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MY "PARDNER" AND I

(*Gray Rocks*)

A Story Of The Middle-West

Illustrated

By Willis George Emerson

Chicago: Laird & Lee, Publishers

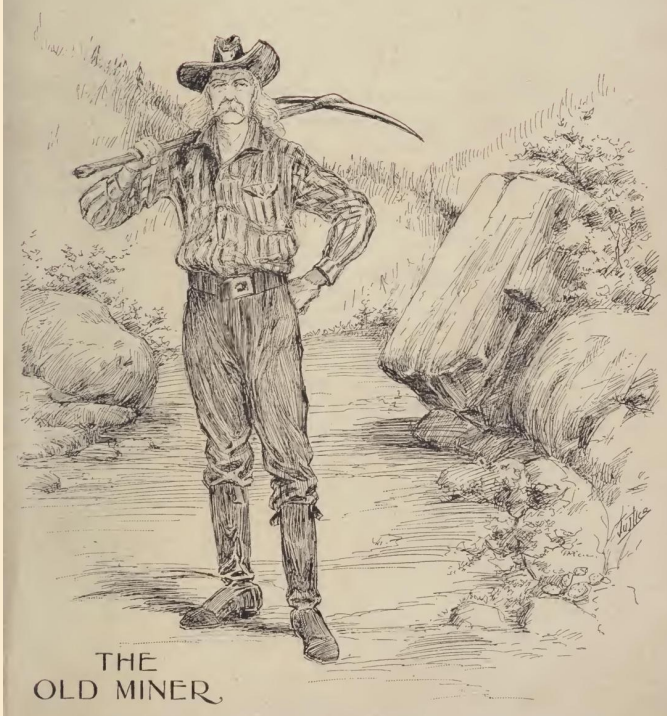
1894

"Beneath yon rocky peak that hides
In fleecy clouds its snow-flecked crest;
Beneath those crimson crags abides
The fairest queen of all the West."

MY "PARDNER" AND I

A Story of the Mines

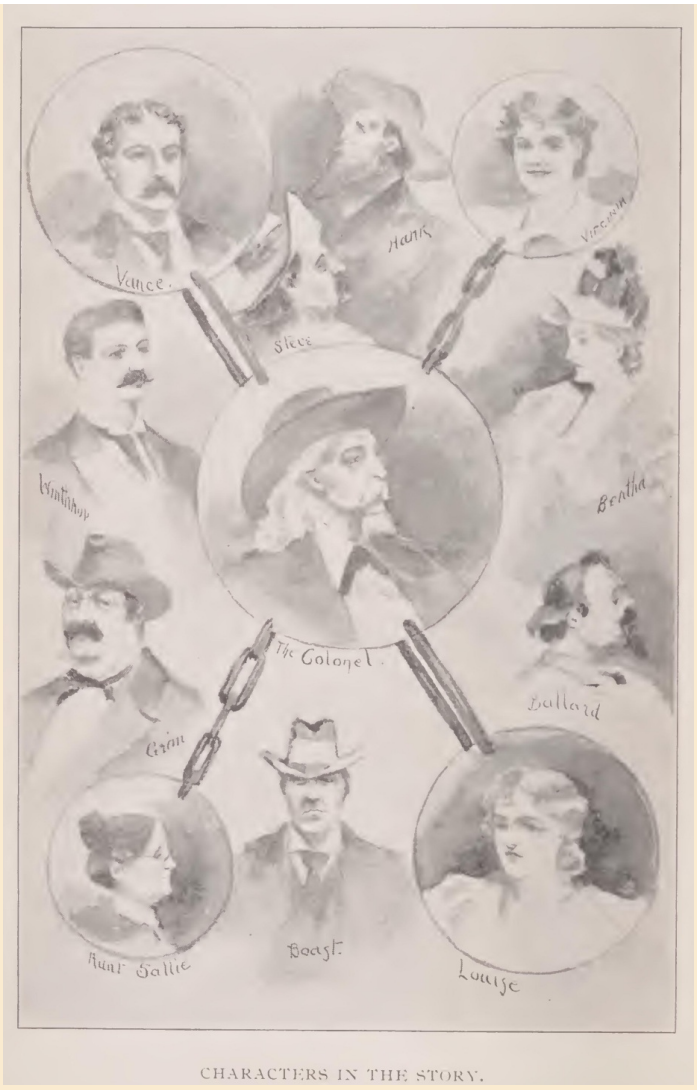
By WILLIS GEORGE EMERSON



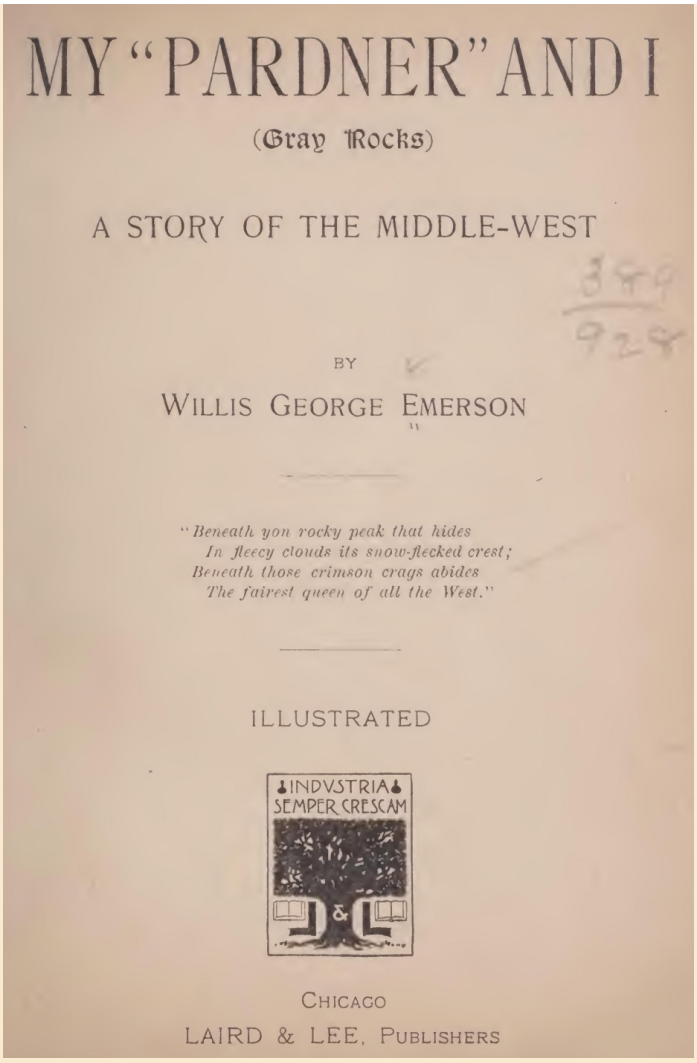
THE OLD MINER.

THE PASTIME SERIES—Monthly. $3.00 per annum. No. 78. July, 1899.
Entered at Chicago Postoffice as second-class matter.

Chicago: LAIRD & LEE, Publishers.



CHARACTERS IN THE STORY.



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PREFACE.

The breaking of a twig in some vast forest, or the dull echo of a miner’s pick in a rugged mountain canyon, alike suggest the solitude of Nature. The unwritten history of mining prospectors who search for yellow gold, or the advance guards of our civilization in the rich valleys of the West, are replete-with interest and dramatic incident. The “boom” town builder also plays a most conspicuous part in this unwritten drama.

There are no frayed-out remnants of a former greatness to be found on the frontier. A man sells for his intrinsic worth—no more, no less. Conditions that made men great in former generations are here active. and develop manhood in its highest form.

There is hardly a cross-road hamlet without its hotel, and usually a “Dick Ballard” presides. “Brainy men.” such as composed the Waterville Town Company, may be found wherever a new town is building, while a “Rufus Grim” is usually the autocrat of the mining camp.

The old “Colonel” represents a class of sturdy miners whose untiring labor occasionally gives to the world the golden keys of some fabulously rich discovery; while the greater number dedicate their lives to a fruitless search for hidden treasures, and finally die of disappointment and a broken heart.

“Louise,” in her unswerving devotion to her father, is a specimen of superior womanhood whose duplicate may be found in many a ranchman’s home throughout the nestling valleys of our y re at West.

Sometimes I imagine I was with “J. Arthur Boast” in his hiding place when he wrote that last letter and saw the spectral ghost that ever kept him company. The retribution perhaps was just, yet my sympathy lingers around the old prospect shaft.

Many of my readers will doubtless desire to express their criticism of GRAY ROCKS. Nothing will afford me more pleasure than to receive just criticisms, for it will at least enable me to escape similar errors in other stories that I am now engaged in writing.

Sincerely,

WILLIS GEORGE EMERSON.

ELM REST, August 20, 1894.

No. 1363 Central Park Boulevard, Chicago.

PARTIAL LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

CHAPTER I.—VANCE GILDER.

VANCE GILDER had an ambition. It was to be a great journalist. 11

The sunshine that gleamed in at his western windows disclosed most luxurious apartments—indicating refinement and culture. The bric-a-brac; the leathern walls stamped with gilt; the frieze of palm-leaves; the chandelier; the richly carved book-case, filled with tawny-covered volumes; the upright piano, and a guitar which stood sentinel-like in a retired corner; together with India rugs and tiger skins on the floor before an open grate, half hidden by a large Japanese fan—bespoke wealth as well as refined taste.

Seated at an open escritoire with writing materials before him, on the evening of a June day, was Vance Gilder.

He was not more than twenty-five, of medium height, dark brown hair, soft and wavy as the silk of Indian corn, large brown eyes, a clear complexion, an aquiline nose, and a rather heavy, dark moustache, which in 12 part hid a well-formed mouth.

Before him lay numerous packages of papers, but they were not claiming his attention. He was perusing a billet-doux written in a lady's hand.

There was a refinement and gentleness in his face, while his dress and surroundings indicated a serious elegance, rich but unaffected.

"Who can she be?" was the exclamation that escaped him as he again read the letter which he held in his hand.

Tossing it down, he walked back and forth across the room with measured strides.

Stopping before the mantel, he lighted a cigar. "Louise Bonifield," he ejaculated, between puffs of smoke, which he blew away in rings toward the ceiling, "where have I met her?


Who is she?

Where have I seen that name?”

Walking back to the escritoire, he took up the letter and read aloud:

Murray Hill Hotel, June 18.

Kind Sir:

Father and I arrived in the city last night. He wishes me to call on you at three o’clock this afternoon; business of special importance to himself.

Respectfully,

LOUISE BONIFIELD.

To Vance Gilder, Esq.

“No,” he said aloud, “I do not remember Miss Louise Bonifield. It is doubtless very stupid of me, and all that, but if ever I even heard the name before, it certainly has passed from my memory. She says three o’clock,” and glancing at the French time-piece which helped to make up the furniture of his room, he saw it was preparing to strike the hour of three. 13

Scarcely had the sound of the mellow cathedral bell died away, when the door-bell clanged out like a harsh echo of the clock’s last stroke.


His visitor.

The servant brought in a card bearing the name of “Louise Bonifield,” and received instructions to admit the visitor at once.

The rustling of skirts was soon heard in the hallway.

With the deportment of a queen, she accepted the proffered chair and raised to Vance’s face a pair of laughing blue eyes that might be dangerous. The parting of her rosy lips displayed her ivory teeth to advantage, while her evident embarrassment tinged with pink her beautiful cheeks.

“I called,” she stammered, “to see Mr. Vance Gilder.”

“At your service,” he replied, bowing low.

“But really, sir, are you Mr. Gilder?”

“I believe,” he replied, “that I enjoy the doubtful honor of that appellation.”

The half-hesitation of the visitor as she stood in the open door might have suggested momentary confusion, but reassurance seemed to assert itself as she complied with the melodious invitation of Vance Gilder to enter and be seated.

This vision of loveliness that entered the bachelor apartments of Vance Gilder might have been eighteen years old, but certainly no more. In stature she was of medium height, rather slender, and sustained herself "It must be,” she faltered, with increasing embarrassment, “all a mistake.” 14


“The Mr. Gilder for whom I am looking is a much older gentleman.”

Vance Gilder, with all his boasted matter-of-fact principles, was wonderfully interested in his fair visitor. She evidently was a stranger in the city, or a skilled actress. In referring to her afterwards, he spoke of her as a “dream of loveliness.”

He was too chivalrous to permit his visitor’s embarrassment to increase if he could help it and quickly assured her that it was not a very serious mistake, and asked in what way he could serve her, at the same time saying he regretted exceedingly that he did not answer the description of the Vance Gilder for whom she was seeking. 15

“The Mr. Gilder for whom I am looking,” said his fair visitor, “is a much older gentleman than you. He

visited father some three years ago, at Gold Bluff, Idaho, and owns an interest in Gray Rocks, my father's mine. My father is very anxious to meet Mr. Gilder; in fact, we have come all the way from Idaho expressly for that purpose. He would have called in person, but was taken ill last evening—so ill, indeed, that we found it necessary to summon a physician. We are stopping at the Murray Hill Hotel. I fear my father will be greatly disappointed."

A shade of sadness stole over the usually buoyant face of Vance Gilder.

"I think I understand," said he. "I bear the name of my father, who, after spending several months in the mining districts of Idaho, went to California, where he remained over a year, endeavoring to regain his health. He returned home a little less than two years ago and died within two months after his arrival.

"As his living representative, and in honor of his memory," said he, with feeling, "if there is any way in which he could have served you or your father, had he lived, I will volunteer, to the extent of my ability, to act in his stead."

"It certainly is very kind of you," she replied, "but I am distressed at this intelligence, and know my father will be also. We learned to think a great deal of Mr. Gilder during his few months' stay at Gold Bluff. You can 16
certainly do my father a great service by calling on him."

"I shall take great pleasure," said Vance, in his earnest way, "in doing so. I am employed on the *Banner*, and my duties will prevent me calling before tomorrow at ten o'clock, but at that hour, tell your father he may expect me."

She had risen while he was speaking, and with a face full of sympathy and kindness, thanked him for his promise; and before he realized what was transpiring, the hall door closed and she was gone.

The house from which she had taken her leave was one of the best overlooking Central Park, in New York City. Vance Gilder, the elder, was a man of great determination of character, and had accumulated a fortune while yet in the prime of life. He built for himself this house. It was surrounded by elegantly kept gardens and velvet lawns.

He retired from business late in the '60'., intending to devote himself to his wife and only son, then a mere child, and his library. Scarcely a year of such enjoyment was allowed him before his wife sickened and died, leaving him his son and his fortune. It was hardly more than natural that he should lavish a great deal of attention and wealth upon his child.

As his son grew to manhood, his father discovered a recklessness and extravagance which was sadly at variance with those economic principles which he himself had so studiously practiced. Vance stood fairly well in his classes, and after graduating at Princeton, went abroad, visiting the principal cities of Europe, and spending money in such a lavish way that at the expiration of a year his father summoned him home and 17
remonstrated with him severely on his manner of living and his expensive habits.

Piqued at the rebuke, he quarreled with his father, and started out to make his way in the world alone. The estrangement was of short duration, however, and soon after the reconciliation he secured a position on the __Banner_ _, and assiduously devoted himself to the study of journalism. He gave up his follies and fast living, and found more enjoyment in his work on the *Banner* than he had ever found in swell dinners and midnight carousals at his club.

CHAPTER II.—THE OLD MINER.

ROOM in which we have introduced Vance Gilder to the reader, in the home overlooking 18
Central Park, had been his from childhood, and furnished by his father in its present luxurious style, as a reward for his devotion to the profession of journalism.

His father had invested his income in real estate, and in the lapse of years found himself possessed of a fortune many times greater than he had ever anticipated. He traveled a great deal over the west, and at Gold Bluff, Idaho, he found in Ben Bonifield, the owner of Gray Rocks, a playmate of his youth.

Ben Bonifield had staked out a claim which he called "Gray Rocks," and had worked away for several years with pick and shovel, believing that some day he would "strike it rich"—and from the output of other mining properties in that vicinity, it seemed as if his expectations might be realized some day.

He deeded a half interest in his mine to the elder Gilder, in consideration of certain moneys advanced him to develop the property. This one investment was the only one that Mr. Gilder ever made outside of New York City, and it is quite probable that in making this 19
one it was not so much an investment as a desire to assist his boyhood's friend. The deed which Ben Bonifield gave had been duly recorded, but in his travels on the Pacific coast he had in some way mislaid it, and on his return to New York City he had died without ever having mentioned the matter to his son. When his father died, Vance was bowed down with grief, while the old Scotch housekeeper and her husband could not have mourned more sincerely had the elder Gilder been related by the nearest ties of blood.

Vance found his father had not only left a fortune, but also a will. The date of this instrument showed that it was executed during the months of their estrangement, and had never been changed. The important part of the will, for this narrative, was a clause limiting Vance to an annuity of $5,000, provided he remained at the

old homestead and gave employment and a home to the Scotch house-keeper and her husband; but the title to the vast property which he owned was not to pass into his custody until he was forty years of age.

To the credit of the son, it can be said that he entertained no enmity towards his father because of this provision, but regarded it as simple justice. In the meantime, he devoted himself with more energy than ever to his profession, was economical in his habits, and had the consolation of knowing that he was being advanced from time to time on the *Banner*, until he was now regarded as one of the most trusted men on that great journal.

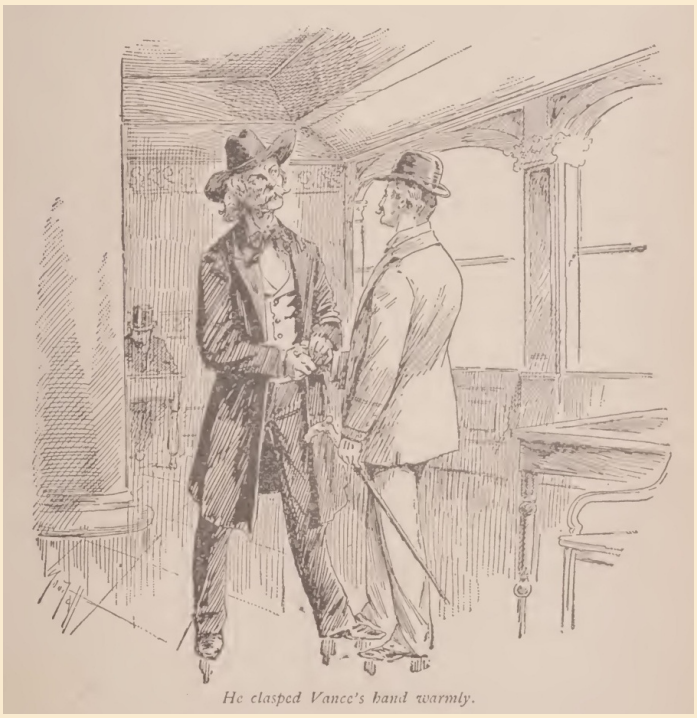
To be a member of the *Banner* staff of newsgatherers was a position to be envied by those similarly employed on less imposing journals. His associates—the city editor, the religious editor, the dramatic critic, the police reporter, and the heads of several other departments—were in the habit of discussing the topics of the times from a strictly democratic standpoint, with the regularity with which day follows night. 20

The "old man," or managing editor, could not take a deeper interest in the columns of the *Banner* than did his faithful coterie of assistants. The managing editor prided himself on his ability to recognize and command intellectual forces.

