is no murder,” said Juan Pachuca, calmly. “And Villa is a friend of mine.”

“Well, I can’t help it, and I think it’s very strange for a well brought up boy like you to be friends with a man like Villa.” 54

Pachuca laughed as he glanced at the girl’s wrathful face.

“Why do you call me a well brought up boy?” he asked.

“Because you are, aren’t you? You remind me a lot of a cousin of mine who’s just entering college.”

“How old is the cousin?”

“Nineteen.”

“When I was nineteen I was a colonel in the army,” said Juan Pachuca, whimsically. “That was six years ago.”

“Good gracious!”

“Why not?”

“Well, in our country we don’t take boys of nineteen very seriously,” said Polly, a little upset. “Did you fight much?”

“A good deal. I suppose then that young men of nineteen do not fall in love either in your country?”

“Oh, yes, they do, but nobody pays much attention to them. We call it puppy love.”

“Puppy love!” Juan frowned. “You are a strange people—you Americans.”

“Yes, I suppose we are but we like ourselves that way. Do you think that engine of yours is all right? It sounds queer to me.”

Pachuca shrugged his shoulders.

“It gives me trouble sometimes. It needs what you call an overhauling, but it will take us to Athens.”

Polly, with an ear trained to engine sounds, wondered whether it would. She felt that the last straw would be to be stranded in the middle of the night in a lonely spot with this good-looking young man, who, to make matters worse, had turned out to be twenty-five instead of nineteen. Again they sat in silence while the machine wrenched itself in and out of ruts and through arroyos.

She found herself wondering what his life had been? A colonel at nineteen! She remembered the boys she had known in our own army, boys she had fed and sewed for on their way to France. They, too, had seemed young, but she felt a great difference. This young man suggested things of which Polly knew little. She wondered whether it was imagination that made her fancy that he had played a part in life which does not usually fall to twenty-five, except in a country so disordered, so desperate as Mexico.

Some of her boy friends who had come back from France and Belgium had carried in their faces some such suggestion, but only a few. For the most part they had come back as they went over, those who had returned whole; husky, lively, youngish chaps—more restless, less satisfied with life at home, perhaps, but not older particularly.

“That’s why he seems odd to me,” she concluded. “He’s done and seen things that a fellow his age hasn’t any business to have done and seen—that is, the way we look at it at home. Oh dear, I wonder if we’re ever going to get there? I can’t keep still much longer and yet I hate to stir him up.”

“The girls in your country, do they fall in love at nineteen?” said Juan Pachuca, suddenly. There was a softness in his voice that under other conditions—say, in a ballroom—Polly would probably have described as melting. In her present environment it struck her less pleasantly.

“Girls? Oh, yes, of course they do; but not in the desperate, hot-headed way your young ladies do. At least, not usually. Of course some girls do queer things and get into the newspapers.”

“Ah, our young ladies do not get into the newspapers,” commented Juan Pachuca. “They are guarded quite carefully; that is, our girls of good family. Most of them are very beautiful.”

“But aren’t they just a little bit tiresome? I mean, just being beautiful and guarded and all that sort of thing. At home we like a girl who has seen a little of life,” apologetically.

“Not a young lady of family!” said Pachuca, decidedly.

“Well, of course, in America we don’t think a lot about family, though it’s nice to have it if you can. We think more of education and getting on in the world. Señor, I wish you would get down and look at that engine; there’s something awfully wrong with it.”

Polly spoke suddenly for Juan Pachuca was leaning very close to her.

“Your young ladies are charming,” he said, softly. “I had always heard it and now I know it is true.” His black eyes were dancing; it would have taken some guessing to know whether with excitement or laughter or both. “Do they ever forget themselves so far as to allow themselves a love affair on a silver night when——”

“No, they do not,” said Polly, half severely and half amused. It was difficult to take Juan Pachuca’s rudeness seriously and yet—oh, why had she come?

“Not a desperate, hot-headed love affair such as pleases the young ladies of my country,” he pursued, seizing the hand so near him. “But one of those—what do you call them in your tongue—flirtations?”

He was laughing but there was a smoldering fire back of the laughter, and the grasp of his hand was strong.

“Señor, now please—remember that I didn’t come with you because I wanted to, but because I had to! Please!” For Pachuca’s arm had slid itself deftly around her and was drawing her toward him, gently, but with an exceeding firmness, while the dancing dark eyes continued to laugh into hers. “There, see what you’ve done!”

The big car had given a most unwieldy lurch, wedged a tire in a rut, bounced a couple of times, and stopped—providentially—on the edge of the deep gully that fringed the road.

“It is nothing,” declared the young man, a bit stunned by the suddenness of the affair. The car, however, refusing to back, gave him the lie. Polly tore herself from his detaining arm and was out in the road.

“If you had an electric torch I could tell you what it is,” she said, trying to control both nerves and temper, for she was both frightened and angry. “Have you?”

“I think so,” replied Pachuca, a little stiffly. “But, please, dear lady, do not get down in the dirt! I beg of you!”

“I don’t mind. I know every little pain an engine can have. I drove an emergency car at home during the war,” said Polly, curtly.

“Indeed?” Juan Pachuca’s voice was cool. The young lady was business-like—too business-like to flirt with—and yet——

“No, it’s not that.” Polly shook the curls out of her eyes and slammed the cover of the radiator. “Where do you think it is? You ought to know something about this car; you’ve been driving it.”

Pachuca's eyes danced. What was the use of being stiff with an American? They were all alike—the men after money, and the women after what they called independence!

"I think," he said, demurely, "that it must be attacked from underneath, if you will hold the torch."

"All right." Polly smiled. "Go ahead. If you can't find it, I'll try."

Thus it was that Marc Scott's first acquaintance with Polly Street came as he pulled the excited team to its haunches within a few feet of the automobile, and she, holding Juan Pachuca's torch, jumped to her feet and faced him.

"Oh!" she cried, eagerly, "is that you, Bob?" Then, seeing more clearly, "I beg your pardon! 59
We've had trouble with the car, but we've fixed it and we'll be out of the way in a moment."

"I'm not Bob Street, but I'm from Athens, and I'm looking for Bob's sister. I guess you must be her," replied Scott. "Well, who are you?" he added, as Juan Pachuca's legs emerged from the car, followed by his body.

"It's not Mendoza—he's sick," volunteered Polly. "It's a gentleman who was in the train and who kindly drove me over. Where is my brother?"

"Your letter only came to-night," stammered Scott, "and in the same mail we had one from your brother in Douglas, saying he had been called East——"

"East!" The blow was too sudden; Polly's legs collapsed. She sat down on the running-board of the machine and gasped. In the meantime Juan Pachuca stepped to the buckboard.

"It is Señor Scott?" he said pleasantly. "We have met before."

Scott surveyed him thoughtfully. "Well, by the Lord, if it ain't Johnny Pachuca! Of all the nerve ——"

"Exactly," grinned Pachuca, appreciatively. "You are surprised, eh? What are you going to do about it?"

"That depends upon how you've treated the young lady," said Marc, quietly, "and on your general behavior," he added, with a reciprocal grin.

"Haven't I told you that he was kind enough to drive me over?" said Polly, impatiently. "And if ——" 60

"That being the case," replied Scott, "I don't know as there's anything I can do except say much obliged, and keep my eye on my horse-flesh. If you'll get into the wagon, Miss ——"

"Oh, he's all right," said Pachuca, airily, as the girl hesitated. "He's the manager of the Athens mine—Marc Scott—a very decent fellow. I regret being deprived of your company, señorita, but he evidently intends to take you back with him."

"Any baggage?" demanded Scott, gruffly.

"One trunk," replied Polly, rather dazed by the suddenness of the affair. "But it's back at Conejo."

"Want any help with that car?"

"No, thank you, the young lady and I have remedied the trouble."

"Of course there's no use in my asking if there's any particular reason for your being in this neighborhood, Pachuca?"

"There is always a reason for my being where I am," was the suave reply. "This time it does not concern you."

"That's good. No revolutions up your sleeve, eh?"

Pachuca chuckled. "I wouldn't be too sure of that, *amigo*," he said. "Would you take the advice of a friend, Marc Scott?"

"I might, if you'd guarantee he ain't lying."

"Then tell your people to close up their mine, take their women and get out of the country. There is trouble coming," and the young Mexican bowed politely to the girl and returned to his machine. 61

"Now, what do you suppose the young devil meant by that?" demanded Scott, as he turned the team and faced the hill again. Polly's eyes were wide open.

"Who is he?" she said, eagerly. "You seemed to know him. Does he really live near here?"

"I believe he has a ranch about here somewhere—some ways south. As to where he lives I reckon he could hardly tell you that himself."

"But where did you know him?"

"I don't know him. I don't want to know him. The last time I saw him was when Villa stopped over with us on one of his retreats. This guy was with him. That little visit cost us a dozen good horses, two hundred dollars, and our winter's supply of canned goods. He's an expensive acquaintance, that fellow."

Polly's face was full of horror. "Do you mean," she gasped, "that I've been riding around the country with a Mexican bandit?"

“Oh, I don’t know as I’d call him a bandit.”

“He told me that he was a colonel in the army!” indignantly.

“Well, he was, so I’ve heard. He’s been quite a lot of things. Maybe we’d better not talk about him any more to-night. It’s kind of exciting for you after all you’ve been through.”

“Exciting!” Polly sank back in her seat limply.

“He was all right to you, wasn’t he?” continued Scott, a little shyly. “Wasn’t fresh or anything like that?”

“Oh, yes, he was all right,” murmured the girl, quickly.

“These Mexicans are queer. You can’t tell what they’ll do,” went on Scott. “Sometimes they’ve got manners like the President of the United States, and the next time they’ll do something that’d disgrace a pirate. Take ’em all around as they go, I guess Pachuca stacks up pretty well. He’s educated and comes of good folks. But how the deuce did you happen——”

“Oh, I suppose it does sound awful!” Polly said, in a rush. “But he was on the train and when the horrid little thing stopped on the side of a hill for two hours, he came along and explained what was the matter.”

“He talks English like a Bostonese,” said Scott.

“Doesn’t he? And anything that sounds like Boston just naturally puts confidence in a Chicagoan, don’t you know? Then when I landed at Conejo in that wild sand-storm with no one to meet me and the Morgans out of town, he offered to drive me over, and I let him. It didn’t seem far; why, at home we often drive that far in an evening.”

“Well, driving around the boulevard with your friends is one thing, and around this sort of country with a strange Mexican is another.” Scott paused at the sight of the girl’s penitent face, and changed the subject. “As for your brother, we had a letter from him to-night saying that he and the bride had gone East. The directors sent for him, so they started pronto. I reckon Miss Emma’s folks coaxed them to stay in Douglas a few days after the wedding—we had expected them here before this.”

“But how did you know——”

Scott cleared his throat nervously. “Well, you see, he wrote me to read all his mail——” he stopped, abruptly. “Go on, Romeo!”

“I see. You opened my letter and found out that I was coming, and came to meet me. I am very much obliged to you.” The words were pleasant enough but the tone was cool.

“She’s on the trail,” Scott thought, disconsolately. “She’s running over in her mind what she said in that letter, and when she remembers, it’s going to be a good idea to get home as soon as possible.”

After this, the silence was extremely marked. Scott, feeling the discomfort of it, continued:

“It’s too bad for you to have had this long trip and then miss your brother after all, but I guess he’ll be back soon, the way things are looking.”

More silence, but Scott was not going to be scared out of his good intentions.

“I reckon we can make you pretty comfortable till he comes. We’ve got a mighty pleasant lady running the boarding-house just now and she’ll be glad enough to have another white woman on the place.”

The silence still continuing, he gave up. “Hang it, if she won’t talk, she won’t,” he thought. Then as he turned to tuck in a flying end of robe he saw the girl’s face. “Great guns, she’s asleep—poor kid!”

The end of a far from perfect day had come for Polly Street, and even an uncomfortable seat with a hard back and the joltings of a rough road had failed to keep her awake. She was asleep, sitting up, her head drooping, her body relaxed. In a few seconds she would be leaning comfortably on the broad shoulder next her. Without interrupting the team’s even trot, Scott leaned down, fished another blanket from under the seat and arranged it on the back of the seat between them just in time to receive Polly’s sleepy head, so that she rested half on the blanket, and half on his own steady bulk for the rest of the trip.

“Poor youngster, she has had a day of it,” the man said softly, as he arranged the blanket carefully around her. “And, by gum, I’ll bet she hasn’t had a mouthful to eat since noon! Well, women have endurance, I’ll say they have. Built like Angora kittens and with the constitutions of beef critters. Go on, Romeo—I don’t want her fainting with hunger on my hands, she’s mad enough at me now.”

CHAPTER V

POLLY ARRIVES

It was midnight when the buckboard stopped in front of the company house where Mrs. Van Zandt and Henry Hard assisted the drowsy Polly out of the wagon, while Scott painstakingly performed the introductions.

“Nothing to eat since noon!” gasped Mrs. Van Zandt, in horror. “What on earth was old lady Morgan thinking of? Mr. Hard, if you’ll throw some more wood into the stove, I’ll put on the percolator and run down to the dining-room for some sandwiches.” She ran off in one direction, while Scott drove the team in another, leaving Hard to do the honors.

“It’s a shame to have things happen this way,” he said. “A thousand times I’ve heard Bob talk about having you come down here, and now that you’ve come, he’s flying in another direction.”

“It’s my own fault,” admitted Polly, honestly. “We are all so sudden in our family—make up our minds and hardly wait to write or telegraph. I might have known that Bob would be doing something just as queer as I was. How comfortably you have this place fixed! Am I turning you out of it?”

“Oh, we’re tramps, Scott and I. We thought it would be pleasanter for you to be here with Mrs. Van Zandt, so we moved ourselves out. We rather like changing about.” He built up the fire and adjusted the percolator, while Polly divested herself of her hat and coat and sat down in a comfortable chair.

“It won’t be for long,” she said, decidedly. “I shall go back as soon as I can now that Bob and Emma are home.”

“I hope you won’t. Apart from the very great pleasure that it gives us all to see someone from home, it would be a pity to let you go back without seeing some of the country.”

Polly laughed in spite of her weariness.

“It seems to me as though I’d seen the entire country of Mexico to-day,” she said. “Such a trip!”

“Isn’t it, though? The first time I made it I said: ‘Here is where I locate for life and found a colony. I’ll never have the courage to go home.’ But I got over it.”

Mrs. Van Zandt bustling in, followed by Scott, their hands full of provisions, found the two chatting sociably.

“I’d have had cake for you,” volunteered the former, “if Dolores and her beau hadn’t ate it all on me.”

“It’s like a midnight feast at boarding-school,” chuckled the visitor, waked up by the coffee.

“It’s like the spreads we used to have when we was on the road,” said Mrs. Van Zandt, meditatively.

“On the road?” Polly’s eyes opened wide.

“Mrs. Van was one of the original ‘Floradora Sextette,’” remarked Scott, soberly. “The only one who didn’t marry a millionaire.”

“A lot you know about it,” retorted the lady. “I was in the ‘Prince of Pilsen,’” she informed Polly, confidentially. “I understudied the ‘Widow’ on the road. It was an interesting life,” she concluded, thoughtfully.

“It must have been,” replied Polly, politely. “How did you happen to come West?”

“Me? Oh, I came West with an invalid,” replied Mrs. Van, easily. “She was one of the cranky kind—middle-aged and none of her family could live with her. You’ve seen that kind? They wanted she should have a trained nurse and the trained nurse never was born that she could get along with. Trained nurses are awful bossy—they can’t help it, they’re supposed to be; that’s all the difference there is between them and the ones that ain’t trained. So I come out to look after her.”

“Did she die?”

“Not she. Get it out of your head that lungers always die—they don’t. She got well and went home and nagged the life out of her family for years. Last I heard of her, she’d taken up with a young fellow she met at a skating rink and her folks were wild for fear she’d marry him.”

“Then you stayed out West?”

“Yes, and sometimes I’ve regretted it. New York’s the place to live. I had a swell flat in a good neighborhood and rented rooms to single gents and business women—they’re the ones that have the money. It was interesting, too. I’d put an ‘ad’ in the Sunday paper and all day Monday folks would be coming to see my rooms; I met some real nice people that way. Well, I think you’d better be turning in; you’ll feel this to-morrow.”

Scott and Hard rose and said good-night.

“That’s a plucky girl, Scott,” said the latter, as they walked down the silent road together.

“Do you know who brought her over from Conejo?” demanded Scott, with a chuckle.

“I thought you said Mendoza did.”

“Mendoza’s sick and she took a dislike to old Mrs. Morgan, so she came over with Juan Pachuca in his car.”

“You’re joking.”

“I am not. I drove as far as Junipero Hill and when I got to the top of it I saw a big car at the foot, twisted about, almost in the ditch. I found Johnny on his stomach under the car and the girl holding an electric torch for him. She said she’d been underneath giving him a hand with it. I wouldn’t put it past her.”

“But the child must be out of her head,” protested Hard, weakly. “They don’t do those things—even in these degenerate days.”

“I guess you and me are behind the times, Henry. And then, you know Pachuca’s manners. Something between the King of Spain and Chauncey Depew. Any woman’d fall for them.”

“But——”

“But nothing. Pachuca brought her over and he behaved himself while he was doing it as near as I can find out. What I want to know is what the smooth young devil wants around here?” 69

“If there’s a revolution in the air, Pachuca would throw in his lot with Obregon and De la Huerta. What he thinks about the First Chief is unprintable.”

“He had the cheek to tell me to close up the mine and get out of the country,” grinned Scott.

“That may mean something and it may not. They’re keen about their bit of melodrama, these chaps. My El Paso paper says that there is a rumor again about troops having been ordered in from Chihuahua. That looks as though they were afraid of something.”

“Or else were trying to stir up something,” replied the other. “Obregon’s never going to stand for Carranza’s candidate for the election. His own chances are too good. It might be a wise plan for the Government to stir up a little revolution on its own hook and get in the first hits.”

“Might be. Anything might be down here; that’s why it’s such an interesting place to live. Still, I don’t altogether like the idea of Pachuca roaming the country like a lion escaped from a circus.”

“Those lions never do much harm,” observed Scott, cheerfully. “Of course, if he hitches up with Villa——”

“I seem to have heard that he and Villa had a row. I should say he was more likely to try to organize a crowd of his own and get in on the fireworks.”

“If he does it’s good-bye to our fellows,” said Scott. “It would be a case of the Pied Piper and the rats; and Johnny’s a mighty good piper.” 70

Hard glanced at his companion in some amusement. Scott, who was a man of little education, had periodic spells of promiscuous reading, and frequently surprised his friend with his references.

“It wouldn’t be only our men, either,” he said, a moment later.

“I was thinking of that,” replied Scott. “Old Herrick’s would go, too. I wish you could persuade him to go back to England, Hard; that ranch of his is no place for an artist.”

Hard nodded. “I doubt if I could,” he said. “Herrick’s obstinate.”

They had reached the cabin where they were to sleep and were hailed drowsily but inquisitively by Adams.

“Hullo, you guys! Did you find the lady?”

“We did, and she asked warmly after you,” replied Scott. Then, in a low tone to Hard: “No use saying anything about Pachuca to the boys.”

Hard nodded. “Better not,” he agreed.

“Did she? I think you lie,” replied Adams, sleepily. “Don’t be any noisier than you can help, you two, getting to bed. I’ve lost two hours of my beauty sleep now waitin’ up for you and I need my rest.”

“I’m going over to my place to give the men their breakfast,” said Mrs. Van Zandt, looking into Polly’s bedroom the next morning. “Just you lay in bed until you’re rested.”

“I’m rested now,” said the girl, sitting up. “Is there—no, of course there isn’t a bathtub on the place?” she laughed. 71

“Bathtub? Well, I should say not, but your pitcher’s full, I guess. You’ll get used to being without bathtubs after a while. They ain’t half as important as folks think.”

“I don’t mind. I’ve camped,” said Polly, heroically. “What I really wanted to ask you was how soon you thought I could get away?”

“Get away? Why, ain’t you just come?”

“Yes, but I thought Bob was here. I never would have dumped myself down upon a lot of strangers like this.”

“If that’s all that bothers you, turn over and get another nap. If the Superintendent’s own sister ain’t got a right to a few weeks’ board and lodging, I don’t know who has. As for the boys, don’t worry about them. I’m an honest-to-goodness widow and I guess I can chaperon you all right.”

Polly laughed again. Mrs. Van Zandt’s eye took in her appearance thoughtfully.

“Do you sleep in those things all the time?” she said. “I mean, are they all you brought?”

Polly glanced at her diaphanous pajamas and nodded cheerfully.

"Well, I'll see that you have an extra blanket. Nights are cold here," and Mrs. Van hurried away. Polly called after her. "Well?" she said, reappearing in the doorway.

"Is this Bob's room, Mrs. Van Zandt?" the girl asked.

"No, it's Mr. Hard's, but you needn't worry about him. He'll be quite comfortable at the other house."

"I was wondering——" Polly blushed. One hates to be curious, and yet—"I was wondering who that was?" pointing to a photograph on the dresser.

"Her name's Conrad—she's a widow woman from Boston, an old friend of his. Pretty, ain't she?"

"Very."

"He never told me anything about her," admitted Mrs. Van, candidly. "Mr. Hard ain't one to chatter about his private affairs, but I got it out of Marc Scott."

"Oh!"

"He said she was a singer; married an Englishman and lived down near Mexico City. Husband died two or three years ago. I've a notion she's an old sweetheart of Henry Hard's—you can tell from her clothes it's an old picture."

"I like her looks," commented Polly.

"So do I. Give me a wide-awake looking woman every time," agreed Mrs. Van Zandt. "There, I must hustle or Dolores will put red pepper in the eggs."

Polly stared at the photograph. It was of a tall, slender woman, with large dark eyes, and obviously of a personality distinctly pleasing. She had, even in the photograph, an air of vitality which accounted for Mrs. Van's comment.

"And he looks like the sort of man who would stay single for a woman," she said, pensively. Then her thoughts returned to her own position. Her eyes filled.

"Oh, why did I come? Why did I?" she asked herself for the fiftieth time. "Because I was a coward and didn't want to hear what people were going to say about me. As though it mattered what the kind of people I know think of anybody! And now I've marooned myself in this dreadful place and I'll have to stay till Bob comes—we can't go chasing each other across the country like this. And that miserable Scott man knows why I came! Well, I can snub him, anyhow."

Polly planted both feet firmly on the floor and reached for her stockings. A few minutes later she stood in the doorway, a dark sweater drawn over her lacy waist, her plaid skirt blowing in the breeze, and her vivid hair covered only with a net. The air was cool and bracing, the sun just beginning to be a bit warm, the mountains emerging from behind fleecy clouds, and the sky as blue as that of Italy.

"Not bad, eh?" Hard stopped beside her, thinking how her splendid youth and vibrant coloring harmonized with the surroundings.

"Not bad at all," laughed the girl. "You only need a few wild looking Mexicans prowling about to give a touch of life."

Hard pointed toward the mine. Some dark-skinned men wearing big straw sombreros were running a hand car up the track while another group lounged in a doorway.

"There are your Mexicans, but I'm afraid they're too lazy to be very wild. Nothing but a revolution excites them these days and sometimes I think they're getting a bit blasé over them. Now and then they wake up over a cock-fight." They walked down the street toward the boarding-house.

"I wish, Mr. Hard, that you would tell me something about the young man who drove me over last night," the girl said.

"Who? Scotty?"

"No," a little indignantly. "I mean Señor Pachuca. Oh, I forgot that I hadn't told you!"

"Scott told me. He and I thought, if you don't mind, that we wouldn't say anything about it before the others. I mean about his being in the neighborhood."

"I won't if you don't want me to," replied Polly, with unusual docility. "But please tell me about him. Mr. Scott didn't seem to want to."

"Well, no, Scotty didn't want to frighten you, I suppose."

"Frighten me? As if I was that kind of girl!"

"It's just a little difficult these days to know what one may or may not tell a young lady," smiled Hard. "But about Johnny Pachuca. A good many people call him 'Don Juan'—I don't know whether it's because he claims to be of pure Spanish blood, or whether it's a subtle recognition of his popularity with the ladies."

"Oh!"

"A few years ago, he was a captain or a colonel or something equally fancy in the army. He's a dashing young scamp, and he had the good luck or the bad luck whatever you want to call it to engage the affections of a good-looking young actress who was supposed to be bestowing those

affections on a man higher up. Naturally, the man higher up looked about for a way of getting even. He dug up a scandal about some army funds. Young Pachuca had been doing what seems to have been the usual thing down in Mexico City—padding his accounts—so they got him.

"Not that they couldn't have got anybody on the staff on the same charge; but they were after Juan. Juan had to choose between retiring to private life or turning bandit. Having a taste for action, he did the latter."

"Do you mean like Villa?"

"Well, no, Villa's in a class by himself. You can't call a man who has controlled a state and who has dictated to presidents, a bandit, can you? He's on too big a scale. Pachuca took up banditry, in a gentlemanly sort of way; at least they say he did; nobody's proved it on him. He was undoubtedly with Villa at one time. He was with him when he stopped here and nabbed our horses. I was away at the time. I've never seen the fellow. Then, gossip says, they quarreled and Pachuca went back to his people in the South. I haven't a doubt, however, that if another revolution should break out, Johnny would climb into the band-wagon against the government and land in the army again."

"And that's the man I undertook to drive alone in the dark with!" gasped the girl. "Mr. Hard, promise me you'll never tell Bob?"

"I promise," replied Hard, laughing. "And here we are at breakfast. Miss Street, this is Mr. Williams, who runs our store, Mr. Adams, of the office force——" and so on until each had very consciously greeted the newcomer. Scott, who sat at the end of the table, looked up and bowed, receiving a cool little response. He returned unconcerned to his ham and eggs. If the new arrival was going to be disagreeable, he would keep out of her way.

Breakfast went off pleasantly. The food was excellent and with the exception of Scott, who kept his distance, everyone was quite evidently trying to put the girl at her ease. From the train crew, who announced their intention of running over to Conejo for her trunk, to Adams who spoke for the privilege of taking her over the plant, and Williams, who begged for an early opportunity to show his collection of baskets and pottery, each had something to offer. Even the black-eyed Dolores peeped admiringly through the hole in the wall, gathering items about the visitor to retail to the eager ears of relatives and friends at the next *baile*.

After breakfast, Adams piloted Polly over the premises, from the corral to the office. He showed her the automobile lying idle because an important part was broken and the new one though ordered from the factory had not come.

"I hope you ride?" he said, and as she nodded: "that's good. Maybe we can get up a party to ride across the mesa to Casa Grande. That's Herrick's place."

"Herrick?"

"Yes. Queer chap—part German and part English. Artistic, you know—plays the piano and sings."

"What's he doing here if he's an artist?" demanded Polly.

"Runs a ranch and writes music. His wife died suddenly—she used to travel around with him and sing his songs—they made a pile of money, I guess."

"You don't mean Victor Herrick!" gasped the girl.

"Yes, that's him. He went to pieces when she died and packed up his piano and his music and came down here and buried himself on the ranch. Queer customer, but you'll like him."

"And to think that Bob Street never wrote me that Victor Herrick was a neighbor of his—and then wrote pages of stuff about those old Morgans!" said Polly, indignantly. "Why, I've heard the Herricks sing—they were wonderful! Men haven't any sense."

"Oh, well, he likes the Morgans. She's a jolly kind of woman, invites a fellow to dinner and feeds him up, you know," said Jimmy, seriously. "They're real folks, the Morgans are, and Herrick's a sort of a nut, don't you see?" He threw open the door of the office abruptly. "Here's the office, where the manager sits with his feet on the desk while the rest of us work."

Scott, who was standing by the window, turned suddenly.

"Hullo, Jimmy," he said, with a grin. "Do you know whether Johnson's gone yet? Well, go over and tell him to drop in at Mrs. Morgan's and tell her that the young lady got here safely; I can't get Conejo on the wire."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Adams, please do!" said the girl, eagerly. "She meant to be awfully kind but she was worried to death about those children. I was too tired to have any patience and I felt as if I just had to get away from Conejo."

"You're not the first person who's been struck that way," grinned Adams, as he left the office.

"Hard tells me he has been talking to you about Juan Pachuca," said Scott, smiling.

"Well, you wouldn't, so I had to ask somebody else," replied Polly. "I'm interested in him."

"So I noticed. Can't you pick out something a little more like home-folks to be interested in? Remember the fellow who tried to bring up the tiger cub?"

"What happened to him?" Polly smiled up into Scott's face. There was something about Scotty that appealed to you even when you were actively engaged in disliking him.

“It grew up and bit him.”

“Oh, and Juan Pachuca seemed so nice and friendly. But I suppose a tiger cub feels soft and furry when it isn’t scratching or biting.”

“Exactly. You can’t tell about these fellows down here. Maybe Pachuca would have brought you over here safe and sound, and maybe he would have taken the south fork of the road down yonder and carried you off to his ranch to hold for a ransom.”

“Oh,” said Polly, faintly, “what a dreadful country!”

“Well, it’s no place for tenderfeet. That’s what I’m always telling our neighbor—Herrick, over at Casa Grande. Bob ever write you about him?”

“Bob never writes me about anything—except Emma,” said the girl. “But Mr. Adams has been telling me about him. Does he live there all alone?” 79

“No, he’s got a Chinese boy to cook for him and a lot of greasers working on the place, but no white men around.”

“I wish I could meet him.”

“You can. I’ll drive you over there any time you say.”

Polly’s face hardened. “I won’t bother you,” she said. “I don’t know how long I’ll stay here. I want to telegraph Bob.”

“I told Johnson to wire him from Conejo,” said Scott, a bit coolly on his side. “He may bring the return message back with him to-night.”

Polly felt suddenly ashamed of herself. She rose and held out her hand.

“That was awfully thoughtful of you, Mr. Scott,” she said. “I’m ever and ever so much obliged to you, both for that and for last night. I suppose if it hadn’t been for you Señor Pachuca might have been sending pieces of my fingers to Bob for a ransom.”

Scott laughed but he took the hand awkwardly.

“I don’t think Pachuca would do anything quite as raw as that—especially with a lady,” he said. “But I’m glad I went just the same. I don’t take chances with these chaps. Shall we walk down to dinner? Mrs. Van gets pretty peeved if we’re late to meals.”

80

CHAPTER VI

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Johnson did not bring a return message from Chicago.

“Family ain’t got its breath yet, I reckon,” he said, as he and Scott discussed the matter. “She looks to me like the sort of youngster who could keep a family pretty well stirred up,” he added, candidly. “Girls have changed sence you and me was young, Scotty.”

“You’ve said it,” was the terse reply.

“If you can believe what these magazine fellers write,” went on the engineer, pensively, “the girl of to-day is a sort of mixture of bronc, ostrich, and rattlesnake thrown in. Smokes, drinks—say, Scotty, I wonder do they chew?”

“Search me,” responded Scott. “I don’t go into society much these days. I reckon, though, you’ve got to take these writing chaps with a grain of salt. There’s probably a few plain, ordinary girls left.”

“There’s plenty of plain ones, if the newspapers ain’t lyin’,” said Johnson, opening his home paper at the society page and revealing three emaciated damsels, clad in extremely short skirts, and with huge bird cages over their ears. “Not that Miss Polly’s like them,” he added, generously. “She’s a looker and a lady, too. I like her.” 81

“That’s lucky, Tom,” remarked Scott. “I’ll tell her she can stay on.”

Polly did stay on. The next day a telegram came from the happy bridegroom.

“For Heaven’s sake stay where you are. Stop racing around the country. Returning shortly. Bob.”

In the meantime, the days passed like hours. Polly rode with Scott, walked with Adams, chatted with Hard, and helped Mrs. Van Zandt with the housework when the latter would let her, which wasn’t often. Now and then she remembered Joyce Henderson, and when she did, her manner would cool toward Scott; but one couldn’t go on holding a grudge long in that climate. The glorious sun, coming after months of dark chilly weather, seemed to melt anything in one’s heart that was unfriendly. Joyce Henderson soon faded into half-tones.

There were a dozen interesting things to do everyday. A Mexican saddle with its high pommel

and cantle, was fascinating after an English one. Foothills and arroyos were a charming part of one's walk after the boulevards and parks of Chicago. She hugely enjoyed chatting in sign language with the Mexicans and Indians on the place, and before a week had passed she had picked up a number of Spanish phrases which she used with delighted inaccuracy.

She believed that of the men she liked Hard the best. He was the type of man she had always admired; the best type of an American gentleman, a man of good old family traditions, quiet and unassuming and yet full of a pleasant humor. She wondered what had brought him to Mexico— 82
an unhappy love affair with the lady who sang? But Hard was not a man of whom one asked personal questions so she did not find out.

Scott, however, was the man who really interested Polly Street though she did not realize it. Much of that interest was due to the fact that he apparently did not care whether he interested her or not. One moment they would be on excellent terms, and the next he would have forgotten her.

"That young man," said Polly, sagely, "understands the art of making himself popular. He knows it irritates a woman to see a man absolutely indifferent to her. It's more than flesh and blood can stand. So he acts that way, for it's a pose, of course. Just for that I'm going to make him like me—if I can spare the time."

In this she wronged Marc Scott, who was quite innocent of the art of posing, and whose mind was on other things these days than young women.

One day, about a fortnight after Polly's arrival, she and Scott rode over to a little village hidden in the mountains some ten miles away. It was a warm day and they were long on the road. It was nearing sundown when they came within sight of Athens. Polly, as usual, was talking:

"They're such queer people—Mexicans. They can't run their own country and they don't want anybody else to come in and run it for them."

"I wouldn't call that queer," replied Scott. "Chances are that if they let someone else in, there 83
wouldn't be enough country left for them to put in their eye, and they darn well know it."

"Not necessarily," replied the girl, sturdily. "We didn't gobble up Cuba. We just helped them to get on their feet."

"Cuba's a different proposition. Cuba was being coerced by an European power and, of course, we had to stop it. Mexico is in the hands of her own people and if you give them time they may make something of her. Then, there's the oil question. That's sort of soured the native population on us. You'd never persuade a live Mexican that the U. S. came over here for anything in the world but to grab the oil lands—whether the U. S. was innocent or not."

"I suppose not, and a good many of us wouldn't be innocent, would we?"

"Afraid not. You see, the oil business has developed to an importance far beyond everything else down here. When this man, Carranza, went into office, he went in under what they call the Constitution of 1917. It provides that the State is entitled to retain what they call 'subsoil rights.' That is, they don't want to sell oil lands or mines outright, they just lease them.

"Now, if they should decide, and a lot of them want to, that that Constitution is retroactive—and undermines the titles of land that's already owned by foreign capital, there'd be a lot of influence brought to bear to make trouble."

"That would affect our mine, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, but mines are pretty small potatoes compared to oil. People down here will tell you that 84
the Constitution is merely a matter of form and that if the oil men will go on paying their taxes nothing will happen; but, of course, that sort of assurance doesn't go far when a man's putting up his money. If they get a new government down here, and we get a new one at home, the chances are that the United States will demand guarantees of some kind. It's a bad question, take it any way you like.

"The Mexican says: 'These oil lands are mine.' And they are. The American says: 'What good were they to anybody when you had them?' None whatever, and the world needs oil, so there you are."

They rode on for a few minutes in silence. Scott watched, with the mixed pleasure of the horseman and the admiring male, the girl's graceful figure adapt itself to the jog of the horse. He reflected that there was something very clean-cut and alive about her, from the way her hair sprang in its tight little waves away from her firm white neck, to the quick flash of her dark eyes; there was a vividness and a health about her which appealed strongly to the out-of-doors man.

Nothing could have been further from his idea of a rich man's daughter; a pampered being, all nerves and affectations, helpless and parasitic. Of course she was spoiled—used to being waited upon a good deal, and with rather a good opinion of herself. One could see that. On the other hand, it did not seem to go very deep; seemed, rather, the sort of thing that might rub off when it came in contact with life. Even the rich sometimes came into contact with life, he reflected, 85
with a feeling of satisfaction. They dodged a good many rough knocks that the poor couldn't dodge, but something usually came along to even up the score, if nothing else—the old boy with the scythe.

"Mr. Scott, when are you going to take me over to see Casa Grande?" said the object of his meditations, suddenly.

“Me?” Scott turned on her in well simulated surprise. “Thought you didn’t want to go last time we talked about it.”

“Well,” Polly blushed, “I’ve changed my mind. I want to meet the celebrity.”

“Who? Victor Herrick? I don’t think you’ll care much for him if you go over there looking for a celebrity. He’s not that kind.”

“I don’t understand.”

“He’s not the kind that likes to go to pink teas and have a lot of women hanging around him,” explained Scott, promptly. “Not a society woman’s pet. Too good a musician, I guess.”

“You don’t like society people very much, do you?”

“Not much,” candidly. “And I guess they wouldn’t care much for me, so that squares it.”

“I suppose the sort of people you mean by ‘society’ wouldn’t care for you,” said the girl, frankly. “But there are people, you know, even among the rich who have sense enough to know a worth-while man when they meet him.”

It was Scott’s turn to show confusion. “I don’t mean that there aren’t any decent rich folks. I’m not such a blamed idiot as that,” he said. “You, yourself, have a lot more sense than an heiress has any right to,” he added, with a smile. 86

“Me? I’m not an heiress. Father has a big salary, of course, but we spend every cent of it. We don’t mean to but we always do. Somehow, our expenses crawl up every time the salary crawls. Of course, there’s insurance, but that would go to Mother. You see, they’ve educated both Bob and me well enough so that we can support ourselves; I could be athletic instructor in a girls’ college to-morrow if I wanted to; and Father’s invested a good deal in this mine on Bob’s account. He thinks he’s done his duty by us and I do, too.”

“So do I,” said Scott, soberly. “I don’t believe in these handed-down fortunes—money tied up for generations.”

“I think,” said Polly, shyly, “that you’re a bit of a socialist.”

“So do I—only I’ve never found exactly the brand of socialism that I believe in. Maybe they haven’t discovered it yet. But I do believe that we’ve got to do better by each other than we’re doing now if we’re ever going to make a success of living. Whether it’s got to come by individual reform or by some new system of government, I don’t know, but things have got to improve, and, by gum, I believe they will! We’re too good, all of us, to be wasted the way most of us are.”

He spoke with a fire that Polly had never seen in him before. She had thought him phlegmatic, but here was something temperamental—something that kindled enthusiasm in her. She was too hampered by her own inexperience of life to know what to say to him; she felt helpless in the presence of feelings that she had never had and could not feel sure that she understood; and she feared to say the wrong thing—she, Polly Street, who had always said what she liked to men and let them take it as they chose! It was a queer feeling and she wondered—— 87

“Hold on, what’s that?” Scott stopped his horse suddenly.

