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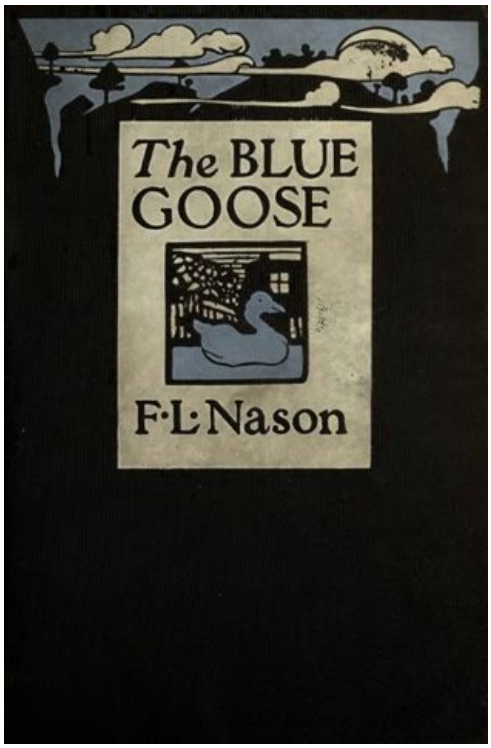

The BLUE GOOSE

FRANK LEWIS NASON

Author of To the End of the Trail

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Second Impression

"*So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise and behold a shaking, and the bones came together bone to bone.*

"*And, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, but there was no breath in them.*

"*Son of man, prophesy unto the wind. Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these that they may live.*

"*And the breath came into them and they lived.*"

To
MY FRIEND OF TWENTY-ONE YEARS,
CHARLES EMERSON BEECHER

who, with infinite skill and patience, has breathed the breath of life into the dry bones of Earth's untold ages of upward struggle, who has made them speak of the eternity of their past, and has made them prophesy hope for the eternity to come, this book is dedicated by the author.

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THE BLUE GOOSE

CHAPTER I

The Blue Goose

"*Mais oui!* I tell you one ting. One big ting. Ze big man wiz ze glass eyes, he is vat you call one slik stoff. Ze big man wiz ze glass eyes."

"The old man?"

"Zat's him! One slik stoff! *Écoutez!* Listen! One day, you mek ze gran' trip. Look hout!" Pierre made a gesture as of a dog shaking a rat.

The utter darkness of the underground laboratory was parted in solid masses, by bars of light that spurted from the cracks of a fiercely glowing furnace. One shaft fell on a row of large, unstoppered bottles. From these bottles fumes arose, mingled, and fell in stifling clouds of fleecy white. From another bottle in Pierre's hands a dense red smoke welled from a colourless liquid, crowded through the neck, wriggled through the bar of light, and sank in the darkness beneath. The darkness was uncanny, the fumes suffocating, the low hum of the furnace forcing out the shafts of light from the cracks of the imprisoning walls infernally suggestive.

Luna shivered. He was ignorant, therefore superstitious, and superstition strongly suggested the unnatural. He knew that furnaces and retorts and acids and alkalies were necessary to the refinement of gold. He feared them, yet he had used them, but he had used them where the full light of day robbed them of half their terrors. In open air acids might smoke, but drifting winds would brush away the fumes. Furnaces might glow, but their glow would be as naught in sunlight. There was no darkness in which devils could hide to pounce on him unawares, no walls to imprison him. The gold he retorted on his shovel was his, and he had no fear of the law. In the underground laboratory of Pierre the element of fear was ever present. The gold that the furnace retorted was stolen, and Luna was the thief. There were other thieves, but that did not matter to him. He stole gold from the mill. Others stole gold from the mine. It all came to Pierre and to Pierre's underground furnace. He stood in terror of the supernatural, of the law, and, most of all, of Pierre. In the darkness barred with fierce jets of light, imprisoned by walls that he could not see, cut off from the free air of open day, stifled by pungent gases that stung him, throat and eye, he felt an uncanny oppression, fear of the unknown, fear of the law, most of all fear of Pierre.

Pierre watched him through his mantle of darkness. He thrust forward his head, and a bar of light smote him across his open lips. It showed his gleaming teeth white and shut, his black moustache, his swarthy lips parted in a sardonic smile; that was all. A horrible grin on a background of inky black.

Luna shrank.

"Leave off your devil's tricks."

"*Moi?*"

Pierre replaced the bottle of acid on the shelf and picked up a pair of tongs. As he raised the cover of the glowing crucible a sudden transformation took place. The upper part of the laboratory blazed out fiercely, and in this light Pierre moved with gesticulating arms, the lower part of his body wholly hidden. He lifted the crucible, shook it for a moment with an oscillatory motion, then replaced it on the fire. He turned again to Luna.

"Hall ze time I mek ze explain. Hall ze time you mek ze question. *Comment?*"

Luna's courage was returning in the light.

"You're damned thick-headed, when it suits you, all right. Well, I'll explain. Last clean-up I brought you two pounds of amalgam if it was an ounce. All I got out of it was fifty dollars. You said that was my share. Hansen brought you a chunk of quartz from the mine. He showed it to me first. If I know gold from sulphur, there was sixty dollars in it. Hansen got five out of it."

Pierre interrupted.

"You mek mention ze name."

"There's no one to hear in this damned hell of yours."

"*Non*," Pierre answered. "You mek mention in zis hell. Bimby you mek mention," Pierre gave an expressive upward jerk with his thumb, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll look out for that," Luna answered, impatiently. "I'm after something else now. I'm getting sick of pinching the mill and bringing the stuff here for nothing. So are the rest of the boys. We ain't got no hold on you and you ain't playing fair. You've got to break even or this thing's going to stop."

Pierre made no reply to Luna. He picked up the tongs, lifted the crucible from the fire, and again replaced it. Then he brought out an ingot mould and laid it on a ledge of the furnace. The crucible was again lifted from the fire, and its contents were emptied in the mould. Pierre and Luna both watched the glowing metal. As it slowly cooled, iridescent sheens of light swept over its surface like the changing colours of a dying dolphin. Pierre held up the mould to Luna.

"How much she bin?"

Luna looked covetously at the softly glowing metal. "Two hundred."

"*Bien.* She's bin ze amalgam, ze quart', ze hozer stoff. Da's hall."

Luna looked sceptical.

"That's too thin. How many times have you fired up?"

"Zis!" Pierre held up a single emphasizing finger.

"We'll let that go," Luna answered; "but you listen now. One of the battery men is off to-night. I'm going to put Morrison on substitute. He's going to break a stem or something. The mortar's full to the dies. We're going to clean it out. I know how much it will pan. It's coming to you. You divide fair or it's the last you'll get. I'll hide it out in the usual place."

"Look hout! Da's hall!"

The other laughed impatiently.

"Getting scared, Frenchy? Where's your nerve?"

"Nerf! Nerf!" Pierre danced from foot to foot, waving his arms. "*Sacré plastron!* You mek ze fuse light. You sit on him, heh? Bimeby, pretty soon, you got no nerf. You got noddings. You got one big gris-spot on ze rock. Da's hall." Pierre subsided, with a gesture of intense disgust.

Luna snapped his watch impatiently.

"It's my shift, Frenchy. I've got to go in a few minutes."

"*Bien!* Go!" Pierre spoke without spirit. "Mek of yourself one gran' *folie*. *Mais*, when ze shot go, an' you sail in ze air, don' come down on ze Blue Goose, on me, Pierre. I won't bin here, da's hall."

Luna turned.

"I tell you I've got to go now. I wish you'd tell me what's the matter with the old man."

Pierre roused himself.

"Noddings. Ze hol' man has noddings ze mattaire. It is you! You! Ze hol' man, he go roun' lak he kick by ze dev'. He mek his glass eyes to shine here an' twinkle zere, an' you mek ze gran' chuckle, 'He see noddings.' He see more in one look dan you pack in your tick head! I tol' you look hout; da's hall!"

Luna jammed his watch into his pocket and rose.

"It's all right, Frenchy. I'll give you another chance. To-day's Thursday. Saturday they'll clean up at the mill. It will be a big one. I want my rake-off. The boys want theirs. It all comes to the Blue Goose, one way or another. You think you're pretty smooth stuff. That's all right; but let me tell you one thing: if there's any procession heading for Cañon City, you'll be in it, too."

Cañon City was the State hostelry. Occasionally the law selected unwilling guests. It was not over-large, nor was it overcrowded. Had it sheltered all deserving objects, the free population of the State would have been visibly diminished.

Pierre only shrugged his shoulders. He followed Luna up the stairs to the outer door, and watched the big mill foreman as he walked down the trail to the mill. Then, as was his custom when perturbed in mind, Pierre crossed the dusty waggon trail and seated himself on a boulder, leaning his back against a scrubby spruce. He let his eyes rest contentedly on a big, square-faced building. Rough stone steps led up to a broad veranda, from which rose, in barbaric splendour, great sheets of shining plate-glass, that gave an unimpeded view of a long mahogany bar backed by tiers of glasses and bottles, doubled by reflection from polished mirrors that reached to the matched-pine ceiling.

Across the room from the bar, roulette and faro tables, bright with varnish and gaudy with nickel trimmings, were waiting with invitations to feverish excitement. The room was a modern presentation of Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla, the bar, stimulated to the daring of Charybdis across the way, and Charybdis, the roulette, sent its winners to celebrate success, or its victims to deaden the pain of loss.

At the far end of the room a glass-covered arcade stood in advance of doors to private club-rooms. At the arcade an obliging attendant passed out gold and silver coins, for a consideration, in exchange for crumpled time-checks and greasy drafts.

Pierre grinned and rubbed his hands. Above the plate glass on the outside a gorgeous rainbow arched high on the painted front. Inscribed within, in iridescent letters, was: "The Blue Goose. Pierre La Martine." Beneath the spring of the rainbow, for the benefit of those who could not read, was a huge blue goose floating aimlessly in a sheet of bluer water.

This was all of the Blue Goose that was visible to the eyes of the uninitiated; of the initiated there were not many.

Beneath the floor was a large cellar, wherein was a fierce-looking furnace, which on occasion grew very red with its labours. There were pungent jars and ghostly vessels and a litter of sacks, and much sparkling dust on the earthen floor. All this Pierre knew, and a few others, though even these had not seen it.

Beneath the shadow of the wings of the Blue Goose dwelt a very plain woman, who looked chronically frightened, and a very beautiful girl who did not. The scared woman was Madame La Martine; the unscared girl passed for their daughter, but about the daughter no one asked questions of Pierre. About the Blue Goose, its bar, and its gaming-tables Pierre was eloquent, even with strangers. About his daughter and other things his acquaintances had learned to keep silence; as for strangers, they soon learned.

Obviously the mission of the Blue Goose was to entertain; with the multitude this mission passed current at its face value, but there were a few who challenged it. Now and then a grocer or a butcher made gloomy comments as he watched a growing accumulation of books that would not prove attractive to the most confirmed bibliophile. Men went to the Blue Goose with much money, but came out with none, for the bar and roulette required cash settlements. Their wives went in to grocers and butchers with no money but persuasive tongues, and came forth laden with spoils.

Pandora could raise no taxes for schools, so there were none. Preachers came and offered their wares without money and without price, but there were no churches. For the wares of the

preachers flushed no faces and burned no throats, nor were there rattles even in contribution boxes, and there was no whirr of painted wheels. Even the hundred rumbling stamps of the Rainbow mill might as well have pounded empty air or clashed their hard steel shoes on their hard steel dies for all the profit that came to the far-away stockholders of the great Rainbow mine and mill.

So it came to pass that many apparently unrelated facts were gathered together by the diligent but unprosperous, and, being thus gathered, pointed to a very inevitable conclusion. Nothing and no one was prosperous, save Pierre and his gorgeous Blue Goose. For Pierre was a power in the land. He feared neither God nor the devil. The devil was the bogie-man of the priest. As for God, who ever saw him? But of some men Pierre had much fear, and among the same was "the hol' man" at the mill.

CHAPTER II

The Old Man

After leaving the Blue Goose Luna went straight to the superintendent's office. He was nettled rather than worried by Pierre's cautions. Worry implied doubt of his own wisdom, as well as fear of the old man. Superintendents had come to, and departed from, the Rainbow. Defiant fanfares had heralded their coming, confusion had reigned during their sojourn, their departure had been duly celebrated at the Blue Goose. This had been the invariable sequence. Through all these changes Pierre was complacently confident, but he never lost his head. The bottles of the Blue Goose bar were regularly drained, alike for welcoming and for speeding the departing incumbent at the Rainbow.

The roulette whirred cheerfully, gold and silver coins clinked merrily, the underground furnace reddened and dulled at regular periods, and much lawful money passed back and forth between the Blue Goose and its patrons. Not that the passing back and forth was equal; Pierre attended to that. His even teeth gleamed between smiling lips, his swarthy cheeks glowed, and day by day his black hair seemed to grow more sleek and oily, and his hands smoother with much polishing.

Pierre read printed words with ease. That which was neither printed nor spoken was spelled out, sometimes with wrinkling of brows and narrowing of eyes, but with unmistakable correctness in the end. From the faces and actions of men he gathered wisdom, and this wisdom was a lamp to his feet, and in dark places gave much light to his eyes. Thus it happened that with the coming of Richard Firmstone came also great caution to Pierre.

The present superintendent blew no fanfares on his new trumpet, he expressed no opinion of his predecessors, and gave no hint of his future policy.

Mr. Morrison, who oiled his hair and wore large diamonds in a much-starched, collarless shirt while at the bar of the Blue Goose, donned overalls and jumpers while doing "substitute" at the mill, and between times kept alive the spirit of rebellion in the bosoms of down-trodden, capitalist-ridden labour. Morrison freely voiced the opinion that the Rainbow crowd had experienced religion, and had sent out a Sunday-school superintendent to reform the workmen and to count the dollars that dropped from beneath the stamps of the big mill. In this opinion Luna, the mill foreman, concurred. He even raised the ante, solemnly averring that the old man opened the mill with prayer, sang hallelujahs at change of shift, and invoked divine blessing before chewing his grub. Whereat the down-trodden serfs of soulless corporations cheered long and loud, and called for fresh oblations at the bar of the Blue Goose.

All these things Luna pondered in his mind, and his indignation waxed hot at Pierre.

"The damned old frog-eater's losing his nerve; that's what! I ain't going to be held up by no frog-spawn."

He opened the office door and clumped up to the railing.

The superintendent looked up.

"What is it, Luna?"

"Long, on number ten battery, is sick and off shift. Shall we hang up ten, or put on Morrison?"

The superintendent smiled.

"Is it Morrison, or hang up?" he asked.

The question was disconcerting. The foreman shifted his footing.

"Morrison is all right," he said, doggedly. "He's a good battery man. Things ain't pushing at the Blue Goose, and he can come as well as not."

"What's the matter with Morrison?" The superintendent's smile broadened.

The foreman looked puzzled.

"I've just been telling you—he's all right."

"That's so. Only, back east, when a horse jockey gets frothy about the good points of his horse, we look sharp."

The foreman grew impatient.

"You haven't told me whether to hang up ten or not."

"I'm not going to. You are foreman of the mill. Put on anyone you want; fire anyone you want. It's nothing to me; only," he looked hard, "you know what we're running this outfit for."

The foreman appeared defiant. Guilty thoughts were spurring him to unwise defence.

"If the ore ain't pay I can't get it out."

"I'll attend to the ore, that's my business. Get out what there is in it, that's yours." He leaned forward to his papers.

The foreman shifted uneasily. His defence was not complete. He was not sure that he had been attacked. He knew Morrison of the Blue Goose. He knew the workings of the mill. He had thought he knew the old man. He was not so sure now. He was not even sure how much or how little he had let out. Perhaps Pierre's words had rattled him. He shifted from foot to foot, twirling his hat on his fingers. He half expected, half hoped, and half waited for another opening. None came. Through the muffled roar of the stamps he was conscious of the sharp scratch of the superintendent's pen. Then came the boom of the big whistle. It was change of shift. The jar of the office door closing behind him was not heard. At the mill he found Morrison.

"You go on ten, in Long's place," he said, gruffly, as he entered the mill.

Morrison stared at the retreating foreman.

"What in hell," he began; then, putting things together in his mind, he shook his head, and followed the foreman into the mill.

The superintendent was again interrupted by the rasping of hobnailed shoes on the office floor and the startled creak of the office railing as a large, loose-jointed man leaned heavily against it. His trousers, tucked into a pair of high-laced, large-eyed shoes, were belted at the waist in a conspicuous roll. A faded gray shirt, rolled up at the sleeves, disclosed a red undershirt and muscular arms. A well-shaped head with grey streaked hair, and a smooth, imperturbable face was shaded by a battered sombrero that was thrust back and turned squarely up in front.

The superintendent's smile had nothing puzzling now.

"Hello, Zephyr. Got another Camp Bird?"

"Flying higher'n a Camp Bird this time."

"How's that?"

"Right up to the golden gates this time, sure. It's straight goods. St. Peter ain't going to take no post-prandial siestas from now on. I'm timbering my shots to keep from breaking the sky. Tell you what, I'm jarring them mansions in heaven wuss'n a New York subway contractor them Fifth Avenue palaces." Zephyr paused and glanced languidly at the superintendent.

Firmstone chuckled.

"Go on," he said.

"I've gone as far as I can without flying. It's a lead from the golden streets of the New Jerusalem. Followed it up to the foot of Bingham Pass; caught it above the slide, then it took up the cliff, and disappeared in the cerulean. Say, Goggles, how are you off for chuck? I've been up against glory, and I'm down hungrier than a she-bear that's skipped summer and hibernated two winters."

"Good! Guess Bennie will fix us up something. Can you wait a few minutes?"

"I think I can. I've been practising on that for years. No telling when such things will come in handy. You don't object to music, Goggles?"

"Not to music, no," Firmstone answered, with an amused glance at Zephyr.

Zephyr, unruffled, drew from his shirt a well-worn harmonica.

"Music hath charms," he remarked, brushing the instrument on the sleeve of his shirt. "Referring to my savage breast, not yours."

He placed the harmonica to his lips, holding it in hollowed hands. His oscillating breath jarred from the metal reeds the doleful strains of *Home, Sweet Home*, muffled by the hollow of his hands into mournful cadences.

At last Firmstone closed his desk.

"If your breast is sufficiently soothed, let's see what Bennie can do for your stomach."

As they passed from the office Zephyr carefully replaced the harmonica in his shirt.

"I'd rather be the author of that touching little song than the owner of the Inferno. That's my new claim," he remarked, distantly.

Firmstone laughed.

"I thought your claim was nearer heaven."

"The two are not far apart. 'Death, like a narrow sea, divides.' But my reminiscences were getting historical, which you failed to remark. I ain't no Wolfe and Pierre ain't no Montcalm, nor the Heights of Abraham ain't the Blue Goose. Pierre's a hog. At least, he's a close second. A hog eats snakes and likewise frogs. Pierre's only got as far as frogs, last I heard. Pierre's bad. Morrison's bad. Luna ain't. He thinks he is; but he ain't. I'm not posting you nor nothing. I'm only meditating out loud. That's all."

They entered the mill boarding-house. Bennie, the cook, greeted Zephyr effusively.

"Goggles invited me to pay my respects to you," Zephyr remarked. "I'm empty, and I'm thinking you can satisfy my longing as nothing else can do."

Zephyr addressed himself to Bennie's viands. At last he rose from the table.

"To eat and to sleep are the chief ends of man. I have eaten, and now I see I am tired. With your consent, uttered or unexpressed, I'll wrap the drapery of my bunk around me and take a snooze. And say, Goggles," he added, "if, the next time you inventory stock, you are shy a sack of flour and a side of bacon, you can remark to the company that prospectors is thick around here, and that prospectors is prone to evil as the sparks fly upward. That's where the flour and bacon are going. Up to where St. Peter can smell them cooking; leastways he can if he hangs his nose over the wall and the wind's right."

CHAPTER III

Élise

Bennie was an early riser, as became a faithful cook; but, early as he usually was, this morning he was startled into wakefulness by a jarring chug, as Zephyr, with a relieved grunt, dropped a squashy sack on the floor near his bunk. Bennie sprang to a sitting posture, rubbing his sleepy eyes to clear his vision; but, before he could open his eyes or his mouth beyond a startled ejaculation, Zephyr had departed. He soon reappeared. There was another chug, another grunt, and another departure. Four times this was repeated. Then Zephyr seated himself on the bunk, and, pushing back his sombrero, mopped his perspiring brow.

"What the—" Bennie started in, but Zephyr's uplifted hand restrained him.

"The race is not to the swift, Julius Benjamin. The wise hound holds his yap till he smells a hot foot. Them indecisive sacks is hot footses, Julius Benjamin; but it isn't your yap, not by quite some."

"What's up, Zephyr?" asked Bennie. "I'm not leaky."

"Them gelatinous sacks," Zephyr went on, eyeing them meditatively, "I found hidden in the bushes near the mine, and they contain mighty interesting matter. They're an epitome of life. They started straight, but missed connections. Pulled up at the wrong station. I've thrown the switch, and now you and me, Julius, will make it personally conducted the rest of the trip."

"Hm!" mused Bennie. "I see. That stuff's been pinched from the mill."

"Good boy, Julius Benjamin! You're doing well. You'll go into words of two syllables next."

Zephyr nodded, with a languid smile.

"But, to recapitulate, as my old school-teacher used to say, there's thousands of dollars in them sacks. The Rainbow ain't coughing up no such rich stuff as that. That rock is broken; ergo, it's been under the stamps. It's coarse and fine, from which I infer it hasn't been through the screens. And furthermore——"

Bennie interrupted eagerly.

"They've just hung up the stamps and raked out the rich stuff that's settled between the dies!"

"Naturally, gold being heavier than quartz. Julius Benjamin, you're fit for the second reader."

Bennie laughed softly.

"It's Luna or Morrison been robbing the mill. Won't Frenchy pull the long face when he hears of your find?"

Zephyr made no farther reply than to blow *There'll Be a Hot Time* from pursed lips as he rolled a cigarette.

"So there will be," Bennie answered.

"Not to-night, Bennie." Zephyr was puffing meditative whiffs in the air. "Great things move slowly. Richard Firmstone is great, Benjamin; leave it to him."

Bennie was already dressed, and Zephyr, throwing the stub of his cigarette through the open window, followed him to the kitchen. He ate his specially prepared breakfast with an excellent appetite.

"I think I'll raise my bet. I mentioned a sack of flour and a side of bacon. I'll take a can of coffee and a dab of sugar. St. Peter'll appreciate that. 'Tis well to keep on the right side of the old man. Some of us may have occasion to knock at his gate before the summer is over. You've heard of my new claim, Bennie?"

Bennie made no reply. Between packing up Zephyr's supplies, attending to breakfast for the men, and thinking of the sacks of stolen ore, he was somewhat preoccupied.

Zephyr stowed the supplies in his pack and raised it to his shoulder. Bennie looked up in surprise.

"You're not going now, are you?"

Zephyr was carefully adjusting the straps of his pack.

"It looks pretty much that way, Benjamin. When a man's got all he wants, it's time for him to lope. If he stays, he might get more and possibly—less."

"What will I do with these sacks?" Bennie asked hurriedly, as Zephyr passed through the door.

Zephyr made no reply, further than softly to whistle *Break the News to Mother* as he swung into the trail. He clumped sturdily along, apparently unmindful of the rarefied air that would ordinarily make an unburdened man gasp for breath. His lips were still pursed, though they had ceased to give forth sound. He came to the nearly level terrace whereon, among scattered boulders, were clustered the squat shanties of the town of Pandora.

He merely glanced at the Blue Goose, whose polished windows were just beginning to glow with the light of the rising sun. He saw a door open at the far end of the house and Madame La Martine emerge, a broom in her hands and a dust-cloth thrown over one shoulder.

Pierre's labours ended late. Madame's began very early. Both had an unvarying procession. Pierre had much hilarious company; it was his business to keep it so. He likewise had many comforting thoughts; these cost him no effort. The latter came as a logical sequence to the former. Madame had no company, hilarious or otherwise. Instead of complacent thoughts, she had anxiety. And so it came to pass that, while Pierre grew sleek and smooth with the passing of years, Madame developed many wrinkles and grey hairs and a frightened look, from the proffering of wares that were usually thrust aside with threatening snarls and many harsh words. Pierre was not alone in the unstinted pouring forth of the wine of pleasure for the good of his companions and in uncorking his vials of wrath for the benefit of his wife.

Zephyr read the whole dreary life at a glance. A fleeting thought came to Zephyr. How would it have been with Madame had she years ago chosen him instead of Pierre? A smile, half pitying, half contemptuous, was suggested by an undecided quiver of the muscles of his face, more pronounced by the light in his expressive eyes. He left the waggon trail that zig-zagged up the steep grade beyond the outskirts of the town, cutting across their sharp angles in a straight line. Near the foot of an almost perpendicular cliff he again picked up the trail. Through a notch in the brow of the cliff a solid bar of water shot forth. The solid bar, in its fall broken to a misty spray, fell into a mossy basin at the cliff's foot, regathered, and then, sliding and twisting in its rock-strewn bed, gurgled among nodding flowers and slender, waving willows that were fanned into motion by the breath of the falling spray. Where the brook crossed the trail Zephyr stood still. Not all at once. There was an indescribable suggestion of momentum overcome by the application of perfectly balanced power.

Zephyr did not whistle, even softly. Instead, there was a low hum—

But the maiden in the garden
Was the fairest flower of all.

Zephyr deliberately swung his pack from his shoulders, deposited it on the ground, and as deliberately seated himself on the pack. There was an unwonted commotion among the cluster of thrifty plants at which Zephyr was looking expectantly. A laughing face with large eyes sparkling with mischievous delight looked straight into his own. As the girl rose to her feet she tossed a long, heavy braid of black hair over her shoulder.

"You thought you would scare me; now, didn't you?" She came forth from the tangled plants and stood before him.

Zephyr's eyes were resting on the girl's face with a smile of quiet approbation. Tall and slender, she was dressed in a dark gown, whose sailor blouse was knotted at the throat with a red scarf; at her belt a holster showed a silver-mounted revolver. An oval face rested on a shapely neck, as delicately poised as the nodding flowers she held in her hand. A rich glow, born of perfect health and stimulating air, burned beneath the translucent olive skin.

Zephyr made no direct reply to her challenge.

"Why aren't you helping Madame at the Blue Goose?"

"Because I've struck, that's why." There was a defiant toss of the head, a compressed frown on the arching brows. Like a cloud wind-driven from across the sun the frown disappeared; a light laugh rippled from between parted lips. "Daddy was mad, awfully mad. You ought to have seen him." The flowers fell from her hands as she threw herself into Pierre's attitude. "'Meenx,'" she mimicked, "'you mek to defy me in my own house? Me? Do I not have plenty ze troub', but you mus' mek ze more? *Hein?* Ansaire!' And so I did. So!" She threw her head forward, puckered her lips, thrusting out the tip of her tongue at the appreciative Zephyr. "Oh, it's lots of fun to get daddy mad. 'Vaire is my whip, my dog whip? I beat you. I chastise you, meenx!'" The girl stooped to pick up her scattered flowers. "Only it frightens poor mammy so. Mammy never talks back only when daddy goes for me. I'd just like to see him when he comes down this morning and finds me gone. It would be lots of fun. Only, if I was there, I couldn't be here, and it's just glorious here, isn't it? What's the trouble, Zephyr? You haven't said a word to me all this time."

"When your blessed little tongue gets tired perhaps I'll start in. There's no more telling when that will be than what I'll say, supposing I get the chance."

"Oh, I knew there was something I wanted especially to see you about." The face grew cloudy. "What do you think? You know I was sixteen my last birthday, just a week ago?" She paused and looked at Zephyr interrogatively. "I want to know where you are all the time now. It's awfully important. I may want to elope with you at a moment's notice!" She looked impressively at Zephyr.

Zephyr's jaw dropped.

"What the mischief——"

Élise interrupted:

"No, wait; I'm not through. Daddy got very playful that day, chucked my chin, and called me *ma chère enfant*. That always means mischief. 'Élise bin seexten to-day, heh? Bimeby she tink to liv' her hol' daddy and her hol' mammy and bin gone hoff wiz anodder feller, *hein*?' Then he made another dab at my chin. I knew what he meant." She again assumed Pierre's position. "'What you say, *ma chérie*? I pick you hout one nice man! One ver' nice man! *Hein?* M'sieu Mo-reeson. A ver' nice man. He ben took good care *ma chérie*!'"

Zephyr was betrayed into a startled motion. Élise was watching him with narrowed eyes. There was a gleam of satisfaction.

"That's all right, Zephyr. That's just what I did, only I did more. I told daddy I'd just like M'sieu Mo-reeson to say marry to me! I told daddy that I'd take the smirk out of M'sieu Mo-reeson's face and those pretty curls out of M'sieu Mo-reeson's head if he dared look marry at me. Only," she went on, "I'm a little girl, after all, and I thought the easiest way would be to elope with you. I would like to see M'sieu Mo-reeson try to take me away from a big, strong man like you." There was an expression of intense scorn on her face that bared the even teeth.

Zephyr was not conscious of Élise. There was a hard, set look on his face. Élise noted it. She tossed her head airily.

"Oh, you needn't look so terribly distressed. You needn't, if you don't want to. I dare say that the superintendent at the mill would jump at the chance. I think I shall ask him, anyway." Her manner changed. "Why do they always call him the old man? He is not such a very old man."

"They'd call a baby 'the old man' if he was superintendent. Do they say much about him?" Zephyr asked, meditatively.

"Oh yes, lots. M'sier Mo-reeson"—she made a wry face at the name—"is always talking about that minion of capitalistic oppression that's sucking the life-blood of the serfs of toil. Daddy hates the old man. He's afraid of him. Daddy always hates anyone he's afraid of, except me."

Zephyr grunted absently.

"That's so." Élise spoke emphatically. "That's why I'm here to-day. I told daddy that if I was old enough to get married I was old enough to do as I liked."

In spite of his languid appearance Zephyr was very acute. He was getting a great deal that needed careful consideration. He was intensely interested, and he wanted to hear more. He half hesitated, then decided that the end justified the means.

"What makes you think that Pierre hates the old man?" he ventured, without changing countenance.

"Oh, lots of things. He tells Luna and M'sieu Mo-reeson"—another wry face—"to 'look hout.' He talks to the men, tells them that the 'hol' man ees sleek, ver' sleek, look hout, da's hall, an' go slow,' and a lot of things. I'm awfully hungry, Zephyr, and I don't want to go down for breakfast. Haven't you got something good in your pack? It looks awfully good." She prodded the pack with inquisitive fingers.

Zephyr rose to his feet.

"It will be better when I've cooked it. You'll eat a breakfast after my cooking?"

Élise clapped her hands.

"That will be fine. I'll just sit here and boss you. If you're good, and you are, you know, I'll tell you some more about M'sieu. Suppose we just call him M'sieu, just you and me. That'll be our secret."

Zephyr gathered dry sticks and started a fire. He opened his pack, cut off some slices of bacon, and, impaling them on green twigs, hung them before the fire. A pinch of salt and baking powder in a handful of flour was mixed into a stiff paste, stirred into the frying-pan, which was propped up in front of the fire. He took some cups from his pack, and, filling them with water, put them on the glowing coals.

Élise kept up a rattling chatter through it all.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Daddy says M'sieu is going to be a great man, a great labour leader. That's what M'sieu says himself—that he will lead benighted labour from the galling chains of slavery into the glorious light of freedom's day." Élise waved her arms and rolled her eyes. Then she stopped, laughing. "It's awfully funny. I hear it all when I sit at the desk. You know there's only thin boards between my desk and daddy's private room, and I can't help but hear. That coffee and bacon smell good, and what a lovely bannock! Aren't you almost ready? It's as nice as when we were on the ranch, and you used to carry me round on your back. That was an awful long time ago, though, wasn't it?"

Zephyr only grunted in reply. He pursed his lips for a meditative whistle, thought better of it, took the frying-pan from its prop, and sounded the browning bannock with his fingers.

For the babbling streams of youth
Grow to silent pools of truth
When they find a thirsty hollow
On their way.

He spoke dreamily.

"What are you talking about?" Élise broke in.

"Oh, nothing in particular. I was just thinking—might have been thinking out loud."

"That's you, every time, Zephyr. You think without talking, and I talk without thinking. It's lots more fun. Do you think I will ever grow into a dear, sober old thing like you? Just tell me that." She stooped down, taking Zephyr's face in both her hands and turned it up to her own.

Zephyr looked musingly up into the laughing eyes, and took her hands into his.

"Not for the same reasons, I guess, not if I can help it," he added, half to himself. "Now, if you'll be seated, I'll serve breakfast." He dropped the hands and pointed to a boulder.

Élise ate the plain fare with the eager appetite of youth and health. From far down the gulch the muffled roar of the stamps rose and fell on the light airs that drifted up and down. Through it all was the soft swish of the falling spray, the sharp *blip! blip!* as points of light, gathered from dripping boughs, grew to sparkling gems, then, losing their hold, fell into little pools at the foot of the cliff. High above the straggling town the great cables of the tram floated in the air like dusty webs, and up and down these webs, like black spiders, darted the buckets that carried the ore from mine to mill, then disappeared in the roaring mill, and dumping their loads of ore shot up again into sight, and, growing in size, swept on toward the cliff and passed out of sight over the falls above.

Across the narrow gulch a precipice sheered up eight hundred feet, a hard green crown of stunted spruces on its retreating brow, above the crown a stretch of soft green meadow steeply barred with greener willows, above the meadow jagged spires of blackened lava, thrust up from drifts of shining snow: a triple tiara crowning this silent priest of the mountains.

To the east the long brown slide was marked with clifflets mottled as was Joseph's coat of many colours, with every shade of red and yellow that rusting flecks of iron minerals could give, brightened here and there with clustered flowers which marked a seeping spring, up and up, broken at last by a jagged line of purple that lay softly against the clear blue of the arching sky.

To the west the mountains parted and the vision dropped to miles of browning mesa, flecked with ranchers' squares of irrigated green. Still farther a misty haze of distant mountains rose, with the great soft bell of the curving sky hovering over all.

Zephyr ate in a silence which Élise did not care to break. Her restless eyes glanced from Zephyr to the mountains, fell with an eager caress on the flowers that almost hid the brook, looked out to the distant mesa, and last of all shot defiance at the blazing windows of the Blue Goose that were hurtling back the fiery darts of the attacking sun.

She sprang to her feet, brushing the crumbs from her clothes.

"Much obliged, Mr. Zephyr, for your entertainment." She swept him a low courtesy. "I told you I was out for a lark to-day. Now you can wash the dishes."

Zephyr had also risen. He gave no heed to her playful attitude.

"I want you to pay especial attention, Élise."

"Oh, gracious!" she exclaimed. "Now I'm in for it." She straightened her face, but she could not control the mischievous sparkle of her eyes.

There was little of meditation but much decision in Zephyr's words.

"Don't let Pierre tease you, persuade you, frighten you, or bulldoze you into marrying that Morrison. Do you hear? Get away. Run away."

"Or elope," interrupted Élise. "Don't skip that."

"Go to Bennie, the old man, or to anyone, if you can't find me."

"What a speech, Zephyr! Did any of it get away?"

Zephyr was too much in earnest even to smile.

"Remember what I say."

"You put in an awful lot of hard words. But then, I don't need to remember. I may change my mind. Maybe there'd be a whole lot of fun after all in marrying M'sieu. I'd just like to show him that he can't scare me the way daddy does mammy. It would be worth a whole box of chips. On the whole I think I'll take daddy's advice. Bye-bye, Zephyr." She again picked up her scattered flowers and went dancing and skipping down the trail. At the turn she paused for an instant, blew Zephyr a saucy kiss from the tips of her fingers, then passed out of sight.

A voice floated back to the quiet figure by the fire.

"Don't feel too bad, Zephyr. I'll probably change my mind again."

CHAPTER IV

The Watched Pot Begins to Boil

Of all classes of people under the sun, the so-called labouring man has best cause to pray for deliverance from his friends. His friends are, or rather were, of three classes. The first, ardent but wingless angels of mercy, who fail to comprehend the fact that the unlovely lot of their would-be wards is the result of conditions imposed more largely from within than from without; the second, those who care neither for lots nor conditions, regarding the labourer as a senseless tool with which to hew out his own designs; the third, those who adroitly knock together the heads of the labourer and his employer and impartially pick the pockets of each in the general *mêlée* which is bound to follow.

The past *were* is designedly contrasted with the present *are*, for it is a fact that conditions all around are changing for the better; slowly, perhaps, but nevertheless surely.