With the breaking of the dawn anew paper, filled with news deftly gathered from the four corners of the earth, was ushered into life, teeming with the world's history of a day, to be discussed by the banker, the politician, and the professional and non-professional classes over the breakfast-table. Each issue was a daily history possessing a soul and character distinctly its own, which collectively made up the policy of one of the greatest journals of New York City. Before high noon of each day a newspaper has generally served its purpose—dies; is a thing of the past, and the record of events found in its columns becomes ancient history.

The following morning at ten o'clock, agreeable to his promise, Vance Gilder was at the Murray Hill Hotel, and sent up his card to Ben Bonifield. Instead of receiving in his room, the old gentleman joined Vance in the lobby. He was a typical character—once seen, never forgotten. An old Virginian by birth and education, he still retained the courtly polish of one of the southern aristocracy, which many years of mining life had not been able to wholly destroy. In stature he was fully six feet, and rather portly; his oval face was smooth-shaven, save an iron-gray moustache. He wore his hair rather long, and the rim of his black felt hat was broad as a sombrero. His Prince Albert coat of broad-cloth was of old-time date, and suggested a revival of ancient gentility. 21

"Glad to see yo', suh; am delighted to meet a son of my old friend, Colonel Gilder."



He clasped Vance's hand warmly.

He clasped Vance's hand warmly, and his face was full of sympathy as he referred to the recent information he had received concerning Mr. Gilder's death. They soon found seats in a retired corner of the lobby, and after assuring Vance that he had entirely recovered from his recent illness, the old gentleman plunged into business. 22

"Yo' know, of cou'se, that yo'r father owned a one-half interest in Gray Rocks?"

"No, I was not aware of the fact until your daughter named it to me yesterday," replied Vance.

"Yo' su'prise me, suh, yo' really do," said the old miner, "but it is true, nevertheless, and the deed is on record; and what is mo', suh, Gray Rocks is destined to be the richest gold mine in Idaho. Yo' see, I have been workin' away on Gray Rocks for seven years—kep' right at it, winter an' summer, and while I have not 'struck it' yet, I am positive, suh, that if I had a little mo' money to push the work, my most sanguine expectations would be mo' than re'lized. We are now on the 200 foot level, but it seems, suh, it is not deep enough. A most wonderful showin', in my opinion, suh, will be made when the 300 foot level is reached, and we have cross-cut into the vein."

"I am not very well versed in regard to mining, in fact know next to nothing about it, but of course, as I am a half owner in a gold mine, I am naturally interested in having it developed."

"Well, suh," said the old gentleman, "yo' see I am. I know all about mines. Yes, suh, I assure yo, on my honor, that I can tell 'pay dirt' as far as I can see it, suh, if I am sixty-five years old, Yo' see, suh," continued the old miner, "let us suppose this table is the top of the mountain. Now, where I place this ink-stand, is Gray Rocks; just beyond, here where I lay this pen-stalk, is the Peacock mine. It joins us directly on the nawth. The Excelsior is at this point, where I lay my eye-glasses, directly south of Gray Rocks. Both of them, suh, are payin' immense dividends, and befo' a year, with proper management, Gray Rocks will be doin' the same. When he learned, suh, that I only had a half interest, he refused to talk with me any mo' about it. He said he wanted all or none. Confidentially, Mr. Gilder, I consider old Grim the most ill-mannered man in the Fish River minin' district, and us miners, suh, usually form a pretty correct idea of mankind in gene'l. I have been minin' it now fo' over thirty years, and while I have never 'struck it' yet, I assure yo' on my word, suh, that I have mo' confidence in Gray Rocks to-day than ever befo'."

"Of course, Col. Bonifield," said Vance, "I know nothing about your technical expressions of 'sinking-shafts,' 'cross-cutting,' and all that sort of thing, but I remember now of my father speaking of you on several occasions, and I doubt not, if he were living, he would gladly assist you in any way in his power. Personally, my means are limited, but if your wants are not too great, I will gladly give you my assistance."

"Give me yo're hand, suh! Why, Mr. Gilder, yo're a gentleman that I'm proud to meet, suh.

"What we must do, suh, is to sink the shaft on Gray Rocks to a 300 foot level, and we will cross-cut into a vein of wealth, suh, that will make yo' rich as a Vanterbilt. Yes, suh; take my word fo' it. Now," he continued, "there is old Grim; he owns a majority of the stock in the Peacock, and he wanted to buy out Gray Rocks, but of the old school, belonging to one of the oldest and proudest families of Virginia—yes, suh. Now, you have a half interest in Gray Rocks, and if yo' can furnish the money, Mr. Gilder, to sink the shaft to the 300 foot level, I will go back to Gold Bluff and immediately commence the work—and mind, Mr. Gilder, I give yo' my word that yo' will never lose a dollar; no, suh, Gray Rocks is a sure winner. The claim is patented and our title is perfect; but we must do mo', suh; we must sink our shaft, and it costs money to sink shafts, and a pow'ful sight of hard work into the bargain, suh. I came to New York especially to see yo're father and have him help me by advancin' a little mo' money. He paid me $1,000, suh, fo' a half interest in Gray Rocks. I told him, and I tell yo' now, it will bring yo' a million. Yes, suh, I pledge yo' my word it will."

The old gentleman's words, his enthusiasm, his southern courtliness, and his unmistakable belief in Gray Rocks, carried Vance quite away, in anticipation of his half-ownership in a gold mine. He mentally computed the amount of money he had in the bank, and felt that he would willingly check out his last half-dollar to sink the shaft on Gray Rocks to a 300 foot level.

He had to his credit in the Chemical National Bank some fifteen thousand dollars, and finally ventured to ask about how much it would take to do the work.

"Why, yo' see, suh," replied the old miner, "the mo' a fellow has, the quicker he can sink a shaft. Now, I could get along at present with, say $1,500, but $2,000 would be betteh, and $2,500 would be a great plenty."

"Very well," replied Vance, "I'll advance you $2,500, and can bring it to you within a couple of hours."

The old gentleman was highly delighted with Vance's ready acquiescence in the matter, and shook his hand warmly, assuring him that he was a very true Virginian. Taking his leave, he quitted the hotel, and in less than two hours paid to Col. Bonifield $2,500.

The old gentleman was very urgent for Vance to remain and lunch with him.

"My Louise, suh," he said, "will be delighted to see yo'.

Now, suh, there's one girl in a thousand. I call her a diamond in the rough, suh. She stays by the old man, and has just as much faith in the ultimate outcome of Gray Rocks as I have, I sometimes think, suh, that I ought not to keep her away so far from civil'zation, so to speak, among the mountains; but she says, 'We will wait until we strike it.' I assure yo', suh, she is a wonderful comfort to me."


The Colonel receives $2,500.

Vance endeavored to persuade the old gentleman to bring his daughter and stop at his house for a few days, but the old miner explained that his stay could not be prolonged; that he was impatient to begin work on the mine, sinking the shaft to the 300 foot level, and then commence cross-cutting. He insisted that he must start for Gold Bluff by the evening train.

Ascending to the ladies' parlor, Vance waited until the old miner brought his daughter to bid him good-bye. As she came into the room on the arm of her stately father, Vance had hard work to convince himself that such a queenly girl as stood before him could have grown to such loveliness among the mountains of the northwest.

CHAPTER III.—THE BANNER FORCE.

GREAT metropolitan journal like the *Banner*, has a tendency to swallow up individual characteristics in its own self-importance. A man may be ever so clever with his pen, and contribute the most readable articles day after day and year after year, and yet not one reader in ten thousand has any idea whose composition he is perusing.

Vance Gilder was only one of the force, and yet he was a favorite with his associates. He sometimes dreamed of promotion, and the time when he would be a correspondent of note, or possibly at the head of

some important department on that great paper. Visions of special work which would call him not only to different parts of his own country, but to foreign parts as well, charmed him into contentment and renewed energy.

Only once during his connection with the *Banner* had he made anything like a “hit.” He had on one solitary occasion succeeded in “scooping” the other New York journals in a most masterly manner. Indeed, to Vance belonged the credit of having completely humiliated the other dailies with an article under flaming headlines and double-leaded. As a compensation, he was sent for by the chief, and received that august person’s special thanks. This was a mark of distinction, for it was seldom that he paid compliments. On the other hand, if the work was not up to the standard, the staff generally heard from him in a volley of profanity that caused them to doubt the permanency of their positions. 27

On the night after Ben Bonfield started for Gold Bluff, Vance found himself thinking a great deal about Gray Rocks. To a young man of twenty-five, fifteen years seems a long time to wait for the possession of one’s property. There is a certain fascination about the idea of owning a gold mine, and this charm had taken possession of Vance to a degree far beyond that which he was willing to admit, and between the lines of copy, he speculated on the future and built many castles in the air.

The half interest which his father owned in Gray Rocks had not been named in the will, and as Vance was his only heir, it naturally occurred to him that in case the old miner should “strike it rich,” he would find himself with a handsome competency long before his fortieth birthday.

For the first time during the years of his connection with the *Banner*, a feeling of dissatisfaction stole over him, and he was glad Colonel Bonfield had been so prompt in returning to Gold Bluff, for he felt the work of sinking the shaft on Gray Rocks should be commenced at the earliest possible moment. There was also a feeling of regret deep down in his heart that he had not had an opportunity to know more of the fair Louise, the remembrance of whose laughing blue eyes and perfect freedom from affectation hovered near him with a distinctness that he had never before experienced with any of his young lady friends. He was in this state of mind when the police reporter came in and declared that he was disgusted with the scarcity of crime. 28

“I say, Vance,” saidhe, “it’s getting to be a pretty pass when a fellow has to rummage all over the city for a few crumbs of accidental deaths, street brawls and shooting affairs.”


The sporting editor.

Before Vance had time to reply, the religious editor commenced swearing about the uninteresting sermons he was compelled to write of late.

The dramatic critic observed that lie presumed writing sermons was a rather stupid business, but if the reading public could endure them, the religious editor ought to be able to, at $60 a week.

The religious editor said, “by Gad! old boy, you’re about right,” and begged a cigarette of the dramatic critic, declaring that he did not know with whom he would rather smoke than a representative of the footlights. He then slapped Vance on the shoulder in a jocular way, and asked him what made him so quiet.

“Scoops are scarce,” replied Vance, without lifting his eyes from the copy he was revising.

“Scarce!” chimed in the city editor, “I should say so. We have not had such a thing as a ‘scoop’ about the office for six months.”

“Journalism,” observed the dramatic critic, “is, without question, the king of professions. Here we see life in its every phase.”

“I am beginning to think,” said Vance, “that journalism is a drudgery without hope or reward.” 29

“You astonish me,” replied the religious editor. “Why, Vance,” he continued, knocking the ashes from his cigarette, “a fellow with as bright a future in the profession as you have, making such a remark as that, causes me to think you are growing cynical. Think of the opportunities which journalism affords.”

“What opportunities,” replied Vance, “have I, or you, or any other members of the staff, excepting those we have no right to take advantage of? I freely admit that there is a fascination about the profession of journalism; an influence, if you please, that holds us in the rut, much the same as the current of a mighty river—always drawing everything into the center where the current is swiftest—but the individuality of the most talented among us is completely lost in the great octopus that we are *daily* and nightly striving with our best efforts of brawn and brain to keep supplied with news.”

“Bravo!” shouted the police reporter. “There is not an ordinary prize-fighter in the land but has more individual reputation than any of us. Vance is about right in his position.”

At this juncture of their conversation, a note was handed to Vance. It was a polite request to report at the chief’s private room at ten o’clock the next morning. After hastily glancing over it, Vance read it aloud.

“I say, Vance, old boy, that’s a little rough; and still,” continued the religious editor, between vigorous puffs of his cigarette, “it may be a step up.” 30

It was an open question with members of the force whether a formal summons into the presence of the chief, without any intimation of the nature of the interview, was a good omen or otherwise.

“Possibly,” responded Vance, “but I rather surmise it is a step out.”

A note was handed Vance.

"The evil is sufficient unto the day thereof," observed the dramatic critic. "It is twelve o'clock, boys; let us adjourn to the 'realm of pie,' and there we will discuss the unlooked-for summons."

A half dozen as jolly young fellows as could be found anywhere, were soon seated in a private room at Thompson's cafe, partaking of the reporter's stereotyped lunch. As a result of their deliberations, there were many hopeful expressions made for the benefit of Vance. There was an under-current, however, of unmistakable belief, which Vance was not slow to perceive and share, that his interview with the chief would not result satisfactorily. 31

The dramatic critic soon drifted to the leeward of the question, and with almost forced vivaciousness recounted the latest hit of a jolly little soubrette dancer at Madison Square Gardens. His description was not only interesting, but a welcome diversion from the somber subject that might mean a separation of Vance from the staff. The religious editor took up the cue where the dramatic critic let go, and commenced swearing in newspaper parlance about the unsatisfactory work he was doing in his department.

The police reporter came in for a description of a "knock-out" he had witnessed in the Bowery, and for the edification of his associates, explained the difference between a "shoulder-strike" and an "undercut."

On returning to their respective posts of duty, there was but little said, but it was noticeable that Vance was bid good night with more consideration than usual.

As Vance hurried along toward the elevated road, his thoughts were again filled with that demure little Louise, a product of the great mountains of the west. With her had come a hope—perhaps only a visionary one—stimulated by the enthusiasm of the old miner. He did not pause to analyze the sustaining hope which he experienced; he only knew that it took off the keen edge of anxiety which otherwise he would have felt concerning his coming interview with the chief. 32

To the elevated station.

CHAPTER IV—A SUPPER PARTY.

T TEN O'.LOCK the following morning, Vance sent in his card to the chief, and was immediately admitted to his presence. "Good morning, Mr. Gilder." 33

"Good morning, sir," was Vance's prompt reply.

"I sent for you," said the chief, as he industriously looked over a bundle of papers on his desk, "To discuss a matter I have had in mind for some time."

"Yes, sir," was Vance's laconic reply.

The chief having found the paper he evidently had been searching for, motioned Vance to be seated, and turning to him, asked:

"Have you ever traveled much in the west?"

"Have never been west of Buffalo."

“Your work,” observed the chief, “has been very satisfactory—I may say, especially so—and it is the policy of the *Banner* not only to reward those who have talent, but also to keep pace with the times, and give its readers reliable information upon all questions of moment and importance. The great Northwest has been opening up for the last half century. There have been booms and counter-booms out in that country, spasmodically, for many years, 34
and a great many fortunes have been lost by ill advised investors, but I am not personally familiar with anyone who has bettered his condition in western speculations. Just at the present time the northwest is attracting, as you are doubtless aware, considerable attention, and the effort to popularize it by the western press, seems unabating. Our eastern people, even some of the oldest families of New York, are becoming poisoned with the virus of western investments. My private opinion is that instead of receiving dividends on these holdings, they will lose principal and all.

“We want,” said he, “a level-headed correspondent in that western country. Mark, I say level-headed, for the reason that not infrequently an eastern man, especially if he is unacquainted with the wonderland of the west, loses his head, figuratively speaking, and becomes won over by the fairy tales of prospective wealth, as told by the average real estate boomer.

“You, Mr. Gilder,” said the chief, eying Vance with great directness, “have been selected for this important position of trust. I might,” he continued, as if it were an afterthought, “modify my remarks by saying there are some places in the west worthy of credence, possessing real merit; but in nine cases out of ten, the new towns that are ringing up throughout the north western portion of the United States are, in my judgment, intangible as moonshine. In short, there is entirely too much capital flowing from the east into those wildcat western speculations, and we desire to give a series of letters descriptive of that country to the readers of the *Banner*, containing the facts stripped of all allurement, and dissuade them from such unstable investments as are daily being made.

"I deem,” continued the chief, “these few suggestions necessary for your good in governing the character of 35
your correspondence from that western country to the columns of the *Banner*. I shall expect you to be ready tomorrow evening, and start on the six o’clock train. As you will probably be away for some time, it would be well for you to arrange your private affairs accordingly.

Call tomorrow at eleven o’clock, and I will have ready the necessary credentials, transports and instructions.”

Vance bowed his acquiescence and turned to go, when the chief said, “By the way, instead of $40 a week, your present salary, you will receive $60 and expenses, which doubtless will be satisfactory.”

Vance attempted to express his appreciation of the confidence that had been reposed in him, of so important an undertaking; but the chief waved him to silence and muttered something about “time being money,” and at once turned to other affairs that were awaiting his attention.

That afternoon Vance was not found among the staff, and a new man occupied his chair. He called on Thomas Patten, Esq., the attorney who had represented the Gilder family for many years, and named in his father’s will as trustee, and explained to him his promotion, telling him he would start for the west the next evening.

His old associates at the *Banner* were asking questions of one another as to what had transpired between Vance and the chief, but no one seemed to know anything about it, except that a new man was on duty and Vance absent.

At half past eleven o’clock that night the dramatic critic hurried in from the street and passed word around 36
among the coterie that a surprise was waiting for them over at Thompson’s cafe. Thompson’s is, and has been for many years, a favorite resort for newspaper men. Vance Gilder was well known to the manager as a member of the *Banner* staff, and when that afternoon he requested that a lunch something better than the ordinary be prepared, he was assured that everything would be in readiness.

The dramatic critic ushered his associates into a private room precisely at twelve o’clock. Vance was in waiting, and a warm greeting was exchanged. The religious editor declared that he believed a conspiracy of gigantic proportions had been laid to entrap the meek and lowly, but, nevertheless, he took his place with alacrity at the table to enjoy the modest but excellent feast prepared for the occasion.

A few bottles of rare old wine added interest to the surprise which Vance had so cleverly arranged. After the glasses had been tilled and drained, the political editor moved that an explanation was in order.

“My friends,” said Vance, “the most important disclosure I have to make is that my salary has been raised to $60 a week.”

The religious editor said, “By Gad,” and fell from his chair, declaring that his nerves were so unstrung that it would require another glass of wine to restore them. After Vance had carefully narrated his interview with the chief, he received the hearty congratulations of his associates. Each vied with the others in wishing him unbounded success as a western correspondent for the *Banner*. "I understand,” said the political editor, after 37
clearing his throat with a glass of wine, “that the west is teeming with opportunities in a political way; and I would not be surprised,” he added, “if the Honorable Vance Gilder would be the next thing we hear of, as mayor of some municipality in the Rocky Mountain region, or possibly as a member of Congress from the Third District.”