“What’s what?” demanded the girl, startled. Then as he did not answer, but continued to stare in the direction of Athens, she cried impatiently: “What are you looking at? Tell me now—this minute!”

Scott took a pair of field-glasses from a case on his saddle. He handed them to the girl.

“Does that look to you like Juan Pachuca’s car down by the store?”

Polly looked. “It does, doesn’t it?” she said. “But it’s too far to be sure. Who do you suppose those men are on horseback?”

“I don’t know,” said Scott, shortly, as he took the glasses and looked again. “But I don’t like the looks of it. Let’s whip up and get to that arroyo that runs back of the camp. We’ll ride the rest of the way in it.”

They descended into the arroyo which was a deep one with sheltering sides that rose above them fully ten feet.

“It doesn’t go all the way,” objected the girl, who was beginning to know the geography of the place already. 88

“I don’t want it to,” replied Scott. “It turns off and runs at an angle—just above the dining-room. I’m going to leave you and the horses there out of sight.”

“Leave us!”

“You didn’t think I was going to turn tail and run when the boys were being held up, did you?”

Polly’s eyes shone with a mixture of fear and excitement.

“Do you mean it’s a real hold-up?” she gasped.

“Haven’t the least idea, but it sure does look like one, especially if that’s Pachuca, himself, on that sorrel. Then, again, it may be the Federal Government quartering men on us. In either case ladies and horse-flesh are better out of the way.”

“But I’m not afraid,” cried the girl, her teeth chattering with excitement. “At least, I don’t think I am—much. Anyhow, I’ll be lots more scared down here in this hole alone.”

“You won’t be alone; you’ve got two good horses to take care of. Thank the Lord, Hard is out of it—that’s three horses we can save.”

Hard had ridden to Conejo the day before and had not returned.

“I’m going to leave you this.” Scott took his revolver from the holster and handed it to the girl, who took it reluctantly.

“I’m more afraid of it than I am of Juan Pachuca,” she pleaded. 89

“You’ve no call to be,” was the reply. “Don’t be a baby—brace up and stay here with these horses. They’re not looking for you and they’ll never come down here. These are the two best horses we’ve got and I’m cussed if I’m going to hand ’em over to a bunch of greasers.”

“Oh!” Polly gasped again. No one had ever spoken to her quite like this before. “You can’t go unarmed, can you?”

“Never mind me. You stay here till I come for you. If anybody bothers you, you shoot. Understand?”

“Yes, I do.”

Scott proceeded to climb cautiously out of the arroyo and in a moment was out of Polly’s sight. He looked back once and saw the girl standing where he had left her, holding the reins of the two horses, her eyes big with excitement, watching his every movement. He waved his hand, then turned his back upon her.

“That’s a good youngster,” he said to himself. “Plenty of spunk but knows when to mind. I’m afraid that if I was ten years younger I might make a fool of myself—for she’d never look at me.”

The spot at which he had left the sheltering arroyo was two or three hundred feet from the cabin in which he was living with Hard and Adams. His idea was to steal into the house from the rear, arm himself, and then see what he could do, though, of course, he realized that their small force could do little against Pachuca, who not only had some twenty-five or thirty men of his own, but who could easily count on the Mexicans who worked on the place. 90

As he walked quickly in the direction of the house, he noticed Pachuca, for he it was on the sorrel horse, giving orders loudly in Spanish to his men who were scattered around the place—many of them down at the corral. He did not see any of his own people, which puzzled him a little. As he entered his cabin and crossed the living-room to go to the bedroom, where he kept an extra gun, he nearly stumbled over the body of a man.

It was Adams, lying in the middle of the room, dead—or had the boy only fainted? Scott rummaged in the cupboard for the whiskey bottle and poured a bit of the liquor down his throat. Jimmy opened his eyes and stared dizzily around. Scott saw that the floor around him was covered with blood.

“What is it, boy? Those hounds shoot you?” he demanded. Adams grinned shakily.

“You’ve hit it, brainy one,” he muttered. “Help me into a chair, Scotty, I ain’t dead, only winged in the left hin’ leg.”

Scott lifted him gently and placed him in the chair, then went into his room and secured the gun. He brought a towel back with him and staunched the flow of blood from the leg with a clumsily fashioned bandage.

“He busted in on us while we were taking our afternoon naps,” said Jimmy, weakly. “I happened to be taking mine in the office as per usual. I saw Pachuca riding up so I grabbed my gun and beat it for the door. They had me covered, about ten of them before I could show my face. They 91 asked for the cash box and when I said we hadn’t one, one of ’em blazed away and hit me in the leg. When I toppled over they made a rush for the office—most of ’em over me.”

“The safe?”

“I thought of that and it occurred to me that I’d better clear out before it struck them that I might know the combination. So while they were enjoying themselves inside, I crawled down here. I hadn’t gone half-way before I heard ’em blow it up. Oh, yes, they got the pay chest all right, all right.”

“Well, what then?” grunted Scott.

“Part of the crowd had gone down to the corral and the rest were down at the store. Just as I crawled in here, I saw Williams come out of the store and get it in the gun arm—the train gang were caught without their guns, and they’ve got ’em all lined up outside the store. They’ve looted the store and the corral and they’ve got all our greasers stirred up to join ’em. Say, there’s no use your mixing in—you can’t do anything.”

“I can spoil Don Juan’s pretty looks, I guess!” snarled Scott. “That’ll be something.”

“Hold on—give me some more of that whiskey before you go. Thanks. Now go and get your fool head shot off if you want to.”

With a growl of rage, Scott flung out of the house. He strode in the direction of the store where the prisoners still stood helplessly. They had seen firearms, dry-goods, canned food, and Williams’ cash box carried out and deposited in the automobile which stood at the side of the 92 store. Now they awaited the next move. Pachuca was evidently gathering his forces for departure. The Athens Mexicans had collected their families, their household goods, and whatever else they could lay their hands on and were ready to follow.

These preparations for a general exodus were the first things to strike Scott as he came out of the cabin. It was exasperating, but what could you expect? There was no knowing what rosy tale Pachuca had told them; more than likely that the American army had crossed the border and that they were striking for their altars and their fires. He saw women, babies, and household goods loaded upon his good horse-flesh and disappearing down the road.

Scott's blood boiled. His impulse was to shoot Juan Pachuca without warning. He raised his arm and then he paused. One does not shoot men in the back easily unless one is used to doing it. At that moment a Mexican saw him and yelled. Instantly everyone saw him. Pachuca whirled his horse about. It reared and plunged. Its rider laughed loudly.

"Ah, there you are, friend Scott!" he called. "I told you——" He brought his gun from his hip with a sudden twist. The two men fired simultaneously. Scott thought—hoped—that he saw Pachuca waver, but the air was full of smoke and he was dazed. He fired again.

Pachuca's horse began to pitch violently; it took all its rider's famous horsemanship to keep in the saddle. At the same moment, two men stole up behind Scott, who was rushing forward, seized him, threw him to the ground, and disarmed him. One of them took his rope and bound the American, while both of them grinned and muttered in Spanish. 93

By this time, Pachuca had defeated the evident intentions of the sorrel to buck himself through the store window, and uttering a cry dashed off in the direction of the automobile.

"Adios, Señor Scott!" he cried, as he went. "Next time you will take a neighbor's good word, eh?"

"Next time I'll take a soft-nosed bullet and get you back of the ear, you rotten little half-breed!" yelled Scott, maddened with helplessness and rage, rolling in the dust.

"Marc Scott, ain't you got any sense? Keep your mouth shut!" screamed Mrs. Van Zandt in terror as they gathered around the prostrate man and untied him while the last of the raiders rode off.

"Did they get everything?" he demanded as he got to his feet.

"All except honor and they didn't leave enough of that to stick in your eye," responded Mrs. Van, bitterly. "They got Adams in the leg and Williams in the arm and took off the whole greaser population. Here, wipe your face off with this handkerchief before you rub all that sand in your eyes."

Scott obeyed meekly.

"Where's the girl?" demanded Williams.

"Down the arroyo with the horses," replied Scott. "We saw the outfit in time or Pachuca'd have had her, too." 94

"He asked me where she was and I told him she'd gone home," said Mrs. Van. "I was awful scared Dolores would give me away but I reckon she didn't hear."

They stared malevolently at the vanishing auto. Pachuca had turned the sorrel over to another man and was driving the car himself. Suddenly, they saw him stop and give an order. Several of the men dismounted and were laying something along the track. Then with a yell, they all bolted, the auto in the lead, the horsemen following. A few seconds and they had disappeared around a curve in the road.

"Now, what the ——" began Williams, when he was answered—there was a crash, the sight of rocks and sand flying, and a thunderous reverberation.

"The mutts have blown up the track!" burst from the engineer, furiously.

"They would," replied Scott, sourly. "Want to cut us off from Conejo till they've made their getaway! Probably cut the wires, too. Go and see, Miller. If they haven't, get Morgan and tell him Pachuca's on the rampage. Did he say what was up? What he was doing this for?" he asked.

"Not him," said O'Grady, disgustedly. "Bring out your dead—that's Johnny Pachuca—no flourishes about him."

"You come in here with me and look at Joe Williams' arm," commanded Mrs. Van. "It don't look to me as if it was broke, do you think so?"

"I'll see to Adams," said Scott. "Johnson, you go down to the arroyo and get the girl." And he went down the street to the cabin. 95

"Well, did he get everything?" demanded Adams, as Scott entered.

"All he could carry. He left the victrola for you, Jimmy, and the stove for Mrs. Van."

"Gosh! What did you do with Miss Polly?"

"Left her with the horses in the arroyo."

"That was smart of you, Scotty. I'll bet she wanted to come?"

"I'll bet she did, but she didn't get to come. Let's have another look at the leg, Jimmy."

They bathed it as well as they could. It had stopped bleeding and they bandaged it carefully with another towel.

"I don't believe the bone's broke, Jimmy, but I don't like the looks of it," said the amateur surgeon. "You need a doctor."

“There ain’t any except that greaser over at Conejo,” said Adams, gloomily. “Morgan says he’s so dirty he won’t let him touch his kids. I don’t want blood poisoning, you bet. Did they blow up the track?”

Scott nodded. “There’s Johnson,” he exclaimed, looking out of the window. “He’s got the horses but not the girl. Hey, there, Tom, where’s Miss Polly?” he cried as the engineer dismounted and came into the house.

“She wasn’t there, Scotty. I found the horses tied to a branch of a tree that grew out of the side of the arroyo but there wasn’t no sign of the girl anywhere.”

Scott’s face darkened. “She was scared and went further up,” he said. “Did you look?”

“Looked and hollered and then some, but she was clean gone.”

Scott muttered something, flung out of the house and threw himself on his horse. In a moment he was tearing up the road.

“Where’s that ugly devil going?” said Johnson, disgustedly. “Didn’t I tell him she’d gone? Is he going to try to chase Johnny Pachuca into the mountains after her?”

“Gone clean nuts!” remarked Adams, gloomily.

“I knew that when I seen him rolling in the dirt and yelling ‘half-breed,’” replied Johnson. “You might as well poison a Mexican as to call him ‘half-breed.’ According to them they’re all second cousins to the King of Spain. Does your leg hurt much, Jimmy?”

“Well, I’ve had legs that felt better,” said Adams, cheerfully. “Where you going, Tom?” as the long, lank engineer swung out of the room.

“To see the boss get his throat cut,” was the reply. “Pachuca’s got the money, the guns and the girl; it don’t seem very good sense to hand him the whole office force but if the boss says so, here goes.”

CHAPTER VII

MISS CHICAGO

Polly stood where Scott left her, gazing after him with a mixture of horror and excitement; horror at the thought that one of the terrible raids of which she had so often heard was taking place scarce two hundred yards from where she stood, and excitement because she was there—she, Polly Street, who had so far in her life never met with any adventure more thrilling than a punctured tire or a lost golf match.

Then, suddenly, it dawned upon her that Scott had left her his only weapon; had gone empty-handed into the trouble! The thought carried a double meaning. He had told her that she was safe, but he had left her his gun. Then there was danger—the Mexicans might come and find her; secondly, he had gone unarmed for her sake. He, the indifferent, the uncaring, the man who didn’t mind whether she smiled on him or snubbed him! Was it only because she was a girl and he a man, or did he, after all, care a little bit?

She had threatened, boastingly, to make him care, but she realized that she was beginning to care a little herself; that she could not stay quietly in the arroyo without knowing what was happening to him; that she must see and hear no matter what the risk.

She looked about her in some perplexity. She had been told that a western horse would stand contentedly if his reins were thrown over his head; but she doubted the universal truth of this statement.

“They might if there was grass for them to nibble,” she decided. “But they never would in this hole. Come on, ponies, let’s see what we can do.” And gathering up the reins she led the horses in the direction Scott had gone. She saw the place where he had scrambled out of the arroyo, and, oh, good luck, a clump of mesquite growing out of the crumbling wall further down. She fastened the bridle reins to the mesquite and left the horses contentedly chewing at it.

Very cautiously she crept up the incline and took a peek at the situation. She was just in time to see Scott disappear into the cabin where Adams lay wounded. Polly’s face fell. That didn’t look very heroic—crawling in by the back door! No wonder he didn’t want her to see him. Then she took another look. She saw the crowd down by the corral, catching and saddling unwilling horses. Women were hurrying in and out of cabins, dragging household goods and children with them.

The little crowd before the store she could not see as the building itself prevented, but she saw Pachuca with several of his men riding up and down, and she also saw several unmounted Mexicans who had been looting the store, carry the goods out and throw them in the car which stood at the side of the building. Instinctively the girl reconstructed the action of the bandits.

“A lot of them came on horseback and the rest in the car. They’re going to carry what they’ve

taken in the car and they're taking the horses for the extra men. Our Mexicans and their women are going with them and are helping themselves to whatever they want. But where are our men? I didn't think they'd sit down and be plundered without putting up some kind of a fight."

She saw the crowd which had been looting the store start for the corral. The car stood alone. Without doubt they had stopped it a little way from the street and made a dash on horseback. Polly's eyes shone.

She glanced at the sun; it was going down rapidly. It would soon be dusk. She crept cautiously out of the arroyo. If only none of the men on horseback saw her she might manage it, wild as her plan was. She shook with fear but she did not falter; a girl does not have an obstinate chin for nothing. She glanced both ways; Pachuca was still riding up and down, issuing orders which were obeyed noisily but cheerfully. She saw him point toward the corral and saw the men who had been loading the car with plunder start toward the corral on a run.

"Going after more horses," thought the girl, stopping and crouching back of one of the cabins. If they should see her—she held her breath. The next moment she was running for the car, still sheltered by the cabins. It was this moment that Scott chose to walk down the street and draw the attention of the raiders. Polly saw him and her heart warmed.

"I knew he wasn't a coward!" she almost sobbed. "Oh, I'm glad—but he needn't be such an idiot as that. He'll be shot as sure as I'm here."

Panic stricken, she increased her pace and in a minute had reached the shelter of the car. Then the shots burst upon her ears. She turned white and clung to the door of the car. If they had killed him! She saw Scott's face as he had left her—friendly, ugly, determined—and she knew that if they had killed him nothing else would matter—anything might happen and she would not care. Mechanically, she opened the door of the car and hastily moved some of the plunder from the floor to the seat. The Mexicans had tossed in canned goods, blankets, rifles, a couple of cash boxes and even a box of victrola records. Then she crawled into the space she had made and seizing one of the blankets, drew it over herself and over a part of the loot, giving the tonneau of the car the appearance of being full of plunder which was protected from the dust by a blanket.

There was a clatter of hoofs and Polly heard Scott's parting yell. It brought a glorious relief to her mind for surely no one who was badly hurt could be as mad as that! She heard the answering yells of the Mexicans, then she felt and heard the door of the car flung open; someone had jumped in and was starting the engine. Something struck her—a man had thrown his bundle into the car that he might take a howling youngster on his saddle. Polly's teeth chattered with fear; she was realizing with every throb of the engine the awful risk she was taking.

Suddenly the car moved. Polly cowered in her uncomfortable position. Cold with terror she clutched the revolver Scott had given her. Suppose at the last minute some of the other men should decide to get into the car?

"But I won't suppose! There wouldn't have been any time to suppose if I'd gone to war to drive an ambulance. The boys didn't suppose when they went over the top—they just went! I hope to goodness none of these guns I'm sitting on are loaded."

The car bumped along on the rutty road and the noise of the riders died away.

"I knew it," the girl said triumphantly. "I knew the horseback people would take to the trail as soon as they could, and the automobile can't, of course. I've scored one point——"

The car stopped. Polly's breathing apparatus stopped simultaneously. What was it? Had he seen her? Or was he about to pull the loot to pieces and discover her? She listened with her whole body, but heard nothing from the driver. Instead, came the detonation of the dynamited tracks. The ground beneath the car trembled. Then she heard the man laugh as he started the car again.

"They've blown up something! That sounds like Don Juan's voice, too. If I could only see!"

The car soon moved at its former speed. On and on it went. Sometimes the road would be smooth, the driver having found wagon ruts and stayed in them. Again, it would be full of bumps and jars. It was very uncomfortable, her position being wretchedly cramped. Once she was startled to hear the driver break into song. It sounded like a Spanish love song and his voice was a lyric tenor and very musical. It was Pachuca! She determined to know what was going on.

Pushing aside a corner of the blanket she saw that it was beginning to grow dusky. Cautiously she raised herself until she could see. Pachuca was bent over the wheel. Looking back she saw the road empty of riders.

She looked ahead again. They were in the foothills already. Polly drew a long breath, then leaning over the back of the seat said desperately:

"Señor Pachuca, would you mind turning round a moment?"

If she had exploded the revolver in his ear, Pachuca could not have given a greater start.

"*Madre di Dios!*" he gasped, as the machine swerved.

"Please, do mind the wheel—that was an awful curve!"

"Where did you come from?" demanded the young man.

"I have been hidden among the stolen goods," replied Polly. "I've heard a lot about you lately, señor, but I honestly didn't believe you were a thief until I saw with my own eyes."

Pachuca stopped the machine and turning glared at the girl, also at the weapon which she pointed with a very unsteady hand in his direction.

"If you'll put that thing down I'll try to explain to you the difference between stealing and requisitioning property in war times," he said, angrily.

"If you'll turn the car around you can explain all the way back to Athens," said Polly, sharply. 103
"I'm awfully tired and stiff and my hand is shaky—the man who gave me this gun told me it was ready to go off. I don't want it to go off but if it does I can't help it. Will you please turn around?"

"No, I won't. The road is too narrow."

"I've turned a Red Cross ambulance around in a lane no wider than this out near Fort Sheridan and I didn't spill anybody either. You're a better driver than I am."

Pachuca shrugged his shoulders but he turned the car. There was an ugly look in his eyes and Polly clutched her weapon tightly. She tried to keep her voice steady but it quavered desperately.

"If you try to do anything mean—upset the car or anything like that, I'm going to fire—I certainly will—as sure as I'm red-headed."

The car sped on. Suddenly Pachuca's shoulders began to shake. He turned a laughing face toward Polly.

"You are so pretty and so disagreeable," he said. "Are all Chicago ladies like you?"

"No. Some of them are not so pretty and are more agreeable," replied the girl, nervously. "Please—you just missed that chuck-hole!"

"Why should I care? I do not want to go to Athens."

"No, but you don't want to go to Heaven, either, do you? Or—well, you know what I mean. I don't know how much of a jar it would take to make this thing go off. A chuck-hole might do it." 104

Pachuca, evidently depressed, relapsed into silence. It was growing colder and darker—would they never get there? However, she would not have been Polly had she kept still.

"Señor Pachuca, what did you mean by requisitioning goods? You aren't working for the government, are you?"

"No."

"Has another revolution broken out?"

"My dear young lady, Sonora has seceded and other states will follow. Mexico is about to throw off Carranza and his government. Is that clear?"

"Pretty clear—only I don't understand why you should take our things."

"I am raising a regiment. When it is complete I shall lead it into the field to fight for Mexico."

"I see. That's why you wanted our men?"

"A regiment means men, señorita."

"And our blankets and money and guns and victrola records?"

"Why not? You Americans make your profit from us, why should you not share in our obligations? Did your generals spare the South when you had your Civil War? War is not a pretty thing, señorita."

"They were at war with the South and they took——"

"Exactly. They took. An American has but one code of morals, and that is to take. I do not quarrel with it, I like it. I also take."

Polly did not reply. She was tired and cold and she wanted to get home. Her hand was cramped and shaky—her threat had not been an idle one. She realized also that Pachuca for all his 105
docility was only waiting the opportunity to turn the tables on her. He was a young man most fertile in expedients and it behooved her to be extremely vigilant. He would be quite capable of shooting up the wrong road and carrying her miles in a strange direction.

The thought made her feel panicky. She tried to remember the turns in the road, only to realize that she had not seen the road—she had been in the bottom of the car, her head covered with a blanket when she had traveled it so short a time ago. Everything looked ghostly and unreal to her in the half light, while Pachuca, she firmly believed, could see in the dark with those handsome eyes of his quite as well as any family cat out for a run.

"Go faster, please," she said, sharply, for wherever they were going it might be as well to get there before dark. "It's getting late and I'm cold."

Obediently Pachuca swung into the next speed and the car bumped cheerfully along, the big lights casting a bewildering glare before them.

"If I only knew where we were and what he has up his sleeve!" the girl groaned inwardly. "I know he has something because he isn't making any fuss. This road is rougher than it was when we came, too; he has taken a wrong turn—I know he has!"

Pachuca, apparently resigned to his fate, began to hum melodiously.

"Señor!" Polly's voice was sharp with apprehension and weariness. 106

“Señorita?”

“We are on the wrong road; I am sure of it. Go back to the place where you left it.”

“With perfect willingness, dear lady, but where shall I go? The road leads to Athens. Is that not where we want to go—I mean where you want to go?”

“No—I don’t know—I think you’re tricking me. This isn’t the way we came. It doesn’t look to me like a road at all—I think you’re going over the open country. I——” The girl paused. It was disheartening—to go through so much and then to fail at last. She peered ahead into the dim light, trying to see what lay beyond the bright lights of the car. It did look like open country. Ahead lay a hill—a tall hill. Would Pachuca try to make it or would he climb around the side of it? Something—it looked like a man on horseback—was coming rapidly down the hill. Had she miscalculated and were some of Pachuca’s men still on the road? Perhaps the same thought struck the Mexican, for he slowed the car down and peered eagerly ahead. Polly clutched the revolver feverishly.

“If it’s one of your men and you stop—I shall fire!” she said, quickly.

Both stared into the dusk in silence. The rider came almost into the glare of the lamps.

“Stop!” cried the girl, loudly. “It’s Mr. Scott!”

The car stopped, the horse was drawn to his haunches, and Scott stared at the couple over his gun.

“Game’s up, Pachuca,” he said, shortly. “You’re my prisoner.” 107

“Oh!” cried Polly, jumping out of the car and running to Scott. “I knew he hadn’t killed you—but I wouldn’t ask him for fear he’d say he had! I knew——” She clutched his stirrup desperately.

Scott stared. “Well. I’m——!” he said, and reaching down he caught the swaying girl by the arm.

“I’m not going to faint—I never do,” she cried, clinging to his arm. “Don’t let him get away.”

“Keep him covered. He’s not going to get away.” Scott swung himself out of the saddle, wound the bridle reins around the pommel and gave the horse a clap which started him toward home. “Well, old man, I’ll take the gun, I reckon. Thanks. What’s up? Getting up a revolution?”

“He doesn’t have to; it’s already got up,” said Polly, as she climbed into her place again. “I hid in the car and made him come back,” she added. “But I was afraid we were off the road.”

“You were,” said Scott, briefly. “I saw your lights from the hilltop and came over this way. He was putting one over on you all right.” He tossed into the back of the car some of the stuff which was in his way and took the seat beside Pachuca who preserved a sullen silence. “Well, I guess we’ve had enough of this. Home, James!”

There was not much conversation. Pachuca was in a bad humor and confined his attention to the wheel, a precaution which the increasing darkness rendered highly prudent; Scott was intent upon watching the young Mexican, determined to have no tricks played upon him; while Polly, exhausted by the excitement of the past hour, crouched quietly in the crowded tonneau. A 108
long way in the rear the patient pony trotted on his homeward way, wondering, no doubt, why things that moved on wheels could go so much faster than those traveling on plain, old-fashioned legs.

Out of the dark came a figure on horseback—as unexpectedly as Scott himself had done a few moments ago. Scott tightened his grasp on his revolver.

“If he’s a friend of yours, señor, I’m afraid you’ll have to go by without recognizing him,” he said.

“He is not,” replied Pachuca. “My friends are better horsemen than that.”

“It’s Tom,” laughed Scott, suddenly. “He’s come after me. Slow down, señor, if you please.”

Johnson, riding rapidly, swerved suddenly to one side as the big machine without lights came toward him.

“What the——” he began.

“Yes, it’s us,” said Scott, drily. “We’ve made a haul and we’re bringing it in. Suppose you wait for that horse of mine, will you, Tom, and see that he gets home all right? Thanks to this gentleman and his friends we’ve only got three head of cattle left, so we’d best be careful of them.”

“You bet,” responded Johnson, heartily. “How’d you do it, old man?” he asked.

“I didn’t, the lady in the case did it,” responded Scott. “She’ll tell you about it later. Whoop her up, will you, señor? It’s getting chilly around here.”

109

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRISONER

Athens was dark and lonely-looking as the big machine reëntered it. There was the usual light in the store and one in the house occupied by Mrs. Van Zandt and Polly. Scott motioned to Pachuca to draw up in front of the cabin. Mrs. Van Zandt came out as the machine stopped; evidently she was in doubt as to whether or not it was another invasion, for she stopped in the doorway and peered out anxiously.

“It’s all right, Mrs. Van!” cried Scott, cheerfully. “I’ve brought her back.”

Polly jumped out and ran to the astonished woman. “It’s all right,” she reiterated.

“Yes, I see it is; but where did you get that car?”

“It’s Señor Pachuca’s and we’ve got him, too,” replied the girl, in an undertone. “And we’ve brought back some of the things they took.”

“Has Hard come back?” demanded Scott, as Mrs. Van came out to the machine.

“No, and I wish he would. I’m worried about Jimmy Adams. Where are you going to put that chap?” asked Mrs. Van, eyeing Pachuca resentfully.

“I think I’ll ask him to spend the night in Hard’s office,” replied Scott, thoughtfully. “It’s the only place we’ve got that isn’t on the ground floor, and I guess nobody wants to put in the night doing sentry duty. Just bring over a couple of blankets, will you, Mrs. Van?” 110

Mrs. Van Zandt and Polly went into the house and Scott with his prisoner walked across to the office where they fell in with O’Grady, who grinned pleasantly when the state of affairs was explained to him.

“Come back to spend the night with us? Sure we can make him comfy! Up-stairs, son. You can have the engineer’s office to yourself,” he added, hospitably.

“I don’t like leaving you here, Pachuca,” said Scott, as he threw open the door of Hard’s office. “It’s not my idea of entertaining the aristocracy, but it’s the best I can do for a gentleman of your peculiar habits.”

“What is your idea?” remarked Pachuca, surveying the small room nonchalantly. “Don’t you think it would be more practical to let me go? I can’t do any more harm to-day, you know.”

“That’s just what I don’t know,” replied Scott, quietly. “I know you can’t do any harm to anyone but yourself while you’re locked up here, and I want to turn you over in my mind a little.”

“I’ll make it worth your while to let me drive that car off the place while you’re all asleep,” proposed Pachuca, smiling.

“You’re a persuasive cuss, but we need that car.”

“Going to do a little banditing on our own hook,” put in O’Grady, cheerfully.

“Shut up, Matt! We’ll send you over some supper, Pachuca, and some bedding by and by,” and locking the door behind them, the two men went downstairs. 111

“You think he can’t slide out?” suggested Matt, doubtfully. “He’s a crafty devil.”

“If he wants to risk breaking a bone or two jumping out of the window, let him try,” said Scott, easily. “How’s Williams?”

“Pretty good. No bones broke and Mrs. Van bandaged him up. He’s sore as the devil about his stuff.”

“We got a good deal of it back. We’ll run the car down to the store and see just what we did get.” And Scott related Polly’s adventure with much enjoyment.

“She’s a mighty game youngster,” declared O’Grady, admiringly. “I didn’t know they raised ’em like that in the East.”

“I’ll swear I didn’t. Lucky for His Nobs she didn’t let a bullet into him by mistake.”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s a case of ‘eventually, why not now?’”

A search of the machine revealed the more important part of the loot—the money taken from the safe in the office, Williams’ cash box, and a good many firearms, blankets and small items. Horses, saddles, bridles, canned goods and innumerable other effects had been carried off by the horseback riders, never to be regained, unless, as Scott suggested, Pachuca could be traded off for them. And, of course, the mine would have to be closed down until more workers could be obtained, rather an improbable thing in the present state of the country.

“What beats me is, how did you happen to think of it?” demanded O’Grady of Polly a little later as they sat around the dining-room table eating a hastily improvised supper. 112

Polly chuckled. “Well, you see,” she said, modestly, “we’ve been having a lot of auto hold-ups in Chicago this winter and one of them happened to a friend of mine.

“She and a friend were coming home from a party one afternoon, and when she drew up at the house, two young men popped into the car, pointed revolvers at her and told her to drive up the avenue. Well, she drove up the avenue! She said the feel of that cold thing on the back of her neck kept her awake at night for months. Then when they had gone a little way, they stopped, dumped both the women out, and went off with the car.”

“Gosh, Chicago must be a great little place!” remarked Matt, admiringly.

“It just came to me when I saw them putting all those things into the car that if anybody could hide in it and make whoever was driving return the goods it would be—well—rather a nice thing to do. Of course, I took an awful chance. The horseback people might not have taken the trail—but even then the machine would have outdistanced them. I felt sure I could get Pachuca alone.”

“You took a chance you’d no business to take,” growled Scott. “When I told you to stay down in that arroyo, I meant stay.”

“I know you did but I couldn’t,” apologized Polly.

“The only thing you did wrong was not leaving that young reptile in the middle of the road like the thieves did those women,” pronounced Mrs. Van Zandt, authoritatively. 113

“I thought of it but I didn’t have the heart,” said Polly. “After all, he’d been kind to me, and he is a gentleman.”

“Gentleman! My God!” Scott’s profanity was innocent with true horror.

“First time I ever heard a hoss-thief called a gentleman,” chuckled Matt.

“Well,” Polly looked a bit crestfallen. “I mean, he’s educated and he comes of good family.”

“I don’t go much on family,” said Mrs. Van, wisely. “I’ve seen some mighty mean skunks hangin’ around stage doors who were as blue-blooded as dogs in a show. Why, even your own family you can’t be too sure about! I had an old auntie who used to say she never went back of second cousins—’twasn’t safe.”

“Well, that’s true, too,” pronounced Matt. “Some don’t feel easy even with seconds.” He gathered up his dishes and followed Mrs. Van into the kitchen with them. Polly ate industriously, while Scott stalked to the window and stood lighting a cigarette.

“Mr. Scott,” she said, after a long pause, “are you worried about Jimmy Adams?”

“Yes, I am,” was the curt reply.

“Isn’t there a doctor in Conejo?”

“Yes, but he’s a dirty scoundrel; I’d hate to have him handle a case like this. We may have to, though, thanks to your gentleman friend.”

“You’re rather a rude person, aren’t you?” 114

“I reckon so. Anyhow, if he’s a gentleman, I’m afraid I’d never pass muster.”

“Still,” persisted Polly, pleasantly, “you will admit that he is agreeable?”

“Agreeable nothing!” growled Scott. “He’s a disreputable young varmint, and no decent girl ought to speak to him.”

Polly smiled and rising, gathered up her plate and cup and carried them to the hole in the wall. Then she walked over to the window and said confidentially:

“I think it would be fun if you would tell me some of the things he’s done. Not the yarn about the actress and the man higher up—Mr. Hard told me that—but some other really exciting ones.”

“I’m not sufficiently interested in the chap,” replied Scott, gruffly. “Perhaps you’d like to carry him his dinner and ask him to tell you himself.”

“I would,” replied the girl, promptly. “I thought perhaps you were thinking of starving him.”

“No, I don’t care to starve him. I want to swap him off for our horses, if I can. He ain’t worth a dozen or two good horses, but we can try.”

“Well, of course, we have the car to make things square.”

“Yes, we have the car, in case we have to quit in a hurry.”

“Quit? You mean before Bob comes back?” the girl’s face was a bit scared.

“We may get orders to close up the mine. You heard what he said—that the state had seceded? Well, that means civil war, and civil war in Mexico can mean a good many things. I’m not sure that I want two women on my hands under the circumstances.” 115

“What are you talking about, Marc Scott? Is it a Yaqui rising?” Mrs. Van Zandt thrust her head through the hole in the wall.

“I don’t know what it is. Pachuca says there’s a revolution on. I’m hoping to get more news about it when Hard comes back.”

“I don’t take much stock in these Yaqui yarns,” said Matt, coming back with another supply of food.

“Them Indians ain’t half as bad as the greasers like to make out. Of course, they feel like they had a right to raise thunder now and then because they know they ain’t been treated white. But you take it from me, I’ve been knockin’ around Mexico for some time, and nine times out of ten there’s a greaser back of everything that’s laid at a Yaqui’s door.”

“That’s true enough,” nodded Mrs. Van.

“I made up my mind when I read in that El Paso paper that there was going to be a Yaqui rising and that the gov’ment was orderin’ troops into Sonora, that the gov’ment most probably had somethin’ up its sleeve.”

“Most likely,” acceded Scott.

“Well, I don’t expect to understand Mexican politics,” said Polly, “but why, if Mr. Carranza wants to be president again, doesn’t he come out like a little man and say so, instead of trying to stir up things with troops?”

“He can’t be president again. The constitution under which he took office forbids a second term,” replied Scott. “He might be military dictator, however, if he stirred up a revolution and 116
came out on top. That’s what the Sonora people say. But you can’t tell; it may be a square deal and there may be a Yaqui rising.”

“Even then this ain’t the place for women folks,” grumbled O’Grady.

“Nor men neither,” retorted Mrs. Van Zandt. “I’ve been trying to get Mr. Herrick on the ’phone to let him know there was trouble on board, but I couldn’t even get Central.”

“Pachuca would attend to that, of course,” said Scott. “We’ll drive over there in the morning and see if he doesn’t want to come back with us.”

“Am I really going to see that fascinating person?” sighed Polly. “I’m beginning to think he’s just hot air.”

“Mighty little hot air about old Herrick,” chuckled Matt. “All wool and a yard wide, I’d say.”

“Well, he is. That’s more than I’d say about a good many artistic chaps,” remarked Mrs. Van. “Most of ’em I hate—they’re so crooked. The Lord starts ’em weak and the women finish ’em. He sure can play, though. Regular pictures—some of the things he composes. I can see the cows grazing on the hills in some of ’em.”

“How queer of him to stay down here!” said the girl, wonderingly.

“Why?” demanded Scott, warmly. “It seems to me that a country like this has a lot more to offer that kind of man than your cities have. What’s New York or Chicago got to give him like these 117
grim old mountains, and the lonesome little canyons with the cows feeding up and down hunting for water holes, and the Mexican folks with their soft voices and fancy manners and all the rest of it?”

“Cows are queer,” continued Mrs. Van, pursuing her own thought cheerfully. “Ever see the old ones get between you and the calves when you rode by ’em? Awful kind of human, they are.”

Scott chuckled. “One summer I was up in New Mexico on a ranch when they were rounding up. They brought in the cattle from all over the place; for days they were getting in strays out of the canyons. Among them were two old bulls. Funny old codgers they were, and as much alike as two peas in a pod—fat, chunky, ragged looking old rascals.

“Well, all during the round-up those old boys stayed together—in the bull pen and out. We named them Tweedledum and Tweedledee. By George, after they’d been turned out on the range again, I was riding down a canyon about a couple of miles from the ranch, and who should I see but those two old pals, hoofing it together as chummy as two old men walking in the park.”

“Well, how’s the chow?” Johnson’s voice came from the doorway. “Not much left, I should say, judging from the happy faces I see around me.”

“Come in, Tommy, I’m just gettin’ something ready for that Mexican, but there’s plenty for you,” said Mrs. Van. 118

“Where’d you put the feller?”

“In Hard’s office,” said Scott. “Will you cart him his grub, Matt?”

“You said I might. I want to,” protested Polly.

“Certainly.” Scott handed her the key ceremoniously. “You’ve earned the right to have your own way to-night, but Matt goes with you. He’s not above throttling you to make a getaway.”

“It’s a funny world,” mused Polly, as she walked along beside Matt, who carried the tray balanced aloft on one outstretched palm. “Three weeks ago I was going to teas at the Blackstone; now I’m carrying grub to a Mexican bandit with the assistance of a fireman. How awfully well you carry that tray!” she said, admiringly.

“Sure! Learned to do that one winter in Minneapolis when I was out of a job. Handy sort of thing to know.”

“Oh!” gasped the girl. Then to herself: “Why should I think it queer? Cousin Ben put himself through college by waiting on the students at table and we thought he had a lot of pep to do it.”

“You go on up and holler to the guy that we’re coming but don’t you open the door till I get there. He might paste you one.”

Polly complied. She sprang up the stairs with a freedom of motion that won O’Grady’s silent admiration.

“Some action!” he commented. “Takes them stairs as easy as a pussy-cat goes up a tree. Some girl that! Old Scotty’s jealous of the greaser—do him good—he’s gettin’ to be a regular old 119
settin’ hen. Hope she shakes him up a bit.”

“Señor Pachuca!” called Polly at the top of the stairs. “We’ve brought you some supper. May we come in?”

“Gracias, señorita, but that rests with you,” was the response.

“I’m going to open it. He won’t do anything,” said Polly, decidedly.

The room was dimly lighted. In the open window sat Pachuca—outside lay the open country, moonlit and lovely, the grim coloring of the day now touched with silvery softness. Pachuca leaped to his feet and relieved the girl of the tray which he placed on the desk.

“I am obliged,” he said, with a touch of a sneer. “The services of a major domo and a beautiful waitress are more than I expected.”

“If you ask me, I’d say it was more than you deserve,” replied Matt, tersely. “I’m going out to sit on the stairs. If the lady wants to stop and visit with you she can, but don’t you try no monkey tricks because they won’t go down. I’m heeled.”

Pachuca shrugged his shapely shoulders, seated himself and began to eat.

“I am hungry,” he admitted. “I have had what you call a hard day’s work.”

“I wish,” said the girl, severely, “that you’d tell me why you do such things? You’re a gentleman—not a bandit.”