The philanthropic friend of the labourer is learning to develop balancing tail-feathers of judgment wherewith to direct the flights of wings of mercy. The employer is beginning to realise the beneficial results of mutual understanding and of considerate co-operation, and the industrious fomenter of strife is learning that bones with richer marrow may be more safely cracked by sensible adjustment than with grievous clubs wielded over broken heads.

Even so, the millennium is yet far away, and now, as in the past, the path that leads to it is uphill and dim, and is beset with many obstacles. There are no short cuts to the summit. In spite of pessimistic clamours that the rich are growing richer and the poor poorer, frothy yowls for free and unlimited coinage at sixteen to one, or for fiat paper at infinity to nothing, the fact remains that, whereas kings formerly used signets for the want of knowledge to write their names, licked their greasy fingers for lack of knives and forks, and starved in Ireland with plenty in France, the poorest to-day can, if they will, indite readable words on well-sized paper, do things in higher mathematics, and avoid the thankless task of dividing eight into seven and looking for the remainder.

Potatoes are worth fifty cents a bushel. Any yokel can dig a hole in the ground and plant the seed and in due time gather the ripened tubers. The engineer who drives his engine at sixty miles an hour, flashing by warning semaphores, rolling among coloured lights, clattering over frogs and switches, is no yokel. Therefore, because of this fact, with the compensation of one day he can, if he so elects, buy many potatoes, or employ many yokels.

Had Sir Isaac Newton devoted to the raising of potatoes the energy which he gave to astronomy, he might have raised larger potatoes and more to the hill than his yokel neighbour. But, his conditions having been potatoes, his reward would have been potatoes, instead of the deathless glory of the discovery and enunciation of the law of gravity. The problem is very simple after all. The world has had a useless deal of trouble because no one has ever before taken the trouble to state the problem and to elaborate it. It is just as simple as is the obvious fact that *x* plus *y* equals *a*.

There is a possibility, however, that we have been going too fast, and have consequently

overlooked a few items of importance. We forgot for the moment, as often happens, that the factors in the problem are not homogeneous digits with fixed values, but complex personalities with decided opinions of their own as to their individual and relative importance, as well as pugnacious tendencies for compelling an acceptance of their assumptions by equally pugnacious factors which claim a differential valuation in their own favour. This consideration presents a somewhat different and more difficult phase of the problem. It really compels us to defer attempts at final solution, for the time being, at least; to make the best adjustment possible under present conditions, putting off to the future the final application, much on the same principle that communities bond their present public possessions for their own good and complacently bestow upon posterity the obligation of settling the bills. Considered in this light, the end of the struggle between capital and labour is not yet. Each is striving for the sole possession and control of things which belong to neither alone. Each looks upon the other not as a co-labourer but as a rival, instead of making intelligent and united effort for an object unattainable by either alone. If capital would smoke this in his cigar and labour the same in his pipe, the soothing effects might tend to more amicable and effective use of what is now dissipated energy.

However, universal panaceas are not to be hoped for. The mailed fist puts irritating chips upon swaggering shoulders, and the unresentful turning of smitten cheeks is conducive to a thrifty growth of gelatinous nincompoops.

The preceding *status quo* existed in general at the Rainbow mines and mill, besides having a few individual characteristics peculiarly their own. Miners and millmen, for the most part recent importations from all countries of Europe, had come from the realms of oppression to the land of the free with very exaggerated notions of what freedom really was. The dominant expression of this idea was that everyone could do as he pleased, and that if the other fellow didn't like it, he, the other fellow, could get out. The often enunciating of abstract principles led to their liberal application to concrete facts. In this application they had able counsel in the ambitious Morrison.

"Who opened these mountain wilds?" Morrison was wont to inquire, not for information, but for emphasis. "Who discovered, amidst toils and dangers and deprivations and snowslides, these rich mines of gold and silver? Who made them accessible by waggon trail and railroads and burros? Who but the honest sons of honest toil? Who, when these labours are accomplished, lolls in the luxurious lap of the voluptuous East, reaping the sweat of your brows, gathering in the harvest of hands toiling for three dollars a day or less? Who, but the purse-proud plutocrat who sits on his cushioned chair in Wall Street, sending out his ruthless minions to rob the labourer of his toil and to express his hard-won gold to the stanchless maw of the ghoulish East. Rise, noble sons of toil, rise! Stretch forth your horny hands and gather in your own! Raise high upon these mountain-peaks the banner of freedom's hope before despairing eyes raised from the greed-sodden plains of the effete East!"

Whereat the sons of toil would cheer and then proceed to stretch forth hands to unripened fruits with such indiscriminating activity that both mine and mill ceased to yield expenses to the eastern plutocrat, and even the revenues of the Blue Goose were seriously impaired, to the great distress of Pierre.

These rhodomontades of Morrison had grains of plausible truth as nuclei. The workmen never, or rarely, came in personal contact with their real employers. Their employers were in their minds men who reaped where others had sown, who gathered where they had not strewn. The labourer gave no heed to costly equipment which made mines possible, or at best weighed them but lightly against the daily toil of monotonous lives. They saw tons of hard-won ore slide down the long cables, crash through the pounding stamps, saw the gold gather on the plates, saw it retorted, and the shining bars shipped East. Against this gold of unknown value, and great because unknown, they balanced their daily wage, that looked pitifully small.

The yield of their aggregate labour in foul-aired stopes and roaring mill they could see in one massive lump. They could not see the aggregate of little bites that reduced the imposing mass to a tiny dribble which sometimes, but not always, fell into the treasury of the company. They would not believe, even if they saw.

For these reasons, great is the glory of the leaders of labour who are rising to-day, holding restraining hands on turbulent ignorance and taking wise counsel with equally glorious leaders who are striving to enforce the truth that all gain over just compensation is but a sacred trust for the benefit of mankind. These things are coming to be so to-day. But so long as sons of wealth are unmindful of their obligations, and so long as ignorance breathes forth noxious vapours to poison its victims, so long will there be battles to be fought and victories to be won.

Thus was the way made ready for the feet of one of the labourer's mistaken friends. Morrison was wily, if not wise. He distinguished between oratory and logic. He kindled the flames of indignation and resentment with the one and fed them with the other. But in the performance of each duty he never lost sight of himself.

Under the slack management of previous administrations, the conditions of the Rainbow mine and mill had rapidly deteriorated. In the mine a hundred sticks of powder were used or wasted where one would have sufficed. Hundreds of feet of fuse, hundreds of detonators, and pounds of candles were thrown away. Men would climb high in the mine to their work only to return later for some tool needed, or because their supplies had not lasted through their shift. If near the close of hours, they would sit and gossip with their fellow-workmen. Drills and hammers would be buried in the stope, or thrown over the dump. Rock would be broken down with the ore, and the

mixed mass, half ore and half rock, would be divided impartially and sent, one-half to the dump and one-half to the mill.

At the mill was the same shiftless state of affairs. Tools once used were left to be hunted for the next time they were wanted. On the night shift the men slept at their posts or deserted them for the hilarious attractions of the Blue Goose. The result was that the stamps, unfed, having no rock to crush, pounded steel on steel, so that stamps were broken, bossheads split, or a clogged screen would burst, leaving the half-broken ore to flow over the plates and into the wash-sluices with none of its value extracted.

Among the evils that followed in the train of slack and ignorant management not the least was the effect upon the men. If a rich pocket of ore was struck the men stole it all. They argued that it was theirs, because they found it. The company would never miss it; the company was making enough, anyway, and, besides, the superintendent never knew when a pocket was opened, and never told them that it was not theirs. These pilfered pockets were always emptied at the Blue Goose. On these occasions the underground furnace glowed ruddily, and Pierre would stow the pilfered gold among other pilfered ingots, and would in due time emerge from his subterranean retreat in such cheerful temper that he had no heart to browbeat the scared-looking Madame. Whereupon Madame would be divided in her honest soul between horror at Pierre's wrong-doing and thankfulness for a temporary reprieve from his biting tongue.

The miners stole supplies of all kinds and sold them or gave them to their friends. Enterprising prospectors, short of funds, as is usually the case, "got a job at the mine," then, having stocked up, would call for their time and go forth to hunt a mine of their own.

The men could hardly be blamed for these pilferings. A slack land-owner who makes no protest against the use of his premises as a public highway, in time not only loses his property but his right to protest as well.

So it happened at the Rainbow mine and mill that, as no locks were placed on magazines, as the supply-rooms were open to all, and as no protest was made against the men helping themselves, the men came to feel that they were taking only what belonged to them, whatever use was made of the appropriated supplies.

These were some of the more obvious evils which Firmstone set about remedying. Magazines and supply-rooms were locked and supplies were issued on order. Workmen ceased wandering aimlessly about while on shift. Rock and ore were broken separately, and if an undue proportion of rock was delivered at the mill it was immediately known at the mine and in unmistakable terms.

The effect of these changes on the men was various. Some took an honest pride in working under a man who knew his business. More chafed and fumed under unwonted restrictions. These were artfully nursed by the wily Morrison, with the result that a dangerous friction was developing between the better disposed men and the restless growlers. This feeling was also diligently stimulated by Morrison.

"Go easy," was his caution; "but warm it up for them."

"Warm it up for them!" indignantly protested one disciple. "Them fellers is the old man's pets."

Morrison snorted.

"Pets, is it? Pets be damned! It's only a matter of time when the old man will be dancing on a hot stove, if you've got any sand in your crops. The foreman's more than half with you now. Get the union organised, and we'll run out the pets and the old man too. You'll never get your rights till you're organised."

At the mill, Firmstone's nocturnal visits at any unexpected hour made napping a precarious business and visits to the Blue Goose not to be thought of.

The results of Firmstone's vigilance showed heavily in reduced expenses and in increased efficiency of labour; but these items were only negative. The fact remained that the yield of the mill in bullion was but slightly increased and still subject to extreme variations. The conclusion was inevitable that the mill was being systematically plundered. Firmstone knew that there must be collusion, not only among the workmen, but among outsiders as well. This was an obvious fact, but the means to circumvent it were not so obvious. He knew that there were workmen in the mill who would not steal a penny, but he also knew that these same men would preserve a sullen silence with regard to the peculations of their less scrupulous fellows. It was but the grown-up sense of honour, that will cause a manly schoolboy to be larruped to the bone before he will tell about his errant and cowardly fellow.

Firmstone was well aware of the simmering discontent which his rigid discipline was arousing. He regretted it, but he was hopeful that the better element among the men would yet gain the ascendant.

"He's square," remarked one of his defenders. "There was a mistake in my time, last payroll, and he looked over the time himself." "That's so," in answer to one objector. "I was in the office and saw him."

"You bet he's square," broke in another. "Didn't I get a bad pair of boots out of the commissary,

and didn't he give me another pair in their place? That's what."

If Morrison and Pierre had not been in active evidence Firmstone would have won the day without a fight.

CHAPTER V

Bennie Opens the Pot and Firmstone Comes in

Firmstone was late to breakfast the day of Zephyr's departure, and Bennie was doing his best to restrain his impatience. When at last the late breakfaster appeared, Bennie's manner was noticeably different from the ordinary. He was a stanch defender of the rights of the American citizen, an uncompromising opponent of companies and trusts, a fearless and aggressive exponent of his own views; but withal a sincere admirer and loyal friend of Firmstone. Bennie knew that in his hands were very strong cards, and he was casting about in his mind for the most effective mode of playing them.

"Good morning, Bennie," Firmstone called out, on entering the dining-room.

Bennie returned the greeting with a silent nod. Firmstone glanced at the clock.

"It is pretty late for good morning and breakfast, that's a fact."

Bennie disappeared in the kitchen. He returned and placed Firmstone's breakfast before him.

"What's the matter, Bennie?" Firmstone thought he knew, but events were soon to show him his mistake.

"Matter enough, Mr. Firmstone, as you'll soon find." Bennie was getting alarming.

Firmstone ate in silence. Bennie watched with impassive dignity.

"Is your breakfast all right?" he finally asked, unbendingly.

"All right, Bennie. Better than I deserve, pouncing on you at this hour." He again looked up at the clock.

"Come when you like, late or early, you'll get the best I can give you." Bennie was still rigid.

Firmstone was growing more puzzled. Bennie judged it time to support his opening.

"I'm an outspoken man, Mr. Firmstone, as becomes an American citizen. If I take an honest dollar, I'll give an honest return."

"No one doubts that, Bennie." Firmstone leaned back in his chair. He was going to see it out.

Bennie's support was rapidly advancing.

"You know, Mr. Firmstone, that I have my opinions and speak my mind about the oppression of the poor by the rich. I left my home in the East to come out here where it was less crowded and where there was more freedom. It's only change about, I find. In the East the rich were mostly Americans who oppressed the dagoes, being for their own good; but here it's the other way. Here's Mike the Finn, and Jansen the Swede, and Hansen the Dane, and Giuseppe the dago, and Pat the Irishman the boss of the whole dirty gang. Before God I take shame to myself for being an honest man and American born, and having this thieving gang to tell me how long I can work, and where I can buy, with a swat in the jaw and a knife in my back for daring to say my soul is my own and sticking to it against orders from the union."

"Thunder and Mars, Bennie! What's the matter?"

Bennie's reserves came up with a rush. He thrust open the door of his room and jerked a blanket from the sacks which Zephyr had left there.

Firmstone gave a low whistle of surprise.

"There's matter for you, Mr. Firmstone."

"Where under the sun did you get these?" Firmstone had opened one of the sacks and was looking at the ore.

"I didn't get them. Zephyr got them and asked me to see that you had them. There's a man for you! 'Twas little white paint the Lord had when he came West, but he put two good coats of it on Zephyr's back."

Firmstone made no reply to Bennie's eulogy of Zephyr. He closed and retied the opened sacks.

"There's mighty interesting reading in these sacks, Bennie."

"Those were Zephyr's words, sir."

"That ore was taken from the mill last night. Luna was on shift, Long was sick, and Luna put

Morrison in his place." Firmstone looked at Bennie inquisitively. He was trying his facts on the cook.

"That's so, sir," remarked Bennie. "But you'll never make a hen out of a rooster by pulling out his tail-feathers."

Firmstone laughed.

"Well, Bennie, that's about the way I sized it up myself. Keep quiet about this. I want to get these sacks down to the office some time to-day." He left the room and went to the office.

Luna reported to the office that night as usual before going on shift. Firmstone gave a few directions, and then turned to his work.

Shortly after twelve Luna was surprised at seeing the superintendent enter the mill.

"Cut off the feed in the batteries."

The order was curt, and Luna, much bewildered, hastened to obey.

Firmstone followed him around back of the batteries, where automatic machines dropped the ore under the stamps. Firmstone waited until there began to come the sound of dropping stamps pounding on the naked dies, then he gave orders to hang up the stamps and shut down the mill. This was done. The rhythmic cadence of the falling stamps was broken into irregular blows as one by one the stamps were propped up above the revolving cams, till finally only the hum of pulleys and the click of belts were heard. These sounds also ceased as the engine slowed and finally stopped.

"Shall I lay off the men?" asked the foreman.

"No. Have them take out the screens."

This also was done, and then Firmstone, accompanied by Luna, went from battery to battery. They first scraped out the loose rock, and afterward, with a long steel spoon, took samples of the crushed ore from between the dies. The operation was a long one; but at length the last battery was sampled. Firmstone put the last sample in a sack with the others.

"Shall I carry the sack for you?" asked Luna.

"No. Start up the mill, and then come to the office." Firmstone turned, and, with the heavy sack on his shoulder, left the mill.

There were a hundred stamps in the mill. The stamps were divided into batteries of ten each. Each battery was driven separately by a belt from the main shaft. There was a man in attendance on every twenty stamps. Firmstone had taken samples from each battery, and each sample bore the number of the battery. He had taken especial care to call this to Luna's attention.

The foreman saw to replacing the screens, and, when the mill was again started, he went to the superintendent's office. He knew very well that an unpleasant time awaited him; but, like the superintendent, he had his course of action mapped out. The foreman was a very wise man within a restricted circle. He knew that the battle was his, if he fought within its circumference. Outside of the circle he did not propose to be tempted. Firmstone could not force him out. Those who could, would not attempt it for very obvious and personal reasons. Luna was aware that Firmstone knew that there was thieving, and was morally certain as to who were the thieves, but lacked convincing proof. This was his protecting circle. Firmstone could not force him out of it. Morrison and Pierre knew not only of the thieving, but the thieves. They could force him out, but they would not. Luna was tranquil.

Luna saw Firmstone in the laboratory as he entered the railed enclosure. He opened the railing gate, passed through the office, and entered the laboratory. Firmstone glanced at the foreman, but he met only a stolid face with no sign of confusion.

"Pan these samples down."

Without a word Luna emptied the sacks into little pans and carefully washed off the crushed rock, leaving the grains of gold in the pans. Eight of the pans showed rich in gold, the last two hardly a trace.

Firmstone placed the pans in order.

"What do you make of that?" he asked, sharply.

Luna shook his head.

"That's too much for me."

"What batteries did these two come from?" Firmstone pointed to the two plates.

"Nine and Ten," the foreman answered, promptly.

"Who works on Nine and Ten?"

"Clancy day and Long night," was the ready answer.

"Did Long work last night?"

"No. He was sick. I told you that, and I asked you if I should put on Morrison. You didn't say nothing against it."

"Did Nine and Ten run all night?"

"Except for an hour or two, maybe. Nine worked a shoe loose and Ten burst a screen. That's likely to happen any time. We had to hang up for that."

"You say you can give no explanation of this?" Firmstone pointed to the empty pans.

"No, sir."

"Look this over." Firmstone went to his desk in the office and Luna followed him. He picked up a paper covered with figures marked "Mine Assays, May," and handed it to the foreman.

Luna glanced over the sheet, then looked inquiringly at Firmstone.

"Well?" he finally ventured.

"What do you make of it?" Firmstone asked.

Luna turned to the assay sheet.

"The average of two hundred assays taken twice a week, twenty-five assays each time, gives twenty-five dollars a ton for the month of May." Luna read the summary.

Firmstone wrote the number on a slip of paper, then took the sheet from the foreman.

"You understand, then, that the ore taken from the mine and sent to the mill in May averaged twenty-five dollars a ton?"

"Yes, that's right." Luna was getting puzzled.

"Very good. You're doing well. Now look at this sheet." Firmstone handed him another paper. "Now read the summary."

Luna read aloud:

"Average loss in tailings, daily samples, May, two dollars and seventy-five cents a ton."

"You understand from this, do you not, that the gold recovered from the plates should then be twenty-two dollars and twenty-five cents a ton?"

"Yes, sir." Luna's face was reddening; beads of perspiration were oozing from his forehead.

"Well, then," pursued Firmstone, "just look over this statement. Read it out loud."

Luna took the paper offered him, and began to read.

"What do you make out of that?" Firmstone was looking straight into the foreman's eyes.

Luna tried his best to return the look, but his eyes dropped.

"I don't know," he stammered.

"Then I'll tell you. Not that I need to, but I want you to understand that I know. It means that out of every ton of ore that was delivered to this mill in May thirteen dollars and forty-five cents have been stolen."

Luna fairly gasped. He was startled by the statement to a cent of the amount stolen. He and his confederates had been compelled to take Pierre's unvouched statements. Therefore he could not controvert the figures, had he chosen. He did not know the amount.

"There must have been a mistake, sir."

"Mistake!" Firmstone blazed out. "What do you say to this?"

He pulled a canvas from the sacks of ore that had been brought to the office. He expected to see Luna collapse entirely. Instead, a look of astonishment spread over the foreman's face.

"I'll give up!" he exclaimed. He looked Firmstone squarely in the face. He saw his way clearly now. "You're right," he said. "There has been stealing. It's up to me. I'll fire anyone you say, or I'll quit myself, or you can fire me. But, before God, I never stole a dollar from the Rainbow mill." He spoke the literal truth. The spirit of it did not trouble him.

Firmstone was astonished at the man's affirmations, but they did not deceive him, nor divert him from his purpose.

"I'm not going to tell you whom to let out or take in," he replied. "I'm holding you responsible. I've told you a good deal, but not all, by a good long measure. This stealing has got to stop, and you can stop it. You would better stop it. Now go back to your work."

That very night Firmstone wrote a full account of the recovery of the stolen ore, the evils which he found on taking charge of the property, the steps which he proposed for their elimination. He closed with these words:

"It must be remembered that these conditions have had a long time in which to develop. At the very least, an equal time must be allowed for their elimination; but I believe that I shall be successful."

CHAPTER VI

The Family Circle

On the morning of Élise's strike for freedom, Pierre came to breakfast with his usual atmosphere of compressed wrath. He glanced at his breakfast which Madame had placed on the table at the first sound which heralded his approach. There was nothing there to break the tension and to set free the pent-up storm within. Much meditation, with fear and trembling, had taught Madame the proper amount of butter to apply to the hot toast, the proportion of sugar and cream to add to the coffee, and the exact shade of crisp and brown to put on his fried eggs. But a man bent on trouble can invariably find a cause for turning it loose.

"Where is Élise?" he demanded.

"Élise," Madame answered, evasively, "she is around somewhere."

"Somewhere is nowhere. I demand to know." Pierre looked threatening.

"Shall I call her?" Madame vouchsafed.

"If you know not where she is, how shall you call her? Heh? If you know, mek ansaire!"

"I don't know where she is."

"*Bien!*" Pierre reseated himself and began to munch his toast savagely.

Madame was having a struggle with herself. It showed plainly on the thin, anxious face. The lips compressed with determination, the eyes set, then wavered, and again the indeterminate lines of acquiescent subjection gained their accustomed ascendency. Back and forth assertion and complaisance fled and followed; only assertion was holding its own.

The eggs had disappeared, also the greater part of the toast. Pierre swallowed the last of his coffee, and, without a look at his silent wife, began to push his chair from the table. Madame's voice startled him.

"Élise is sixteen," she ventured.

Pierre fell back in his chair, astonished. The words were simple and uncompromising, but the intonation suggested that they were not final.

"Well?" he asked, explosively.

"When are you going to send Élise away to school?"

"To school?" Pierre was struggling with his astonishment.

"Yes." Madame was holding herself to her determination with an effort.

"To school? *Baste!* She read, she write, she mek ze figure, is it not suffice? Heh?"

"That makes no difference. You promised her father that you would send her away to school."

Pierre looked around apprehensively.

"Shut up! Kip quiet!"

"I won't shut up, and I won't keep quiet." Madame's blood was warming. The sensation was as pleasant as it was unusual. "I will keep quiet for myself. I won't for Élise."

"Élise! Élise! Ain't I do all right by Élise?" Pierre asked, aggressively. "She have plenty to eat, plenty to wear, you tek good care of her. Don't I tek good care, also? Me? Pierre? She mek no complain, heh?"

"That isn't what her father wanted, and it isn't what you promised him."

Pierre looked thoughtful; his face softened slightly.

"We have no children, you and me. We have honly Élise, one li'l girl, *la bonne* Élise. You wan' mek me give up *la bonne* Élise? *P'quoi?*" His face blazed again as he looked up wrathfully. "You wan' mek her go to school! *P'quoi?* So she learn mek *teedle, teedle* on ze piano? So she learn speak gran'? So she tink of me, Pierre, one li'l Frenchmens, not good enough for her, for mek her shame wiz her gran' friends? Heh? Who mek ze care for ze li'l babby? Who mek her grow up strong? Heh? You mek her go school. You mek ze gran' dam-zelle. You mek her go back to her pip'l. You mek me, Pierre, you, grow hol' wiz noddings? Hall ze res' ze time wiz no li'l Élise? How you like li'l Élise go away and mek ze marry, and w'en she have li'l children, she say to her li'l children, '*Mes enfants, voila!* Pierre and Madame, *très bon* Pierre and Madame,' and *les petits enfants* mek

big eyes at Pierre and Madame and li'l Élise? She say, '*Pauvres enfants*, Pierre and Madame will not hurt you. *Bon* Pierre! *Bonne* Madame!'" Pierre made a gesture of deprecating pity.

Madame was touched to the quick. Starting tears dimmed the heavy eyes. Had she not thought of all this a thousand times? If Pierre cared so much for li'l Élise how much more reason had she to care? Li'l Élise had been the only bright spot in her dreary life, yet she was firm. Élise had been very dear to her in the past, but her duty was plain. Her voice was gentler.

"Élise is not ours, Pierre. It is harder to do now what we ought to have done long ago."

Pierre rose and walked excitedly back and forth. He was speaking half to himself, half to Madame.

"Sixtin year 'go li'l Élise mammy die. Sixtin year! She no say, 'Madame Marie, tek my li'l babby back Eas' to my friend, *hein*? No. She say, 'Madame Marie, my poor li'l babby ain' got no mammy no mo'. Tek good care my poor li'l babby.' Then she go die. We mek good care of ze li'l Élise, me and you, heh? We sen' away Élise? *Sacré non!* Nevaire!" Pierre stopped, and looked fiercely at Madame.

"Yes," answered Madame. "Her mammy asked me to care for her little baby, but it was for her father. When her father died he made you promise to give her to her friends. Don't I know how hard it is?" Her tears were flowing freely now. "Every year we said, 'She is yet too young to go. Next year we will keep our promise,' and next year she was dearer to us. And now she is sixteen. She must go."

Pierre broke in fiercely:

"She shall not! Sixtin year? Sixtin year she know honly me, Pierre, her daddy, and you, her mammy. What you tink, heh? Élise go school in one beeg city, heh? She mek herself choke wiz ze brick house and ze stone street. She get sick and lonesome for ze mountain, for her hol' daddy and her hol' mammy, for ze grass and ze flower."

"That is for her to say. Send her away as you promised. Then"—Madame's heavy eyes grew deep, almost beautiful—"then, if she comes back to us!"

Pierre turned sullenly.

"She is mine. Mine and yours. She shall stay."

Madame's tears ceased flowing.

"She shall go." Her temerity frightened her. "I will tell her all if you don't send her away."

Pierre did not explode, as she expected. Instead, there was the calm of invincible purpose. He held up one finger impressively.

"I settle hall zis. *Écoutez!* She shall marry. Right away. Queek. Da's hall." He left the room before Madame had time to reply.

Madame was too terrified to think. The possibility conveyed in her husband's declaration had never suggested itself to her. Élise was still the little baby nestling in her arms, the little girl prattling and playing indoors and out, on the wide ranch, and later, Madame shuddered, when Pierre had abandoned the ranch for the Blue Goose, waiting at the bar, keeping Pierre's books, redeeming checks at the desk, moving out and in among the throng of coarse, uncouth men, but through it all the same beautiful, wilful, loving little girl, so dear to Madame's heart, so much of her life. What did it matter that profanity died on the lips of the men in her presence, that at her bidding they ceased to drink to intoxication, that hopeless wives came to her for counsel, that their dull faces lighted at her words, that in sickness or death she was to them a comfort and a refuge?

What if Pierre had fiercely protected her from the knowledge of the more loathsome vices of a mining camp? It was no more than right. Pierre loved her. She knew that. Pierre was hoarding every shining dollar that came to his hand. Was he lavish in his garnishment of the Blue Goose? It was only for the more effective luring of other gold from the pockets of the careless, unthinking men who worked in mines or mills, or roamed among the mountains or washed the sands of every stream, spending all they found, hoping for and talking of the wealth which, if it came, would only smite them with more rapid destruction. And all these little rivulets, small each one alone, united at the Blue Goose into a growing stream that went no farther. For what end? Madame knew. For Pierre, life began and ended in Élise. Madame knew, and sympathized with this; but her purpose was not changed. She knew little of life beyond the monotonous desolation of a western ranch, the revolting glamour of a gambling resort, where men revelled in the fierce excitement of shuffling cards and clicking chips, returning to squalid homes and to spiritless women, weighed down and broken with the bearing of many children, and the merciless, unbroken torture of thankless, thoughtless demands upon their lives. Madame saw all this. She saw and felt the dreary hopelessness of it all. Much as she loved Élise, if it parted her from all that made life endurable she would not shrink from the sacrifice. She knew nothing of life beyond her restricted circle, but anything outside this circle was a change, and any change must be for the better.

"She shall marry. Right away." Pierre's words came to her again with overwhelming terror. Overwhelming, because she saw no way of averting the threatened blow.

From behind, Madame felt two soft hands close on her straining eyes, and a sympathetic voice:

"Has daddy been scolding you again? What was it about this time? Was it because I ran away this morning? I did run away, you know."

For reply Madame only bowed her head from between the clasping hands that for the first time had distress instead of comfort for her groping soul. She did not pray for guidance. She never thought of praying. Why should she? The prisoned seed, buried in the dank and quickening soil, struggles instinctively toward the source of light and strength. But what instinct is there to guide the human soul that, quickened by unselfish love, is yet walled in by the Stygian darkness of an ignorant life?

Madame's hands were clinched. Her hot eyes were dry and hard. No light! No help! Only a fierce spirit of resistance. At length she was conscious of Élise standing before her, half terrified, but wholly determined. Her eyes moistened, then grew soft. Her outstretched arms sought the girl and drew her within their convulsive grasp.

"My poor Élise! My poor little girl, with no one to help her but me!"

"What is it, mammy? What is it?"

Madame only moaned.

"My poor little Élise! My poor little girl!"

Élise freed herself from the resisting arms.

"Tell me at once!" She stamped her foot impatiently.

Madame sprang to her feet.

"You shall not marry that man. You shall not!" Her voice rose. "I will tell you all—everything. I will, if he kills me. I will! I will!"

The door from the saloon was violently opened, and Pierre strode in. He pushed Élise aside, and, with narrowed eyes and uplifted hand, approached his wife.

"You will? You will, heh?"

The threatening blow fell heavily, but upon Élise. She thrust forth her hands. Pierre stumbled backward before the unexpected assault. His eyes, blazing with ungoverned fury, swept around the room. They rested upon a stick. He grasped it, and turned once more toward Madame.

"You will! You will! I teach you bettaire. I teach you say 'I will' to me! I teach you!" Then he stopped. He was looking squarely into the muzzle of a silver-mounted revolver held in a steady hand and levelled by a steady eye.

Pierre was like a statue. Another look came into his eyes. Youth toyed with death, and was not afraid. Pierre knew that. At threatening weapons in the hands of drink-crazed men Pierre smiled with scorn. The bad man stood in terror of the law as well as of Pierre. But when determined youth laid hold on death and shook it in his face Pierre knew enough to stand aside.

Élise broke the tense silence.

"Don't you ever dare to strike mammy again. Don't you dare!"

Without a word Pierre left the room. He had loved Élise before with as unselfish a love as he could know. But hitherto he had not admired her. Now he rubbed his hands and chuckled softly, baring his teeth with unsmiling lips.

"A-a-ah!" he breathed forth. "*Magnifique! Superb! La petite diable!* She mek ze shoot in her eye! In ze fingaire! She bin shoot her hol' man, her hol' daddy, *moi!* Pierre." Pierre thoughtfully rubbed his smooth chin. "*La petite diable!*"

Poor Madame! Poor Pierre! The dog chases his tail with undiminished zest, and is blissfully rewarded if a straggling hair but occasionally brushes his nose. He licks his accessible paws, impelled alone by a sense of duty.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Morrison Tackles a Man with a Mind of His Own and a Man without One

Mr. Morrison was a slick bird—in fact, a very slick bird. It was his soul's delight to preen his unctuous feathers and to shiver them into the most effective and comfortable position, to settle his head between his shoulders, and, with moistened lips, to view his little world from dreamy, half-closed eyes. This, however, only happened in restful moments of complacent self-contemplation. He never allowed these moods to interfere with business. He had broached the subject of marriage to Pierre, and Pierre had of course fallen in with his views. The fact that Élise

evidently loathed him disturbed no whit his placid mind. He was in no hurry. He assumed Élise as his own whenever he chose to say the word. He regarded her in much the same way as a half-hungered epicure a toothsome dinner, holding himself aloof until his craving stomach should give the utmost zest to his viands without curtailing the pleasure of his palate by ravenous haste. He served Pierre with diligence and fidelity. The Blue Goose would sooner or later come to him with Élise.

He had ambitions, political especially, not acquired, but instinctive. Not that he felt inspired with a mission to do good unto others, but that others should do good unto him, and also that the particular kind of good should be of his own choosing. He knew very well the temperaments of his chosen constituency, and he adapted himself to their impressionable peculiarities. To this end he dispensed heavily padded gratuities with much ostentation on selected occasions, but gathered his tolls in merciless silence. He did this without fear, for he knew that the blare of the multitude would drown the cries of the stricken few.

Mr. Morrison had long meditated upon the proper course to take in order best to compass his ends. The unrest among the employees of the Rainbow Company came to him unsought, and he at once grasped the opportunity. The organisation of a miners' and millmen's union would be an obvious benefit to the rank and file; their manifestation of gratitude would naturally take the very form he most desired. To this end before the many he displayed the pyrotechnics of meaningless oratory, in much the same manner as a strutting peacock his brilliant tail; but individuals he hunted with nickel bullets and high-power guns. On various occasions he had displayed the peacock tail; this particular afternoon he took down his flat-trajectoried weapon and went forth to gun for Bennie.

Bennie had washed the dinner dishes, reset his table, prepared for the coming meal, and now, as was his custom, was lying in his bunk, with an open book in his hands, prepared to read or doze, as the spirit moved him.

Mr. Morrison appeared before him.

"Howdy, Bennie! Taking a nap?"

"I'm taking nothing but what's my own." Bennie looked meaningly at Morrison.

Morrison slipped into what he mistook for Bennie's mood.

"You're wise, if you get it all. Many's the ignorant devil that takes only what's given him and asks no questions, worse luck to him!"

"You'll do well to go on," remarked Bennie, placidly. "There's many that gets more, and then damns the gift and the giver."

"And just what might that mean, Bennie?" Morrison looked a little puzzled.

"It means that, if more got what they deserved, 'twould be better for honest men." Bennie was very decided.

Morrison's face cleared. He held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said.

Bennie took the proffered hand.

"Here's hoping you'll come to your own!" he remarked, grimly.

The clasped hands each fell to its own. Morrison's hands went to his pocket as he stretched out his crossed legs with a thankful look on his face.

"I'm not specially troubled about myself. I've had fairly good luck looking out for Patrick Morrison, Esq. It's these poor devils around here that's troubling me. They get nipped and pinched at every turn of the cards."

"It's God's truth you're talking. And you want to help them same poor devils?"

"That's what."

"Then listen to me. Smash your roulette and faro. Burn down the Blue Goose, first taking out your whisky that'll burn only the throats of the fools who drink it. Do that same, and you'll see fat grow on lean bones, and children's pants come out of the shade of the patches."

Morrison lifted his hat, scratching his head meditatively.

"That isn't exactly what I'm at."

"Eagles to snowbirds 'tis not!" put in Bennie, aside.

Morrison gave no heed to the interruption.

"Every man has the right to spend his own money in his own way."

"The poor devils get the money and the Blue Goose furnishes the way," Bennie again interpolated.

Morrison was getting uneasy. He was conscious that he was not making headway.

"You can't do but one thing at a time in good shape."

"You're a damned liar! At the Blue Goose you're doing everyone all the time."

Morrison rose impatiently. The nickel bullets were missing their billet. He began tentatively to unfold the peacock's tail.

"You see," he said, "it's like this. In union is strength. What makes the rich richer? Because they hang together like swarming bees. You pick the honey of one and you get the stings of all. Learn from the rich to use the rich man's weapons. Let us poor workingmen band together like brothers in a common cause. Meet union with union, strength with strength. Then, and only then, can we get our own."

"It took more than one cat to make strings for that fiddle," Bennie remarked, thoughtfully. "Just what might that mean?"

Morrison again looked puzzled. He went back to his bullets.

"To be specific," he spoke impressively, "as things stand now, if one workingman thinks he ought to have more pay he goes to the company and asks for it. The company says no. If he gets troublesome, they fire him. If one man works in a close breast with foul air the company tells him to go back to his work or quit. It costs money to timber bad ground. One poor workman's life doesn't count for much. It's cheaper for the company to take chances than to put in timber." He paused, looking sharply at Bennie.

"You're talking sense now. How do you propose to help it?"

Morrison felt solid ground beneath his feet.

"Do as I said. Learn from the rich. Unite. If the men are not getting fair wages, the union can demand more."

Bennie lifted an inquiring finger.

"One word there. You want to organise a union?"

"That's it. That's the stuff." Morrison was flatteringly acquiescent. "A company can turn down one man, but the union will shove it up to them hard."

"If one man breaks five tons of ore a day, and another man breaks only one, will the union see that both get the same pay?"