My salary has been raised.

"Or still better," observed the religious editor, "president of one of those bonanza gold mines that advertise themselves as being the greatest dividend paying properties in the world." 38

"What's the matter," said the police reporter, "of being moderate in your expectations? Suppose Vance secures the position of judge of the police court in one of those western towns, where from a dozen to twenty drunks and brawls occur every twenty-four hours—ye gods! what a country for rich morsels of crime!"

It was conceded by all that Vance would have abundant opportunity for making investments here and there in the growing west that would materially increase his financial prospects.

"Sixty dollars," said the dramatic critic, as he finished his third glass of wine, "is quite a step up, but evidently a mere bagatelle to the 'pick-ups' on the side, in a new country that is just developing like the west is at the present time."

They celebrate.

That Vance was one of the luckiest fellows living was the verdict of all his associates. After the lunch had been disposed of and a good-night glass of wine drunk to Vance's success, he bade his companions good-night, and was soon being driven rapidly up Eighth Avenue to Central Park, west.

On reaching his room he began to feel more than ever that he had awakened to find himself famous, and that a great honor had been thrust upon him.

His gratitude to his chief was unbounded, but like the young and ambitious everywhere, his own personal advancement in a financial sense was a consideration not to be overlooked. While he knew personally very little about the Western country, the many allusions of his companions to the rare opportunities which awaited him in the new world he was about to visit filled him with a vague, indescribable sense of importance. 39

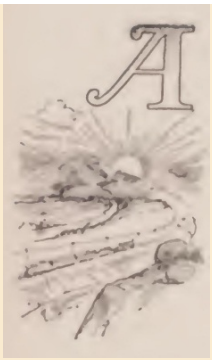
As he retired for the night, he assured himself that Gold Bluff, Idaho, would be one of his objective points, and hoped he would be there when the shaft reached the 300 foot level. He was beginning to share the old miner's enthusiasm and confidence in Gray Rocks.

He drifted away into a restful sleep, while visions of a lovely girl in early womanhood, with beautiful blue eyes, "gentle grace and sovereign sweetness," rose in a mist before him, and he dreamed he was at Gold Bluff.

CHAPTER V.—AN ODD CHARACTER.

TRIP from New York to the inter-mountain country of the west, with the present railroad facilities of palatial Pullmans and dining cars, is now an every-day affair. The traveler is surrounded by every comfort. Vance Gilder was more than ever in love with the change, as the cars rumbled on through dell and forest, across broad stretches of beautiful valley country, and ever and anon rushing over an iron bridge that spanned some beautiful stream of water, some of them calm and peaceful, and others rushing madly along, breaking into white spray over rocky ripples, and then hurrying on again as if they were running a race with time. 40

As he approached the Rocky Mountain country, and for the first time in his life gazed upon that mighty



range of Nature's towering masonry, he was almost intoxicated with the new sights to be seen on the "crown of the continent."

Notwithstanding his enjoyment of the new and varied scenery, he was glad enough to abandon the cars at Butte City, after four days and nights of continuous riding.

Butte City is said to be, not only the greatest mining camp in Montana, but the greatest in the world. They boast of the many millions that are brought to the light of day by the magic wand of the miner's pick. Vance found lodging at the Mercury Hotel, and early the next morning, after breakfasting heartily, started for a walk. 41

Hello, pard; how d'ye do?

The town is built on a side-hill, gently rising from the depot grounds westward to a very considerable elevation. He paused now and then to inspect the architecture of some of the buildings, and then looked away toward the smelter districts, at the black clouds of smoke which the chimneys were belching forth, and falling over the city like a veil of mourning. 42

Presently he was accosted by an individual of grizzly beard and good-matured countenance, who said: "Hello, pard; how d'ye do? Sizin' up these diggins' be ye?"

As Vance eyed his questioner rather critically and acknowledged the salutation, the fellow reached him a card which bore the name "Hank Casey." While Vance was glancing at the card, his new acquaintance said:

"I reckon you be from down east? I come from thar a long time ago. You'll notice from my card that I'm in the real estate business; also have some fine minin' propositions."

"Yes," replied Vance, "I am from the east, but do not know as I care to make any investments."

"Well, now, look'ee? here, stranger. I 'spect I might give you a pinter or two that may not come amiss. This 'ere town is chuck up full of dead beats and black legs, who make it their business to run every new feller in that comes from down east. Now Hank Casey do a straight-for'ard, legitimate business—that's me," said he, as he tucked his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and straightened himself to his fullest height.

Vance was amused by this odd character, and determined to learn from him what he could concerning Butte City and the claims made for it. He therefore asked, "What population have you and what are your resources?"

"Over fifty thousand people, above an' below. You see, thar's several thousand of us in this town below ground, workin' away with shovel an' pick. I reckon as how you'll see a fair sample of our miners if you're on the streets tonight. As for resources—why, pardner, thar's no end to 'em. We took out mighty near forty million dollars from our mines last year, an' thar's ore enough in sight to keep on minin' at the same rate for a hundred years to come. What d'ye think o' that?" 43

Vance replied that it certainly was a most extraordinary statement.

"What other towns have you in this state," asked Vance.


Hank Casey.

"None to speak of," was the prompt reply. "Butte City is the pertest town in any o' these western diggings. Thar's not another town in Montana as can tech one side of us, for money, marbles, or chalk. To be sure," he went on, in a condescending tone, "we have lots o' towns in this 'ere state, sech as they be; lots o' minin' camps, but they are merely blacksmith-shops-on-the-crossroads,' compared with Butte City. D'ye see that Corner lot over thar'. Five years ago I owned the ground whar' that buildin' stands. I bought it for $300, held it just thirteen months, and sold it for $4,000 spot cash."

"Why that was an immense profit," said Vance, with more interest than he had yet manifested in Hank Casey's description of Butte City. Hank Casey smiled contentedly and expectorated an accumulation of tobacco juice with a resounding "pit-tew" on the side walk,

and said: “You call that a good profit? Why, pardner, I bought stock in the Blackbird mine at twelve cents a share when the company was fust organized, and now its worth $300 a share and payin’ an immense dividend monthly. That’s what I call a good investment; but as fer that speck,” said he, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the corner lot, “that don’t amount to nothin’.” 44

“Do you know where Gold Bluff, Idaho, is?” asked Vance.

“I reckon I ought to know,” replied the boomer; “me an’ Steve Gibbons were the fust prospectors in that ‘neck o’ the woods.’ Steve an’ I claim to own the Peacock, but old Rufus Grim, the biggest scoundrel in Idaho yes, the biggest in this whole minin’ country claims to own it, and has got possession, and I’ve learned, in this western country ‘specially, that possession is not only nine points of the law, but mighty near ten. Of course, a gold mine like the Peacock is a mighty handy thing to have in the family, but as a general rule, they’re mighty unsartin. Give me a silver or copper mine every time.”

Vance assured his new-found acquaintance that he was under many obligations for the information received, and said he hoped to meet him again. Hank Casey, however, was not to be disposed of in this way, and walked along with Vance. Presently he called his attention to some vacant lots across the street.

“D’ye see them lots over thar? I can sell you one o’ them fifty-foot lots at $3,500. an I’ll bet diamonds against peanuts it’ll be a rich buy at $10,000 before two years. By the way, stranger, what’s the matter with you takin a leetle ‘flyer’ in Butte City dirt? Buy a few lots, stop here with us for six months, sell ‘em out agin for 100 per cent, profit, an’ that’ll pay all the expenses of your western trip. See? said he, touching Vance gently in the ribs with his elbow.

“Yes; I see,” said Vance, “I see very clearly, or would, were it not for the smoke. It smells like sulphur. Does it come from some of your mills or smelters?” 45

“Now, look’ee here, pard, you’re just like every other down-easter. They’re always kickin’ ‘bout this smoke.

Now, let me tell you; if we didn’t have that ‘ar smoke we wouldn’t have any Butte City, and besides, it kills the bacteria, molecules, an’ all that sort o thing. It’s mighty healthy here, I can tell you, an’ a mighty pert town into the bargain.”

Vance coughed immoderately, but Hank Casey who was acclimated, assured him that he was at that moment breathing the healthiest air that ever his lungs were filled with.

In the course of their walk, the boomer kept up a constant conversation, explaining different points of interest, pointing out the different mining properties in sight and telling their names, until Vance felt that he had been very fortunate in falling in with one so conversant with Butte City. At parting, Vance bade his new-found friend good day, and promised to call at his office before leaving the city.

When he returned to the hotel, he commenced his first letter to the *Banner*, but it was not finished until late that night. When it appeared in the great New York journal it surprised, in point of brilliancy and interest, even his warmest friends. His descriptions were so vivid and lifelike, and his characters so droll, and withal teeming with information, that a score of letters came to the managing editor, assuring him of the great pleasure and profit they had experienced in its perusal. Of course, Vance knew nothing of this at the time, but devoted himself with unceasing diligence in searching out reliable information, and then training it into weekly letters. 46

Butte City began to impress him as a place of more importance than he had at first thought. He learned that almost one million of dollars was paid out monthly to the miners alone, and they, as a class, are “hail fellows well met,” who believe in the doctrine of keeping money in constant circulation.

He noticed in many of the mercantile houses that when the day clerks went off duty at six o’clock in the evening, another set of clerks came on, and the shops and stores, by the aid of brilliant electric lights, continued business twenty-four hours out of the day the year around.

Vance frequently thought of his conversation with the managing editor, and what he had said about western towns and the over-enthusiastic town boomer. In Hank Casey he felt he had found a typical character that fully came up to all the managing editor had inferred, and had frequently used him as an inspiration, but was becoming more and more convinced that Butte City was one of those solid, substantial places which the managing editor had classed as exceptions to the rule.

CHAPTER VI—THE TOWN BOOMER.

BOUT TWO WEEKS after Vance Gilder arrived in Butte City, he noticed one morning that everybody was talking about a new town, and each was asking the others what they thought about it. Glancing at the hotel register, he saw the name, Homer Winthrop, of Waterville, Idaho. 47

In looking over the *Butte City Miner* and the *Inter-Mountain Blade*, both healthy dailies and well edited, he was somewhat astonished to find a full-page advertisement in each of the papers, setting forth in blazing splendor the great Thief River Valley, and signed by Homer Winthrop as agent, announcing that he would be at the Mercury Hotel for a short time, and inviting those who were interested in investing a little money in a purely agricultural city, to come early and “get in on the ground floor.”

The advertisement represented Waterville as being in the midst of the great Thief River Valley, with the largest water power in the country, surrounded by an agricultural district of two million acres of the richest land the sun ever shone down upon. He termed the new town of Waterville the “City of Destiny,” and said the 48

price of town lots would quadruple in a few years' time.

Vance was at once interested. "Here," said he to himself, "is a genuine town boomer, and as the fellow is stopping at this hotel, it will be an easy matter to learn just how this boom business is operated. It will make an excellent article for the *Banner*."

Accordingly, about eleven o'clock that forenoon he called to see the irrepressible town boomer and hear what sort of a marvelous story he had to tell about Waterville.


Winthrop's assistant.

He was quickly admitted into a reception room by a young gentleman who assured him that Mr. Winthrop would soon be at leisure, and begged him to be seated, calling his attention to the numerous maps on the walls, one of which covered nearly the entire side of the room.

Winthrop's young assistant seemed to know his business, and at once commenced the preliminary skirmish of interesting Vance in the great Thief River Valley, and especially town lots in Waterville; but as Vance did not evince any inclination to purchase, the young fellow endeavored to so impress him by calling his attention to the advertisements in the morning papers. Every once in a while he would tip-toe over to the door where the great town-boomer, Homer Winthrop, was holding a private conversation with a would-be purchaser. He would put his ear to the keyhole and listen for a moment, and then come tip-toeing back and assure Vance Mr. Winthrop would soon be at leisure.

Presently the door opened and a gentleman in miner's garb came out, and Vance was immediately shown in. As he entered the private room of Homer Winthrop, he involuntarily paused to study, if but for a moment, the face of the man who had arrived in Butte City late the night before, and now had everyone in the place agog over the prospects of a new town that had just been laid out on paper in the Thief River Valley.

Homer Winthrop, with all the easy grace of a Chesterfield, motioned his visitor to a seat, pushing a box of very superior Havanas toward him, and invited him to join him in burning a weed. He was a man above the average height, inclined to be rather slender, and possessed a rather good looking face, beaming with good nature and apparent frankness; a pair of intelligent dark eyes that laughed and smiled with as much expression as the face, changeable, however, into intenseness and earnestness seldom met with; a broad, intellectual forehead; a rather square chin, indicating great determination of character. To this add a luxuriant head of dark hair, and moustache, otherwise a clean-shaven face, and the reader will have a fair idea of his appearance.

He was evidently an adept in reading human nature, and knew his man on sight; had seen much of western life—and yet it required no second interview to discover in him the polished manners and easy grace of one who has seen much of refinement and culture. He could have entered into the gaieties of a reception in a Fifth Avenue mansion with as little effort as he had stirred up a city of 50,000 people in a few hours over the magnificent prospects of a new town that was just budding into existence. 49 50


Vance accepted the proffered cigar.

Vance accepted the proffered cigar, and they easily engaged in conversation. They discussed the great out put of ore from the mines of Butte City, and the wonderful development of the western country during recent years; the magnificent mining properties that had been opened up; and, in fact, nearly everything except Waterville and the great Thief River Valley. Homer Winthrop with the skill of a tactician, narrated incidents and legends of different miners who had devoted a lifetime in searching for the precious metal and finally "struck it rich" in some out-of-the-way, unexpected place.

Vance finally inquired in regard to the new town of Waterville, and was not a little surprised at the conservative reply he received, wholly devoid of any enthusiasm. 51

“Oh,” said Winthrop, “we have a very excellent agricultural country in the valley. We are building our new town of Waterville on the rapids of the Thief River. It has, perhaps, the greatest water power of any inland city in the United States. Many believe a great citv will eventually be built at that point. We also have a great deal of capital invested in the construction of irrigating canals, reclaiming the valley lands from their present arid condition and converting them into productive farms.” He also went on, in a voice full of rhythm that was almost musical in its intonation, explaining in a modest way why many people believed in the future of the place, touching on the numerous natural resources that were apparent to everyone sufficiently interested to visit the valley and see for himself.

Vance was deeply interested in Homer Winthrop’s appearance, and later found himself charmed with his new acquaintance more than he cared to admit, even to himself. On taking his leave, he promised to call again the next day. As Vance stepped into the reception room, he found it almost filled with miners and tradesmen who were waiting for an interview’ with Mr. Winthrop, and he rightly guessed that a profitable business was being done.

In thinking over his interview with the town boomer of Waterville, Vance was compelled to admit that he was one of the most attractive individuals with whom he had ever come in contact. That afternoon he finished a letter to the *Banner*, but it contained no reference to Waterville.

The result of his second interview was that he accepted an invitation to visit the new town, which was some two hundred miles distant. Agreeable to this arrangement, they left Butte City early one morning, and that evening reached Waterville. 52

Vance was not particularly attracted by the general appearance and “lay” of the new town site. It appeared crude and unfinished, and abounded with sage brush and sand. The waters of the rapids, however, in their mad rushing as they went foaming down the narrows like race horses, impressed him with a belief that nothing had been overdrawn in regard to this great natural power, which had been idling its time away for centuries.

Homer stood by his side on the rocky bank, but said nothing.

Presently Vance looked up and said: “What a wonderful power is going to waste in these rapids!”

“It will soon be harnessed,” replied Winthrop, “and this vast power utilized in many manufacturing enterprises. I do not feel,” he continued, “that I am over-estimating facts, Mr. Gilder, when I say there is power enough here to turn every spindle in every woolen mill and factory in the United States.”

“My only surprise,” replied Vance, “is that these waters have not been put to use long before this.”

That night at the hotel Vance felt he was indeed “roughing it.” He rose in the morning feeling but little refreshed, and sat down to a very unpalatable breakfast, and immediately afterwards started with Homer Winthrop on a drive through the valley.

The farmers were busy harvesting their grain, and on inquiry they learned the yield of wheat was from forty to seventy bushels to the acre, and that oats yielded from sixty to one hundred bushels to the acre. Vance was greatly astonished, and became almost enthusiastic over the agricultural possibilities of the valley. 53

“Why,” said he, “Mr. Winthrop, there is no question but this is destined to be one of the richest agricultural valleys in the world. In my work on the *Banner* I have had occasion to look up statistics on grain products, and if these farmers are telling the truth in regard to the yield of their crops, there is no other place like it in the United States.”

A moment after, he was chagrined to think he had given way to such a burst of enthusiasm. It would have been better for him to remain a listener, and allow Winthrop to grow enthusiastic in praise of the country. Winthrop, however, took no advantage of Vance’s earnestness.

The day was a perfect one; the sun was shining, and yet there was a cool, invigorating breeze sweeping gently down from the snow-capped Tetons. Driving rapidly and pleasantly along, they at last found themselves near the foot-hills on a slight elevation overlooking the valley to the west. Alighting from the carriage, Vance followed Winthrop’s lead, and soon they found themselves on a table rock, at a sufficient elevation to see for many miles to the north, south and west. For a few minutes Vance contemplated the sight in silence, and then said: “This is indeed a grand sight.” Turning to Winthrop, he continued:

“I have seen many beautiful sights—the Green and White Mountains of New England, the Cumberland of Virginia, and the mighty Rocky Mountains through Colorado but standing here on the foot hills, with the mountains rising behind us to the sky, with their hoary crests even on this July day capped with snow, and these mountain streams, foaming cataracts, all shimmering in the sunshine, making sweet and restful harmony in their ceaseless flow, surpasses anything I have ever seen. The valley itself looks like a vast green sward stretching before us like a map. The yellow shocks of golden grain in the farming districts are suggestive of what may be in years to come. No man can look upon such a promising picture and not be convinced of the commercial importance which will attend the development of this valley.” 54

During Vance’s outburst of ecstacy, Homer Winthrop said nothing, merely acquiescing, in a modest way, to all Vance expressed.

Returning to Waterville, they partook of a sumptuous repast, which Winthrop had ordered especially prepared, Consisting principally of mountain trout, caught that morning in the Thief River.

After lunch Vance accepted an invitation to smoke and walk out over the town site.

“This,” said Winthrop, “is block fourteen of Eagle’s addition. You see it is less than three blocks from the center of the town. It is one of the choicest blocks we have. If you want me to give you some advice, Mr. Gilder, I will do so, and say, buy a few of these lots. The price is only $100 each, and, in my judgment, they will be worth $500 before five years from to-day.”