“Of course I’m not a bandit.” Pachuca’s composure appeared to be deserting him. “You do not seem to understand—you Americans—that Mexico is our country and that we must deal with its political situations independently of you and your affairs.” 120

“Oh,” innocently, “I didn’t know that political situations demanded blankets and victrola records.”

“You must make allowances for my people. They are poor and ignorant.”

“It isn’t the people we complain about. They only do what you tell them to. Why should you come and tell them to stop working for us?”

“In your country it is only the walking delegate who does that?” grinned Pachuca.

“That’s different. This wasn’t a strike. These men didn’t want to stop work.”

“My dear girl, you seem to have lost sight of the fact that a revolution is taking place. It is their duty to stop working and to fight.”

“It always seems to be their duty to fight and they never get anything out of it!”

“They do get something out of it. They got their land when they overthrew Diaz. With Carranza, they got a new constitution. With Obregon, they will get peace and a good government.”

“Then you are for Obregon?”

“Naturally. But I must have men and horses and munitions. I—Juan Pachuca—cannot fight in the ranks.”

“I don’t see why not,” said Polly, candidly. “My brother fought in the ranks and he’s a college man. He didn’t mind.” 121

“Oh, well, in America—that is different! You have no ideas as to family. I beg your pardon, what I mean is, that your people are different.”

“Well, I hope we are,” replied Polly, piously. “But I’m afraid some of us aren’t as different as we ought to be.”

“Now we are even,” said the Mexican, showing his white teeth. “And you know why I took your men and horses. They will be made good to you when the country becomes settled.”

“I hope so, but it seems to me you’re going to have so many people to settle with that some of us are going to come out at the little end. Of course, your car will help some.”

Pachuca frowned. “Señorita,” he said, gravely, “I must have the car and I must get away from here to-night. Much depends upon it. Won’t you help me?” He leaned toward her as he spoke, his dark eyes luminous, his voice soft and caressing.

“The tiger kitty is purring,” thought Polly. “It’s a nice kitty but I mustn’t pet it. Señor,” she said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t.”

“Say rather that you won’t.”

Polly fingered the key which she had taken from Matt. Then she put it in the pocket of her sweater.

“It would be easy,” said Pachuca, persuasively. “You could throw it into the window there when everyone was asleep.”

“It would be easy,” agreed Polly, “but it wouldn’t be nice.”

Pachuca ate for a moment in silence. “I suppose,” he said, finally, “that an American girl never does anything that is not nice?” 122

“Well, I’d hardly go as far as to say that,” replied Polly, “but I don’t think you’d find many who would be as dishonest as—oh, what’s the use? You know I’d like to do it for you because you were kind to me, and I do not believe you meant to kidnap me——”

“Kidnap you!” wrathfully. “Who said I meant to kidnap you?”

“Oh, nobody, only——”

Pachuca began to laugh; gently at first, then wholeheartedly.

“He is jealous—that good Marc Scott! He told you I wanted to kidnap you—like Villa, eh? Does he think a Spanish gentleman so unattractive that he has to kidnap a young lady in order to

make love to her?”

“I don’t know what he thinks and I don’t care,” said Polly, angrily. “And I wouldn’t have come here if I had thought you were going to be foolish. I wanted to show you that I wasn’t ungrateful ——”

Pachuca had jumped to his feet and stood between her and the door. His manner was respectful and apologetic.

“Señorita, I beg your pardon! Indeed——”

“It’s not necessary,” said the girl, coldly, trying to pass him.

“No, no, I beg—do not go.” Then, in a lower tone, “I had a double reason for asking your help. I can be of help to you and to your brother.”

Polly paused in some surprise. From the stairway came the sound of energetic whistling—a medley of the “Wearin’ of the Green” and the “Long, Long Trail.” Pachuca continued eagerly. 123

“Yes, it sounds very extravagant, I know; what my brother-in-law used to call a bit thick. But I can help you—to a treasure.”

“A treasure?” incredulously.

“Exactly. You have heard that I was for a time with Villa?”

Polly nodded.

“Well, in his camp I met some very strange people—among them a fellow named Gasca—what you call a bad lot. He told me one night when he was very drunk—you know, señorita, how some people talk about their affairs when they are drunk?”

Polly’s eyes were beginning to shine with excitement.

“He told me that he and his brother had hidden a treasure over in New Mexico.”

“A treasure! Do you mean pieces-of-eight and Spanish doubloons?”

“Oh, no, I am afraid not. It would be bullion—ore. They took it from one of the Fiske, Doane Co. mines in Chihuahua. That is why your brother would be interested. Perhaps you have heard of the Sant Ynez mine?”

“Bullion!” Polly’s face dropped.

“For me, I would not object to bullion if I could get my hands on it, but I can’t,” said Pachuca, candidly. “Gasca, you understand, had this brother who lived in New Mexico, in a lonely sort of a spot on the border, with an Indian woman that he had stolen from her people. He helped Gasca get the treasure across the border—and they hid it in the canyon where he lived. 124

“Shortly after that they quarreled and the brother threatened to shoot Gasca if he came near the place. Also, he told the border patrol some things about Gasca so that he was afraid to go over any more. Just after I met Gasca, he had heard, in a roundabout way as my people hear things, that the brother had been killed and the Indian woman had died of a sickness. Gasca wanted me to go over with him to find out if the treasure was still there—he felt sure that it was because he said the brother would be afraid to dispose of it without his help—but I had what you call other fish to fry. Afterward, Gasca himself was shot for disobeying a command of the general. If you will help me to get away I will tell you exactly where that treasure is.”

Polly rose suddenly, the light of determination in her eyes.

“No,” she said, firmly. “I won’t. Mr. O’Grady, will you come and help me with this tray, please?”

“Sure Mike!” In two strides the fireman was in the room, his eyes looking searchingly at both the man and the girl. Pachuca, with a shrug of his shoulders, put his hands in his pockets and strode to the window. The dishes were piled up in silence, the door was locked—the key returning to Polly’s sweater pocket, and the two went back to the dining-room.

“Say, was that guy tryin’ to get fresh with you?” demanded Matt, as they went along. “I set out there on the steps because I thought mebbe you wanted to chat with the crittur, being acquaintances like, but if I’d of thought that he——” 125

“No, no, he was trying to bribe me to let him go.”

“Let him go? Well, if he ain’t got a nerve! What’d he offer you—a castle in Spain?”

“No,” replied the girl, “a buried treasure in New Mexico.”

“What? Well, say, he must have thought you was green to fall for that stuff. A bright, wide-awake girl like you, too. Was it under an elm tree fifty paces off by moonlight?”

“Why? Couldn’t there be a buried treasure in New Mexico?”

“Well, I suppose there could if there’s been a fool to bury it; but it seems to me I’d of tried something snappier if I’d been him. An oil well, or shares in a gold mine, or somethin’ first class in the bunk line.”

CHAPTER IX

AT LIBERTY

Polly and Matt continued their walk in silence until they reached the dining-room. They found Scott sitting as they had left him, smoking and thinking; while, through the hole in the wall, Mrs. Van Zandt could be seen and heard busy with the dishes.

“Well, did His Nobs enjoy his tea?” asked Scott.

“He did that! Kicked into it like a little man,” replied Matt, cheerfully. “Also he made the young lady a real sporting proposition.”

“What?”

“Oh, don’t be absurd!” snapped Polly, disgustedly. “Anybody’d suppose you were college boys at thé dansant.” And she went into the kitchen.

“Well, you see what you get, Matt; you would horn in. What do you mean—a sporting proposition?”

“Oh, a rich one. Buried treasure up in New Mexico—secret chart handed down to Juan Pachuca by a maiden aunt—I don’t know what all—just to get the key of the office, but she was too sharp for him.”

“I should hope so. Is that Hard?” Scott went to the window as the sound of hoof-beats was heard. Down the street came a man on horseback. Silhouetted against the moonlight, the tall Bostonian acquired a picturesqueness lacking in daylight. “I’ve got to take Hard out one of these days and teach him how to ride,” remarked Scott, meditatively. “Jolt some of that Boston stiffness out of him.”

“You can’t,” replied the Irishman, placidly. “It’s in his blood. His ancestors brought it over in the *Mayflower* with ’em from England. I’ll bet you Paul Revere rode just like Hard does.”

“Shucks, Matt, those English guys can ride—stands to reason they can. Look at the cross-country stuff they do! And on an English saddle at that.”

“Country? The country they ride over’s nothing to what the Irish do. A feller told me——”

“Hello, boys, what’s up? Why the theatre supper?” demanded Hard, entering.

He listened to the particulars which poured upon him. “Well,” he said, finally, “I’m sorry I missed the excitement. ’Twas ever thus. The only time our house ever burned down I was at a matinée of the ‘Black Crook.’ Well, you saved the cash?”

“Miss Polly did,” grinned Scott. “And we’ve got the boy that made the mischief.”

“Jimmy much hurt?”

“Afraid so.”

“I was afraid something like this would happen,” said Hard. “They told me over in Conejo that there was trouble on. They had an all-night session at Hermosillo and the state seceded.”

“That’s what Pachuca says.”

“Morgan’s taken his family up to Douglas.”

“Any news from Bob?”

“Just a letter for Miss Polly.”

“We won’t desert until we have orders, but I’m rather glad to have the car,” continued Scott. “I thought we’d run over and see Herrick in the morning.”

“I say, Scott, that Chinaman of Herrick’s is a doctor. Why not have him take a look at Jimmy’s leg?”

“A Chinaman!” Polly had come in with Hard’s coffee.

“Sure!” cried Scott. “Just the thing. I’d forgotten about him. When a Chink is scientific, he’s as scientific as the devil.”

“He came over to practice medicine; you know how the Mexicans feel about the Chinese? His money went and he had to do what he could. Herrick picked him up somewhere and he’s been there ever since,” said Hard.

“We’ll get him over here for Jimmy. He’s clean at any rate.”

“Listen to this!” Polly had opened her letter. “It’s from Mother,” she explained. “Poor old Bob’s in the hospital—just been operated on for appendicitis! Isn’t that the limit? On a honeymoon!”

“Hard luck,” commented Scott. “How’s he coming on?”

“She says he’s doing splendidly. You see, he’s been dodging that operation for the last ten years, and now it’s got him, poor boy. Mother says they’re worried to death about me.”

“And well they may be,” remarked Mrs. Van Zandt, heartily.

“She says the directors have met but didn’t do anything.”

“That sounds natural,” said Hard. “They’ve been doing that for the last three years.”

“Trying to figure out which costs less; to give up the property, or to pay us our salaries to hold it down,” chuckled Scott.

“She says I am to come home at once,” continued Polly, “but that I am not to try to travel alone. Either Mr. Scott or Mr. Hard is to go with me to the border.”

“I’m glad somebody in your family has got good sense,” said Scott, grimly. “It’s a pity those things aren’t hereditary.”

“Thank you. I think I prefer to have Mr. Hard go.”

Hard bowed solemnly. “Bob coming back?” he asked.

“As soon as they’ll let him,” said Bob’s sister, promptly.

“Yes, he likes a scrap,” remarked Scott. “I hope they keep the papers away from him this next week. Well, it’s lucky for you, Miss Polly, that we’ve got Pachuca’s car. Traveling on these railroads is bad enough at any time, but with a brand new revolution on hand, it’ll be the deuce.”

“I think it’s rather horrid of them not to care whether I go home or not,” Polly told herself, as she undressed for bed. “They might at least pretend they don’t want me to go! I always supposed that the one girl in a mining camp would be dazzlingly popular—but this doesn’t look much like it. And yet—he likes me, I know he does! He liked my bringing the car back; I saw it in his eyes, if he did make fun of me.

“He’s jealous of Don Juan, too. Well, that won’t do him any harm. He’s so determined not to fall in love with me that he’s going to need a little outside interference to make him change his mind. He’s got to change his mind because I—yes, I do care for him—a lot. People may think these things don’t come suddenly outside of books, but they do—oh, they do!” And, worn out by the exertions of the day, Polly curled herself in a knot and prepared to sleep.

Juan Baptisto Pachuca had not availed himself of the shakedown made for him by Mrs. Van Zandt’s blankets. He had put out his light because he wanted to think and he preferred thinking by moonlight. He sat in Hard’s office chair by the window, closed now, for the night was cool, and drummed impatiently upon the arm of it.

Mentally, Pachuca was more than impatient; he was outraged. His plans had been spoiled, his liberty restricted and his dignity impaired. He had been made to look ridiculous. Of all the offenses against him the latter was the most serious. He hated giving up anything he had put his mind on, but he hated a great deal more being made ridiculous.

Nor was it pleasant to be triumphed over by a girl. Juan Pachuca liked girls, especially good-looking ones, but he liked them in their places, not in the larger affairs of life. When they insisted upon mixing themselves up with such affairs, they ceased, in his estimation, to be pretty girls and became merely tiresome members of the other sex.

Had Polly Street given in to his proposals of escape he would have felt in a better temper with her, but he would not have been at all tempted to fall in love with her. He had been in the mood for that once—the night they had come over from Conejo together—but Fate, or the girl herself, or Marc Scott, he had hardly taken the time to decide which, had interfered and that was over.

Pachuca bore Polly no ill will for her part in that affair. That was her province—a love affair. A lady had the privilege of granting or denying her favors; it was not always because she wanted to that she denied them. He knew a good deal about that sort of thing and he was willing to give and take very agreeably in the game of love, without repining if things didn’t seem to be going his way.

This, however, was a question of business and Juan Pachuca considered that any woman who could get ahead of him in a matter of business would have to get up exceedingly early in the morning. He would get out of that room or he would know the reason why. It was highly important that he should. In fact, his plans for the next few days depended absolutely upon his so doing.

Pachuca’s business head, for all his conceit about it, was exceedingly primitive. His had been rather a primitive career from its beginning. Hard’s story of the actress, while not entirely correct, had its foundation in fact. Pachuca had been disgraced; to be disgraced in any manner is bad enough, but to be disgraced for doing something that you know quite well is being done in perfect security by most of the people with whom you are connected is particularly galling.

Aching to thwart the government he hated, Pachuca hastened to ally himself with its particular enemy and to work against it with all the impetuosity of his nature. But Francisco Villa was not an easy man for anyone as heady as Juan Pachuca to get on with. There were quarrels and more quarrels, and finally Pachuca, again disgusted with the world and its people, retired to private life.

He was not, however, built for private life. Some of us are like that. We need the excitement and the stimulus of action to bring out our better points. Also, Pachuca’s friends were not of the sort who cared much for the quiet life. In those few months of association with the great Villa, he had met men of various kinds; men who were honestly trying to do something for Mexico; men who were dishonestly trying to do something for themselves; and men who were in such a truly desperate frame of mind after ten years of revolution, banditry, and general upset, that they

scarcely knew what they were doing.

Pachuca, who for all his aristocratic blood, was an exceedingly good mixer, had enjoyed these various and sundry associations and in the quiet of private life he yearned for them. Very much as a celebrated actress feels the lure of the footlights after she has left them for matrimony and the fireside, very much as the superannuated fire horse is said to react to the alarm, so Pachuca 133
yearned for the agreeable persons with whom he had foregathered since leaving the army.

When there were rumors of another revolution, he began to think of looking up some of these exceedingly live wires, and seeing what could be done for Freedom, Mexico, and Juan Pachuca. It was with the idea of informing himself as to these matters that he had taken the journey which had resulted in his meeting with Polly Street, and the fortnight which she had spent in Athens had been used to accomplish a number of things.

Himself rather a good judge of which way the political cat might be expected to jump at this particular crisis, Pachuca had decided to throw in his lot with the Obregonistas. He knew Obregon, knew his hold on the people, his popularity with the labor party, and it looked to him very much as though that general of fascinating Irish ancestry had a good chance of being Mexico's next president.

At the same time he realized perfectly that his own reputation with the Obregonistas was not good. Various tales current among Mexicans of political standing, in regard to his relations with Villa, would be very much against him, and services rendered the Carranza government would hardly be likely to stand him in good stead. Pachuca wanted to stand well with the new party if he stood with them at all. He intended that the next president of Mexico should confer upon him an office of distinction, and offices of this sort must be earned, not only in Mexico but anywhere. In the great republic near by which Pachuca hoped some day to visit, preferably on a state 134
mission, things were handled in this way also. If he could bring to the revolutionary chiefs of the new party men, arms, and money, he might hope for a warm reception.

During the fortnight referred to he had communicated with one Angel Gonzales, previously mentioned, who had also quarreled with Villa and been rigorously persecuted by him. Gonzales was at the head of a small band which he was quite willing to consolidate with Pachuca's men, and they had agreed to meet and discuss ways and means. It was toward this rendezvous that Pachuca had been journeying when he stopped to raid the Athens mining camp.

To be stopped at such a time was not to be endured. Pachuca looked around the small room angrily. He looked out of the window. It was a bad drop but not an impossible one. An athlete might manage it, he supposed, but he was not an athlete—he was a gentleman and a soldier. It would be a nasty thing to try it and to break a leg. He had never tried breaking a leg but he remembered having heard the family physician say that a broken leg meant a six weeks' vacation and he had no mind for a vacation on those terms.

He went to the door—locked, of course, he had heard the girl turn the key, but one might burst it open. He tried, several times, but the door held maddeningly. There was no transom, no other door—nothing but the plastered walls and the window. He turned again to the window, and threw it open. The cool night air came in refreshingly. In the distance, the dark shapes of the 135
mountains stood out forbiddingly in the moonlight. Millions of stars winked and twinkled. Gaunt cacti reared their ungainly shapes—beautiful because of their very ugliness.

Somewhere over in those mountains Angel Gonzales was wending a torturous path to meet him. Angel would swear and rage when he did not come. Then he would probably annex Pachuca's men and their plunder and go cheerfully on his way. That would be Angel's idea of the philosophical manner of handling the situation. Juan ground his white teeth in a fury. Again he hung out of the window. The moonlight was so glaring that he was easily visible had anyone been watching, but all the lights in Athens were out and the inhabitants in bed.

Pachuca swung lightly out of the window and with a very cattish agility caught the sill with both hands and lowered himself. He looked down. It was the devil of a drop. Ten chances to one he would turn an ankle at the very least. He made a wry face. One does not do things successfully when one does them in this frame of mind. With an effort surprising in one so slight he drew himself back into the window again. There must be another way. It was positively not on the cards for him to be fooled in this stupid manner. He could see his car standing near the corral and the sight urged him to greater efforts.

He paced angrily up and down the floor. It was a very solid floor. As far as he was concerned it might be regarded as an invincible floor. If he had a pick, perhaps—Pachuca's eyes brightened, and a roguish look came into them. He had been thinking as he often did in English, being 136
practically bi-lingual, and the word suggested something to him. Why not pick the lock? He felt eagerly in his pocket for his knife—left, alas, in the pocket of his leather coat in the machine. Still, there might be one somewhere about. In the desk, perhaps. The saints would help a good Spaniard, undoubtedly. Pachuca was not unduly religious, and he could not recall at the moment any saint renowned for picking locks, so he let it go at that and began to hunt. Some sort of tool might be found in the desk.

The desk yielded pencils, pens, erasers, and other harmless implements without number, but nothing even remotely resembling a knife. Pachuca slammed the drawers angrily and resumed his tramping. The night was getting on and he was apparently no nearer freedom than when the girl had left him. He cursed volubly and disgustedly.

"I suppose if I had the shoulders of that abominable Scott I could break the door!" he muttered. "On the other hand," he mused, grimly, "if I had had his brains I would not be here. It was a

foolish business—trying to confiscate American property. It rarely pays." Pachuca, like the famous Mr. Pecksniff, believed in keeping up appearances even with one's self. His attempt was confiscation distinctly and not robbery. "It was talking with the American girl that day on the train that put it into my head. She would talk about her brother and his mine. Juan Pachuca, when will you learn to let women alone? Every time a woman comes upon the scene something disagreeable happens—and usually to you."

He paused by the window and surveyed it distastefully. "If I have to go out by that window, I will —but I do not like it. If I could bribe someone to put up a ladder! But they are all asleep—the lazy fools."

He glanced at the shakedown which Mrs. Van Zandt had sent over by Miller, the idea of a rope ladder made of sheets having floated idly through his head. Alas, the shakedown consisted of a small hard mattress and a couple of blankets, army blankets at that. Anyone who can make a rope ladder of army blankets, with nothing more solid to fasten them to than a rickety old desk, must be cleverer than even Juan Pachuca considered himself.

With a sigh of surrender he returned to the window. It was the only way; broken bones or no broken bones, it must be attempted. If he were unlucky enough to meet with disaster, he must crawl as far as the car, and once in the car he defied anyone, white, brown or black to stop him. If only they had left him his gun!

Carefully Pachuca balanced himself once more on the window and swung himself out, still clinging to the sill. The drop looked easier than it had before; he felt almost cheerful about it. Give him five minutes alone in the moonlight and he would have his liberty, his car and his triumph over Gringo carelessness. At the same moment, there arose out of the stillness the loud and penetrating bark of an aroused dog.

Yellow, who slept anywhere, being a tramp dog by nature, had elected to pass the night outside Scott's window, and the cabin in which Scott was sleeping was across the street and only a few feet away from the window from which Pachuca was trying to escape. Not content with barking, the interfering Yellow started on a gallop for the peculiar looking person hanging out of the window. Almost instantly, a light flashed in Scott's room and a head was thrust out of the window.

With an exasperated groan Pachuca drew himself back again and waited. Scott's head was withdrawn, and two seconds later, Scott, himself, clad in pajamas and a bathrobe, dashed out of the cabin and was met by another figure which seemed to spring from nowhere. Pachuca thought the second figure looked like Miller, the man who had brought his blankets, but he was not sure. By this time the dog had stopped barking and was following the two men. Pachuca stood in the window, waiting developments. Scott looked up with evident relief.

"You're there, are you?" he said.

"So it appears," disgustedly. "Am I a cat to scramble out of a window?"

"Well, Yellow was barking at something," replied Scott, with a grin. "Might have been a plain, four-footed one, and it might have been a human puss. If you don't mind, I reckon I'll tie him to the front door down here. He's rough on cats."

"Suit yourself, *amigo*, I'm going to sleep," was the disdainful reply.

Well, that ended going out by the window. Pachuca, having a Latin dislike for fresh air in the sleeping-room, closed the window angrily and threw himself down on the mattress. It was hard and there was no pillow. The blankets he would need to keep him warm. Pachuca, though used to hardships, dearly loved his comfort. He glanced around the room again; an old office coat hanging on a peg in a corner caught his eye. It would do for a pillow. He took it down and rolled it into a wad. As he did so, a clinking sound became audible. He reached into the pocket—a bunch of keys and an old hunting-knife came to light.

Pachuca grinned. Well, Heaven was looking out for its own; it was not in the nature of things that a Pachuca should be trampled in the dust by the proletariat! Patiently, one after another, he tried the keys—ah, the right one at last! He turned it and the door opened. Pachuca chuckled delightedly; it pleased his whimsicality to think that so apparently unsurmountable a difficulty should be solved in so plain and unromantic a fashion.

He returned to the window and saw Scott and Miller standing outside Scott's cabin; saw Scott go inside and the cabin become dark once more and Miller go on down the street, stopping at the last house near the corral. Pachuca frowned. Was the fellow going in and going to bed like a Christian, or was he going to hang around and keep an eye on the car? This last would be extremely awkward. Miller, however, turned in at the house and disappeared.

Pachuca spent five minutes at the window watching, but he did not reappear. "Ah well, one must risk something!" he mused, and glanced down at the sleeping Yellow. Cautiously and with the soft step of one who has learned the wisdom of a silent tread, the young man slid down the stairway. The door at the foot of the stairs was open; it opened outward and they had tied the dog back of it.

Juan Pachuca opened the hunting-knife and surveyed it in a business-like fashion. There was a sudden movement of his arm and poor Yellow shivered and crumpled up noiselessly. Quietly, the knife still in his hand, Pachuca slipped behind the building and continued his way toward the corral. He reached the car unhindered and breathed a sigh of relief; the rest would be plain sailing. A peep into the tonneau showed him that the plunder had been removed; but that, of

course, he had expected. He jumped into the car and started the engine. At the same moment, a burly figure rushed out of the house near by, caught at the car as it started, clung to the running-board and, leaning over, seized Pachuca by the arm.

It was Miller; Miller, who had indeed gone to bed, but whose bed was near the window of the little cabin, and who had been keeping one eye on the car and had emerged, scantily attired in a nightshirt tucked into a pair of trousers, to put a spoke in the Mexican's wheel. Pachuca set his teeth! It was too much—to be so near liberty and then to lose it. A desperate look came into his eyes; he paid no attention to the angry demand of his assailant that he stop the car, but, making a sudden lunge, he drove the hunting-knife into the shoulder of the big man.

"Damn you, put up that knife!" choked Miller, seeing the blow coming but not quickly enough to dodge it. With one hand clutching the car and one holding Pachuca, he was too late to reach his gun. By the time he loosed his hold on the Mexican, the knife had reached its mark; a knife none too sharp, but driven by a practiced hand, it pierced the flesh, and with a groan, Miller dropped off the running-board into the road.

Ah, the good car! Pachuca sang with joy as it leaped ahead into the darkness. They would be awake in a moment, the lazy Gringos, but what of it? He would be out of their reach. He laughed as he flew past the house where Polly slept.

"Adieu, pretty American! I kiss your hand—until we meet again!"

Something struck the back of the car with a sharp, tearing sound. Pachuca turned with a grin. A light had sprung up in the house into which he had seen Scott go. With another chuckle, the young Mexican bent over the wheel and whirled down the road toward freedom.

CHAPTER X

THE DISCOVERY

Marc Scott was slow in falling asleep on the night of Pachuca's escape. He was in the habit of rolling over a few times and losing himself; but on this particular night he was tormented by half a dozen ugly little worries. He was worried about Adams, whose leg had a nasty look to the unprofessional eye; he was worried about Pachuca, whose case was going to require a good deal of finesse; and he was worried about Polly Street, who had to be conveyed to the border, revolution or no revolution.

The most pressing danger on his horizon, Scott did not worry about because he did not recognize it. He was like one of those patients in whose system a deadly disease has started, but who remains in perfect health to all outward appearances. He was in happy ignorance of his feelings for Polly Street. He had been in love times enough, he would have told you, to know the symptoms; all of which was quite true, but the fact remained that this time he did not know them.

Polly Street was so exactly the sort of girl that Marc Scott had not the faintest idea of falling in love with, much less marrying, that he would have dismissed the possibility with a shrug. He, who valued his freedom above everything, to throw it away for exactly the kind of woman who would take the greatest pleasure in trampling on it? As for his jealousy of Juan Pachuca, which should have opened his eyes, he put it aside easily. He didn't like the fellow—never had—and it annoyed him to see a decent girl allowing herself to be humbugged by his good looks and oily tongue.

It was a pity, for she was a plucky young thing. She had done well to bring back the prisoner and his car; mighty few girls would have had the courage to try it. It was foolish, of course, a regular kid trick—wouldn't have succeeded once in a dozen times, but nevertheless, she had shown pluck. It was at this stage in his reflections that he had been disturbed by Yellow's barking and had gone out to investigate. The air and the action had changed his circulation and his thought and when he went to bed the second time he dropped off easily.

This time he was aroused by the noise of the engine started by Pachuca on his escape. At first he hardly realized what it was that had wakened him, but as it dawned on his consciousness, he jumped to his feet and rushed to the window in time to see the car tear down the road. With a muttered exclamation, Scott seized his gun and sent a bullet wildly in the direction of the escaping prisoner. Then he drew on his trousers, calling to Hard at the same time.

"What's wrong? Another raid?" growled the sleepy Bostonian, who had dozed peacefully through Pachuca's first attempt.

"No. The guy's got away," snapped Scott, angrily.

"Well, we didn't particularly need him, did we?" observed Hard, sitting up reluctantly.

"We needed his car and needed it bad," said Scott, viciously. He tramped out of the room, while Hard reached drowsily for his clothes.

“By George, he must have made it through the window!” he muttered as he crossed the street, then as he came upon the body of the dog, thrown aside behind the open door, “The dirty butcher!” he growled, furiously. “And I didn’t have sense enough to search him for a knife!”

Outside, he met O’Grady and Johnson, sketchily dressed and wrathful.

“You heard him, too, did you?” he growled. “He got out by the window. This is some of his work,” he continued, pointing to Yellow.

“He did not,” said O’Grady, promptly. “Did you ever hear of a guy jumping out of a second-story winder and shutting it after him?”

“What?”

“Sure—it’s shut,” grinned Johnson. “He come out of the door all right. It’s wide open, and not hurt, either.”

“Who let him out? Where’s the key? You had it, O’Grady.”

“I did not—you handed it to the girl, yourself. She locked him in all right; I heard her do it,” replied O’Grady quickly.

“That explains it,” said Scott, shortly. “She came over here and let him out. Might have expected it, I suppose, with a flighty youngster and a smooth talker like Pachuca.” He turned away in the direction of the house. 145

“He’s mad!” murmured Johnson, admiringly. He liked a little excitement himself.

“Mad? He’s jealous, the fool!” Matt offered, disgustedly.

“Jealous? Who of? The greaser?”

“Sure. Good-looking, Juan is, and a winner with the dames.”

“Scott’s one of them woman haters. What d’ye mean—jealous?”

“Woman haters?” Matt spat disdainfully. “There ain’t no such thing as a woman hater, Tommy, in the whole animal kingdom. Don’t you fall for none of that stuff. But, believe me, that girl never opened that door. She’s a straight, honest, smart girl, if she is flighty.”

“Well, if she didn’t, who did?”

“I don’t know. I ain’t sleuthed around enough yet to find out. Hullo, here’s Boston—half asleep, too.”

Scott was angry clear through. He did not stop to analyze his emotions—he was not of an analytical mind—and he did not care why he was angry. He felt that Polly Street, a girl of whom he was beginning to think rather highly, had done an unsportsmanlike thing; a thing that Bob’s sister ought to have been ashamed to do; had disgraced the family, so to speak, and had seriously inconvenienced him into the bargain.

Scott had depended on that automobile for various things. He wanted it to fetch a doctor for Jimmy, and to take Polly, herself, to the border in comfort. Both these important things she had jeopardized because she had been coaxed into it by a soft-spoken young man with dark eyes. 146 The treasure story he put aside. Even a girl from the East would hardly have taken that stuff seriously, he thought.

He would have felt just the same, he reasoned, had the culprit been Bob instead of Bob’s sister. There was, thank Heaven, nothing soft about him! He could see and hear and even enjoy a good-looking girl without making a fool of himself. That was the beauty of being on the way to forty—one saw things in their right light—and did not make a fool of one’s self over girls.

“Marc Scott, are we being raided again or what? Did I hear a shot and a machine going by or was I dreaming?” demanded Mrs. Van, who, clad in a blanket kimono, her feet thrust into moccasins, and a gay-looking pink boudoir cap on her head, came to the door before Scott reached it. In her rear could be dimly seen another figure, wrapped in a gray blanket.

“You ought to know,” said Scott, rudely; focussing his attention on the pink cap and ignoring the blanketed figure in the rear.

“What do you mean—I ought to know?” indignantly.

“Somebody has unlocked the office door and let that half-breed get away and he’s taken his car with him,” said Scott. “The key’s in your house—that’s all.”

“Of course it’s in this house. It’s in the pocket of my sweater,” answered Polly, indignantly. “If you think I let him out——” She was too angry to continue.

“Well, he didn’t get out by the window because it’s shut, and there’s no chimney for him to melt 147 out of.”

“Look here, Marc Scott, ain’t you ashamed of yourself? Coming here and talking to ladies like that—and in the middle of the night, too.” Mrs. Van Zandt was as angry as the other two. “That key couldn’t get out of this house to-night without my knowing it. He’s brainy enough to get out without help, that fellow.”

“He may be brainy, but he’s hardly brilliant enough to go through a locked door,” said Scott, obstinately. “Somebody let him out, that’s all. If you’ll be kind enough to look for the key, Miss Street, and see if it’s been taken away——”

“How could it be? From my room?” demanded Polly, angrily.

“Are you going to hold an inquest over it?” asked Mrs. Van, cuttingly. “I see the jury coming along.”

Johnson, O’Grady and Hard were coming across the street. Polly drew her blanket closely around her and tucked one bare foot behind the other. Her reddish colored braids gave her a squaw-like appearance in the darkness.

“It’s all right, Scotty, don’t stir up the community,” called Hard, cheerfully. “I’m the guilty party.”

“You!”

“It never dawned on me till I saw the unlocked door,” confessed Hard, with a chuckle. “The chap must have found that old bunch of keys that’s been knocking around in the pocket of my old office coat. I’m afraid that’s where he got the knife that did for poor Yellow, too.” 148

“Do you mean there was a duplicate key?” demanded Scott.

“There must have been. Clever chap to ferret it out,” replied Hard, breezily.

“Mighty clever. I could open a door myself with a key in my hand,” muttered Scott, as he turned away. “Well, he’s gone and the car’s gone and we might as well go back to bed.”

“Just one moment.” Polly’s voice was clear and firm. “I think you owe me an apology, Mr. Scott.”

There was a suppressed chuckle from the rear where the train gang still lingered. Scott stiffened and cleared his throat consciously.

“I apologize,” he said; then, as he saw the others disappear down the street, “Will you shake hands?”

“Not right now; I’m going to think it over,” said the girl, coolly. “I think you should have known that I wouldn’t do a thing like that.”

“Well, I did know it, of course,” confessed Scott, helplessly. “But——”

“But you didn’t believe it.” Polly’s voice was cutting. “Well, next time have a little more faith in your friends, Mr. Scott,” and the blanketed figure disappeared into the house.

“She had you there,” observed Mrs. Van. “Well, go home to bed before you wake up Jimmy—it’s a wonder he’s slept through this all right.”

She went into the house and knocked softly at the girl’s door—after listening a moment and assuring herself that Adams had not wakened. Polly’s room was dark and she was standing, still 149 wrapped in the blanket, by the window in the moonlight.

“Well?” she said, rather curtly.

“Nothing—only——” Mrs. Van’s usually glib tongue faltered. “I was just going to say that you mustn’t take Marc Scott too—too—I mean, you mustn’t be too hard on him.”

“Hard!”

“Yes. It’s just his way; he don’t mean to be ugly. He’s queer, Scotty is, kind of—oh, I don’t know how to put it, but he didn’t mean to be rude to you.”

“He was, though, very rude.”

“Yes, that’s what I mean. It sort of shocked him to think you’d do a thing like that and he didn’t stop to think.”

“Maybe he’ll stop to think next time.”

“Maybe, but I don’t reckon so. Folks like that you can’t change much; you have to take ’em or leave ’em as they are. He’s awful square, though. I’d trust him with anything; money, liquor, or women. When you’ve been around as much as I have, you’ll know that means something.”

In the meantime, Scott, Hard, and the train gang, going down to the corral to investigate, found Miller lying as Pachuca had left him, in the middle of the road. He was regaining consciousness as they came along, and did not seem to be badly hurt, the knife having entered the fleshy part of the arm near the shoulder. 150

“Serves me damn right, bein’ so slow with my gun,” he said. “I suppose the guy got away?”

“Oh, yes, he got away!” muttered Scott, as they helped Miller to bed. “That’s the kind of luck we’re playing in just now around here.”

Breakfast next morning was not a particularly cheerful meal. Adams was still in bed, and Williams was feverish and cross. Miller seemed little the worse for his accident, but he was blue; he had been particularly attached to the dog and felt its death more than his own misadventure.

“Blankets, canned goods, saddles—everything they could grab,” muttered Williams, resentfully. “Nice condition to be in with a revolution looming.”

“Not looming, loomed,” said O’Grady, cheerfully.

“Wish I could get hold of an *Omaha Bee*,” murmured Johnson. “I never somehow feel like I had a grip on a situation till I’ve seen my home paper.”

“I think I’ll ride over to Casa Grande this morning and get the doctor,” said Hard. “That leg of Jimmy’s needs advice.”

“I’ll go with you.” Scott looked at Polly. “Want to go?” he said; then as she hesitated, he looked at her penitently, smiling as Scott did not often smile, and whispered: “Please do!”

“How mean of him! He knows I’m dying to. How’s anybody going to stay mad when they want to do things?” said the girl to herself.

“It’s too far for her,” objected Mrs. Van.

“We’ll send the Chink back,” said Scott, persuasively, “and we’ll stay all night with Herrick. We’ll make him play for you,” he added, as Polly smiled in spite of herself. “Will you go?” 151

“She must,” said Hard. “It’s her last chance to see the country.” And so the matter was settled.

“That Chink’ll ride the whole twenty miles on a dead run—he’ll be here to dinner,” said Matt. “Ever see a Chinaman ride?”

“He’ll ride his own horse, then,” replied Scott, as he left the room. “Perhaps we’ll bring Herrick back with us, Mrs. Van.”

“He won’t leave that piano of his,” prophesied Mrs. Van Zandt. “No more than a mother’d leave her baby when there was danger around.”

It was ten o’clock when the three riders started on their trip, Scott preserving a reasonably cheerful face, in spite of the fact that he hated late starts. It was a beautiful morning; the sky, blue and cloudless, the air fresh and invigorating with the crispness of early spring, the radiant clearness of the atmosphere making neighbors of the mountains, all combined to make a tonic which showed signs of going to Polly’s head. After all, there are few sensations like the starting out upon a horseback trip; the mare’s springy trot, the freshness of her own healthy body, even the feel of the bridle reins brought her joy.

“You look mighty happy,” commented Hard. “It must be pleasant to be twenty-three.”

Polly laughed. “It is,” she admitted. “But I’m going to be just as happy at forty-three. I’ve found the recipe.” 152

“Will you sell it to me? My next one happens to be my forty-second. I’ll be needing it soon.”

“I’ll make you a present of it. Stay out-of-doors and keep on doing things. Of course, I haven’t tried it for forty-three years, but I feel in my bones that it will work.”

“I never could see, myself, how people could spend twenty-two out of their twenty-four hours under a roof, the way most of them do,” said Scott, thoughtfully. “Here, we turn now into the trail.”

“That’s where Pachuca’s men went yesterday,” said Polly. “I hope we don’t meet them.”

“No danger of that. Those fly-by-nights are a long way from here by this time.”

“They told me yesterday in Conejo that Obregon had been put under arrest in Mexico City. If that’s true it may put a cog in the revolutionary machinery,” said Hard.

“I wish we’d managed to keep our hands on that automobile,” remarked Scott, wistfully. “I don’t half fancy trying to make the border in a wagon, and no one knows how the railroads will be.”

The trail debouched from the road, running over ground very slightly elevated. There was for some distance no particular reason as far as Polly could see for its being a trail at all except that it hadn’t been sufficiently traveled to make it a road. It was merely a narrow little path leading over some very barren-looking country, but leading ever upward, gradually but surely, toward the hills.