"A workingman is a workingman." Morrison spoke less enthusiastically. "A man that puts in his time earns all that he gets."

Bennie looked musingly at the toes of his boots.

"The union will equalise the pay?"

"You bet it will!"

"They'll make the company ventilate the mines and keep bad ground timbered?"

"They'll look after these things sharp, and anything else that comes up."

"The union will run the company, but who'll run the union?"

Morrison waxed enthusiastic.

"We'll take our turn at bossing all right. Every man in the union stands on the same floor, and when any of the boys have a grievance the president will see them through. The president and the executive committee can tie up the whole camp if the company bucks."

"Is the union organised?" asked Bennie.

"Not yet. It's like this." Morrison's voice had a tinge of patronage. "You see, I want to get a few of the level-headed men in the camp worked up to the idea; the rest will come in, hands down."

"Who have you got strung?"

"Well, there's Luna, and——"

"Luna's a crowd by himself. He's got more faces than a town-clock telling time to ten streets. Who else?"

"There's Thompson, the mine foreman——"

"Jim Thompson? Don't I know him now? He'll throw more stunts than a small boy with a bellyful of green apples. Who else?"

Morrison looked a little sulky.

"Well, how about yourself. That's what I'm here to find out."

Bennie glared up wrathfully.

"You'll take away no doubts about me, if my tongue isn't struck by a palsy till it can't bore the wax of your ears. When it comes to bosses, I'll choose my own. I'm American and American born. I'd rather be bossed by a silk tile and kid gloves than by a Tipperary hat and a shillalah, with a damned three-cornered shamrock riding the necks of both. It's a pretty pass we've come to if we've got to go to Irish peat-bogs and Russian snow-banks to find them as will tell us our rights and how to get them, and then import dagoes with rings in their ears and Hungarians with spikes in their shoes to back us up. Let me talk a bit! I get my seventy-five dollars a month for knowing my business and attending to it, because my grub goes down the necks of the men instead of out on the dump; because I give more time to a side of bacon than I do to organising unions. And I'll tell you some more facts. The rich are growing richer for using what they have, and the poor are growing poorer because they don't know enough to handle what they've got. Organise a union for keeping damned fools out of the Blue Goose, and from going home and lamming hell out of their wives and children, and I'll talk with you. As it is, the sooner you light out the more respect I'll have for the sense of you that I haven't seen."

Morrison was blazing with anger.

"You'll sing another tune before long. We propose to run every scab out of the country."

"Run, and be damned to you! I've got a thousand-acre ranch and five hundred head of cattle. I've sucked it from the Rainbow at seventy-five a month, and I've given value received, without any union to help me. Only take note of this. I've laid my eggs in my own nest, and not at the Blue Goose."

Morrison turned and left the room. Over his shoulder he flung back:

"This isn't the last word, you damned scab! You'll hear from me again."

"'Tis not the nature of a pig to keep quiet with a dog at his heels." Bennie stretched his neck out of the door to fire his parting shot.

Morrison went forth with a vigorous flea in each ear, which did much to disturb his complacency. Bennie had not made him thoughtful, only vengeful. There is nothing quite so discomposing as the scornful rejection of proffers of self-seeking philanthropy. Bennie's indignation was instinctive rather than analytical, the inherent instinct that puts up the back and tail of a new-born kitten at its first sight of a benevolent-appearing dog.

Morrison had not gone far from the boarding-house before he chanced against Luna.

Morrison was the last person Luna would have wished to meet. Since his interview with Firmstone he had scrupulously avoided the Blue Goose, and he had seen neither Morrison nor Pierre. His resolution to mend his ways was the result of fear, rather than of change of heart. Neither Morrison nor Pierre had fear. They were playing safe. Luna felt their superiority; he was doing his best to keep from their influence.

"Howdy!"

"Howdy!" Luna answered.

"Where've you been this long time?" asked Morrison, suavely.

Luna did not look up.

"Down at the mill, of course."

"What's going on?" pursued Morrison. "You haven't been up lately."

"There's been big things going on. Pierre's little game's all off." Luna shrank from a direct revelation.

"Oh, drop this! What's up?"

"I'll tell you what's up." Luna looked defiant. "You know the last lot of ore you pinched? Well, the old man's got it, and, what's more, he's on to your whole business."

Morrison's face set.

"Look here now, Luna. You just drop that little *your* business. It looks mighty suspicious, talking like that. I don't know what you mean. If you've been pulling the mill and got caught you'd better pick out another man to unload on besides me."

"I never took a dollar from the mill, and I told the old man so. I——"

But Morrison interrupted:

"You've been squealing, have you? Well, you just go on, only remember this. If you're going to set in a little game of freeze-out, you play your cards close to your coat."

Luna saw the drift of Morrison's remarks, and hastened to defend himself.

"It's gospel truth. I haven't squealed." He gave a detailed account of his midnight interview with Firmstone, defining sharply between his facts and his inferences. He finally concluded: "The old man's sharp. There isn't a corner of the mine he doesn't know, and there isn't a chink in the mill, from the feed to the tail-sluice, that he hasn't got his eye on." Luna's mood changed from the

defensive to the assertive. "I'll tell you one thing more. He's square, square as a die. He had me bunched, but he give me a chance. He told me that I could stop the stealing at the mill, that I had got to, and, by God, I'm going to, in spite of hell!"

Morrison was relieved, but a sneer buried the manifestation of his relief.

"Well," he exclaimed, "of all the soft, easy things I ever saw you're the softest and the easiest!"

Luna only looked dogged.

"Hard words break no bones," he answered, sullenly.

"That may be," answered Morrison; "but it doesn't keep soft ones from gumming your wits, that's sure."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this. You say the old man had you bunched. Well, he's got you on your back now, and roped, too."

Luna answered still more sullenly:

"There's more'n one will be roped, then. If it comes to a show-down, I'll not be alone."

"All right, Mr. Luna." Morrison spoke evenly. "When you feel like calling the game just go right ahead. I'm not going to stop you."

Luna made no immediate reply. Morrison waited, ostentatiously indifferent. Luna finally broke the silence.

"I don't see how the old man's got me roped."

"Well, now you're acting as if you had sense. I'll tell you. I'm always ready to talk to a man that's got sense. Just answer a few straight questions. In the first place, you've been stealing from the mill."

"I tell you I haven't," broke in Luna; "but I can tell you who has." He looked sharply at Morrison.

Morrison waved his hand with wearied endurance.

"Well, you're foreman at the mill. If there's been stealing, and you know your business, you know where it was done and how it was done. If you don't know your business what are you there for, and how long are you going to stay? You say yourself the old man is sharp, and he is. How long is he going to keep either a thief or a fool in your place?"

"I'm not a thief," Luna answered, hotly. "I'm not a fool, either, and I'm not going to be made one any longer by you, either."

"If you're not a fool listen to me, and keep quiet till I'm through." Morrison leaned forward, checking his words with his fingers. "The old man's sharp, and he's got you roped, any turn. There's been stealing at the mill. You say this. You're foreman there. It doesn't make any difference whether you stole or someone else. They hold you responsible. The old man's got the cards in his hands. The men saw him come in the mill, shut down, and take samples to back him up."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it, you fool! This is what of it. He's got you just where he wants you. You'll walk turkey from now on, according to his orders. If there's any dirty work to be done you'll do it. You squeal or you kick, and he'll start the whole slide and bury you."

"I'm not obliged to do any dirty work for him or any other man. Not even for you. I can quit."

"And get another job?" Morrison asked, mockingly.

"That's what."

"Let me just point out a few things. You get mad and quit. Call for your time. Pack your turkey and go to another mill. They will ask your name. Then, 'Excuse me a minute.' Then they'll go to a little book, and they'll find something like this, 'Henry Luna, mill man, foreman Rainbow mill. Richard Firmstone, superintendent. Discharged on account of stealing ore from the mill.' Then they'll come back. 'No place for you, Mr. Luna,' and you'll go on till hell freezes, and that little record of yours will knock you, every clip. When you wear the skin off your feet, and the shirt off your back, you'll come back to the Rainbow, and Mr. Firmstone will politely tell you that, if you've walked the kick out of you, he'll give you another try."

Luna was open-eyed. He had grasped but one thing.

"What little book are you talking about?" he asked.

"It's known as the Black List, little lambie. You'll know more about it if you keep on. Every company in Colorado or in the United States has one. You'll run up against it, all right, if you keep on."

Luna had vague ideas of this powerful weapon; but it had never seemed so real before. He was

growing suspicious. He recalled Firmstone's words, "I've told you a good deal, but not all by a good long measure." They had seemed simple and straightforward at the time, but Morrison's juggling was hazing them.

"What's a fellow to do?" he asked, helplessly.

"Nothing alone, except to take what's given you. You stand alone, and you'll be cut alone, worked overtime alone, kicked alone, and, when it gets unendurable, starve alone. But, if you've got any sense or sand, don't stand alone to get kicked and cuffed and robbed by a company or by a bunch of companies. Meet union with union, strength with strength, and, if worst comes to worst, fight with fight. Us workingmen have things in our own hands, if we stand together." Morrison was watching the foreman narrowly. "And there's another thing. When a long-toothed, sharp-nosed, glass-eyed company bull-dog puts up a padded deck on a workingman, he'll have the backing of the union to put him down."

"The union ain't going to take up no private grievance?" Luna spoke, half questioningly.

"They ain't, heh? What's it for, then? Bunching us up so they can pick us off one by one, without hunting us out like a flock of sheep. That ain't the union." Morrison paused, looking keenly at Luna. "There's no use scattering. There's nothing as skittish as a pocketful of dollars in a dress suit. If there's a grievance, private or common, go to the company in a bunch. Remonstrate. If that don't work, strike, fight, boycott! No weapons? The poor man's dollar will buy rifles and cartridges as quick as a rich man's checks. We've got this advantage, too. Rich men have to hire men to fight for them; but, by God, we can fight for ourselves!"

Luna's thick wits were vibrating betwixt fear and vengeance. He had all the ignorant man's fear of superior brains, all the coward's sneaking resentment of a fancied imposition. He could see that fear had blinded his eyes to the real but covert threat of Firmstone's words. Here was his chance to free himself from Firmstone's clutches. Here his chance for revenge.

Morrison was watching him closely.

"Are you with us, or are you going down alone?"

Luna held out his hand.

"I'm with you, you bet!"

"Come up to the Blue Goose some night when you're on day-shift. We'll talk things over with Pierre."

Then they parted.

CHAPTER VIII

Madame Seeks Counsel

There are many evil things in the world which are best obviated by being let severely alone.

The clumsy-minded Hercules had to be taught this fact. Tradition relates that at one time he met an insignificant-looking toad in his path which he would have passed by in disdain had it not been for its particularly ugly appearance. Thinking to do the world a service by destroying it he thumped the reptile with his club, when, to his surprise, instead of being crushed by the impact, the beast grew to twice its former size. Repeated and heavier blows only multiplied its dimensions and ugliness, until at length the thoroughly frightened hero divested himself of his clothing with the intention of putting an end to his antagonist. His formidable club was again raised, but before it could descend, he was counselled to wait. This he did, and to his greater surprise the ugly beast began to shrink, and finally disappeared.

Pierre had no convenient goddess to instruct him in critical moments, so he depended on his own wit. Of this he had inherited a liberal portion, and this by diligent cultivation had been added to manyfold. So it happened that after Madame's surprising exhibition of an unsuspected will of her own, and her declaration of her intention to enforce it, Pierre had studiously let her alone.

This course of action was as surprising to Madame as it was disconcerting. The consequences were such as her wily husband had foreseen. Encountering no externally resisting medium, its force was wasted by internal attrition, so that Madame was being reduced to a nervous wreck, all of which was duly appreciated by Pierre.

This particular instance, being expanded into a general law, teaches us that oftentimes the nimble wit of an agile villain prevails against the clumsy brains of a lofty-minded hero.

Madame had had long years of patient endurance to train her in waiting; but the endurance had been passive and purposeless, rather than active, and with a well-defined object. Now that an object was to be attained by action the lessons of patient endurance counted for naught. Instead of determined action against her open revolt, Pierre had been smilingly obsequious and non-resisting.

She knew very well that Pierre had been neither cowed into submission nor frightened from his purpose; but his policy of non-interference puzzled and terrified her. She knew not at what moment he might confront her with a move that she would have neither time nor power to check. In this state of mind day after day passed by with wearing regularity. She felt the time going, every moment fraught with the necessity of action, but without the slightest suggestion as to what she ought to do. Pierre's toast might be burned to a crisp, his eggs scorched, or his coffee muddy, but there was no word of complaint. Regular or irregular hours for meals were passed over with the same discomposing smiles. She did not dare unburden her mind to Élise, for fear of letting drop some untimely word which would immediately precipitate the impending crisis. For the first time in her life Élise was subjected to petulant words and irritating repulses by the sorely perplexed woman.

One evening, after a particularly trying day during which Élise had been stung into biting retorts, an inspiration came to Madame that rolled every threatening cloud from her mind.

The next morning, after long waiting, Pierre came to the dining-room, but found neither breakfast nor Madame, and for the best of reasons. With the first grey light of morning, Madame had slipped from the door of the Blue Goose, and before the sun had gilded the head of Ballard Mountain she was far up the trail that led to the Inferno.

Zephyr was moving deliberately about a little fire on which his breakfast was cooking, pursing his lips in meditative whistles, or engaged in audible discussion with himself on the various topics which floated through his mind. An unusual clatter of displaced rocks brought his dialogue to a sudden end; a sharp look down the trail shrank his lips to a low whistle; the sight of a hard knob of dingy hair, strained back from a pair of imploring eyes fringed by colourless lashes, swept his hat from his head, and sent him clattering down to Madame with outstretched hands.

"You're right, Madame. You're on the right trail, and it's but little farther. It's rather early for St. Peter, it's likely he's taking his beauty sleep yet; but I'll see that it's broken, unless you have a private key to the Golden Gates, which you deserve, if you haven't got it." His address of welcome had brought him to Madame's side.

Her only reply was a bewildered gaze, as she took his hands. With his help she soon reached the camp, and seated herself in a rude chair which Zephyr placed for her.

Zephyr, having seen to the comfort of his guest, returned to his neglected breakfast.

"It takes a pretty cute angel to catch me unawares," he glanced at Madame; "but you've got the drop on me this time. Come from an unexpected direction, too. I've heard tell of Jacob's vision of angels passing up and down, but I mostly allowed it was a pipe dream. I shall have to annotate my ideas again, which is no uncommon experience, statements to the contrary notwithstanding." Zephyr paused from his labours and looked inquiringly at Madame.

Madame made no reply. Her bewildered calm began to break before the apparent necessity of saying or doing something. Not having a clear perception of the fitting thing in either case, she took refuge in a copious flood of tears.

Zephyr offered no impediment to the flow, either by word or act. He was not especially acquainted with the ways of women, but being a close observer of nature and an adept at reasoning from analogy, he assumed that a sudden storm meant equally sudden clearing, so he held his peace and, for once, his whistle.

Zephyr's reasoning was correct. Madame's tears dried almost as suddenly as they had started. Zephyr had filled a cup with coffee, and he tendered it deferentially to Madame.

"A peaceful stomach favours a placid mind," he remarked, casually; "which is an old observation that doesn't show its age. From which I infer that it has a solid foundation of truth."

Madame hesitatingly reached for the proffered coffee, then she thought better of it, and, much to Zephyr's surprise, again let loose the fountains of her tears. Zephyr glanced upward with a cocking eye, then down the steep pass to where the broken line of rock dropped sheer into Rainbow Gulch where lay Pandora and the Blue Goose.

"About this time look for unsettled weather," he whispered to himself. Zephyr had dropped analogy and was reasoning from cold facts. He was thinking of Élise.

Tears often clear the mind, as showers the air, and Madame's tears, with Zephyr's calm, were rapidly having a salubrious effect. This time she not only reached for the coffee on her own initiative, but, what was more to the purpose, drank it. She even ate some of the food Zephyr placed before her.

Zephyr noted with approval.

"Rising barometer, with freshening winds, growing brisk, clearing weather."

Madame looked up at Zephyr's almost inaudible words.

"How?" she ventured, timidly.

"That's a fair question," Zephyr remarked, composedly. "The fact is, I get used to talking to myself and answering a fool according to his folly. It's hard sledding to keep up. You see, a fellow that gets into his store clothes only once a year or so don't know where to hang his thumbs."

Madame looked somewhat puzzled, began a stammering reply, then, dropping her useless efforts, came to her point at once.

"It's about Élise."

Zephyr answered as directly as Madame had spoken.

"Is Élise in trouble?"

"Yes. I don't know what to do." Madame paused and looked expectantly at Zephyr.

"Pierre wants her to marry that Morrison?"

Madame gave a sigh of relief. There was no surprise in her face.

"Pierre says she shall not go to school and learn to despise him and me. He says she will learn to be ashamed of us before her grand friends. Do you think she will ever be ashamed of me?" There was a yearning look in the uncomplaining eyes.

Zephyr looked meditatively at the fire, pursed his lips, and, deliberately thrusting his hand into the bosom of his shirt, drew forth his harmonica. He softly blew forth a few bars of a plaintive melody, then, taking the instrument from his lips, began to speak, without raising his eyes.

"If my memory serves me right, I used to know a little girl on a big ranch who had a large following of beasts and birds that had got into various kinds of trouble, owing to their limitations as such. I also remember that that same little girl on several appropriate occasions banged hell—if you will excuse a bad word for the sake of good emphasis—out of two-legged beasts for abusing their superior kind. Who would fly at the devil to protect a broken-winged gosling. Who would coax rainbows out of alkali water and sweet-scented flowers out of hot sand. My more recent memory seems to put it up to me that this same little girl, with more years on her head and a growing heart under her ribs, has sat up many nights with sick infants, and fought death from said infants to the great joy of their owners. From which I infer, if by any chance said little girl should be lifted up into heaven and seated at the right hand of God, much trouble would descend upon the Holy Family if Madame should want to be near her little Élise, and any of the said Holies should try to stand her off."

Madame did not fully understand, but what did it matter? Zephyr was on her side. Of that she was satisfied. She vaguely gleaned from his words that, in his opinion, Élise would always love her and would never desert her. She hugged this comforting thought close to her cramped soul.

"But," she began, hesitatingly, "Pierre said that she should not go to school, that she should marry right away."

"Pierre is a very hard shell with a very small kernel," remarked Zephyr. "Which means that Pierre is going to do what he thinks is well for Élise. Élise has got a pretty big hold on Pierre."

"But he promised her father that he would give back Élise to her friends, and now he says he won't."

"Have you told Élise that Pierre is not her father?"

"No; I dare not."

"That's all right. Let me try to think out loud a little. The father and mother of Élise ran away to marry. That is why her friends know nothing of her. Her mother died before Élise was six months old, and her father before she was a yearling. Pierre promised to get Élise back to her father's family. It wasn't just easy at that time to break through the mountains and Injuns to Denver. You and Pierre waited for better times. When better times came you both had grown very fond of Élise. A year or so would make no difference to those who did not know. Now Élise is sixteen. Pierre realizes that he must make a choice between now and never. He's got a very soft spot in his heart for Élise. It's the only one he ever had, or ever will have. Élise isn't his. That doesn't make very much difference. Pierre has never had any especial training in giving up things he wants, simply because they don't belong to him. You haven't helped train him otherwise." Zephyr glanced at Madame. Madame's cheeks suddenly glowed, then as suddenly paled. A faint thought of what might have been years ago came and went. Zephyr resumed: "As long as Élise is unmarried, there is danger of his being compelled to give her up. Well," Zephyr's lips grew hard, "you can set your mind at rest. Élise isn't going to marry Morrison, and when the proper time comes, which will be soon, Pierre is going to give her up."

Madame had yet one more episode upon which she needed light. She told Zephyr of Pierre's threatened attack, and of Élise's holding him off at the point of her revolver. She felt, but was not sure, that Élise by her open defiance had only sealed her fate.

Zephyr smiled appreciatively.

"She's got her father's grit and Pierre's example. Her sense is rattling round in her head, as her nonsense is outside of it. She'll do all right without help, if it comes to that; but it won't."

Madame rose, as if to depart. Zephyr waved her to her seat.

"Not yet. You rest here for a while. It's a hard climb up here and a hard climb down. I'll shake things up a little on my prospect. I'll be back by dinner-time."

He picked up a hammer and drills and went still farther up the mountain. Having reached the Inferno, he began his work. Perhaps he had no thought of Jael or Sisera; but he smote his drill with a determined emphasis that indicated ill things for Pierre. Jael pinned the sleeping head of Sisera to the earth. Sleeping or waking, resisting or acquiescent, Pierre's head was in serious danger, if it threatened Élise.

Zephyr loaded the hole and lighted the fuse, then started for the camp. A loud explosion startled Madame from the most peaceful repose she had enjoyed for many a day.

After dinner Zephyr saw Madame safely down the worst of the trail.

"Pierre is not all bad," he remarked, at parting. "You just *restez tranquille* and don't worry. It's a pretty thick fog that the sun can't break through, and, furthermore, a fog being only limited, as it were, and the sun tolerably persistent, it's pretty apt to get on top at most unexpected seasons."

Madame completed the remainder of her journey with very different emotions from those with which she had begun it. She entered the back door of the Blue Goose. Pierre was not in the room, as she had half expected, half feared. She looked around anxiously, then dropped into a chair. The pendulum changed its swing. She was under the old influences again. Zephyr and the mountain-top were far away. A thousand questions struggled in her mind. Why had she not thought of them before? It was no use. Again she was groping for help. She recalled a few of Zephyr's words.

"Élise isn't going to marry Morrison, and Pierre's going to give her up."

They did not thrill her with hope. She could not make them do so by oft repeating. Confused recollections crowded these few words of hope. She could not revivify them. She could only cling to them with blind, uncomprehending trust, as the praying mother clings to the leaden crucifix.

CHAPTER IX

The Meeting at the Blue Goose

An algebraic formula is very fascinating, but at the same time it is very dangerous. The oft-times repeated assumption that *x* plus *y* equals *a* leads ultimately to the fixed belief that a is an attainable result, whatever values may be assigned to the other factors. If we assign concrete dollars to the abstract *x* and *y*, *a* theoretically becomes concrete dollars as well. But immediately we do this, another factor known as the personal equation calls for cards, and from then on insists upon sitting in the game. Simple algebra no longer suffices; calculus, differential as well as integral, enters into our problem, and if we can succeed in fencing out quaternions, to say nothing of the *nth* dimension, we may consider ourselves fortunate.

Pierre was untrained in algebra, to say nothing of higher mathematics; but it is a legal maxim that ignorance of the law excuses no one, and this dictum is equally applicable to natural and to human statutes. Pierre assumed very naturally that five dollars plus five dollars equals ten dollars, and dollars were what he was after. He went even further. Without stating the fact, he felt instinctively that, if he could tip the one-legged plus to the more stable two-legged sign of multiplication, the result would be twenty-five dollars instead of ten. He knew that dollars added to, or multiplied by, dollars made wealth; but he failed to comprehend that wealth was a variable term with no definite, assignable value. In other words, he never knew, nor ever would know, when he had enough.

Pierre had started in life with the questionable ambition of becoming rich. As foreman on a ranch at five dollars a day and found, he was reasonably contented with simple addition. On the sudden death of his employer he was left in full charge, with no one to call him to account, and addition became more frequent and with larger sums. His horizon widened, the Rainbow mine was opened, and the little town of Pandora sprang into existence. Three hundred workmen, with unlimited thirst and a passion for gaming, suggested multiplication, and Pierre moved from the ranch to the Blue Goose. Had he fixed upon a definition of wealth and adhered to it, a few years at the Blue Goose would have left him satisfied. As it was, his ideas grew faster than his legitimate opportunities. The miners were no more content with their wages than he with his gains, and so it happened that an underground retort was added to the above-ground bar and roulette. The bar and roulette had the sanction of law; the retort was existing in spite of it. The bar and roulette took care of themselves, and incidentally of Pierre; but with the retort, the case was different. Pierre had to look out for himself as well as the furnace. As proprietor of a saloon, his garnered dollars brought with them the protection of the nine points of the law—possession; the tenth was never in evidence.

As a vender of gold bullion, with its possession, the nine points made against rather than for him. As for the tenth, at its best it only offered an opportunity for explanation which the law affords the most obviously guilty.

Morrison allowed several days to pass after his interview with Luna before acquainting Pierre with the failure to land their plunder. The disclosure might have been delayed even longer had not Pierre made some indirect inquiries. Pierre had taken the disclosure in a very different

manner from what Morrison had expected. Morrison, as has been set forth, was a very slick bird, but he was not remarkable for his sagacity. His cunning had influenced him to repel, with an assumption of ignorance, Luna's broad hints of guilty complicity; but his sagacity failed utterly to comprehend Pierre's more cunning silence. Pierre was actively acquainted with Morrison's weak points, and while he ceased not to flatter them he never neglected to gather rewards for his labour. If the fabled crow had had the wit to swallow his cheese before he began to sing he would at least have had a full stomach to console himself for being duped. This is somewhat prognostical; but even so, it is not safe to jump too far. It sometimes happens that the fox and the crow become so mutually engrossed as to forget the possibility of a man and a gun.

Late this particular evening Luna entered the Blue Goose, and having paid tribute at the bar, was guided by the knowing winks and nods of Morrison into Pierre's private club-room, where Morrison himself soon followed.

Morrison opened the game at once.

"That new supe at the Rainbow is getting pretty fly." He apparently addressed Pierre.

Pierre bowed, in smiling acquiescence.

"Our little game is going to come to an end pretty soon, too."

"To what li'l game you refer?" Pierre inquired, blandly. Pierre did not mind talking frankly with one; with two he weighed his words.

Morrison made an impatient gesture.

"You know. I told you about the old man's getting back that ore."

Pierre rubbed his hands softly.

"Meestaire Firmstone, he's smooth stuff, ver' smooth stuff."

"He's getting too smooth," interrupted Luna. "I don't mind a supe's looking out for his company. That's what he's paid for. But when he begins putting up games on the men, that's another matter, and I don't propose to stand it. Not for my part."

"He's not bin populaire wiz ze boy?" inquired Pierre.

"No."

Pierre chuckled softly.

"He keeps too much ze glass-eye on ze plate, on ze stamp, heh?"

"That's not all."

"No," Pierre continued; "he mek ze sample; he mek ze assay, hall ze time."

"That's not all, either. He——"

"A—a—ah! He bin mek ze viseete in ze mill in ze night, all hour, any hour. Ze boy can't sleep, bin keep awake, bin keep ze han'—" Pierre winked knowingly, making a scoop with his hand, and thrusting it into his pocket.

Luna grinned.

"At ze mine ze boy get two stick powdaire, four candle, all day, eh? No take ten, fifteen stick, ten, fifteen candle, use two, four, sell ze res'?" Pierre again winked smilingly.

"You're sizing it up all right."

"*Bien!* I tol' you. Ze hol' man, he's bin hall right. I tol' you look out. Bimeby I tol' you again. Goslow. Da's hall."

Morrison was getting impatient.

"What's the use of barking our shins, climbing for last year's birds' nests? The facts are just as I told you. The old man's getting too fly. The boys are getting tired of it. The question is, how are we going to stop him? If we can't stop him can we get rid of him?"

"I can tell you one way to stop him, and get rid of him at the same time," Luna broke in.

"How is that?" asked Morrison.

"Cut the cable when he goes up on the tram."

"Will you take the job?" Morrison asked, sarcastically.

Luna's enthusiasm waned under the question.

"Such things have happened."

"Some odder tings also happens." Pierre slipped an imaginary rope around his neck.

Morrison passed the remark and started in on a line of his own.

"I've been telling Luna and some of the other boys what I think. I don't mind their making a little on the side. It's no more than they deserve, and the company can stand it. It doesn't amount to much, anyway. But what I do kick about is this everlasting spying around all the time. It's enough to make a thief out of an honest man. If you put a man on his honour, he isn't going to sleep on shift, even if the supe doesn't come in on him, every hour of the night. Anyway, a supe ought to know when a man does a day's work. Isn't that so?" He looked at Luna.

"That's right, every time."

"Then there's another point. A man has some rights of his own, if he does work for $3 a day. The old man is all the time posting notices at the mine and at the mill. He tells men what days they can get their pay, and what days they can't. If a man quits, he's got to take a time-check that isn't worth face, till pay-day. Now what I want to know is this: Haven't the men just as good a right to post notices as the company has?" Morrison was industriously addressing Pierre, but talking at Luna. Pierre made no response, so Luna spoke instead.

"I've been thinking the same thing."

Morrison turned to Luna.

"Well, I'll tell you. You fellows don't know your rights. When you work eight hours the company owes you three dollars. You have a right to your full pay any time you want to ask for it. Do you get it? Not much. The company says pay-day is the 15th of every month. You have nothing to say about it. You begin to work the first of one month. At the end of the month the company makes up the payroll. On the 15th you get pay for last month's work. The 15th, suppose you want to quit. You ask for your time. Do you get your pay for the fifteen days? Not much. They give you a time-check. If you'll wait thirty days you'll get a bank-check or cash, just as they choose. Suppose you want your money right away, do you get it?" Morrison looked fixedly at Luna.

Luna shook his head in reply.

"Of course not. What do you do? Why, you go to a bank, and if the company's good the bank will discount your check—one, two, three, or five per cent. Your time amounts to $60, less board. The bank gives you, instead of $60, $57, which means that you put in one hard day's work to get what's your due."

"The law's done away with time-checks," objected Luna.

"Oh, yes, so it has. Says you must be paid in full." Morrison called on all his sarcasm to add emphasis to his words. "So the company complies with the law. It writes out a bank-check for $60, but dates it thirty days ahead, so the bank gets in its work, just the same."

Luna glanced cunningly from Morrison to Pierre.

"It strikes me that the Blue Goose isn't giving the bank a fair show. I never cashed in at the bank."

"What time ze bank open, eh?" Pierre asked, languidly.

"Ten to four." Luna looked a trifle puzzled.

"*Bien!* Sunday an' ze holiday?" pursued Pierre.

"'Tain't open at all."

"*Très bien!* Ze Blue Goose, she mek open hall ze time, day, night, Sunday, holiday."

"Well, you get paid for it," answered Luna, doggedly.

"Oh, that isn't all," Morrison interrupted, impatiently. "I just give you this as one example. I can bring up a thousand. You know them as well as I do. There's no use going over the whole wash." There was no reply. Morrison went on, "There's no use saying anything about short time, either. You keep your own time; but what does that amount to? You take what the company gives you. Of course, the law will take your time before the company's; but what does that amount to? Just this: You're two or three dollars shy on your time. You go to law about it, and you'll get your two or three dollars; but it will cost you ten times as much; besides, you'll be blacklisted."

It may appear that Morrison was training an able-bodied Gatling on a very small corporal's guard, and so wasting his ammunition. The fact is, Morrison was an active dynamo to which Luna, as an exhausted battery, was temporarily attached. Mr. Morrison felt very sure that if Luna were properly charged he would increase to a very large extent the radius of dynamic activity.

Inwardly Pierre was growing a little restless over Morrison's zeal. It was perfectly true that in the matter of paying the men the company was enforcing an arbitrary rule that practically discounted by a small per cent. the men's wages; but the men had never objected. Understanding the reason, they had never even considered it an injustice. There was no bank at Pandora, and it was not a very safe proceeding for a company, even, to carry a large amount of cash. Besides, the men knew very well that the discount did not benefit the company in the least. An enforcement of the law would interfere with Pierre's business. If Pierre found no butter on one side of his toast, he was accustomed to turn it over and examine the other side before he made a row. Recalling the fact that last impressions are the strongest, he proceeded to take a hand himself. He turned blandly to Luna.

"How long you bin work in ze mill?" he asked.

"About a year."

"You get ze check every month?"

"Why, yes; of course."

"How much he bin discount?"

"Nothing."

"*Bien!* You mek ze kick for noddings?"

"I don't know about that," remarked Luna. "The way I size it up, that's about all that's coming my way. It's kick or nothing."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Morrison.

The door swung open, and the mine foreman entered.

"Why, howdy, Jim? You're just the fellow we've been waiting for. How's things at the mine?"

"Damned if I know!" replied Jim, tossing his hat on the floor. "The old man's in the mix-up, so I don't know how much I'm supposed to know."

"What are you supposed to know?" Morrison was asking leading questions.

"Well, for one thing, I'm supposed to know when a man's doing a day's work."

"Well, don't you?"

"Not according to the old man. He snoops around and tells me that this fellow's shirking, and to push him up; that that fellow's not timbering right, doesn't know his business, that I'd better fire him; that the gang driving on Four are soldiering, that I'd better contract it."

"Contract it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Did you?"

"I had to!"

"How are the contractors making out?"

"Kicking like steers; say they ain't making wages."

"Who measures up?"

"The old man, of course."

"Uses his own tape and rod, eh?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; only, if I were you, I'd just look over his measures. You never heard of tapes that measured thirteen inches to the foot, did you? Nor of rods that made a hole three feet, when it was four?"

"What are you feeding us?" the foreman asked, in surprise.

"Pap. You're an infant. So's the gang of you."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this." Morrison looked wearied. "Thirteen inches to the foot means eight and one-third feet to the hundred. That is, it's likely the contractors are doing one hundred and eight feet and four inches, and getting pay for a hundred. No wonder they're kicking. That's $75 to the good for the company."

"I never thought of that," replied the foreman.

"I don't know that it's to be wondered at," answered Morrison. "After a man's pounded steel all day and got his head full of powder smoke, he's too tired and sick to think of anything. How are you coming on with the organisation?"

"Oh, all right. Most of the boys will come in all right. Some are standing off, though. Say they'd as soon be pinched by the company as bled by the union."

"Oh, well, don't trouble them too much. We'll attend to them later on. It's going to be a bad climate for scabs when we get our working clothes on."

"It means a strike to get them out."

To this sentiment Luna acquiesced with an emphatic nod.

"Strike!" ejaculated Morrison. "That's just what we will do, and pretty soon, too!" He was still smarting with the memory of Bennie's words.

Pierre again took a hand.

"Who mek ze troub', heh? Meestaire Firmstone. I bin tol' you he's smooth stuff, ver' smooth stuff. You mek ze strike. *P'quoi?* Mek Meestaire Firmstone quit, eh? *Bien!* You mek ze strike, you mek Meestaire Firmstone keep his job. *P'quoi?* Ze company say Meestaire Firmstone one good man; he mek ze boy kick. *Bien!* Meester Firmstone, he stay."

"He'll stay, anyway," growled Morrison, "unless we can get him out."

Pierre shook his head softly.

"Ze strike mek him to stay."

"What do you propose, then?" asked Morrison, impatiently.

"Meestaire Jim at ze mine bin foreman. Meestaire Luna at ze mill bin foreman. Slick men! Ver' slick men! An' two slick men bin ask hol' Pierre, one hol' Frenchmans, how mek for Meestaire Firmstone ze troub'." Pierre shook his head deprecatingly. "Mek one suppose. Mek suppose ze mill all ze time broke down. Mek suppose ze mine raise hell. *Bien!* Bimeby ze company say, 'Meestaire Firmstone bin no good.'"

"Frenchy's hitting pay dirt all right," commented Luna. "That's the stuff!"

Pierre rose to his feet excitedly.

"*Bien!* Ze mill broke down and ze mine blow hup. Bimeby ze company say, 'Meestaire Firmstone mek *beaucoup* ze troub' all ze time!' *Bien!* Ze steel get hin ze roll, ze stamp break, ze tram break, ze men kick. Hall ze time Meestaire Firmstone mek ze explain. *Comment!* 'Meestaire Firmstone, you ain't bin fit for no superintend. Come hoff; we bin got anodder fel'.'"

Luna expressed his comprehension of Pierre's plan. He was seconded by the mine foreman. Morrison was not wholly enthusiastic; but he yielded.

"Well," he said, "warm it up for him. We'll give it a try, anyway. I'd like to see that smooth-faced, glass-eyed company minion dancing on a hot iron."

The assembly broke up. The very next day the warming process began in earnest.

CHAPTER X

Élise Goes Forth to Conquer

Élise had been environed by very plebeian surroundings. Being ignorant of her birth-right, her sympathies were wholly with her associates. Not that as yet they had had any occasion for active development; only the tendencies were there. In a vague, indefinite way she had heard of kings and queens, of lords and ladies, grand personages, so far above common folk that they needs must have mongrel go-betweens to make known their royal wills. Though she knew that kings and queens had no domain beneath the eagle's wings, she had absorbed the idea that in the distant East there was springing up a thrifty crop of nobilities who had very royal wills which only lacked the outward insignia. These, having usurped that part of the eagle's territory known as the East, were now sending into the as yet free West their servile and unscrupulous minions.