Vance looked away into the distance at the farm lands, and the music of the sickle was borne lazily to him by a gentle breeze; then he turned his gaze toward the river, where the roaring waters were crowding down 55

the rapids, proclaiming in thundering tones that Waterville was an exception to the rule. After a little he turned to Homer Winthrop and said: “I have been advised to keep clear of these new towns. The person who gave me this advice told me there were a few honorable exceptions to the rule. I must believe, from what I have seen, that Waterville is an exception. I will take twenty-five of these lots, and you may fix up the deed for them as soon as possible.”

The deed and abstract were delivered to Vance that afternoon, and his check for $2,500 was duly deposited in Homer Winthrop’s pocket.

“I may have been foolish,” said Vance, “to act so hastily in this matter.”

Winthrop turned to him, and placing a hand on either shoulder, looked squarely into his companion’s eyes, and said:

“My belief, Mr. Gilder, is that you have acted wisely, and if you will keep these lots five years, you will thank me for suggesting the advisability of making the purchase. I have but one request to make—that you will wait five years before passing judgment on my advice.”

“Your request is cheerfully granted,” replied Vance with great earnestness, and the two men clasped hands, and a bond of friendship was thereby woven.

CHAPTER VII.—A VISIT TO WATERVILLE

NEW WESTERN TOWN is usually provided with a public square, and the business houses and shops are arranged along the four sides of it in sentinel-like position, the corner lots going at a premium, and where the most substantial buildings are erected. Waterville, however could not boast of a public square, but it had two iron bridges spanning the Thief River. 56

A large stone grist mill had been built on the side of the river opposite the town, and on the elevated ground beyond, it was said the State Agricultural College was to be built.

It was a favorite pastime with the real estate agents to sit on the depot platform, and while waiting for the incoming trains, to whittle pine sticks into shavings, telling of the different manufactories, state institutions, colleges and asylums, etc., that would be located in the near future at Waterville.

That evening after Vance had made his purchase of town lots he strolled away by himself across the great iron bridge, and gave himself up to meditation. Had he acted wisely? Would Waterville after all prove a “boom town” and his investment a losing one? Was Homer Winthrop, with his suave manners and great earnestness, which at times seemed to carry conviction to the hearts of all who heard him express himself, the noble specimen of manhood he appeared to be, or were his fascinations merely the arts of the ordinary skilled western boomer? Would the managing editor approve his action in purchasing lots in such a new and undeveloped place as Waterville? 57

It is a common experience with mankind, that after a doubtful transaction has been consummated, we can deliberate with far more intentness of thought than before the trade was made.

A peculiarity of a western town is its plentifulness of real estate agents, who seem to travel in swarms, and find an abiding place in the town that promises the greatest activity.

After a reaction sets in and hard times overtake them, this peculiar class usually pick up their “ink-horns” and fly, as from a pestilence.

Another peculiarity is, that if a trade is made with a “tender-foot” everyone in the village usually knows of it in a very few hours.

As Vance was returning from his walk he was met on the outskirts of the village by a number of this class of hangers-on, who make their living by selling town lots on commission. Each one was desirous of saying “just a word” to Vance in private.

The story of one was practically the story of all. They advised him to stop and think what he was losing by not buying more property in Waterville. One particularly long, lank individual, who wore a sombrero and high-topped boots, assured him that “the opportunity of a lifetime was at that very minute knocking at his door; it might never come again.” 58

“You might go away from Waterville,” said he, “and come back here in a few mouths’ time, and you’ll find the town lots I can sell you to-day for a mere song, going at ten times the price that you can buy them for now. My name is Steve Gibbons, and I presume I am doing the biggest real estate business in Waterville. I sell more lots than any other half dozen agents in town. You’ve made a great mistake, Mr. Gilder,” said he, “in buying of the Town Company. Of course, this is confidential, but if you had come to me instead of buying of Winthrop, I could have saved you big money.”

“What do you mean by ‘the company’.” asked Vance.

“Why, you see, the Waterville Town Company own mighty near all the property in town.

That man Winthrop is a member of the company. Now, while I have not as many lots for sale as the Town Company, my prices beat them all holler.”

“Do you think,” asked Vance, “that Mr. Winthrop charged me too much for my lots?”

“Think!” said Steve Gibbons, “think? why, pardner, all the agents in town are laughin’ about it; he took you


Steve Gibbons.

in.”

Vance bit his lips, and mentally concluded to investigate very thoroughly before he quit Waterville.

“You see,” Gibbons went on, “all us fellers are down on the Town Company. We don’t like corporations, nohow; they don’t give us honorable-intentioned fellers a fair chance. We are the men that’s buildin’ up this here town—givin’ it the bone, and the sinew, and the standin’, so to speak. Don’t you see?” 59

“Yes,” said Vance, “I understand,” and begging to be excused, he turned and walked away from the “honorable-intentioned” Steve Gibbons, and soon after sought the privacy of his own room in the Ballard House.

Dick Ballard was a Grand Army man, and kept the only hotel of any importance in Waterville. The only thing first-class about it was the price for lodging. Immediately after the average traveler settled his bill at the Ballard, there was generally a half-distinct impression in his mind that he had been stopping at a first-class hotel, but the remembrance of three kinds of meat cooked in the same kettle was not easily forgotten.

As Vance sat in his room, in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, there came a gentle knock on his door. He quickly admitted his visitor, and found it was Dick Ballard, the proprietor.

“I reckon,” said he, as soon as he stepped in, “you’ll be one of us by and by. Bought property already, and a mighty good buy you’ve made of it, too. Oh, you know a good thing when you see it; you bet yer life you do.”

“Do you think,” said Vance, “the lots I purchased were reasonable at the price?”

“I should say so; yes, sir, mighty cheap. This here town is comin out of the kinks in fine shape. We’ll have a drum corps in our State militia before another year; you bet we will. I presume you know we have the finest drilled company at Waterville, outside the regular army, in the state?”

“I have been told,” said Vance, “that I paid too much for the property. I am more interested in learning the truth or untruth of the statement than I am about your militia company.” 60


This 'ere town is comin' out of the kinks in fine shape.

“Who told you that:” asked Ballard, with indignation. As Vance did not answer, the hotel proprietor went on to say: “I’ll bet it was J. Arthur Boast. Now, look’ee here, Mr. Gilder, you can’t believe everything these fellers tell you.”

The truth of this remark pressed itself on Vance so forcibly, and his indignation getting the better of him, he turned upon Dick Ballard and said bitterly: 61

“Who in thunderation can I believe?”

“You can believe me, sir, and I’ll produce prima facie evidence of everything I say. This town is all right; your investment is a good one, and the man who says it is not is surely trying to stick his nose into other people’s business—but, say, hold on a minute,” said Ballard, as if he had forgotten something, “will you take a drink?” and he produced a bottle from his pocket.

“No, thank you,” said Vance.

“Well, if you don’t mind, I will,” said the landlord, as he proceeded to treat himself to a liberal portion of the contents of his bottle.

“Now,” said he, as he sat down smacking his lips, “everything I tell you is prima facie. I know how it is; some of these fellows have been trying to make you dissatisfied with your purchase. I am not selling town lots. My business is to run this hotel and see that everybody has a fair deal.”

“Who is the Town Company?” asked Vance.

“The Town Company, sir, consists of some of the most remarkable men in this country. They are strong men, brainy men; they are hustlers; and I,” said Ballard, rising to his feet, “I am their friend. This man, Homer Winthrop,” he went on, “carries more gray matter about on his brain than all the shark real estate agents in Waterville put together. He is one of the company, but you’ll see them all before long; and when you do, I know you’ll agree with me in saying they are the cleanest cut lot of men on the continent. Winthrop is a great man, but there are others in the company that are a mighty sight stronger than he is. They are all men of honor, and their integrity is prima facie.” 62

“Prima facie” seemed to be a favorite expression of Dick Ballard’s. After he had delivered himself in the strongest language at his command, he treated himself to another drink and retired.

Vance sat far into the night, looking out at his window into the mellow moonlight, listening to the ceaseless roar of the waters and the yelping coyotes in the distance, which were answered by half a dozen dogs in different parts of the town. At times he regretted his purchase, and again he felt it must, in the very nature of things, increase many times in value in a few years.

The moon came up the eastern sky, and seemed to hang in space like a ball of fire, beckoning him to return to his eastern home before disaster overtook him. The three great Tetons of the mountain range bearing their name stood out in bold relief, throwing long, menacing shadows directly towards him. The shimmering of the soft moonbeams glistened on the restless waters of the musical river, whose alluring song of promise and power was wafted to him on the night wind.

CHAPTER VIII.—AT THE MINE

HE next morning Vance was rather late in rising. Soon after he had taken his seat at the breakfast table, he was joined by an individual small in stature but tastily dressed. His eyes were restless, and he seemed on the point of making an observation several times before he finally did so. 63

“Very pleasant morning,” said he, looking up at

Vance and then hastily glancing at the sunshine that streamed in at the window.

“Yes, delightful,” was Vance’s reply.

Presently the stranger observed: “Sunny days are the rule, cloudy days the exception, at Waterville. At least that’s my experience during a year’s sojourn among the good people of this village.” There was a quaking sound in the fellow’s voice that attracted Vance’s attention, because it was different from others more than because there was anything charming about it. Vance wondered if this individual was not also in the real estate business. It seemed as if every one with whom you come in contact was a real estate agent. He was on the point of asking him what line of business he was engaged in, when the fellow, looking up from his plate, said, “Real estate is my line. My office is just across the street; you can see my sign from the window.” Looking out at the window, Vance saw a large real estate sign, with gold letters on a black back-ground, bearing the name of “J. Arthur Boast.” 64

“You are Mr. Boast, I presume,” said Vance, turning from the window.

“J. Arthur Boast, at your service.”

Half an hour later Vance Gilder was seated in the real estate office of J. Arthur Boast, looking over his special bargain list; not with a view of buying, but rather to gain information.

Boast talked a great deal, and in his fawning, insinuating manner, advised Vance, without saying so in so many words, to keep his eyes open when dealing with the Town Company. After Vance had carefully scanned his list of town lots, he was better satisfied than ever with his purchases.

Taking a bottle from his desk, Boast held it up toward the sunlight, and asked Vance if he would have some “red liquor.” Vance declined with thanks. Boast walked back and forth with the bottle in his hand, and in a quaking voice, meant to be confidential, told Vance that he had got to quit drinking; that red liquor was getting an awful hold on him. He seemed to be desirous of giving the impression that he was a hard drinker. Finally he poured out some of the contents of the bottle into a glass, and drank it down at one swallow. Afterwards he seemed quite wretched and his eyes were filled with tears. Vance concluded, notwithstanding all he had said against himself, that J. Arthur Boast was not a drinking man. 65

“That liquor is all right,” said Boast; “a very superior article, but it is a little early in the day for me to commence. It always half strangles me in the morning.”

As Vance was seeking information from which he could draw his own conclusions, he gave Boast all the opportunities possible to express himself in regard to Waterville and its people.

The fellow said nothing positive, yet there was an evil vein of insinuation in all that he did say not only in regard to the Waterville Town Company and every other real estate agent, but also against everybody in the town generally. Vance very much disliked the fellow, and afterwards learned that he was universally disliked and shunned by everyone in Waterville.

Instead of returning to Butte City with Winthrop that afternoon, Vance remained in Waterville, and

arranged to take the early stage next morning for Gold Bluff, which was located some sixty miles northwest of Waterville, in the Fish River Mining District. He arrived in that Idaho mining town late the following night, registered at the Bluff House, and after a late supper retired to his room for a much needed rest.


I must stop drinking.

The next morning he found, on inquiry, that Ben Bonifield's mine was located about half a mile from town upon the mountain side, and he at once started out in that direction, to see how the work on the shaft, bound for the 300 foot level, was progressing. 66

The town of Gold Bluff was cozily nestled in a little valley, with abrupt mountains lowering away to the sky on either side of it. The mountains were covered with spruce and pine and mountain poplars up to the snow line, above which the barren rocks rose majestically towards the heavens. A refreshing stream meandered its course through the town, on one side of which were stores and shops, and on the other residences. Vance noticed that some of them were of modern architecture and neatly painted, while others were primitive in the extreme—relics of early mining; days. The town was rather quaint and picturesque, and made more so by a profusion of shade trees.

"Good morning," said Vance, as he came up to Ben Bonifield, who, in miner's costume, was working vigorously away at the frame-work of the shaft over Gray Rocks. The old man looked up with an astonished air, and said: 67


Almost pa'alyzed to to see you, suh.

"Good mawnin', suh." Then, recognizing his visitor, he threw down his hammer and gave Vance's hand such a squeeze in his powerful grasp that it almost made him cry out with pain.

"Why, suh," cried the old miner, "I am almost pa'alyzed to see yo'. I am indeed, suh. Mr. Gilder, I welcome yo' suh, to Gold Bluff and to Gray Rocks. Here, suh, are our possessions," waving his hand toward the shaft. "Immediately upon my return from the city, Mr. Gilder, we commenced work in earnest, suh, and befo' many weeks, I am proud to say, suh, we will reach the 300 foot level and be ready to cross-cut into the vein, suh. Yo' don't know," said the old miner, again taking Vance's hand, "how proud I am—yes, proud, suh, proud to be honored with a visit from yo', I very much desire that yo' pu'son'lly inspect the mine; and there is no better time than the present."

Vance entered heartily into the tour of inspection, and at the old miner's invitation, went down in the bucket, where the miners were at work. The old gentleman kept him there until he had explained everything to the minutest detail, and when Vance at last reached the top of the shaft he felt he had a far better idea of sinking shafts on mines than ever before.

"Come," said the old miner, "my Louise will be most delighted to see yo', suh; she will indeed." Then turning, he gave some instruction to his foreman, telling him he would not return that afternoon, and together the old gentleman and Vance walked down the mountain side to the village of Gold bluff.

The old miner's residence was a modest one, situated well back from the street, near some huge boulders—a natural pyramid of rocks, while a beautiful little spring of water flowed from near its base. There was a very pretty yard in front, filled with growing evergreens and mountain ash.

"I planted these trees myself, suh," said the old miner, "years ago. They remind me of my old Virginia home. I was the fust one to set out shade trees in Gold Bluff; yes, still, the fust one."

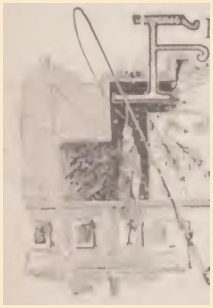
As Vance entered the yard, he paused a moment to contemplate the beauty and home-like appearance of the yard, and Ben Bonifield's home, with its wide porches in front literally covered with honeysuckles, ivy, and vining roses. 68


He forgot time.

Vance found Louise dressed as a mountain maid, instead of the fashionable young lady who had called on him in his New York home. She was not such a woman as poets rave about, and yet, withal, there was a grace—a charm—about her, that commanded admiration. Her hair, in the sunlight, was like one beautiful sheen of gold, with little ringlets here and there; her complexion was pink and white, and when under deep excitement 69
a ruddy glow would mantle her cheeks. Her nose, while well formed, neither large nor small, was quite ordinary. Her mouth was a perfect Cupid's bow, with lips like two red cherries. As Vance conversed with her that afternoon, he forgot the hair, forgot the delicately formed, rosy lips, forgot even the glow of pink which came and went over her fair cheeks, in looking into her talking eyes—so clear, so blue, and yet to trustful; even forgot the long brown lashes that fringed them with gentle protection. Her eyes were the crowning feature of her expressive face, which may not have been a beautiful one in the parlance of fashion, yet it was one that a student of human nature would term a face of intelligence; and after all, to the cultured, is there aught more beautiful?

As Vance sat with the old miner and his daughter on the porch of their cozy dwelling that afternoon, he forgot time. The sun went down behind the western mountains, leaving the beauty of an afterglow reflected on the waters of the mountain brooklet. The moon that was climbing up over the eastern hills threw its rays aslant through the clinging roses that grew in profusion about the porch. A feeling of peace, and possibly a dangerous contentment, stole into his heart, and he murmured a thanksgiving to the fates. The unseen, potent force that binds us all, sooner or later, with a silken cord, was thonging him to a future destiny.

CHAPTER IX.—THE STAGE DRIVER.



ROM Gold Bluff Vance sent to the *Banner* one of his strongest descriptive letters. The 70
inspiration of the new west, with its gorges, mountains, beautiful valleys and gurgling streams abounding with trout, tinged its every sentence.

His vivacious style, which had won for him the place he occupied on the *Banner*, was reinforced with the new and intoxicating sights of the picturesque. For two weeks he did little else than tramp through valleys, following up mountain streams on fishing jaunts, and felt that he was "roughing it" in a most delightful fashion. One night, coming in from a long tramp far up in the mountains, he found a large bundle of mail awaiting him that had been forwarded from Butte Citv. Among his letters was one from the chief, which read as follows:

Banner Office,

New York City, July

Dear Sir:

Your letters to the Banner, in one sense of the word, are all and even more than I expected. They are giving excellent satisfaction. As yet you have expressed no decided opinion in regard to the desirability of Western investments.

My ideas are to educate our readers against unstable investments. Nine out of every ten of the mining shafts in Montana, in my judgment, have had more money put into 71
them than ever has or ever will be taken out. You will also find many Western towns where they are selling lots at from one to two hundred dollars each, which, in reality, would be expensive property to own at the government price of $1.25 per acre. Of course, there are, perhaps, a few honorable exceptions.

To Vance Gilder, Esq.

Respectfully,

J. R. S., Chief.

When one is seeking an excuse for his convictions, especially if they are as strong as Vance's had become in regard to Butte City and Waterville, the one little sentence, "Of course, there are, perhaps, a few honorable exceptions," in the chief's letter saves him a great deal of worry. Vance was too light hearted to be cast down by the half-criticism of the class of correspondence he was sending in.

He had an engagement that evening with Louise Bonifield and her father; indeed, his was a standing invitation at the Bonifields', and almost every afternoon since his arrival at Gold Bluff found him at their mountain home.

As he started from the hotel he was accosted by a familiar voice: "Hello, pard; how d' ye do?" and Steve Gibbons thrust out his long arm to shake Vance's hand in western fashion. He still wore his sombrero and high-topped boots.

Vance assured Gibbons that he was delighted to see him.

"I knew you would be," said Gibbons, "You see, I have given up the real estate t business 72
clown at Waterville, and am turned stage driver. Of course, every man in this 'ere country is lookin' for promotion. I don't reckon I'm any smarter than other people, but I've had my eye on this job for several months; but you can bet your life them other real estate agents didn't know nothin' about it. I tell you, pardner, it's a mighty elevatin' position to drive a six-horse team through these deep mountain gorges in all kinds of wind and weather. Had to give a mighty stout bond, too, for we handle all the express matter, and there's a good deal of gold

dust hauled down from this ‘ere camp.”

Vance was glad to meet anyone, however slight the acquaintance had been, and in the course of their conversation Steve Gibbons confessed to him that he was “givin’ it to him just a leetle” in regard to the town lots which Vance had purchased of the Town Company.