“You see, the regular road runs fairly straight along toward Conejo for maybe twenty miles, and then meets a crossroad which runs past Casa Grande,” explained Scott. “Now, with this trail, we cut directly across those foothills, over a couple of ranges of mountains, across a big mesa and down. Casa Grande is almost in a straight line from here and we cut off a lot.” 153

“Casa Grande is an awfully fancy sort of name. Is it a wonderful place?”

“Just a good little ranch. These Latins like big sounding names,” replied Scott. “Casa Grande is very common down here.”

A dip in the trail took them into an arroyo and out the other side, where they lost sight entirely of Athens. A few moments later, they wound their way through some brush into a narrow canyon, walled on one side by hills and with a drop of some fifteen feet on the other side into a ravine. Out of the ravine grew more brush so densely that it almost crowded the little trail out of existence.

Here it was necessary to go single file and Polly noticed how naturally Scott took the lead, leaving her to follow and Hard to bring up the rear. She noted with some amusement that it seemed characteristic of him to take the lead everywhere, just as it seemed quite in keeping with Hard’s easy-going nature to fall into the rear.

“And yet of the two Mr. Hard has the education and the brains,” thought the girl. “No, that’s not fair. I believe you can have just as good a brain without education—only you’re hampered in the use of it. Marc Scott has what the psychologists call ‘initiative.’ Oh, look!” 154

High up in the air a bird had flown out from among the tree-tops on the other side of the canyon —a big bird with wide spreading wings.

“It’s an eagle.”

“An eagle!” Polly was awed.

“There’s a nest up there somewhere,” said Scott, shading his eyes with his hand and peering upward. “Last year I was riding over this trail with Gomez, an Indian we had working for us. We were just about here when an eagle, a young one, flew out from the trees. Before I could speak, Gomez up with his gun and shot it.”

“Oh!”

“I wanted to kill the geezer—but Lord, what can you expect of an Indian?”

As they proceeded, Polly found herself riding closer to Scott, while Hard lagged behind. She was not displeased. Scott on horseback and in the woods was Scott at his best as she was beginning to know.

“I’m wondering,” she said, as the mare pushed her nose along the big bay’s flank, “how you know so much about the country. You aren’t a Westerner, are you?”

“Me? No, indeed. Born in New York State and raised in Michigan. Never laid eyes on anything west of the Mississippi until I came out to Colorado to work in the mines. Then I drifted into New Mexico and down here.” Scott was riding with his knee around the pommel and talking meditatively over his shoulder.

“You see, I’ve got mining in my blood. My grandfather was a Forty-Niner.”

“Did he get rich?” asked Polly, interestedly.

“Not so’s you’d notice it. Spent all he had and died trying to get home.”

“Oh!”

“Hard luck, wasn’t it? My folks went to Detroit when I was a little codger and they both died there. I was adopted by an uncle—an uncle who was the whitest man God ever made,” declared Scott, solemnly.

“Why was he—I mean, how was he?” Polly had by nature that healthy capacity for asking questions, which is one of the most flattering characteristics that a woman can have or assume.

“He was always doing decent things. Didn’t have much money, either, but somehow he always made it do for a lot of folks who didn’t have any. He adopted a girl that wasn’t any kin to him, had her educated and then married her. She made him a fine wife, too, thought the world of him. Well, he adopted me and sent me to school and when he saw I had the roving instinct and couldn’t stick to the books, he gave me a lift to go West to the mines. He knew that there was no use arguing.

“He was queer, too. Didn’t like city folks nor their ways. He owned one of those big farms out near what’s now Grosse Pointe—ran down to the river—and when the town began to grow out toward them, instead of holding on to his land as it began to get valuable, he’d sell out and go further away. Died, leaving Aunt Mary just enough to live comfortably on—might have been a millionaire. But Uncle Silas was a wise man.

“Sometimes when I look at these tight-fisted old guys who make their millions and tie ’em up into estates to hand down, and then remember Uncle Silas—not giving a hoot for money and always pulling along a dozen or two poor relations and setting ’em on their feet, living comfortable and happy, leaving a wife that’s as fond of him to-day as she was the day he died—well, I sort of wonder if money and success mean as much as folks think they do.”

Scott’s autobiography was halted by the view which met their eyes as they rounded the turn at the top of the canyon. Turning, the narrow trail wound its way around the mountainside until one looked down upon the tops of foothills, green with scrubby vegetation. Then it stretched in an irregular line down the mountainside, to disappear in their midst. Beyond lay another range of mountains.

“Back of that range and across the mesa is where Herrick’s place is,” said Scott, as they drew rein and waited for Hard to come along. Polly gazed in silence. It was the first view she had had of the wilder part of the country and it thrilled her.

Hard came up with them. “Don’t you think we’d better make a little speed when we hit the level?” he said.

“We’ve only crossed one stream since we started,” observed Polly.

“We cross another just before we get to Herrick’s,” said Hard, “but it never has much water in it except in the rainy season.”

“I’ve seen plenty in it then,” said Scott, laughing. “I was caught on the wrong side once when they’d had a cloudburst in the mountains. Oh boy, you should have seen her come down! Swept away a wagon with two horses and the Mexican who was driving it in just two minutes.”

“Oh, how could it—in two minutes?”

“Well, it could and did. Before that there wasn’t a foot of water in the river bed. When the water came thundering down there was eight or ten. Picked up trees, bushes, chicken coops, greasers—anything in its way, and whirled ’em down the canyon.”

It was the middle of the afternoon when they crossed the second range, which they did by means of a trail which went through a gap, thus cutting off the worst of the ascent. Once through the gap, they came out upon a huge mesa from which they looked down upon the valley

in which Casa Grande was located. On the mesa, the tired horses broke into the little easy-going jog which mountain ponies love.

Scott watched Polly's sparkling eyes with real gratification. He had chosen to go by trail rather than by road very largely that she might have this experience. He wanted her to see more of the country before she went back to the city and its ways.

"She's a natural out-of-doors woman, and she's never had the chance to find it out," he mused. "Better than a golf course?" he asked, as they trotted across the broad mesa. 158

"Oh!" she cried, reproachfully. "It's like the happy hunting grounds! I never understood before why the Indians called their Heaven that. It was because they were thinking of space and openness and freedom. I think it beats our kind of Heaven all hollow," finished the cheerful product of 1920.

Finally they came out on the other side of the little river bed, which lay below the mesa and was entered by means of a rocky staircase, crossed a round-topped hill, and there, in a flat little valley surrounded by hills, the rear view of the Casa Grande ranch-house became visible. Two or three smaller buildings stood near it and a fence marked the corral.

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CHAPTER XI

CASA GRANDE

There was a great stillness about the place; the whole panorama suggested a picture rather than an actuality, except for the white clouds sailing slowly about in the blue sky, and an occasional bird flying from one tree or bush to another.

"I don't like things being so still," said Scott. "Let's push on." Riding around to the front of the house—a long, narrow, adobe building, they came upon the first real sign of habitation; a brown hen, who, accompanied by her family, was scratching around the walk with an immense show of industry; while on the veranda sat two men. One was a white man; the other, a Chinese, dressed in the dark blue shirt and trousers of his people. As the newcomers dismounted, the white man came forward.

"Humph, it's you!" he remarked, with evident relief. "Well, here is what is left of a once prosperous household."

He was a little man, thin and wiry, with bushy brown hair and beard, and keen dark eyes. His hands, slender and with long white fingers, played nervously with a quirt which he held, apparently for no purpose than that those nervous members might have occupation. 160

"What's happened?" demanded Scott. "How do, Li Yow?" as the Chinaman came forward smilingly to take the horses.

"All gone," he said, blandly. "Laided. One hen, some shickens—notting else left."

"Raided! Did that young rascal——" began Hard, when Herrick interrupted impatiently.

"Oh, he has been to you, too? He makes a clean sweep of it! He comes here at noon with a score, perhaps, of men; and if there is anything they do not take, it is because it is broken—like my wagon. Men, money, and stock—our neighbor is thorough and no mistake!"

"I was afraid of it," said Scott. "He's cleaning up the community. Herrick, I want you to know Bob Street's sister, Miss Polly Street." He added a few words of explanation of the girl's presence. Herrick surveyed her with interest.

"You are unlucky to strike this country at such a time," he said. "Unless you like experiences?"

"I do," said Polly, promptly. "That's why they're sending me home."

The little man smiled. "After all, most experience is worth while," he said. "Sit down and rest—you will stay, all of you, won't you? For the night? There is some food left."

Scott and Li Yow walked away with the horses to the barn which stood not a great way from the house, surrounded by a good-sized corral. Polly sank into an easy chair which commanded through a window a view of a part of the living-room. She caught a glimpse of a grand piano, 161 bright colored rugs, bookcases overflowing with books, and other evidences of comfort. Hard gave their host an account of the Athens hold-up, not forgetting the part Polly had played in it.

"I remembered," he said, "that Li was a doctor, and thought perhaps you'd loan him to us for Jimmy. We don't think much of the Conejo medico."

"Himmel, no!" responded Herrick, quickly. "You shall have Li, of course."

Polly leaned back with a little sigh of content. Herrick smiled.

"You are tired," he said, "and by and by you will be chilly. Henry, as Li is busy, suppose you build up a fire in the living-room?"

Polly looked a bit surprised, but Hard laughed as he went into the house.

“Herrick never does any rough work,” he said, indulgently. “He has to take care of his hands.”

“So!” replied their host, “my fingers are my good friends, consequently I take good care of them. Why not? Some day I may need their services again.”

“I hope so,” said Polly, frankly. “I think it’s rather dreadful for an artist to bury himself in a place like this.”

“One does not bury oneself, my child, one rests and creates,” said the musician, gently. “Ah, here is Scott! He has been looking at my wagon.”

Scott tossed Polly her long cloak which she had left on her saddle.

“Yes, I took a look at the wagon, while Li turned the horses out,” he said. “I think I can patch it 162
up so that we can drive to Athens in it. You see, Herrick, we’ve only got three horses and I have to send Li back on one of them to-night.”

“Can he make it—the horse?”

“With a little rest and a feed—if Li takes it easy. Of course, it’s not the way I like to treat my horses, but Jimmy’s leg is in a bad state.”

“Very well. You may have Li and also the wagon,” replied Herrick. “The more willingly because I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Of course. What is it?”

“I have a guest,” said the other, slowly. “A lady, from the South. She has had to leave her plantation and is on her way back to the United States. I had intended taking her to the border, but since you are sending this young lady——” He stopped, and Polly thought she saw a look of understanding pass between them.

“We’ll see her through, of course,” said Scott, readily. “Can she be ready to go in the morning?”

“I should think so,” replied the little man; “we will ask her.” To Polly’s disappointment, the talk passed on to the revolution and other political subjects, and nothing more was said about the mysterious guest. “If they’re going to tack a Mexican refugee to me, they might at least tell me something about her!” she thought.

In the meantime, Hard had entered the living-room and was examining the contents of the wood-box.

“Empty, of course!” he said, with a smile. “The household is quite evidently off its balance.” He 163
went out through the kitchen and returned in a few minutes with a basket of logs from the wood-pile. As he re-entered the living-room, a woman—a tall, slender, graceful woman, with black hair and eyes, entered it from the hall. There was a moment’s silence and then the basket of wood dropped crashingly from Hard’s arms. The woman smiled.

“Henry!” she exclaimed, coming forward, both hands outstretched. “Henry! I heard your voice—I’d have known it anywhere, even if Victor hadn’t told me that you lived near here. You haven’t changed one bit in—how many years is it since I saw you?”

“Fifteen years, six months, and twenty-seven days, Clara,” replied the tall Bostonian, taking her hands and leading her to the light. Something in her easy, friendly manner had softened both the shock of the surprise and the embarrassment of the situation. He looked long into her face and then dropped her hands. She sank into a chair by the fireplace.

“It is a long time, isn’t it?” she said, smiling.

“No one would think so to look at you,” said Hard, sincerely. “You are the same Clara Mallory who went to Paris fifteen years ago to study music.” He picked up the basket of wood and proceeded to build the fire. She watched him, her eyes misty.

“Well, it’s odd that I haven’t changed for I’ve been through a lot,” she said, with a little smile. “And you?”

“Just the same easy-going, good-for-nothing chap, I reckon,” replied Hard. 164

“But this mining business? But, of course, you were educated for it at the Tech——”

“Yes, without much idea of using it.”

“But, being a Hard, you weren’t contented with doing nothing,” said Mrs. Conrad. “You know why I’m here, I suppose?”

“No. Herrick told me some time ago that you were living down near Mexico City—and that Dick Conrad had died, and how.”

Mrs. Conrad was silent for a moment. “Two years ago,” she said, quietly. “While he lived, we managed to hold down the plantation fairly well. He got on well with the government, and he organized the peons and fought off the bandits. Since then, things have gone rather badly; it takes a man to handle that kind of a situation. I’ve been raided six times in two years and my patience is almost gone.

“I wrote up here to Victor; he’s always been a good friend of mine—I studied with him in London, you know, and knew his wife well. He advised me to sell and go home. I didn’t take his advice about selling; I couldn’t get anything decent for the place right now, and I’ve a fairly good man running it for me. I have faith in this country and I intend to come back some day and

go on with my plantation."

"You always were plucky, Clara." Hard touched a match to his fire. "But Mexico's no place for you. Where are you going?"

"I don't know," admitted Clara, frankly. "Back to the States, of course, but where and for what I don't know. But I hope—my music." 165

"Your music?"

"Victor says it's not too late—but—well, perhaps. I'm out of the way of cities, and I've enough so that I don't have to do anything, but—oh, I would love to be at it again!"

Hard smiled. "You will, Clara. You're not an idler—as I am. You'll be in the thick of it in no time."

"Ah, you have found one another! I thought perhaps you would." Herrick's voice broke in upon their talk. He was followed by Polly and Scott, and introductions and explanations came naturally.

"It's not a Mexican refugee, and it is the lady of the photograph!" Polly said to herself, triumphantly. "But it doesn't look to me much like a love affair. They've got over it evidently."

"So you also were raided by Juan Pachuca?" said Mrs. Conrad, as Scott seated himself beside her. The latter nodded.

"I happened to hear him talking to one of my men," said Herrick, "and telling him that he had a rendezvous with Angel Gonzales, somewhere in the vicinity—not too near, I hope. I don't want Angel Gonzales on my place; I'd rather entertain the devil."

"What a queer name—Angel! Who is he?" asked Polly, curiously. She was beginning to realize, since she had gotten off her horse and relaxed into the comfort of an easy chair near the fire, how very tired she was.

"A young ruffian with a price on his head," replied Herrick. "He's half Indian and half Mexican 166 and they tell me that both halves are very bad indeed."

"If Gonzales—by the way, Miss Polly, don't mix him up with Pablo Gonzales who is a general of note and one of the candidates for the next presidency——" said Hard, laughing. "If Gonzales is trying to get in with the new party, he must have inside information that the revolution is going to be a success."

"Well, its first work had better be to line Angel and a few more of his kind up against a wall and settle 'em with a firing squad," said Scott.

"That's what I think," declared Mrs. Conrad. "I don't put much faith in this regiment business. I think Pachuca has simply gone back to first principles and run amuck."

"I don't believe——" Polly stopped, consciously.

"Miss Polly thinks he's a gentleman and that ends it," said Scott, drily.

"She's young, and the wretch has a way with him. I liked him myself when I was young and frivolous," said Mrs. Conrad, cheerfully. "I've entertained him many a time in Mexico City. Suppose you go into my room, my dear, and have a nice rest and clean up while I go and help Li rustle us a dinner out of the remnants?" she continued, taking the girl by the hand.

"If Angel Gonzales is playing around this neighborhood, the sooner we get away the better," said Scott to Hard as the three men were left together. "Come and cast your weather eye over the wagon. For a quiet part of the country, we seem to have struck a bad gait." 167

It was nearly eight o'clock when they sat down to their dinner; a dinner contrived with Oriental thrift from materials scorned by the marauders.

"Give a Chinaman a handful of rice and a few vegetables and he'll make you a feast, so my husband used to say," remarked Mrs. Conrad. "You simply can't starve them."

"Li wants to start right after dinner," said Scott.

"And ride all night?" asked Herrick.

"He says so. He says he knows the trail, and, of course, he's got the moon."

A little later, as they sat around the fire, they heard the sound of his horse's feet on the stones and knew that the Chinaman had started.

Polly began to feel the charm of the quaint room, with its dim lighting, the low fire, the fantastic patterns of rug and basket showing faintly, and through the windows the mountains and the stars. As the conversation began to yield to the quiet of the place, Herrick went to the piano and played softly. It had never fallen to the lot of the girl to hear such music; the revelation of a man's soul, poured out through an absolute mastery of the art. The little man, with the brown beard and the long nervous hands, sat hunched up in his low chair, knees crossed, eyes half closed, drawing from the keyboard the chords which carried to each one the message of his own heart.

Presently, Clara Conrad rose, and, standing back of the piano, leaning over it, her hands clasped, began to sing—softly and easily—her voice, a rich contralto, blending with Herrick's 168 small but exquisite baritone, in an old song. Polly looked at Hard, seated in a dim corner, his chin resting on his hand, his eyes fixed on the two at the piano. She wondered what he was thinking and what the woman meant to him. There was something almost too intimate about the

whole scene and she was glad when Scott rose and went toward the door, speaking to her as he passed her.

“Want to see a pretty sight?” he said. She nodded and followed him out. For miles in front of them stretched the hilly country, dotted here and there in the half light by clumps of trees and bushes showing inky black in the night, while in the distance stretched the mountains, irregular, dark, and mysterious looking. Over all shone the moon, while the stars—but who can describe the stars in a desert country?

“Makes you feel like you’d never seen stars before, doesn’t it?” asked Scott, as the girl stood, drinking in the scene.

“Doesn’t it? So many, so bright and so twinkly! Do you know, I don’t wonder that Mrs. Conrad’s rather a wonderful woman—living all the time with this.”

“Well, she is, rather. She’s had a hard life, too; lots of trouble.”

“Wasn’t her husband—I mean, weren’t they happy together?” asked the girl.

“Why, yes, I guess they were,” replied Scott, cautiously. “I reckon they were like most married folks, rubbed along together pretty well.” 169

“But you said she’d had lots of trouble.”

Scott smiled. “And you made up your mind right off that it was a love affair, eh? You’re a good deal of a kid, aren’t you?”

Polly flushed. “I think you’re rather inconsiderate,” she said, crossly. “You start up my curiosity and then you make fun of me. I don’t think I like the way you treat me, most of the time.”

“I don’t think it’s fair, myself,” said Scott, penitently. “I suppose a girl brought up as you’ve been oughtn’t to be blamed for seeing a love affair behind every bush.”

“Why do you say brought up as I’ve been?”

“I mean having everything easy; everything done for you. No real hard knocks in life.”

“Oh, well, if that’s all, I’ll probably have hard knocks enough before I get through. Most people do, I’ve noticed,” replied Polly, easily. “I’ll probably marry somebody who’ll spend all his money and leave me eight children to support, or else I’ll die a rheumaticky old maid. Will that satisfy you?”

“Don’t talk that way,” said Scott, sharply. “It’s unlucky.”

“Unlucky? Are you superstitious?”

“No, but I’ve noticed that people who are always expecting bad luck usually get it. I’d hate to have you——” he stopped, and Polly caught a look in his eyes that startled her.

“Die a rheumaticky old maid?” she said, nervously. “Well, I don’t want to, either, but it seems to me that the number of people who get out of this world without a lot of trouble of some kind or other is a pretty small one, so you needn’t begrudge me a few years of easy going. What was Mrs. Conrad’s trouble?” 170

“She’s had a good deal of it first and last, but I was thinking of her husband’s death, two years ago.”

“Did you know her then?”

“Me? No, indeed, I never met her before to-night, but Hard told me, and so did Herrick. I don’t reckon Hard would mind my telling you her story, now you’ve met her. You see, he and she were young folks together in Boston. I guess they sort of played at being in love with each other, like young folks do. Then her father died, and left her with hardly anything, and that woke ’em up. It made things look more serious.

“Hard wanted to marry her, but she wouldn’t. She had a voice and she wanted a career; so she went to Europe. That’s where she met Herrick and took lessons of him. Then, suddenly, instead of going on the stage, she married one of those floating Englishmen. Met him in Paris, married him, and came over here with him.”

“Didn’t she care for Mr. Hard?”

“Well, it’s pretty hard sometimes to know who a woman does care for,” said Scott, candidly. “But if she did, she must have got over it. Or maybe she got tired of the singing business and took Conrad in a fit of the blues. I’ve known ’em to do that.”

“Men, I suppose, never marry for reasons of that sort!”

“Men? Lord, yes, men’ll do anything—most of ’em,” grinned Scott, cheerfully. “We’re a rum lot. 171
Anyhow, Mrs. Conrad married her Englishman and came over to the coffee plantation with him. I guess they had some trouble like everybody else has had these last few years, but they managed to weather it. Then, about two years ago, they went on a hunting trip, up in the mountains, just the two of them and a Mexican boy. While they were there, Conrad shot himself while he was cleaning his gun.”

“Oh!”

“It was hopeless from the first and she knew it, but she stayed alone with him and sent the boy back to the ranch for a doctor. He died while they were there alone.”

Polly’s eyes had tears in them. She was staring wistfully at the mountains. “I’m trying to think

what it would mean—being up there, alone, with someone you loved who was dying," she said at last. "No wonder little things don't bother a woman who's been through a thing like that."

"Yes, it's those things that make character, I guess," said Scott, thoughtfully. "Or break it."

"Hasn't Mr. Hard ever been down there to see her?"

"No, there's a proud streak in Hard—or maybe he's got over his feeling for her. He never would let her know he was in the country. I rather guess Herrick planned this."

"I wonder? Oh, what is it? What do you see?" she cried, as she noticed that Scott's attention was no longer on her, but was fastened upon the dark foothills which rose between them and the mountains.

"I don't know; wish I had my glasses! Looks to me like fellows riding—do you see 'em? Over there, coming through that darkish spot between the foothills? Wonder if we're in for another row?"

"No—yes, it is! Coming this way!"

"Go in and tell them to put out the lights and stop that noise quick!" Scott's voice was hard and sharp. Polly darted into the house. Scott strained his eyes to watch the party of riders racking recklessly down the dark roadway from the hills. "It can't be Pachuca!" he muttered. "He wouldn't come back. It must be that damned young Angel. Well, I guess we're in for trouble before daybreak."

"What is it?" Hard was at his elbow. Scott turned and saw that the house was dark.

"It's a bunch on horseback—see, over yonder? They're making good time; they'll be on us in half a minute. Where's Herrick?"

"Getting the rifles. Where are the horses?"

"In the pasture, up by the river. They'll not find them in a hurry."

"Hadn't we better have the women go up there, too?" said Hard, anxiously.

"I don't believe so. If they're bound for us, there's no time. I think——"

"Mr. Scott," Clara Conrad's voice came softly from the dark doorway, "if that's Angel Gonzales why can't we all go——"

"I don't know who it is, and the moon's too strong out there—they'd spot you in a minute."

"But we can't sit here and do nothing!"

"You can do as you please." Scott's voice was ugly with the ugliness of strained nerves. "I say stick to shelter while you've got it." He drew his revolver as he spoke and examined it.

"They're coming fast." Hard's voice was tense. Herrick carrying three rifles came out.

"Get inside—everybody!" ordered Scott. The party had turned in from the road and were dashing toward them. Mrs. Conrad and Polly were already in the house. The men followed. "They ride like Indians, Hard; I believe it's Yaquis on the warpath!" He and Hard stationed themselves at the open windows in the darkness. "I'm for waiting till they attack us; what do you think?"

"Yes. Let them make the first move."

The intruders were at the gate. Now they swept in, a couple of score of them. They whirled and made for the barn.

"They're Indians, all right," whispered Scott. "They're after the horses."

The silence was complete for a few seconds, the women obediently crouching in the darkest corner scarcely seeming to breathe, Scott and Hard, hidden behind the light curtains, keeping their eyes fixed upon the swiftly moving figures outside, Herrick standing just within the doorway. Suddenly, cries broke the stillness. Two of the Yaquis who had entered the barn came out with the news. The yells were of rage.

"No horses!" grinned Scott. "Their feelings are hurt. Here's where the play begins."

"They're firing the barn," said Hard, grimly.

They were. It blazed like a child's bonfire and the shouts and curses of the disappointed Yaquis rose with the flames.

In another moment the Indians had ridden toward the house. Polly, who in spite of orders, had crept toward the window saw them in amazement. Between the moon and the light of the blazing barn, they were distinctly visible.

"But they can't be Indians!" she exclaimed, at Scott's elbow. "They're just like our Mexicans!"

"Did you expect them to wear scalp locks? Get out of range, quick! Hard, cover the second chap, there. I'm going to give the first boy a shock. They'll be in here in half a minute if I don't."

His shot rang out and the bullet flew over the Indian's head. It was close enough to make him pull his horse to its haunches while those behind him did the same.

"While I'm talking to him, you women slide out the back door," muttered Scott, hurriedly. "Make for the stream and the horses while they're watching us. Hello, out there, what do you want?" he said in Spanish.

Mrs. Conrad gripped Polly's arm. "Come!" she said.

"We can't!" demurred the girl. "We can't leave them like this."

"Come!" repeated Clara, angrily. "Do you want to fall into their hands?" Polly, too frightened by her tone to resist, crept softly behind her. They heard the Indian at whom Scott had fired answer. To Polly it meant nothing, but Clara's ears, accustomed to the tongue, caught an angry demand for horses, food and money.

"We haven't any of those things. We've just been raided—cleaned out—we're as poor as you are," was Scott's reply. The Indians conferred together. "It's a question of whether they think we're lying or not," said Scott, drily.

"Exactly. And they have unfortunately every reason to believe that a white man usually is," replied Hard. "What's the play if they come at us?"

"Shoot as many as we can," said Scott. "They'll do the rest. That's why I sent the women off."

"I thought so. Well, here goes. I ought to be able to get a couple before I cash in though I'm not considered very dangerous with firearms," replied Hard, calmly, though his heart was registering something approaching acute blood pressure.

From the leader came in angry Spanish: "We don't believe you! We'll come and get it."

"Come on!" yelled Herrick. Instantly, a dozen Yaquis were off their horses and running toward the house, shooting as they came. As instantly, two of the leaders fell in the path of the others.

"Good boy, Herrick!" cried Scott. "Let 'em have it again!" he yelled, as the Indians, halted for a moment by the fall of their men, came on again. The shots rang out again but this time no one fell. Hard felt something sing by him in the darkness and thanked God that the women were not there. Herrick rushed over for more cartridges.

"They're coming!" he shouted, excitedly.

"Let 'em come. Some of 'em are coming to something they won't like," growled Scott. "Look out—in the doorway!"

Two Indians had burst their way into the house, but disconcerted by its utter darkness after the moonlight outside, paused a moment to get their bearings. Scott, Hard and Herrick shot with one accord. One Indian came on; the other uttered a cry of pain; then both dashed outside for the shelter of the veranda. There was silence; the Indians hesitating in doubt as to their companions' fate, the white men uncertain as to what form the attack would take next.

"Are the women gone?" Herrick called softly.

"Yes," replied Hard. "Are you all right?"

"So. They whistle through my hair but they do not touch me," replied the musician, cheerfully.

"Here they come!" cried Scott, impatiently. "Watch your shots!"

The Indians were coming, and coming in a body.

"Gosh, it's going to be all day with us in half a minute!" gasped Scott. "Let 'em have it as hard as you can, boys. We may be able to hold 'em long enough to give the women a chance to get the horses."

Hard clenched his teeth and bent his eye on his rifle. In another moment the invaders would be upon them—when, sharp and decisive came the sound of shots; shots from among the foothills, followed by yells. There was a cry from the Indian who led the rush; a wavering of the line; and a stop. They broke into loud talk. In the meantime, the shots and yells continued. They seemed to come from two directions.

"There's another crowd back in the hills. They've got another fight on their hands," muttered Scott, listening. "It's a flank attack and these fellows don't like it."

"If it is——"

"It is. Hear that!"

There were more yells; the Yaquis outside flung themselves into their saddles and in another moment the two wounded men lying near the windows were all that remained of the attack.

"By golly, I've heard of luck before, but this is a case of the pure and unadulterated article," said Scott, awed.

Hard did not reply. He was taking a deep breath—the first in several minutes. Herrick whistled cheerfully.

"Unless it's Angel Gonzales," continued Scott, pensively. "In that case it's a question of 'Go it, old woman; go it, b'ar.'"

"Let's go after the horses and the women," said Hard. "The quicker we hit the trail for home the better my circulation's going to be. I think the Hards must have deteriorated considerably since the battle of Lexington. I'm getting to be a regular old woman."

Scott laughed. "You're a pretty good pal in a fight, old man," he said, simply. "I think you winged one of those birds outside. Shall we go and have a look?"

"Not I," replied Hard, decidedly. "It's unpleasant enough to me to kill a man without pawing him over afterward."

Scott went outside and looked over the victims of the fight.

“Dead, both of them,” he said, briefly. “Come on, let’s get out of this before their friends come back.” And to the sounds of yells and shots in the distance they made their way toward the stream.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT RIDE

When Li Yow clattered up the trail leading out of the river bed and up the mesa, he was a happy man, in spite of the fact that a horse was to him the last means of locomotion that he would have chosen for an all night trip, with the possible exception of a camel or an elephant. Except as objects for his scientific skill, horses were not dear to his heart. A wagon, a train, an automobile, these were sensible conveyances for an intellectual man of an old and distinguished family going about his business, but a horse, never!

Not that Li would have admitted that his family was old. Distinguished, perhaps, but scarcely old when it only counted its ancestry through some eight or nine hundred years. In China that is to be classed among the blatantly new. He was happy, however, because he was being given a chance to use his skill for that great purpose for which it had been acquired, the alleviation of pain.

Li was a student, and for five years he had had very little opportunity for the work that he loved. With the patience of the Oriental, he had toiled at an inferior art; now opportunity had come, and so eager was he to grasp it, that a twenty-mile ride on an uncongenial animal, in the night, did not deter him. Not that he was afraid of the dark as we like to think the Chinese are. Li Yow had a philosophy, old when the Christian philosophy was born, which amply sufficed to relieve his mind of any superstitious terrors. Mexicans on the rampage, and Yaquis on the warpath, did not, however, come under the category of superstitious fears, and he heartily hoped he might accomplish his journey without meeting either of them.

He rode Scott’s big roan, Cochise, a common-sense animal which could be trusted to the tender mercies of what its master called “a crazy Chink.” This excellent beast understood thoroughly the art of saving his strength, and curbing any foolish enthusiasm on the part of a rider to race up-hill or to exhaust one’s wind too early in the game.

“Spirit and a bit of deviltry are all right in a horse or a woman, I’ll grant you,” Scott used to say when anyone derided the roan. “But the horse or the woman who lives with me has got to have common sense.”

So Li Yow and Cochise trotted placidly along the mesa, one thinking of the joys of surgery, and the other of the pleasure of feeding in one’s own corral. They had been out a couple of hours perhaps, and Li, moved by the beauty of the night, quoted a fragment of eighth century poetry and turned in his saddle to see how far he had come—when, suddenly, he gave an exclamation of horror!

Back of him, across the river bed, back of the round-topped hill, from exactly the spot where Casa Grande stood, he saw the tops of flames shooting up against the sky line! Something was being burned. Something sizable, or its flames would not rise so high. It must be either Casa Grande, its barn, or both. Li’s heart stood still. He stopped Cochise in sympathy with that important organ. What to do? At Casa Grande was a friend to whom he was attached. Things of a most unpleasant nature might be happening to him—could he ride away and leave him?

On the other hand, what could he do—a lone Chinese, unarmed except for a formidable surgical apparatus? After all, they had two horses and perhaps they had seen the brigands coming and had escaped. Still, if he went back they would have three horses. The women could ride and the men could ride and tie. Li groaned in spirit. He hated walking more than he hated riding.

Obviously his duty was to go back and offer his help such as it was. If they were fighting, it would not be worth much, unless he could persuade a Mexican or two to stand still while he stabbed them with a lancet. With a sigh, Li turned Cochise in the direction of Casa Grande and applied an encouraging dig of the heel.

Cochise, however, saw things differently. He had started for Athens. Athens was home and a good place at that. He saw no reason for going back just to please an ignoramus who didn’t know how to ride and who would probably change his mind again before they had gone a mile. Consequently, when Li kicked, Cochise threw his head in the air and made crab-like motions with his legs. Li pulled and Cochise reared. Li, mindful of past instructions, loosed the reins and Cochise whirled. Li leaned over and patted the horse’s neck and Cochise bucked.

It was a nice exhibition of obstinacy on the part of both man and beast, and no one there but the moon to witness it. The buck, however, did the business. A bump and a rattle reminded Li Yow of his precious medical chest—absolutely unreplaceable—and with a frightened:

“Whoa, thou son of evil, thou animal of ill omen!” he gave in; and Cochise, secure in his victory, settled down to a trot again. “Ah, well, a sensible man spends no time in weeping over the inevitable,” meditated Li. “What is to be, will be. The young man with the injured leg is the gainer by thy obstinacy, oh, vile beast!”

At daybreak a tired man and a stiff horse arrived at Athens. Mrs. Van Zandt saw them because she was up attending to Adams who was suffering. She hailed the Chinaman from her doorway, bathrobed and boudoir capped as she was.

“Is that you, Marc Scott?” she called anxiously, as she recognized Cochise.

“No, lady,” replied Li, in his professional manner. “This not Mr. Scott, this Li Yow from Casa Grande. I come see sick boy,” and he rolled off the horse.

“Well, that’s good, he needs you! Leave the horse and come in.” Li complied and Cochise, released, started wearily for the corral. “See here,” Mrs. Van Zandt led the way to the bedroom, “I guess you’re pretty well used up, ain’t you? I’m going to get you something to eat in a minute. 183
Did you have a hard ride?” She had got a light and looked at him curiously. Li Yow did look very much used up.

“I hurry a great lot,” he said, simply. “I want go back but the horse he want come on.”

“What did you want to go back for?”

“Fire. I see big fire at Casa Grande,” replied the Chinaman, gravely. “I much afraid the bandits burn the house.”

Mrs. Van Zandt pulled him suddenly from the bedroom door.

“Good land, man, don’t let the boy hear you! He’s half out of his head now. What do you mean? Has Casa Grande been raided?”

Li nodded.

“By Pachuca?”

“Yes. He come morning, take everything—horses, chow, money, everything! Then Mr. Scott’s folks they come in afternoon. Only thlee horse for everybody. Mr. Scott say he mend wagon and they come over to-morrow. I come to-night to see sick boy. When I get up on mesa I see fire—don’t know who make him but mebbe bandits.”

Mrs. Van Zandt turned pale. Clutching her bathrobe tightly she made for the door. “Look here,” she called, over her shoulder, “you look after the boy and mind you don’t spill any of that news before him. I’ll get you some breakfast and see what’s to be done.”

Then she came back. “They were all right when you left them? The young lady, too?” she queried, anxiously. 184

“Yes, they all light. Both them ladies all light.”

“Both! Who’s the other?” demanded Mrs. Van Zandt, instantly.

“Mr. Hellick got flend—Mrs. Conlad,” said Li, wearily. “She come day before yest’day—from Mexico City. Mr. Hard’s flend, too.”

“Good Heavens, now what do you suppose the heathen means by that?” gasped the astonished woman. “Come here,” she added, sternly, and seizing the Chinaman by the sleeve of his blouse, she led him into the room occupied by Polly. Dramatically, she pointed to the photograph on the wall. “Is that the woman you’re talking about?”

Li examined the face gravely and nodded. “Yes,” he said, “only younger here.”

Mrs. Van released him suddenly. “All right, go on in and see the boy,” she said, and hurried down the street. “Fire and bandits—and I let that poor girl go over there with those men!” she gasped. “And what on earth is that woman doing at Casa Grande? It’s either a scandal or a romance, that’s a cinch!”

“What’s the matter? Whose horse was that? Great snakes, Mrs. Van, what the devil——” Johnson, hastily and scantily attired, came down the street, followed by the others. Cochise had waked up the camp. Mrs. Van looked at them tragically.

“It’s the Casa Grande Chinaman come over to see Jimmy. He rode Cochise,” she sobbed.

“What’d he ride Cochise for? What’s come over Marc Scott, lendin’ Cochise to a Chink?” 185

“Tom, something awful has happened,” and she burst into the story.

“Didn’t the heathen go back to help?”

“I guess he tried to, but Cochise got scared and wouldn’t go. What do you suppose it is ?”

“Gosh, I dunno! Don’t sound like Pachuca; he wouldn’t come back a second time. Sure looks bad.”

“And the feller says Mrs. Conrad’s there. What’s he mean by that, do you think?”

“Who’s she?”

“Mr. Hard’s friend; the widow woman that lives down South. Upon my word, Tom Johnson, I do believe that’s the woman and the trouble that the ouija meant and I thought all the time it was talking about Polly Street!”

“Dunno, I’m sure. Where’s Cochise?”

“Gone down to the corral.”

“Guess I’d better go down and give him the once over. They’ve probably rode him to death between ’em. Gosh, I’m sorry to hear that news!” and Tom strode off, sadly, followed by the others. “Poor old chap,” he murmured, a few minutes later, as he took the saddle off Cochise. “Can’t do nothin’ for your boss, so I’ll do what I can for you. Pretty well petered out, ain’t you?”

“Say, Tom, what are we going to do about this Casa Grande business, anyhow?” demanded O’Grady.

“Well, with a dynamited track, a busted auto, a smashed ’phone connection and a foundered horse, what would you suggest doing?” demanded Johnson, pessimistically. “Walkin’ ain’t so durned good in this country.” 186

“If we could get to Conejo we could get Mendoza to drive us over to Casa Grande,” hazarded Williams.

“Well, that ain’t a bad idea for you, Jack,” said Tom, patronizingly. “I reckon I’ll stretch my legs in that direction after breakfast. Suppose we go up and see what the Doc says about Jimmy?”

In the meantime, the doctor had examined his patient’s leg, quietly ignoring the flood of excited questions hurled at him by the boy.

“Him velly bad,” he declared at length. “You keep him still while I get bullet out, mebbe he get well. You talk a heap and mebbe I cut him off.”

“You cut him off and I’ll cut your liver out, Li, you sabe?” grinned Adams, gamely. “Anyhow, it’s blamed good of you to ride over here. I’ll bet you’re sore, eh?”

Mrs. Van Zandt coming up the road with the tray in her arms met the men coming up from the corral.

“I never did suppose I’d see myself carrying breakfast to a Chinese,” she said, wearily, “but you can’t tell these days what’ll come your way. I know exactly how that poor guy feels. I rode over to Casa Grande once on Cochise. He’s wide and he’s rough and anyone who wants to ride him twenty miles is welcome to him as far as I’m concerned.”