This was common talk among the imported citizens who flocked nightly to the Blue Goose, and in this view of the case the home-made article coincided with its imported fellows. There were, however, a few independents like Bennie, and these had a hard row of corn. By much adulation the spirit of liberty was developing tyrannical tendencies, and by a kind of cross-fertilization was inspiring her votaries with the idea that freedom meant doing as they pleased, and dissenters be damned!

On this evening Élise was in attendance as usual at the little arcade, which was divided from the council-room by a thin partition only. Consequently, she had overheard every word that passed between Pierre and his visitors. She had given only passive attention to Morrison's citation of grievances; but to his proposed plan of action she listened eagerly.

Her sympathies were thoroughly enlisted over his proposed strike more than over Pierre's artful suggestion of covert nagging. Not that she considered an ambushed attack, under the circumstances, as reprehensible, but rather because open attack revealed one's personality as much as the other course concealed it. The first year only of humanity is wholly satisfied, barring colic, with the consciousness of existence. The remaining years are principally concerned with impressing it upon others.

Élise was very far from possessing what might be termed a retiring disposition. This was in a large measure due to a naturally vivacious temperament; for the rest, it was fostered by peculiarly congenial surroundings. In this environment individuality was free to express itself until it encountered opposition, when it was still more freely stimulated to fight for recognition,

and, by sheer brute force, to push itself to the ascendant. This being the case, Élise was sufficiently inspired by the exigencies of the evening to conceive and plan an aggressive campaign on her own account. Being only a girl, she could not take part either in Morrison's open warfare, or in Pierre's more diplomatic intrigues. Being a girl, and untrammelled by conventionalities, she determined upon a raid of her own. Her objective point was none other than Firmstone himself. Having come to this laudable conclusion, she waited impatiently an opportunity for its execution.

Early one morning, a few days later, Élise saw Firmstone riding unsuspiciously by, on his way to the mine. Previous observations had taught her to expect his return about noon. So without ceremony, so far as Pierre and Madame were concerned, Élise took another holiday, and followed the trail that led to the mine. At the falls, where she had eaten breakfast with Zephyr, she waited for Firmstone's return.

Toward noon she heard the click of iron shoes against the rocks, and, scattering the flowers which she had been arranging, she rose to her feet. Firmstone had dismounted and was drinking from the stream. She stood waiting until he should notice her. As he rose to his feet he looked at her in astonished surprise. Above the average height, his compact, athletic figure was so perfectly proportioned that his height was not obtrusive. His beardless face showed every line of a determination that was softened by mobile lips which could straighten and set with decision, or droop and waver with appreciative humour. His blue eyes were still more expressive. They could glint with set purpose, or twinkle with quiet humour that seemed to be heightened by their polished glasses.

Élise was inwardly abashed, but outwardly she showed no sign. She stood straight as an arrow, her hands clasped behind her back, every line of her graceful figure brought out by her unaffected pose.

"So you are the old man, are you?" The curiosity of the child and the dignity of the woman were humorously blended in her voice and manner.

"At your service." Firmstone raised his hat deliberately. The dignity of the action was compromised by a twinkle of his eyes and a wavering of his lips.

Élise looked a little puzzled.

"How old are you?" she asked, bluntly.

"Twenty-eight."

"That's awfully old. I'm sixteen," she answered, decisively.

"That's good. What next?"

"What's a minion?" she asked. She was trying to deploy her forces for her premeditated attack.

"A minion?" he repeated, with a shade of surprise. "Oh, a minion's a fellow who licks the boots of the one above him and kicks the man below to even up."

Élise looked bewildered.

"What does that mean?"

"Oh, I see." Firmstone's smile broadened. "You're literal-minded. According to Webster, a minion is a man who seeks favours by flattery."

"Webster!" she exclaimed. "Who's Webster?"

"He's the man who wrote a lexicon."

"A lexicon? What's a lexicon?"

"It's a book that tells you how to spell words, and tells you what they mean."

Élise looked superior.

"I know how to spell words, and I know what they mean, too, without looking in a—. What did you call it?"

"Lexicon. I thought you just said you knew what words meant."

"I didn't mean big words, just words that common folks use."

"You aren't common folks, are you?"

"That's just what I am," Élise answered, aggressively, "and we aren't ashamed of it, either. We're just as good as anybody," she ended, with a toss of her head.

"Oh, thanks." Firmstone laughed. "I'm common folks, too."

"No, you aren't. You're a minion. M'sieu Mo-reeson says so. You're a capitalistic hireling sent out here to oppress the poor workingman. You use long tape-lines to measure up, and short rods to measure holes, and you sneak in the mill at night, and go prying round the mine, and posting notices, and—er—oh, lots of things. You ought to be ashamed of yourself." She paused in breathless indignation, looking defiantly at Firmstone.

Firmstone chuckled.

"Looks as if I were a pretty bad lot, doesn't it? How did you find out all that?"

"I didn't have to find it out. I hear M'sieu Mo-reeson and Daddy and Luna and lots of others talking about it. Daddy says you're 'smooth, ver' smooth stuff,'" she mimicked. Élise disregarded minor contradictions. "'Twon't do you any good, though. The day is not far distant when down-trodden labour will rise and smite the oppressor. Then——" her lips were still parted, but memory failed and inspiration refused to take its place. "Oh, well," she concluded, lamely, "you'll hunt your hole all right."

"You're an out-and-out socialist, aren't you?"

"A socialist?" Élise looked aghast. "What's a socialist?"

"A socialist is one who thinks that everyone else is as unhappy and discontented as he is, and that anything that he can't get is better than what he can. Won't you be seated?" Firmstone waved her to a boulder.

Élise seated herself, but without taking her eyes from Firmstone's face.

"Now you're making fun of me."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you sit there and grin and grin all the time, and use big words that you know I can't understand. Where did you learn them?"

"At school."

"Oh, you've been to school, then, have you?"

"Yes."

"How long did you go to school?"

"Ten or twelve years, altogether."

"Ten or twelve years! What an awful stupid you must be!" She looked at him critically; then, with a modifying intonation, "Unless you learned a whole lot. I know I wouldn't have to go to school so long." She looked very decided. Then, after a pause, "You must have gone clear through your arithmetic. Zephyr taught me all about addition and division and fractions, clear to square root. I wanted to go through square root, but he said he didn't know anything about square root, and it wasn't any use, anyway. Did you go through square root?"

"Yes. Do you want me to teach you square root?"

"Oh, perhaps so, some time," Élise answered, indifferently. "What else did you study?"

"Algebra, trigonometry, Latin, Greek." Firmstone teasingly went through the whole curriculum, ending with botany and zoology.

Élise fairly gasped.

"I never knew there was so much to learn. What's zoo—what did you call it—about?"

"Zoology," explained Firmstone; "that teaches you about animals, and botany teaches you about plants."

"Oh, is that all?" Élise looked relieved, and then superior. "Why, I know all about animals and plants and birds and things, and I didn't have any books, and I never went to school, either. Do all the big folks back East have to have books and go to school to learn such things? They must be awful stupids. Girls don't go to school out here, nor boys either. There aren't any schools out here. Not that I know of. Mammy says I must go to school somewhere. Daddy says I sha'n't. They have no end of times over it, and it's lots of fun to see daddy get mad. Daddy says I've got to get married right away. But I won't. You didn't tell me if girls went to school with you."

"No; they have schools of their own."

Élise asked many questions. Then, suddenly dropping the subject, she glanced up at the sun.

"It's almost noon, and I'm awfully hungry. I think I'll have to go."

"I'll walk down with you, if you'll allow me."

He slipped his arm through the bridle and started down the trail. Élise walked beside him, plying him with questions about his life in the East, and what people said and did. Firmstone dropped his teasing manner and answered her questions as best he could. He spoke easily and simply of books and travel and a thousand and one things that her questions and comments suggested. Her manner had changed entirely. Her simplicity, born of ignorance of the different stations in life which they occupied, displayed her at her best. Her expressive eyes widened and deepened, and

the colour of her cheeks paled and glowed under the influence of the new and strange world of which he was giving her her first glimpse.

They reached the Blue Goose. Firmstone paused, raising his hat as he turned toward her. But Élise was no longer by his side. She had caught sight of Morrison, who was standing on the top step, glowering savagely, first at her, then at Firmstone.

Morrison was habilitated in his usual full dress—that is, in his shirt-sleeves, unbuttoned vest, a collarless shirt flecked with irregular, yellowish dots, and a glowing diamond. Just now he stood with his hands in his pockets and his head thrust decidedly forward. His square, massive jaw pressed his protruding lips against his curled moustache. His eyes, narrowed to a slit, shot forth malignant glances, his wavy hair, plastered low upon a low forehead and fluffed out on either side, flattened and broadened his head to the likeness of a venomous serpent preparing to strike.

Élise reached the foot of the stone steps, shot a look of fierce defiance at the threatening Morrison, then she turned toward Firmstone, with her head bent forward till her upturned eyes just reached him from beneath her arching brows. She swept him a low courtesy.

"Good-bye, Mr. Minion!" she called. "I've had an awfully nice time."

She half turned her head toward Morrison, then, as Firmstone lifted his hat in acknowledgment, she raised her hand to her laughing lips and flung him a kiss from the tips of her fingers. Gathering her skirts in her hand, she darted up the steps and nearly collided with Morrison, who had deliberately placed himself in her way.

She met Morrison's indignant look with the hauteur of an offended goddess. Morrison's eyes fell from before her; but he demanded:

"Where did you pick up that—that scab?" It was the most opprobrious epithet he could think of.

Élise's rigid figure stiffened visibly.

"It's none of your business."

"What have you been talking about?"

"It's none of your business. Is there any more information you want that you won't get?"

"I'll make it my business!" Morrison burst out, furiously. "I'll——"

"Go back to your gambling and leave me alone!" With unflinching eyes, that never left his face, she passed him almost before he was aware of it, and entered the open door.

Could Morrison have seen the change that came over her face, as soon as her back was toward him, he might have gained false courage, through mistaking the cause. Loathing and defiance had departed. In their place were bewildering questionings, not definite, but suggested. For the first time in her life her hitherto spontaneous actions waited approbation before the bar of judgment. The coarse, venomous looks of Morrison ranged themselves side by side with the polished ease and deference of Firmstone.

As she passed through the bar-room long accustomed sights were, for the first time, seen, not clearly, but comparatively. In the corridor that led to the dining-room she encountered Pierre. She did not speak to him. The quick eyes of the little Frenchman noted the unwonted expression, but he did not question her. At the proper time he would know all. Meantime his concern was not to forget.

Élise opened the door of the dining-room and entered. Madame looked up as the door closed. Élise stood with distant eyes fixed upon the pathetically plain little woman. Never before had she noticed the lifeless hair strained from the colourless tan of the thin face, the lustreless eyes, the ill-fitting, faded calico wrapper that dropped in meaningless folds from the spare figure. Madame waited patiently for Élise to speak, or to keep silence as she chose. For a moment only Élise stood. The next instant Madame felt the strong young arms about her, felt hot, decided kisses upon her cheeks. Madame was surprised. Élise was fierce with determination. Élise was doing penance. Madame did not know it.

Élise left Madame standing bewildered, and darted upstairs to her little room. She flung herself on her bed and fought—fought with ghostly, flitting shadows that elusively leered from darker shades, grasped at fleeting phantoms that ranged themselves beside the minatory demons, until at last she grew tired and slept.

Élise had left the Blue Goose in the morning, a white-winged, erratic craft, skimming the sparkling, land-locked harbours of girlhood. She returned, and already the first lifting swells beyond the sheltering bar were tossing her in their arms. She had entered the shoreless ocean of womanhood.

Pierre passed from the corridor to the bar-room. He glanced from the bar to the gaming-tables, where a few listless players were engaged at cards, and finally stepped out upon the broad piazza. He glanced at Morrison, who was following Firmstone with a look of malignant hatred.

"Meestaire Firmstone, he bin come from ze mine?"

"To hell with Firmstone!" growled Morrison. He turned and entered the saloon.

Pierre followed him with knowing eyes.

"To hell wiz Firmstone, heh?" He breathed softly. "*Bien!*"

Pierre stood looking complacently over the broken landscape. Much understanding was coming to him. The harmlessness of the dove radiated from his beaming face, but the wisdom of the serpent was shining in his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

The Devil's Elbow

If Firmstone had flattered himself that his firm but just treatment of Luna in the case of the stolen ore had cleared his path of difficulties he would have been forced by current events to a rude awakening. He had been neither flattered nor deceived. He knew very well that a prop put under an unstable boulder may obscure the manifestation of gravity; but he never deceived himself with the thought that it had been eliminated. The warming-up process, recommended by Pierre, was being actively exploited. Scarcely a day passed but some annoying accident at the mine or mill occurred, frequently necessitating prolonged shut-downs. Day by day, by ones, by twos, by threes, his best men were leaving the mine. There was no need to ask them why, even if they would have given a truthful answer. He knew very well why. Yet he was neither disheartened nor discouraged. He realised the fact clearly, as he had written to his Eastern employers that it would take time and much patient endeavour to restore order where chaos had reigned so long undisturbed. There was another element impeding his progress which he by no means ignored—that was the Blue Goose.

He had no tangible evidence against the resort beyond its obvious pretensions. He had no need of the unintentional but direct evidence of Élise's words that the habitués of the Blue Goose there aired their grievances, real or imagined, and that both Pierre and Morrison were assiduously cultivating this restlessness by sympathy and counsel. He was morally certain of another fact—that the Blue Goose was indirectly, at least, at the bottom of the extensive system of thieving, in offering a sure market for the stolen gold. This last fact had not especially troubled him, for he felt sure that the careful system of checks which he had inaugurated at the outset would eventually make the stealing so dangerous that it would be abandoned.

So far in the history of the camp, when once the plates were cleaned and gold, as ingots, was in possession of the company, it had been perfectly safe. No attempts at hold-ups had ever been made. Yet Firmstone had provided, in a measure, safeguards against this possibility. The ingots had been packed in a small steel safe and shipped by stage to the nearest express office, about ten miles distant. Shipments had not been made every day, of course. But every day Firmstone had sent the safe, loaded with pigs of lead. The next day the safe was returned, and in it was the agent's receipt. Whether the safe carried gold or lead, the going and the returning weight was the same. If the safe carried gold enough lead was added by the express agent to make the returning weight the same. This fact was generally known, and even if a stage hold-up should be attempted, the chances were thirty to one that a few pounds of lead would be the only booty of the robbers.

This afternoon Firmstone was at his office-desk in a meditative and relieved frame of mind. He was meditative over his troubles that, for all his care, seemed to be increasing. Relieved in that, but an hour before, $50,000 in bullion had been loaded into the stage, and was now rolling down the cañon on the way to its legitimate destination. His meditations were abruptly broken, and his sense of relief violently dissipated, when the office-door was thrust open, and hatless, with clothing torn to shreds, the stage-driver stood before him, his beard clotted with blood which flowed from a jagged cut that reached from his forehead across his cheek.

Firmstone sprang to his feet with a startled exclamation. The driver swept his hand over his blood-clotted lips.

"No; 'tain't a hold-up; just a plain, flat wreck. The whole outfit went over the cliff at the Devil's Elbow. I stayed with my job long's I could, but that wa'n't no decades."

Firmstone dragged the man into his laboratory, and carefully began to wash the blood from his face.

"That's too long a process, gov'ner." The driver soused his head into the bucket of cold water which Firmstone had drawn from the faucet.

"Can you walk now?" Firmstone asked.

"Reckon I'll try it a turn. Been flyin', for all I know. Must have been, to get up the cliff. I flew down; that much I know. Lit on a few places. That's where I got this." He pointed to the cut.

Firmstone led the man to his own room adjoining the office, and opening a small chest, took out some rolls of plaster and bandages. He began drying the wound.

The office-door again opened and the bookkeeper entered.

"Go tell Bennie to come down right away," Firmstone ordered, without pausing in his work.

Satisfied that the man's skull was not fractured, he drew the edges of the wound together and fastened them with strips of plaster. A few minutes later Bennie, followed by Zephyr, hurriedly entered the office. Paying no attention to their startled exclamations, Firmstone said:

"I wish you would look after Jim. He's badly hurt. He'll tell you about it. You said at the Devil's Elbow?" turning to the driver.

Zephyr glanced critically at the man; then, making up his mind that he was not needed, he said:

"I'll go along with you. Are you heeled?"

Firmstone made no audible reply, but took down his revolver and cartridge-belt, and buckled them on.

"'Tain't the heels you want; it's wings and fins. They won't be much good, either. The whole outfit's in the San Miguel. I followed it that far, and then pulled out." The driver was attempting to hold out gamely, but the excitement and the severe shaking-up were evidently telling on him.

Firmstone and Zephyr left the office and followed the wagon-trail down the cañon. Neither spoke a word.

They reached the scene of the wreck and, still silent, began to look carefully about. A hundred feet below them the San Miguel, swollen by melting snows, foamed and roared over its boulder-strewn bed. Near the foot of the cliff one of the horses was impaled on a jagged rock; its head and shoulders in the lapping water. In mid-stream and further down the other was pressed by the current against a huge rock that lifted above the flood. No trace of the stage was to be seen. That, broken into fragments by the fall, had been swept away.

The spot where the accident occurred was a dangerous one at best. For some distance after leaving the mill the trail followed a nearly level bench of hard slate rock, then, dipping sharply downward, cut across a long rock-slide that reached to the summit of the mountain a thousand feet above. On the opposite side a square-faced buttress crowded the trail to the very brink of the cañon. The trail followed along the foot of this buttress for a hundred feet or more, and at the edge it again turned from the gorge at an acute angle. At the turning-point a cleft, twenty feet wide, cut the cliff from the river-bed to a point far above the trail. A bridge had spanned the cleft, but it was gone. The accident had been caused by the giving way of the bridge when the stage was on it.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Firmstone turned to Zephyr and Zephyr shook his head.

"That's a superfluous interrogation. Your thinks and mine on this subject under consideration are as alike as two chicks hatched from a double-yolked egg."

"This is no accident." Firmstone spoke decidedly.

Zephyr nodded deliberately.

"That's no iridescent dream, unless you and I have been hitting the same pipe."

"The question is," resumed Firmstone, "was the safe taken from the stage before the accident?" He looked at Zephyr inquiringly.

"That depends on Jim Norwood." Zephyr whistled meditatively, then spoke with earnest decision. "That safe's in the river. The Blue Goose has been setting for some time. This ain't the first gosling that's pipped its shell, and 'tain't going to be the last one, either, unless the nest is broken up."

"That's what I think." Firmstone spoke slowly. "But this is a dangerous game. I didn't think it would go so far."

"It's up to you hard; but that isn't the worst of it. It's going to be up to you harder yet. They never reckoned on Jim's getting out of this alive." Zephyr seated himself, and his hand wandered unconsciously to his shirt. Then, changing his mind, he spoke without looking up. "You don't need this, Goggles, but I'm going to give it to you, just the same. You're heavier calibre and longer range than the whole crowd. But I am with you, and there are others. The gang haven't landed their plunder yet, and, what's more, they aren't going to, either. I'll see to that. You just *restez tranquille*, and give your mind to other things. This little job is about my size."

Firmstone made no reply to Zephyr. He knew his man, knew thoroughly the loyal sense of honour that, though sheltered in humourous, apparently indifferent cynicism, was ready to fight to the death in defence of right.

"I think we might as well go back to the mill. We've seen all there is to be seen here."

They walked back in silence. At the office-door Zephyr paused.

"Won't you come in?" asked Firmstone.

"I think not, dearly beloved. The spirit moveth me in sundry places. In other words, I've got a hunch. And say, Goggles, don't ask any embarrassing questions, if your grub mysteriously disappears. Just charge it up to permanent equipment account, and keep quiet, unless you want

to inquire darkly whether anyone knows what's become of that fellow Zephyr."

"Don't take any risks, Zephyr. A man's a long time dead. You know as well as I the gang you're up against. I think I know what you're up to, and I also think I can help you out."

Firmstone entered the office with no further words. It was the hardest task of many that he had had, to send a report of the disaster to the company, but he did not shrink from it. He made a plain statement of the facts of the case, including the manner in which the bridge had been weakened to the point of giving way when the weight of the stage had been put upon it. He also added that he was satisfied that the purpose was robbery, and that he knew who was at the bottom of the whole business, that steps were being taken to recover the safe; but that the conviction of the plotters was another and a very doubtful proposition. Above all things, he asked to be let alone for a while, at least. The driver, he stated, had no idea that the wrecking of the stage was other than it appeared on the face, an accident pure and simple. The letter was sealed and sent by special messenger to the railroad.

One thing troubled Firmstone. He was very sure that his request to be let alone would not be heeded. Hartwell, the Eastern manager of the company, was a shallow, empty-headed man, insufferably conceited. He held the position, partly through a controlling interest in the shares, but more through the nimble use of a glib tongue that so man[oe]uvred his corporal's guard of information that it appeared an able-bodied regiment of knowledge covering the whole field of mining.

If Firmstone had any weaknesses, one was an open contempt of flatterers and flattery, the other an impolitic, impatient resentment of patronage. There had been no open breaks between the manager and himself; in fact, the manager professed himself an admiring friend of Firmstone to his face. At directors' meetings "Firmstone was a fairly promising man who only needed careful supervision to make in time a valuable man for the company." Firmstone had strongly opposed the shipping of bullion by private conveyance instead of by a responsible express company. In this he was overruled by the manager. Being compelled to act against his judgment, he had done his best to minimise the risk by making dummy shipments each day, as has been explained.

The loss of the month's clean-up was a very serious one, and he had no doubt but that it would result in a visit from the manager, and that the manager would insist upon taking a prominent part in any attempt to recover the safe, if indeed he did not assume the sole direction. The opportunity to add to his counterfeit laurels was too good to be lost. In the event of failure, Firmstone felt that no delicate scruples would prevent the shifting of the whole affair upon his own shoulders.

Firmstone had not made the mistake of minimising the crafty cunning of Pierre, nor of interpreting his troubles at the mine and mill at their obvious values. Cunningly devised as was the wreck of the stage, he felt sure that there was another object in view than the very obvious and substantial one of robbery. With the successful wrecking of the stage there were yet large chances against the schemers getting possession of the safe and its contents. Still, there was a chance in their favour. If neither Pierre nor the company recovered the bullion, Pierre's scheme would not have miscarried wholly. The company would still be in ignorance of the possibilities of the mine. Firmstone arranged every possible detail clearly in his mind, from Pierre's standpoint. His thorough grasp of the entire situation, his unwearying application to the business in hand made further stealing impossible. Pierre was bound to get him out of his position. The agitation inaugurated by Morrison was only a part of the scheme by means of which this result was to be accomplished. A whole month's clean-up had been made. If this reached the company safely, it would be a revelation to them. Firmstone's position would be unassailable, and henceforth Pierre would be compelled to content himself with the yield of the gambling and drinking at the Blue Goose. Whether the bullion ever found its way to the Blue Goose or not, the wrecking of the stage would be in all likelihood the culminating disaster in Firmstone's undoing.

Firmstone's indignation did not burn so fiercely against Pierre and Morrison—they were but venomous reptiles who threatened every decent man—as at the querulous criticisms of his employers, which were a perpetual drag, clogging his every movement, and threatening to neutralise his every effort in their behalf. He recalled the words of an old and successful mine manager:

"You've got a hard row of corn. When you tackle a mine you've got to make up your mind to have everyone against you, from the cook-house flunkey to the president of the company, and the company is the hardest crowd to buck against."

Firmstone's face grew hard. The fight was on, and he was in it to win. That was what he was going to do.

Zephyr, meantime, had gone to the cook-house. He found Bennie in his room.

"How's Jim?" he asked.

"Sleeping. That's good for him. He'll pull out all right. Get on to anything at the bridge?" Bennie was at sharp attention.

"Nothing to get on to, Julius Benjamin. The bridge is gone. So's everything else. It's only a matter of time when Goggles will be gone, too. This last will fix him with the company." Zephyr glanced slyly at Bennie with the last words. "The jig is up. The fiddle's broke its last string, and I'm going,

too."

Bennie's eyes were flaming.

"Take shame to yourself for those words, you white-livered frog-spawn, with a speck in the middle for the black heart of you! You're going? Well, here's the bones of my fist and the toe of my boot, to speed you!"

"You'll have to put me up some grub, Benjamin."

"Grub! It's grub, is it? I'll give you none. Stay here a bit and I'll grub you to more purpose. I'll put grit in your craw and bones in your back, and a sup of glue, till you can stand straight and stick to your friends. Lacking understanding that God never gave you, I'll point them out to you!"

Zephyr's eyes had a twinkle that Bennie's indignation overlooked.

"The Lord never passed you by on the other side, Julius. He put a heavy charge in your bell-muzzle. You're bound to hit something when you go off. If He'd only put a time-fuse on your action, 'twould have only perfect. Not just yet, Julius Benjamin!" Zephyr languidly lifted a detaining hand as Bennie started to interrupt. "I'm going a long journey for an uncertain time. This is for the public. But, Julius, if you'll take a walk in the gloaming each day, and leave an edible bundle in the clump of spruces above the Devil's Elbow you'll find it mysteriously disappears. From which you may infer that I'm travelling in a circle with a small radius. And say, Julius, heave over some of your wind ballast and even up with discretion. You're to take a minor part in a play, with Goggles and me as stars."

"It's lean ore you're working in your wind-mill. Just what does it assay?" Bennie was yet a little suspicious.

"For a man of abundant figures, Julius, you have a surprising appetite for ungarnished speech. But here's to you! The safe's in the river. There's fifty thousand in bullion in the safe that's in the river. The Blue Goose crowd is after the bullion that's in the safe that's in the river. Say, Julius Benjamin, this is hard sledding. It's the story of the House that Jack Built, adapted to present circumstances. I'm going to hang out in the cañon till the river goes down, or till I bag some of the goslings from the Blue Goose. Your part is to work whom it may concern into the belief that I've lit out for my health, and meantime to play raven to my Elijah. Are you on?"

"Yes, I'm on," growled Bennie. "On to more than you'll ever be. You have to empty the gab from your head to leave room for your wits."

CHAPTER XII

Figs and Thistles

Though Zephyr had not explained his plan of operations in detail, Firmstone found no difficulty in comprehending it. It was of prime importance to have the river watched by an absolutely trustworthy man, and Firmstone was in no danger of having an embarrassing number from whom to choose. A day or two of cold, cloudy weather was liable to occur at any time, and this, checking the melting of the snow, would lower the river to a point where it would be possible to search for, and to recover the safe.

It was with a feeling of relief that he tacitly confided the guarding of the river to Zephyr. While he offered no opposition to Zephyr's carrying out his scheme of having his mysterious disappearance reported, he was fully satisfied that it would not deceive Pierre for an instant. Firmstone, however, was deceived in another way. It was a case of harmless self-deception, the factors of which were wholly beyond his control. His reason assured him unmistakably that Hartwell would start at once for Colorado on learning of the loss of the bullion, and that the manager would be a hindrance in working out his plans, if indeed he did not upset them entirely.

Firmstone's confidence in his ability to emerge finally triumphant from his troubles came gradually to strengthen his hope into the belief that he would be let alone. A telegram could have reached him within a week after he had reported the loss, but none came. He was now awaiting a letter.

The bridge had been repaired, and travel resumed. A meagre account of the accident had been noted in the Denver, as well as in the local papers, but no hint was given that it was considered otherwise than as an event incidental to mountain travel. The miraculous escape of the driver was the sole item of interest. These facts gratified Firmstone exceedingly. Pierre was evidently satisfied that the cards were in his own hands to play when and as he would. He was apparently well content to sit in the game with Firmstone as his sole opponent. Firmstone was equally well content, if only——

There came the sharp click of the office gate. Inside the railing stood a slender man of medium height, slightly stooped forward. On his left arm hung a light overcoat. From a smooth face, with a mouth whose thin lips oscillated between assumed determination and cynical half-smiles, a pair of grey eyes twinkled with a humorously tolerant endurance of the frailties of his fellow-men.

"Well, how are you?" The gloved right hand shot out an accompaniment to his words.

Firmstone took the proffered hand.

"Nothing to complain of. This is something of a surprise." This was true in regard to one mental attitude, but not of another. Firmstone voiced his hopes, not his judgment.

"It shouldn't be." The eyes lost their twinkle as the mouth straightened to a line. "I'm afraid you hardly appreciate the gravity of the situation. The loss of $50,000 is serious, but it's no killing matter to a company with our resources. It's the conditions which make such losses possible."

"Yes." Firmstone spoke slowly. The twinkle was in his eyes now. "As I understand it, this is the first time conditions have made such a loss possible."

The significance of the words was lost on Hartwell. The possibility of a view-point other than his own never occurred to him.

"We will not discuss the matter now. I shall be here until I have straightened things out. I have brought my sister with me. Her physician ordered a change of air. Beatrice, allow me to introduce my superintendent, Mr. Firmstone."

A pink and white face, with a pair of frank, blue eyes, looked out from above a grey travelling suit, and acknowledged the curt introduction.

"I am very happy to meet you." Firmstone took the proffered hand in his own.

Miss Hartwell smiled. "Don't make any rash assertions. I am going to be here a long time. Where are you going, Arthur?" She turned to her brother, who, after fidgeting around, walked briskly across the room.

"I'll be back directly. I want to look after your room. Make yourself comfortable for a few minutes." Then addressing Firmstone, "I suppose our quarters upstairs are in order?"

"I think so. Here are the keys. Or will you allow me?"

"No, thanks. I'll attend to it." Hartwell took the keys and left the room.

Firmstone turned to Miss Hartwell.

"What kind of a trip did you have out?"

"Delightful! It was hot and dusty across the plains, but then I didn't mind. It was all so new and strange. I really had no conception of the size of our country before."

"And here, even, you are only a little more than half way across."

"I know, but it doesn't mean much to me."

"Does the altitude trouble you?"

"You mean Marshall Pass?"

"Yes. In part, but you know Denver is over five thousand feet. Some people find it very trying at first."

"Perhaps I might have found it so if I had stopped to think. But I had something else to think of. You know I had a ridiculous sensation, just as if I were going to fall off the world. Now you speak of it, I really think I did gasp occasionally." She looked up smilingly at Firmstone. "I suppose you are so accustomed to such sights that my enthusiasm seems a bore."

"Do you feel like gasping here?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Because you are a thousand feet higher than at Marshall Pass, and here we are three thousand feet below the mine. You would not only have the fear of falling off from the world up there, but the danger of it as well."

Miss Hartwell looked from the office window to the great cliff that rose high above its steep, sloped talus.

"I told Arthur that I was going to see everything and climb everything out here, but I will think about it first."

"I would suggest your seeing about it first. Perhaps that will be enough."

Hartwell bustled into the room with a preoccupied air. "Sorry to have kept you waiting so long."

Miss Hartwell followed her brother from the room and up the stairs.

"Make yourself as comfortable as you can, Beatrice. I gave you full warning as to what you might expect out here. You will have to look out for yourself now. I shall be very busy; I can see that with half an eye."

"I think if Mr. Firmstone is one half as efficient as he is agreeable you are borrowing trouble on a very small margin." Miss Hartwell spoke with decided emphasis.

"Smooth speech and agreeable manners go farther with women than they do in business," Hartwell snapped out.

"I hope you have a good business equipment to console yourself with."

Hartwell made no reply to his sister, but busied himself unstrapping her trunk.

"Dress for supper as soon as you can. You have an hour," he added, looking at his watch.

Hartwell did not find Firmstone on re-entering the office. He seated himself at the desk and began looking over files of reports of mine and mill. Their order and completeness should have pleased him, but, from the frown on his face, they evidently did not.

Firmstone, meanwhile, had gone to the cook-house to warn Bennie of his coming guests, and to advise the garnishing of the table with the whitest linen and the choicest viands which his stores could afford.

"What sort of a crowd are they?" Bennie inquired.

"You'll be able to answer your own question in a little while. That will save you the trouble of changing your mind."

"'Tis no trouble at all, sir! It's a damned poor lobster that doesn't know what to do when his shell pinches!"

Firmstone, laughing, went to the mill for a tour of inspection before the supper hour. Entering the office a little later, he found Hartwell at his desk.

"Well," he asked, "how do you find things?"

Hartwell's eyes were intrenched in a series of absorbed wrinkles that threw out supporting works across a puckered forehead.

"It's too soon to speak in detail. I propose to inform myself generally before doing that."

"That's an excellent plan."

Hartwell looked up sharply. Firmstone's eyes seemed to neutralise the emphasis of his words.

"Supper is ready when you are. Will Miss Hartwell be down soon?"

Miss Hartwell rustled into the room, and her brother led the way to the cook-house.

Bennie had heeded Firmstone's words. Perhaps there was a lack of delicate taste in the assortment of colours, but scarlet-pinks, deep red primroses, azure columbines, and bright yellow mountain sunflowers glared at each other, each striving to outreach its fellow above a matted bed of mossy phlox. Hartwell prided himself, among other things, on a correct eye.

"There's a colour scheme for you, Beatrice; you can think of it in your next study."

Bennie was standing by in much the same attitude as a suspicious bumble-bee.

"Mention your opinion in your prayers, Mr. Hartwell, not to me. They're as God grew them. I took them in with one sweep of my fist."

Miss Hartwell's eyes danced from Firmstone to Bennie.

"Your cook has got me this time, Firmstone." Hartwell grinned his appreciation of Bennie's retort.

They seated themselves, and Bennie began serving the soup. Hartwell was the last. Bennie handed his plate across the table. They were a little cramped for room, and Bennie was saving steps.

"It's a pity you don't have a little more room here, Bennie, so you could shine as a waiter."

"Good grub takes the shortest cut to a hungry man with no remarks on style. There's only one trail when they meet."

Hartwell's manner showed a slight resentment that he was trying to conceal. "This soup is excellent. It's rather highly seasoned"—he looked slyly at Bennie—"but then there's no rose without its thorns."

"True for you. But there's a hell of a lot of thorns with the roses, I take note. Beg pardon, Miss!"

Miss Hartwell laughed. "You have had excellent success in growing them together, Bennie."

"Thank you, Miss!" Bennie was flushed with pleasure. "I've heard tell that there were roses without thorns, but you're the first of the kind I've seen."

Bennie had ideas of duty, even to undeserving objects. Consequently, Hartwell's needs were as carefully attended to as his sister's or Firmstone's, but in spite of all duty there is a graciousness of manner that is only to be had by a payment in kind. Bennie paraded his duty as ostentatiously as his pleasure, and with the same lack of words. Hartwell noted, and kept silence.

Hartwell looked across to the table which Bennie was preparing for the mill crew.

"Do you supply the men as liberally as you do your own table, Firmstone?"

"Just the same."

"Don't think I want to restrict you, Firmstone. I want you to have the best you can get, but it strikes me as a little extravagant for the men."

Bennie considered himself invaded.

"The men pay for their extravagance, sir."

"A dollar a day only, with no risks," Hartwell tendered, rather stiffly.

"I'll trade my wages for your profits," retorted Bennie, "and give you a commission, and I'll bind myself to feed them no more hash than I do now!"

The company rose from the table. For the benefit of Miss Hartwell and Firmstone, Bennie moved across the room with the dignity of a drum-major, and, opening the door, bowed his guests from his presence.

CHAPTER XIII

The Stork and the Cranes

In spite of Élise's declaration that she would see him again, Firmstone dropped her from his mind long before he reached his office. She had been an unexpected though not an unpleasant, incident; but he had regarded her as only an incident, after all. Her beauty and vivacity created an ephemeral interest; yet there were many reasons why it promised to be only ephemeral. The Blue Goose was a gambling, drinking resort, a den of iniquity which Firmstone loathed, a thing which, in spite of all, thrust itself forward to be taken into account. How much worse than a den of thieves and a centre of insurrection it was he had never stated to himself. He, however, would have had no hesitancy in completing the attributes of the place had he been asked. The fact that the ægis of marriage vows spread its protecting mantle over the proprietor, and its shadow over the permanent residents, would never have caused a wavering doubt, or certified to the moral respectability of the contracting parties. Firmstone was not the first to ask if any good thing could come out of Nazareth, or if untarnished purity could dwell in the tents of the Nazarenes. It occasionally happens that a stork is caught among cranes and, even innocent, is compelled to share the fate of its guilty, though accidental, associates.