“You see,” said he, “the facts are, the Town Company of Waterville has made that ‘ere town, and are still makin’ it. It’s a mighty pert place, and is growin’ perter all the time.”

Vance mentally wondered if all the “honest intentioned” fellows of Waterville would talk in the same way about the Town Company if they were occupying positions where their interests were no longer adverse to the Company’s.

“Then you don’t think I paid too much for my lots?” asked Vance, looking up with a quizzical expression.

“No,” said Steve Gibbons, “them lots are all right, pardner, and will make you a barrel if you hold on to ‘em. They sold ‘em to you cheap enough. That was just a leetle competition talk I was givin’ you that night down at Waterville. Business is business, you know, when you are sellin’ town lots, and a man has got to talk for hisself. I really did want to sell you some lots, that’s a fact, ‘cause I wanted to rake in the commission; but it’s all over with now. I have throwed up the whole darned business of sellin’ lots since I was promoted. Old Dick Ballard,” said he, “is jest as *prima facie* as ever, and says his company is the finest drilled militia in the state. By the way,” he continued, “the Town Company has had a meetin’, and the people are feelin’ mighty good jess now’.” 73

“How’s that?” asked Vance.

“Oh,” replied Gibbons, “about once a month the Town Company have a meetin’, and pass resolutions, declar’ dividends and get up a new’ prospectus of different manufacturin’ enterprises that’s goin’ to be built thar; also, of colleges and state institutions that will be located at Waterville this comin’ year, and that always makes the people feel high-spirited for the next week or ten days, anyhow. Most of the people go on a spree after one o’ them encouragin’ meetin’s.”

“I presume,” said Vance, “that Homer Winthrop is one of the leading spirits of the Company.”

“He is one of the Company,” said Gibbons, as he filled his pipe and lit it, “but he lacks a good deal, I can tell you, of bein’ the biggest toad in the puddle. There’s old Colonel Alexander, he’s the fellow that lays out the plans on a gigantic scale. Then there’s General Ira House. I ‘spect he has the biggest reputation of any town boomer on the western half of the continent—I allow as what he has. And when you’re talkin’ about smart ones, you don’t want to forget B. Webster Legal; he’s the corporation attorney, and you can bet your last half dollar the company will never run agin’ any shoals as long as he stands at the wheel and writes up contracts. Oh, he’s a hummer, and no mistake.” 74

“It’s reported down thar’ that half a dozen different railroad companies are tryin’ mighty hard to get him for their attorney, but he saws, ‘Not much; I have cast my fortune with my friends and with Waterville, and I’ll stick by the enterprise as long as a town lot can be sold.’.rdquo;

“The Town Company is mighty cute,” he went on, “they never have any law suits, ‘cause their contracts are drawn up with knots tied knee deep all over the fellow they’re dealin’ with.”

It is probable that Steve Gibbons would have gone on indefinitely had not Vance begged to be excused, pleading a previous engagement. They bade each other good night, Gibbons starting for the stables to look after his horses, and Vance walked leisurely along toward the Bonifield’s home.

That afternoon Louise had accepted his invitation to go on a fishing jaunt some day during the week to a place called Silver Point Lake, some two miles away.

Her simplicity of manner and frankness, though possessing, withal, a demure humor, which was one of her charming characteristics, had greatly fascinated him.


Angling.

They were standing on the cottage porch in the soft summer twilight, while a mountain breeze was tossing the ringlets of Louise’s hair about, as if coquetting with them. Vance was studying her face while she was looking far away toward the western mountains, where the sun had left a reddened glow on the sky, which, he said, was a promise of fair weather for the fishing excursion the next day. Presently, a creaky voice commenced calling: 75

“Louise! Louise! where is your par?” and before Vance’s fair companion could explain, a woman well advanced in years came out on the porch, and seemed surprised at seeing Vance, and eyed him critically.

“Aunt Sally,” said Louise, “this is Mr. Gilder, papa’s friend. Mr. Gilder, this is my Aunt Sally, father’s sister.”

Aunt Sally acknowledged the introduction with a stately bow. Her apparel was of the fashion of a quarter of a century ago.

“Am very glad to see you, suh,” she said, addressing Vance. “I understand you are interested with my brother in his mine. I can give you, Mr. Gilder, some very excellent advice; I can, indeed, suh, but I will defer it until some other time.” Then turning to Louise, she said, “Do you know where your par’s gone?”

“I do not,” replied Louise, sweetly, “I think he will be here in a few moments.”

“I just allow he’s grub-stakin’ some of them pesky prospectin’ miners again,” cried Aunt Sally. “Mr. Gilder,” she continued, “I have to watch over my brother very closely, I do, indeed, suh. He’s been plantin’ money all over these mountains for many years, but there’s no crop ever been harvested. I allow I’ll give him a piece of my mind when he comes home.” Saying this, she turned and disappeared into the house. Louise was evidently confused, and regretted her aunt’s words, while Vance was at a loss to understand the import of the spinster s remarks.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Gilder,” said Louise—and he noticed she was trembling like a frightened bird—“sorry that Aunt Sally should so far forget herself as to speak so before a stranger.” 76

"I am goin' to give him a piece of my mind."

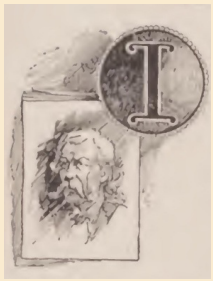
Vance declared there was no reason for being disturbed, but Louise was not wholly reassured by his words. “I know papa will be very angry with Aunt Sally.”

“There surely is no cause for that,” replied Vance.

"You see,” said Louise, “mamma died when Virginia and I were little girls, and Aunt Sally has been a mother to us. Ever since papa commenced work on Gray Rocks she has continually opposed him. She says he will never find a dollar s worth of gold if he sinks his shaft a thousand feet. I sometimes think she has influenced sister Virgie. Sister is away from home now, teaching school at Waterville. I do not know whether papa is wrong or not, but if he is, then I am also, for I believe with all my heart that some time papa will find the wealth he has so persistently labored for so many years. And I sincerely hope,” she continued, laying her hand on Vance’s arm and looking pleadingly up into his face, “that you will not be influenced by anything that Aunt Sally may have said, will you?” 77

Vance was only human; he could not withstand such an appeal, If doubts had ever come to him, the trembling girl at his side, by her looks and words, had put them to flight. “No,” he replied, “my faith is as firm as the rocks in your father’s mine.”

CHAPTER X.—PROPERTY HAS GONE UP.



IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the following morning, Vance was waited upon by Col. Bonifield. The old miner bore a troubled expression on his face. Vance invited him to his room. 78

“Mr. Gilder,” said the old miner, as he raised himself to his full height, and with the dignity of a general addressed Vance: “I assure yo’, suh, I am greatly pained at the uncalled fo’ remarks which my sister made in yo’r presence last evening; I am indeed, suh.

“I assure you,” replied Vance, “there is no occasion to refer to the matter at all. I assured your daughter, and I now assure you, that I have every confidence in the mine, and will continue to have until you yourself have sufficient reason to shake your faith. I certainly cannot say more, and under the circumstances could not say less.”

“Mr. Gilder,” said the old miner, “yo’, suh, are a very honorable gentleman, and I am very proud of my partnership with yo’. I am indeed, suh. In regard to my sister—in her younger days, I assure yo’, she was one of the most rema’kable women of Virginia; yes, suh, a vehy rema’kable woman. She certainly has been a true sister to me, suh, and a faithful mother to my daughters, but in some way she disbelieves in Gray Rocks, and would yo’ believe it, suh, she has gone so far at times as to intimate that I am crazy as a March hare in regard to ever ‘strikin’ it rich’ on our minin’ property; yes, suh, she certainly has said some vehy bitter things against Gray Rocks, but fo’ all that, she is a vehy rema’kable woman, even to this day. Yes, suh, quite rema’kable.” 79

“I now have a matter, Mr. Gilder,” he continued, “of vehy great importance to discuss with yo.” Vance offered the old miner a cigar, which he accepted, and soon they were discussing the “important matter,” which of course referred to Gray Rocks.


The colonel's advice

"We are not far away, Mr. Gilder, from the 300 foot level. Our machinery and pumps, suh, have been workin' rema'kably well. Two weeks mo' and our shaft will be finished; yes, suh, finished. Then we will cross-cut, and my opinion is, it will be well fo' yo' to remain in Gold Bluff and be ready to send in yo'r resignation as cor'spondent of that New York paper; yes, suh that is my advice. It is only proper, suh, that yo' should enjoy the riches that await yo'."

"But supposing, Col. Bonifield," said Vance, "supposing that you do not find any pay ore when you crosscut into the vein, as you say; in that event, I suppose you agree with me that it would be a pretty good idea for me to hold my position on the *Banner?*"

"Of cou'se, suh," replied the old miner, "but there is but one chance in ten thousand that we won't strike it. I admit of this one chance against us, suh, fo' the sake of argument alone. Mr. Grim is now takin' out of the Peacock some of the richest ore I ever saw in my life, he is indeed, suh—and his mine joins ours, as yo' know, directly on the nawth." 80

Vance was silent for a few moments, and then said: "In the event, Col. Bonifield, we do not strike it; what then? Will you be discouraged?"

"No, suh; if we fail at the 300 foot level, suh, and yo' can furnish the money, we will start the next mornin' fo' the 400 foot level; but I assure yo', suh, I have no idea yo 'll have to furnish any mo' money. Gray Rocks is a sure winner; it is indeed, suh. The oldest miners in the camp say that if we stick to Gray Rocks it will be worth mo' in five years than Rufus Grim's Peacock mine. When I was yo'r age, Mr. Gilder," he continued, blowing a cloud of smoke away out of the window toward Gray Rocks, "I could not have stuck to that property year after year as I have been doin'. Why suh, it took a quarter of a century's experience fo' me to learn that a rollin' stone gathers no moss'. it did indeed, suh. Now I have observed the fellows that strike it, in nine cases out of ten, are the ones who follow up and hold on after they once strike a trail. Why, suh, if yo' had seen the float rock that I found befo' stakin' out Gray Rocks, yo' would know why I believe there is an entire hill full of wealth over yonder."

While they were talking there came a gentle rap on the door. Vance called out for them to "come in. The door opened, and a boy sidled into the room with a letter in his hand and asked for Col. Bonifield.

"At yo'r service, suh," said the old miner' rising with much dignity. "Thank yo', suh," said he, taking the letter. The boy took himself off, closing the door behind him, while the colonel, adjusting his glasses, read aloud the address, "Miss Louise Bonifield." 81

Dropping his glasses from his eyes, he placed the letter in his pocket and said: "Mr. Boast has evidently returned to Gold Bluff."

"Mr. Boast, did you say?" asked Vance.

"Yes, suh, Mr. Boast—a young man in whom I have only the slightest confidence. His full name is J. Arthur Boast. His father, Colonel Boast, lives on a ranch about three miles from here."

Vance could never explain why, but the unfavorable opinion he had formed of J. Arthur Boast while at Waterville was in the twinkling of an eye changed to hatred. Soon after, Colonel Bonifield took his departure, and Vance commenced preparing for his next day's fishing-jaunt. His door had been left ajar, and presently he heard a squeaky, ill-omened voice that he well remembered.

"How do you do, Mr. Gilder?"

Vance turned and saw J. Arthur Boast standing at his door. "How do you do," said Vance, rather abruptly.

"I did not expect to find you at Gold Bluff," said Boast in an insinuating tone of voice.

"Why not?" said Vance; without deigning to look up.

"Oh, you eastern fellows, and newspaper men in particular, never stay very long in one place. So you've met my old mining friend, Colonel Bonifield?"

"Yes," replied Vance.

"I presume you've met his daughter, Miss Louise?" As he made this remark he looked out of the corners of his restless eyes in a manner that was intended to be cunning Vance was full of resentment, and dared not trust himself to make and immediate reply. Presently Boast continued: "They are old friends, of mine; a most respectable family. I used to live in Gold Bluff; may live here again. One can't say what may happen, you know." 82

Vance turned and saw J. Arthur Boast.

"I thought," said Vance, "you were in love with Waterville."

"One's in love where one's possessions are, don't you see?"

Vance did not reply to the question, but busied himself with his fishing tackle. Presently Boast took a bottle from his pocket, and said:

"Will you have a drink of red liquor Vance replied in the negative.

"Well, I suppose," said Boast, "I ought not to drink so much. The truth is, I am a pretty devilish hard citizen. I am drinking entirely too much of the stuff, but no one takes interest enough in me to tell me so; yet I know I'm going to the bad. The habit is formed and what is a fellow going to do about it?"

He waited some time for a reply, but as Vance made none, he proceeded to pour out a small portion of the contents of the bottle into a glass, and then added some water to it and stood looking out of the window. 83

"Won't you be seated?" asked Vance.

"Thank you, I believe I will," replied Boast, and sat down with the glass of liquor in his hand, and said nothing for several minutes. He acted as if he dreaded the ordeal of swallowing the portion, but felt it would not do to set it aside after all he had said in regard to being a hard drinker. Finally he gulped it down at a single swallow, and then drank a great quantity of water immediately afterward. He strangled considerably and his eyes became very red, and evidently was glad the trial was over. Presently he said:

"Mr. Gilder, there are things going to happen down at Waterville in the next ninety days that will surprise everyone. Some very large manufacturing enterprises wall soon be located there."

"That certainly is very welcome news," replied Vance, "as a property owner in the new city, I am naturally interested in its development."

"Property has gone up ten per cent since you were there." 84

"Is that so?" said Vance, looking up in some surprise. "Of course," Boast continued, "I am selling my special bargain list at the same old prices, but the Company and other real estate agents who have desk room here and there over the town, are trying very hard to inflate prices. I am holding them level, however, and intend to keep on doing so. I don't propose having Waterville killed by a lot of town boomers, who are trying to get prices away above intrinsic values."

"It is very fortunate," replied Vance, "that Waterville has such a conservative citizen as yourself."

"It's very complimentary for you to say so, I am sure," replied Boast. "Of course. Mr. Gilder, I would not say anything detrimental about anyone."

"Certainly not," replied Vance. The tenor of his conversation was decidedly wicked in its insinuations; indeed, one to hear him talk would naturally think the destiny of Waterville rested entirely with J. Arthur Boast. Presently, in a high, creaking voice, he said:

"How do you like Miss Louise?"

"Miss Louise?" repeated Vance, with a perplexed look on his face.

"Yes, Miss Louise Bonifield. How do you like her? Pretty fair specimen for the west, ain't she?"

"My likes and dislikes," said Vance, "are hardly to be taken into consideration. One seldom forms an opinion until he is acquainted. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. I have known people for a very short time, and yet instinctively taken a great dislike to them. Miss Bonifield," continued Vance, without looking up, "has the appearance of a lady of refinement and culture, but as my observations have been limited, I can hardly say more than that I am well pleased with both the young lady and her father." At this Vance prepared to leave the room. 85

"You'd better drink with me," said Boast, taking up his bottle again.

"I am liable to drink every drop of this liquor before I let up, and you'd only be doing me a kindness by

dividing it up with me a little."

"No, thank you," replied Vance. "Very well," said Boast "I shall remain in Gold Bluff several days, and hope to see you often."

Vance closed the door after Boast had left his room, and the one word, "Scoundrel!" hissed through his teeth.

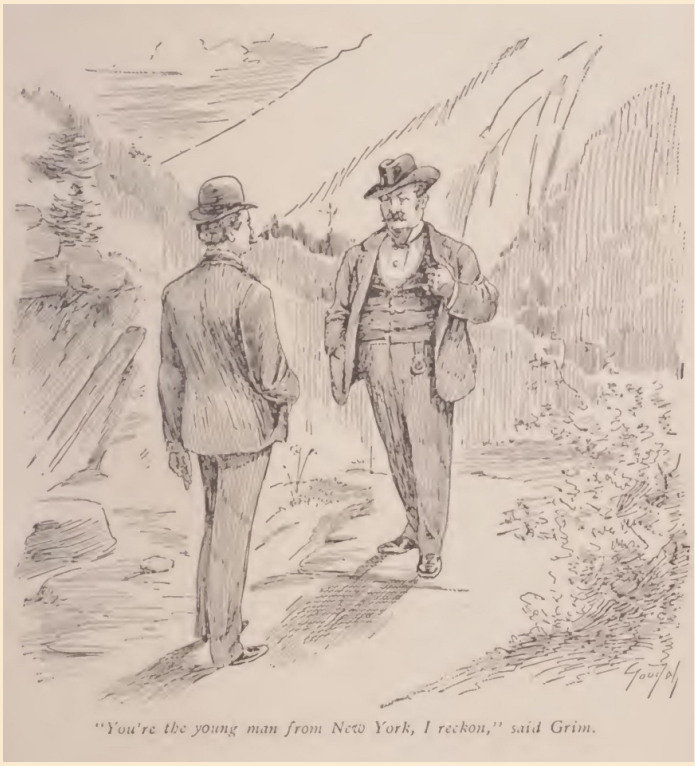
CHAPTER XI.—OWNER OF THE PEACOCK MINE.

HE next morning Vance was up at an early hour for a morning walk. He followed the winding road up the hill-side toward Gray Rocks. The air was fresh and invigorating; the sun was just rising over the eastern mountains. Robins and mountain thrushes were twittering gaily their morning songs. He mentally compared the stifled life so prevalent in the great cities to the healthful and exhilarating prospect about him. 86

A shadow flitted across his mind. It was J. Arthur Boast's inquiry in regard to Louise Bonifield. "But why should I be so ready to come to her rescue? What right have I to be her champion? They may be old acquaintances, but they certainly are not friends. She is too noble a character to form an alliance of friendship with such an individual as Boast. He is critical, cold, calculating, and, I believe, unprincipled."

Walking on in an aimless way, he followed a path that led by Gray Rocks on toward the Peacock. Presently he saw a well-dressed man in middle life walking toward him. There was an unmistakable look of good living and prosperity—a general air of superiority about him. His round, fat face was smooth shaven, except a bristly dark moustache. His nose was large and obtrusive. In his shirt front glistened a diamond of great value, while its counterpart reflected the morning sun from a massive ring on one of his fat, short fingers. 87

"Good morning," said he.



Vance returned the salutation, and presently the pompous stranger introduced himself as Rufus Grim, owner of the Peacock.

"Yes, I have heard of you," replied Vance.

"You're the young man from New York, I reckon," said Grim. 88

"New York is my home."

"Yes, I have heard about you. I rather expected you over to see me. I assure you, Mr. Gilder," he went on, "it would afford me great pleasure to show you through the Peacock. She is a fine piece of property, I can tell you; none better. If you'll walk down this way a little we can see the old prospect shaft where the precious metal of the Peacock was first discovered."

Vance readily consented, and presently they came to an old, open shaft near the brow of the mountain overlooking the village of Gold Bluff and the valley below.