The train gang hung around to hear the verdict on Jimmy Adams. They were much relieved to hear that the operation was to be one of probing rather than of cutting. They had had some gloomy discussions on that point which had ended in consulting the mail order catalogue in order to see whether it advertised artificial limbs. 187

“He wants one of you to help,” said Mrs. Van, coming out of the room. “I wisht you would. I feel that nasty this morning that the sight of blood would just about finish me. Go on in, Tom.” Tom went in. Mrs. Van set the tray on the table. “Seems funny to be waiting on a cook, don’t it? But I suppose it’s different when he’s tending the sick, and I’ll say he’s clean. He washed his hands before he touched Jimmy. I watched him.”

“Well, that’s more than old Estrada over in Conejo does,” said O’Grady. “He pulled a tooth for me last winter and he come in from feedin’ his pigs to do it. Right plumb into my mouth he started to put his dirty fist. ‘No,’ says I, ‘you wash that mitt first. Afterward you can suit yourself.’”

“You better get a swig of whiskey ready for Tom,” suggested the brakeman, solicitously. “Them operations is ugly things.”

“I will,” said Mrs. Van, hurrying to the cabinet and taking down the bottle.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE WAGON

Herrick stopped before they had gone a dozen yards from the house.

“Go on and find the women,” he said, curtly. “I have something to do before they come.”

“Something——” Scott stared at the little man uncomprehendingly.

“So. Do you want them to see those ugly bodies?” he pointed to the two dead Yaquis, stretched ghastly and plain in the moonlight. “I shall pull them into the shadow of the bushes.”

“Well, he’s nervy for a piano player, ain’t he?” murmured Scott, as he and Hard turned the corner of the house.

“I think, myself, that there’s a lot of rot talked about the artistic temperament,” replied Hard, drily. “The war showed us that poets could fight as courageously as plumbers, and I’ve always thought that when you got the real unadulterated article in artistic temperament, you usually got with it a distinctly cruel streak. I believe that you and I hated killing those Indians a lot more than Herrick did, though he’ll probably throw a nervous chill over it after a while and compose a

piece about it."

"Well, maybe so," assented Scott. "He's the only artistic chap I ever got real close to and I don't mind admitting he's mighty queer—but he ain't yellow. I'll say that for him after to-night." 189

They were passing a clump of bushes as he spoke and two dark figures started forth. Scott instinctively put his hand on his gun.

"Oh," gasped the shorter figure, "what has happened? Are you shot? Who is running away—you or they?" She seized Scott's wrists with a clutching hold.

Scott laughed. "That's how you obey orders, is it? Where are the horses?"

"I don't know. We stayed right here," faltered Polly. "I want to know if you're hurt!"

"No, not if I know it, and I usually recognize bullets when they hit me."

"What happened?" insisted the other woman. "Have they gone?"

"They're fighting somebody over in the hills—we don't know who it is," replied Hard. "Probably Angel Gonzales. These fellows were evidently an advance guard."

"We ought to get out of here before they come back," said Scott. "You can't tell how long that will last—and whoever licks, we don't want to be hanging around here."

"They'll burn the place, I suppose," said Mrs. Conrad, wearily. "May I go back and get some things?"

Scott hesitated. "I think we ought to get away," he said. "But one of us will have to go back to get Herrick and the saddles—if you can hurry—go with her, Hard, and I'll go after the horses." 190

"Saddles?" Polly spoke suddenly. "Weren't they in the barn?"

"No; luckily I put them in the wagon when I was tinkering with it," said Scott. "We've only two horses, you know, and I want you women to ride them."

"By—by ourselves?" Mrs. Conrad's usually cheerful voice sounded a little frightened. "I couldn't find that trail in the dark; I'm not Li Yow, you know."

"The horses will take you."

"Oh, please let's keep together!" pleaded Polly. "Why can't we all go in the wagon the way you planned?"

"Well, for one reason, the harness was in the barn and was burned," said Scott, with some irritation.

"Herrick has a lot of old junk of that sort in his storeroom," volunteered Hard. "I believe you could patch up one. Those sounds have died away—the fight's over," he added. "Let's go back and have a look, and see what Herrick says."

There was a pause and the two men consulted anxiously together. It was very still—not a sound from the direction of the hills. It really did look as though the attack had been followed by flight. Scott, against what he afterward called his better judgment, but what was really only a disinclination to change his mind, gave in, and the two men walked on ahead.

"If we're going in the wagon, Hard, we've got to go by the road, and I don't stir a step on that road till I know whether this deviltry is over for the night or not. We'll camp down here for a few hours, and start by daybreak." 191

"Why not? The horses need the rest and so do we. I say camp, by all means."

Everything seemed harmless at the ranch house. Herrick, who had performed his unpleasant task, was studying the extent of the damage, which seemed to be confined to broken windows. When consulted, he approved of the idea of an early morning start in the wagon and believed that out of the odds and ends of harness in the storeroom something could be patched up and made to do.

"All right then." Scott's voice was emphatic. "I'll fix the wagon first thing in the morning. And now, let's all turn in and catch a few winks before daybreak."

"I don't believe I'll sleep a minute," said Polly, as the two women were left alone in the room which Clara Conrad had been occupying. "I'll throw my cloak around me and lie down on the couch. I feel awfully strung up, don't you?"

"Yes," said the older woman. "But I'm going to try to sleep, and so must you."

As a matter of fact, Clara did not expect to sleep. The meeting with Henry Hard had brought up old memories—memories both happy and sad. He had changed little, the tall, thin, sandy-haired man. It was good, oh so good, to have something back again from the old life! As she closed her eyes and put away from her the events of the day, old scenes came back with a clearness that they had not worn for many years. The old houses; the quiet, cultured, elderly men and women, 192 the gayer young ones, herself and Hard among them; the dinners, dances, concerts; the summer days on the water, and the rides—all came back as though they had been but yesterday, and all on account of this one man who had played so important a part in them.

She realized, as she lay there in the darkness, that without putting the thought clearly, she had had deeply imbedded in her mind the idea that she would see him or hear something about him when she went back to Boston. She was not in love with him, but she had never forgotten him and she would never feel about him as she did about so many of the others who had played

parts in her old life. Soothed by the thought, she drifted into a calm and restful sleep.

Polly, however, was too unskilled in the management of her thoughts to be able to relax at will. She lay quietly, so as not to disturb the other woman, but her mind was whirling. She lived again each event of the past two days; the raid on the mine, the ride with Pachuca, his escape, the trip to Casa Grande, and the growing companionship with Scott—the look she had surprised in his eyes only an hour ago when she had stood with him on the veranda, looking at the distant mountains; and then the dreadful minutes spent behind the bushes, listening to the guns of the attacking Yaquis.

"And I thought a golf tournament was exciting!" she said, smiling in the dark. Softly she rose and crept to the window. It was very beautiful out there; mountains, hills, bushes, all a study in 193
absolute stillness. The only sound that came to her ears was the howl of a wolf in the distance.

"Coming in at just the right moment," smiled the girl. "What a country for effects! Oh dear, I believe I could sleep out there in the hammock if it wasn't too chilly."

Taking the couch cover over her arm she crept softly out of the door and out on to the veranda where the hammock swayed gently in the breeze. Polly adjusted herself in it with care; a fall would bring all the occupants of the house out with a bound.

"First they'd bound and then they'd fuss," she said to herself. "I don't want to be fussed at, I just want to snatch a few winks out under this gorgeous sky. I don't understand how when skies and stars and mountains are all laid out for them, artists want to do the red and green futurist horrors that they love so. Now, what's that noise?"

A queer kind of noise it was. Polly sat up quite suddenly. It seemed to come from behind a clump of bushes some distance to the right. It was a pounding, scraping sort of noise, not very loud, but distinctly disconcerting. You got the impression that whoever was doing it was trying not to make any more noise than he could help. Polly's heart beat rapidly. She must call one of the men. She rose unsteadily and at the same moment the noise stopped. A tall figure stepped out from behind the bushes and came toward the house.

Polly stepped back into the shadow of the porch. She was about to dive into the open window 194
when another sound caught her ear. The man was whistling softly—whistling the Slumber Motif from Die Walküre! Polly laughed aloud. She had taken Henry Hard for a bandit.

"Hello, what are you doing up on deck?" he said, whimsically. "I thought we'd sent the passengers below and battened down the hatches."

"I couldn't sleep, so I came out here. What are you doing with that pick? Was it you I heard digging?"

"Scott and me. I came up for a match."

"But what can you be digging for at this time of night? Not buried treasure?" eagerly.

"My dear child, I hate to disappoint you, knowing your feelings on the subject. If you must know, we killed a couple of Yaquis and we're burying them on what we'd call at home 'the lawn.' It's rather awful, but we can't help it."

"Killed them!" Polly's eyes were wide with horror.

"It's a rotten business, if you ask me, both killing and burying. I'm just beginning to form a faint idea of the sort of thing the youngsters we sent abroad had to face. I was keeping up my courage by whistling. Won't you go to bed like a nice girl?"

"No. I couldn't stand it in there in the dark. It doesn't seem so bad out here. Go on—don't bother about me."

After Hard had got his match and joined Scott again behind the bushes, Polly sat and listened to the ominous sounds, her pleasant reflections quite at an end. 195

"That's how it always goes. You begin to feel comfortable and pleased with your philosophy and yourself and then reality comes along and swats you one in the eye. I will not think of those Indians! I'll think of Bob and Emma. Wonder what kind of a nurse Emma makes? Not that she'll have a chance to try, poor lamb. Those trained ones will shoo her off and flirt with Bob themselves."

It was some time before the two men finished their ugly job. Polly saw them come out from behind the bushes and go into the house by the back door. She stretched herself sleepily—it was beginning to be a bit chilly, even when wrapped in a coat and a serape. Perhaps it would be wiser to go in. She folded the serape and started for the door, only to stop midway as Scott came out.

"Oh," she said, "I thought you'd all gone to bed."

"And you know you ought to," said he. "I don't blame you for not wanting to. Those mountains get one, don't they?"

They were standing exactly where they had stood so short a time ago, but so much had happened since that it seemed hours gone by. It wasn't to be expected, the girl thought, that they could go on from where they had left off. She looked up. He was staring at the mountains. She felt a ridiculous mixture of relief and disappointment.

"They get me," she answered. "I never knew I was so fond of mountains." 196

"It's the mystery of them. You have the feeling that things are going on in and about them that

you don’t know—that nobody’ll ever know. I remember the first time I climbed a big mountain—up in Colorado. When I was about three-quarters of the way up I looked down on one of those little mountain lakes—just as blue as that ring of yours—set in the brown of the mountain. It made me feel as if I’d struck gold. I couldn’t believe that anybody but the Indians and I had ever seen that lake.”

Scott was leaning against the post of the veranda, still looking at the mountains. Suddenly he turned.

“Little girl, I think you’d better be going in and getting a few hours of sleep,” he said. “Four o’clock comes along awfully early in the morning.”

Polly said nothing. She picked up the serape again and turned to go. Then she came back again, holding out her hand.

“Mr. Scott, I haven’t said a word to show that I’m grateful for what you did to-night. You saved my life, didn’t you?”

Scott took the hand and smiled down into the serious eyes.

“I wouldn’t go that far,” he said. “Those fellows who horned into our fight did that, I reckon. I sure tried to, though, if you’d like to shake hands on that.”

“You risked your own life, anyhow, so please don’t spoil my story.”

“Well, put it that I’ll be delighted to save your life any time you say, even if I get my hide full of holes for doing it. How’s that?”

“That’s all right,” agreed Polly, heartily. “You may call me at twenty minutes of four, if you please,” and she disappeared into the house.

Scott stood a moment after she was gone, an odd little smile on his lips.

“I wonder if she’d care—or would it be another case of Joyce Henderson?” he said. “Well, serve me right for a fool if it was!” He kicked a stick out of his way as he made for the wagon. “What have you got to offer a girl, anyhow?” He took a pocket torch out and examined the wheel of the wagon. “I’ve seen better looking wheels and then again I’ve seen worse,” he decided, pessimistically. “If our luck holds we’ll make it. Doggone it, being civilized makes an awful idiot of a man. I’m going to dream of those poor Yaquis we’ve just buried, sure as shoe leather.”

Four o’clock does indeed come along early when you have not closed your eyes before midnight. It also comes along chilly and dark and generally uncomfortable. The women were awakened by Hard, who had to knock loudly on their door in order to accomplish it. They tumbled to their feet and performed the necessary dressing operations in the dark, except for a candle which Clara lighted cautiously.

“And to think that people once lived by candlelight!” murmured Polly, sleepily. “Were born, married, and finally died by it. Well, the race has come up a peg, I’ll say that for it.”

Mrs. Conrad was ready first. She was very rapid, in a quiet, unhurried fashion. In her corduroy skirt and jacket, she looked very girlish. Polly mentally took five years off her estimate of her new acquaintance’s age.

“Awfully natural looking woman, too,” she commented, silently. “Most of the pretty women I know at home are always doing things to themselves—fussing over their looks; but she just seems to keep herself fresh and neat and let it go at that, and she manages to look young and handsome. As for me, I’m a rag and I look it, but perhaps as there are no tremendous beauties around, I’ll pass.”

She followed Mrs. Conrad into the kitchen, where she found her busy with Herrick over the breakfast. The pleasant odors of burning wood and boiling coffee had already made themselves noticed. Scott, in a corner of the kitchen, was working over the harness which he was getting into a condition possible for use. He looked up and nodded as Polly entered.

“Your gentleman friend left a few things; we won’t have to starve on the road,” he said, drily. “There’s a side of bacon—wonder why he left that?”

“Perhaps he didn’t see it,” suggested Polly, sweetly.

“I guess that’s the answer. There, I reckon that harness will take us as far as Athens, if we have a bit of luck. If you’ll bring out what you want to take, Mrs. Conrad, we’ll pack it in the wagon.”

“I’ve only a couple of suitcases. My trunks went by rail to the border—that is, they started.”

“How about you, Herrick? Afraid we can’t take the piano.”

Herrick looked up in some surprise. “Me?” he said. “I am not going with you, my friend.”

“Not going with us? But, Victor, you can’t stay here alone.” Mrs. Conrad’s voice had real solicitude in it.

“Why not? Li will return and you shall send him first to Conejo to buy provisions. When things settle down, my men will come back and we shall go to work again.”

“You’re going to stick by the ranch?” demanded Scott.

“It is my home. What else have I?” The little man’s voice was sad.

“Well, maybe you’re right,” said Scott, after a moment. “The best way to hang on to property just now is to sit down on it. We’ll send Li over to Conejo with the wagon and he can load up. If

you get into trouble, remember you've got friends in this country." And the two men shook hands heartily as Scott tramped off to the wagon.

Polly did not see the parting between the musician and Clara Conrad, but the latter looked, when she came out of the house, as though she had been crying, and the little man looked more pathetic than ever as he stood alone in the doorway waving them good-bye.

"Do you think he ought to say there?" demanded Polly, as Scott helped her into the wagon.

"No, I don't, but he's obstinate and you can't move him once he makes up his mind. There's a lot of the woman in every artistic man, I believe," grunted Scott, disgustedly. 200

A little later, with the two Athens horses hitched to the mountain wagon, the party started out, Hard driving. The road led out through the hills where the fighting had been only a few hours ago. There was no sign of what had happened. It was a poor road, narrow, rough and little used. There were ruts in it and chuck-holes, turns and an occasional arroyo. It was rather ghostly, too, driving at this hour; the chill, early morning feel of the air, the fading moon, the faint pinkness hanging over the mountains suggesting the coming dawn.

"One thing you miss around here is the cattle," said Scott. "Up in New Mexico you'd be starting out this time in the morning and you'd see the range cattle looking at you, sort of surprised to see folks around so early in the morning; some of 'em still lying down and napping. Around here raising cattle hasn't been very popular the last few years—too hazardous."

"Miss Polly, I want you to notice that funny little house over there," said Hard, pointing to his right.

"Where?"

Indeed, there was reason for the question. The little cabin had been built tightly against a hill, with the hill scooped out to make the back part. A closer look revealed a burro standing on the roof beside the chimney.

"Well, that's the first time I ever saw a burro on a roof!" declared Polly. "Who lives there?"

"A Mexican family named Soria," replied Hard. "I'll go over and see if they know anything about the fighting last night." 201

"You won't need to," said Scott. "Here comes the whole population."

So it seemed. There was an old woman—very old, very thin and very brown; a younger one, half a dozen youngsters, several dogs and finally the burro. The family were clad in every sort of decrepit garment. Polly thought she had rarely seen so pitiful an assemblage; and yet they did not look particularly unhappy, except the younger woman, who hung back and seemed to have been crying. They had seen the wagon and had come out to find out what was going on. The older woman came directly to the wagon, while the younger one stood a little way off, a baby in her arms, and the other children hanging around her. She was rather a pretty woman, or would have been with half a chance. It is difficult to be pretty when your hair hangs in straggling locks, your too plump figure festoons itself around you in bags, and your clothes look as though you had never had them off since you first became acquainted with them. Poor things, they lead an awful life.

"I'll let you speak to her, Clara," Hard said, with a smile. "I think your Spanish is in better working order than mine. Ask after the daughter's husband; he's in the army and it may open the way for a little information."

Mrs. Conrad spoke in rapid and soft-sounding Spanish to the old woman who stood listening, her wrinkled face set in the monotony of hopelessness.

"How beautifully she speaks Spanish!" thought Polly, enviously. "I don't understand a word of it, but even I can tell the difference between hers and the kind that both the men speak." 202

"Good-morning, my friend." Clara's voice was cheerful and pleasant. "How is the family?"

"Badly, señora, very badly. My son Manuel joined the army last night and with him his wife and two little ones. Now we have no man in the house—we shall starve."

"But your daughter's husband?"

"Francisco was killed last week in a fight. The soldiers brought the news. Carlotta has four little ones now and no man."

"That is very bad. I am sorry. What soldiers do you mean?"

"Last night. The soldiers who came from the north."

"D'you mean that the crowd that was fighting up here in the hills were soldiers?" broke in Scott, eagerly. "Federal soldiers?"

"No, no, the soldiers of the revolution—Sonora troops. They march south against Sinaloa." Carlotta had crept nearer and was taking part in the conversation.

"I don't get you. Who was doing the fighting?" demanded Scott.

The old woman burst into rapid speech, leaving Scott in the lurch immediately. Clara came to his rescue.

"The poor old thing is more Indian than Mexican and she doesn't talk very clearly," she said. "She says that the party which came along the road last night was a regiment of cavalry from up north. They saw the barn burning and thought that the bandits were on the march; so they 203

started over that way. They fell in with the stragglers of the Yaqui crowd and started to fight. As near as I can tell, each party seems to have thought that the other was Angel Gonzales' band. The Yaquis had been rooted out of their village by Gonzales and were on the warpath, poor creatures.

"Fortunately, there were a lot of Yaquis in the troop and by the time the fellows who were trying to loot us came along they began to understand the situation and the lot of them joined the troops. This old lady's son, Manuel, joined too, and his wife and babies went along. That explains why they let us alone last night."

"It does," said Scott. "And it shows that Angel is around somewhere bent on deviltry. Here, old lady, is something to buy chow for the babies for a few days—better luck to you!" He handed her some money and they drove away amid loud thanks and happy smiles.

"What in the world do you mean by the wife and babies going, too?" demanded Polly, excitedly.

"Why, here in Mexico war is a family affair," replied Scott. "There's no such thing as the girl I left behind me. The Missus goes along and so do the youngsters. She does most of the foraging for food on the march."

"The Mexican believes in equality of the sexes," said Hard. "He believes that the woman has just as much right to do manual labor, to provide a living for the family, to fight, and to perform all the other unpleasant functions of living as he has. If there are not enough to go around, he generously allows her to do his share."

"It's great to be a wife in Mexico," observed Scott, drily. "Think of that, Miss Polly, next time you meet a fascinating Spaniard."

"Don't be disagreeable," said Mrs. Conrad, "and don't tell fibs. It's the women of the lower classes who have the hard time down here just as they do in every country."

"Except the U. S. A.," replied Scott, stoutly. "A woman may have hard luck in our country because she's sick or poor or married to a no-account; but not because the general opinion of the female sex is so darned low that any loafer who comes along feels that he's got a right to treat her as he pleases."

"How you like to argue every point, don't you?" observed Polly. "Were you born like that or did it grow on you? Oh!"

The "oh" was literally jolted out of her. Turning rather a sudden curve at a pretty good clip, the wagon slipped over the edge of a chuck-hole a little deeper than the ordinary. Happening as it did in just the right place, it caught the weakened wheel and wrenched it off as neatly and as suddenly as a dentist wrenches a tooth out of the jaw of an unwilling patient.

There was a crash and a jar as the wagon sank on its side, and the frightened horses struggling to pull the dragging load, snapped the harness where Scott had patched it. The occupants were jumbled into the bottom of the wagon, except Hard, who was pitched out into the road. Scott was out in a minute and at the horses' heads; the women righted themselves just in time to see Hard pull himself to his feet, staggering as he did so.

"Hurt, Henry?" asked Scott, who was trying to calm the horses.

"No, just bent my knee under me."

"Here, hold these critturs while I pull the ladies out!"

"We're all right—that is, I'm all right. Look after Mrs. Conrad," said Polly, as Scott lifted her from the débris. "What was it? The wheel?"

Mrs. Conrad gladly availed herself of Scott's ready arm. "What did Henry do?" she said. By this time, Scott was loosing the horses from the harness and Hard had hobbled over to the edge of the road, where he sat down.

"It's my bad knee," he explained. "I did this once, only much worse, playing football in college. Fell, you know, with it doubled under me. I was laid up for six months."

"Oh, Henry!"

"Oh, I shan't be this time. It always lames me for a few hours, though, when I do anything to it. Knees are great chaps for bearing malice."

"Well, you certainly shan't walk to Athens," said Polly, with decision. "You must ride one horse and Mrs. Conrad the other, while Mr. Scott and I walk. I'd love to!"

"Dear child, you couldn't," exclaimed Clara. "Could you ride, Henry, do you think? You and Polly could ride to Athens and send somebody back for us with the other wagon."

"I could," said Hard, "but I'd rather not. I'd like to rest it for a couple of hours if I could. Scott, suppose you walk and let them ride and leave me here. There's a shady-looking spot over in those cottonwoods and I'll just rest there till I'm able to hobble back to the Soria place. You can send for me there."

"There's a trail just above here that goes over and strikes the one we came on about eight miles from Athens," said Scott, doubtfully. "I've never traveled it, but Gomez told me about it last year. Rough, he said, but navigable. I guess that's what we'd better do, Hard, leave you here and I'll walk."

"How far is it?" asked Mrs. Conrad.

“Oh, twenty miles, maybe. It cuts off a good deal.”

“You shan’t walk twenty miles on a rough trail, my dear man, if I can prevent it,” said Clara, firmly. “You and Polly must ride, and I’ll stay here with Henry. Now, please! I’m at home in this country and I’m not afraid.” There was a pause, then Scott said:

“I guess she’s right, Hard. They don’t either of ’em ride well enough to tackle a strange trail alone, and if I walk it will delay sending back for you. One of us had better ride the trail with Polly, while the other stays at Soria’s with Mrs. Conrad.”

After a little more discussion it was decided that Scott and Polly should go, while the other two returned, after Hard had rested a bit, to the Soria place. Scott moved the suitcases which Clara had brought over to the little nook made by the cottonwoods, where they could be left until someone came with the Athens wagon, and helped Hard to hobble over there. Then, feeling 207
rather as though they had deserted their friends, and yet not knowing what else to do, Scott and Polly rode away.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAIL

In after years, Scott was wont to say that he distrusted the trail recommended by Gomez from the moment his horse started to travel it.

“It was one of those trails that didn’t look right—from the first,” he would say with a reminiscent inflection. As a matter of fact, however, the trail looked innocent enough at the first glance, and Scott’s pessimism may be laid partly to the circumstances under which the trip was attempted and partly to the fact that Scott almost always hated to change his mind.

“How long will it be, do you suppose, before you can send back for the others?” queried Polly, as they rode away.

“Well, we ought to make Athens to-night,” replied Scott, thoughtfully. “Tom could start back with our wagon early in the morning. Cochise and this fellow I’m riding, Jasper, could make it.”

“They’ll have to stay at the Sorias’ all night. They’ll be very uncomfortable.”

“Oh, I don’t know. They’re neither of them tenderfeet. They’ll get along.”

“It’ll be very romantic, of course, and very exciting,” sighed Polly.

“Romantic? Why?” 209

“Well, people have a way of making love to widows,” said Polly, wistfully. “And anybody with half an eye can see that he likes her.”

“Shucks! Hard’s a gentleman; he won’t think he has to be rude to a woman just because he’s left alone with her overnight.”

“It isn’t being rude to ask a woman to marry you if you happen to like her, is it?” demanded Polly, with spirit.

“It is, under some circumstances,” replied Scott, shortly. “You’re pretty romantic, aren’t you, for a grown-up girl?”

“I? Not at all.” Polly flushed, indignantly. “But I’m interested when I see two people that I like falling nicely in love with each other.”

“She’s not in love with him or she’d have married him when she had the chance,” said Scott, authoritatively. “She’s an ambitious woman; what does she want of a man buried in a coal mine?”

“She may have changed. That was a long time ago,” ventured the girl. “And if she cares for him, she might forget her ambition. Women do, sometimes.”

“Yes, in books they do,” replied Scott, moodily. “But I never saw a woman in her class give up anything she really wanted just to marry a poor man. If she did, she’d probably make him miserable afterward, when she was sorry she’d done it.”

They rode a while in silence. Polly was hurt and angry. It occurred to her that Scott’s objection to her romantic imaginings was based on something deeper than just his usual 210
argumentativeness. Perhaps her imagination had misled her in regard to what had been in his eyes the night before. Or rather, not her imagination, but her vanity. It was a disagreeable thought for one who had promised herself to have done forever with that unpleasant trait. Also, down underneath, there was a hurt that had nothing to do with vanity.

Scott rode silently, occupied with his thoughts. He glanced now and then, however, at the slender figure of the girl who rode beside him. She was very pleasing to look upon, with her curly, reddish hair, big dark eyes, delicate features, and smooth tanned skin. Her white hat was

pulled down to shade her eyes; her brown coat, trousers and boots wore a jaunty appearance; but it was not altogether of appearances that Scott was thinking.

It is possible with some of us to view the outward and the inward at the same time and to render quite unrelated verdicts. Scott had been conscious of doing this before with Polly Street, but of late somehow the verdicts had begun to agree. He was finding the inward Polly quite as attractive as the outward. Had she changed or had he learned to look deeper, he wondered? He had thought her spoiled and superficial, yet possessing undoubtedly worth-while qualities, such as pluck and honesty—things you cannot be deceived in.

Now he was finding another side to the girl; a something very sweet and lovable. Was he being led away by the eye of man which is troubled by many things, or was the better side of the girl 211
coming to the surface under different conditions? Was she beginning to care a little for him or was she playing with him as she probably had done with the Henderson boy? Scott set his teeth grimly.

There are after all two great classes into which humanity may be divided; those who are living purposefully, in the higher sense of the word, and those who are drifting. The purposeful people may and often do go wrong, but they have at least something to come back to when they right themselves. The drifters, on the other hand, are not only without help for themselves, but have a dreadful way of clutching at the purposeful ones and submerging them as well. The average man or woman who belongs to the former class has rather a horror of the drifter and likes to give him a wide berth. Something of this nature had passed through Scott's head more than once when he had been attracted by a woman whose outer and inner trappings did not correspond.

It was so easy, however, to like this auburn-headed youngster, who seemed to have gotten over her anger against him and to be beginning to like him. She had such a warm, quick smile; such a caressing look in those serious eyes. She was so natural and easy with him; turned to him so quickly for his approval of what she said or did and took his uncouth criticism so sweetly. It was flattering—yes, that was just the point. Was she sincere, or was she planning to add him to the list of her victims? She would not do that. He was no boy, to be petted and thrown aside. 212

About this time, they came upon the trail. The little river had followed the road for about a mile and a half, when across on its other bank Scott saw a deep rut leading out of it and continuing in a narrow line or trail so faint as to be easily overlooked. It wound along, lost itself in some chaparral and doubtless became clear again beyond. The chaparral being on a little rise, one could not see beyond it.

"There we are," he called to the girl, who had fallen a little behind. "Wait a bit till I find a place to get down the bank on this side."

Polly waited. Scott rode up and down the bank; finally he stopped.

"We'll have to cross here," he called. "It's steep but it's all right. Follow me," and both he and his horse disappeared in the river bed. Polly rode up and took a look at the descent.

"I won't go so far as to say that he picked a nasty one because he's out of temper, but it looks like it," she grumbled. "Go on, pony, if he can do it I suppose we can."

The pony put her two forefeet over the edge of the descent and clung to solidity and sanity with her hind two.

"I don't blame you. It's what I'd do if I had four legs and some fool tried to make me slide down a precipice. But we've got to go. That man's got a jaw like Napoleon and there's no use arguing with him."

She looked down. Scott had reached the bottom and was smiling back at her. One had to admit that he had the sort of smile which warmed up the atmosphere. 213

"Want me to come and lead her?" he offered.

"I do not." Polly gave her mount a little dig with her heel, the tension on the hind legs relaxed, a series of slides and jolts and the descent was made. She found herself in the river with Scott while the horses drank thirstily.

"It was the only place to come down," he said, penitently.

"Well, I wasn't scared, it was the horse," replied Polly, briefly. "You needn't think that every time we hang back it's my fault."

"I've known times when it was a sign of good sense to be scared," retorted Scott, as he turned his horse's nose toward the upward climb.

"That man can use up more good gray matter trying to dodge paying one a compliment than most men use in thinking up one," decided Polly.

The way through the chaparral was trying. The trail was very faint, the stiff brush hit one in the face and almost tore one's clothing. It was necessary for Scott to go first in order to keep the trail, while the girl fell considerably into the rear to escape the blows from the brush which flew back after he had disturbed it. On either side of them, above the brush, rose walls formed by foothills, growing higher as they went. They were evidently going directly into the mountains.

"Of course, we crossed two ranges when we came from Athens to Casa Grande," reasoned Polly, "and we've got to cross them again going back. But this doesn't look as though we were going 214
through any gaps as we did on the other trail. We're evidently going straight up. It's going to be

hard on the horses."

It *was* hard on the horses. It was getting on in the afternoon and the sun was still very hot. They had seen no water since leaving the little river. The trail had come out of the brush and become a narrow—a very narrow ledge on the side of the mountain, while on the other side one looked down into a ravine deep enough to make one's head swim if one looked too long. Scott ploughed along ahead, looking back whenever the trail showed a nasty place, ready to jump off and go to the girl's rescue if necessary.

"She's a plucky one all right," he said to himself. "This is no trail for a tenderfoot. I hope we don't run into anything worse before we get through. How are you coming?" he called back.

They had come to a turn in the trail. Huge boulders poised on the edge of the narrow ledge with that utter disregard for gravity displayed now and then by rocks which look big enough to know better. Scott had dismounted and stood looking into the ravine which had widened into a valley. In front of him, on the narrow turn, it seemed but a step to the tree-tops of the valley below. Further ahead, lay the next range of mountains, higher than the ones through which they were passing. Back of them, the winding trail seemed to flutter like a brown ribbon. Polly hopped down and joined him. Together they drank in the scene.

"It's too lovely. It hurts," said the girl, with wet eyes. 215

"Isn't it? I didn't know myself that there was anything around here like this."

"It's worth being raided for," replied Polly. "Let's stay here a while and keep on looking."

Scott smiled. "Will it spoil it for you if I eat a sandwich?" he said.

"Not if there's one for me, too," laughed the girl. "But I thought you left all the lunch with the others."

"Not all. I'm too good a woodsman to go on a strange trail with nothing to eat in my saddle-bag. Luckily I didn't have to leave them the canteen." They ate the sandwiches—saving a portion for dinner in case they were late reaching Athens—and washed them down with warm water from the canteen.

"Let's look around the corner before we mount again," suggested the girl. "I like to know what's ahead of me."

"Around the corner" was a slope down into the ravine, more gradual than before and green with stunted grass and mesquite. Here and there a cactus rose gauntly, some in the tall Spanish bayonet with its lovely bloom, and some in the low, dagger-like plant close to the ground. Above them, on the right side rose the rocky wall of the mountain, not altogether sheer in its ascent, but curving in and then out at the top, the upper ridge forming a shelf. Mesquite grew seemingly out of the solid rock.

"Oh, look," exclaimed the girl. "There's almost a little cave up there under that shelf! It could be a rustler's cave if there were any rustlers around." 216

"There are more rustlers than there are things to rustle," remarked her companion.

Standing on the narrow trail, they looked over and down into the valley. It was lonely to look at; not a house, not a living creature, and yet so very beautiful—with a warmth of color and sunshine. Polly did not speak. Her eyes were fixed on the scene below. She did not see the look on Scott's face as he stood beside her, gazing not at the valley but at the purity of her face so near his shoulder.

It was very still. Suddenly a bird flew from one of the bushes, flew across the rock in front of their faces. Polly, her thought broken, turned quickly and surprised the hungry look in Scott's eyes. Her face flushed and neither spoke. Then, impulsively, he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately, Polly, sobbing, clinging to him in a silence full of meaning. As suddenly Scott put her away from him, holding her and looking into her eyes.

"Do you mean it?" he demanded almost angrily. "You're not playing with me?"

Polly did not answer. She looked up into his eyes, her own still wet. He took her in his arms again.

"I don't see why!" he said, softly. "There's nothing about me for you to fall in love with. Are you sure?"

"Very sure," she lifted her head. "I was sure last night, when you nearly told me—before those Indians came. Why didn't you want to tell me?"

"Because I knew I'd no business to," replied Scott, roughly. "I've no business to, now, but I'm human and when you stood there with the sun on your hair, and that look on your face, I fell." 217

"I'll stand that way again," smiled Polly, "if you'll stop scowling and say nice things to me. It isn't a criminal offense, Marc Scott, for an unmarried man to fall in love with me. Don't feel so badly about it."

"It may not be criminal, but it's not square," replied Scott, obstinately. "With you a rich man's daughter, and——"

"But not an heiress, remember! That makes a difference," she said, coaxingly.

"Perhaps—anyhow, I'm glad you're not rich," said Scott, soberly. "I think I'd fight with a rich wife."

“My dear Marc, you and I would fight, no matter who had the money. We’re the scrappy kind. But, on the other hand, we’ll always make up again, and that’s what counts. That’s what Joyce Henderson and I couldn’t do. We went for months and months without a quarrel, but when we once had one we couldn’t get over it.”

“You’re sure you’ve forgotten about that chap?”

“Quite. He doesn’t exist.”

Again they were silent, the sun picking out radiant bits of Polly’s hair to light upon as she stood leaning against Scott’s arm, his rough coat rubbing her soft skin.

“It’s a nice old world,” she said, drawing a long breath.

“It’s good enough for me,” he answered as he leaned over and kissed her.

“Do you know, I’ve been wondering for a week whether it was me or Mrs. Van Zandt that you were in love with?” said Polly, with one of her sudden smiles. 218

“Me? Care for——” Scott’s voice died away in surprise.

“You behaved as though you did. You are always so gentle and pleasant with her.”

“I’m gentle and pleasant with everybody,” declared Scott, stoutly. “I have that kind of disposition.”

“I think you’d better go and get the horses,” suggested Polly. “I’d rather not begin disagreeing with you just yet.”

Scott, chuckling, went back after the horses. Polly, left alone, sat down on a stone and gave a little sigh of contentment.

“To think,” she said, incredulously, “that once I thought I was in love with Joyce Henderson!”

“Polly!” Scott’s voice was sharp. He came around the turn on a trot. “Those cussed horses have cleared out and left us high and dry. I’ve got to go after them.”

“But—I thought horses always went home when they ran off!”

“I think they’ve gone down into the canyon—there may be water down there. Will you sit here while I go after them?”

“I suppose so,” forlornly. “You won’t stay long?”

“Be back in half an hour.” Scott disappeared down the trail. Polly watched him a moment or two and then returned to her resting place. Something of the happiness was gone from her eyes. 219 The accident was ill-timed. It brought a feeling of foreboding most disagreeable in its contrast with her former exaltation. She jumped to her feet determined to do something to take her mind off the ugly thought.

“I’ll climb up and see if that really is a cave up there,” she thought. Fired by this ambition, she started to work her way up the cliff; no easy task and ruinous to riding boots of soft leather. By the time she had discovered this last fact she had covered about one-third of the distance and was crouching beside a protruding rock to get her breath. “It’s rather foolish to tear up a perfectly good pair of riding boots just at the psychological moment when leather is villainously high and I’m on the verge of marrying a poor man. I guess I’ll give up the cave.”

If the view had been remarkable from the trail, it was marvelous from the little eminence which she had reached. She looked and looked, her eyes full of wonder. Away in the distance, a tiny stream fluttered its way over the brown side of the mountain, which the sun seemed to polish until it shone; while on the shadowed side, the pines took on a dark, heavy green, both sombre and beautiful. Below her, on the trail—but what was that? Coming over the top of a hilly rise, a little way below, was a man on a horse—then a second and a third, and finally a line of riders, so long a line that it suggested a regiment!

Polly’s mind worked quickly. There was but one explanation; Angel Gonzales was in the neighborhood, was on his way to rendezvous with Juan Pachuca, and without doubt this was 220 Angel Gonzales, and these were his men. What should she do? They were coming very rapidly, and whatever was done would have to be done instantly. Her first thought was for Scott. He would be taken unaware. If she could only get to him—warn him—so that he could hide in the brush till the men had passed! Breathlessly, she began to climb down the cliff. She was badly frightened, her nerve was shaken and her strength seemed to be leaving her. She found herself slipping and sliding on the rock.

Another look at the riders showed them very near—so near that her courage failed her. In a panic she began to climb again. She must reach the little cave before they saw her. She could not fall into the hands of Angel Gonzales. She caught her breath in little sobs, her heart seemed about to burst, every foot gained meant a desperate effort. She clutched at the tufts of mesquite that grew out of the rock and thanked Providence that her brown suit was so nearly the color of the cliff. Gasping and sobbing, she finally sank behind the mesquite bush which covered the cave.

It was not really a cave, she discovered, but merely a crevice in the cliff, made into a little shelf by the rock which protruded above it, while the bush growing thickly in front of it gave it the look of a cave. It was, however, a shelter, and Polly crouched in it thankfully, breathing with difficulty and keeping one eye on the line of men filing along below her. They were a hard looking lot, clad in all sorts of clothes from uniforms to overalls. They seemed to her

inexperienced eye innumerable; they were, perhaps, seventy-five or a hundred.