Thus it happened that when Élise, for the second time, met Firmstone at the falls he hardly concealed his annoyance. Élise was quick to detect the emotion, though innocence prevented her assigning it its true source. There was a questioning pain in the large, clear eyes lifted to Firmstone's.

The look of annoyance on Firmstone's face melted. He spoke even more pleasantly than he felt.

"Well, what I can do for you this time?"

"You can go away from my place and stay away!" Élise flashed out.

Firmstone's smile broadened.

"I didn't know I was a trespasser."

"Well, you are! I had this place before you came, and I'm likely to have it after you are gone!" The eyes were snapping.

"You play Cassandra well." Firmstone was purposely tantalising. He was forgetting the cranes, nor was he displeased that the stork had other weapons than innocence.

Élise's manner changed.

"Who is Cassandra?"

The eager, hungry look of the changing eyes smote Firmstone. The bantering smile disappeared. It occurred to him that Élise might be outdoing her prototype.

"She was a very beautiful lady who prophesied disagreeable things that no one believed."

Élise ignored the emphasis which Firmstone unconsciously placed on *beautiful*. She grew thoughtful, endeavouring to grasp his analogy.

"I think," she said, slowly, "I'm no Cassandra." She looked sharply at Firmstone. "Daddy says you're going; Mo-reeson says you're going, and they put their chips on the right number pretty often."

Firmstone laughed lightly.

"Oh, well, it isn't for daddy and Morrison to say whether I'm to go or not."

"Who's this Mr. Hartwell?" Élise asked, abruptly.

"He's the man who can say."

"Then you are up against it!" Élise spoke with decision. There was a suggestion of regret in her eyes.

"These things be with the gods." Firmstone was half-conscious of a lack of dignity in seeming to be interested in personal matters, not intended for his immediate knowledge. Several times he had decided to end the episode, but the mobile face and speaking eyes, the half-childish innocence and unconscious grace restrained him.

"I don't believe it." Élise looked gravely judicial.

"Why not?"

"Because God knows what he's about. Mr. Hartwell doesn't; he is only awfully sure he does."

Firmstone chuckled softly over the unerring estimate which Élise had made. He began gathering up the reins, preparatory to resuming his way. Élise paid no attention to his motions.

"Don't you want to see my garden?" she asked.

"Is that an invitation?"

"Yes."

"You are sure I'll not trespass?"

Élise looked up at him.

"That's not fair. I was mad when I said that."

She turned and hurriedly pushed through the matted bushes that grew beside the stream. There was a kind of nervous restlessness which Firmstone did not recall at their former meeting. They emerged from the bushes into a large arena bare of trees. It was completely hidden from the trail by a semicircle of tall spruces which, sweeping from the cliff on either side of the fall, bent in graceful curves to meet at the margin of the dividing brook. Moss-grown boulders, marked into miniature islands by cleaving threads of clear, cold water, were half hidden by the deep pink primroses, serried-massed about them. Creamy cups of marshmallows, lifted above the succulent green of fringing leaves, hid the threading lines of gliding water. On the outer border clustered tufts of delicate azure floated in the thin, pure air, veiling modest gentians. Moss and primrose, leaf and branch held forth jewelled fingers that sparkled in the light, while overhead the slanting sunbeams broke in iridescent bands against the beaten spray of the falling water. The air, surcharged with blending colours, spoke softly sibilant of visions beyond the power of words, of exaltation born not of the flesh, of opening gates with wider vistas into which only the pure in heart can enter. The girl stood with dreamy eyes, half-parted lips, an unconscious pose in perfect harmony with her surroundings.

As Firmstone stood silently regarding the scene before him he was conscious of a growing regret, almost repentance, for the annoyance that he had felt at this second meeting. Yet he was right in harbouring the annoyance. He felt no vulgar pride in that at their first meeting he had unconsciously turned the girl's open hostility to admiration, or at least to tolerance of himself. But she belonged to the Blue Goose, and between the Blue Goose and the Rainbow Company there was open war. Suppose that in him Élise did find a pleasure for which she looked in vain among her associates; a stimulant to her better nature that hitherto had been denied her? That was no protection to her. Even her unconscious innocence was a weapon of attack rather than a shield of defence. She and she alone would be the one to suffer. For this reason Firmstone had put her from his mind after their first meeting, and for this reason he had felt annoyance when she had again placed herself in his path. But this second meeting had shown another stronger side in the girl before him. That deep in her nature was an instinct of right which her surroundings had not dwarfed. That this instinct was not to be daunted by fear of consequences. She had evidently come to warn him of personal danger to himself. This act carried danger—danger to her, and yet she apparently had not hesitated. Perhaps she did not realise the danger, but was he to hold it of less value on that account? Was he to accept what she gave him, and then through fear of malicious tongues abandon her to her fate without a thought? The idea was revolting, but what could he do? His lips set hard. There must be a way, and he would find it, however difficult. In some way she should have a chance. This chance must take one of two forms: to leave her in her present surroundings, and counteract their tendencies by other influences, or, in some way, to remove her from the Blue Goose.

Firmstone was deeply moved. He felt that his course of action must be shaped by the calmest judgment, if Élise were to be rescued from her surroundings. He must act quickly, intelligently. If he had known of her real parentage he would have had no hesitancy. But he did not know. What he saw was Élise, the daughter of Pierre and Madame. To him they were her parents. Whatever opportunities he offered her, however much she might desire to avail herself of them, they could forbid; and he would be helpless. Élise was under age; she was Pierre's, to do with as he would. This was statute law. Firmstone rebelled against it instinctively; but it was hopeless. He knew Pierre, knew his greed for gold, his lack of scruple as to methods of acquiring it. He did not know Pierre's love for Élise; it would not have weighed with him had he known. For he was familiar

with Pierre's class. Therefore he knew that Pierre would rather see Élise dead than in a station in life superior to his own, where she would either despise him or be ashamed of him. It was useless to appeal to Pierre on the ground of benefit to Élise. This demanded unselfish sacrifice, and Pierre was selfish.

Firmstone tried another opening, and was confronted with another danger. If Pierre suspected that efforts were being made to weaken his hold on Élise there was one step that he could take which would forever thwart Firmstone's purpose. He had threatened to take this step. Firmstone's pulses quickened for a moment, then calmed. His course was clear. The law that declared her a minor gave her yet a minor's rights. She could not be compelled to marry against her own wishes. Élise must be saved through herself. At once he would set in motion influences that would make her present associates repugnant to her. The strength of mind, the hunger of soul, these elements that made her worth saving should be the means of her salvation. Should Pierre attempt to compel her marriage, even Firmstone could defeat him. Persuasion was all that was left to Pierre. Against Pierre's influence he pitted his own.

"Where is Zephyr?" Élise broke the silence.

"Why do you ask?" The Blue Goose was in the ascendant. Firmstone was casting about for time. The question had come from an unexpected direction.

"Because he is in danger, and so are you."

"In danger?" Firmstone did not try to conceal his surprise.

"Yes." Élise made a slightly impatient gesture. "It's about the stage. They will kill him. You, too. I don't know why."

"They? Who are they?"

"Morrison and Daddy."

"Did they know you would meet me to-day?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"You came to warn me?"

"Yes."

Firmstone stretched out his hand and took hers.

"I cannot tell you how much I thank you. But don't take this risk again. You must not. I will be on my guard, and I'll look out for Zephyr, too." He laid his other hand on hers.

At the touch, Élise looked up with hotly flaming cheeks, snatching her hand from his clasp. Into his eyes her own darted. Then they softened and drooped. Her hand reached for his.

"I don't care. I can take care of myself. If I can't, it doesn't matter." Her voice said more than words.

"If you are ever in trouble you will let me know?" Firmstone's hand crushed the little fingers in a tightening grasp.

"Zephyr will help me."

Firmstone turned to go.

"I cannot express my thanks in words. In another way I can, and I will."

CHAPTER XIV

Blinded Eyes

An old proverb advises us to be sure we are right, then go ahead. To the last part of the proverb Hartwell was paying diligent heed; the first, so far as he was concerned, he took for granted. Hartwell was carrying out energetically his declared intention of informing himself generally. He was accumulating a vast fund of data on various subjects connected with the affairs of the Rainbow Company, and he was deriving great satisfaction from the contemplation of the quantity. The idea of a proper valuation of its quality never occurred to him. A caterpillar in action is a very vigorous insect; but by means of two short sticks judiciously shifted by a designing mind he can be made to work himself to a state of physical exhaustion, and yet remain precisely at the same point from whence he started.

Hartwell's idea was a fairly laudable one, being nothing more nor less than to get at both sides of the question at issue individually from each of the interested parties. Early and late he had visited the mine and mill. He had interviewed men and foremen impartially, and the amount of information which these simple sons of toil instilled into his receptive mind would have aroused the suspicions of a less self-centred man.

Of all the sources of information which Hartwell was vigorously exploiting, Luna, on the whole, was the most satisfactory. His guileless simplicity carried weight with Hartwell, and this weight was added to by a clumsy deference that assumed Hartwell's unquestioned superiority.

"You see, Mr. Hartwell, it's like this. There's no need me telling you; you can see it for yourself, better than I can tell it. But it's all right your asking me. You've come out here to size things up generally." Luna was not particularly slow in getting on to curves, as he expressed it. "And so you are sizing me up a bit to see do I know my business and have my eyes open." He tipped a knowing wink at Hartwell. Hartwell nodded, with an appreciative grin, but made no further reply. Luna went on:

"You see, it's like this, as I was saying. Us labouring men are sharp about some things. We have to be, or we would get done up at every turn. We know when a boss knows his business and when he don't. But it don't make no difference whether he does or whether he don't, we have to stand in with him. We'd lose our jobs if we didn't. I'm not above learning from anyone. I ain't one as thinks he knows it all. I'm willing to learn. I'm an old mill man. Been twenty years in a mill—all my life, as you might say—and I'm learning all the time. Just the other day I got on to a new wrinkle. I was standing watching Tommy; he's battery man on Five. Tommy was hanging up his battery on account of a loose tappet. Tommy he just hung up the stamp next the one with the loose tappet, and instead of measuring down, he just drove the tappet on a level with the other, and keyed her up, and had them dropping again inside of three minutes. I watched him, and when he'd started them, I up and says to Tommy, 'Tommy,' says I, 'I'm an old mill man, but that's a new one on me!' Tommy was as pleased as a boy with a pair of red-topped, copper-toed boots. It's too bad they don't make them kind any more; but then, they don't wear out as fast as the new kind. But, as I was saying, some bosses would have dropped on Tommy for that, and told him they didn't want no green men trying new capers."

Luna paused and looked at Hartwell. Hartwell still beamed approbation, and, after casting about for a moment, Luna went on:

"You see, a boss don't know everything, even if he has been to college. Most Eastern companies don't know anything. They send out a boss to superintend their work, and they get just what he tells them, and no more. None of the company men ever come out here to look for themselves. I ain't blaming them in general. They don't know. Now it's truth I'm telling you. I'm an old mill man. Been in the business twenty years, as I was telling you, and your company's the first I ever knew sending a man out to find what's the matter, who knew his business, and wa'n't too big to speak to a common workman, and listen to his side of the story."

It was a strong dose, but Hartwell swallowed it without a visible gulp. Even more. He was immensely pleased. He was gaining the confidence of the honest toiler, and he would get the unvarnished truth.

"This is all interesting, very interesting to me, Mr. Luna. I'm a very strict man in business, but I try to be just. I'm a very busy man, and my time is so thoroughly taken up that I am often very abrupt. You see, it's always so with a business man. He has to decide at once and with the fewest possible words. But I'm always ready to talk over things with my men. If I haven't got time, I make it."

"It's a pity there ain't more like you, Mr. Hartwell. There wouldn't be so much trouble between capital and labour. But, as I was saying, we labouring men are honest in our way, and we have feelings, too."

Luna was getting grim. He deemed that the proper time had arrived for putting his personal ax upon the whirling grindstone. He looked fixedly at Hartwell.

"As I was saying, Mr. Hartwell, us labouring men is honest. We believe in giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, and it grinds us to have the boss come sneaking in on us any time, day or night, just like a China herder. He ain't running the mill all the time, and he don't know about things. Machinery won't run itself, and, as I was saying, there ain't no man knows it all. And if the boss happens to catch two or three of us talking over how to fix up a battery, or key up a loose bull-wheel, he ain't no right to say that we're loafing and neglecting our business, and jack us up for it. As I said, Mr. Hartwell, the labouring man is honest; but if we're sneaked on as if we wasn't, 'tain't going to be very long before they'll put it up that, if they're going to be hung for sheep-stealing, they'll have the sheep first, anyway."

Luna paused more for emphasis than for approbation. That he could see in every line of Hartwell's face. At length he resumed:

"As I said, that ain't all by a long shot. There's all sorts of pipe-dreams floating around about men's stealing from the mine and stealing from the mill. But, man to man, Mr. Hartwell, ain't the superintendent got a thousand chances to steal, and steal big, where a common workman ain't got one?" Luna laid vicious emphasis on the last words, and his expression gave added weight to his words.

To do Hartwell simple justice, dishonesty had never for an instant associated itself in his mind with Firmstone. He deemed him inefficient and lacking a grasp of conditions; but, brought face to face with a question of honesty, there was repugnance at the mere suggestion. His face showed it. Luna caught the look instantly and began to mend his break.

"I'm not questioning any man's honesty. But it's just like this. Why is it that a poor labouring man is always suspected and looked out for, and those as has bigger chances goes free? That's all, and, man to man, I'm asking you if that's fair."

Luna's garrulity was taking a line which Hartwell had no desire to investigate, for the present, at least. He answered directly and abruptly:

"When a man loses a dollar, he makes a fuss about it. When he loses a thousand, he goes on a still hunt."

Luna took his cue. He winked knowingly. "That's all right. You know your business. That's plain as a squealing pulley howling for oil. But I wasn't telling you all these things because you needed to be told. Anyone can see that you can just help yourself. I just wanted to tell you so that you could see that us labouring men ain't blind, even if everyone don't see with eyes of his own the way you're doing. You are the first gentleman that has ever given me the chance, and I'm obliged to you for it. So's the men, too."

Hartwell felt that, for the present, he had gained sufficient information, and prepared to go.

"I'm greatly obliged to you, Mr. Luna, for the information you and your men have given me." He held out his hand cordially. "Don't hesitate to come to me at any time."

Hartwell had pursued the same tactics at the mine, and with the same results. He had carefully refrained from mentioning Firmstone's name, and the men had followed his lead. Hartwell made a very common mistake. He underrated the mental calibre of the men. He assumed that, because they wore overalls and jumpers, their eyes could not follow the pea under the shell which he was nimbly manipulating. In plain English, he was getting points on Firmstone by the simple ruse of omitting to mention his name. There was another and far more important point that never occurred to him. By his course of action he was completely undermining Firmstone's authority. There is not a single workman who will ever let slip an opportunity to give a speeding kick to a falling boss on general principles, if not from personal motives. Hartwell never took this factor into consideration. His vanity was flattered by the deference paid to him, never for a moment dreaming that the bulk of the substance and the whole of the flavour of the incense burned under his nose was made up of resentment against Firmstone, nor that the waning stores were nightly replenished at the Blue Goose. Had Hartwell remained East, as devoutly hoped by Firmstone, it is all but certain that Firmstone's methods would have averted the trouble which was daily growing more threatening.

Hartwell had occasionally dropped in for a social drink at the Blue Goose, and the deferential welcome accorded to him was very flattering. Each occasion was but the prologue to another and more extended visit. The open welcome tendered him by both Pierre and Morrison had wholly neutralised the warnings embodied in Firmstone's reports. He was certain that Firmstone had mistaken for deep and unscrupulous villains a pair of good-natured oafs who preferred to make a living by selling whisky and running a gambling outfit, to pounding steel for three dollars a day.

In starting out on the conquest of the Blue Goose, Hartwell acted on an erroneous concept of the foibles of humanity. The greatness of others is of small importance in comparison with one's own. The one who ignores this truth is continually pulling a cat by the tail, and this is proverbially a hard task. Hartwell's plan was first to create an impression of his own importance in order that it might excite awe, and then, by gracious condescension, to arouse a loyal and respectful devotion. Considering the object of this attack, he was making a double error. Pierre was not at all given to the splitting of hairs, but in combing them along the line of least resistance he was an adept.

Hartwell, having pacified the mine and the mill, had moved to the sanctum of the Blue Goose, with the idea of furthering his benign influence. Hartwell, Morrison, and Pierre were sitting around a table in the private office, Hartwell impatient for action, Pierre unobtrusively alert, Morrison cocksure to the verge of insolence.

"Meestaire Hartwell will do me ze honaire to mek ze drink?" Pierre inquired.

"Thanks." Hartwell answered the question addressed to him. "Mine is brandy."

"A-a-ah! Ze good discrimination!" purred Pierre. "Not ze whisky from ze rotten grain; but ze *eau-de-vie* wiz ze fire of ze sun and ze sweet of ze vine!"

Morrison placed glasses before each, a bottle of soda, and Pierre's choicest brand of cognac on the table.

"Help yourself," he remarked, as he sat down.

Sipping his brandy and soda, Hartwell opened the game.

"You see," he began, addressing Pierre, "things aren't running very smoothly out here, and I have come out to size up the situation. The fact is, I'm the only one of our company who knows a thing about mining. It's only a side issue with me, but I can't well get out of it. My people look to me to help them out, and I've got to do it."

"Your people have ze great good fortune—ver' great." Pierre bowed smilingly.

Hartwell resumed: "I'm a fair man. I have now what I consider sufficient knowledge to warrant me in making some radical changes out here; but I want to get all the information possible, and

from every possible source. Then I can act with a perfectly clear conscience." He spoke decidedly, as he refilled his glass.

"Then fire that glass-eyed supe of yours," Morrison burst out. "You never had any trouble till he came."

Hartwell looked mild reproach. Morrison was going too fast. There was a pause. Morrison again spoke, this time sullenly and without raising his eyes.

"He's queered himself with the men. They'll do him if he stays. They ain't going to stand his sneaking round and treating them like dogs. They——"

"Mistaire Mo-reeson speak bad English, ver' bad." Pierre's words cut in like keen-edged steel. "On ze odder side ze door, it not mek so much mattaire."

Morrison left the room without a word further. There was a look of sullen satisfaction on his face. Hartwell smiled approvingly at Pierre.

"You've got your man cinched all right."

"Hall but ze tongue." Pierre shrugged his shoulders, with a slight wave of his hands.

"Well," Hartwell resumed, "I want to get at the bottom of this stage business. Fifty thousand doesn't matter so much to us; it's the thing back of it. What I want to know is whether it was an accident, or whether it was a hold-up."

"Feefty tousand dollaire!" Pierre spoke musingly. "She bin a lot of monnaie. A whole lot." Pierre hesitated, then looked up at Hartwell.

"Well?" Hartwell asked.

"How you know she bin feefty tousand dollaire hin ze safe?"

"Mr. Firmstone advised me of its shipment."

"*Bien!* Ze safe, where she bin now?"

"In the river."

"A-a-ah! You bin see her, heh?"

"No. The water's too high."

"When ze wattaire bin mek ze godown, you bin find her, heh?"

"I suppose so."

"*Bien!* Mek ze suppose. When ze wattaire mek ze godown, you not find ze safe?"

To some extent, Hartwell had anticipated Pierre's drift, but he preferred to let him take his own course.

"It would look as if someone had got ahead of us."

Pierre waved his hand impatiently. "Feefty tousand dollaire bin whole lot monnaie. Big lot men like feefty tousand dollaire, ver' big lot. Bimeby somebody get ze safe. Zey find no feefty tousand dollaire—only pig lead, heh?" Pierre looked up shrewdly. "Ze men no mek ze talk 'bout feefty tousand dollaire, no mek ze talk 'bout honly pig lead, heh?"

"You think, then, the bullion was never put into the safe?" Hartwell had hardly gone so far as Pierre. "In other words, that Mr. Firmstone kept out the bullion, planned the wreck, caused the report to be spread that there was fifty thousand in the safe, with the idea of either putting it out of the way himself, or that someone else would get it?"

Pierre looked up with well-feigned surprise.

"*Moi?*" he asked. "*Moi?*" He shrugged his shoulders. "I mek ze fact, ze suppose. You mek ze conclude."

Hartwell looked puzzled.

"But," he said, "if what you say is true, there is no other conclusion."

Pierre again shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"*Bien!* I mek no conclude. You mek ze conclude. Ze suppose mek ze conclude. She's bin no mattaire *á moi*. I mek no conclude." Pierre's words and manner both intimated that, so far as he was concerned, the interview was closed.

Pierre was a merciful man and without malice. When he felt that his dagger had made a mortal thrust he never turned it in the wound. In this interview circumstances had forced him farther than he cared to go. He was taking chances, and he knew it. Zephyr was booked to disappear. Others than Zephyr were watching the river. But Zephyr might escape; the company might recover the money. What, then? Only his scheme would have miscarried. The recovery of the money would clear Firmstone and leave him where he was before. Pierre's diagnosis of Hartwell was to the effect that, if an idea was once lodged in his mind, an earthquake would not jar it out

again. Even in this event Pierre's object would be accomplished. Firmstone would have to go.

Hartwell made several ineffectual attempts to draw out Pierre still farther, but the wily Frenchman baffled him at every turn. And there the matter rested. Had Hartwell taken less of Pierre's good brandy, he would hardly have taken so freely of his sinister suggestions. As it was, the mellow liquor began to impart a like virtue to his wits, and led him to clap the little Frenchman's back, as he declared his belief that Pierre was a slick bird, but that his own plumage was smoothly preened as well. Followed by Pierre, he rose to leave the room. His eyes fell upon Élise, sitting quietly at her desk, and he halted.

His outstretched hand had hardly touched the unsuspecting girl when Pierre caught him by the collar, and, with a twist and shove, sent him staggering half-way across the room. Little short of murder was blazing from Pierre's eyes.

"*Crapaud!*" he hissed. "You put ze fingaire hon my li'l Élise! *Sacré mille tonnerre!* I kill you!" Pierre started as if to carry out his threat, but restraining hands held him back, while other hands and feet buffeted and kicked the dazed Hartwell into the street.

The safe guarding of Élise was the one bright spot in Pierre's very shady career. To the fact that it was bright and strong his turning on Hartwell bore testimony. Every point in Pierre's policy had dictated conciliation and sufferance; but now this was cast aside. Pierre rapidly gained control of his temper, but he shifted his animus from the lust of gain to the glutting of revenge.

CHAPTER XV

Bending the Twig

Firmstone had done a very unusual thing for him in working himself up to the point where anything that threatened delay in his proposed rescue of Élise made him impatient. The necessity for immediate action had impressed itself so strongly upon him that he lost sight of the fact that others, even more deeply concerned than himself, might justly claim consideration. He knew that in some way Zephyr was more or less in touch with Pierre and Madame. Just how or why, he was in no mood to inquire.

Only a self-reliant mind is capable of distinguishing between that which is an essential part and that which seems to be. So it happened that Firmstone, when for the second time he met Zephyr at the Devil's Elbow, listened impatiently to the latter's comments on the loss of the safe. When at last he abruptly closed that subject and with equal abruptness introduced the one uppermost in his mind the cold reticence of Zephyr surprised and shocked him.

The two men had met by chance, almost the first day that Firmstone had assumed charge of the Rainbow properties, and each had impressed the other with a feeling of profound respect. This respect had ripened into a genuine friendship. Zephyr saw in Firmstone a man who knew his business, a man capable of applying his knowledge, whose duty to his employers never blinded his eyes to the rights of his workmen, a man who saw clearly, acted decisively, and yielded to the humblest the respect which he exacted from the highest. These characteristics grew on Zephyr until they filled his entire mental horizon, and he never questioned what might be beyond. Yet now he had fear for Élise. Firmstone was so far above her. Zephyr shook his head. Marriage was not to be thought of, only a hopeless love on the part of Élise that would bring misery in the end. This was Zephyr's limit, and this made him coldly silent in the presence of Firmstone's advances. Firmstone was not thus limited. Zephyr's silent reticence was quickly fathomed. His liking for the man grew. He spoke calmly and with no trace of resentment.

"Of course, Élise is nothing to me in a way. But to think of a girl with her possibilities being dwarfed and ruined by her surroundings!" He paused, then added, "I wish my sister had come out with me. She wanted to come."

Zephyr caught at the last words for an instant, then dropped them. His answer was abrupt and non-committal. "There are some things that are best helped by letting them alone."

Firmstone rose. "Good night," he said, briefly, and started for the mill.

Firmstone was disappointed at Zephyr's reception; but he had reasoned himself out of surprise. He had not given up the idea of freeing Élise from her associates. That was not Firmstone.

The next morning, as usual, he met Miss Hartwell at breakfast.

"I am going up to the mine, this morning. Wouldn't you like to go as far as the Falls? It is well worth your effort," he added.

"I would like to go very much." She spoke meditatively.

"If that means yes, I'll have a pony saddled for you. I'll be ready by nine o'clock."

Miss Hartwell looked undecided. Firmstone divined the reason.

"The trail is perfectly safe every way, and the pony is sure-footed, so you have nothing to fear."

"I believe I will go. My brother will never find time to take me around."

"I'll get ready at once."

A seeming accident more often accomplishes desirable results than a genuine one. Firmstone was fairly well satisfied that one excursion to the Falls would incline Miss Hartwell to others. If she failed to meet Élise on one day she was almost certain to meet her on another.

Promptly at nine the horses were at the door, and as promptly Miss Hartwell appeared in her riding habit. In her hand she carried a sketch-book. She held it up, smiling.

"This is one weakness that I cannot conceal."

"Even that needn't trouble you. I'll carry it."

"You seem to have a weakness as well." She was looking at a small box which Firmstone was fastening to his saddle.

"This one is common to us all. We may not be back till late, so Benny put up a lunch. The Falls are near Paradise; but yet far enough this side of the line to make eating a necessity."

They mounted and rode away. Firmstone did not take the usual trail by the Blue Goose, though it was the shorter. The trail he chose was longer and easier. At first he was a little anxious about his guest; but Miss Hartwell's manner plainly showed that his anxiety was groundless. Evidently she was accustomed to riding, and the pony was perfectly safe. The trail was narrow and, as he was riding in advance, conversation was difficult, and no attempt was made to carry it on. At the Falls Firmstone dismounted and took Miss Hartwell's pony to an open place, where a long tether allowed it to graze in peace.

Miss Hartwell stood with her eyes resting on reach after reach of the changing vista. She turned to Firmstone with a subdued smile.

"I am afraid that I troubled you with a useless burden," she said.

"I do not know to what you refer in particular; but I can truthfully deny trouble on general principles."

"Really, haven't you been laughing at me, all this time? You must have known how utterly hopeless a sketch-book and water-colours would be in such a place. I think I'll try botany instead. That appeals to me as more attainable."

Firmstone looked at his watch.

"I must go on. You are quite sure you won't get tired waiting? I have put your lunch with your sketch-book. I'll be back by two o'clock, anyway."

Miss Hartwell assured him that she would not mind the waiting, and Firmstone went on his way.

Miss Hartwell gathered a few flowers, then opened her botany, and began picking them to pieces that she might attach to each the hard name which others had saddled upon it. At first absorbed and intent upon her work, at length she grew restless and, raising her eyes, she saw Élise. On the girl's face curiosity and disapprobation amounting almost to resentment were strangely blended. Curiosity, for the moment, gained the ascendency, as Miss Hartwell raised her eyes.

"What are you doing to those flowers?" Élise pointed to the fragments.

"I am trying to analyse them."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Analysis?" Miss Hartwell looked up inquiringly; but Élise made no reply, so she went on. "That is separating them into their component parts, to learn their structure."

"What for?" Élise looked rather puzzled, but yet willing to hear the whole defence for spoliation.

"So that I can learn their names."

"How do you find their names?"

It occurred to Miss Hartwell to close the circle by simply answering "analysis"; but she forebore.

"The flowers are described in this botany and their names are given. By separating the flowers into their parts I can find the names."

"Where did the book get the names?"

If Miss Hartwell was growing impatient she concealed it admirably. If she was perplexed in mind, and she certainly was, perplexity did not show in the repose of her face. Her voice flowed with the modulated rhythm of a college professor reciting an oft-repeated lecture to ever-changing individuals with an unchanging stage of mental development. If her choice of answer was made in desperation nothing showed it.

"Botanists have studied plants very carefully. They find certain resemblances which are persistent. These persistent resemblances they classify into families. There are other less comprehensive resemblances in the families. These are grouped into genera and the genera are

divided into species and these again into varieties, and a name is given to each."

Élise in her way was a genius. She recognised the impossible. Miss Hartwell's answers were impossible to her.

"Oh, is that all?" she asked, sarcastically. "Have you found the names of these?" Again she pointed to the torn flowers.

Miss Hartwell divided her prey into groups.

"These are the Ranunculaceæ family. This is the Aquilegia Cærulea. This is the Delphinium Occidentale. This belongs to the Polemoniaceæ family, and is the Phlox Cæspitosa. These are Compositæ. They are a difficult group to name." Miss Hartwell was indulging in mixed emotions. Mingled with a satisfaction in reviewing her erudition was a quiet revenge heightened by the unconsciousness of her object.

"You don't love flowers." There was no indecision in the statement.

"Why, yes, I certainly do."

"No; you don't, or you wouldn't tear them to pieces."

"Don't you ever pick flowers?"

"Yes; but I love them. I take them to my room, and they talk to me. They do, too!" Élise flashed an answer to a questioning look of Miss Hartwell, and then went on, "I don't tear them to pieces and throw them away. Not even to find out those hideous names you called them. They don't belong to them. You don't love them, and you needn't pretend you do." Élise's cheeks were flushed. Miss Hartwell was bewildered in mind. She acknowledged it to herself. Élise was teaching her a lesson that she had never heard of before, much less learned. Then came elusive suggestions, vaguely defined, of the two-fold aspect of nature. She looked regretfully at the evidences of her curiosity. She had not yet gone far enough along the new path to take accurate notes of her emotions; but she had an undefined sense of her inferiority, a sense of wrong-doing.

"I am very sorry I hurt you. I did not mean to."

Élise gave a quick look of interrogation. The look showed sincerity. Her voice softened.

"You didn't hurt me; you made me mad. I can help myself. They can't."

Miss Hartwell had left her sketch-book unclosed. An errant breath of wind was fluttering the pages.

"What is that?" Élise asked. "Another kind of book to make you tear up flowers?" Her voice was hard again.

Miss Hartwell took up the open book.

"Perhaps you would like to see these. They may atone for my other wrong-doing."

Élise seated herself and received the sketches one by one as they were handed to her. Miss Hartwell had intended to make comments as necessity or opportunity seemed to demand; but Élise forestalled her.

"This is beautiful; only——" She paused.

Miss Hartwell looked up.

"Only what?"

Élise shook her head impatiently.

"You've put those horrid names on each one of them. They make me think of the ones you tore to pieces."

Miss Hartwell stretched out her hand.

"Let me take them for a moment, please."

Élise half drew them away, looking sharply at Miss Hartwell. Then her face softened, and she placed the sketches in her hand. One by one the offending names were removed.

"I think that is better."

Élise watched curiously, and her expression did not change with the reception of the sketches.

"Don't you ever get mad?" she asked.

"Sometimes."

"That would have made me awfully mad."

"But I think you were quite right. The names are not beautiful. The flowers are."

"That wouldn't make any difference with me. I'd get mad before I thought, and then I'd stick to it anyway."

"That is not right."

Élise looked somewhat rebuked, but more puzzled.

"How old are you?" she asked.

This was too much. Miss Hartwell could not conceal her astonishment. She recovered quickly and answered, with a smile:

"I was twenty-five, last February."

Élise resumed her examination of the water-colours. There was a look of satisfaction on her face.

"Oh, well, perhaps when I get to be as old as that I won't get mad, either. How did you learn to make flowers?" Her attention was fixed all the time on the colours.

"I took lessons."

"Is it very hard to learn?"

"Not very, for some people. Would you like to have me teach you?"

Élise's face was flushed and eager.

"Will you teach me?" she asked.

"Certainly. It will give me great pleasure."

"When can you begin?"

"Now, if you like."

Miss Hartwell had taste, and she had been under excellent instruction. Her efforts had been praised and herself highly commended; but no sweeter incense had ever been burned under her nostrils than the intense absorption of her first pupil. It was not genius; it was love, pure and simple. There was no element of self-consciousness, only a wild love of beauty and a longing to give it expression. Nominally, at least, Miss Hartwell was the instructor and Élise the pupil; but that did not prevent her learning some lessons which her other instructors had failed to suggest. The comments of Élise on the habits and peculiarities of every plant and flower that they attempted demonstrated to Miss Hartwell that the real science of botany was not wholly dependent upon forceps and scalpel. Another demonstration was to the effect that the first and hardest step in drawing, if not in painting, was a clear-cut conception of the object to be delineated. Élise knew her object. From the first downy ball that pushed its way into the opening spring, to the unfolding of the perfect flower, every shade and variety of colour Élise knew to perfection.

Miss Hartwell's lessons had been purely mechanical. She had brought to them determination and faithful application; but unconsciously the object had been herself, not her subject, and her work showed it. Élise was no genius; but she was possessed of some of its most imperative essentials, an utter oblivion of self and an abounding love of her subjects. Miss Hartwell was astonished at her easy grasp of details which had come to her after much laborious effort.

They were aroused by the click of iron shoes on the stony trail as Firmstone rode toward them.

He was delighted that his first attempt at bringing Élise in contact with Miss Hartwell had been so successful. There was a flush of pleasure on Miss Hartwell's face.

"I believe you knew I would not be alone. Why didn't you tell me about Élise?"

"Oh, it's better to let each make his own discoveries, especially if they are pleasant."

Firmstone looked at the paint-smudged fingers of Élise. "You refused my help in square root, and are taking lessons in painting from Miss Hartwell."

"Miss who?"

Firmstone was astonished at the change in the girl's face.

"Miss Hartwell," he answered.

Élise rose quickly to her feet. Brush and pencil fell unheeded from her lap.

"Are you related to that Hartwell at the mill?" she demanded.

"He is my brother."

Fierce anger burned in the eyes of Élise. Without a word, she turned and started down the trail. Miss Hartwell and Firmstone watched the retreating figure for a moment. She was first to recover from her surprise. She began to gather the scattered papers which Élise had dropped. She was utterly unable to suggest an explanation of the sudden change that had come over Élise on hearing her name. Firmstone was at first astonished beyond measure. A second thought cleared his mind. He knew that Hartwell had been going of late to the Blue Goose. Élise, no doubt, had good grounds for resentment against him. That it should be abruptly extended to his sister was no matter of surprise to Firmstone. Of course, to Miss Hartwell he could not even suggest an explanation. They each were wholly unprepared for the finale which came as an

unexpected sequel.

A delicate little hand, somewhat smudged with paint, was held out to Miss Hartwell, who, as she took the hand, looked up into a resolute face, with drooping eyes.

"I got mad before I thought, and I've come back to tell you that it wasn't right."

Miss Hartwell drew the girl down beside her.

"Things always look worse than they really are when one is hungry. Won't you share our lunch?"

With ready tact she directed her words to Firmstone, and she was not disappointed in finding in him an intelligent second. Before many minutes, Élise had forgotten disagreeable subjects in things which to her never lacked interest.

At parting Élise followed the direct trail to the Blue Goose. As Firmstone had hoped, another series of lessons was arranged for.

CHAPTER XVI

An Insistent Question

Had Firmstone been given to the habit of self-congratulation he would have found ample opportunity for approbation in the excellent manner with which his plan for the rescue of Élise was working out. The companionship of Élise and Miss Hartwell had become almost constant in spite of the unpropitious dénouement of their first meeting. This pleased Firmstone greatly. But there was another thing which this companionship thrust upon him with renewed interest. At first it had not been prominent. In fact, it was quite overshadowed while Miss Hartwell's unconscious part in his plan was in doubt. Now that the doubt was removed, his personal feelings toward Élise came to the front. He was neither conceited nor a philanthropist with more enthusiasm than sense. He did not attempt to conceal from himself that philanthropy, incarnated in youth, culture, and a recognised position, directed toward a young and beautiful girl was in danger of forming entangling alliances, and that these alliances could be more easily prevented than obviated when once formed.

Firmstone was again riding down from the mine. He expected to find Élise and Miss Hartwell at the Falls, as he had many times of late. He placed the facts squarely before himself. He was hearing of no one so much as of Élise. Whether this was due to an awakening consciousness on his part or whether his interest in Élise had attracted the attention of others he could not decide. Certain it was that Miss Hartwell was continually singing her praise. Jim, who was rapidly recovering from his wounds and from his general shaking up at the wreck of the stage, let pass no opportunity wherein he might express his opinion.