“Here,” said Rufus Grim, with a wave of his fat hand, “is where I commenced prospecting fifteen years ago. I was one of the pioneers in this mining camp. Sometimes I did not know where the next meal was coming from, but I worked on, day after day; first for wages, and then for an interest in what, at the time, was looked upon as a labor and money losing investment. I stuck to it; the other fellows didn’t. Finally I bought out the other fellows, and if you have heard very much about the history of Gold Bluff and the prosperity of her mines, of course you have heard about me. In fact,” he said, with vulgar braggadocio, “the history of the Peacock and my own are so interwoven that you couldn’t very well hear of one and not know all about the other.”

“Yes,” replied Vance, “I have heard a great deal of you. Mr. Grim, and am delighted to have the pleasure of knowing you personally.”

“Yes, I presume,” said Grim, as he looked away toward the valley that nestled beneath their feet, “I 89
presume you’ve heard a great deal about Rufus Grim that is not true, and precious little to my credit. I have not a doubt but what the busy-bodies of Gold Bluff have told you that old, worn-out story about Steve Gibbons and Hank Casey, and how unjustly I treated them; but I can tell you,” he continued with warmth, “there’s not a word of truth in all that you may have heard. No, sir, I have climbed the ladder step by step and built up my own fortune, and whatever I am to-day, I have nobody to thank but myself.”

“I assure you,” said Vance, “I have heard nothing particularly to your discredit. In fact, I have heard next to nothing at all, except that you were the owner of the Peacock, and that it is a paying property.”

Rufus Grim looked at Vance at first as if he doubted him, and then expressed his surprise that no one had told him what a mean man he was. “If you get acquainted with that young scoundrel, Boast, he’ll tell you quick enough—a miserable story; how I cheated Casey and Gibbons out of their share of the mine; but I say it’s false,” he continued, as he brought his fat hands down together, “not a word of truth in any of their statements. No, sir. You see,” he went on, turning to the old prospect shaft, “I have put a wall around this so that it may be preserved. It gratifies me to come here occasionally and think over the hard times of my prospecting life and the change that has come. It came, sir, because I made it come. Yonder is my home,” said he, waving his hand toward an elegant residence located in the suburbs of the village, with beautiful grounds about it. “If there is any better in the Fish River mining district, I don’t know it.”

"You’re home,” said Vance, “is certainly a lovely looking place.” 90

“You are at liberty,” said Grim “to come and see me whenever you desire. I can’t promise you more than this, that you will be welcome.” Grim made this last remark as if he was bestowing a great favor upon a stranger within the gates of Gold Bluff; indeed, one might have imagined him Lord Mayor of some municipality granting the freedom of the city to some favored guest.

Vance thanked him for the invitation. With a stately bow to Vance, Grim turned and walked toward the works on the Peacock, and Vance returned to the hotel refreshed from his walk, and interested in the fragments of the story he had heard from the owner of the Peacock.

At the appointed hour he called for Louise, and, together, they walked briskly toward Silver Point Lake.

Louise was all animation and life, and thought nothing of the two miles’ walk which lay before them. 91


Vance and Louise.

Indeed, she had followed these mountain paths from her early childhood, and felt less fatigue after a tramp of a half-dozen miles than many a city belle after walking a half-dozen blocks.

It might be well to explain that Louise’s mother was a lady of great culture and refinement, and belonged to one of the oldest families of Baltimore. She died when Louise was only four years old. A spinster sister of Colonel Bonifield tried to persuade her brother to give up his daughters while he was leading a life in the mountains, and let than be reared to womanhood at the old Bonifield home in Virginia, but Ben Bonifield could not do this. The loss of his wife was a severe blow, and to part with his daughters, Virginia and Louise, could not be thought of. Therefore, Aunt Sully had accepted her brother’s invitation to make her home in the mountains, and take upon herself the care and training of her brother’s children.

Aunt Sally was a lady in the olden time possessed of uncommon gifts and a finished education, not only in classical literature, but also in music and painting. Louise had proven a more apt scholar than her elder sister, Virginia. Aunt Sally had been a most painstaking instructress, and her wards had grown up with minds enriched and cultured, while their physical development was in keeping with the wild freedom of a health-sustaining mountain country.

In her later years, however, Aunt Sally had become greatly dissatisfied with her brother and his attachment for Gray Rocks, and she had developed a querulous disposition, which, at times, was very annoying to Ben Bonifield. She lost no opportunity to express her opinion that “he was fooling his time away” while working on Gray Rocks.

As Vance and Louise walked along that morning toward Silver Point Lake, he could not help glancing at the ruddy glow on the fair cheeks of his companion. He listened to her childish talk of the many excursions which she had made with her father far over some of the tallest mountains that lav before them, and of numerous “fish frys” they had enjoyed at Silver Point Lake.

While he listened to the sweet music of her voice, he mentally speculated as to what sort of a friendship, if 92
any, could possibly exist between such a fair creature and J. Arthur Boast. Presently, looking up at Vance with her large blue eyes, she said:

“We may have company at the lake.”

“Why, how is that?” inquired Vance in some surprise.

“I received a note,” replied Louise, “from Bertha Allen, inviting me to go horseback riding to-day. In my reply I explained my previous engagement with you. Just before starting this morning I received a note from

her saying that she and her cousin, Arthur Boast, would try to join our fishing party. Of course," she said, with a sweet little laugh, "you do not know who Bertha Allen is. Bertha Allen," she went on, "is Mr. Rufus Grim's step-daughter. Mr. Grim married Mrs. Allen when Bertha was a girl in her early teens. Mrs. Allen is Colonel Boast's sister, and Bertha and Arthur are, therefore, cousins."

Vance did not fancy the prospect of meeting Boast, and felt that his happiness for the day would certainly be very incomplete if Boast was to be one of the fishing party.

"I have met Mr. Boast," said Vance, with just a tinge of resentment in his voice.

"I hope you like him," said Louise, as she turned her lovely face toward him with a pleading look in her eyes.

"May I ask you why you hope so?" asked Vance, in almost a defiant tone.

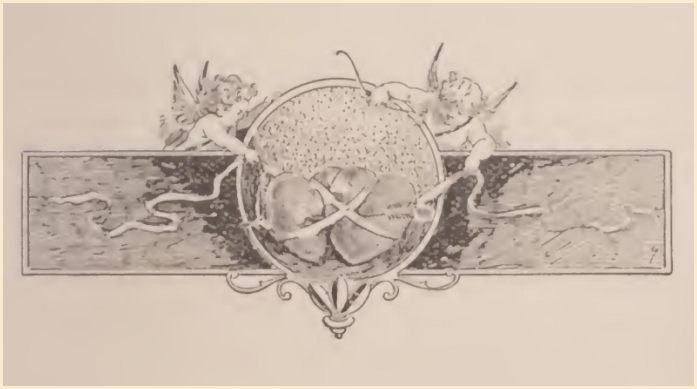
There was no maidenly blush on Louise's cheeks as she replied with the simplicity of a child:

"Why, Mr. Gilder, there is hardly anybody that likes Arthur, and I sometimes feel sorry for him. Mr. Grim says very hard things about him, and no one seems to be his friend." 93

"Perhaps he is unworthy," replied Vance.

For a moment Louise was silent, and then said:

"The judgment of the world, Mr. Gilder, is often at fault. We may judge with a degree of accuracy art, music, fame, or power, but it is hardly wise to apply the same rule to a human being."



CHAPTER XII—TROUT FISHING.

RRIVING at the lake by a circuitous path, they found themselves on the banks of a lovely sheet of water, several hundred feet wide and perhaps a mile in length. The distinct reflection of the foliage, trees and mountains, which rose several hundred feet on the opposite side, made a double picture of enchanting loveliness. 94

"We have been waiting for you," said Bertha Allen, in a flute-like voice. She was a cooing sort of a young lady, with a dainty lisp, which she evidently regarded as becoming. She embraced Louise and gave her one of her sweetest kisses, and in a half sotto voice lisped, "how beautiful you look to-day!"

Vance was presented, and Bertha honored him with one of her stateliest bows. There was no alternative, as Boast extended his hand and observed that he had met Mr. Gilder before, but to accept the situation and make the best of it.

Vance saw in Bertha Allen a young lady of about five and twenty, rather tall and slender, with a wasp-like waist. She had a small head and face, with heavy braids of dark brown hair, which corresponded with her long eyelashes of a dark hue. Her eyes never looked straight at anyone, but she continually practiced a bewitching habit of shy observation, evidently considering it fascinating. Her mouth 95 was small, and a noticeable dimple was in her chin. There was a delicate pink upon her cheeks, which Vance noticed as the day wore on, did not come and go, but remained as one of her permanent features. There was a poetry in her movements, however, which admirably fitted her slow, soft tone of lisping-speech. Her slender form was robed in a pretty costume of pink, with black lace and ribbons. It was a costume of frills and laces, coquetishly arranged, making her graceful figure more symmetrical in arrangement. There were puffings here and there, which concealed defects, if any existed, and revealed her womanly charms to the best advantage. She talked a good deal, and called Louise her own "dear darling." Here every sentence was a lisp, and she told Cousin Arthur he was "simply horrid to kill the poor worms in baiting the hooks."

Vance noticed that Roast was ready at any time to neglect his stylish cousin to engage in conversation with Louise. He found himself interpreting Bertha Allen's attempts to entertain and interest him, as the act of an accomplice, to enable Boast to have a tete-a-tete with Louise. There was consolation, however, in the fact that he did not believe Louise favored Arthur Boast's attentions.

"How Arthur and Louise are enjoying themselves!" lisped Bertha Allen, in a sweet, confiding way, to Vance.

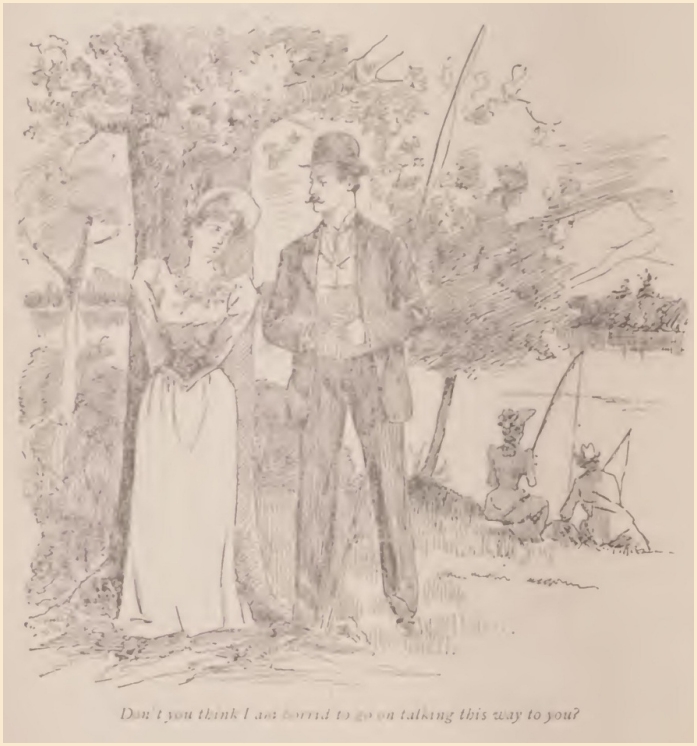
“Do you think their enjoyment is superior to ours?” asked Vance.

“No more than mine,” she replied demurely, “but possibly more than yours.” This was followed by a silvery little laugh.

“I fear I am not very entertaining,” said Vance.

"On the contrary, Mr. Gilder,” replied Bertha, “I think you are a very charming companion. Are you from Virginia?” she asked. 96

“No; my people were from Virginia. I was born and reared in New York City.”



“The Bonifields are Virginians. They seem to think,” continued Bertha, “that all good people come from Virginia or Baltimore. I sometimes wish I had been born in Virginia.”

"I never noticed that peculiarity,” replied Vance, “in either Colonel Bonifield or his daughter.” 97

“Oh, I don’t mean, Mr. Gilder, they are affected. Don’t you think I am horrid to go on talking this way to you? But really, is not Louise one of the sweetest little darlings in the world?”

Vance was bored, but turning toward Bertha Allen and smiling at her pretty up-turned face, replied:

“You ask me so many questions, Miss Allen, that I do not know which to answer first.”

She looked archly at Vance, and said: “Do not answer either of them, for I know I would be dissatisfied with your reply. Is not that a beautiful botanical specimen? Really, Mr. Gilder,” she continued, “I sometimes do not know what I am saying. I know you will think me awfully stupid.”

The well modulated and lisping voice of Bertha Allen possessed a charm of its own, and Vance found himself interested in studying the difference between the sweet, simple, unaffected Louise, and the affected, calculating Miss Allen.

“Don’t you think, Mr. Gilder, that Louise has great individuality?”

“I believe her to be a most exemplary young lady,” replied Vance, “and possessed of a good mind.”

“Oh, you think that, do you?” said Bertha, lisping and laughing like the silvery tones of a flute. “You are not the only one, Mr. Gilder, that thinks that way. I mean Cousin Arthur. Oh, he’s awfully smitten.”

“Indeed!” replied Vance.

“What a beautiful picture,” said Bertha presently. “The waters mirror the trees and the mountains so distinctly. Let us look over the bank at our own reflections.” 98

“Permit me to hold your hand,” said Vance, “and I will prevent your falling. There—can you see yourself?”

“Oh, just splendidly!” lisped Bertha, “it is clear as a French plate mirror. Shall I support you, Mr. Gilder, while you look?”

“No, thank you,” replied Vance, “I am not fond of looking at homeliness. I would rather look at you.”

“Oh, Mr. Gilder, you men are such flatterers! I thought better things of you.”

“And why of me?” asked Vance, teasingly.

“Louise has spoken of you so many’ times,” she replied, “and in such flattering terms, that I was very anxious to meet you. Indeed, I had quite made up my mind that you were different from other men. Let us turn down this way, Mr. Gilder. Let me see—what was I saying? I thought you must be different; but I guess men are all about alike.”

“I feel highly honored,” replied Vance, “to think that Miss Bonifield should have spoken of me at all.”

Bertha stopped and looked at Vance for a moment in silence, and then said:

“Men are so conceited. There is no sentiment, I assure you, in Louise.”

“Your frankness is quite charming, Miss Allen.”

“Oh, do you think so?” said Bertha, with a sweet lisp.

“Yes: and as to Miss Bonifield, I beg to differ from you. She certainly possesses in a high degree that sentiment peculiar to the children of nature. She loves all that is natural, and in the tenderness of her heart, pities the assumed.”

"How unfortunate, Mr. Gilder,” said Bertha, “that love is not reciprocal.” 99

Before Vance could reply, Louise called to them and soon after she and Boast came up, declaring the day had been a great success. Arthur and Vance divided the catch equally, and soon with their baskets swinging from their shoulders, they started for home. Bertha was profuse in her invitations to Mr. Gilder to call, and he promised to do so. He was quite glad, however, when they finally separated and he had Louise all to himself.

“I hope you have enjoyed the day as much as you anticipated, Mr. Gilder,” said Louise.

“If I am anything,” replied Vance, “I am frank; and therefore confess I would have enjoyed it far more without Boast and his pretty cousin.”

“I knew you would think her pretty,” said Louise; “everyone does.”

“And do you think she is pretty?” asked Vance.

“Yes, indeed,” replied Louise, “I have seen no one, even in your great city of New York, half so handsome as Bertha.”

“You are certainly generous in your compliments,” said Vance.

“Bertha has such a sweet way about her, and she always makes one feel so at his ease.”

Before Vance had time to reply, Colonel Bonifield waved his pipe and blew out a cloud of smoke as an act of welcome to the returning fishermen. Vance displayed his long string of speckled beauties, and the Colonel assured him they had made a great success. “I have been thinkin’ of yo’ all day,” he continued, “and had half a mind, upon my honor I did, suh, to come oveh and help yo’ out.” Soon after. Vance took leave of the 100
Bonifields, and started for the hotel. His respect for generous-hearted Louise was increasing. “Yes,” said Vance to himself, “she is a child of nature. She does not know how to dissemble, and her heart is too pure to be resentful.” His pleasant reverie was broken by encountering Boast at the hotel, who had arrived a little before him.

His shoes had been exchanged for polished ones, yet he complained about his negligee appearance, and stooped to brush the least speck of dust or cigar ashes that might have found lodgment on his trousers or coat sleeves, and kept assuring Vance that he knew he “looked rougher than a miner.”

As a matter of fact, he was spotlessly at-attired, as was his custom. Even in his office at Waterville, he seemed backward about doing any business, for fear of soiling his hands in ink, or getting his desk out of order. Stepping into the bar-room of the hotel, they found seats near an open door, and Vance determined to gain as much information as he could from what Boast might have to say. As they seated themselves, Vance said:

“I met Mr. Grim this morning.”

“Oh. did you?” replied Boast. “There is a man,” he continued, “that ought to be hung. He’s a robber!”

“A robber?” asked Vance.

“Yes. Fifteen years ago,” continued Boast, “my father was the richest man in this part of Idaho. He was engaged then as now in the cattle and horse ranching business. He owns a very large ranch three miles from here down the valley. Grim came to the mining camp without a dollar in his pocket and worked by the day. An opportunity presented itself for 101
him to steal from his associates. He not only stole everything in sight, but by fraud and misrepresentation secured possession of the Peacock.

“He is an ignorant old boor.

“Ten years ago he married my aunt, the widow Allen, who is fully fifteen years his senior. He wanted a position in society and a home. My aunt is a stickler on all that’s polite, but notwithstanding her training and all of old Grim’s wealth, she has been unable to gild him over with even an appearance of culture, learning or decency. I never call at his house. They own perhaps the finest residence in the state of Idaho. If you will talk with Rufus Grim half an hour, it will be a wonder if he does not tell you that I am the biggest scoundrel outside the penitentiary; and it is all because my cousin Bertha is my friend. Sometimes I think he is afraid I will marry her. I believe he is in love with Bertha himself, and is only waiting for my aunt to die. It may be unwise for me to talk so plainly, Mr. Gilder, but when I think of that old reprobate, I become desperate.”

There was certainly no half insinuation in this statement, but rather a fiendish denunciation of the rich miner.

“I think,” said Boast, “we’d better have something to drink. I have a bottle in my pocket, but you are not very sociable, and I don’t presume you will drink with me.”

“No,” said Vance, “I am just as much obliged, but I do not feel the need of any stimulant this evening.”

"I have abstained all day,” said Boast, “out of respect for the ladies.” His voice began to sound piping, and 102
his restless eyes no longer looked squarely at Vance, but confined themselves to side-long glances, as if he were trying to discover what his feelings were toward his cousin and Miss Louise. “They are pretty fair specimens, eh, for the mountains? The ladies, I mean; the ladies.”