“And poor—like an army of tramps,” she thought. “Very desperate tramps—oh, why didn’t I keep on and try to warn Marc?”

She could not understand her panic, now that her own danger was over and the men had passed. Marc Scott had called her a brave girl, and she had saved her own skin and let him walk into the trap. She sobbed bitterly. If there was only anything that she could do! To sit there in that awful silence was more than she could bear. She could no longer see the riders, who had turned the curve and were out of sight and sound. Far off in the distance two buzzards circled about over something that was dead or dying. Perhaps it was a man—at the thought the girl rose unsteadily to her feet. She could not stay alone another moment in this horrible place; she would go and find Scott, if she had to brave Angel Gonzales to do it. With a recklessness born of desperation she slid and scuffled down the side of the cliff and ran blindly down the trail.

CHAPTER XV

ANGEL

Scott, starting breezily down the trail after the recreant horses, whistled a tune as he went, for he was happy. He did not weigh reason against happiness—it was too soon for that. He would have given you, however, if pressed, a number of very good reasons why he and Polly Street were going to be happy together, in spite of their different upbringing, and his own not very lucid reasons for not having wanted to marry her.

Just at present he was occupied with the idea of the horses. He felt that they would not be apt to go back on the trail unless it was to look for water, and water they might find at the bottom of the ravine though the underbrush was too dense for him to see it. He could follow their trail very easily in the sandy path but he walked a quarter of a mile before he found the place where they had struck out of the trail for the bottom of the ravine.

Very cautiously he started down, for the going was decidedly bad and he had no wish to risk a fall. He trailed the prints, marveling at the sure-footedness of the animal which can follow so hazardous a path.

“I wouldn’t dare put a horse down a trail like this,” he mused with a grin, “and yet the rascals will go down by themselves as smooth as silk. Hullo, I guessed right! There is water down here. There’s old Jasper filling up on it, and the mare, too. Well, I guess we don’t walk home this trip.” And just as Polly, some hundreds of feet above him was trying madly to reach the cave, Scott, quite oblivious of impending danger, started on his difficult climb, leading the two horses.

“Serve you darn well right, you fellows, if I was to make you haul me,” he said, as Jasper’s soft nose rubbed against his shoulder. “I would, too, if I didn’t think you’d slide down and break my neck just when my girl needs me. Come on, you grafters, shake a leg, will you?”

It was a bad climb. The perspiration rolled off Scott’s face and the veins stood out upon his forehead. Gasping for breath, he dug his toes into the soft earth and plugged ahead, pulling the reluctant animals after him. He had nearly gained the top, was within twenty feet, perhaps, of the end of the climb, when Jasper began to pull back. They were breaking through some brush, Scott being nearly through when Jasper began pulling. Scott gave the bridle an irritated jerk and spoke sharply to the horse. As he did so, he looked up and saw Angel Gonzales and his band coming down the trail. For a second, Scott lost his wits. He took a quick step forward, giving the bridle another jerk as he did so. Jasper, naturally aggrieved, pulled back again, and Scott, standing on a loose bit of rock, slipped, tried to right himself, slipped again, overbalanced, fell and rolled down—over boulders, through brush, falling ever faster as he tried to regain a foothold.

Both bridles had been wrenched from his hand as he fell and the horses, half scared, half inquisitive, followed him a few steps and then returned to the munching of grass, behind the clump of brush.

Angel Gonzales, a large, brutal-looking man, his face covered with a black beard, his clothes bearing the mark of many a scuffle, swung down the trail in the lead, his particular crony, one Porfirio Cortes, riding immediately after him. A little distance intervened between Cortes and the other members of the party. Even in bandit circles the line is drawn somewhere, and in Angel’s band it was drawn immediately after Porfirio Cortes.

Angel rode, one leg thrown over his pommel, which enabled him to chat comfortably with Cortes. They were talking of Juan Pachuca.

“A slippery one, that,” Cortes had remarked, keenly. “I don’t believe he means to throw in his lot with us. When I see him do it, I will believe—not before.”

“Why not? I have more men than he has. He needs men. All he has is this understanding that he brags of with the new government.”

“Lies, *amigo*, lies! His record with Carranza is against him.”

“Well, all men lie,” replied Angel, tersely, and with probably no intention of plagiarism. “Anyhow, we can do some good fighting together. There will be some fine pickings when we get the old man out of Mexico City. Think of the money, the fine clothes, the women!” 225

“Yes, I think of them,” replied Cortes, meditatively. “But I think also of Obregon. I hate that man. He hung a cousin of mine, once, for less than what you and I did to those Yaquis. Also, he has persecuted Villa.”

“Well, so will I persecute Villa if I ever get a chance,” replied Angel, cheerfully. “The fat thief! Think of the gold he has hidden in these mountains! Hold—what is that? Down in the canyon? Horses! Is it troops, do you think?”

“Troops—in a hole like that? It might be those Indians—an ambush!”

“It would be like the devils. I don’t see them now.”

“You saw Soria’s burro, most likely. Your nerves are bad, as the gringos say.” Both men grinned and rode on. Suddenly, they heard a crashing sound of scattering stones that rose even above the noise made by their horses. Angel threw up his head in alarm, very much as a horse does when he scents danger. “It is the Indians,” he said to Porfirio. “We must not be attacked in this narrow place. Forward! Ride! The Yaquis are upon us!” he cried, driving the spurs into his horse. He was followed by Cortes, who in turn was followed by the others. The entire band gave a vivid moving picture of a reckless run down a narrow trail, by a hundred men, any one of whom would have considered it utter madness had he been alone. 226

Marc Scott, stopped by a mesquite bush near the bottom of the canyon, lay for a few moments where he had fallen, literally too shaken to move. When he realized what had happened to him, he crawled to his feet and listened. All was still. The sounds from above had ceased, and a cloud of dust hovering over the trail was the only evidence that he had not imagined the passing of a crowd of men.

“By golly, I believe they didn’t hear me after all!” he gasped. Then the thought came to him of Polly—alone on the trail above him. A sickening fear shook him; how could she possibly have escaped those men? In a blind fury he started to climb the ravine. It had been hard going before—now, in spite of his body, stiff and shaken, he did not feel the effort. His face was purple with heat and exertion, his hands were bloody with the cactus he had clutched when falling, but his terror for the girl dwarfed all physical discomfort. Panting and choking, he forged ahead. If he could only reach Jasper he would follow that cloud of dust until he knew what had happened to the woman he loved.

Jasper and the mare, uninfluenced by motives either of fear or anger, still grazed by the clump of brush and allowed the almost exhausted Scott to lead them back to the trail. He mounted Jasper, and turned the mare loose. He started down the trail after the vanished band at a pace quite as reckless as their own.

“Marc! Marc Scott!” Polly’s voice rose desperately as she saw him disappearing down the trail. “Come back here!” 227

Scott turned, bewildered, to see Polly running wildly toward him. She flung herself upon him and upon Jasper before he could dismount, pouring out the story of the men who had gone down the trail.

“And the worst of it was,” she wept, stormily, “that I didn’t even try to warn you. I just made for that cave and hid myself. That’s the sort of a girl I am.”

“Did you, honey? Do you know, that strikes me as mighty sensible? I don’t hold much with girls saving men’s lives outside the movies, where they’re well paid for it. It strikes me life-saving is a man-sized job.”

“But you’re all scratched! What in the world——”

“I had to roll down the hill to dodge ’em,” chuckled Scott, as he caught the mare and helped the girl to mount her. “I’ll tell you about it after a while; just now I think we’d better be on our way.”

They rode on in silence, back over the trail and around the curve past the imitation cave which had sheltered Polly. Scott eyed the horses with inward pessimism.

“They’re never going to make it,” he thought. “They’re about all in now. Wish I knew whether to camp out and go on in the morning or to keep on pushing. If I was alone I’d bed down for the night but I hate to ask her to spend a night in the open unless I have to. Well, we’ll go on a while.”

They rode on, the tired horses going more and more slowly and responding less and less readily to urging. The trail did not go all the way down into the canyon, but met a rocky ledge which crossed it like a natural bridge. It was narrow and it was slippery with loose stones, but the girl took it silently. She was too tired and hungry to be afraid. The two sandwiches seemed things belonging to another life. She tried to smile when Scott looked back at her but it was hard work. 228

They came off the ledge onto the side of a hill which formed a part of the second range of mountains. The spot, green as a deer park, was directly on the side of the hill, about half-way up. Around it were trees—pines and live oaks. The trail seemed to have disappeared altogether. Scott had dismounted and was waiting for the girl to come up.

“What’s the matter?” she demanded, anxiously.

He dropped his horse's bridle and came to her side. "I've a question for you, best girl," he said, his hand on the pommel of her saddle, "These horses are hardly fit to climb this next range. They might do it and make the rest of the trip to-day if we urged them but it ain't a square deal. Then, too, it would be dark before we got there.

"This is a place where we could stay. There's pasture for the horses and I think that little stream that I found down in the canyon starts from up here somewhere. If we go on we may make it and again we may get tangled up in the mountains after dark, which I don't fancy. I'm no forest ranger, you know. Shall we stay here till three or four o'clock in the morning or shall we plug ahead? It's up to you."

Polly turned an appalled face toward him. "But, Marc, you don't mean to stay here—in this place —all night?" she said, faintly.

"Well, it won't be exactly all night. It's nearly five o'clock now and we could start at daybreak."

"But—why, we haven't anything to stop with! No tent and no blankets and nothing to eat! It would be rather dreadful, wouldn't it?"

"Well, not dreadful, exactly. We've the blankets under our saddles, and you have your long cloak. I'll build you a fire. Of course there's nothing to eat except the rest of the sandwiches."

"Well, perhaps—it would be pretty bad to get lost up here after dark. There might be mountain lions or mad skunks. They do have mad skunks out here, don't they?"

Scott chuckled. "Search me, honey, all the skunks I ever met were mad. Come on down and we'll have a look at the country."

"Marc," Polly looked down at him, her eyes soft, "I'm wondering what I would have done if those bandits had gobbled you."

"I don't let bandits gobble me when I'm escorting ladies," replied Scott. Then meeting her eyes, the twinkle faded out of his. "You'd better say what would I have done if you hadn't hidden in that cave." His head rested for a moment against her knee.

"I don't know. Seems as though things were being managed for us, doesn't it?"

"I hope so."

He lifted her to her feet and she looked around her curiously.

"It's a pretty place," she pronounced. "I hope you're right about the water. I saw a little stream way up in the mountains when I climbed to the cave."

"I'm going to let Jasper find it for me," replied Scott. He had the saddles off the tired horses in a few seconds and they lay down and rolled happily, drying their sweaty backs in the dust. When they got to their feet again, he took the two long ropes from the saddles and fastened them around the horses' necks.

"Are you going to tie them up?" demanded the girl.

"Not now. Going to let them drag the ropes around. I can catch 'em easy that way. Guess they're too tired to go far."

The horses had smelled the water and made for it. It ran in a trickling little stream down the hillside about a dozen feet away, hidden by some brush. Once refreshed, they were easily led back and began to feed on the coarse grass. Scott shook out the blankets.

"They're a bit horsey," he admitted, "but they'll keep you warm. I put them under the saddles instead of the regular saddle blankets because I've been caught out this way before. A man learns things in this country." He handed Polly her long coat and she slipped into it. "This isn't exactly the time of year I'd pick for a camping trip," he added, "but we'll do, I reckon. Do you want to eat the sandwiches now, or do you prefer dinner at six?"

Polly eyed the two big sandwiches with a serious eye. "Let's look at them a while first," she said, hungrily. "Isn't there any way of getting anything else? Can't you shoot something?"

"I don't see anything but you and me and the horses. What's the matter?" For the girl had given a shriek of joy.

"In my coat pocket! A cake of chocolate that Mrs. Van put there—and the sugar. I always bring it for the horses. We'll keep the chocolate for breakfast, shall we?"

They ate the sandwiches and topped off with the sugar. "Which," said Polly, seriously, "is very strengthening. I've heard that they feed it to the Japanese army."

"Yes, I've heard that, too," assented Scott, "but I reckon that's not all they feed 'em."

"Well, it's not all you've been fed, either, so don't grumble," said the lady, practically.

"I think," said Scott, rising, "that before it grows dark I'll investigate this trail a bit. It looks sort of blind to me. If we have to start by moonlight it'll be just as well to have some notion of where to begin."

Polly leaned back against a tree and watched him lazily. He looked very strong and capable. She recalled Joyce Henderson's graceful proportions and smiled. She had had to come a long way to find the man she wanted but she was well content. It was odd, she reflected, that she and Joyce Henderson, who had known each other all their lives, were like strangers once they attempted the more intimate relation; while for this man whom she had known but a few weeks she felt a sense of familiarity, of belongingness, that she could scarcely believe. She was trusting him now

in a way that she had never imagined herself trusting any man and yet she felt at ease.

Scott, returning, threw himself down beside her. “I’ve found the trail,” he said, “but we’ve got some traveling ahead of us. Don’t look to me as if anybody’d been over it since Gomez was.”

“Didn’t those men come this way?”

“No. They must have hit the trail lower down—from some place we’ve missed. I’ll swear no crowd like that have been where I’ve just been.”

The girl looked at him gravely. “Do you think we ought to go back?”

“Back? No, I don’t. Those folks are waiting for us at Soria’s and I want to get Tom started for them as soon as I can.”

“I wonder if those men will make any trouble at Soria’s?”

“I don’t believe so. If it was Angel Gonzales, he’s heading for your gentleman friend’s place and he’ll be in a hurry.”

“Why do you go on calling him my gentleman friend?”

“Well, you think he’s some kind of a guy, don’t you?” demanded Scott, with a grin. “Pretty manners, soft voice, nice long eyelashes—all that kind of thing?”

“Yes, I do,” replied Polly, stoutly. “I like Juan Pachuca and I believe he’s been led away by bad company. I believe what he told me about that treasure, too. I only wish I’d made him tell me 233
the name of the border town where it was.”

“Women are queer,” remarked Scott, with more truth than originality. “Well, Polly Street, I think I’ll gather the wood for your fire.”

Together they gathered the loose twigs and branches—they were not many, but eked out with pine cones would make a fire for a few hours, and Scott made Polly’s bed close by it. He put his rubber poncho on the ground and made the girl wrap herself in both blankets.

“I’ve got a heavy sweater under my coat,” he said, “and I’ll have to keep moving a good deal to look after the horses and keep the fire going.” And he refused to take a blanket, much to Polly’s dismay. “Curl up and be comfortable, girlie, and relax. It don’t matter if you don’t sleep if you can relax.”

Polly tried to comply, but she was too much interested in what was going on around her to give up either to sleep or to relaxation. The crackling of the fire and its wonderful odor, the little hushing noises of the birds going to rest, the gentle coming up of the moon and the myriads of stars, all were too fascinating to risk missing in sleep. Scott had gone after the horses and had tethered each by a long rope in a place where feeding could be attended to, and had come back to the fire and thrown on some more wood. He sat smoking with his feet nearly in the fire and his face lit by its glow.

“I suppose you’ve spent lots of glorious nights in the open?” asked Polly, wistfully. 234

“A good many. Some of them not so glorious, either. One night up in New Mexico——” he paused to light another cigarette.

“Go on,” demanded the girl. “When you say ‘one night up in New Mexico’ I feel just as I used to when my father used to say ‘once upon a time.’”

“Well, I don’t know why I happened to think of this special night,” grinned Scott, “except that on most of my out-of-door nights I’ve been by myself—out hunting and that kind of thing—and this one I had somebody with me. It was when I was mining in Colorado, and some fellows I knew had a big cattle ranch down in New Mexico. It was a real ranch—not a two for a cent one like Herrick’s. I went down to visit them at round-up time. I’d never seen a round-up before so I was hanging around every chance I got.

“They had a lot of cattle—some of them pretty wild—and it wasn’t easy to keep ’em together especially at night. Well, one day Jim Masters got a fall from his horse and a kick on the head from another when he was down, and he was in a pretty bad state—it looked to us like concussion of the brain but we didn’t know. We carried him into a tent we’d put up about a quarter of a mile from where the cattle were, and one of the boys rode to town for a doctor.

“We were up on a mesa, like the one we crossed yesterday, remember? We had outlaw cattle in the bunch and it took all the boys to handle them. I, being a tenderfoot and not much use with the cattle, said I’d sit with Jim and sort of watch him till the doctor came. He was out of his head so ’twasn’t any comfort to him but it made the boys feel better.” 235

“I’ll bet it was a comfort to him, Marc Scott! You are the sort of person it would be a comfort to have around if one was out of one’s head,” said Polly, emphatically.

“Thank you, honey; I’m afraid you’re jollying me. Anyhow, I stayed with Jim and while he lay there groaning I sat in the doorway of the tent and smoked—wasn’t anything I could do for the poor boy. Man, that was a night! The mesa just like a big green table spread under the sky—what is it that lunger poet said—‘under the wide and starry sky’? Well, that’s how she looked. Mountains all around, moon blazing away showing up the cattle at the other end of the mesa, not a sound except the river, one of those busy little rivers that keep it up night and day. If I’d known something of cattle I wouldn’t have thought that stillness was so pretty, but I didn’t. I hadn’t even noticed that the cows had stopped bellowing—it seemed like a night that ought to be still.

“When, all of a sudden, I saw a movement in that bunch of cattle. It was a stampede. That’s what they’re cooking up, you know, when they’re still like that. Before I’d realized what had happened they began to bolt—and in our direction. It was just exactly as if one of those old bulls had said to the crowd: ‘There’s a couple of stiffs in a tent down by the river, boys, let’s rush ’em.’

“They came down that mesa like all heck let loose. The electricity in their hides had made a sort of blue haze—phosphorescent, they call it—and it gave ’em an awful look. Of course, the boys hadn’t let them start a stampede without doing anything to stop ’em. They were riding round ’em, yelling and shooting into the air, but on they came.

“Well, it was no place for me and Jim. It began to look to me as if that doctor was going to have his trip for nothing, but what could I do? I couldn’t go off and leave Jim, and when I tried to pick him up he fought me so I had to drop him. ’Twouldn’t have done much good anyhow because there was no place to go. So I said to myself: ‘Sit tight, old man, and if you can’t die game, die as game as you can.’

“On they came like a lot of mad things. Then, all at once, when I’d about given up hope, the boys got ’em to milling. You know how they do that? Get ’em started to going round and round instead of straight ahead and the fools will go till they drop in their tracks. When I saw ’em doing that I knew that Jim and I weren’t slated for Heaven that night so I sat still and enjoyed the sight.

“It was one wild sight. You can read about stampedes till your head aches but you’ve got to see one to know how she feels.”

“What an interesting life you’ve had, Marc, and all I’ve done was to drive a Red Cross ambulance around Chicago and win a few golf trophies,” murmured Polly, sleepily.

“Well, that depends. Perhaps it’s been interesting, but it ain’t been easy.”

They sat in silence for a while and then Scott saw that the girl had fallen asleep. He smiled as he put more wood on the fire.

“Funny that she and I should find each other out of all the world,” he meditated. “Just one nice girl and one no-account chap drawn toward each other. Some folks call it Fate. I didn’t mean to do it and maybe I’m going to wish I hadn’t—but just now I’m satisfied.”

CHAPTER XVI

TOM DOES A MARATHON

That Jimmy Adams survived the operation of probing to which he was subjected by Li Yow was to Tom Johnson evidence of an almost miraculous skill on the part of the Chinese doctor. Tom knew very little of operations. His life had been a normal one and the grisly sight which he was called upon to witness would have altogether unmanned him had it not been for Mrs. Van’s timely nip. As it was, he came out of the room extremely depressed.

Depression was a mood which in Tom Johnson usually led to action. In this case his first move was to visit Cochise. It did not brighten his outlook upon life. Cochise was in no state to travel, that was evident. He was tired and stiff and his back showed signs of soreness. Rest was undoubtedly what his case demanded.

“If you was a society dame, your doctor would send you to Miami for a month and say cut out all mental strain,” soliloquized the engineer, bathing the back gently. “Being as you’re a horse, the best we can do is to turn you out to pasture for a while. Well, I’m no fancy rider, God knows, but nobody can say I ever give a horse a sore back. That blanket was pretty nigh off your tail when he brought you in. Any white man would have stopped and fixed it.”

He sauntered back to his cabin and sat down to think. Tom was tall, over six feet, and very thin. His skin was brown and his straight black hair which he wore rather long, not because he liked it, but because he disliked the Conejo barber, gave him rather an Indian look. His clothes hung loosely on him, lending very little to his personal charm, and when he sat he usually sat on his spine, a practice deplored by beauty doctors. When O’Grady came along a few minutes later, he was deep in thought.

“Say, what do you think of this here business over at Casa Grande?” demanded the latter persistently. “Think the Doc’s lyin’?”

“Why should he? Besides, he was scared. He most put old Cochise out of commission. He saw something all right.”

“Think it was Pachuca?”

“No. Why should Pachuca come back after he’d cleaned ’em out once?”

“Yaquis?”

“Might be. And ag’in it might be the rebels.”

“Who is the rebels now? Johnny’s bunch?” asked O’Grady.

“Search me. I suppose this here state of Sonora is fighting the rest, but I don’t see that they’ve got any call to burn an Englishman’s property. This here Mrs. Conrad’s English, too, ain’t she?”

“No, she ain’t English, she’s good plain American, Came from Boston, same as Hard,” said O’Grady. 240

“Well, don’t an American woman lose her nationality when she marries a foreigner?” demanded Tom, wisely.

“She’d ought to if she marries an Englishman,” replied O’Grady, belligerently. “But don’t she get it back if he dies?”

“Hanged if I know! Woman’s suffrage has come up since I left home,” replied Johnson, placidly. “Anyhow, I’m going to walk to Conejo and see if I can’t find out something about Casa Grande.”

“Walk? Holy Moses! I’ll go with you.”

“No, you won’t. Somebody’s got to stay here and look after Mrs. Van and Jimmy. The Doc can’t fight and Williams don’t think of anything but the store. You and Miller have got to do the rest.”

“Why don’t you go to Casa Grande? It’s nearer.”

“What’s the use? What could I do? If I go to Conejo, I can pick up Mendoza and his car and mebbe some fellers to go along and make a posse. Of course, if they’re cleaned out—but I’m figurin’ that they ain’t.”

“Sure. You got to do that,” replied O’Grady. “When you goin’ to start?”

“Soon as I can get Mrs. Van to put me up some chow.”

“Well, good luck to you—and the rest of them. I’d sure hate to think of them folks of ours massacred by a bunch of greasers,” and O’Grady strolled sadly away.

Mrs. Van Zandt was washing dishes when Johnson stopped in with his request He prefaced it with an inquiry about the invalid. 241

“Oh, he’s doin’ all right, I guess. Doc’s give him something to make him sleep. I’ll say this for the man—he’s a good doctor. He means to be a doctor while he’s here, too. Nothing doing on the cooking job.”

“No?”

“No, sir! I asked him something just kind of casual about pies and you’d have said he’d never heard of one. Distant as anything! I suppose I can stand it if he cures Jimmy. Where you going?”

“Going to walk to Conejo.”

“Walk!”

Tom repeated his plan. Mrs. Van wiped her eyes on the dish towel. “You’re a good man,” she said, simply. “I wish I could go with you.”

“I ain’t feeling as brisk as I’m letting on about this business, Mrs. Van,” continued Tom. “What that Chink saw don’t listen good to me.”

“Nor to me. When I think of those girls—well, I ain’t going to think of them. After all, Tom, there’s more ways for folks to get out of trouble than there is for them to get in. I’ve always noticed that. When I was married, I had a husband who knew more about getting into trouble than any living man, and I used to notice that he always went about it in just the same kind of ways—drink, cards, and women; but when I had to get him out of it—why, Lord, there were a million different ways I had to manage. There are loads of ways for smart folks to dodge trouble and our folks are smart.”

Johnson started for Conejo about noon. It was not the hour he would have selected for a long walk in a warm climate, but he had no choice. He did not try to make very rapid progress during the afternoon, his idea being to get in his best work at night; so he rested whenever he struck a shady spot. A stranger coming along and spying Tom stretched under a tree, with his sombrero covering his face, would not have associated him with reckless speed. He ate his supper slowly, thanking Heaven for the invention of the thermos bottle, and then started for the long pull. 242

It was cool and delightful now and he felt refreshed and invigorated. His bundle was light and he swung along at a good clip. In and out of arroyos, over little bridges, under fragrant branches of pine—the walk was pleasant and the engineer reflected that one sees a good deal from one’s feet that one misses from the cab of an engine. Prairie dogs scuttled into their holes as he approached and chipmunks sat on branches and swore at him in sharp little voices. Now and then a far-away but penetrating odor reminded him of another night animal on the prowl.

His wisdom in following the railroad track instead of the road was evident. It was longer but it led through the mountains at the lowest places. Midnight found him nearly out of the mountains, standing, tired but not exhausted, on the edge of a decline, looking over miles of the semi-flat country to a dark spot where one or two lights twinkled faintly and which he knew was Conejo.

“Old Swartz is still on the job,” he reflected, as he rolled himself in his blanket and settled down for a nap. He had built a small fire and lay with his feet almost in it. He stared ahead of him over the road which he must travel before he could reach his destination and though his trip was only 243

half made he felt as though he were already there, so encouraging was the sight of Swartz' night light.

"It's a great country for them that can stand the pace," he murmured, sleepily. "I've a notion sometimes to go back to Omaha and get me a wife and settle down out here. Picking a woman these days is a risk, though. Get a young one, so's you can educate her, and ten to one you get an ambitious young brat that wants to spend all your money seein' life. Pick a settled one, a widow woman, say, and you get one that knows more'n you do and that don't make for happiness in married life. Mrs. Van Zandt's a likely woman but she's had one gold brick—'tain't likely she'd want to fall for another. Besides, I can enjoy her cooking and her company without bein' married to her, and there's times I like right well to get clear of her gab," and so he drifted into sleep, snoring comfortably before his fire went out.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Johnson, tall, gaunt and tired, stalked into Swartz' store at Conejo where he found a situation for which he was not prepared. Conejo was under martial law, and from every doorway he saw the interested faces of women and children who stared at the soldiers as they went by or stood talking in groups. The jail had a military guard while the office of the local *jefe* swarmed with uniforms. Outside stood a motor truck and two large automobiles, quite dwarfing Mendoza's Ford, which, having been requisitioned, also stood near by, its wrathful owner lurking in the distance keeping an eye on his treasure.

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In Swartz' store the fat owner was still in his accustomed seat, while the usual loafers still persistently loafed, but there were soldiers everywhere.

"Whew, this is something new for Conejo!" whistled Tom. "I reckon I'd better have a word with Dutch before I horn in. Say, Swartz," he said, pushing a crowd of youngsters out of the way, "got anything to drink? I've just walked in from Athens."

"My Gott, are you mad?" inquired Swartz, pleasantly.

"Not yet, but I'm likely to be if I don't get something down my gullet. Got any beer?"

"Beer?" Swartz' contempt was sweeping. "Look at dem," pointing to the soldiers. "Doos that look like I haf any beer mit dem fellers around?"

"Who are they? Federals or Rebs?"

"De State troops. Don't you know dis here state has—what you call it—seceded?"

"Martial law, eh?"

Swartz nodded.

"Did they grab your stuff or did they pay for it?"

"Oh, dey pays—in paper money," replied the German, sourly.

"Well, you're better off than we are. They took our stuff, shot two of the boys, knifed another, and blew up our track."

"Who done it?"

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"Young Pachuca and his crowd. Say, who's the boss of this outfit?"

Swartz opined that Colonel d'Anguerra, who was lodged in the house of the local *jefe*, was in command.

"Good-natured kind of a guy, is he?" queried Tom, anxiously. "Or one of the kind that orders out the firing squad if his dinner don't set well on him?"

Swartz had seen better natured men than the Colonel, but on the other hand admitted that he had seen worse. "He iss a young man," he said, "and he ain't got so much sense that it bothers him, yet he tries to keep them devils quiet if he can."

"Well, give me a drink of water if you ain't got no beer. I guess I'll look this feller up."

"I got some lemon pop," offered Swartz, hospitably. "Them fellers don't like it; it ain't got poison enough in it for 'em."

Johnson, having drunk the pop, departed for the official residence. It took some time and a good deal of diplomacy to get an audience with the military chief, but it was accomplished at last. D'Anguerra was a youngish man, tall, thin and sallow. He spoke very little English, but his secretary spoke it very well and acted as interpreter, Tom's Spanish being several degrees worse than the Colonel's English. The conversation in two tongues proceeded through the secretary with dispatch and accuracy.

"I understand that you are from an American mining company located at Athens?" the Colonel began.

"I am," replied Tom, a little awed by the other's dignity and the threefold nature of the dialogue.

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"You have been raided by bandits, eh?"

"Well, I suppose you'd call it that. Juan Pachuca helped himself to what he wanted and shot two of our boys."

"Killed them?"

"No, they ain't killed, but one of 'em's likely to lose a leg. He knifed one, but the knife was dull and he ain't hurt much. But that ain't what I come over here about." And Tom went on with Li Yow's story of the Casa Grande raid, the arrival of Scott, Hard and Polly, and the fire. "I dunno

and he dunno who done the burnin' or what else has happened over there, but he says they heard Pachuca say somethin' about meeting Angel Gonzales, and I guess you know who he is. I thought mebbe you could let me have a car and a posse and I could go over and see what's been done."

The Colonel and his secretary conversed together for a few moments, Tom listening anxiously but quite unable to get the thread of the talk.

"You see, Colonel," he continued, anxiously, "I dunno if this little revolution of yours is going to turn out the real thing or not; but there's one thing you can be darn sure of if it does, and that is that one of the first letters your new president's going to get in his official mail is going to be a bill of damages from Washington and whatever's happened to our folks is going to be wrote down in it."

Colonel d'Anguerra smiled patiently. "I will tell you, señor, what I know about the affair at Casa Grande. According to this dispatch, a regiment of Sonora troops passed by the ranch on their way south. They saw flames and heard shots. A band of Yaquis who had been driven from their 247
village by one Angel Gonzales were burning and looting. The troops' orders were for haste and they did not stop to find out the extent of the damage but called off the Yaquis. You perhaps know that those Indians are excellent soldiers and that there are many of them in our army."

"You mean to say they didn't go over to see if anything had happened to the women folks?" demanded Tom, aghast.

"Their orders were positive. They could not take the time. To-day we have news that some of our troops have crossed the Sinaloa border. These men who passed Casa Grande were on their way to Hermosillo to guard the capital."

"Well, it does look like you were pulling it off, don't it?" Tom's voice was admiring in spite of himself. "What beats me, señor, is how you manage to pump enough enthusiasm into these fellers to keep them fighting. You've been at it nearly ten years now. In my country we'd either have put it through by that time or given it up as a bad job and pretended we'd never wanted it anyhow."

The Mexican laughed. "My friend," he said, seriously, "people will fight for more than ten years with the hope of liberty and a good government ahead of them. This time we hope to get both."

"Well, I hope you do. It's too good a country to go to the dogs. But about this Juan Pachuca——"

"He is no business of mine," replied the Colonel, briefly. "He was out of favor with the Carranza government and evidently hopes to get into the saddle again through the revolution. Personally, 248
I do not believe he will. General Obregon is not fond of his type. Angel Gonzales is what you call in your country a regular bad lot. I have orders in this dispatch to look into his case. As to the automobile. I can give you an order for the car which you saw outside—the small one. I can't spare any men."

"Mendoza's Ford?" groaned Tom. "I knew I'd draw that. Well, never mind, señor. I'm obliged to you just the same."

The order written, Mendoza was induced to start. "What the devil are those for?" demanded Johnson, as he saw the old Mexican putting three large cans in the car.

"Water," replied Mendoza, tersely. "Las' time I drive him ze radiator he leak. I mend him, but *quien sabe*? We play safe, eh?"

"My God, yes," murmured Tom. "Come on, *amigo*, it's near six and this here's no country to be rattlin' round in a damaged Ford after dark."

The little car justified its owner's faith in it, however, for it went along at a good clip. The road from Conejo was fairly good and they made good time. The sun was down and the evening had set when they reached the place where Scott and Polly had taken the trail. Mendoza stopped the car.

"Lots of men been by here," he said. "Soldiers or bandits—mebbe bot'."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Tom, waking up. "How can you tell?" 249

"Don' have to be Injun to know dat. See tracks," grunted Mendoza. "Mebbe hundred men come here from trail, *amigo*."

Tom looked. The banks of the river were broken and trodden by the feet of many horses. Even in the dim light he could see that, though he would never have noticed it for himself. He admitted when Mendoza persisted that it did look as though a large party of horsemen had crossed the river.

"Well, they've passed anyhow, so we should worry. Got a gun?"

"*Si*," grinned Mendoza, cheerfully, "I always got a gun."

"Hold on, what's this?" They had come around the corner and saw, by the edge of the road, the wrecked wagon. "That's Herrick's wagon," said Tom, excitedly. "In the ditch!" He got down and went to investigate.

"Wheel's busted. Horses must have got scared and bolted round the curve," said the engineer, meditatively. "Nothin' in the wagon. Looks bad to me; don't it to you, Mendoza?"

"*Si*," responded Mendoza. "We go by Soria's place. He know mebbe what happen."

“All right,” assented Tom, sadly. “If they’d got away on the horses seems to me we’d have seen or heard somethin’ of them on the road. Unless they went by the trail—in that case them fellers on horseback would have met ’em. Well, step on your gas, Mendoza, and let’s get to Soria’s.”

Soria’s place was empty. Not a child, nor a dog, nor a burro. Not a sign of life on the place anywhere. This was a blow and intensified Tom’s gloomy fears. He did not speak as they drove on to Casa Grande. The moon was coming up and they saw the badly burned ruins of the barn as they turned in.

“Ze house is lef’,” said Mendoza, consolingly.

“Yes, it is,” said Tom. “But look at them windows! Riddled with bullets. The boys must have put up a good fight with them Indians, anyhow. Tell you what, Mendoza, I’d give a good deal to see old Scotty’s ugly mug in one of ’em! Come on, we may as well go in,” and he stepped apprehensively out of the car.

CHAPTER XVII

AT SORIA’S

Hard and Mrs. Conrad stared at each other in whimsical dismay as the other couple rode away. Then they looked at the suitcases carefully tucked away in the brush.

“Not much of a hiding place,” observed Hard, “but it’s better than leaving them in the wagon.”

“And decidedly better than carrying them all the way to Soria’s,” replied Clara. “Safe enough, too. It isn’t once in a coon’s age that anybody travels around these places. Funny, isn’t it, when you think of all the crowded spots there are in the world?”

“It reminds me,” said Hard, with a reminiscent chuckle, “of a yarn. I was in New Mexico on a hunting trip with Joe McArthur—you remember the Boston McArthurs who had a ranch near one of the Apache reservations? Well, we rode up to the agency store to ask old Slade, the trader, about an Indian guide.

“We got him and started out the next day. We were riding up among the pines—great tall fellows, a regular park of them; not a living thing in sight except the birds, not a sound except the river. McArthur and I were riding behind Charley, the guide. We’d been arguing rather aimlessly as to whether an Indian had a sense of humor or not; Joe thought they hadn’t, while I contended that they had.

“The quiet of the place rather got us. McArthur took a silver dollar from his pocket and said: ‘Hard, I believe I could lay this dollar on that stump over there and come back here in a year and find it there.’ Old Charley turned around, his wrinkled face twisted into a grin. ‘No,’ he said, ‘no find him nex’ year. Mr. Slade he get him nex’ morning.’

“Well, Charley got the dollar and McArthur admitted that I had the right of the argument.”

“That sounds to me just like a McArthur of Boston,” said Clara, severely. “An Indian without a sense of humor! Just because they don’t see fit to howl over the fool things a white man howls over, I suppose.” She did not speak again for some time, then she burst out tempestuously:

“Henry, why did you begin talking about Boston? Do you know, I’ve been more lonesome for the dear old place in the last twenty-four hours than ever before? I wonder if seeing you has made me homesick?”

“I hope so,” said Hard. “It’s time for you to go back to Boston, Clara.”

“Perhaps; but I shall come back here. Once this country gets on its feet I can sell for a decent price. There’s going to be a rush to Mexico some day when people find that they can come without risking their lives and their money.”

“Do you think that time is coming soon?”

“I hope it is. This last move looks hopeful. If Obregon can establish a good government, he will. Of course, our people will have to be patient. At any rate, I’m going to risk it.”

“Yes,” smiled Hard, “you would feel that way, of course.”

“Money getting isn’t such an ugly business, Henry, when you risk something. It puts a bit of romance into the thing. I think I rather despise people who make money just by sitting in an office and guessing right.”

“Clara, how old are you? Sixteen?”

“I don’t mind telling you that I’m older than I look, and it’s a wonder to me after the hard knocks I’ve had. Well, do you think you can hobble back to Soria’s?”

“Let’s wait a little longer. I could wish it a little cooler.”

“If you’d wear a sombrero instead of that white thing——”

“Can’t. I’m not built for a sombrero. Makes me look like the villain in a show.”

Clara burst into laughter.

“Henry,” she said, “what an absurd world this is once a human being cuts loose from his original moorings!”

“Yes? It’s an almighty hot world when he cuts loose from a roof and an ice-water tank, I’ve noticed.”

“I’m not thinking of ordinary things—I’m thinking of you and me and Boston,” pursued Clara, firmly.

“Clara, I can stand a good deal, especially from you, but if you insist upon talking about Boston I’m likely to do something that we’ll both regret.”

“I was just thinking that if you and I had stayed in Boston, in our own little niches, as our kind of people usually do, what would we be doing?” went on Clara, meditatively. 254

“I would be having a gin fizz at the club,” said Hard, pensively, “to be followed possibly by a game of bridge and a dinner—a real, human dinner, not just food—at my brother John’s.”

“If I had stayed where I belonged, or where everybody said I belonged when my father died and the family income disappeared,” said Clara, persistently, “I would be teaching music in a girls’ school, and planning a trip to Italy with a lot of other middle-aged spinsters. Instead of that, I put all that I had into a two years’ study in London and Paris and fell in with a wandering Englishman, married him, and here I am.”

“Well, I’m glad you didn’t stay where you belonged, Clara, for quite apart from the pleasure of your company, which under sane conditions I find very delightful, I don’t seem to see you in the rôle of a middle-aged spinster. Still, you might easily have been one. I know some charming girls in Boston who have gone that path.”

“So do I,” soberly. “Some of them so much more charming than some of my married friends that I don’t quite get the idea. Some of Nature’s blunders, I suppose. Well, shall we start?”

“We’d better. I think it’s going to be some walk.”