"Hell!" he remarked. "I couldn't do that girl dirt by up and going dead after all her trouble. Ain't she just fed me and flowered me and coddled me general? Gawd A'mighty! I feel like a delicatessen shop 'n a flower garden all mixed up with angels."

Bennie was equally enthusiastic, but his shadowing gourd had a devouring worm. His commendation of Élise only aroused a resentful consciousness of the Blue Goose.

"It's the way of the world," he was wont to remark, "but it's a damned shame to make a good dog and then worry him with fleas."

There was also Dago Joe, who ran the tram at the mill. Joe had a goodly flock of graduated dagoes in assorted sizes, but his love embraced them all. That the number was undiminished by disease he credited to Élise, and the company surgeon vouched for the truth of his assertions. Only Zephyr was persistently silent. This, however, increased Firmstone's perplexity, if it did not confirm his suspicions that his interest in Élise had attracted marked attention. There was only one way in which his proposed plan of rescue could be carried out that would not eventually do the girl more harm than good, especially if she was compelled to remain in Pandora. Here was his problem—one which demanded immediate solution. He was at the Falls, unconsciously preparing to dismount, when he saw that neither Élise nor Miss Hartwell was there. He looked around a moment; then, convinced that they were absent, he rode on down the trail.

As he entered the town he noted a group of boys grotesquely attired in miner's clothes. Leading the group was Joe's oldest son, a boy of about twelve years. A miner's hat, many sizes too large, was on his head, almost hiding his face. A miner's jacket, reaching nearly to his feet, completed his costume. In his hand he was swinging a lighted candle. The other boys were similarly attired, and each had candles as well. Firmstone smiled. The boys were playing miner, and were "going on shift." He was startled into more active consciousness by shrill screams of agony. The boys had broken from their ranks and were flying in every direction. Young Joe, staggering behind them, was almost hidden by a jet of flame that seemed to spring from one of the pockets of his coat. The boy was just opposite the Blue Goose. Before Firmstone could spur his horse to the screaming child Élise darted down the steps, seized the boy with one hand, with the other tore the flames from his coat and threw them far out on the trail. Firmstone knew what had happened. The miner had left some sticks of powder in his coat and these had caught fire from the lighted

candle. The flames from the burning powder had scorched the boy's hand, licked across his face, and the coat itself had begun to burn, when Élise reached him. She was stripping the coat from the screaming boy as Firmstone sprang from his horse. He took the boy in his arms and carried him up the steps of the Blue Goose. Élise, running up the steps before him, reappeared with oil and bandages, as he laid the boy on one of the tables. Pierre and Morrison came into the bar-room as Firmstone and Élise began to dress the burns. Morrison laid his hand roughly on Firmstone's arm.

"You get back to your own. This is our crowd."

"Git hout! You bin kip-still." Pierre in turn thrust Morrison aside. "You bin got hall you want, Meestaire Firmstone?"

"Take my horse and go for the doctor."

Pierre hastily left the room. The clatter of hoofs showed that Firmstone's order had been obeyed. Élise and Firmstone worked busily at the little sufferer. Oil and laudanum had deadened the pain, and the boy was now sobbing hysterically; Morrison standing by, glaring in helpless rage.

Another clatter of hoofs outside, and Pierre and the company surgeon hurried into the room. The boy's moans were stilled and he lay staring questioningly with large eyes at the surgeon.

"You haven't left me anything to do." The surgeon turned approvingly to Élise.

"Mr. Firmstone did that."

The surgeon laughed.

"That's Élise every time. She's always laying the blame on someone else. Never got her to own up to anything of this kind in my life."

Joe senior and his wife came breathless into the room. Mrs. Joe threw herself on the boy with all the abandon of the genuine Latin. Joe looked at Élise, then dragged his wife aside.

"The boy's all right now, Joe. You can take him home. I'll be in to see him later." The surgeon turned to leave the room.

Joe never stirred; only looked at Élise.

"It's all right, Joe."

The surgeon shrugged his shoulders in mock despair.

"There it is again. I'm getting to be of no account."

Something in Élise's face caused him to look again. Then he was at her side. Taking her arm, he glanced at the hand she was trying to hide.

"It doesn't amount to anything." Élise was trying to free her arm.

From the palm up the hand was red and blistered.

"Now I'll show my authority. How did it happen?"

"The powder was burning. I was afraid it might explode."

"What if it had exploded?"

Firmstone asked the question of Élise. She made no reply. He hardly expected she would. Nevertheless he did not dismiss the question from his mind. As he rode away with the company surgeon, he asked it over and over again. Then he made answer to himself.

CHAPTER XVII

The Bearded Lion

Zephyr was doing some meditation on his own account after the meeting with Firmstone at the Devil's Elbow.

That not only Firmstone's reputation, but his life as well, hung in the balance, Zephyr had visible proof. This material proof he was absently tipping from hand to hand, during his broken and unsatisfactory interview with Firmstone. It was nothing more nor less than a nickel-jacketed bullet which, that very morning, had barely missed his head, only to flatten itself against the rocks behind him.

The morning was always a dull time at the Blue Goose. Morrison slept late. Élise was either with Madame or rambling among the hills. Only Pierre, who seemed never to sleep, was to be counted upon with any certainty.

By sunrise on the day that Firmstone and Miss Hartwell were riding to the Falls Zephyr was up and on his way to the Blue Goose. He found Pierre in the bar-room.

"*Bon jour, M'sieur.*" Zephyr greeted him affably as he slowly sank into a chair opposite the one in which Pierre was seated.

Pierre, with hardly a movement of his facial muscles, returned Zephyr's salutation. From his manner no one would have suspected that, had someone with sufficient reason inquired as to the whereabouts of Zephyr, Pierre would have replied confidently that the sought-for person was bobbing down the San Miguel with a little round hole through his head. Zephyr's presence in the flesh simply told him that, for some unknown reason, his plan had miscarried.

Zephyr lazily rolled a cigarette and placed it between his lips. He raised his eyes languidly to Pierre's.

"M'sieu Pierre mek one slick plan. Ze Rainbow Company work ze mine, ze mill. *Moi*, Pierre, mek ze gol' in mon cellaire." Zephyr blew forth the words in a cloud of smoke.

Pierre started and looked around. His hand made a motion toward his hip pocket. Zephyr dropped his bantering tone.

"Not yet, Frenchy. You'll tip over more soup kettles than you know of." He dropped the flattened bullet on the table and pointed to it. "That was a bad break on your part. It might have been worse for you as well as for me, if your man hadn't been a bad shot."

Pierre reached for the bullet, but Zephyr gathered it in.

"Not yet, M'sieur. It was intended for me, and I'll keep it, as a token of respect. I know M'sieur Pierre. Wen M'sieur Pierre bin mek up ze min' for shoot, M'sieur Pierre bin say,'*Comment!* Zat fellaire he bin too damn smart *pour moi*.' Thanks! Me and Firmstone are much obliged."

Pierre shrugged his shoulders impatiently. Zephyr noted the gesture.

"Don't stop there, M'sieur. Get up to your head. You're in a mess, a bad one. Shake your wits. Get up and walk around. Explode some *sacrés*. Pull out a few handfuls of hair and scatter around. No good looking daggers. The real thing won't work on me, and you'd only get in a worse mess if it did. That's Firmstone, too. We both are more valuable to you alive than dead. Of what value is it to a man to do two others, if he gets soaked in the neck himself?"

Pierre was angered. It was useless to try to conceal it. His swarthy cheeks grew livid.

"*Sacré!*" he blurted. "What you mean in hell?"

"That's better. Now you're getting down to business. When I find a man that's up against a thing too hard for him, I don't mind giving him a lift."

"You lif' and bedam!" Pierre had concluded that pretensions were useless with Zephyr, and he gave his passion full play. Even if he made breaks with Zephyr, he would be no worse off.

"I'll' lif'' all right. 'Bedam' is as maybe. Now, Frenchy, if you'll calm yourself a bit, I'll speak my little piece. You've slated Firmstone and me for over the divide. *P'quoi, M'sieur?* For this. Firmstone understands his business and tends to it. This interferes with your cellar. So Mr. Firmstone was to be fired by the company. You steered that safe into the river to help things along. You thought that Jim would be killed and Firmstone would be chump enough to charge it to a hold-up, and go off on a wrong scent. Jim got off, and Firmstone was going to get the safe. I know you are kind-hearted and don't like to do folks; but Firmstone and me were taking unwarranted liberties with your plans. Now put your ear close to the ground, Frenchy, and listen hard and you'll hear something drop. If you do Firmstone you'll see cross-barred sunlight the rest of your days. I'll see to that. If you do us both it won't make much difference. I've been taking my pen in hand for a few months back, and the result is a bundle of papers in a safe place. It may not be much in a literary way; but it will make mighty interesting reading for such as it may concern, and you are one of them. Now let me tell you one thing more. If this little damned thing had gone through my head on the way to something harder, in just four days you'd be taking your exercise in a corked jug. My game is worth two of yours. Mine will play itself when I'm dead; yours won't."

Pierre's lips parted enough to show his set teeth.

"*Bien!* You tink you bin damn smart, heh? I show you. You bin catch one rattlesnake by ze tail. *Comment?* I show you." Pierre rose.

"Better wait a bit, Frenchy. I've been giving you some information. Now I'll give you some instructions. You've been planning to have Élise married. Don't do it. You've made up your mind not to keep your promise to her dead father and mother. You just go back to your original intentions. It will be good for your body, and for your soul, too, if you've got any. You're smooth stuff, Pierre, too smooth to think that I'm talking four of a kind on a bob-tail flush. Comprenny?"

Pierre's eyes lost their fierceness, but his face none of its determination.

"I ain't going to give hup my li'l Élise. *Sacré, non!*"

"That's for Élise to say. You've got to give her the chance."

There was a moment's pause. "How you bin mek me, heh?" Pierre turned like a cat. There was a challenge in his words; but there were thoughts he did not voice.

Zephyr was not to be surprised into saying more than he intended.

"That's a slick game, Pierre; but it won't work. If you want to draw my fire, you'll have to hang more than an empty hat on a stick. In plain, flat English, I've got you cinched. If you want to feel the straps draw, just start in to buck."

Pierre rose from the table. His eyes were all but invisible. There was no ursine clumsiness in his movements, as he walked to and fro in the bar-room. As became a feline, he walked in silence and on his toes. He was thinking of many a shady incident in his past career, and he knew that with the greater number of his shaded spots Zephyr was more or less familiar. With which of them was Zephyr most familiar, and was there any one by means of which Zephyr could thwart him by threatening exposure? Pierre's tread became yet more silent. He was half crouching, as if ready for a spring. Zephyr had referred to the cellar. There was his weakest spot. Luna, the mill foreman, dozens of men, he could name them every one—all had brought their plunder to the Blue Goose.

Every man who brought him uncoined gold was a thief, and they all felt safe because in the eyes of the law he, Pierre, was one of them. He alone was not safe. Not one of the thieves was certainly known to the others; he was known to them all. It could not be helped. He had taken big chances; but his reward had been great as well. That would not help him, if—Unconsciously he crouched still lower. "If there's any procession heading for Cañon City you'll be in it, too." Someone had got frightened. Luna, probably. Firmstone was working him, and Zephyr was helping Firmstone. Pierre knew well the fickle favour of the common man. A word could destroy his loyalty, excite his fears, or arouse him to vengeance. Burning, bitter hatred raged in the breast of the little Frenchman. Exposure, ruin, the penitentiary! His hand rested on the butt of his revolver as he slowly turned.

Zephyr was leaning on the table. There was a look of languid assurance, of insolent contempt in the eye that was squinting along a polished barrel held easily, but perfectly balanced for instant action.

"Go it, Frenchy." Zephyr's voice was patronising.

Pierre gave way to the passion that raged within him.

"*Sacré nom du diable! Mille tonnerres!* You bin tink you mek me scare, *moi*, Pierre! Come on, Meestaire Zephyr, come on! Fourtin more just like it! Strew de piece hall roun' ze dooryard!"

Zephyr's boots thumped applause.

"A-a-ah! Ze gran' *spectacle*! *Magnifique!* By gar! She bin comedown firsrate. Frenchy, you have missed your cue. Take the advice of a friend. Don't stay here, putting addled eggs under a painted goose. Just do that act on the stage, and you'll have to wear seven-league boots to get out of the way of rolling dollars."

CHAPTER XVIII

Winnowed Chaff

Hartwell had a rule of conduct. It was a Procrustean bed which rarely fitted its subject. Unlike the originator of the famous couch, Hartwell never troubled himself to stretch the one nor to trim the other. If his subjects did not fit, they were cast aside. This was decision. The greater the number of the too longs or the too shorts the greater his complacence in the contemplation of his labours. There was one other weakness that was strongly rooted within him. If perchance one worthless stick fitted his arbitrary conditions it was from then on advanced to the rank of deity.

Hartwell was strongly prejudiced against Firmstone, but was wholly without malice. He suspected that Firmstone was at least self-interested, if not self-seeking; therefore he assumed him to be unscrupulous. Firmstone's words and actions were either counted not at all, or balanced against him.

In approaching others, if words were spoken in his favour, they were discounted or discarded altogether. Only the facts that made against him were treasured, all but enshrined. Even in his cynical beliefs Hartwell was not consistent. He failed utterly to take into account that it might suit the purpose of his advisers to break down the subject of his inquiry.

For these reasons the interview with Pierre, even with its mortifying termination, left a firm conviction in his mind that Firmstone was dishonest, practically a would-be thief, and this on the sole word of a professional gambler, a rumshop proprietor, a man with no heritage, no traditions, and no associations to hold him from the extremities of crime.

Not one of the men whom Hartwell had interviewed, not even Pierre himself, would for an instant have considered as probable what Hartwell was holding as an obvious truth. This, however, did not prevent Hartwell's actions from hastening to the point of precipitation the very crisis he was blindly trying to avert. He had not discredited Firmstone among the men, he had only nullified his power to manage them. Hartwell had succeeded in completing the operation of informing himself generally. Having reached this point, he felt that the only thing remaining to be done was to align his information, crush Firmstone beneath the weight of his accumulated evidence, and from his

dismembered fragments build up a superintendent who would henceforth walk and act in the fear of demonstrated omniscient justice. He even grew warmly benevolent in the contemplation of the gratefully reconstructed man who was to be fashioned after his own image.

Firmstone coincided with one of Hartwell's conclusions, but from a wholly different standpoint. Affairs had reached a state that no longer was endurable. Among the men there was no doubt whatever but that it was a question of time only when Firmstone, to put it in the graphic phrase of the mine, "would be shot in the ear with a time check." Firmstone had no benevolent designs as to the reconstruction of Hartwell, but he had decided ones as to the reconstruction of the company's affairs. The meeting thus mutually decided upon as necessary was soon brought about.

Firmstone came into the office from a visit to the mine. It had been neither a pleasant nor a profitable one. The contemptuous disregard of his orders, the coarse insolence of the men, and especially of the foremen and shift bosses, organised into the union by Morrison, had stung Firmstone to the quick. To combat the disorders under present conditions would only expose him to insult, without any compensation whatever. Paying no attention to words or actions, he beat a dignified, unprotesting retreat. He would, if possible, bring Hartwell to his senses; if not, he would insist upon presenting his case to the company. If they failed to support him he would break his contract. He disliked the latter alternative, for it meant the discrediting of himself or the manager. He felt that it would be a fight to the death. He found Hartwell in the office.

"Well," Hartwell looked up abruptly; "how are things going?"

"Hot foot to the devil."

"Your recognition of the fact does you credit, even if the perception is a little tardy. I think you will further recognise the fact that I take a hand none too soon." The mask on Hartwell's face grew denser.

"I recognise the fact very clearly that, until you came, the fork of the trail was before me. Now it is behind and—we are on the wrong split."

"Precisely. I have come to that conclusion myself. In order to act wisely, I assume that it will be best to get a clear idea of conditions, and then we can select a remedy for those that are making against us. Do you agree?"

"I withhold assent until I know just what I am expected to assent to."

Hartwell looked annoyed. "Shall I go on?" he asked, impatiently. "Perhaps your caution will allow that."

Firmstone nodded. He did not care to trust himself to words.

"Before we made our contract with you to assume charge of our properties out here I told you very plainly the difficulties under which we had hitherto laboured, and that I trusted that you would find means to remedy them. After six months' trial, in which we have allowed you a perfectly free hand, can you conscientiously say that you have bettered our prospects?"

Hartwell paused; but Firmstone kept silence.

"Have you nothing to say to this?" Hartwell finally burst out.

"At present, no." Firmstone spoke with decision.

"When will you have?" Hartwell asked.

"When you are through with your side."

Hartwell felt annoyed at what he considered Firmstone's obstinacy. "Well," he said; "then I shall have to go my own gait. You can't complain if it doesn't suit you. In your reports to the company you have complained of the complete disorganisation which you found here. That this disorganisation resulted in inefficiency of labour, that the mine was run down, the mill a wreck, and, worst of all, that there was stealing going on which prevented the richest ore reaching the mill, and that even the products of the mill were stolen. You laid the stealing to the door of the Blue Goose. You stated for fact things which you acknowledged you could not prove. That the proprietor of the Blue Goose was striving to stir up revolt among the men, to organise them into a union in order that through this organised union the Blue Goose might practically control the mine and rob the company right and left. You pointed out that in your opinion many of the men, even in the organisation, were honest; that it was only a scheme on the part of Morrison and Pierre to dupe the men, to blind their eyes so that, believing themselves imposed on and robbed by the company, they would innocently furnish the opportunity for the Blue Goose to carry on its system of plundering."

Firmstone's steady gaze never flinched, as Hartwell swept on with his arraignment.

"In all your reports, you have without exception laid the blame upon your predecessors, upon others outside the company. Never in a single instance have you expressed a doubt as to your own conduct of affairs. The assumed robbery of the stage I will pass by. Other points I shall dwell upon. You trust no one. You have demonstrated that to the men. You give orders at the mine, and instead of trusting your foremen to see that they are carried out you almost daily insist upon inspecting their work and interfering with it. The same thing I find to be true at the mill. Day and

night you pounce in upon them. Now let me ask you this. If you understand men, if you know your business thoroughly, ought you not to judge whether the men are rendering an equivalent for their pay, without subjecting them to the humiliation of constant espionage?" He looked fixedly at Firmstone, as he ended his arraignment.

Firmstone waited, if perchance Hartwell had not finished.

"Is your case all in?" he finally asked.

"For the present, yes." Hartwell snapped his jaws together decidedly.

"Then I'll start."

"Wait a moment, right there," Hartwell interrupted.

"No. I will not wait. I am going right on. You've been informing yourself generally. Now I'm going to inform you particularly. In the first place, how did you find out that I had been subjecting the men to this humiliating espionage, as you call it?" Firmstone waited for a reply.

"I don't know that I am under obligations to answer that question," Hartwell replied, stiffly.

"Then I'll answer it for you. You've been to my foremen, my shift bosses, my workmen; you've been, above all other places, to the Blue Goose. You've been to anyone and everyone whose interest it is to weaken my authority and to render me powerless to combat the very evils of which you complain."

Hartwell started to interrupt; but Firmstone waved him to silence.

"This is a vital point. One thing more: instead of acquiring information as to the conditions that confront me and about my method of handling them, you go to my enemies, get their opinions and, what is worse, act upon them as your own."

"Wait a minute right there." Hartwell spoke imperiously. "You speak of 'my foremen' and 'my shift bosses.' They are not your men; they are ours. We pay them, and we are going to see to it that we get an equivalent return, in any way we think advisable." Hartwell ignored Firmstone's last words.

"That may be your position. If it is it is not a wise one, and, what is more, it is not tenable. You put me out here to manage your business, and you hold me responsible for results. I ask from you the same consideration I give to my foremen. I do not hire a single man at the mine or mill; my foremen attend to that. I give my orders direct to my foremen, and hold them strictly responsible. The men are responsible to my foremen, my foremen are responsible to me, and I in turn am wholly responsible to you. If in one single point you interfere with my organisation I not only decline to assume any responsibility whatever, but, farther, I shall tender my resignation at once."

Hartwell listened impatiently, but nevertheless Firmstone's words were not without effect. They appealed to his judgment as being justified; but to accept them and act upon them meant a repudiation of his own course. For this he was not ready. In addition to his vanity, Hartwell had an abiding faith in his own shrewdness. He was casting about in his mind for a plausible delay which would afford him time to retreat from his position without a confession of defeat. He could find none. Firmstone had presented a clean-cut ultimatum. He was in an unpleasant predicament. Some one would have to be sacrificed. He was wholly determined that it should not be himself. Perhaps after all it would be better to arrange as best he might with Firmstone, rather than have it go farther.

"It seems to me, Firmstone, as if you were going altogether too fast. There's no use jumping. Why not talk this over sensibly?"

"There is only one thing to be considered. If you are going to manage this place I am going to put it beyond your power even to make me appear responsible."

"You forget your contract with us," Hartwell interposed.

"I do not forget it. If you discharge me, or force me to resign, I still demand a hearing."

Hartwell was disturbed, and his manner showed it. Firmstone presented two alternatives. Forcing a choice of either of them would bring unpleasant consequences upon himself. Was it necessary to force the choice?

"Suppose I do neither?" he asked.

"That will not avert the consequences of what you have already done."

"Are you determined to resign?" Hartwell asked, uneasily.

"That is not what I meant."

"What did you mean, then?"

"This. Before you came out, I had things well in hand. In another month I would have had control of the men, and the property would have been paying a good dividend. As it is now——" Firmstone waved his hand, as if to dismiss a useless subject.

"Well, what now?" Hartwell asked, after a pause.

"It has to be done all over again, only under greater difficulties, the outcome of which I cannot foresee."

"To what difficulties do you refer?" Firmstone's manner disturbed Hartwell.

"The men were getting settled. Now you have played into the hands of two of the most unscrupulous rascals in Colorado. Between you, you've got the men stirred up to a point where a strike is inevitable." For a time, Hartwell was apparently crushed by Firmstone's unanswerable logic, as well as by his portentous forecasts. He could not but confess to himself that his course of action looked very different under Firmstone's analysis than from his own standpoint alone. He drummed his fingers listlessly on the desk before him. He was all but convinced that he might have been wrong in his judgment of Firmstone, after all. Then Pierre's suggestions came to him like a flash.

"You are aware, of course, that I shall have to make a full report of the accident to the stage to our directors?"

"I made a report of all the facts in the case, at the time. Of course, if you have discovered other facts, they will have to be given in addition."

Hartwell continued, paying no attention to Firmstone.

"That in the report which I shall make, I may feel compelled to arrange my data in such a manner that they will point to a conclusion somewhat at variance with yours?"

"In which case," interrupted Firmstone; "I shall claim the right to another and counter statement."

Hartwell looked even more intently at Firmstone.

"In your report you stated positively that there were three thousand, one hundred and twenty-five ounces of bullion in your shipment; that this amount was lost in the wreck of the stage."

"Exactly."

Hartwell leaned forward, his eyes still fixed on Firmstone's eyes. Then, after a moment's pause, he asked, explosively,—

"Was there that amount?"

Firmstone's face had a puzzled look.

"There certainly was, unless I made a mistake in weighing up." His brows contracted for a moment, then cleared decisively. "That is not possible. The total checked with my weekly statements."

Hartwell settled back in his chair. There was a look of satisfied cunning on his face. He had gained his point. He had attacked Firmstone in an unexpected quarter, and he had flinched. He had no further doubts. This, however, was not enough. He would press the brimming cup of evidence to his victim's lips and compel him to drink it to the last drop.

"Who saw you put the bullion in the safe?"

"No one."

"Then, if the safe is never recovered, we have only your word that the bullion was put in there, as you stated?"

Firmstone was slowly realising Hartwell's drift. Slowly, because the idea suggested appeared too monstrous to be tenable. The purple veins on his forehead were hard and swollen.

"That is all," he said, from between compressed lips.

"Under the circumstances, don't you think it is of the utmost importance that the safe be recovered?"

"Under any circumstances. I have already taken all the steps possible in that direction." Firmstone breathed easier. He saw, as he thought, the error of his other half-formed suspicion. Hartwell was about to suggest that Zephyr should not be alone in guarding the river.

Hartwell again leaned forward. He spoke meditatively, but his eyes were piercing in their intensity.

"Yes. If in the event of the unexpected," he emphasised the word with a suggestive pause, "recovery of the safe, it should be found not to contain that amount, in fact, nothing at all, what would you have to say?"

Every fibre of Firmstone's body crystallised into hard lines. Slowly he rose to his feet. Pale to the lips, he towered over the general manager. Slowly his words fell from set lips.

"What have I to say?" he repeated. "This. That, if I stooped to answer such a question, I should put myself on the level of the brutal idiot who asked it."

CHAPTER XIX

The Fly in the Ointment

At last the union was organised at mill and mine.

The men had been duly instructed as to the burden of their wrongs and the measures necessary for redress. They had been taught that all who were not for them were against them, and that scabs were traitors to their fellows, that heaven was not for them, hell too good for them, and that on earth they only crowded the deserving from their own. In warning his fellows against bending the knee to Baal, Morrison did not feel it incumbent upon him to state that there was a whole sky full of other heathen deities, and that, in turning from one deity to make obeisance to another, they might miss the one true God. He did not even take the trouble to state that there was a chance for wise selection—that it was better to worship Osiris than to fall into the hands of Moloch.

With enthusiasm, distilled as much from Pierre's whisky as from Morrison's wisdom, the men had elected Morrison leader, and now awaited his commands. Morrison had decided on a strike. This would demonstrate his power and terrify his opponents. There was enough shrewdness in him to select a plausible excuse. He knew very well that even among his most ardent adherents there was much common sense and an inherent perception of justice; that, while this would not stand in the way of precipitating a strike, it might prevent its perfect fruition. Whatever his own convictions, Morrison felt intuitively that ideas in the minds of the majority of men were but characters written on sand which the first sweep of washing waves would wipe out and leave motiveless; that others must stand by with ready stylus, to write again and again that which was swept away. In other words, he must have aides; that these aides, if they were to remain steadfast, must be thinking men, impressed with the justice of their position.

Hartwell had supplied just the motive that was needed. As yet, it was not apparent; but it was on the way. When it arrived there would be no doubt of its identity, or the course of action which must then be pursued. Morrison was sure that it would come, was sure of the riot that would follow. His face darkened, flattened to the similitude of a serpent about to strike.

There was a flaw in Morrison's otherwise perfect fruit. Where hitherto had been the calm of undisputed possession was now the rage of baffled desire. Aside from momentary resentment at Élise's first interview with Firmstone, the fact had made little impression on him. As Pierre ruled his household, even so he intended to rule his own, and, according to Morrison's idea of the conventional, a temporary trifling with another man was one of the undeniable perquisites of an engaged girl. Morrison had been too sure of himself to feel a twinge of jealousy, rather considering such a course of action, when not too frequently indulged, an additional tribute to his own personality. What Morrison mistook for love was only passion. It was honourable, insomuch as he intended to make Élise his wife.

Morrison ascribed only one motive to the subsequent meetings which he knew took place between Élise and Firmstone. Élise was drifting farther and farther from him, in spite of all that he could do. "Rowing," as he expressed it, had not been of infrequent occurrence between himself and Élise before Firmstone had appeared on the scene; but on such occasions Élise had been as ready for a "mix-up" as she was now anxious to avoid one. There was another thing to which he could not close his eyes. There had been defiance, hatred, an eager fierceness, both in attack and defence, which was now wholly lacking. On several recent occasions he had sought a quarrel with Élise; but while she had stood her ground, there was a contempt in her manner, her eyes, her voice, which could not do otherwise than attract his attention.

To do Morrison the justice which he really deserved, there was in him as much of love for Élise as his nature was capable of harbouring for any one outside himself. He looked upon her as his own, and he was defending this idea of possession with the same pugnacity that he would protect his dollars from a thief. Morrison had been forced to the conclusion that Élise was lost to him. Hitherto Firmstone had been an impersonal obstacle in his path. Now—The eyes narrowed to a slit, the venomous lips were compressed. Morrison was a beast. Only the vengeance of a beast could wipe out the disgrace that had been forced upon him.

In reality Élise was only a child. Unpropitious and uncongenial as had been her surroundings to her finer nature, these had only retarded development; they had not killed the germ. Her untrammelled life had been natural, but hardly neutral. To put conditions in a word, her undirected life had stored up an abundant supply of nourishing food that would thrust into vigorous life the dormant germ of noble womanhood when the proper time should come. There had been no hot-house forcing, but the natural growth of the healthy, hardy plant which would battle successfully the storms that were bound to come.

In the cramped and sordid lives which had surrounded her there was much to repel and little to attract. The parental love of Pierre was strong and fierce, but it was animal, it was satiating, selfish, and undemonstrative. Hence Élise was almost wholly unconscious of its existence. As for Madame, hers was a love unselfish; but dominated and overshadowed, in terror of her husband, she stood in but little less awe of Élise. These two, the one selfish, with strength of mind sufficient to bend others to his purposes, the other unselfish, but with every spontaneous emotion

repressed by stronger personalities, exerted an unconscious but corresponding influence upon their equally unconscious ward. These manifestations were animal, and in Élise they met with an animal response. She felt the domineering strength of Pierre, but without awe she defied it. She felt the unselfish and timorous love of Madame. She trampled it beneath her childish feet, or yielded to a storm of repentant emotion that overwhelmed and bewildered its timid recipient. She was surrounded and imbued with emotions, unguided, unanalysed, misunderstood, that rose supreme, or were blotted out as the strength of the individual was equal to or inferior to its opposition. They were animal emotions that one moment would lick and caress and fight to the death, the next in a moment of rage would smite to the earth. As Élise approached womanhood, these emotions were intensified, but were otherwise unmodified. There was another element which came as a natural temporal sequence. She had seen with unseeing eyes young girls given in marriage; she had no question but that a like fate was in store for her. So it happened that when Pierre, announcing to her her sixteenth birthday, had likewise broached the subject of marriage she opposed it not on rational grounds but simply on general principles. She was not at first conscious of any objections to Morrison. Being ignorant of marriage she had no grounds upon which to base a choice. To her Morrison was no better and no worse than any other man she had met. Morrison was perfectly right in his assumptions. Had not circumstances interfered, in the end he would have had his way. Morrison was also perfectly wrong. Élise was not Madame in any sense of the word. His reign would have been at least troubled, if not in the end usurped. The first circumstance which had already interfered to prevent the realisation of his desire was one which, very naturally, would be the last to appeal to him. This circumstance was Zephyr.

From the earliest infancy of Élise, Zephyr had been, in a way, her constant guardian and companion. With enough strength of character to make him fearless, it was insufficient to arouse the ambition to carve out a distinctive position for himself. He absorbed and mastered whatever came in his way, but there his ambition ceased. He was respected and, to a certain extent, feared, even by those who were naturally possessed of stronger natures.

There may be something in the fabled power of the human eye to cow a savage beast, but unfortunately it will probably never be satisfactorily demonstrated. A man confronted with the beast will invariably and instinctively trust to his concrete "44" rather than to the abstract force of human magnetism. Yet there is a germ of truth in the proverbial statement. Brought face to face with his human antagonist, the thinking man always stands in fear of himself, of his sense of justice, while the brute in his opponent has no scruples and no desires save those of personal triumph.

These things Élise did not see. The things she saw which appealed to her and influenced her were, first of all, Zephyr's fearlessness of others who were feared, his good-natured, philosophical cynicism which ridiculed foibles that he did not feel called upon to combat, his protecting love for her which was always considerate but never obsequious, which was unrestraining yet restrained her in the end. Against his cynical stoicism the waves of her childish rage beat themselves to calm, or, hurt and wounded, she wept out her childish sorrows in his comforting arms. The protecting value of it she did not know, but in Zephyr, and that was the only name by which she knew him, was the only untrammelled outlet for every passion of her childish as well as for her maturing soul.

Zephyr alone would have thwarted Morrison's designs on Élise. But Morrison despised Zephyr, even though he feared him. Zephyr in a neutral way had preserved Élise from herself and from her surroundings. Neutral, because his efforts were conserving, not developmental. Neutral, for, while he could keep her feet from straying in paths of destruction, he had through ignorance been unable to guide them in ways that led to a higher life.

This mission had been left to Firmstone. Not that Zephyr's work had been less important, for the hand that fallows ground performs as high a mission as the hand that sows the chosen seed. Unconsciously at first, Firmstone had opened the eyes of Élise to vistas, to possibilities which hitherto had been undreamed of. It mattered little that as yet she saw men as trees, the great and saving fact remained, her eyes were opened and she saw.

Morrison's eyes were also opened. He saw first the growing influence of Firmstone and later the association of Élise with Miss Hartwell. He could not see that Élise, with the influence of Firmstone, was an impossibility to him. Like a venomous serpent that strikes blindly at the club and not at the man who wields it, Morrison concentrated the full strength of his rage against Firmstone.

Perhaps no characterisation of Élise could be stronger than the bald statement that as yet she was entirely oblivious of self. The opening vistas of a broader, higher life were too absorbing, too intoxicating in themselves, to permit the intrusion of the disturbing element of personality. Her eager absorption of the minutest detail, her keen perception of the slightest discordant note, pleased Miss Hartwell as much as it delighted Firmstone.

Élise was as spontaneous and unreserved with the latter as with the former. She preferred Firmstone's company because with him was an unconscious personality that met her own on even terms. Firmstone loved strength and beauty for themselves, Miss Hartwell for the personal pleasure they gave her. She was flattered by the childish attention which was tendered her and piqued by the obvious fact that her personality had made only a slight impression upon Élise as compared with that of Firmstone.

This particular afternoon Élise was returning from a few hours spent with Miss Hartwell at the

Falls. It had been rather unsatisfactory to both. As the sun began to sink behind the mountain they had started down the trail together, but the walk was a silent one. Miss Hartwell had a slight flush of annoyance. Élise, sober and puzzled, was absorbed by thoughts that were as yet undifferentiated and unidentified. They parted at the Blue Goose.

Élise turned at the steps and entered by the back door. Morrison was watching, unseen by either. He noted Élise's path, and as she entered he confronted her. Élise barely noticed him and was preparing to go upstairs. Morrison divined her intention and barred her way.

"You're getting too high-toned for common folks, ain't you?"

Élise paused perforce. There was a struggling look in her eyes. Her thoughts had been too far away from her surroundings to allow of an immediate return. She remained silent. The scowl on Morrison's face intensified.

"When you're Mrs. Morrison, you won't go traipsing around with no high-toned bosses and female dudes more than once. I'll learn you."

Élise came back with a crash.

"Mrs. Morrison!" She did not speak the words, she shrank from them and left them hanging in their self-polluted atmosphere. "Learn me!" The words were vibrant with a low-pitched hum, that smote and bored like the impact of an electric wave. "You—you—snake; you—how dare you!"

Morrison did not flinch. The blind fury of a dared beast flamed in his eyes.

"Dare, you vixen! I'll make you, or break you! I've been in too many scraps and smelled too much powder to get scared by a hen that's trying to crow."

The animal was dominant in Élise. Fury personified flew at Morrison.

"You'll teach me; will you? I'll teach you the difference between a hen and a wild cat."

The door from the kitchen was opened and Madame came in. She flung herself between Élise and Morrison. The repressed timorous love of years flamed upon the thin cheeks, flashed from the faded eyes. There was no trace of fear. Her slight form fairly shook with the intensity of her passion.

"Go! Go! Go!" The last was uttered in a voice little less than a shriek. "Don't you touch Élise. She is mine. Why don't you go?"

Her trembling hands pushed Morrison toward the open door. Bewildered, staggered, cowed, he slunk from the room. Madame closed the door. She turned toward Élise. The passion had receded, only the patient pleading was in her eyes.

The next instant she saw nothing. Her head was crushed upon Élise's shoulder, the clasping arms caressed and bound, and hot cheeks were pressed against her own. Another instant and she was pushed into a chair. For the first time in her life, Madame's hungry heart was fed. Élise loved her. That was enough.

The westward sinking sun had drawn the veil of darkness up from the greying east. Its cycles of waxing and waning were measured by the click of tensioned springs and beat of swinging pendulums. But in the growing darkness another sun was rising, its cycles measured by beating hearts to an unending day.

CHAPTER XX

The River Gives up its Prey

Because Zephyr saw a school of fishes disporting themselves in the water, this never diverted his attention from the landing of the fish he had hooked.