Vance answered in the affirmative.

“My cousin is terribly taken with you, Mr. Gilder; if she was not my cousin I would feel jealous of you.” As Vance made no reply, Boast continued: “I know I am going down hill at a pretty rapid rate, all on account of this red liquor.” Tipping up the bottle, he took a swallow, coughed immoderately afterward, and made wry

faces, as if he were mentally damning all the “red liquor” to perdition.

“There’s only one thing that will ever save Bertha Allen, and that is for old Grim to *die*. My aunt would inherit the wealth, and of course, in that event, Bertha would be an heiress. At present, she is entirely dependent upon his generosity. I understand,” continued Boast, “Colonel Bonifield has about reached the 300 foot level. If I have one hope greater than another, it is that he will strike it ten times richer than old Grim ever did. In that event,” he continued, while he furtively glanced at Vance, “there will be another heiress in Gold Bluff.”

That night, after Vance found the seclusion of his room, he worked far into the early hours of morning, finishing a letter to the *Banner, a letter full of decided opinions*.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE STAGE RIDE.

HE following morning Vance forwarded to the *Banner* office a two column article, which 103
he considered the finest of all his western letters.

The chief was at Buzzard’s Bay enjoying a much needed rest, when Vance’s letter was received. The assistant managing editor did little more than glance over the manuscript and observe to the dramatic critic, as he hung the copy on the hook, that “Young Gilder was sending in some excellent articles from the Northwest.” The article was headed “Two Honorable Exceptions.” It proceeded, in a most logical manner, to give the output of precious metals from the mining town of Butte City.

His statistics were carefully revised, showing there was five times as much capital per capita in the mining camp of Butte City, with her 50,000 people, as in the cities of New York, Philadelphia or Boston.

Vance had spent a good deal of time in preparing the article, and every statement was supplemented with irrefragable proof. The latter half of the article was devoted to Waterville and the agricultural resources of the Thief River Valley. The exports of surplus crops had increased from 100 carloads per annum to 3,000 104
carloads in four years’ time, and a clever comparison was drawn between the farmers of eastern and New England states and the farmers of the great Thief River Valley, showing that for a given amount of labor, the farmer in the Thief River Valley received at least three dollars where the eastern farmer received only one.

The wonderful water power in the rapids of the Thief River, where the new town of Waterville was building, was also dwelt upon, as well as the centrality of location of the new city—not only from a local standpoint, but as to the entire northwestern section of the United States. The yield of wheat and other cereals was briefly referred to, all showing that Gilder had been most painstaking in preparing the article.

The managing editor, at Buzzard’s Bay, was enjoying his morning smoke when the *Banner* was laid on his table. Glancing it over leisurely, his eye caught the head-lines, “Two Honorable Exceptions.” In a moment he was all animation. His cigar was permitted to go out in his general neglect of everything else, in devouring every sentence and word of the article. He then paced back and forth across his room and swore like a pirate, declaring he would not have had the article appear in the columns of the *Banner* for $10,000.

“Just to think,” said he, “the very thing I sent that young fool of a Gilder into the west to accomplish, he has in this one article spoiled forever. Half a dozen of my friends have been asking me about mining investments 105
in Butte City. I have pleaded ignorance, but assured them we had sent a trusty man to inspect the merits of such investments, and they could expect reliable information in the columns of the *Banner*. Here it is, and a pretty mess he has made of it. He has,” continued the managing editor, angrily, “completely lost his head; only one thing will bring him to his senses, and that is a prompt dismissal from the *Banner* force.”

Accordingly he wired the assistant managing editor, directing him to notify Mr. Gilder by letter that his services were no longer required. He also instructed his assistant to send the clearest headed man on the force immediately to Butte City, Montana, and Waterville, Idaho, and have an article for the coming Sunday issue that would entirely counteract the effect of Mr. Gilder’s communication.

While these arrangements were being made at the *Banner* office, Vance was preparing to return to Butte City by way of Waterville, in order to make some investigations and secure additional information for his next letter to the *Banner*.

The old miner, Ben Bonifield, had assured him they would reach the 300 foot level by the following Saturday night, and Vance promised to return to Gold Bluff early the following week. Vance waited over one stage in order to travel in the one driven by Steve Gibbons.

As a special mark of distinction to Vance, Gibbons invited him to a seat on the top of the stage. As they were whirled away from the beautiful little village of Gold Bluff, the sun was beginning to gild with gold the eastern hills. Vance felt it was a sight never to be forgotten. The evening before starting he was at the Bonifields. When Louise said good-bye, with the sweet truthfulness of youth, and assured him that she would 106
be lonely when he was gone, he felt like declaring then and there, he would stay forever if she would but make the request. She gave Vance a letter of introduction to her sister Virginia, whom Vance promised to call upon as soon as possible after reaching Waterville.

Steve Gibbons was in his element on top of the stage coach.

He chatted away in a vivacious manner, recounting various reminiscences of the different mountain gorges, here and there, where fine specimens of float rock had been discovered at different times. Again he would tell

of some thrilling adventure with the Indians, and marvelous hair-breadth escapes. Gibbons invariably figured in these narratives as one of the principal characters. Presently he said:


Gibbons' invitation.

“I don’t reckon you met Grim, did you?”

“Rufus Grim?” said Vance; “yes, I had the pleasure of meeting him only a few days ago.”

“I ‘spect,” said Gibbons, “that Rufus Grim is the biggest scoundrel unhung in these diggins. He thinks he’s mighty pert, but Hank Casey and me ‘ll teach him afore long that other people can be a mighty sight perter than what he is. The only hearty, overgrown regret that I’ve never been able to get rid of is that I didn’t twist his neck ten years ago.”

“What grievance have you,” asked Vance, “against Mr. Grim? One would naturally suppose the owner of the richest mine in the Fish River Mining District would be respected instead of disliked.” Steve Gibbons pushed his sombrero back from his forehead, as if to relieve his pent up feelings, swung his long whip twice around his head, and made the welkin ring as he cracked it over the backs of his dappled leaders. 107

He then expectorated a vigorous “pit-tew” of tobacco juice, and said: “I reckon one can’t always judge by appearances. When Steve Gibbons says that Rufus Grim is a scoundrel, he is a pretty good jedge of what he is sayin’, and he mighty near means what he says, pardner. Somebody’s goin’ to be jerked out of the kinks ‘fore long, and—’twixt ourselves—I think that somebody is Rufus Grim. Hank Casey an’ me are old pards, and we’ve employed B. Webster Legal. He’s the corporation attorney for the Waterville Town Company. You won’t be takin’ no chances, pardner, of bettin’ your last dollar that old Grim will think somebody’s after him with a sharp stick and a diamond drill in the end of it ‘afore B. Webster Legal gets through with him. I tell you, Jedge Legal is a cuss in the court room. He can whip his weight in wild-cats in a law suit. Of course, I don’t mean that he’s goin’ to leave the Town Company; he’ll never do that as long as a lot can be sold—he says so his-self. Hank and I hev made a bargain with him, and old Grim is goin’ to be ousted. The Peacock belongs to Hank Casey and me. What do you think of that?”

“I assure you,” replied Vance, “you interest me very much. I supposed Mr. Grim was the owner of the Peacock.”

Again Steve Gibbons’ long whip cracked like a pistol shot over the backs of his horses. Presently he said:

“I don’t tell everybody, pardner, but I ‘spect it makes no difference with you. You see, when Rufus Grim came to Gold Bluff some fifteen years ago, he was so darnation poor he couldn’t buy a meal of victuals. Hank and I had staked out the Peacock. 108


The stage ride.

We had found some mighty rich float rock in that part of the mountain, and knew the precious stuff was not very far away. We ‘grub-staked’ Grim and put him to work on wages, and while he was workin’, he struck a ‘pocket’ and found free gold—a regular vault full of yellow stuff. He commenced his treachery by stealin’ every grain of it, and then cleverly walled up that part of the shaft and continued diggin’ in the opposite direction, endeavorin’ to get as far away from the place where he had made the discovery as possible. Well, by and by Hank Casey and me got tired of payin’ out money, and we sold out the Peacock for a mere song to Grim. Soon after, the name of Rufus Grim was known all over the mountain district as a bonanza king. He organized an immense company, and owns most of the stock himself. Within six months after we were defrauded of our rights in the Peacock, he was a rich man, and has been gettin’ richer ever since. Hank Casey and me have a whole lot of evidence. B. Webster Legal says if we can prove what we claim, that we have got a lead pipe cinch on the Peacock. The papers are bein’ drawn up, and things are goin’ to be sizzlin’ hot for Rufus Grim before many moons go over his head.”

Vance expressed much surprise and sympathy at the injustice he had sustained. 109

“Say, pardner,” said Steve, “I kind o’ reckon you’re shinin’ up a little toward old Bonifield’s gal, ain’t you?” and he nudged Vance in the ribs with his elbow.

The question was so unexpected that Vance hardly knew how to reply. “I hope,” replied Vance, “that I am not in disfavor with the young lady, or her father either. I own an interest in Gray Rocks.”

“The dickens you do!” said Steve Gibbons. “Well, if there’s any man in these mountains, pardner, who ought to strike it, old Ben Bonifield is the one. He’s been stickin to Gray Rocks for a good many years, and is one of the squarest men in the Fish River Minin’ District, while that gal of his—-why, she is the gem of all these diggins. I did think J. Arthur Boast had the inside track on the Bonifield ranch, but here lately I ‘lowed as 110
maybe Boast was playin’ second fiddle; but then you can’t tell how a game is goin’ to end until the last card is played.”

Vance made no reply, but ground his teeth in silent anger at the mention of Boast’s name.

It was late that night when they arrived at Waterville.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE TOWN COMPANY’. MEETING.

EARLY the next morning Dick Ballard rapped on Vance’s door, and being admitted, greeted 111
him warmly, and assured him he was mighty glad to see him again.

“There’s goin’ to be a meetin’ of the Town Company.”

“Is that so?” said Vance.

“Yes; the hul kit and bilin’ of ‘em are here,” replied Ballard. “There’s Colonel Alexander, Homer Winthrop, General Ira House and his brother, Jack House, B. Webster Legal and Marcus Donald. Donald is the resident director of the Town Company.” Vance said he would be glad to meet them.

“Well, you’ll see the keenest lot of men,” said Ballard, “this here country has ever pulled together. Every one of ‘em is a strong man and a hustler from the word go. What I say about ‘em you’ll find is *prima facie*.” After a little, Dick Ballard winked one eye at Vance and said: “I feel a bottle in my pocket, and I wouldn’t wonder a mite there was suthin’ in it that wouldn’t taste bad. A little spirits is mighty good for a feller when he has had a hard day’s ride.”

Vance assured him that he was much obliged, but was thoroughly refreshed by his night’s rest, and a light 112
breakfast was all he wanted.

“We usually,” replied Ballard, “accommodate fellows that want that kind of a breakfast; in fact, some of our breakfasts are too darned light. I’ll go down and see what I can skirmish up for you.”

At the door Dick Ballard turned and said, “Oh, yes, have you heard the news?”

“No, I do not remember of having heard anything of a startling character,” replied Vance.

“Well, by Ned, I supposed you had heard all about it,” said Ballard, as he leaned against the door and looked wise.

“Well, what is it?” queried Vance.

“Well, sir, our militia company has got a new snare drum, and, gosh all fish hooks! but she is a rat-tat-tat-to-or from away back!” The door closed and Old Dick Ballard retreated, merrily whistling “Away down in Dixie.”

After breakfast, Vance was escorted to the Town Company’s office, where he met the different members of the company. Each vied with the other in showing him courtesies.

“I presume,” said Homer Winthrop, as they drew a little aside from the others, “that you have never met as remarkable men as you see in my associates.” He looked radiant, inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, and continued:

“Colonel Alexander is possessed of one of the richest brains of any man I ever knew. Our attorney, Mr. Legal is a star of the first magnitude in his profession, and can whip a small army in a lawsuit, while Gen. Ira House has a reputation superior to any man in the Rocky Mountains as a town builder. Now, if he,” continued 113
Winthrop, “should go into the midst of a desert and say, ‘Here a great city shall be built,’ you would make no mistake in taking a ‘flyer’ on some dirt in that vicinity. Then there is Jack House, the General’s brother, who is, in his specialty, a most remarkable man. He is sometimes called ‘the Conspirator’ of our gang, because of his ability to set up jobs on the enemy and down ‘em.”

“By Jove, look,” said Winthrop, pointing out of the window, while his face became animated, “do you see that young lady on the other side of the street? That’s Miss Virgie Bonifield, and I venture to say she’s one of the loveliest girls in the Rocky Mountains.”

“I have a message for her, sent by her sister,” replied Vance. “I will be under many obligations if you’ll introduce me to the young lady.”

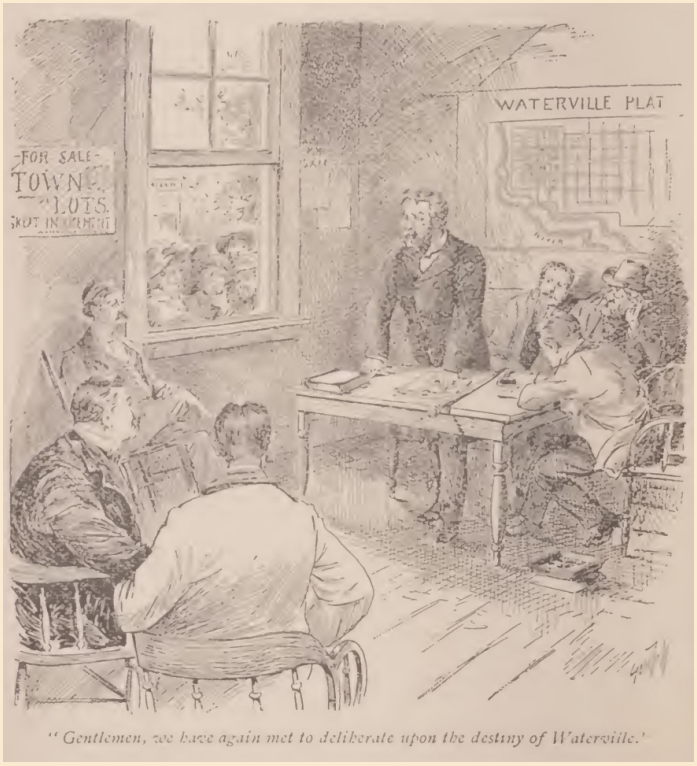
“With pleasure,” replied Winthrop, “as soon as the town meeting adjourns we will call upon her.”

The meeting was called to order, with Colonel Alexander in the chair.

The chairman cleared his throat several times with marked vehemence, and said:

“Gentlemen, we have again met to deliberate upon the destiny of Waterville and the great Thief River

Valley. It is no small matter for gigantic intellects to thus assemble as a deliberative body, to arrange, by resolutions or otherwise, questions of great moment. The leading question to-day, gentlemen, is that of mind over matter. We have said to one another, 'Waterville shall become a great city;' our united efforts are concentrated in this work. The story of the bundle of sticks is as true to-day as when the fable was first written. 114



"Gentlemen, we have again met to deliberate upon the destiny of Waterville."

"The wealth, gentlemen, of our united intellects is bearing down in concentrated rays against every opposition, and with hammer and tongs we are reaching out in every direction, and are making one of the grandest campaigns the country has ever witnessed. Gentlemen, what is the pleasure of this meeting?"

The Colonel's earnestness could not be doubted. When he sat down he fondled his gold-headed cane with apparent tenderness, as if he were ashamed of the way he had abused it in emphasizing his remarks by punching it into the floor in a most merciless fashion. 115

B. Webster Legal, addressing the chairman, said: "I am proud again to meet my distinguished associates as a deliberative body. For the benefit of our beloved citizens of Waterville, who are crowding into this room of deliberation, and standing in front of the windows eagerly listening to the important proceedings of this meeting, I will say that only men in the broadest term—men with an abundance of gray matter clinging to their brains—could possibly have accomplished the feats which have characterized the acts of the Waterville Town Company from its organization up to the present time. I feel, Mr. President and gentlemen, that our untiring efforts are about to be crowned with a success little dreamed of by the most hopeful.

"From a legal point of view, I am proud to assure you that the Waterville Town Company is in a most safe and healthy condition. I have frequently observed, and will again say, I am not a seller of lots, but I assure each and every one of you that I am here to stay by this company as long as a lot can be sold. So far as legal knots are concerned, I will untie them; or, failing to do so, will, with the sharp edge of the law, cleave them asunder."

The attorney's remarks were greeted with applause as he sat down.

The chairman jarred the frail building by again clearing his throat, and requested C. Webster Legal to make a report of the assets of the Waterville Town Company.

"Mr. Chairman," said B. Webster Legal, "I have recently looked over the list of property owned by the Waterville Town Company, and find that we have assets amounting to some two millions of dollars." 116

As the attorney sat down there was a satisfied look upon his face suggestive of the millionaire.

The chairman looked over his spectacles and said, "Gentlemen, you have heard, and no doubt with pardonable elation, the statement of our honored associate, Judge Legal. There are eight of us," he continued, "and two millions means a quarter of a million each. Within two years, sirs, these assets will have doubled in value. There are men whose statements I would not rely implicitly upon without discounting them—say, fifty or seventy-five per cent—but, gentlemen, when it comes to downright conservatism, why, my level-headed friend the Judge takes the jackpot. Yes, sir, I undertake to say, gentlemen, he is the king bee of us all in cutting square into the heart of a proposition, and analyzing it with a precision that is truly remarkable; and when he says two millions, I have no hesitancy, gentlemen, in staking my reputation that it is three millions if it is a cent."

As the chairman sat down he looked carefully at his gold-headed cane again to make sure it had sustained no injury.

Marcus Donald, the resident Town Company's director, addressed the meeting, and said:

"Mr. Chairman, I never felt so rich in my life as I do at the present moment. I regret that my ancestors are not alive to rejoice with me in the prosperity I am now enjoying. There is a reason in this contemplated

prosperity. First, the great natural opportunities in this wonderful valley, and, second, the unity of action on the part of the members of our Town Company. 117

"I have here a small matter to which I wish to call the directors' attention.


The Livery Bill.

It is a livery bill of some eighty dollars that is past due, and, perhaps, we had better arrange for it."

Judge Legal rose to a point of order. He said that such small details as paying livery bills had no place in the deliberations of this body of men. "It is the duty of the auditing committee to first approve and then look after the payments of small items like expense bills."

Director Donald stated in reply that B. Webster Legal was a member of the auditing committee as well as himself, and, doubtless, knew the bill had been approved of long ago, but that there were no funds with which—

"Order!" shouted the chairman, punching his goldheaded cane vigorously into the floor. "I sustain the point of order made by this corporation's attorney. Let us now proceed with the deliberations of weighty and progressive questions."