They plodded along in silence. This time Hard broke it.

“Clara, do you think that youngster is good enough for Marc Scott? You’re clever enough to judge people even on a short acquaintance.” 255

“Heavens, Henry, what a question!”

“I admit it’s crude. Theoretically, any nice girl confers a tremendous favor on the man she marries merely by so doing; man being inherently vile. But, Clara, honestly, man to man, how many nice girls one knows who would be the deuce to live with!”

Clara’s eyes twinkled. “Henry,” she said, “you’re perfectly right, of course, but man to man, do you think you’ve any right to assume that the ones who aren’t nice are any pleasanter—taken as a steady diet?”

“Well, no, if you put it like that. But, I mean—well—this Polly youngster, of whom by the way I am very fond, I don’t know why, she’s as spoiled as the deuce, has had very little education——”

“She graduated from Wellesley, so she tells me.”

“Truly? How well they cover it up these days! In my youth, you knew when a woman was well educated.”

“And avoided her. That’s why they learned to cover it up.”

“Don’t be trivial. What I mean is this. Scott is an unusual fellow. He’s brought himself up from nothing, with only a boost here and there from someone who recognized his worth. He’s rough and he’s odd, but he has a mind. He will always be a man of importance in his community.”

“I admit all that; but it doesn’t imply that he’s too good for Polly.”

“No, but after all, what does a spoiled society girl of twenty-four know about a worth-while man, anyhow?” 256

“Oh, my dear Henry, wake up! You aren’t living in the Victorian period. She knows a lot more about everything than you think, and well for her that she does. Girls of to-day may be daring, they may be over confident, they may be hard, but at least they know something of the world outside their own environment. After all, life’s a tricky job for a woman—don’t begrudge her a little folly before she undertakes it.”

“I don’t. I like frivolous girls—in a way; but I don’t like to see a man with a brain marrying a kitten.”

“Polly Street isn’t a kitten. She’s never had to consider anything more serious than a golf course, but she’ll make good when the time comes. She’s shown that since she’s been here. But, Henry, why this sudden interest in match-making? Has he, by any chance, asked your valuable advice?”

“Good Heavens, no!”

“Match-making, you know, belongs to middle age. Young people are too self-centred to bother with it. I wonder if we’re nearly there? I’m dead.”

“Well, my aching feet tell me we are, Clara, but my manly intelligence suggests that if we’ve covered one-third of the distance we’re mighty lucky.”

“That’s about what I thought,” groaned Clara. “How’s your knee?”

“Peevish but possible. Shall we take a rest?”

“Oh dear, yes, and a bite.”

They topped the next rise. It was decidedly a rise and commanded a wide view of the flat part of 257
the country. At a little distance rose a live oak whose low branches offered a slight shelter from the sun. A cooling breeze played about them, kicking up spirals of sand, and a prairie-dog village manifested eager interest in their presence. They ate their sandwiches and Hard returned to the subject of Scott and Polly.

“Do you think—you being a woman and acute in such matters—that he’s asked her yet?” he said.

“No, I don’t; they both look too edgy. He’s going to, however, and she’s going to take him, I think. I’m not sure. She may be flirting.”

“If she flirts with Scott, I’ll have her punished,” declared Hard, indignantly.

“Well, maybe she won’t. She’s a bit of a minx, though, and while she’s young she’s no infant. Some girls have to do the world’s flirting, Henry, because the others won’t—or can’t. It wouldn’t do to have things made too easy for you.”

“They are not,” said Hard, with meaning.

“Well, this isn’t getting to Soria’s.” Clara rose hastily. She looked back over the road. “It looks like people back there—dust flying. Do you suppose it’s more troops?”

Hard stared. “No,” he said, finally, “it’s only the wind.”

“Yes, I guess it is,” assented Clara. “Let’s be moving.”

It was slow going—a lame man and a tired woman—both unused to walking even under 258
favorable circumstances. It seemed to Clara Conrad as she looked ahead at the wearisome stretch of road, as though they made no more progress than a couple of ants crawling up a mountainside.

“Do you think we’ll ever make it?” she said, stopping for a long breath at the top of a small rise.

“We’ve got to,” said Hard, simply, “What else is there to do?”

Clara did not answer but looked longingly back toward the spot in the cottonwoods.

“Don’t play Lot’s wife, Clara; keep on looking forward. It’s our only hope.”

“Lot’s wife always appealed to my sympathies,” said Clara, pensively. “I think she was probably a settled sort of a woman, married to one of these men who like change. It must have irritated her awfully to have to pack up and move when she was so comfortable. Oh, Henry, that’s not wind blowing the dust! It’s men—horsemen!”

“It does look like it.”

“They’re coming this way. I don’t like it.”

“Neither do I.” Hard’s voice was anxious. “If we had a bit of shelter——”

They looked anxiously about, but the flatness of the country offered no opportunity for anything larger than a gopher to hide. Trees and bushes, alike too small for shelter, and little rises of land, hard enough to climb but easily visible to anyone on horseback, were all that offered themselves. In the distance an arroyo looked promising, but it was far and the line of riders very near.

“We’ve got to make a break for it, anyhow,” said Hard, at last. “It’s off the road. It’s our only 259
chance; that, and the possibility that they may be troops and in too much of a hurry to stop for the likes of us. Come on.”

Clara sighed and quickened her pace. They left the road and struck across country toward the arroyo.

“I don’t believe they’re troops,” she said. “There aren’t enough of them. Oh, Henry, suppose it’s Angel Gonzales and his men!”

Hard shrugged his shoulders. “They may very well be,” he said. “But we’ll hope they’re not. Let’s be optimistic as long as we have a straw to clutch.”

Clara did not answer. She took another look at the rapidly advancing line and felt, not unreasonably, that the straw was a weak one even for the clutch of an optimist. They dug in, weary as they were, making small progress, but with hopeful eyes bent upon the distant arroyo. At least they were going in a different direction from the riders. Hard limped painfully. His face was set in lines of determination—or was it pain? Clara wondered. She stopped suddenly.

“Henry,” she said, firmly, “this is folly. Those men must have seen us. They’re able to overtake us if they want to, and if they want to do anything to us, they will. We can’t help ourselves. I’m not going another step. I’m going to sit down here and see what happens.” As she spoke, she sat down on a tree stump. Hard laughed ruefully.

“Well, I suppose you’re right,” he said. “They’ve got us, if they want us. We’ll hope they don’t.” He sat down on the ground beside her, feeling very much as though he would never get up 260

again.

So far the horsemen had given no indication of having seen the fugitives. They were fox-trotting along, in twos and threes, for the road was fairly wide. There was no air of discipline about the party, nothing to indicate that it was of a military character. As they came opposite the fugitives, who had struck off the road at a right angle, they stopped, in obedience to a signal from one of the two riding ahead.

“They’ve seen us!” breathed Clara.

“And are wondering whether we’re worth while,” supplemented Hard. “Ah, here they come!”

The result of the conference reached, the two leaders of the party followed by half a dozen men struck off toward Clara and Hard. The others waited in the road. They came at a good gait, their badly fed horses responding to the ugly spur with a nervous speed which covered the hilly space in seconds where Hard and Clara had taken minutes to crawl.

“I’m afraid they’re not troops,” observed Hard. “They wouldn’t take all that trouble for a pair of strangers. It’s Angel, or someone of his sort. Well?”

“Well?” Clara smiled bravely. “There’s nothing to do but wait. Better let me talk to them; I have the language better in hand, I think. If it’s money they want we may as well give them what we have to buy our freedom.”

“By all means.” Hard grinned. “I’ve got ten dollars. It won’t buy much—even of freedom, I’m afraid.” 261

“Most of mine is in express checks, tucked away in a sheltered spot,” said Clara, frowning. “I don’t believe they’d want them—Pachuca didn’t. However, I have a little to offer.” She handed him her handbag.

Angel Gonzales, closely followed by Porfirio Cortes, drew up beside the odd-looking couple sitting by the wayside. The other men lingered within hearing. Angel opened the conversation in his native tongue.

“Who are you and where are you going?” he demanded, his shifty black eyes gleaming from his weather-beaten face.

“And why?” growled Cortes. “When the country is upset, the place for foreigners is at home.”

“Yes, we know it is,” said Clara, placatingly. “But your country, you know, is almost always upset. This gentleman, Señor Hard, is connected with the mining company at Athens. I am from the South, and on my way to the border.”

“Where are your horses?” said Angel, suspiciously.

“A young man named Juan Pachuca raided the ranch where we were visiting and took all the livestock,” replied Clara, eyeing the swarthy fellow quietly.

There was a hurried colloquy between the two Mexicans and a laugh from Gonzales.

“You are not going toward Athens,” he observed, drily.

“No, we’re not,” replied Hard. “We’re heading for the Soria place just at present with the idea of borrowing their burro to ride and tie.” He had risen and was leaning heavily on his well leg. 262

“Humph! It is a long walk to the Soria place,” grunted Angel. “You’re lame?”

“Yes, temporarily.”

“Humph!” Angel turned to his men. “Here, two of you double up and give these people horses,” he commanded curtly. Apparently, he was one of those leaders whose word is law, for two of the men rolled their horses and led them toward the two Americans who stared at them in astonishment.

“We go by Soria’s,” said Angel, gruffly. “We will take you that far.”

“Thank you, but I think——” Clara began weakly, but stopped as she felt herself being seized by one of the men and lifted roughly to the saddle of a wiry little gray horse which was dancing around in a most disconcerting manner. It was a time for self-preservation and not for protest. She grasped the pommel desperately with one hand and the reins with the other, while her feet were being thrust into the straps of the stirrups—the stirrups themselves being too long.

She was badly scared, for the horse gave every indication of being unmanageable; and very miserable, for her skirt pulled in a most uncomfortable and unsightly fashion. There was nothing to do, however, but to make the best of it; for having helped her mount, the man who did so climbed up back of one of his fellows and abandoned her to her fate. Hard, in the meantime, had mounted another rough-looking but more conventionally disposed beast, and the procession started back to the road, the two Americans side by side, surrounded by the Mexicans; Angel 263
Gonzales leading, and Porfirio Cortes bringing up the rear.

“It may be a friendly lift, but it looks more like a case of abduction,” said Hard, wrathfully. “Can you hold that brute, Clara?”

“I hope so,” she said, her lips a bit white. “I think the poor thing is as scared as I am; probably never saw skirts before in his life.”

“Don’t try to hold him too tight. He’s probably got a tender mouth, judging from the way he fidgets.”

“Well, I suppose he has, but if I don’t hold him, he’s going to land me over somewhere in those foothills,” said Clara, faintly. “He’s got the most awful little rack I ever rode. Henry, do you suppose that fellow is Angel Gonzales?”

“Can’t say. He’s an ugly-looking ruffian whoever he is.”

“Hush, here he comes! He may understand English,” shivered Clara.

Angel grinned as he came back to them. “The señorita does not ride very well,” he said, mockingly. Clara did not reply.

“I suppose,” she reflected, with a gleam of humor, “that I ought to be grateful to be taken for a ‘señorita,’ but how can I be grateful for anything when I’m being rattled to pieces?”

Angel joined himself to them and they rode three abreast. He began to ask questions; questions which plainly were designed to inform him as to the financial standing of his guests or his prisoners whichever he chose to make them.

“He’s as persistent as a society reporter,” growled Hard, under his breath, as Angel relinquished his place to one of his men and fell back to ride with Cortes. “It’s a case of ransom, all right.”

“Shall we make a break for it?” whispered Clara. “If I let this thing go he’ll be over in the foothills before you can whistle.”

“No, they’d shoot. Better not risk it.”

“But, Henry, I can’t stand it! And I look so! I never was so altogether wretched in all my life,” groaned Clara.

“Be patient, that’s a good girl, until we see what they’re going to do.”

“If that devil’s face is any index to his character, he’s going to do something awful.”

Angel Gonzales, in fact, was justifying Clara’s opinion of him.

“The woman has money and property, and so, I think, has he,” he said to Cortes. “If they have money, they have friends, and friends will pay, eh?”

“Sometimes,” admitted Cortes. “But we are in a hurry, *amigo*. If Pachuca has come this far, he means business. We had better be on our way to meet him.”

“Yes, that’s so. Our horses are not strong enough to carry double, either. We’ll leave the Americanos with Manuel Soria and pay him to keep them for a few days until we know what we want to do with them, eh?”

“Not bad,” agreed Cortes. “Manuel is a good deal of a fool but his woman is smart. Give her a gun and she will know how to use it. She will do it for me because I make love to her now and then,” he added, with something which in a civilized being would pass for a simper.

“Humph, she’d do it for me because I’ll pay her some good money and promise her more,” said the unsympathetic Gonzales.

By this time they had reached the Soria cabin, much to Clara’s relief, and the party dismounted. The cabin door was closed, and Angel, who evidently wasted no time on the little courtesies of life, raised his pistol and fired into it. Clara caught her breath in horror.

“Those babies!” she gasped, clutching Hard.

“I don’t believe they’re in there,” he whispered. “I don’t see a sign of life—not even the burro.”

“Henry, they’ve gone to town to spend the money that Mr. Scott gave them this morning!”

“That’s it. They’ve taken the burro along to bring home the supplies. Don’t say anything; let them find it out. It’s not our funeral.”

It was soon apparent that the Soria family had gone—root and branch. There was no response either to Angel’s rude salutation or to the search which followed.

“They’re in a hole,” chuckled Hard, shrewdly. “I’ll bet you a dollar that they meant to leave us here and pay the Sorias to hold us. Now, they’ve either got to take us along or leave a guard for us, which is what they’ll probably do.”

“You don’t think there’s any chance of his letting us go?”

“Does he look like a chap who lets anything get away from him? Well, I’m glad he’s worried, anyhow.”

Angel Gonzales was worried, no mistake about that. The Sorias had upset his plans exceedingly. He did not want to burden himself with prisoners; his horses, fed only on the scant growth of the land, were in no condition to carry double. He did not want to leave any of his men behind, because he expected to need every one of them in his proposed campaign. On the other hand, he hated to give up the dazzling prospect of a ransom. He had never played the ransom game, but he knew the ropes and he longed to try.

“Who’s that coming up the road?” demanded Cortes, breaking off a dialogue with his chief.

A man—or, as it developed at closer range—a boy, a very ragged boy, riding a sweating horse, was tearing madly in their direction. Boylike, he pulled his poor beast to its haunches and gave what was intended for a military salute as he saw the redoubtable Gonzales.

“Well, what’s the matter? Who are you?” demanded that gentleman, unencouragingly.

“Señor Juan Pachuca——” gasped the panting messenger, “he sends me to say to Captain Gonzales to make speed. He waits—at his *rancho*. He has news of the revolution,” finished the boy, proudly.

“News! Humph, is that all he’s got?” demanded Angel, promptly.

“Men, and horses and plunder—oh, much plunder!” The boy’s eyes shone.

“So? That’s better, eh, Cortes? Shall we go, or——” 267

“Señor Pachuca says to make speed. Much speed,” reiterated the messenger. “The troops went South only last night.”

“We had better go,” said Cortes, eagerly. “We can make the *rancho* with hard riding by morning. That is, unless you burden yourself with those!” he gestured scornfully toward the two Americans.

Angel hesitated. Like Scott, he hated changing his mind. Also, the ransom loomed large; and he liked the woman’s looks—liked her manner of talk. With her dark hair and eyes, and her soft voice, she was like one of his own people——only much more charming, he reflected, with a gleam of the eye.

“Señor Pachuca says——”

“The devil with Señor Pachuca!” exploded Angel, menacingly. “Go back and tell him——” But the messenger had already gone. His horse’s feet were pattering down the side of the hill at a rate which argued panic in its rider. A laugh rose from the men, and Angel, guffawing himself, sent a parting bullet over the boy’s head.

“Cheerful man, isn’t he?” muttered Hard. “Never mind, Clara, he didn’t hit the boy. It’s evidently only his little joke.”

“Monster!” Clara’s black eyes snapped.

Apparently the little joke had cleared Angel’s mental atmosphere, for without further explanation, he turned and with a rough: “Get on your horses—we’ll go!” swung onto his mount. Cortes, with a grin of relief, passed the word on:

“To horse!” And in a second the party was mounted. Hard and Clara stood watching, ignorant of 268
what part they were to play in this new move. No attempt was made to mount them, which was in itself encouraging, nor did there seem to have been anyone detailed to stay and guard them. There was another confab between Gonzales and Cortes, which resulted in the latter’s coming toward the two Americans and saying, gruffly:

“Captain Gonzales regrets that he cannot escort you further but he is called suddenly to the front.” There was a pause, then, with an impudent grin, he continued, “Of course you know that in time of war, all alien property is confiscate? You will give me what money you have.”

“Oh, yes, give it to him, Henry, please!” Clara’s voice was eager. She pressed her little handbag into Cortes’ willing hand. Hard shrugged his shoulders.

“All right, old man, it’s not much, and if I thought you’d buy a good feed for those horses of yours, I’d hand it over with my blessing. As it is—I hand it over.”

Cortes took the money very much as a conductor collects his fares——with no comment but a ready hand. He also took a diamond ring which Clara had thoughtlessly put in the bag for safe keeping and the watch which Hard carried. Then without further words, he swung his horse around and at a command from Gonzales, the whole crowd swept furiously down the hill.

“Henry, they’ve gone! Actually gone—and taken that vile gray horse with them!” gasped Clara, faintly. 269

“It looks like it,” responded Hard. “But unless I’m a lot mistaken, they didn’t mean to go until that boy came with his message.”

“Well, blessings on the head of Juan Pachuca who sent him!” murmured Clara, wearily, as she started for the cabin.

“Do you want to stay outside or go in?” asked Hard, pulling a chair forward on the veranda.

“Outside, please, as long as we can stand it,” said Clara, with a little shiver. “I don’t believe I’d care for Grandmother Soria’s housekeeping.” She peeped into the family *olla* hanging on the side of the house. It was full. “Oh, well, Henry, things might have been worse,” she smiled as she sank into the chair.

“You can bet your dear life they might,” replied Henry, with a glance in the direction taken by Angel Gonzales.

“See if they’ve left anything to eat—anything that looks fairly clean.”

Hard emerged a few moments later empty-handed.

“Not a thing,” he said. “We evidently arrived at the psychological moment for this little family. That ten dollars Scott gave them will tide them over till Carlotta finds another beau.”

“But wasn’t there anything to eat?”

“Not a bone. Mother Hubbard’s cupboard was a cafeteria compared to Grandmother Soria’s. Draw in your belt and forget it.”

“Why did we eat so much this afternoon? They left us the biggest part of the luncheon. Henry,

we are pigs," moaned Clara, wanly.

"I know. We're not the sort to be cast on a desert isle, I'm afraid. If the Sorias get back to-night ——"

"They won't. They'll stay and make a night of it."

"Perhaps the hungry feeling will wear off after a while," said Hard, hopefully.

"I wonder? I've often thought I'd like to try a fast. One hears of people doing it and having such odd and fascinating sensations," said Clara, thoughtfully.

"My sensations are odd," replied Hard, "but they are distinctly not fascinating."

They sat quietly for a while, watching the clouds hovering over the mountains, sometimes over the peaks, sometimes nestling in fleecy patches half-way up.

"The trail they took crosses about where that gap in the mountains is," said Clara. "Under that first cloud, so Mr. Scott said."

"Pretty high."

"Yes, they'll have to do some climbing." Clara sighed softly. Hard felt an unreasonable desire, almost an angry desire to take her in his arms. It was a feeling unlike him, usually so moderate in his emotions.

"Clara," he said, softly, "were you thinking of him when you sighed?"

Clara started. "Him!" she echoed, helplessly.

"Yes, Dick Conrad."

"Not exactly, Henry. I was thinking of that terrible trip we took through the mountains—yes, I was in a way thinking of Dick."

"You were very happy together, weren't you? You were awfully in love with him, I mean. I'm not being impertinent, am I, Clara? You know I don't intend to be."

"No, Henry, I understand. I don't believe I'm the kind of woman who falls in love—at least, in the way most people mean. There's nothing very violent about me except once in a while when I get to singing something which takes hold of me pretty hard.

"Richard and I had a rather exciting little love affair, then after a while we both began to realize that we weren't very romantic—in regard to people. He was passionately devoted to adventure of every kind, and I had a way of putting my best into music. I didn't feel heart-broken when I found out that we really weren't anything more than good friends and neither did he.

"I'd cheerfully give all I've got to bring Dick back; I get lonesome for him—awfully. And yet, that isn't exactly the sort of thing that the average person means by 'love,' is it?"

"It would have made me very happy once to know that you cared that much for me," answered Hard, bitterly.

"I did. I always did, Henry. Only we were—so near, so much a part of each other—like cousins. I called it friendship instead of love," cried Clara, warmly.

"What difference does it make what you call it? Two people like to be together, seem to fit into one another's lives, isn't that love?"

Clara smiled. "It's not the kind of love that Polly Street will give the man she marries," she said. "You know that as well as I. And it's not a matter of years, it's temperament. An actress told me once that when it came to a question of comparison between her married life and her stage life, she could say instantly that it was her stage life that had meant the most to her. She was happily married, too. I'm a bit like her. I can get more downright exaltation over my music when it goes right than I ever got out of any love affair. I think my talent is for friendship rather than for love."

"Clara," Hard's voice shook, "I tell you, you wrong yourself. Neither you nor that woman were happily married if—oh, I don't want to be maudlin——"

"Bless your heart, Henry, you couldn't be, any more than I could. Perhaps it's the New England conscience——"

"I haven't a New England conscience," replied Hard. "My conscience is as elastic and pleasantly disposed as an Irishman's. Bunker Hill casts no blight upon me."

"Henry, this is all very nice; but I'm dying of hunger."

"Will you be afraid to stay here if I go back to Casa Grande and fetch you something?"

"Wild horses couldn't hold me in this God-forsaken spot without you, Henry! Don't think of it. I—I'll go with you, though."

"You can't walk it."

"Then I'll die on the road. But how about your knee?" She stopped in discouragement.

"What's a knee or two when you're starving to death?" demanded Hard, with decision. "Come on, let's start before I get any stiffer."

They started out again, through the half darkness; walking slowly, for Hard limped painfully. He had helped himself to a stout staff which he found on the Soria veranda and which gave him some assistance. They were very silent; Hard, because his mind was still running on Clara's

words, Clara, because she was honestly puzzled over the situation, and her own feelings.

She watched the tall, thin figure, limping along by her side, and again the old memories came back, as they had the night before in the darkness; memories of the days when he and she had played at love.

“I wasn’t in love with him, and yet, seeing him again, after all these years, it seems as though I must have been,” she thought, gently. “It’s friendship, and yet it’s more than friendship. It’s going to hurt dreadfully to go away again.”

“Clara, one more word before we drop the subject; because I will drop it if it troubles you.” Hard’s voice came quietly through the darkness. “Don’t let us mistake each other again. I’ve tortured myself for fifteen years, wondering whether I should have let you go as I did, or have tried to hold you. Do you think, with fifteen years behind us, that we made a mistake?”

Clara’s voice trembled as she answered: “No, Henry, I don’t. We were too young to understand each other. We needed experience—at least, I did. I don’t know,” she added, with a shadow of a laugh, “whether it’s the romantic situation, my enfeebled condition, or your noble heroism, but I never felt more like being in love with you than I do this minute.” 274

“Honestly, Clara?”

“Honestly, Henry. If you give out on the road I shall try to emulate that husky woman in history who carried her husband on her back, do you remember?” Then, suddenly, her eyes filled with tears. “Henry, you’ve been awfully patient with me. If you really want to embark on the seas of matrimony with such a shaky thing as I am——”

“Clara, I never thought it would come about like this or I would have smashed this cussed knee ages ago! My dearest girl, my face is dirty and yours is dirtier, but I’m going to kiss you, and then we’ll take another whack at hobbling to Casa Grande.”

The ranch-house stood dark and uninviting except for the dim light of the fire which shone through the broken windows of the living-room, but the sound of the piano came to their ears as they neared it.

“He’s composing,” said Clara, softly.

“Yes, he would be,” said Hard, unsympathetically. “They always do work it off that way, don’t they?”

“Work what off?” demanded Clara, instantly.

“Anything that happens to them,” said Hard, cheerfully. “You artistic fellows are queer, you know, Clara. Don’t try to wriggle out of it.”

“I shan’t,” replied Clara, promptly. “But let me warn you, my lad, you haven’t made me want to give up my music yet. I’m still going back to have a try at it.”

“Bully for you! Of course you are. And I’m going with you, either to help you do it, or to make you fall in love with me so deeply that you’ll want to give it up.” 275

Clara laughed softly and laid her hand on his arm. “Henry, if you can do that, I’ll be the happiest woman in the world. Please try!”

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CHAPTER XVIII

BACK TO ATHENS

Mendoza and Tom walked toward the Casa Grande ranch-house with fearful hearts.

“Dark as a pocket,” commented Tom. “You set down here, Mendoza, while I go around in back.” From the side, a faint light was visible from the dining-room of the house. “Hullo, what have we here?” ejaculated the engineer. At the same time, he saw a man’s figure coming toward him; a very familiar figure. “Hard!” he gasped, darting forward and knocking the load of firewood from Hard’s arms with the fervency of his greeting.

“Hullo, Tom!” Hard returned the handshake quite as heartily. “Glad to see you. We were beginning to think we were marooned on this place.”

“We?” Tom’s face lit up. “You’re all right? All of you? Didn’t none of you get killed by them Yaquis?”

“Why, didn’t Scott tell you?” demanded Hard, with sudden anxiety.

“I ain’t seen Scott sence you all went off together,” said Tom, puzzled.

“Hold on! Do you mean to say that they haven’t shown up yet? Scott and the girl?”

“Well, I left Athens yestiddy morning. You see, I walked to Conejo and picked up Mendoza and his car.” 277

“You walked to Conejo!” Hard’s voice was awed.

“’Twa’n’t much. I took my time. You see, the Chink brought us word that there was something going on over here. He seen the barn burning when he was up on the mesa, and he didn’t know what was up. He pretty nigh killed Cochise, so I had to walk. I knew there was no use coming here with no horses, so I went to Conejo. They’ve got martial law there. The Colonel’s a nice young feller, if he is a greaser, and he loaned me Mendoza and the Ford. Now what happened here, anyhow?”

Hard gave a brief outline of their adventures.

“Mrs. Conrad,” he said, “is an old friend of Herrick’s and mine, who’s had to leave her plantation in the South, and is on her way home. She is going East with Miss Street. She and I tried camping out at Soria’s last night after Gonzales left us, but we got starved out and we tramped it back here, waiting for someone to come after us. I’m lame as I can be.”

Clara’s face lit up when she saw the three men enter, and she shook hands cordially with Johnson and the old Mexican. Then an anxious look came into her eyes. Hard, seeing it, spoke quickly.

“Johnson left Athens yesterday before Scott and Polly got there,” he said, reassuringly. “He walked to Conejo.”

“Walked to Conejo!”

“You see, Tom, Mrs. Conrad and I walked here from Soria’s and we’ve both been crippled ever since. A walk to Conejo fills us with excited admiration.” 278

Tom chuckled. “Well, I always could walk,” he replied. “Never done anything particular with the other end of me, but I could always depend on my feet. Say, folks, Mendoza’s got his car outside. How about a quick bite and then beating it for Athens?”

Clara turned eagerly to Herrick.

“You’ll come, won’t you, Victor? I hate to think of your being here alone when everything is so upset.”

Herrick smiled and patted her hand affectionately.

“You will give me no peace until I do, so I will go,” he said.

It was a sober little crowd that sat around the dining-room table at Athens that night. Though their joy had been very great at the safe coming of Hard and Clara in Mendoza’s car, it had been tinged with gloom at the non-arrival of Scott and Polly. Jimmy Adams was reported much improved.

“That Chinaman doesn’t cook any more,” confided Mrs. Van to Clara. “He’s had a rise in life and he just sits and meditates. Awful people to meditate—the Chinese. What they find to think about I can’t see, but it seems to make ’em happy.”

Clara’s mind, however, was upon the absent. “I can’t see what could have happened to them. They didn’t fall in with Angel Gonzales, that we know,” she said. “I’m dreadfully worried about them.”

“Hello!” It was O’Grady’s voice. “Here comes horses down the road—two of them. I believe it’s our folks.” And he bolted out into the moonlight, followed by the others. 279

It was, and a more exhausted and bedraggled couple it would have been hard to find.

“Look like a pair of forty-niners,” said O’Grady, “on the last lap of the trip.”

Scott rolled out of the saddle while Hard lifted Polly to her feet.

“Coffee!” whispered the girl. “Is it really coffee that I smell?”

“Gracious, I believe they’re starving,” gasped Mrs. Van, running into the house.

“All we’ve had to-day is a cake of chocolate and some lumps of sugar,” said Scott, briefly. “Look after the horses, O’Grady, will you? They’ve had it pretty rough, too.”

He was lame and sore from his fall of the day before, and tired and hungry from the day’s discomforts, but he managed to say enough to give them an idea of what had happened.

“After I climbed out of the arroyo,” he said, “I didn’t know which way to go. If those fellows had got Polly I wanted to go after them; if they hadn’t—well, I didn’t dare take the chance that they hadn’t. I was pelting down the trail like a madman when I heard her voice calling me from up the trail.

“We got on the horses and began climbing again, pretty well pleased with our luck, but the horses were all in. They’d been at it since early morning, climbing most of the time, and I saw that they weren’t going to make it. So I picked a good-looking spot near the head of the stream that we’d been following, and we camped there for the night, ate the rest of our sandwiches, and rolled up in our blankets. It wasn’t very comfortable but it was a case of needs must. 280

“In the morning I set out to find the trail again. It had pretty well disappeared—choked up by the brush. We fought our way through it all morning and finally lost it; struck out higher up on the mountain and came out on the barren side near the top. That’s all, except that we’ve been going since five this morning on nothing but a cake of chocolate that Polly found in her coat pocket and a few lumps of sugar.”

“If I were going back to Chicago to live I believe I’d start soup kitchens for hungry people,” declared Polly, suddenly. “It’s the worst thing in the world—being hungry.”

“If you was——” Mrs. Van Zandt started suddenly and stopped equally so. Polly blushed. Scott came to the rescue.

“We may as well tell ’em while we’re telling our other troubles,” he suggested, and Polly told them.

“I’m going home because he won’t marry me unless Father consents,” she said, “and he doesn’t seem to think a consent by wire is legal. But I’m coming back.”

“Well, I wish you good luck, I’m sure.” Mrs. Van Zandt leaned over and kissed Polly impulsively. “He’ll browbeat you a bit but he’ll stick by you. Guess I’ll make some more coffee,” and she bounced into the kitchen.

“Gracious! Would you call that a congratulation?” gasped Polly. 281

“Here’s a bona-fide one, my dear,” said Clara, gently. “I am sure you’ll be happy.”

The others laughed and joked while Clara and Hard kept their secret to themselves. Scott followed Mrs. Van Zandt into the kitchen with some empty cups and their voices could be heard talking earnestly.

“Well,” said the latter, as she returned, “I’ll say I think Mr. Scott’s idea a good one.” By a psychological process quite her own and quite unconsciously followed, Mrs. Van had promoted Scott to the dignity of the prefix upon hearing that he was engaged to the superintendent’s sister. “He’s hired Mendoza and that junk-pile of his to take you all to the border so’s you can get a train East without traveling on the Mexican railroads.”

“It’s like this,” Scott explained. “Tom says they told him at Conejo that the revolutionary government had taken over all the railroads, both Mexican and American, and is operating them. Now, we might make the trip all right—they say lots of refugees are coming North; but what’s the use? I’ll run over to Conejo and get them to let us keep Mendoza for a few days and perhaps we can get some sort of a safe conduct for the road from that military guy over there.

“I’d rather have old Villa’s safe conduct than any of the rest of them; I think it cuts more ice with the population at large. But perhaps this chap can do something for us. We’ll try to hit the border at Chula Vista—the roads that way are pretty fair. Now, Hard, suppose you and I take a turn down the road and have a look at Jimmy before he goes to sleep.” 282

“Scotty,” they were outside and Hard spoke frankly, “I didn’t want to speak of it before the others, but Mrs. Conrad and I have made up our minds to undo an old mistake. We’ve going to try life together instead of apart.”

“I hoped you would, Hard. She’s a fine woman.”

“When I say an old mistake, don’t misunderstand me,” continued Hard, soberly. “She and Dick Conrad were happy together. She loved him when she married him—and she didn’t love me. The mistake was mine, in not making her love me when I had the chance. I’ve got the chance again and I’m going to make good this time.”

“You’re very lucky, Hard. Most fellows don’t get a second chance—with the same woman. Will she come back here with you?”

“I don’t know. We’re going to be married in Chula Vista and she’s going home just as she had planned. I can’t go, of course, but as soon as Street comes back I’ll either go to her or she’ll come to me. She hasn’t given up her music and I don’t want her to. It’s all rather hazy, Scott. I only know that I let her get away from me once, and, selfish brute that I am, I’m going to tie her to me now while she’s in the humor.”

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CHAPTER XIX

POLLY MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

Not far from the Mexican border lies the town of Chula Vista, New Mexico. It is a small town, does not even boast of a railroad connection nearer than twenty-five or thirty miles, being, like Conejo, on a bi-weekly spur; but it is a town of reputation and a not altogether blameable civic pride.

It has borne its part in the border warfare with credit. It has slaughtered and been slaughtered, one might say, and rather enjoyed both proceedings. When, some years ago, a Mexican bandit raided Chula Vista and carried off a young woman, the citizens of the town organized an expedition, followed him across the line, and recovered the lady, none the worse for her experience; which proves not only that Chula Vista is a wide-awake town, but that some bandits are not as black as they are painted.

Chula Vista, on the afternoon when our party entered it, duly chaperoned by the aged Mendoza,

presented an everyday appearance. The Chula Vista Trading Company was doing its usual business, and, as this was before the days of prohibition, several saloons were doing what they could to relieve a universal thirst. An ambitious building of brick, the new schoolhouse, witnessed the fact that culture was believed in, even pursued. 284

The other buildings were less imposing. There was the butcher's place, a small adobe with a fenced-in yard. As Mendoza's car drove past it, the butcher, with sanguinary intentions, was occupied in driving a wise and reluctant young steer around the yard. A little further along was the Roman Catholic Church—a Penitentes church, by the way, and the little house of Father Silva, who officiated. Further still was a long low building which had once been a livery stable, but which had been altered to meet the needs of a moving picture theatre, and the Commonwealth House, kept by Sam Penhallow, who varied the monotony of hotel keeping by exercising the duties of sheriff of the county. He it was who had crossed the line after the kidnapped young lady. The newspapers had featured him as a Texas Ranger, which he was not and never had been, but that was rather a near thing for a newspaper.

Penhallow was a tall, thin, brown-skinned man, who wore checked suits and who had the long drooping mustache which fiction assigns to the calling of a sheriff. Whether fiction is right in this particular, or whether Sam wore the mustache to conform with the best standards, is not important. He was sitting in a tilted chair, on the narrow strip of flooring which served the hotel as a veranda when Mendoza and his party wheezed into view.

Penhallow's conventional welcome expanded into real warmth when he recognized Scott, who was well known in Chula Vista.

"Hullo," he said, his hand outstretched. "If it ain't Marc Scott! Drive you out down there, did they? Well, Mendoza—blamed if I didn't think you was dead long ago! No, I don't guess I know the ladies or your other friend, but any friend of Scott's has got the keys of the city all right." He turned and called into the house: "Mabel, come out here!" 285

"One of these ladies, Miss Street, is on her way to Chicago," said Scott. Polly, restored to good looks by a few days rest and her prettiest lace blouse, beamed on Mr. Penhallow with the usual result. "Mrs. Conrad," continued Scott, "is a friend of ours and is going back with the young lady. No, we weren't driven out but things are rather bad down yonder."

"Well, you ladies sure have courage, travelin' round at this time," said the admiring Penhallow. A tall pretty girl appeared in the doorway and was introduced as "my daughter, Mabel, who runs the ranch. Mabel, show these ladies the best rooms we've got. Give 'em the bridal soot if you can find it."

Hard, suitcases in hand, followed the women into the hotel, while Mendoza steamed away to a haunt of his own. Scott sank into an armchair and settled himself for a talk with Penhallow.

"That young Street's sister?" demanded the latter.

Scott nodded.

"I heard Bob Street had married a Douglas girl?"

"He did." Scott explained the situation in regard to Polly. "Her people are anxious about her and wrote her to come back at once, so we're carrying out instructions. The other folks——" Scott paused and surveyed the sheriff with an eye that twinkled. "Are you good at keeping secrets, Sam?" he said. 286

"Well, I have kept 'em," replied Sam, modestly.

"Well, the lady is a widow, runs a ranch down South, and the tall chap is our chief engineer, a Boston man. They're up here to get spliced before she goes East."

"So! Well, no reason why they shouldn't, I s'pose?"

"None that I know of."

"I kind of had a hunch 'twas her and you when you got out of the car, Marc."

"Me!"

"Yes. You needn't blush. You ain't too old to think of settlin' down if you pick a woman that ain't too young and giddy for you."

"I'm not asking your advice on matrimony, you old fool, I'm asking if you've got anybody in this one-horse place who can marry folks legally," said Marc, touchily.

"The judge could, I guess, but in a case like this there'd be more tone to it if you had the Padre. We haven't got any Protestant fellow here just now," replied Penhallow, meditatively.

"The Padre's the boy. I'll go over and interview him now."

"You can't. He's to a christening at some Mexican's up the creek. Won't be home till late."

"Well, morning's as good a time as any, I reckon, for a wedding," said Scott, philosophically. "We've got to stay over anyhow, to see the women off. Tomorrow's your train day, ain't it? Or have you changed your schedule?" 287

"No, we haven't changed it," replied Penhallow. "Only we don't run on it much. We will to-morrow, though, because I'm sending a lot of hogs over."

"That's good. Say, what do they think up here of the revolution?"

"Which one?" with a chuckle.

“The new one. Looks like the real thing down yonder.”

“Well, of course, we were looking for trouble before the elections. We never expected the old man to keep his hands off the ballot box and everyone knows the man he put up—Bonillas—has got no show. It’ll be Obregon, I s’pose?”

“It’s hard to say. I was in Conejo a couple of days ago and they said Sinaloa had followed Sonora and a good many of the other states would fall in line in a few days. Obregon’s broken away from Mexico City—guess you heard that—and they’re talking of De la Huerta for provisional president.”

“Know him? De la Huerta?”

“I’ve seen him. He’s a young chap—some folks think he’s a radical—I don’t know.”

“Had any trouble at your place?”