This principle of his life he was applying to a particular event. The river had been closely watched; now, at last, his fish was hooked. The landing it was another matter. He needed help. He went for it.

Zephyr found Bennie taking his usual after-dinner nap.

"Julius Benjamin, it's the eleventh hour," he began, indifferently.

Bennie interrupted:

"The eleventh hour! It's two o'clock, and the time you mention was born three hours ago. What new kind of bug is biting you?"

Zephyr studiously rolled a cigarette.

"Your education is deficient, Julius. You don't know your Bible, and you don't know the special force of figurative language. I'm sorry for you, Julius, but having begun I'll see it through. Having

put my hand to the plough, which is also figuratively speaking, it's the eleventh hour, but if you'll get into your working clothes and whirl in, I'll give you full time and better wages."

Bennie sat upright.

"What?" he began.

Zephyr's cigarette was smoking.

"There's no time to waste drilling ideas through a thick head. The wagon is ready and so is the block and ropes. Come on, and while we're on the way, I'll tackle your wits where the Almighty left off."

Bennie's wits were not so muddy as Zephyr's words indicated. He sprang from his bed and into his shoes, and before the stub of Zephyr's cigarette had struck the ground outside the open window Bennie was pushing Zephyr through the door.

"Figures be hanged, and you, too. If my wits were as thick as your tongue, they'd be guessing at the clack of it, instead of getting a wiggle on the both of us."

The stableman had the wagon hooked up and ready. Zephyr and Bennie clambered in. Bennie caught the lines from the driver and cracking the whip about the ears of the horses, they clattered down the trail to the Devil's Elbow.

Zephyr protested mildly at Bennie's haste.

"Hold your hush," growled Bennie. "There's a hell of a fight on at the office this day. If you want to see a good man win the sooner we're back with the safe the better."

There were no lost motions on their arrival at the Devil's Elbow. The actual facts that had hastened Zephyr's location of the safe were simple. He had studied the position which the stage must have occupied before the bridge fell, its line of probable descent. From these assumed data he inferred the approximate position of the safe in the river and began prodding in the muddy water. At last he was tolerably sure that he had located it. By building a sort of wing dam with loose rock, filling the interstices with fine material, the water of the pool was cut off from the main stream and began to quiet down and grow comparatively clear. Then Zephyr's heart almost stood still. By careful looking he could distinguish one corner of the safe. Without more ado he started for Bennie.

The tackle was soon rigged. Taking a hook and chain, Zephyr waded out into the icy water, and after a few minutes he gave the signal to hoist. It was the safe, sure enough. Another lift with the tackle in a new position and the safe was in the wagon and headed for its starting-point.

Bennie was rigid with important dignity on the way to the office and was consequently silent save as to his breath, which whistled through his nostrils. As for Zephyr, Bennie's silence only allowed him to whistle or go through the noiseless motions as seemed to suit his mood. The driver was alive with curiosity and spoiling to talk, but his voluble efforts at conversation only confirmed his knowledge of what to expect. When later interrogated as to the remarks of Zephyr and Bennie upon this particular occasion he cut loose the pent-up torrent within him.

"You fellows may have heard," he concluded, "that clams is hell on keeping quiet; but they're a flock of blue jays cussin' fer a prize compared with them two fellers."

As Firmstone turned to leave the office the door was thrust open and the two men entered. Bennie led, aggressive defiance radiating from every swing and pose. Zephyr, calm, imperturbable, confident, glanced at the red-faced Hartwell and at the set face of Firmstone. He knew the game, he knew his own hand. He intended to play it for its full value. He had an interested partner. He trusted in his skill, but if he made breaks it was no concern of his.

"Assuming," he began; "that there's an interesting discussion going on, I beg leave to submit some important data bearing on the same."

"Trim your switches," burst out Bennie. "They'll sting harder."

The unruffled Zephyr bent a soothing eye on Bennie, moved his hat a little farther back from his forehead, placed his arms leisurely akimbo, and eased one foot by gradually resting his weight on the other. It was not affectation. It was the physical expression of a mental habit.

"Still farther assuming," here his eyes slowly revolved and rested on Hartwell, "that truth crushed to earth sometimes welcomes a friendly boost, uninvited, I am here to tender the aforesaid assistance." He turned to Bennie. "Now, Julius, it's up to you. If you'll open the throttle, you can close your blow-off with no danger of bursting your boiler." He nodded his head toward the door.

Hartwell's manner was that of a baited bull who, in the multiplicity of his assailants, knew not whom to select for first attack. For days and weeks he had been marshalling his forces for an overwhelming assault on Firmstone. He had ignored the fact that his adversary might have been preparing an able defence in spite of secrecy on his part. It is a wise man who, when contemplating the spoliation of his neighbour, first takes careful account of defensive as well as of offensive means. His personal assault on Firmstone had met with defeat. In the mental rout that followed he was casting about to find means of concealing from others that which he could not hide from himself. The irruption of Bennie and Zephyr threatened disaster even to this forlorn

hope. Firmstone knew what was coming. Hartwell could not even guess. As he had seen Firmstone as his first object, so now he saw Zephyr. Blindly as he had attacked Firmstone, so now he lowered his head for an equally blind charge on the placid Zephyr.

"Who are you, anyway?" he burst out, with indignant rage.

"Me?" Zephyr turned to Hartwell, releasing his lips from their habitual pucker, his eyes resting for a moment on Hartwell. "Oh, I ain't much. I ain't a sack of fertilizer on a thousand-acre ranch." His eyes drooped indifferently. "But at the same time, you ain't no thousand-acre ranch."

"That may be," retorted Hartwell; "but I'm too large to make it safe for you to prance around on alone."

Zephyr turned languidly to Hartwell.

"That's so," he assented. "I discovered a similar truth several decades ago and laid it up for future use. Even in my limited experience you ain't the first thorn-apple that I've seen pears grafted on to. In recognition of your friendly warning, allow me to say that I'm only one in a bunch."

A further exchange of courtesies was prevented by the entrance of four men, of whom Bennie was one. Their entrance was heralded by a series of bumps and grunts. There was a final bump, a final grunt, and the four men straightened simultaneously; four bended arms swept the moisture from four perspiring faces.

"That's all." Bennie dismissed his helpers with a wave of his hand, then stood grimly repressed, waiting for the next move.

The scene was mildly theatrical; unintentionally so, so far as Zephyr was concerned, designedly so on the part of Bennie, who longed to push it to a most thrilling climax. It was not pleasant to Firmstone; but the cause was none of his creating, he was of no mind to interfere with the event. He was only human after all, and that it annoyed and irritated Hartwell afforded him a modicum of legitimate solace. Besides, Zephyr and Bennie were his stanch friends; the recovery of the safe and the putting it in evidence at the most effective moment was their work. The manner of bringing it into play, though distasteful to him, suited their ideas of propriety, and Firmstone felt that they had earned the right to an exhibition of their personalities with no interference on his part. He preserved a passive, dignified silence.

As for Hartwell, openly attacked from without, within a no less violent conflict of invisible forces was crowding him to self-humiliation. To retreat from the scene meant either an open confession of wrong-doing, or a refusal on his part to do justice to the man whom he had wronged. To remain was to subject himself to the open triumph of Zephyr and Bennie, and the no less assured though silent triumph of Firmstone.

Hartwell's reflections were interrupted by Zephyr's request for the keys to the safe. There was a clatter as Firmstone dropped them into his open hand. Hartwell straightened up with flushed cheeks. Pierre's words again came to him. The whole thing might be a bluff, after all. The safe might be empty. Here was a possible avenue of escape. With the same blind energy with which he had entered other paths, he entered this. He leaned back in his chair with tolerant resignation.

"If it amuses you people to make a mountain out of a molehill I can afford to stand it."

Bennie looked pityingly at Hartwell. "God Almighty must have it in for you bad, or he'd let you open your eyes t'other end to, once in a while."

As the safe was finally opened and one by one the dull yellow bars were piled on the scales, there was too much tenseness to allow of even a show of levity. Zephyr had no doubts. No one could have got at the safe while in the river; he could swear to that. From its delivery to the driver by Firmstone there had been no time nor opportunity to tamper with its contents. As for Firmstone, he had too much at stake to be entirely free from anxiety, though neither voice nor manner betrayed it. He had had experience enough to teach him that it was not sufficient to be honest—one must at all times be prepared to prove it.

The last ingot was checked off. Firmstone silently handed Hartwell the copy of his original letter of advice and the totalled figures of the recent weighing. Hartwell accepted them with a cynical smile and laid them indifferently aside.

"Well," he remarked; "all I can say is, the company recovered the safe in the nick of time, from whom I don't pretend to say. We've got it, and that's enough." There was a grin of cunning defiance on his face. He had entered a covert where further pursuit was impossible.

For once Bennie felt unequal to the emergency. He turned silently, but appealingly, to Zephyr.

It was a new experience for Zephyr as well. For the first time in his life he felt himself jarred to the point of quick retort, wholly unconsonant with his habitual serenity. His face flushed. His hand moved jerkily to the bosom of his shirt, only to be as jerkily removed empty. The harmonica was decidedly unequal to the task. His lips puckered and straightened. His final resort was more satisfying. He deliberately seated himself on the safe and began rolling a cigarette. Placing it to his lips, he drew a match along the leg of his trousers. The shielded flame was applied to the cigarette. There came a few deliberate puffs, the cigarette was removed. His crossed leg was thrust through his clasped hands at he leaned backward. Through a cloud of soothing smoke his

answer was meditatively voiced.

"When the Almighty made man, he must have had a pot of sense on one hand and foolishness on the other, and he put some of each inside every empty skull. He got mighty interested in his work and so absent-minded he used up the sense first. Leastways, some skulls got an unrighteous dose of fool that I can't explain no other way. I ain't blaming the Almighty; he'd got the stuff on his hands and he'd got to get rid of it somehow. It's like rat poison—mighty good in its place, but dangerous to have lying around loose. He just forgot to mix it in, that's all, and we've got to do it for him. It's a heap of trouble and it's a nasty job, and I ain't blaming him for jumping it."

CHAPTER XXI

The Sword that Turns

As Zephyr and Bennie left the office Hartwell turned to Firmstone. There was no outward yielding, within only the determination not to recognise defeat.

"The cards are yours; but we'll finish the game."

The words were not spoken, but they were in evidence.

Firmstone was silent for a long time. He was thinking neither of Hartwell nor of himself.

"Well," he finally asked; "this little incident is happily closed. What next?"

Hartwell's manner had not changed. "You are superintendent here. Don't ask me. It's up to you."

Firmstone restrained himself with an effort. "Is it?"

The question carried its own answer with it. It was plainly negative, only Hartwell refused to accept it.

"What else are you out here for?"

Firmstone's face flushed hotly. "Why can't you talk sense?" he burst out.

"I am not aware that I have talked anything else." Hartwell only grew more rigid with Firmstone's visible anger.

"If that's your opinion the sooner I get out the better." Firmstone rose and started to the door.

"Wait a moment." Firmstone's decision was, by Hartwell, twisted into weakening. On this narrow pivot he turned his preparation for retreat. "The loss of the gold brought me out here. It has been recovered and no questions asked. That ends my work. Now yours begins. When I have your assurance that you will remain with the company in accordance with your contract, I am ready to go. What do you say?"

Firmstone thought rapidly and to the point. His mind was soon made up. "I decline to commit myself." The door closed behind him, shutting off further discussion.

The abrupt termination of the interview was more than disappointing to Hartwell. It carried with it an element of fear. He had played his game obstinately, with obvious defiance in the presence of Zephyr and Bennie; with their departure he had counted on a quiet discussion with Firmstone. He had no settled policy further than to draw Firmstone out, get him to commit himself definitely while he, with no outward sign of yielding, could retreat with flying colours. He now recognised the fact that the knives with which he had been juggling were sharper and more dangerous than he had thought, but he also felt that, by keeping them in the air as long as possible, when they fell he could at least turn their points from himself. Firmstone's departure brought them tumbling about his ears in a very inconsiderate manner. He must make another move, and in a hurry. Events were no longer even apparently under his control; they were controlling him and pushing him into a course of action not at all to his liking.

The element of fear, before passive, was now quivering with intense activity. He closed his mind to all else and bent it toward the forestalling of an action that he could not but feel was immediate and pressing.

Partly from Firmstone, partly from Pierre, he had gathered a clear idea that a union was being organised, and this knowledge had impelled him to a course that he would now have given worlds to recall.

This act was none else than the engaging of a hundred or more non-union men. On their arrival, he had intended the immediate discharge of the disaffected and the installing of the new men in their places. He had chuckled to himself over the dismay which the arrival of the men would create, but even more over the thought of the bitter rage of Morrison and Pierre when they realised the fact that they had been outwitted and forestalled. The idea that he was forcing upon Firmstone a set of conditions for which he would refuse to stand sponsor had occurred to him only as a possibility so remote that it was not even considered. He was now taking earnest counsel with himself. If Firmstone had contemplated resignation under circumstances of far less

moment than the vital one of which he was still ignorant—Hartwell drew his hand slowly across his moistening forehead, then sprang to his feet. Why had he not thought of it before? He caught up his hat and hurried to the door of the outer office. There was not a moment to lose. Before he laid his hand on the door he forced himself to deliberate movement.

"Tell the stable boss to hitch up the light rig and bring it to the office."

As the man left the room, Hartwell seated himself and lighted a cigar. In a few moments the rig was at the door and Hartwell appeared, leisurely drawing on a pair of driving-gloves. Adjusting the dust-robe over his knees, as he took the lines from the man, he said:

"If Mr. Firmstone inquires for me tell him I have gone for a drive."

Down past the mill, along the trail by the slide, he drove with no appearance of haste. Around a bend which hid the mill from sight, the horses had a rude awakening. The cigar was thrown aside, the reins tightened, and the whip was cracked in a manner that left no doubt in the horses' minds as to the desires of their driver.

In an hour, foaming and panting, they were pulled up at the station. Hitching was really an unnecessary precaution, for a rest was a thing to be desired; but hitched they were, and Hartwell hurried into the dingy office.

The operator was leaning back in his chair, his feet beside his clicking instrument, a soothing pipe perfuming the atmosphere of placid dreams.

"I want to get off a message at once." Hartwell was standing before the window.

The operator's placid dreams assumed an added charm by comparison with the perturbed Hartwell.

"You're too late, governor." He slowly raised his eyes, letting them rest on Hartwell.

"Too late!" Hartwell repeated, dazedly.

"Yep. At once ain't scheduled to make no stops." The operator resumed his pipe and his dreams.

"I've no time to waste," Hartwell snapped, impatiently.

"Even so," drawled the man; "but you didn't give me no time at all. I don't mind a fair handicap; but I ain't no jay."

"Will you give me a blank?"

"Oh, now you're talking U. S. all right. I savvy that." Without rising, he pushed a packet of blanks toward the window with his foot.

Hartwell wrote hurriedly for a moment, and shoved the message toward the operator. Taking his feet from the desk, he leaned slowly forward, picked up a pencil and began checking off the words.

> John Haskins, Leadville, Colorado.
>
> Do not send the men I asked for. Will explain by letter.
>
> Arthur Hartwell.

"Things quieting down at the mine?" The operator paused, looking up at Hartwell.

Hartwell could not restrain his impatience.

"I'm Mr. Hartwell, general manager of the Rainbow Company. Will you attend to your business and leave my affairs alone?"

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hartwell. My name is Jake Studley, agent for R. G. S. I get fifty dollars a month, and don't give a damn for no one." He began clearing the papers from before his instrument and drumming out his call.

The call was answered and the message sent. The operator picked up the paper and thrust it on a file.

Hartwell's face showed conflicting emotions. He wanted to force the exasperating man to action; but his own case was urgent. He drew from his pocket a roll of bills. Selecting a ten-dollar note, he pushed it toward the operator, who was refilling his pipe.

"I want that message to get to Haskins immediately, and I want an answer."

The operator shoved the bill into his pocket with one hand, with the other he began another call. There was a pause, then a series of clicks which were cut off and another message sent. The man closed his instrument and winked knowingly at Hartwell.

"I squirted a little electricity down the line on my own account. Told them the G. M. was in and ordered that message humped. 'Tain't up to me to explain what G. M. is here."

Hartwell went out on the platform and paced restlessly up and down. In about an hour he again approached the window.

"How long before I can expect an answer?"

"I can't tell. It depends on their finding your man. They'll get a wiggle on 'em, all right. I'll stir them up again before long. Jehosaphat! There's my call now!" He hurriedly answered, then read, word by word, the message as it was clicked off.

Arthur Hartwell, Rainbow, Colorado.

Message received. Too late. Men left on special last night.

John Haskins.

Hartwell caught up another blank.

John Haskins, Leadville, Colorado.

Recall the men without fail. I'll make it worth your while.

Arthur Hartwell.

There was another weary wait. Finally the operator came from his office.

"Sorry, Mr. Hartwell, but Leadville says Haskins left on train after sending first despatch. Says he had a ticket for Salt Lake."

"When will that special be here?" Hartwell's voice was husky in spite of himself.

"Ought to be here about six. It's three now."

"Is there no way to stop it?"

"Not now. Haskins chartered it. He's the only one that can call it off, and he's gone."

Hartwell's face was pale and haggard. He again began pacing up and down, trying in vain to find a way of doing the impossible. The fact that he had temporised, resolutely set his face against the manly thing to do, only to find the same alternative facing him at every turn, more ominous and harder than ever, taught him nothing. The operator watched him as he repeatedly passed. His self-asserting independence had gone, in its place was growing a homely sympathy for the troubled man. As Hartwell passed him again he called out:

"Say, governor, I know something about that business at the mine, and 'tain't up to you to worry. Your old man up there is a corker. They're on to him all right. He'll just take one fall out of that crowd that'll do them for keeps."

Hartwell paused, looking distantly at the speaker. He was not actively conscious of him, hardly of his words. The operator, not understanding, went on with more assurance.

"I know Jack Haskins. This ain't the first time he's been called on to help out in this kind of a racket, you bet! He's shipped you a gang that 'ud rather fight than eat. All you've got to do is to say 'sick 'em' and then lay back and see the fur fly."

Hartwell turned away without a word and went to his rig. He got in and drove straight for the mill. His mind was again made up. This time it was made up aright. Only—circumstances did not allow it to avail.

As he drove away he did not notice a man in miner's garb who looked at him sharply and resumed his way. The operator was still on the platform as the man came to a halt. He was deriving great satisfaction from the crackling new bill which he was caressing in his pocket. The new bill would soon have had a companion, had he kept quiet, but this he could not know.

Glancing at the miner, he remarked, benevolently:

"Smelling trouble, and pulling out, eh?"

"What do you mean?" The new-comer looked up stupidly.

"Just this. I reckon you've run up against Jack Haskins's gang before, and ain't hankering for a second round."

"Jack Haskins's gang comin'?" There was an eagerness in the man's manner which the operator misunderstood.

"That's what, and a hundred strong."

The man turned.

"Thanks, pard. Guess I'll go back and tell the boys. Perhaps they'd like a chance to git, too; then again they mightn't." Tipping a knowing wink at the open-mouthed operator, he turned on his heel and walked briskly away. He too was headed for the mill.

The operator's jaw worked spasmodically for a moment.

"Hen's feathers and skunk oil! If he ain't a spy, I'll eat him. Oh, Lord! Old Firmstone and Jack Haskins's gang lined up against the Blue Goose crowd! Jake, my boy, listen to me. You can get another job if you lose this; but to-morrow you are going to see the sight of your life."

CHAPTER XXII

Good Intentions

Returning from the station, Hartwell drove rapidly until he came to the foot of the mountain that rose above the nearly level mesa. Even then he tried to urge his jaded team into a pace in some consonance with his anxiety; but the steep grades and the rarefied air appealed more strongly to the exhausted animals than did the stinging lash he wielded. As, utterly blown, they came to a rest at the top of a steep grade, Hartwell became aware of the presence of three men who rose leisurely as the team halted. Two of them stood close by the horses' heads, the third paused beside the wagon.

"Howdy!" he saluted, with a grin.

"What do you want?" A hold-up was the only thing that occurred to Hartwell.

"Just a little sociable talk. You ain't in no hurry?" The grin broadened.

"I am." Hartwell reached for his whip.

"None of that!" The grin died away. The two men each laid a firm hand on the bridles.

"Will you tell me what this means?" There was not a quaver in Hartwell's voice, no trace of fear in his eyes.

"By-and-by. You just wait. You got a gun?"

"No; I haven't."

"I don't like to dispute a gentleman; but it's better to be safe. Just put up your hands."

Hartwell complied with the request. The man passed his hands rapidly over Hartwell's body, then turned away.

"All right," he said, then seated himself and began filling his pipe.

"How long am I expected to wait?" Hartwell's tone was sarcastic.

"Sorry I can't tell you. It just depends. I'll let you know when."

He relapsed into silence that Hartwell could not break with all his impatient questions or his open threats. The men left the horses' heads and seated themselves in the road. It occurred to Hartwell to make a dash for liberty, but there was a cartridge-belt on each man and holsters with ready guns.

In the deep cañon the twilight was giving way to darkness that was only held in check by the strip of open sky above and by a band of yellow light that burned with lambent tongues on the waving foliage which overhung the eastern cliff. Chattering squirrels and scolding magpies had long since ceased their bickerings; if there were other sounds that came with the night, they were overcome by the complaining river which ceased not day nor night to fret among the boulders that strewed its bed. Like a shaft of light piercing the darkness a whistle sounded, mellowed by distance. The man near the wagon spoke.

"That's a special. Where in hell's Jack?"

"On deck." A fourth man came to a halt. He paused, wiping the perspiration from his face. "They're coming, a hundred strong. Jakey coughed it up, and it didn't cost a cent." He laughed. "It's Jack Haskins's crowd, too."

The man by the wagon addressed Hartwell.

"I can tell you now. It's an all-night wait. Tumble out lively. Better take your blankets, if you've got any. It's liable to be cool before morning right here. It'll be hotter on the mountain, but you'd better stay here."

Hartwell did not stir.

"Out with you now, lively. We ain't got no time to waste."

Hartwell obeyed. The man sprang into the wagon and, pitching out the blankets, gathered up the lines.

"Come on, boys." Turning to his companion, he said, "You stay with him, Jack. He ain't heeled; but don't let him off." To Hartwell direct, "Don't try to get away. We'll deliver your message about the special."

His companions were already in the wagon and they started up the trail.

Jack turned to his charge.

"Now, if you'll just be a good boy and mind me, to-morrow I'll take you to the circus."

CHAPTER XXIII

An Unexpected Recruit

Like the majority of men in the West, Jake Studley took the view that all men are equal, and that the interests of one are the concerns of all. A civil answer to what in other climes would be considered impertinent curiosity was the unmistakable shibboleth of the coequal fraternity. Hartwell's manner had been interpreted by Jakey as a declaration of heresy to his orthodox code and the invitation to mind his own business as a breach of etiquette which the code entailed. Jakey thereupon assumed the duties of a defender of the faith, and, being prepared for action, moved immediately upon the enemy. The attack developed the unexpected. Hartwell's bill, tendered in desperation, was accepted in error, not as a bribe, but as an apology. Jakey sounded "cease firing" to his embattled lines, and called in his attacking forces. He had taken salt, henceforth he was Hartwell's friend and the friend of his friends.

Jakey took neither himself nor his life seriously. He was station agent, freight agent, express agent, and telegraph operator at Rainbow Station, R. G. S., and he performed his various duties with laudable promptness, when nothing more promising attracted his attention. Just now the "more promising" was in sight. The company had no scruples in dismissing employees without warning, and Jakey had no quixotic principles which restrained him for a moment from doing to others what they would do to him if occasion arose.

Jakey did not hold that the world owed him a living, but he considered that it possessed a goodly store of desirable things and that these were held in trust for those who chose to take them. Being "broke" did not appal him, nor the loss of a job fill him with quaking. The railroad was not the whole push, and if he could not pump electric juice he could wield a pick or rope a steer with equal zeal. Just now the most desirable thing that the world held in trust was the coming fight at the Rainbow. Accordingly he wired the R. G. S. officials that there was a vacancy at Rainbow Station. The said officials, being long accustomed to men of Jakey's stamp, merely remarked, "Damn!" and immediately wired to the nearest junction point to send another man to take the vacant position.

Jakey admired Firmstone, and this admiration prepossessed him in Firmstone's favour. The prepossession was by no means fixed and invulnerable, and had not Hartwell cleared himself of suspected heresy, he would have lent the same zeal, now kindling within him, to the Blue Goose rather than the Rainbow.

In what he recognised as the first round of the opening fight Jakey realised that the Blue Goose had scored. But, before the special pulled in, he was ready, and this time he was sure of his move.

"By the Great Spirit of the noble Red Man," Jakey was apostrophising the distant mountains in ornate language; "what kind of a low-down bird are you, to be gathered in by a goose, and a blue one at that?" Jakey paused, gazing earnestly at the retreating figure of the miner. Then, shaking his fist at the man's back, "Look here, you down-trodden serf of capitalistic oppression, I'll show you! Don't you fool yourself! Tipped me the grand ha-ha; did you? Well, you just listen to me! 'Stead of milking the old cow, you've just rubbed off a few drops from her calf's nose. That's what, as I'll proceed to demonstrate."

Jakey's loyalty had been wavering, passive, and impersonal. Now his personal sympathies were enlisted, for the path of self-vindication lay through the triumph of the Rainbow.

Before the special had come to a standstill its animated cargo began to disembark. Coatless men with woollen shirts belted to trousers, the belts sagging with their heavy loads of guns and cartridges, every man with a roll of blankets and many with carbines as well, testified to the recognition of the fact that the path of the miner's pick must be cleared by burning powder.

Jakey, thrusting his way through the boisterous crowd, forced upon the resentful conductor his surrendered insignia of office, then mingled with his future associates. He met a hilarious welcome, as the knowledge spread from man to man that he was with them. Its practical expression was accompanied by the thrusting of uncorked bottles at his face and demands that he should "drink hearty" as a pledge of fellowship. Jakey waved them aside.

"Put them up, boys, put them up. Them weapons ain't no use, not here. They're too short range, and they shoot the wrong way."

The leader pushed his way through the crowd around Jakey.

"That's right, boys. It's close to tally now. Where's the Rainbow trail?"

With elaborate figures, punctuated by irreverent adjectives, Jakey pointed out the trail and his reasons against taking it.

"It's good medicine to fight a skunk head on," he concluded; "but when you go up against a skunk, a coyote, and a grizzly wrapped up in one skin, you want to be circumspect. Morrison's a skunk, Pierre's a coyote, and the rest are grizzlies, and you don't want to fool yourselves just because the skin of the beast grows feathers instead of fur."

The leader listened attentively and, from the thick husk of Jakey's figures, he stripped the hard grains of well-ripened truth. Jakey laid small emphasis on the manner in which the envoy of the Blue Goose had gained his information. He had personal reasons for that, but the fact that the information was gained sufficed.

The men grew silent as they realised that the battle was on and that they were in the enemy's country. Under the guidance of Jakey they tramped up the track, turned toward what appeared as a vertical cliff, and clambered slowly and painfully over loose rocks, through stunted evergreens, and at last stood upon the rolling surface of the mesa above. From here on, the path was less obstructed. It was near midnight when the dull roar of the mill announced the proximity of their goal. As silently as they had followed the tortuous trail, so silently each wrapped himself in his blankets and lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Gathering to its Own

Had Firmstone known of Hartwell's move, which was to bring affairs to an immediate and definite crisis, his actions would have been shaped along different lines.

But the only one who could have given this knowledge blindly withheld it until it was beyond his power to give. At the mill Firmstone noticed a decided change in Luna. The foreman was sullen in look and act. He answered Firmstone's questions almost insolently, but not with open defiance. His courage was not equal to giving full voice to his sullen hatred. Firmstone paid little heed to the man's behaviour, thinking it only a passing mood. After a thorough inspection of the mill, he returned to the office.

"Mr. Hartwell said, if you inquired for him, that I was to tell you he had gone for a drive." The man anticipated his duty before Firmstone inquired.

"Very well," Firmstone replied, as he entered the office.

He busied himself at his desk for a long time. Toward night he ordered his horse to be saddled. He had determined to go to the mine. He had decided to move with a strong hand, to force his authority on the rebellious, as if it had not been questioned, as if he himself had no question as to whether it would be sustained. Hartwell had refused to indicate his position; he would force him to act, if not to speak. His after course events would decide; but half-way measures were no longer to be tolerated.

As he rode by the Falls, he met Zephyr on his way down. Zephyr was the first to speak.

"A weather-cock," he remarked, "has a reputation for instability of character which it does not deserve. It simply pays impartial attention to a breeze or a hurricane. In fact, it's alive to anything that's going in the wind line. We call a weather-cock fickle and a man wide-awake for doing the same thing." He paused, looking inquiringly at Firmstone.

Firmstone was in anything but an allegorical mood, yet he knew that Zephyr had something of interest to communicate, and so restrained any manifestation of impatience which he might have felt.

"Well?" he answered.

"Say, Goggles"—Zephyr continued his allegory—"I've studied weather-cocks. I take note that when one of them so-called fickle-minded inanimates goes jerking around the four cardinal points and feeling of what's between, it's just responding to the fore-running snorts of a pull-up and come-along cyclone. That's why I'm bobbing up and down like an ant looking for its long-lost brother. There's a cyclone on its way, Goggles, and it's going to light hereabouts right soon."

"I guess you're right, Zephyr." Firmstone gathered his reins, preparatory to resuming his way, but Zephyr laid a detaining hand on the horse's neck.

It was not in Zephyr to make haste easily. His undulating shoulders indicated a necessity for immediate speech. The words, sizzling from between closed lips, were a compromise.

"You have more sense than many weather-cocks, and more sand than a gravel train." Zephyr's face began to twitch. "Wait!" The word came forth explosively; the detaining hand grasped the bridle firmly. "Say, Goggles, I was dead wrong. Do you hear? About Élise. You remember? At the Devil's Elbow. She ain't Pierre's girl. She's as much of a lady as you are. Keep still! Listen! A hurricane ain't got sense. It'll pull up a weed as quick as an oak. It's coming. For the love of God and me especially, if I get pulled, look out for her! Say yes, and go along. Don't fool with me! You'll swallow a barrel of water to get a drink of whisky."

Firmstone only stretched out his hand. Zephyr took it for an instant, then flung it aside. The next moment he was striding down the trail. Firmstone heard the strain of the jarring reeds of the harmonica shrill triumphantly, penetrated now and then by louder notes as a plunging step jarred a stronger breath through his lips.

At the mine, Firmstone found his work cut out for him. On the narrow platform of the mine boarding-house, the foreman was standing with his cap shoved far back on his head, his hands in his pockets. There was an insolent poise to the head that only intensified the sneering smile on the lips. He was surrounded by a dozen or more of the men whom Firmstone had marked as makers of trouble.

"Well, what in hell you up here for? Think I can't run a mine?" The foreman called into play every expression of coarse contempt at his command.

"Not this one for me. Go into the office, and I'll make out your time."

The foreman did not move.

Firmstone made no threatening gesture as he advanced. The foreman's eyes wavered, cast behind him at the gaping men, then he turned as Firmstone ordered.

In the office Firmstone wrote out a time check and tendered it to the man.

"Now pack up and get down the hill."

There were discordant cries outside that grew nearer and more distinct. As the foreman opened the door to pass out he flung back a defiant grin, but his words were drowned by a babel of voices that were surging into the ante-room from the platform and dining-room. Firmstone closed and locked the office door behind him. In an instant he was surrounded by a crowd of gesticulating, shouting men. There was a spreading pressure on all sides, as men were pushed back from an opening ring in the centre of the room. A man with blood-stained face rose, only to be again hurled to the floor by a stunning blow. Firmstone crushed his way into the ring.

"No fighting here."

The man dropped his eyes.

"I ain't going to be called down by no scab."

"If you want to fight, get off the company's grounds!" Firmstone moved between them.

"I want my time." The man's eyes were still downcast.

"You'll get it."

The ring closed up again.

"Are we let out?"

"The whole push fired?"

A burly, red-faced man pushed his way to the front.

"Say, Mr. Firmstone! Don't make no mistake. This ain't you. You're the whitest boss that ever looked down my shirt collar. That's so. That's what the boys all say. Just you pull out from the company and go with us. We'll carry you right up to glory on the back of a fire-snorting alligator."

Firmstone paid no attention to the man. He went from end to end of the room. The men gave way in front, only closing in behind. There was a hushed silence.

"There's no shut-down. Any man who wants work can have it and be taken care of. Any one who wants to quit, come for your time right now!"

As Firmstone again turned toward the office he was conscious for the first time of a thick-set man with kindly eyes, now steely-hard, who followed his every motion. It was the night-shift boss.

"You're with me?"

"You bet, and plenty more."

"Hold them down. Send the men in, one by one, who want to quit. How about the magazine?"

"All right. Two men and four guns. They're with you till hell freezes, and then they'll skate."

It was midnight before the last man called for his time. Firmstone laid down his pen.

"I'm shy a foreman. Will you take the job?" Firmstone addressed the shift boss.

"Yes, till you can do better."

"All right. You better move around pretty lively for to-night. I'll stay in the office till morning."

The man left the office. He had not been gone long before there was a timid knock at the office door.

"Come in," Firmstone called.

The door was opened hesitatingly and two men entered. They stood with lowered eyes, shifting their caps from hand to hand, and awkwardly balancing from foot to foot.

"Well?" Firmstone spoke sharply.

"Me and my partner want our jobs back."

"You'll have to see Roner. He's foreman now."

"Where is he?"

"In the mine."

"Can we take our bunks till morning, sir?"

"Yes."

The men left the office. Outside, their manner changed. Nudging elbows grated each other's ribs. The darkness hid their winks.

Firmstone had made a sad mistake. He was not omniscient. The men knew what he did not. They had been down to the Blue Goose and had returned with a mission.

CHAPTER XXV

A Divided House

In her little alcove at the Blue Goose Élise was gaining information every day of the progress of affairs, but in spite of impatience, in spite of doubt, she had seen nothing, heard nothing that seemed to demand immediate action on her part. She had made up her mind that a crisis was approaching. She had also determined with whom she would cast in her lot.

It was late when Hartwell's team pulled up at the Blue Goose. A crowd of excited men surrounded it, but the driver and his companions made no reply to loud questions as they sprang from the wagon and entered the door. Morrison was the first to halt them. The driver broke out with a string of oaths.

"It's so. Jack Haskins's gang is coming. Hartwell is taken care of all right. If his crowd try to make it through the cañon, there won't a hundred show up, to-morrow." He ended with a coarse laugh.

Morrison listened till the driver had finished. Then he turned toward Pierre. Pierre was standing just in front of the alcove, hiding Élise from Morrison. Morrison advanced, shaking his fist.

"Now you've got it, you trimmer. What are you going to do? I told you they were coming, and I've fixed for it."

Pierre stood with his hands in his pockets. There was the old oily smile on his face, but his eyes were dangerous. Morrison did not observe them.

"Why don't you speak? You're called." Morrison glanced over his shoulder at the silent crowd. "He's got a frog in his throat! The last one he swallowed didn't go down."

Morrison was very near death. He noticed the crowd part hurriedly and turned in time to look into the muzzle of Pierre's revolver. The parting of the crowd was explained.

An unlighted cigar was between Pierre's teeth. They showed gleaming white under his black moustache. Only bright points of light marked his eyes between their narrowed lids. Still holding his revolver point-blank, with thumb and finger he raised and lowered the hammer. The sharp, even click pierced Morrison's nerves like electric shocks. It was not in man to endure this toying with death. Surprise gave place to fear, and this in turn to mortal agony. His face paled. Great drops stood out on his forehead, gathered and streamed down his face. He feared to move, yet he trembled. His legs shook under him. There was a final stagger, but his terrified eyes never left Pierre's face. With a shuddering groan, he sank helpless to the floor. Pierre's smile broadened horribly. He lowered his weapon and, turning aside, thrust it in his pocket.

Morrison had died a thousand deaths. If he lived he would die a thousand more. This Pierre knew. For this reason and others he did not shoot. Pierre also knew other things. Morrison had refused to take heed to his words. He had gone his own way. He had made light of Pierre before the men. Last of all, he had gained courage to taunt Pierre to his face with weakening, had bitterly accused him of using Élise as a means of ingratiating himself with the Rainbow crowd. Pierre was not above taking a human life as a last resort; but even then he must see clearly that the gain warranted the risk. Morrison had been weighed and passed upon. A dead Morrison meant a divided following. A living Morrison, cowed and beaten and shamed before them all, was dead to Pierre. This was Pierre's reasoning, and he was right. The first step had been taken. The next one he was not to take; but this fact did not nullify Pierre's logic. Given time, Pierre knew that Morrison would be beaten, discredited, do what he would.