Scott narrated the proceedings of Juan Pachuca at some length and with some heat. “A military guy over in Conejo told me that he’d had orders to clean up the state, so when Tom wised him up to the fact that Pachuca and Angel Gonzales were doping it up to meet somewhere around 288
Pachuca’s place, he sent a troop of men down there, cut Angel off and smashed up the whole business.”

“Get their men?”

“Got Angel, but Pachuca slid out.”

“They let him probably.”

“Maybe so.”

“Framed it up for him so’s not to hurt the feelings of any of his high-toned friends.”

“Shouldn’t wonder. What time do you eat around here, Sam?”

“How’ll six suit you?”

“Suits me fine. I’ll go and break it to Hard that he can’t get married till morning. I suppose this Spanish chap won’t object to marryin’ a couple of Presbyterians? That’s what they say they are.”

“Gosh, no, the Padre’s a regular fellow,” replied Penhallow, easily. “You give him his fee and he ain’t going to raise no rows.”

The dining-room of Sam Penhallow’s hotel was a fair-sized room with one long dinner table and three small round ones. These latter were a concession to the habits of certain citizens who brought their sweethearts on the nights that Sam served chicken suppers and who were partial to parties carrés. It was to one of these small tables that Scott led his party. Altogether, thanks to the efforts of Mabel and her influence upon a certain invisible person whose identity changed often but who was always to be identified as the “help,” things were much better at the Commonwealth than one had a right to expect in a town the size of Chula Vista. Compared to 289
Conejo, it was like entering into the promised land.

Mabel, herself, waited at table, and in the just opinion of most of the boarders, added fifty per cent, to the pleasure of the occasion. On this particular night the room was full and she had the assistance of a smiling young Mexican girl who waited on a company of her compatriots who sat at the farthest of the small tables. They had just ridden in—their horses could be seen outside at the rail. The back of the head of one of these gentlemen interested Polly immensely. There was something about it which reminded her strongly of Juan Pachuca.

“Do those Mexicans live in Chula Vista?” she asked Mabel, under cover of a laugh at one of Hard’s stories.

“No, they’re strangers,” replied the girl. “I think they come from a ranch out of town.”

Of course it couldn’t be Pachuca! He was in hiding somewhere down yonder, and yet—the party was on her mind and she noticed it as it broke up and the men passed out of the dining-room. She caught a side view of the suspected one—it was Pachuca, without a doubt. Whether he saw her or not she could not say but if he did he avoided showing it.

The girl’s first inclination was to call Scott’s attention to the Mexican; then she hesitated—it would mean trouble. There would be fighting and someone would be hurt. Scott’s back was toward them and he talked along quite innocent of the presence of Pachuca. While she hesitated the moment passed, the Mexicans were out of the room and she saw them mount their horses 290
and ride off. Scott and Hard were still deep in argument. Whether Clara saw or not Polly could not tell.

“Marc,” Polly stopped beside him as they left the dining-room, “I’ve a nasty little headache—shall you mind if I go to bed?”

Scott, a bit surprised, replied in the negative and Polly went on, her hand on his arm coaxingly:

“Did you find out that the train goes to-morrow?”

“Yes.”

“Do I have to go on it?”

“There’s no other way that I know of for you to go home.”

“You won’t come with me?”

“I can’t leave the property when your brother’s away; you know that.”

“Well, I suppose you can’t. It’s very trying, isn’t it?”

“It’s not what I’d like.” Scott, in spite of himself, smiled down into the serious eyes.

“Well, if I were as big as you and didn’t like a thing, I’d change it, that’s all. Good-night.” She ran up the stairs.

Scott shrugged his shoulders and strode into the office of the hotel; the Commonwealth boasted no parlor—guests sat in the office or went to bed. Clara and Hard stood near the desk talking to Penhallow. Scott lit a cigarette and went outside. The narrow strip of veranda was vacant. He walked moodily up and down. 291

Of course, if she had a headache—but it seemed queer to leave a fellow so early on their last evening together for no one knew how long. Perhaps she wouldn’t come back after all and he would wish that he hadn’t given the old life a chance to call her and keep her. Then he thought of the parents—never having had any of his own as far as memory went, Scott felt their claims strongly. He wanted the girl; wanted her so badly that his whole being ached to take advantage of her youth and impulsiveness; to make the wedding in the morning a double one.

But Scott had not lived a hard life without learning to do without a thing if he chose to do without it; the thing might be a drink, it might be a horse, it might be a woman. Still, Polly might have stayed down and walked with him a while in the moonlight—it wasn’t much to ask. Hard and Clara had come out, the latter muffled in her long cloak, and were walking down Chula Vista’s main artery toward the Padre’s church. With a muttered exclamation, Scott dug his hands into his pockets and went inside.

“I suppose I can sit in the office and gab with Sam,” he growled, but Sam had disappeared. Scott picked up a newspaper and lit another cigarette. Suddenly, the door opened and Clara, visibly excited, appeared, followed by Hard.

“Mr. Scott, what do you think? We’ve just seen Juan Pachuca,” declared Clara.

“Sure enough? I suppose he could slide over the border if he wanted to. Where’d you see him?”

“He was one of those three Mexicans who had dinner at that other small table—so Clara says,” 292
replied Hard.

“Your back was toward them,” went on Clara. “Henry’s never seen him, so of course he wouldn’t notice. I thought at the time that the man looked like Pachuca but I didn’t get a good view of him. We were going past that little saloon down near the church and they came out and rode off. He pretended not to see us.”

“Where’d they go?” demanded Scott, with the dryness in his tone which always appeared when Pachuca was mentioned.

“Out of town—past the church. I’m going up to tell Polly what she’s missed,” said Clara, as she ran up the narrow little stairway. “Girls have changed—not a doubt about it,” she thought, whimsically. “Fancy spending the last evening they have together moping upstairs with a headache! Wonder if anything’s gone wrong?”

A few moments later she was back in the office with the two men.

“I can’t find Polly,” she said, in alarm. “I’ve been to my room and to hers and she isn’t in either. Her hat and coat are gone, too.”

Scott came out of his chair with a bound. “I knew that devil was here for no good,” he said, starting for the door.

“Don’t be a fool, Marc Scott!” Clara’s voice was sharp and angry. “We saw Pachuca and those two men go off on horseback. He hasn’t carried off Polly!” 293

“I didn’t say he’d carried her off,” said Scott, doggedly. “She sat where she could see him at dinner. You saw him—so did she—and he saw her. This riding off is a blind——”

“You’re going to be terribly ashamed of yourself for what you’re saying. I know that girl. She wouldn’t do a thing like that any more than I would. I’m going to see Mabel Penhallow and find out what she knows about it,” said Clara, angrily.

“I’m going to find that boy and choke the life out of him. Get out of my way, Hard.”

“Look here, Scotty, that’s not the way to handle this affair,” remonstrated Hard, barring Scott’s progress toward the door and speaking with a warmth unusual to him. “Let’s get hold of Penhallow and tell him that Pachuca’s over on this side——”

“I don’t need a sheriff to handle my affairs.”

“This isn’t your affair, it’s the Government’s. If this chap’s got the nerve to think he can come over here after the way he’s acted with American property it’s up to the Government to put him right.”

“I can’t find Mabel.” Clara had returned, her face worried. “The Mexican girl said she saw an automobile go by a quarter of an hour ago and that Polly was in it. A Mexican was driving and she thought there was another man in the car. Marc, he has kidnapped her!”

But Scott had burst out of the room, followed by Hard. Clara, pale and frightened, watched them from the window. Scott’s blood was boiling. At first, stung with a sense of injury at Polly’s treatment of him, he had leaped to the jealous conclusion that she had seen and communicated 294

with Pachuca. Scott was not a model lover. He was not of the type which believes always until convinced by proof. He was a hot-blooded, jealous, none too good tempered man, who lost his head very easily when he believed himself ill-treated. Now that he was beginning to realize that the affair might have a different complexion—that the girl had perhaps been overpowered and carried off—he was furious in another way, this time against Pachuca and against himself.

Mendoza had left his car outside his favorite saloon but the car was gone and so was Mendoza.

“I thought I could trust that old greaser but I guess I was wrong,” groaned Scott. “We’ll get horses from the stable, Hard, and perhaps they’ll know something about it there.”

Investigation revealed the fact that Mendoza had succeeded in getting his car out of town without attracting the attention of anyone but his dish-washing compatriot. When it leaked out that there was a kidnapping involved, the chivalrous instincts of Chula Vista were aroused. Horses were eagerly offered and a posse was to be formed as soon as Sam Penhallow could be located. Unfortunately, the only machine in town, owned by the sheriff, had been loaned that morning to Ed Merriam who had driven it over to the railroad junction. In an incredibly short time, Scott and Hard were clattering down the road which the three Mexicans had taken half an hour before.

“It’s useless, of course,” grunted Scott “They’ll meet the car and shake the horses before we can 295
get to them; but, by God, Hard, I’ll get that boy if I have to comb New Mexico for him.”

Hard was trying to be optimistic, but on a strange horse and with a lame knee, optimism came with difficulty. “I may be wrong, Scott,” he said, between jolts; “but Pachuca doesn’t seem to me to be just that kind of a scamp. He’d elope with your wife in a second if she gave him an opportunity, but I can’t seem to see him carrying off your sweetheart against her will. There is such a thing as type, you know.”

“In Boston, maybe. Out here a man’s decent or he ain’t,” growled the other.

Hard relapsed into reflection. The road they were traveling forked at about a mile out of town. Ahead of them, it continued on the flat; to their left it became narrower and wound toward the foothills, remaining, however, a road possible for a car or a wagon.

“Which?” queried Hard, looking ahead as the fork became visible.

“The left,” replied Scott. “They’ll hit out for the hills. The other road goes along the railroad tracks.”

“I don’t think so,” muttered Hard. “I think they’ll stick to a good road.” But Scott had spurred his horse. Hard followed him a moment in silence, then he called: “Scott, I hear a machine! By Jove, I see it—it’s coming toward us, down the main road.”

Scott pulled up his horse. They peered into the dusk ahead of them. The car was coming toward
them. 296

“You brought a gun, I suppose?” he asked.

Hard nodded. “What do we do?”

“Hold ’em up.” They pulled their horses down to a walk. “No headlights,” observed Scott. “We’ll keep this side of that little rise. If they haven’t seen us, they won’t see us till they’re on us.”

“We don’t shoot, I trust, until we know who they are,” suggested Hard, mildly. “It strikes me they’re going the wrong way for our men.”

“They may be going to turn at the fork. If it’s not them, it’s someone who can tell us if the Mexicans have gone this way.”

The car, a small one, pulled up the hill and started down toward Chula Vista. Scott rode into the middle of the road.

“Stop!” he called, authoritatively. The car stopped. It was driven by a fat man who was its only occupant.

“What’s the matter with you fools?” he demanded, angrily. “Don’t you know this here’s the sheriff’s car?”

Scott lowered his gun. “That so?” he said. “Then I suppose you’ll be Ed Merriam?”

“What business of yours is it?” replied Merriam, disgustedly, though apparently relieved at the removal of the weapon. Hard rode up quickly.

“Nothing, only we’re out after a bunch of Mexicans who have kidnapped a young lady,” he explained. “We thought we had them.”

“See anything of a Ford car up the road?” demanded Scott. 297

“No. Say, who——”

“Or any Mexicans on horseback?”

“No. But——”

Scott turned to Hard. “I told you they’d taken the other road.”

“Look here,” demanded the fat man, excitedly. “Is this an honest-to-gosh kidnapping? I say, it ain’t Mabel Penhallow?”

“No, it ain’t,” grunted Scott. “Will you loan us that car for a couple of hours?”

“You bet—pile in. Say, you boys give me an awful start. I’m going to marry that girl.” Merriam wiped his brow in relief.

“And I’m going to marry the girl those brutes have carried off,” replied Scott, dismounting and turning his horse loose. Hard followed his example.

“Well, why didn’t you say so at first?” demanded Merriam, as they got into the car. “Man’s a gabby animal, ain’t he? Which way’d they go?”

“Up in the hills, we think,” replied Hard.

“It ain’t much of a road,” said the driver, doubtfully. “Still, if they can make it with one car we can with another, I reckon. Goes up Wildcat Canyon after a bit; nobody living up there since that old Mexican died. Say, d’you suppose they’d take her up to that old cabin? Gosh, we’d better hit it up!”

There was silence in the rear of the car. The two men saw in imagination the helpless girl and the tiny remote cabin. Scott leaned forward, devouring the road with despairing eyes. Hard sat beside him, quiet except when he answered Merriam’s questions, sparing Scott, whose impatience and irritation made speech unendurable.

The new road led directly into the foothills. It was narrow and very rough. The travelers were shaken about like marbles in a boy’s pocket. Wildcat Canyon, into which the road ran, was of a real loneliness—a loneliness that penetrated one’s consciousness like an odor or a sound. On either side the foothills rose, dark and forbidding; to the left of the road a deep arroyo ran; on the other, the slope of the hill rose gradually to the sky line. Ahead, the hills seemed to come together as the road became narrower and wound in and out, becoming finally a trail. There was no trace of habitation to be seen, though here and there a few range cattle wandered.

“Cabin’s about two miles up the canyon,” volunteered Merriam. “Can’t see it from here, the road winds too much.”

Scott interrupted him suddenly. “There they are!” he cried, pointing up the road. Three horsemen were riding rapidly in the same direction with the car.

“She’s not with them, Scott,” Hard said, thankfully.

Scott did not answer. In his mind, he still saw the auto with the girl in it, going toward the cabin up the canyon. Well, at all events, Juan Pachuca would not reach that cabin alive! Merriam threw the car into its full speed.

“They’ve piped us—see ’em cross the arroyo,” he said. It was true. The three riders had plunged into the depths of the arroyo and were out on the other side. They did not seem to be running away, but kept to the rapid trot which they had been riding.

“Don’t know who we are and aiming to give us the idea that they’re out for a little moonlight ride,” remarked Merriam. “This car can go, can’t she? Sam’d sure be sore if he knew I was runnin’ her like this. Why don’t we beat it up to the cabin and get the girl and let them mosey along by themselves?”

“Because we don’t know that’s where they’ve taken her,” said Scott, angrily. He concluded that Merriam had guessed right. Pachuca had no particular reason to believe that the car held his enemies, or even that Scott and Hard knew him guilty of Polly’s disappearance. They would safeguard themselves by riding on the other side of the arroyo but they evidently did not intend to be scared out of their road to any further extent.

The car was rapidly catching up with the riders and soon things must come to a showdown. Scott fingered his gun lovingly.

“Hey, you guys, where you heading for?” demanded Merriam, loudly, as the car came almost abreast of the three. They turned as the machine slowed down to their pace. Before they could answer, Scott was out of the car and had them covered.

“Pachuca, it’s no use—we’ve got you,” he called. “Hands up!”

The two Mexicans who evidently understood little English, though the magic words, “hands up,” probably penetrated their darkness, glanced at Pachuca for orders. The latter turned his horse and rode to the edge of the arroyo. He was his usual jaunty self, a little travel worn, but not dulled.

“Señor Scott?” he asked, peering through the dusk. “What do you want?”

Scott paused for a moment, daunted by the other’s impudence.

“We want you, Pachuca,” said Hard, peremptorily. “Come quietly and don’t force us to use our guns—we don’t want to.”

Pachuca slid gracefully from his horse and took a few steps nearer the edge. “What’s the trouble?” he demanded. “I won’t come over till I know what you want. We’ve got our guns, too.”

“He’s a cool one!” murmured Merriam, admiringly. While Pachuca had drawn the attention of the Americans by his sudden move in their direction, his two friends had ridden up behind him and stood with their guns ready for action. It looked like a deadlock. Scott dropped his gun to his side.

“All right, put up your guns,” he said, his voice dangerously calm. “We’ll talk it over.”

The Mexicans got the idea if not the words and lowered their weapons.

“You know what I want you for,” Scott went on, angrily. “Where is she?”

“She?” Pachuca’s assumption of ignorance was masterly. It almost convinced Hard. “Who do you mean?”

“I mean Miss Street. You’ve kidnapped her or else your friends in Mendoza’s car have and you’re on your way to join them. We want to know where. Come, you can’t get away with it.” 301

“I’ve not seen the girl since that night at Athens—yes, I saw her to-night for a moment but I did not speak to her. I am here on business of my own with these gentlemen. If you have an officer of the law with you I’ll show him my papers. If you haven’t, I’ll go on. If you shoot, we’ll shoot.”

“Anyone would think he had papers,” murmured Hard to Merriam.

“Well, mebbe he has. They ain’t so hard to get. What I want to know is how are we going to get him into the car?”

Scott tried to swallow his desire to choke the slim youth on the other side. “Come, Pachuca,” he said, “this won’t get you anywhere. Either tell us where the girl is and go your way, or come over here and fight it out.”

“I don’t know where she is. As for fighting—well, if I kill you what do I get out of it? Also, you might quite possibly kill me.”

“If I only knew she was in the cabin, he could go and welcome,” was rushing through Scott’s brain. “But I don’t and I mustn’t let him get away.”

Suddenly, a sound broke upon their ears—the sound of an automobile. It was coming down the canyon and coming fast. Merriam seized his horn.

“We can’t have ’em coming down on us in this narrow place!” he cried, honking furiously. The other car answered. The Mexicans turned at the sound and Pachuca, casting a hurried glance at them over his shoulder, reached for his bridle. Scott raised his gun instantly. 302

“You stay where you are!” he yelled. “If those are your people we’ll get the lot of you; if they’re not we’ve got you, anyhow, *sabe*?”

Pachuca gave one look at Scott and another at his flying friends. Then he threw himself upon his horse’s back, thrust the spur in deep, and as the horse reared, drew his gun. His shot and Scott’s rang out together as they had done once before in front of the store at Athens—but with a different result. Pachuca reeled, recovered, spurred the horse again and tore off in the direction taken by the flying Mexicans; Scott stood looking furiously at him for a moment then staggered to the machine.

“He got me, Henry,” he muttered, as he toppled over. “Look after the girl.”

And the other machine came rumbling on through the dusk.

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CHAPTER XX

TREASURE TROVE

Polly Street went up to her room after leaving Scott but she did not go to bed. Nor did she behave in any way which suggested an alarming amount of headache. Instead, she opened her window and looked out. Her first glance showed Scott pacing scowlingly up and down the narrow veranda. Further down the street she saw Mendoza’s car parked in front of its owner’s favorite saloon, next door, in fact, to the butcher’s, in whose yard hung the remains of the steer—an unhappy evidence of the truth of the adage that in the midst of life we are in death. Mendoza was not visible, but it needed no stretch of the imagination to locate him.

With a little sigh of satisfaction, Polly withdrew her head and remained a moment in thought; then she ran downstairs again. A cautious peep into the office showed Clara and Hard in conversation with Sam Penhallow. She glided into the dining-room where she found the good-looking Mabel finishing the clearing off of the tables. Polly looked winningly into the tall girl’s eyes.

“I want awfully to speak to your father about something; do you suppose you could get him into the dining-room without anyone’s knowing? I want to consult him in his official capacity,” she added with dignity. 304

“Oh!” said Mabel, surveying her guest calmly. “Do you mean as the sheriff or as the boss of this hotel? Because if it’s that, you can see me. I’m the real boss.”

“Oh, as the sheriff, of course,” replied Polly, hastily. “Anybody could see that you ran this hotel. It’s much too well handled to be a man’s job.”

“Well,” the tall girl unbent a trifle, “I don’t mind telling you that I think so myself. Of course, as a sheriff Papa is all right. You wait here and I’ll fetch him and look after the office till you’re through with him.”

In a moment or two Sam Penhallow entered the dining-room, his good-natured face a trifle puzzled.

“Mabel said——” he began.

Polly smiled. “Yes, isn’t she clever at managing things? You see, Mr. Penhallow, it’s a case of ‘Kind Captain, I’ve important information.’ Won’t you sit down?”

Sam sat down.

“In the first place, one of those Mexicans who had dinner here to-night is Juan Pachuca—the man who held up our mine a few days ago.”

“What? Why didn’t you say so before? I’d have——”

“I didn’t think quick enough,” admitted Polly, “and for another thing I knew that if Mr. Scott saw him there would be trouble. He has reasons for disliking Pachuca—apart from the raid, at least, he thinks he has.” Polly blushed in spite of herself. 305

“I get you,” responded Penhallow, instantly.

“I thought you would. You seem to me like that sort of a man. Now, I want to ask you something; did you ever hear of a Mexican named ‘Gasca’ who lived around here?”

Penhallow, a little mystified, seemed to be thinking.

“A Mexican who had an Indian wife and who was murdered?” went on Polly. Much to her disappointment, this minute description did not seem to clear Sam’s mind.

“You see, that fits so many of them,” he said, apologetically.

“The wife died after he was killed,” hazarded the girl, anxiously.

“Hold on—you mean the old duffer who lived up Wildcat Canyon?” demanded Penhallow. “Woman had a stroke—they found her up there dead. Their name was ‘Gasca’ or ‘Gomez’ or something of that kind.”

“I knew it!” Polly’s voice was triumphant. “If I don’t make Marc Scott apologize to me——” Then, calming herself, she continued: “I’m going to spin you a yarn, Mr. Penhallow, and then you’ve got to help me out.”

“Fire away,” said the gallant Penhallow and Polly repeated as nearly as she could remember the tale that Juan Pachuca had told her that night in Athens. Penhallow’s eyes snapped. 306

“By gum, I bet you’re on the trail! He and those Mexicans are looking up the stuff.”

“Of course they are, but why do they come on horseback? They can’t carry bullion on their saddles.”

“They probably don’t more than half believe the yarn themselves,” said Sam, meditatively. “They’re just snooping round to see if there’s anything in it. And automobiles ain’t so common round here that you can pick one up every time you feel like hunting treasure, either. I own the only one in town and I loaned it to-day to a good-for-nothing guy that’s courtin’ Mabel, worse luck!”

“We’ve got Mendoza and his Ford,” said Polly, eagerly. “If I run up and get my hat and coat, will you slip down and pry him out of that saloon and the three of us run out to Wildcat Canyon before those Mexicans can get there?”

“You bet I will,” replied the willing Sam.

“Oh, Mr. Penhallow, you’re the kind of man that I admire!” Polly’s eyes shone. “You’ve got imagination—it’s the only thing Marc Scott hasn’t got.”

“Well,” grinned Penhallow, “I wouldn’t worry about that if I was you; it ain’t such an awful good quality to marry. My wife used to kick about it a whole lot.” But Polly was gone. “I knew it!” chuckled Sam. “I knew Scotty was meditatin’ matrimony by the way he jumped me. Fine girl, that. For ten cents I’d give him a run for his money.”

Faced with the alternative of driving his car or allowing someone else to do it, Mendoza capitulated and allowed Penhallow to coax him out of the saloon. They drove down the street back of the houses and were joined by Polly who was waiting in the shadow for them. The Mexican girl saw the car as it passed the kitchen window, as she afterward told Clara, but failed to recognize Penhallow who sat on the further side. 307

“Do we have to pass the Mexicans or can we go another way?” asked Polly.

“We can take another road and beat them to the fork,” said Penhallow. “Then we’ll have the canyon to ourselves. This way, Mendoza.”

“You know, Mr. Penhallow, this gold was stolen from one of the mines owned by our company,” said the girl. “That’s one reason I’m so anxious to find it. It will mean something to my brother.”

“Sure it will.”

“There ought to be a reward, oughtn’t there? Not that I care about that; the excitement’s enough for me.”

“Fond of excitement, are you?”

“I’m afraid so. I’ll have to get over that, I suppose.”

“Not if you marry Marc Scott,” said Marc’s loyal friend, quite forgetting his sinister intentions.

“There’s nothing tame about Marc. I’d hate to be the woman who tried to fool him. She would have some job on her hands.”

“Well, she’d have to be cleverer than I am to do it,” sighed Polly, sadly.

“Well, I don’t know. Say, what’s your idea of finding this junk, anyhow? Where d’you reckon it’d be? Above ground?” 308

Polly looked a bit taken back. “I never thought of that,” she admitted. “It’s the first time I ever hunted treasure. Where do you think it will be?”

“Well, if you want the truth, I ain’t looking for it to be there at all. My idea is that Gasca got rid of it and that’s why they killed him. And yet——”

“Yes?”

“Kind of funny the woman hung around after he died. The natural thing would have been for her to have gone back to her people, wouldn’t it?”

“Of course it would. I know it’s there.”

“If you know it’s there it’s a pity I didn’t bring along a couple of pickaxes,” said Sam, with a grin. “All the treasures I ever heard about called for pickaxes, skeletons and an old family chart.”

“Oh, have it your own way!” said the aggravated Polly. “But who, I’d like to know, would have come up to this lonely place to look for gold, and how could an ignorant old Mexican like Gasca dispose of it without getting into trouble?”

“Well, mebbe so. Anyhow, here’s your cabin.”

The cabin was situated up the canyon on the right hand side of the road. It was a little wooden shack, sagging and discolored, its windows broken and its whole appearance denoting that utter desolation to which only a deserted homestead can attain; not even a human wreck can equal this silent abandonment. It had been a fairly decent place once; there were outbuildings which evidenced past association with pigs and chickens, while back of the house stood a wooden cart such as country people use for hauling wood or hay. 309

In the dusk, that saddest of sad times, between sunset and moonrise, Wildcat Canyon presented an awesome appearance. The hills were outlined sharply and darkly against the sky; the little stream that dribbled past the cabin was so quiet that it seemed the ghost of water; there was no movement—no sound—no suggestion of life.

Polly drew a long breath. “What a dreadful place to live!” she murmured, her spirits dashed for a moment. A woman had lived here—a woman stolen from her people. Had lived—and, stricken and alone, had died here. Polly thought of her own spoiled and sheltered life and her eyes filled.

In the meantime, Sam Penhallow took in the view with intense disfavor. “I never was partial to Wildcat Canyon,” he remarked, pessimistically. “I caught a cattle thief up here once. He hid behind that rock and gave us a real nasty time before we got him. Well, since we’re here we may as well get busy. Can’t you get us a little nearer, Mendoza? This is pretty far to tote gold bars.”

“Oh, laugh if you want to,” said Polly, indulgently. “Since I’ve seen the place I’m sure it’s here.”

“I’ll say this,” remarked Penhallow, “if I had anything I wanted to hide and didn’t want any fools blunderin’ into, I couldn’t pick a likelier place to hide it in than this one—whether it was gold or a body.”

Mendoza ran them within a few yards of the hut and they got out. Gasca’s late residence did not improve on closer inspection. The door hung loosely on its hinges and once within, its dark recesses suggested many things not altogether pleasant. There was little furniture and that broken and poor; the hut boasted two rooms and the floor was merely the ground. There was nothing to suggest hidden treasure, and no place where it could be secreted as far as the visitors could see. Even the fireplace yielded no secrets. 310

“How stupid of us!” declared Polly, determined not to be discouraged. “Of course it wouldn’t be in here or they would have found it when they took the poor woman away. Let’s go outside and think.”

“My idea is that it’s either buried or they got rid of it,” said Penhallow, promptly. It had suddenly occurred to him that Mendoza was a poor chaperon for a good-looking widower—not old—and a pretty girl engaged to Marc Scott. It was a disturbing idea, for Sam was of a conventional turn of mind. “If he’s buried it, we’ll have to dig all over the place, and I take it none of us is much on the dig.”

“Wait a minute, I’ve got an idea myself,” said Polly, with dignity. “You look in the chicken-house and I’ll take a peep into the shed in the corral.”

Sam shrugged his shoulders and started for the chicken-house.

“Scott’s gettin’ his match all right,” he muttered, rebelliously. “Goin’ to make him toe the chalk line, that girl.”

“Mr. Penhallow, come here!” Polly’s voice was shrill and excited. “Come here!” 311

“Comin’, lady. Did you find it?”

“Look here.” Polly was at the side of an old cart, peering and poking through the sticks of wood

and bits of old straw which filled it. “See, down there—doesn’t that look to you like something?”

Sam Penhallow felt a sudden thrill; a thrill he had not known the like of since he led the posse across the border after the kidnapping bandit. He bent an excited gray eye over the hole indicated.

“Sure does look like there was somethin’ besides wood in there—somethin’ bulky, and there’s some sacking.—Hi, Mendoza, come here and lend a hand!”

In the meantime he and Polly began throwing the wood out of the wagon.

“My idea is that Gasca hid it in the wagon because he thought no one would suspect anything there,” said Polly, “and he could haul it away in a hurry if they did.”

“It’s more likely he buried it and after he died the woman dug it up and packed it in here meaning to go South with it and then got sick and died before she had the chance.”

“Well, I said you had imagination. That’s a much better theory than mine,” said Polly, generously. “But why didn’t somebody take the wagon?”

“Well, it ain’t much of a wagon. I reckon they took the horse and the pigs and chickens and let the rest slide. The wood don’t amount to much; just sticks she’s picked up.”

Mendoza, quite of the opinion that the couple whom up to this time he had suspected of nothing more alarming than an elopement, had suddenly gone very mad, stolidly chucked wood out of the wagon lest a worse thing be demanded of him. 312

“There!” The three gathered around the half-empty wagon in excitement, even Mendoza manifesting a slight degree of zest when through the layer of straw, half covered with sacking, was revealed a number of rough looking blocks, in shape resembling large loaves of bread. Penhallow lifted one with difficulty.

“That’s what it is, girl,” he cried, his eyes glistening. “It’s gold straight from the mine. Why, what’s the matter?”

“It’s so disappointing,” murmured the girl; “it looks like old junk.”

“Well, it’s pretty good old junk. I only wish it was mine, don’t you, Mendoza? This stuff, Mendoza, all belongs to some rich guys who own a lot of mines down yonder. Big, fat chaps who sit in easy chairs back of mahogany tables and let other fellows earn their money for them; fine business, eh?”

Mendoza grinned—a comprehending if not a lovely grin.

“*Si*,” he grunted. “I seen them fat fellers up in San Antone. All got de sickness of de kidney or de stomach. Me, I rather be poor man and live on de outside.”

“Well, that ain’t bad for an old heathen, eh, Miss Polly?” chuckled Penhallow. “Come on, we’ve got to load this stuff into the Ford before those greasers get here.” 313

“How much do you think there is?” asked Polly, eagerly.

“Oh, I don’t know—a few thousands, I guess. I’ve a notion old Gasca had to whack up with the fellows who helped him get it across. It’s no fortune but it’s going to give us lame backs moving it and I reckon the Company will be glad to see it again.”

It was a hard load to move and long before the transfer was made Polly acknowledged that she was glad they hadn’t made a bigger haul. It was growing darker, too, and Wildcat Canyon began to seem less and less the sort of place for a picnic.

“Well, little lady,” observed Penhallow, as they started down the canyon, “you’ve done a good night’s work for your brother. Say, Mendoza, don’t that look like a car to you down yonder?”

Polly sat up suddenly. “I thought you said that you owned the only car in town?”

“I do. That’s why I’ve a notion that that’s mine, though why Ed Merriam should be flourishin’ it around here, I don’t know.”

“Car, yes,” agreed Mendoza. “Make ’em back up. Can’t pass there.”

At the same moment the other car honked excitedly and Mendoza answered.

“There are some men on horseback there, aren’t there?” said Polly, straining her eyes.

“On the other side of the arroyo—yes. Hullo, guns! Say, Ed’s in trouble! Shake a leg, Mendoza—we got to look into this. Girlie, you can lie down if they shoot, do you hear?” 314

“Yes,” breathed Polly, excitedly.

They could see plainly now. They saw two of the mounted men dash off and the other, reeling in his saddle, but holding gamely to his seat, dash after them. Then they saw two men from the automobile spring to support the third who had fallen.

“Gosh, I hope that ain’t Ed!” said Penhallow. “I don’t like the guy much, but Mabel would have my blood if I let him get plugged and me on the spot doing nothing.”

“Not Merriam,” said Mendoza, darkly. “Merriam and Señor Hard carry the man.”

“Hold on!” But Penhallow was too slow. The car was slowing down and Polly was out in the road. Penhallow followed her.

“Is—is he killed?”

Hard looked up from his task of reviving Scott, with the contents of his whiskey flask and saw to his amazement a white-faced Polly Street bending over him.

“Polly!” he gasped. “Then they didn’t get you, after all?”

“Is he killed?” The girl’s voice was sharp and hard.

“No, he ain’t,” Penhallow’s hearty voice broke in. “It takes more than one bullet to kill a tough bird like Scotty.”

Marc opened his eyes, grinned feebly and shut them again, not before he had seen Polly’s anxious face bending over him.

“They—Pachuca didn’t——” 315

“Not a bit of it, old man,” Hard broke in. Then to Polly: “We thought Pachuca had carried you off.”

Polly stared at him in horror. “Carried me off?” she gasped. “Were those men——” she paused, dazed. Hard explained.

Sam Penhallow in the meantime had tackled his prospective son-in-law.

“Where’d they get him, Ed?”

“Shoulder. Don’t look to me like no vital spot.”

“Well, we ain’t all got our vitals as protected as you have, Ed,” replied the sheriff, scathingly. “What was you up here for, anyhow?”

“Scott got it into his head that his girl had been kidnapped by Mexicans and he got us up here after three of ’em. Looks to me, Father-in-law, like he’d picked the wrong kidnapper.”

“That’ll do, Ed; fat folks was made to look funny, not to talk smart. Here, let’s get this boy bandaged up before he bleeds to death.”

Polly, white and frightened, looked on as Penhallow’s experienced hands tore up a shirt and made it into a bandage. The wound looked very vital to her and she would have given up hope a dozen times if it hadn’t been for Penhallow’s cheerful monologue.

“That’s the idea! Say, you boys better guess what this girl and I got in that Ford. We’ve been after treasure. Oh, you’re waking up, are you?” as Scott opened his eyes. “I thought you would. You won’t josh your wife much about Gasca and his hidden gold, I’m thinkin’.”

“It’s all my fault,” wept the girl. “If I’d only told you where I was going this wouldn’t have 316
happened. Oh, Marc, I’m so sorry!”

“Well, you ain’t the only one that’s sorry, I reckon,” grinned Merriam. “That Mexican ain’t going to do much ridin’ for a while by the looks of him.”

“Humph!” Penhallow and Hard lifted Scott gently into the car. “Don’t worry about him. He’s had this coming to him for some time by all accounts and the worst of it is his hide’s probably so tough he won’t know it’s been punctured.” Penhallow spat disgustedly.

The return of the two cars, the one with the treasure and the other with the missing girl, made a sensation quite after Chula Vista’s own heart. When it became known that the doctor had pronounced Scott’s wound not dangerous but requiring care and quiet, the situation was all that could be desired. They would have been happier still could they have heard Polly’s ultimatum, delivered the following morning when she and Scott were alone together a few minutes before Clara’s wedding. Scott had insisted that the wedding should not be postponed for even a day.

“You’re needed in Athens, Hard,” he said. “With Bob and me both in the discard, you’ve got to stand by the ship.” So the wedding had been set for ten o’clock, Polly’s train leaving for the railroad junction at noon.

“Now, Marc, listen to me,” Polly said. Her tone was severe. “I’ve never been really stern with you since our acquaintance. I’ve always given in and let you have the biggest piece of cake. Now 317
I mean what I say. I’m not going back and leave you here, sick and alone. Besides, Mrs. Conrad changed her mind last night. She’s going to Athens with Mr. Hard.”

“There’s Mabel Penhallow—she’d look after me,” replied Scott, mildly.

“Well, she shan’t. Let her look after that fat thing she’s going to marry. No, I’m going to stay here until you’re well again, and by that time my reputation will be in shreds—perfect shreds.”

“Well, I think it will, too, but what can I do?”

“You can let me tell that minister to come right over here and marry us when he’s through with the others,” said Polly, firmly. Then, with tears in her eyes: “Oh, Marc, don’t you see I don’t like doing underhand things any more than you do, but I can’t go away and leave you like this? I know my people and I know what they’ll say. They’ll say I did the right thing.”

“Well, girlie, I don’t know—I’d rather like to see Hard and Mrs. Conrad married, myself. Don’t you think maybe you could get the Padre to do both jobs over here?”

Thus it was that a double wedding took place in the small room which the invalid occupied. Chula Vista, or at least those citizens who were allowed to witness the ceremony, were loud in their praises of the brides. Ed Merriam was particularly impressed and begged earnestly that it might be made a triple affair, but, as Mr. Penhallow justly observed, you can overdo even a good

thing if you try hard enough. Ed was obliged to content himself with the rôle of spectator. Mr. Penhallow, himself, was a busy man. He not only acted as best man at both ceremonies, but he also had the gold on his nerves. It was removed immediately after the weddings—in the first spare moment that the best man had—to a near-by town which possessed banking facilities, a full account of its recovery being sent to Robert Street. This arrived in the same mail with a letter from Polly, and Bob celebrated his first sitting up by breaking the news to his parents. 318

“Tell you what, folks,” he said, “while it’s a bit of a blow to have our baby cut loose like this, there’s something to be said on the other side. Marc Scott’s a first-class fellow and he’ll make her a much better husband than that Henderson chap ever would.”

“But, Bob dear, what sort of a man is he?” Mrs. Street’s delicate face expressed alarm neatly blended with horror.

“That,” replied her husband, briefly, “is what I am going to find out. There’s a train going west in about two hours and if you wish me to carry your blessing to our wayward child I shall be happy to do so.”

Mr. and Mrs. Hard went south in Mendoza’s Ford. Theirs was a gentle romance, with more poetry in it than the bride suspected. Two people so thoroughly suited to each other do not always have the happiness to meet at just the right time.

“For it is just the right time, Clara,” Hard said. “A little earlier and we might not have had the wisdom to fall in love again with each other; a little later and we might have felt too old and dignified to think of it. I consider that we took things in the nick of time.” 319

The success of the revolution, which resulted in the presidency of Alvaro Obregon, made popular a movement against the bandits which have flourished so long in Mexico. The case of Angel Gonzales was handled early one morning by a firing squad in the courtyard of Juan Pachuca’s country residence. The evidence against Angel was cumulative, the episode of the Yaqui village being only one of many interesting exploits in which he had figured.

Just how much the escape of Juan Pachuca was due to the connivance of his captors will probably never be known. The general opinion, however, was that while his misdeeds were not to be condoned, in view of the friendly sentiments on the part of the new Government toward the United States; at the same time they were considered hardly of a nature to subject a gentleman to the fate of a bandit. Cared for by his friends on the other side while his wound was healing, Pachuca is still living peacefully and very quietly on our side of the border, waiting, probably, the opportunity to return to his country to help along another revolution.

Scott and Polly will be happy. They are happy at present, and are no longer at Athens; the Fiske, Doane Co. having appointed Scott to a better position in one of its Arizona mines, a delicate compliment, he says, to his wife’s services in the little matter of the Gasca treasure.

THE END

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