Luna helped the fallen Morrison to his feet. The first thing Morrison noticed was Pierre walking away toward the private office. Luna again approached Morrison with a brimming glass of brandy.

"Take this down. Lord! That was a nerve-peeler! I don't blame you for going under."

Morrison swallowed the liquor at a gulp. The pallor died away and a hot flush mounted his face.

"I've got him to settle with, too. I'll make him squeal before I'm done."

The crowd had surged to the door to meet a swarm of howling men who had just come down from the mine. Three or four remained with Luna around Morrison. His voice was hoarse and broken.

"He's thrown us over. You see that? It's up to us to play it alone. He's put it up to your face that he's with you, but he's playing against you. He can't stop us now. It's gone too far. The first tug is coming, to-morrow. We'll win out, hands down. The Rainbow first, then Pierre." He ended with a string of profanity.

Luna took up Morrison's broken thread.

"There's fifty men with rifles in the cañon. Hartwell's gang will never get through. The boys are going to shoot at sight."

"Where's Firmstone?" Morrison's face writhed.

"Up to the mine. He's getting in his work." Luna looked over his shoulder at the crowd of miners.

"That's so. The foreman's fired. So am I. He is going to die boss." The man grinned, as he held out a time check.

"He'll die, anyway." Morrison's jaws set. "You're sure he's at the mine?"

"Dead sure. He's got his work cut out to-night. Lots of scabs held out. He's put the night boss in foreman." The man grinned again.

Morrison laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You're game?"

"You bet I am!"

"Go back to the mine to-night——"

"And miss all the fun down here?" the man interrupted.

Morrison's hand rested more heavily on the shoulder.

"Don't get flip. Have some fun of your own up there. The supe will hear the racket down here early. He'll start down with his scabs to help out. Two men can start a racket there that will keep him guessing. If he's started it will fetch him back. If he hasn't he won't start at all."

"What kind of a racket, for instance?"

Morrison swung impatiently on his foot.

"What's the matter with letting off a box or two of powder under the tram?"

"Nothing. Is that our job?"

"Yes. And see that it's done."

"That's me. Come on, Joe. Let's have a drink first."

These two were the penitents whom Firmstone had taken back.

The greater number of the men were crowded around the gilded bar, drinking boisterously to the success of the union and death to scabs and companies. A few, more sober-minded, but none the less resolute, gathered around Morrison. They were the leaders upon whom he depended for the carrying out of his orders, or for acting independently of them on their own initiative, as occasion might demand. With logic fiendish in its cunning, he pointed out to them their right to organise, laid emphasis on their pacific intentions only to defend their rights, and having enlarged upon this, he brought into full play Hartwell's fatal error.

"You see," he concluded; "right or wrong, the company's gone in to win. They ain't taking no chances, and the law's at their backs. You know Haskins's gang. You know what they're here for. They're here to shoot, and they'll shoot to kill. Suppose you go out like lambs? That won't make no difference. It'll be too tame for them, unless some one's killed. What if it is murder and one of the gang is pulled? They've got the whole gang at their back and the company's money. Suppose we go out one by one and shoot back? Self-defence?" Morrison snapped his fingers. "That's our chance to get off. We've got to pull together. In a general mix-up, we'll be in it together, and there ain't no law to string up the whole push. Stick together. That's our hold. If Haskins's gang is wiped out to-morrow, and that glass-eyed supe with them, who'll get jumped? If the mine and mill both get blowed up, who's done it? The fellows who did it ain't going to tell, and it won't be good medicine for any one else to do it, even if he wants to."

"Who's going to open up?" one of the men asked, soberly.

Morrison turned carelessly.

"That's a fool question. Folks that ain't looking for trouble don't put caps and powder in a bag to play foot-ball with. Both sides are putting up kicks. Who's to blame?"

The man looked only half convinced.

"Well, we ain't, and we don't want to be. If we keep quiet, and they open up on us, we've got a right to defend ourselves. Unless," he added, meditatively, "we get out beforehand, then there won't be any questions to ask."

Morrison turned fiercely.

"How much did you get?"

"Get for what?"

"How much did the company put up to stand you off?"

"I haven't been bought off by the company," the man answered, fiercely; "and I ain't going to be fooled off by you."

Morrison lifted his hand, palm outward.

"That's all right. Go right on, first door right. Go right in. Don't knock. You'll find Pierre. He's scab-herding now."

Morrison passed among the thronging men, giving suggestions and orders for the morning's struggle. His manner was forced, rather than spontaneous. Pierre's leaven was working.

To Élise at her desk it seemed as if the revel would never end. She had made up her mind what to do, she was awaiting the time to act. She did not dare to leave her place now; Morrison would be certain to notice her absence and would suspect her designs. There was nothing to do but wait. It was after one o'clock when, slipping out from the alcove, she ostentatiously closed the office-door and, locking it, walked through the passage that led to the dining-room. Her footsteps sounded loudly as she went upstairs to her room. She intended they should. In her room, she took down a dark, heavy cloak, and, throwing it over her shoulders, drew the hood over her head. A moment she stood, then turned and silently retraced her steps.

As the outside door closed noiselessly behind her, there was a momentary tightening around her heart. After all, she was leaving the only friends she had ever known. They were crude, coarse, uncouth, but she knew them. She knew that they would not remain ignorant of her actions this night. It would cut her off from them forever, and what was her gain?

Only those she had known for a day, those whose very words of kindness had shown her how wide was the gulf that parted her from them. How wide it was she had never realised till now when she was to attempt to cross it, with the return for ever barred. She recalled the easy grace of Miss Hartwell, considerate with a manner that plainly pointed to their separate walks in life. And Firmstone? He had been more than kind, but the friendly light in his eyes, the mobile sympathy of his lips, these did not come to her now. What if the steel should gleam in his eyes, the tense muscles draw the lips in stern rebuke, the look that those eyes and lips could take, when they looked on her, not as Élise of the Blue Goose, but Élise, a fugitive, a dependant?

The colour deepened, the figure grew rigid. She was neither a fugitive nor a dependant. She was doing right; how it would be accepted was no concern of hers.

The shadow of the great mountain fell across the gulch and lay sharp and clear on the flank of the slide beyond. Overhead, in the deep blue, the stars glinted and shone, steely hard. Élise shivered in a hitherto unknown terror as she crept into the still deeper shadow of the stunted spruces that fringed the talus from the mountain. She did not look behind. Had she done so she might have seen another shadow stealing cautiously, but swiftly, after her, only pausing when she passed from sight within the entrance to the office at the mill.

Zephyr had despoiled the Blue Goose of its lesser prey. He had no intention of stopping at that.

Élise had gained her first objective point. It was long before the light in Miss Hartwell's room over the office descended the stairs and appeared at the outer door. Her face was pale, but yet under control. Only, as she clasped the hand that had knocked for admission, she could not control the grasp that would not let go its hold, even when the door was relocked.

"It was very good of you to come."

CHAPTER XXVI

The Day of Reckoning

If Miss Hartwell was a debtor she was a creditor as well. In spite of a calm exterior, the hand that so tightly clasped Élise's throbbed and pulsed with every tumultuous beat of the heart that was stirred with a strange excitement born of mortal terror. Gradually the rapid strokes slowed down till, with the restful calm that comes to strained nerves in the presence of a stronger, unquestioning will, the even ebb and flow of pulsing blood resumed its normal tenor.

The bread that Élise had cast upon the waters returned to her in a manifold measure. The vague

sense of oppression which she had felt on leaving the doors of the Blue Goose gave way to an equally vague sense of restful assurance. She could dissect neither emotion, nor could she give either a name. The sense of comfort was vague; other emotions stood out clearly. These demanded immediate attention. She rose gently, but decidedly. The calm beat of the clasping hand again quickened with her motion.

"I must leave you now." Her voice was even, but full of sympathy.

"Don't. Please don't. I can't bear it."

"I must; and you must." She was gently freeing the clasping hand.

"Where are you going?"

"To the mine, to warn Mr. Firmstone."

"Don't go! Why not telephone?" The last was spoken with eagerness born of the inspiration of despair.

"The wires are cut." Her hand was free now and Miss Hartwell was also standing. There was a deathly pallor on the quiet face, only the rapid beat of the veins on her temples showed the violence of the emotion she was mastering so well.

"But my brother?"

"Your brother is perfectly safe." Élise told briefly the circumstances of Hartwell's capture and detention. "They have men posted in the cañon; they have men between here and the mine. Mr. Firmstone does not know it. He will try to come down. They will kill him. He must not try to come down."

"How can you get up there?" Miss Hartwell clutched eagerly at this straw.

Élise smiled resolutely.

"I am going up on the tram. Now you must listen carefully." She unbuckled her belt and placed her revolver in Miss Hartwell's listless hands. "Keep away from the windows. If there is any firing lie down on the floor close to the wall. Nothing will get through the logs." She turned toward the door. "You must come and lock up after me."

At the door Miss Hartwell stood for a moment, irresolute. She offered no further objections to Élise's going. That it cost a struggle was plainly shown in the working lines of her face. Only for a moment she stood, then, yielding to an overmastering impulse, she laid her hands on the shoulders of Élise.

"Good-bye," she whispered. "You are a brave girl."

Élise bent her lips to those of Miss Hartwell.

"Yours is the hardest part. But it isn't good-bye."

The door closed behind her, and she heard the click of the bolt shot home.

There were a few resolute men in the mill. It was short-handed; but the beating stamps pounded out defiance. In the tram tower Élise spoke to the attendant.

"Stop the tram."

The swarthy Italian touched his hat.

"Yes, miss."

The grinding brake was applied and an empty bucket swung gently to and fro.

"Now, Joe, do just as I tell you. I am going up in this bucket." She glanced at the number. "When three-twenty comes in stop. Don't start up again for a half hour at least."

The man looked at her in dumb surprise.

"You go in the tram?" he asked. "What for?"

"To warn Mr. Firmstone."

For reply, the man brushed her aside and began clambering into the empty bucket.

"Me go," he said, grimly.

Élise laid a detaining hand upon him.

"No. You must run the tram. I can't."

"Me go," he insisted. "Cable jump sheave? What matter? One damn dago gone. Plenty more. No more Élise."

Élise pulled at him violently. He was ill-balanced. The pull brought him to the floor, but Élise did not loose her hold. Her eyes were flashing.

"Do as I told you."

The man brought a ladder and Élise sprang lightly up the rounds.

"All right," she said. "Go ahead."

The man unloosed the brake. There was a tremor along the cable; the next instant the bucket shot from the door of the tower and glided swiftly up the line.

"Don't forget. Three-twenty." Already the voice was faint with distance.

In spite of injunctions to the contrary, Miss Hartwell was looking out of the window. She saw, below the shafts of sunlight already streaming over the mountain, the line of buckets stop, swing back and forth, saw the cable tremble, and again the long line of buckets sway gently as the cable grew taut and the buckets again slid up and down. Her heart was beating wildly as she lifted her eyes to the dizzy height. She knew well what the stopping and the starting meant. Sharp drawn against the lofty sky, the great cable seemed a slender thread to hold a human life in trust. What if the clutch should slip that held the bucket in place? What if other clutches should slip and let the heavy masses of steel slide down the cable to dash into the one that held the girl who had grown so dear to her? In vain she pushed these possibilities aside. They returned with increased momentum and hurled themselves into her shrinking soul. There were these dangers. "All employees of the Rainbow Company are forbidden to ride on the tram. ANY EMPLOYEE VIOLATING THIS RULE WILL BE INSTANTLY DISCHARGED." These words burned themselves on her vision in characters of fire. Élise had explained all of these things to her, and now! She buried her face in her trembling hands. Not for long. Again her face, pale and drawn, was turned upward. She moaned aloud. A black mass clinging to the cable was rising and sinking, swaying from side to side, a slender figure poised in the swinging bucket, steadied by a white hand that grasped the rim of steel. She turned from the window resolved to see no more. Her resolution fled. She was again at the window with upturned face and straining eyes, white lips whispering prayers that God might be good to the girl who was risking her life for another. The slender threads even then had vanished. There was only a fleck of black floating high above the rambling town, above the rocks mercilessly waiting below. She did not see all. At the mine two stealthy men were even then stuffing masses of powder under the foundations that held the cables to their work. Even as she looked and prayed a flickering candle flame licked into fiery life a hissing, spitting fuse and two men scrambled and clambered to safety from the awful wreck that was to come. A smoking fuse eating its way to death and "320" not yet in the mill! She saw another sight.

From out the shadow of the eastern mountain, a band of uncouth men emerged, swung into line and bunched on the level terrace beyond the boarding-house. Simultaneously every neighbouring boulder blossomed forth in tufts of creamy white that writhed and widened till they melted in thin air like noisome, dark-grown fungi that wilt in the light of day. Beyond and at the feet of the clustered men spiteful spurts of dust leaped high in air, then drifted and sank, to be replaced by others. Faint, meaningless cries wove through the drifting crash of rifles, blossoming tufts sprang up again and again from boulders near and far. Answering cries flew back from the opening cluster of men, other tufts tongued with yellow flame sprang out from their levelled guns. Now and then a man spun around and dropped, a huddled grey on the spurting sand.

It was not in man long to endure the sheltered fire. Dragging their wounded, Jack Haskins's gang again converged, and headed in wild retreat for the office. The opposing tufts came nearer, and now and then a dark form straightened and advanced to another shelter, or was hidden from sight by a bubble of fleecy white that burst from his shoulder. Close at the heels of the fleeing men the spiteful spurts followed fast, till they died out in the thud of smitten logs and the crashing glass of the office.

The answering fire of the beleaguered men died to silence. The dark, distant forms grew daring, ran from shelter and clustered at the foot of the slide, across the trail from the Blue Goose. Rambling shots, yells of defiance and triumph, broke from the gathering strikers. The shafts of sunlight had swept down the mountain, smiting hard the polished windows of the Blue Goose that blazed and flamed in their fierce glory.

Suddenly the clustered throng of strikers broke and fled. Cries of terror pierced the air.

"The cables! The cables!"

Overhead the black webs were sinking and rising with spiteful snaps that whirled the buckets in wild confusion and sent their heavy loads of ore crashing to the earth, five hundred feet below. Then, with a rushing, dragging sweep, buckets and cables whirled downward. Full on the Blue Goose the tearing cables fell, dragging it to earth, a crushed and broken mass.

Morrison's emissaries had done their work well. The tram-house at the mine had been blown up. They had accomplished more than he had hoped for. Pierre was in the bar-room when the cables fell. He had no time to escape, even had he seen or known.

Momentarily forgetful, the strikers swarmed around the fallen building, tearing aside crushed timbers, tugging at the snarled cable, if perchance some of their own were within the ruins. There came the spiteful spat of a solitary bullet, then a volley. With a yell of terror, the strikers broke and fled to the talus behind the saloon. They were now the pursued. They paused to fire no return shots. Stumbling, scrambling, dodging, through tangled scrub and sheltering thicket, down by the mill, down through the cañon, spurred by zipping bullets that clipped twigs and spat on stones around them; down by the Devil's Elbow they fled, till sheltering scrub made pursuit dangerous; then, unmolested, they scattered, one by one, in pairs, in groups, never to return.

Even yet the startled echoes were repeating to the peaceful mountains the tale of riot and death, but they bent not from their calm to the calm below that was looking up to them with the eyes of death. Set in its frame of splintered timbers, the body of Pierre rested, a ruined life in a ruined structure, and both still in death. Wide-open eyes stared from the swarthy face, the strained lips parted in a sardonic smile, showing for the last time the gleaming teeth. Morrison had triumphed, but the wide open eyes saw the triumph that was yet defeat. Far up on the mountain-side they looked and saw death pursuing death. They saw Morrison climbing higher and higher, saw him strain his eyes ever ahead, never behind, saw them rest on two figures, saw Morrison crouch behind a rock and a shimmer of light creep along the barrel of his levelled rifle. The eyes seemed eager as they rested on another figure above him that stretched forth a steady hand; saw jets of flame spring from two guns. Then they gleamed with a brighter light as they saw the rifle fall from Morrison's hand; saw Morrison straighten out, even as he lay, his face upturned and silent. That was all in life that Pierre cared to know. Perhaps the sun had changed, but the gleam of triumph in the staring eyes faded to the glaze of death.

Élise knew well the danger that went with her up the line. It laid strong hold upon her, as the loosened brake shot the bucket up the dizzy cable. As she was swept up higher and higher she could only hope and pray that the catastrophe which she knew was coming might be delayed until the level stretch above the Falls was reached, where the cables ran so near the ground she might descend in safety. She had given Joe the right number, and she knew that nothing short of death would keep him from heeding her words. She turned her thoughts to other things. Cautiously she raised her eyes above the rim of the bucket and scanned the winding trail. She saw men crouching behind boulders, but Firmstone was not in sight, and strength and courage returned. Her bucket swept up over the crest of the Falls, and her heart stood still, as it glided along swiftly, eating up the level distance to another rise. The saddle clipped over the sheave, swung for an instant, then stood still. She clambered out, down the low tower, then sped to the trail and waited.

She rose to her feet, as from behind a sheltered cliff Firmstone emerged, stern, erect, determined. He caught sight of Élise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, fiercely.

"To keep you from going to the mill." There was an answering fierceness in her eyes.

"Well, you are not going to." He brushed her aside.

"I am." She was again in his path.

He took hold of her almost harshly.

"Don't be a fool."

"Am I? Listen." There was the glint of steel on steel in the meeting eyes. Echoing shots dulled by distance yet smote plainly on their ears. "Morrison's men are guarding the trail. They are in the cañon. You can't get through."

Firmstone's eyes softened as he looked into hers. The set line broke for an instant, then he looked down the trail. Suddenly he spun around on his heel, wavered, then sank to the ground.

Élise dropped on her knees beside him, mumbling inaudible words with husky voice. The hands that loosened the reddening collar of his shirt were firm and decided. She did not hear the grate of Zephyr's shoes. She was only conscious of other hands putting hers aside. His knife cut the clothes that hid the wound. Zephyr took his hat from his head.

"Water," he said, holding out the hat.

Élise returned from the brook with the brimming hat. The closed eyes opened at the cooling drops.

"It's not so bad." He tried to rise, but Zephyr restrained him.

"Not yet."

Élise was looking anxiously above the trail. Zephyr noted the direction.

"No danger. 'Twas Morrison. He's done for."

Three or four miners were coming down the trail. They paused at the little group. Zephyr looked up.

"You're wanted. The old man's hit."

A litter was improvised and slowly and carefully they bore the wounded man down the trail. Zephyr was far in advance. He returned.

"It's all right. The gang's on the run."

The little procession headed straight for the office, and laid their burden on the floor.

The company surgeon looked grave, as he carefully exposed the wound. To Élise it seemed ages.

Finally he spoke.

"It's a nasty wound; but he'll pull through."

CHAPTER XXVII

Passing Clouds

In spite of the surgeon's hopeful words, the path to recovery lay fearfully near the gate of death. Firmstone had been shot from above, and the bullet, entering at the base of the neck just in front of the throat, had torn its way beneath the collar-bone, passing through the left arm below the shoulder.

During the period of trying suspense, when Firmstone's life wavered in the balance, through the longer period of convalescence, he lacked not devotion, love, nor skill to aid him. Zephyr was omnipresent, but never obtrusive. Bennie, with voiceless words and aggressive manner, plainly declared that a sizzling cookstove with a hot temper that never cooled was more efficacious than a magazine of bandages and a college of surgeons.

Élise cared for Firmstone, Madame for Élise. Zephyr's rod and rifle, with Bennie's stove, supplied that without which even the wisest counsel comes to an inglorious end. Over all Élise reigned an uncrowned queen, with no constitution, written or unwritten, to hamper her royal will. Even the company surgeon had to give a strict accounting. The soft, red lips could not hide the hard, straight lines beneath rounded curves, nor the liquid black of velvet eyes break the insistent glint of an active, decisive mind.

Miss Hartwell was still pretty and willing, but yet helpless and oppressed. It was therefore with a regretted sense of relief that the arrival of Miss Firmstone removed the last appearance of duty that kept her in useless toleration. Hartwell's capacious sleeve held a ready card which awaited but an obvious opportunity for playing. No sooner was Firmstone pronounced out of danger than the card, in the form of urgent business, was played, and Hartwell and his sister left for the East.

Like her brother, Miss Firmstone evidently had a will of her own, and, also like her brother, a well-balanced mind to control its manifestations. There was a short, sharp battle of eyes when first the self-throned queen was brought face to face with her possible rival. The conflict was without serious results, for Miss Firmstone, in addition to will and judgment, had also tact and years superior to Élise. These were mere fortuitous adjuncts which had been denied Élise. So it happened that, though a rebellious pupil, Élise learned many valuable lessons. She was ready and willing to defy the world individually and collectively; yet she stood in awe of herself.

One afternoon Firmstone was sitting in his room, looking out of his window, and in spite of the grandeur of the mountain there was little of glory but much of gloom in his thoughts. The mine was in ruins; so, as far as he could see, were his labours, his ambitions, and his prospects. He tried to keep his thoughts on the gloom of the clouds and shut his eyes to their silver lining. The silver lining was in softly glowing evidence, but he could not persuade himself that it was for him. Step by step he was going over every incident of his intercourse with Élise. Their first meeting, her subsequent warning that his life was in serious danger, her calm, resolute putting aside of all thought of danger to herself, her daring ride up the tram to keep him from sure death when she knew that the tram-house was to be blown up, that the catastrophe might occur at any moment, her unremitting care of him, wounded near to death: all these came to him, filled him with a longing love that left no nerve nor fibre of heart or soul untouched with thrills that, for all their pain, were even yet not to be stilled by his own volition. Firmstone grew more thoughtful. He realised that Élise was only a girl in years, yet her natural life, untrammelled by conventional proprieties which distract and dissipate the limited energy in a thousand divergent channels, had forced her whole soul into the maturity of many waxing and waning seasons. Every manifestation of her restless, active mind had stood out clear and sharp in the purity of unconscious self. This was the disturbing element in Firmstone's anxious mind. Responsive to every mood, fiercely unsparing of herself, yet every attempted word of grateful appreciation from him had been anticipated and all but fiercely repelled. With all his acumen, Firmstone yet failed to comprehend two very salient features of a woman's heart, that, however free and spontaneous she may be, there is one emotion instinctively and jealously guarded, that she will reject, with indignation, gratitude offered as a substitute for love.

Firmstone's meditations were interrupted by a knock on the door. Zephyr came in, holding out a bulky envelope. It was from the eastern office of the Rainbow Company. Firmstone's face stiffened as he broke the seals. Zephyr noted the look and, after an introductory whistle, said:

"'Tisn't up to you to fret now, Goggles. Foolishness at two cents an ounce or fraction thereof is more expensive than passenger rates at four dollars a pound."

Firmstone looked up absently.

"What's that you're saying?"

Zephyr waved his hand languidly.

"I was right. Have been all along. I knew you had more sense than you could carry in your head.

It's all over you, and you got some of it shot away. I'm trying to make it plain to you that foolishness on paper ain't near so fatal as inside a skull. Consequently, if them Easterners had had any serious designs on you, they'd sent the real stuff back in a Pullman instead of the smell of it by mail."

Firmstone made no reply, but went on with his letter. There was amusement and indignation on his face as, having finished the letter, he handed it to Zephyr.

The letter was from Hartwell and was official. Briefly, it expressed regret over Firmstone's serious accident, satisfaction at his recovery, and congratulations that a serious complication had been met and obviated with, all things considered, so slight a loss to the company. The letter concluded as follows:

> We have carefully considered the statement of the difficulties with which you have been confronted, as reported by our manager, and fully comprehend them. We have also given equal consideration to his plans for the rehabilitation of the mine and mill, and heartily assent to them as well as to his request that you be retained as our superintendent and that, in addition to your salary, you be granted a considerable share in the stock of our company. We feel that we are warranted in pursuing this course with you, recognising that it is a rare thing, in one having the ability which you have shown, to take counsel with and even frankly to adopt the suggestions of another.
>
> By order of the President and Board of Directors of the Rainbow Milling Company, by
>
> ARTHUR HARTWELL,
>
> Gen. Man. and Acting Secretary.

Zephyr's face worked in undulations that in narrowing concentrics reached the puckered apex of his lips.

"Bees," he finally remarked, "are ding-twisted, ornery insects. They have, however, one redeeming quality not common to mosquitoes and black flies. If they sting with one end they make honey with the other. They ain't neither to be cussed nor commended. They're just built on them lines."

Firmstone looked thoughtful.

"I'm inclined to think you're right. If you're looking for honey you've got to take chances on being stung."

"Which I take to mean that you have decided to hive your bees in this particular locality."

Firmstone nodded.

Zephyr looked expectantly at Firmstone, and then continued:

"I also wish to remark that there are certain inconveniences connected with being an uncommonly level-headed man. There's no telling when you've got to whack up with your friends."

"All right." Firmstone half guessed at what was coming.

"Madame," Zephyr remarked, "having been deprived by the hand of death of her legal protectors, namely, Pierre and Morrison, wishes to take counsel with you."

Zephyr, waiting no further exchange of words, left the room and shortly returned with Madame. She paused at the door, darted a frightened look at Firmstone, then one of pathetic appeal to the imperturbable Zephyr. Again her eyes timidly sought Firmstone, who, rising, advanced with outstretched hand. Madame's hands were filled with bundled papers. In nervously trying to move them, in order to accept Firmstone's proffered hand, the bundles fell scattered to the floor. With an embarrassed exclamation, she hastily stooped to recover them and in her effort collided with Zephyr, who had been actuated by the same motive.

Zephyr rubbed his head with one hand, gathering up the papers with the other.

"If Madame wore her heart on her neck instead of under her ribs, I would have had two hands free instead of one. Which same being put in literal speech means that there's nothing against nature in having a hard head keeping step with a tender heart."

Madame was at last seated with her papers in her lap. She was ill at ease in the fierce consciousness of self, but her flushed face and frightened eyes only showed the growing mastery of unselfish love over the threatening lions that waited in her path. One by one, she tendered the papers to Firmstone, who read them with absorbed attention. As the last paper was laid with its fellows Madame's eyes met fearlessly the calm look of the superintendent. Slowly, laboriously at first, but gathering assurance with oblivion of self, she told the story of Élise's birth. With the intuition of an overpowering love, she felt that she was telling the story to one absolutely trustworthy, able and willing to counsel her with powers far beyond her own. Firmstone heard far more than the stumbling words recited. His eyes dimmed, but his voice was steady.

"I think I understand. You want Élise restored to her friends?"

Madame's eyes slowly filled with tears that welled over the trembling lids and rolled down her cheeks. She did not try to speak. She only nodded in silent acquiescence. She sat silent for a few moments, then the trembling lips grew firm, but her voice could not be controlled.

"We ought to have done it long ago, Pierre and I. But I loved her. Pierre loved her. She was all we had." It was worse than death. Death only removes the presence, it leaves the consoling sense of possession through all eternity.

Zephyr started to speak, but Firmstone, turning to Madame, interrupted.

"You have no need to fear. Where you cannot go Élise will not."

Madame looked up suddenly. The rainbow of hope glowed softly for an instant in the tear-dimmed eyes. Then the light died out. "She will be ashamed of her hol' daddy and her hol' mammy before her gran' friends." Pierre's words came to her, laden with her own unworthiness.

The door opened and Élise and Miss Firmstone came in. Miss Firmstone took in the situation at a glance.

"You are reliable people to trust with a convalescent, aren't you? And after the doctor's warning that all excitement was to be avoided!"

"Doctors don't know everything," Zephyr exploded, in violence to his custom. Then, more in accord with it, "It does potatoes no end of good to be hilled."

Élise looked questioning surprise, as her glance fell on Madame, then on Zephyr. Her eyes rested lightly for a moment on Firmstone. There was a fleeting suggestion that quickened his pulses and deepened the flush on his face. Again her eyes were on Madame. Pity, love, glowed softly at sight of the bowed head. She advanced a step, and her hand and arm rested on Madame's shoulders. Madame shivered slightly, then grew rigid. Nothing should interfere with her duty to Élise.

Élise straightened, but her arm was not removed.

"What is it? What have you been saying?" She was looking fixedly at Firmstone. There was no tenderness in her eyes, only a demand that was not to be ignored.

Firmstone began a brief capitulation of his interview with Madame. When he told her that she was not Madame's daughter, that she was to be restored to her unknown friends, that Madame wished it, the change that came over the girl amazed him. Her eyes were flashing. Her clinched hands thrust backward, as if to balance the forward, defiant poise of her body.

"That is not so! You have frightened her into saying what she does not mean. You don't want me to leave you; do you? Tell me you don't!" She turned to Madame, fiercely.

Firmstone gave Madame no time to answer.

"Wait," he commanded. "You don't understand." His words were impetuous with the intensity of his emotion. "I don't want you to leave Madame. You are not going to. Don't you understand?" He laid his hand on hers, but she shook it off.

He withdrew his hand.

"Very well, but listen." Himself he put aside; but he was not to be diverted from his purpose. He felt that in the life of the girl before him a vital crisis was impending, that, unforeseeing of consequences, she, in the sheer delight of overcoming opposing wills, might be impelled to a step that would bring to naught all her glorious possibilities. The thought hardened his every mental fibre. He was looking into eyes that gleamed with open, resolute defiance.

"You and Madame are not to be separated. You are going East with my sister and Madame is going with you: You are going to your father's friends."

"Is that all?" The voice was mocking.

"No. I want your word that you will do as I say."

Without seeming to turn her defiant eyes, Élise laid her hand firmly on Madame.

"Come."

Madame rose in response to the impulse of hand and word. She cast a frightened, appealing look at Firmstone, then with Élise moved toward the door.

On the threshold Firmstone barred the way.

"I have not had my answer."

"No?"

"I can wait."

Élise and Firmstone stood close. There was a measure of will opposed to will in the unflinching eyes. Élise felt a strange thrill, strange to her. With Pierre and Madame opposition only roused her anger, their commands only gave piquancy to revolt. But now, as she looked at the strong, resolute man before her, there was a new sensation fraught with subtler thrills of delight, the yielding to one who commanded and took from her even the desire to resist. She felt warm waves

of blood surging to her face. The defiant poise of her head was unchanged, her eyes softened, but the drooping lids hid them from those that she acknowledged master.

"May I go if I give my answer?"

"If your answer is right, yes."

The eyes were veiled, but the mobile lips were wavering.

"Madame and I have decided to go East."

The look on Firmstone's face changed from resolution to pleading.

"I have no right to ask more, unless you choose to give it. Don't you know what I want to ask? Will you give me the right to ask?"

The drooping head bent still lower, a softer flush suffused the quiet face.

Firmstone took the girl's unresisting hands in his own.

"Can't you give me my answer, dear? You have come to be all the world to me. You are going away for the sake of your friends. Will you come back some time for mine?"

Élise slowly raised her eyes to his. He read his answer. There was a slight answering pressure, then her hands were gently withdrawn. Firmstone stood aside. Élise and Madame moved over the threshold, the door swinging to behind them, not quite shut; then it opened, just enough to show a flushed face, with teasing, roguish eyes.

"I forgot to ask. Is that all, Mr. Minion?"

Then the door closed with a decided click.

THE END

THE REBELLION OF THE PRINCESS

A book that is a story, and never loses the quick, on-rushing, inevitable quality of a story from the first page to the last. Stirring, exciting, romantic, satisfying all the essential requirements of a novel. The scene is laid in Moscow at the time of the election of Peter the Great, when the intrigues of rival parties overturned the existing government, and the meeting of the National Guard made the city the scene of a hideous riot. It resembles in some points Miss Taylor's successful first story, "On the Red Staircase," especially in the date, the principal scenes and the fact that the hero is a French nobleman.

By Edward W. Townsend

Author of "Chimmie Fadden," "Days Like These," etc.

LEES AND LEAVEN

No novel of New York City has ever portrayed so faithfully or so vividly our new world Gotham—the seething, rushing New York of to-day, to which all the world looks with such curious interest. Mr. Townsend, gives us not a picture, but the bustling, nerve-racking pageant itself. The titan struggles in the world of finance, the huge hoaxes in sensational news-paperdom, the gay life of the theatre, opera, and restaurant, and then the calmer and comforting domestic scenes of wholesome living, pass, as actualities, before our very eyes. In this turbulent maelstrom of ambition, he finds room for love and romance also.

There is a bountiful array of characters, admirably drawn, and especially delightful are the two emotional and excitable lovers, young Bannister and Gertrude Carr. The book is unlike Mr. Townsend's "Chimmie Fadden" in everything but its intimate knowledge of New York life.

By S. R. Crockett

Author of "The Banner of Blue," "The Firebrand"

FLOWER O' THE CORN

Mr. Crockett has made an interesting novel of romance and intrigue. He has chosen a little town in the south of France, high up in the mountains, as the scene for his drama. The plot deals with a group of Calvinists who have been driven from Belgium into southern France, where they are besieged in their mountain fastness by the French troops. A number of historical characters figure in the book, among them Madame de Maintenon.

"Flower o' the Corn" is probably one of Mr. Crockett's most delightful women characters. The book is notable for its fine descriptions.

By Edith Wyatt

Author of "Every One His Own Way"

TRUE LOVE

A Comedy of the Affections

Here commonplace, everyday, ordinary people tread the boards. The characters whom Miss Wyatt presents are not geniuses, or heroes, or heroines of romance, but commonplace persons with commonplace tricks and commonplace manners and emotions. They do romantic things without a sense of romance in them, but weave their commonplace doings into a story of great human interest that the reader will find far from commonplace. The vein of humorous satire, keen, subtle and refined, permeating the story and the characterization, sets this work of Miss Wyatt's in a class by itself.

By Pauline B. Mackie

Author of "The Washingtonians"

THE VOICE IN THE DESERT

This is a story of subtle attractions and repulsions between men and women; of deep temperamental conflicts, accentuated and made dramatic by the tense atmosphere of the Arizona desert. The action of the story passes in a little Spanish mission town, where the hero, Lispenard, is settled as an Episcopal clergyman, with his wife Adele and their two children. The influence of the spirit of the desert is a leading factor in the story. Upon Lispenard the desert exerts a strange fascination, while upon his wife it has an opposite effect and antagonizes her. As their natures develop under the spell of their environment, they drift apart and the situation is complicated by the influence upon Lispenard of a second woman who seems to typify the spirit of the desert

itself. The spiritual situation is delicately suggested and all is done with a rare and true feeling for human nature.

By Shan F. Bullock

Author of "The Barrys," "Irish Pastorals"

THE SQUIREEN

Mr. Bullock takes us into the North of Ireland among North-of-Ireland people. His story is dominated by one remarkable character, whose progress towards the subjugation of his own temperament we cannot help but watch with interest. He is swept from one thing to another, first by his dare-devil, roistering spirit, then by his mood of deep repentance, through love and marriage, through quarrels and separation from his wife, to a reconciliation at the point of death, to a return to health, and through the domination of the devil in him, finally to death. It is a strong, convincing novel suggesting, somewhat, "The House with the Green Shutters." What that book did for the Scotland of Ian Maclaren and Barrie, "The Squireen" will do for Ireland.

By Seumas McManus

Author of "Through the Turf Smoke"

"A LAD OF THE O'FRIEL'S"

This is a story of Donegal ways and customs; full of the spirit of Irish life. The main character is a dreaming and poetic boy who takes joy in all the stories and superstitions of his people, and his experience and life are thus made to reflect all the essential qualities of the life of his country. Many characters in the book will make warm places for themselves in the heart of the reader.

By Joel Chandler Harris

GABRIEL TOLLIVER

A story filled with the true flavor of Southern life. The first important novel by the creator of "Uncle Remus." Those who have loved Mr. Harris's children's stories, will find in this story of boy and girl love in Georgia during the troublous Reconstruction period, the same genial and kindly spirit, the same quaintly humorous outlook on life that characterizes his earlier work. A host of charming people, with whom it is a privilege to become acquainted, crowd the pages, and their characters, thoughts and doings are sketched in a manner quite suggestive of Dickens. The fawn-like Nan is one of the most winsome of characters in fiction, and the dwarf negress, Tasma Tid, is a weird sprite that only Mr. Harris could have created.

> "A novel which ranks Mr. Harris as the Dickens of the South."—*Brooklyn Eagle.*
>
> "It is a pretty love-story, artistically wrought, a natural, healthy love-story, full of Joel Chandler Harris's inimitable naivete."—*Atlanta Constitution.*

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