Gen. Ira House sat propped back in his chair in a retired corner of the room, and until now had maintained silence, save the fetching and labored puffs of his cigar, which almost completely enveloped him in a cloud of smoke. As he straightened himself up, he pushed his chair in front of him, elevated one foot to the seat and rested his left elbow on his elevated knee. He wore an expression on his face becoming a philosopher. "Mr. Chairman," said he, "it seems to me we're drifting." He looked wise and waited a moment for his remark to take effect. "Drifting," he continued, "is weakness. If we drift, we scatter; if we scatter, we fall. Now, gentlemen," he continued, "we must not drift. There are important business matters awaiting our attention. I hold in my hand a letter from a party who wants to know if Waterville would not be a good place to start a foundry. Now, gentlemen, do we want a foundry at Waterville, or do we not? That is the question before this meeting." 118

As Gen. House sat down, the crowd cheered him lustily, stamped their feet, clapped their hands, and cries of "Good!"

"That's business!" "That's the talk!" were heard on all sides among the citizens who were listening with bated breath to the proceedings of the Town Company's meeting.

"I move," said Jack House, "that we want a foundry at Waterville, and resolutions to that effect be prepared, inviting the party, whoever he is, to locate his foundry here."

"Order, gentlemen!" shouted the chairman, again clearing his throat. "Mr. Secretary, please record in the minutes of this meeting, if there are no objections, the unanimous vote in favor of the foundry, and prepare a set of elaborate resolutions, which we will sign, inviting the party making the inquiry to come at once to Waterville and locate his foundry."

The throng of citizens broke into cheers at this announcement, and the word was soon passed through the throng to the outer circle, that a foundry was to be located at Waterville. Presently, three cheers and a tiger were proposed for the new foundry, and the deliberations of the Town Company were necessarily delayed until the cheering had ceased. 119

Marcus Donald, addressing the chairman, said: "I have received a communication from the owners of a sash, blind and door factory, who seem quite desirous of casting their lot with us. I suggest the importance of taking official notice of their communication."

The throng of citizens waited almost breathlessly, and with a fair degree of patience, to see what was to be done in regard to the sash, blind and door factory. Judge Legal moved that the suggestion offered by Director Donald be acted upon, and that a resolution favoring the sash, blind and door factory be voted upon. As he sat down, three other directors seconded the motion.

"You have heard the question," said the chairman. "Unless there is some opposition, we will regard it as carried unanimously." He looked over his spectacles a moment, and as no one offered an objection, he brought his gold-headed cane down with a sharp rap upon the floor, and said "Carried!"

Again the word was passed from citizen to citizen onto the waiting mob without, that Waterville was to have a sash, blind and door factory. Again huzzas and cheering rent the air, and impeded, to a certain degree, the deliberations of the Town Company's meeting.

At this juncture, a clerk of the local bank—the only one that Waterville could boast of—presented himself and asked permission to address the directors.

"What is the nature of your business, young man?" asked Col. Alexander, clearing his throat threateningly and looking hard at the clerk over his spectacles.

"I have a sight draft for $50, drawn on the Waterville Town Company for printing stock certificates." 120

The chairman and his seven colleagues came to their they cried, almost in unison. Several of the directors shouted, "Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!" at the top of their voice, but in his indignation the chairman failed to take notice of them.

Presently a silence, caused by sheer consternation, succeeded the first burst of surprise. Judge Legal, mounting a chair, said:

"Mr. Chairman! I move you that article 57 of our by-laws be copied and certified to under our corporate seal and delivered to this young gentleman, that he may return it with the sight draft. Here is the wording of article 57: 'Further, that this corporation, the Waterville Town Company refuses to honor or pay sight drafts from any and all sources.'.rdquo;

"You have heard the question," said the excited chairman, bringing his cane down with great vehemence. "Do I hear a second?"

"We all second it."

Silence having been restored, Judge Legal again addressed the chair:

"Mr. Secretary," said the chairman, "record the question as carried unanimously."

"Mr. Chairman," said he, "in the future all printing by the Waterville Town Company will be sent to another printing establishment." 121

"Unless there is opposition, we will consider the question as carried unanimously," said the chairman. At this juncture the chairman took the floor, and addressing the directors, said:

"There are times when, notwithstanding the power of our united intellects, questions of a very exasperating nature confront us, and, momentarily, we are at a loss to know just what to do; but it is only momentarily—we meet every crisis. It takes us a very short time to decide; and, with us, decision is action.

"In my experience I have observed that, occasionally, storms of opposition sweep down upon men like an irresistible avalanche. At such times it is well to retreat to some protected place and let the storm tire itself out—beat itself into exhaustion, so to speak—until its very protest becomes a dead silence. Refreshed with the rest we have had, we may then safely sally forth, and, with renewed vigor, arrange a flank movement on the enemy, and everlastingly choke opposition into a corpse."

When the chairman sat down he motioned Vance to his side, and said, *sotto voce*: "Was not that a master stroke, Mr. Gilder? Do not we meet and dispose of questions that would simply stump any ordinary body of men into inaction? Opposition does not faze us; no sir, we know our rights, and are here to fight for them."

The citizens were very much elated over the prospects of a foundry and a sash, blind and door factory at Waterville. Their gratitude to the Town Company was very marked, and was evidenced by three hearty cheers and many huzzas. Presently the meeting of the Town Company adjourned, and then there was much clapping 122 of hands and more cheering. Each member of the company crowded around Vance and shook him warmly by the hand, and assured him they had had one of the most profitable meetings that had ever taken place.

CHAPTER XV.—MISS VIRGINIA BONIFIELD.

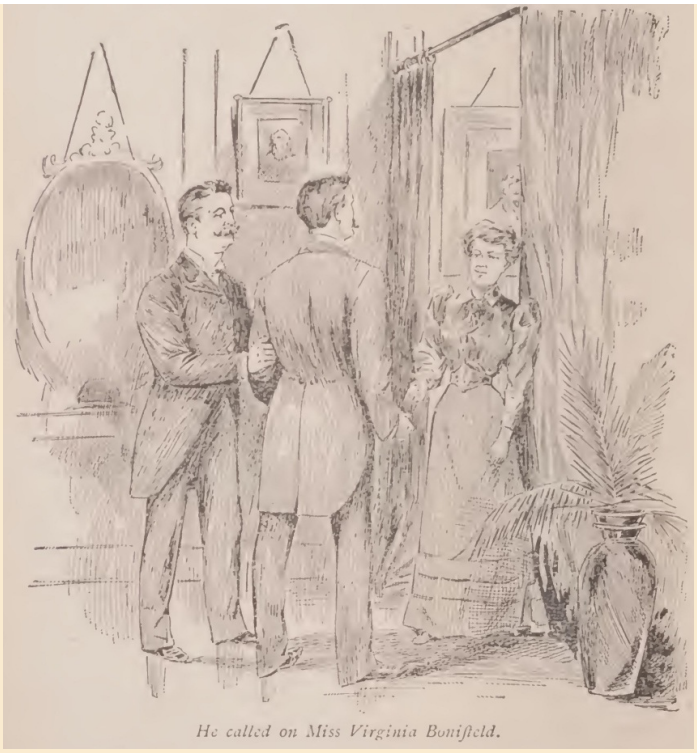
VANCE had become so thoroughly interested during his first visit to Waterville, that he 123 was prepared, in a degree, to share in a general way the enthusiasm of the citizens and the members of the Waterville Town Company which prevailed after the meeting adjourned.

Buoyant with hope of the future, without hardly understanding why, and with a blind belief that his investment would yield him a splendid return, he began to feel that it was indeed a lucky day when the chief of the *Banner* sent him to the northwest, and still luckier when he fell in with the members of the Waterville Town Company.

That afternoon, accompanied by Homer Winthrop, he called on Miss Virginia Bonifield.

That young lady received her callers with a cultured grace and dignity that would have done honor to even one who had seen much more of the world. She was rather tall and a pronounced brunette. Her well poised head was in keeping with her graceful figure. One could not say she was strikingly beautiful, but there was something in her face as well as manner that made one forget to desire her different than the interesting 124 person she was. Both vivacious and intelligent, she possessed the rare charm, in her conversation, of reflecting the mood of those about her. Addressing Vance, she said:

"Louise has written me so much about you that I have been quite impatient to form your acquaintance. I presume that papa is still working away on Gray Rocks?"



He called on Miss Virginia Bonifield.

"Yes," replied Vance, "he will soon reach the 300 foot level."

"And the old story will be told again, I dare say," said Virginia, laughing. 125

"Miss Virginia is not an enthusiast," said Winthrop, "in regard to untold millions that have not yet been discovered in mining shafts."

"My observations," retorted Virginia, "have caused me to be less sentimental, if not more practical, than my good sister Louise."

"I fear," said Vance, "you do not share in your father's belief in regard to the future of Gray Rocks?"

"I am a Bonifield," replied Virginia, "and believe implicitly in my father; and, in my way, love him as tenderly, I dare say, as any daughter ever loved a parent, but sometimes I fear he is mistaken—but, to change the subject," she continued, "how do you like the west?"

"I am very favorably impressed with what I have seen. In the east we have many brilliants that are not diamonds; in the west we have many rough ashlars that are diamonds unpolished."

"Thank you," replied Virginia, "I consider that a compliment."

"It is our intention," said Winthrop, "to claim Mr. Gilder as a western man before another year; and if Waterville continues to grow, as we expect it will, we may persuade him to edit our first daily paper."

Soon after, they rose to go. "I shall hope," said Miss Virginia, "that I will be honored by a call from you whenever you are in Waterville."

"Thank you," replied Vance, "it will afford me great pleasure."

Winthrop remained behind a few moments, while Vance walked up and down the sidewalk. The sun was well toward the western horizon. A bluish haze lay against the mountains in the distance. It was an Indian 126 summer afternoon, full of quiet rest, with a gentle, invigorating mountain breeze as a constant tonic.

Presently Winthrop joined him, and they hurried down to the depot, for it was nearing train time, and they had arranged to travel together to Butte City.

"How are you impressed with Miss Bonifield?" asked Winthrop.

"Quite favorably," replied Vance. "She is, however, an entirely different type from her sister, Miss Louise; indeed, I can discover no family resemblance. Miss Louise is quite fair, while Miss Virginia is a decided brunette."

Soon after, the train came in, and they secured comfortable seats in a Pullman. As the train started, Vance looked out of the window at the turbulent waters in the river, and asked Winthrop where the foundry, and sash, blind and door factory would be located.

"We have not decided as yet," replied Winthrop. "That will be an easy matter to arrange when the party or parties are ready to commence building."

"I presume you are selling a good many lots?" said Vance.

"Well, yes," replied Winthrop, hesitatingly. "We are interesting a good many people; and it takes people to build a city. Where a man's possessions are, his heart is generally not far away."

"I should judge from your complimentary remarks about Miss Virginia Bonifield, and the delightful expression of your face when we called this afternoon, that your heart abides quite permanently at Waterville." Winthrop seemed confused and looked out of the window. Presently lie said: 127

"Miss Bonifield is one of the most practical young ladies it has ever been my good fortune to meet. She is a most exemplary young lady, and the good people of Waterville hold her in high esteem. This is her second year in the public school at that place."

“I judge from her remarks,” said Vance, “that her faith is very limited in her father’s mine.”

“Yes,” replied ‘Winthrop, “I consider her the most practical member of the Bonifield family.”

Vance blushed scarlet and turned resentfully in his seat toward Winthrop. “Ho! ho!” said Winthrop, laughing, “I was merely expressing my own private opinion. I see, without your saying it, that your opinion is quite different. How fortunate it is that all men, especially you and I, Mr. Gilder, are not of the same opinion. This very difference of opinion,” Winthrop went on, “may, as the months come and go, weld our friendship more and more firmly.”

Vance saw that he had betrayed his feelings, and good-naturedly observed that he always was quite partial to blondes. “I presume,” he went on, “when I become editor of the first daily paper in Waterville, you will, doubtless, be president of some great banking house.”

“I hope so,” replied Winthrop, thoughtfully. “If many people are interested in our new town it will help us in more ways than one. They will ultimately move to Waterville, erect homes, and engage in business; but we must not be impatient and expect too much for the first year, or the second, for that matter. ‘Rome was not built in a day.’ I fully believe,” continued Winthrop, “that parties purchasing lots at the present prices will receive most excellent returns on their investments. You see,” continued Winthrop in a confidential way, “the Waterville Town Company was compelled to go into debt very heavily at the time it commenced its operations, but by persistent and continued efforts on the part of various members of the company, we have greatly reduced the indebtedness, and if the sale of lots continues for a week longer we will, probably, not owe a dollar. 128


Homer's Prophecy.

We will then divide our property, each member receiving a deed for his respective share.”

Winthrop seemed so happy in anticipation of the joyful time when the company’ would be out of debt, and was so confidential and frank in regard to the matter, that Vance, hardly knowing why, found himself deeply interested in the work of selling lots, and suggested to Winthrop that he would write to some of the members of the *Banner* force who were particular friends of his, and advise them to send on their surplus earnings for investment.

The town boomer was at once on the alert, and, in not an over-anxious way, heartily advised the step. Accordingly, that night at the hotel in Butte City, Vance wrote a letter to his friends advising an investment in Waterville.

The dramatic critic, the religious editor, the police reporter, and the heads of the several departments of the *Banner* at once acted on Vance’s advice. They knew nothing of the chief’s action in regard to Vance’s dismissal. They wired Vance, authorizing him to sight draft them for $2,500, and invest the proceeds in town lots in Waterville. 129

He at once complied with the instructions, turned the money over to Winthrop, and instructed him to forward the deeds to his friends in New York city.

He was not a little gratified to find his last letter to the *Banner* copied in full by the *Intermountain Blade* and the *Butte City Miner*, with editorials referring to the article as particularly able, and to the writer as having the “courage of his convictions.”

The article had a most salutary effect on Homer Winthrop’s lot selling enterprise, and during the next few days he sold more Waterville town lots than his most sanguine expectations had caused him to hope for.

Toward the last of the week Vance left Butte City for Gold Bluff, via Waterville. He had in his possession additional data and statistics to support and corroborate his recent letter to the *Banner*.

At first the west was distasteful to him, but as he became better acquainted with its customs and habits he began to recognize the true manhood that is not unfrequently found under the miner’s garb.

There is an uncouth, whole-soul generosity met with on the frontier of which the effete easterner knows nothing.

Arriving at Waterville the following morning too late for the Gold Bluff stage, he was compelled to put in another day at Waterville. Remembering Miss Virginia Bonifield’s invitation, he called on her that evening, and was most hospitably received. In the course of their conversation she said:

“I understand, Mr. Gilder, that you are interested with my father in Gray Rocks I hope you did not misunderstand me or my motive when I spoke discouragingly of my father’s mining prospects.” 130

“May I ask,” said Vance, “what reason you have for your pessimistic views, if I may term them such?”

“I presume,” she replied, a little nettled, “they are about as tangible and equally hard to explain as those of an optimist. I have a presentiment that father will never find what he is looking for in the Gray Rocks mine. My sister, Louise, encourages faith in what to me seems a mad belief.”

“Your sister may be right,” replied Vance.

“My greatest hope,” she replied, “is that I am wrong and that my sweet sister is right; but I really fear, Mr. Gilder, you will never see your money again that you have been investing with my father.”

“I cannot doubt your sincerity,” replied Vance, “but I am glad to have more faith than you have.”

“Why should I have any faith,” she replied. “Have I not seen my father clinging to that false hope year after year, and every day resulting in a fresh disappointment? Long ago I made up my mind that Aunt Sally is about right. She says that father has been planting money with different prospectors all over the mountains, and none of it has ever found its way back. She also predicts that father will work away on Gray Rocks until he dies, and never have his hopes realized. I love my father tenderly, and feel very sorry for him. A stranger cannot understand his personal charms and grandeur as one of his family. He is certainly one of the sweetest characters in the world. His persuasive powers, as you evidently have reason to know, are very great, and I feel it my duty to thus warn you for your own protection. Papa is so sane on everything else excepting Gray Rocks, and is so foolish about that, notwithstanding his many years of lost labor.” 131

“If your father has a ‘wheel in his head’ on the subject of Gray Rocks, I must admit that I, too, have one in mine,” replied Vance.

The blush that overspread Virginia’s face suggested that she felt keenly the rebuke.

“Pardon me, Mr. Gilder,” said she, “I had forgotten that I am not ‘my brother’s keeper’. I promise never to refer to the subject again.”

That evening, after Vance had taken leave of Miss Virginia Bonifield, he experienced a strange unrest and dissatisfaction, and while he did not admit it to himself, the glamour of his day-dreams had been broken.

Presently, as he walked along, the face of Louise came before him, and, in a moment, he forgot his unsatisfactory evening; forgot hope’s broken glamour, and basked again in the alluring belief that the future held no clouds for him.

It was late when he reached the hotel.

Looking through the window, he saw old Dick Ballard, who was alone in the barroom entertaining himself with an evening drill.

He carried a long, iron poker at “carry arms,” and was marching back and forth with military tread. Arriving at the end of the room, he would call out “Halt! About face! March!”

Vance was very much amused at old Dick Ballard’s pantomime drill, but finally opened the door and walked in. The transformation scene was wonderful. Old Dick Ballard was vigorously poking in the stove, notwithstanding it was a July night. 132

“Hello, Mr. Gilder,” said he, looking up, “I saw a mighty big rat run in this stove a minute ago, and I am after it.”

“Better charge your entire militia company on the enemy,” said Vance, laughing.

“Oh, you saw me, did you,” said Ballard. “I was jes’ drillin’ up a little for dress parade. Well, pardner, I’ll set ‘em up, and you say nothin’ about it.”

Vance declined to be entertained, but Ballard drank copiously from his ever ready bottle.

“I tell you, Waterville’s got it and no mistake,” said he, putting his bottle carefully away.

“Got what,” asked Vance, as he turned to go to his room.

“Got the crack military company of the state,” replied Ballard. “You ought to see ‘em drill once. There is nothin’ in New York city or anywhere else can tech one side of ‘em for big money.”

CHAPTER XVI.—THE OLD COLONEL’. DISAPPOINTMENT.

HE FOLLOWING morning Vance took the stage for Gold Bluff. As he neared that little mining town, he found himself experiencing an impatience once more to see Louise Bonifield that was strangely at variance with any former sensation of his life. It seemed to him the stage coach was traveling at a snail’s pace, and even the good natured, “honest intentioned” Steve Gibbons, with all his droll talk of frontier adventure, failed to interest him. Arriving at the hotel, he found the old miner, Ben Bonifield, waiting for him. 133

“Am delighted to see yo’, Mr. Gilder; I am indeed, suh. I presume yo’r almost famished; pow’ful tiresome ridin’ in a stage coach all day, suh. After yo’ have refreshed yo’self, I shall be pleased to join yo’ in yo’r room. I have a matteh of vehy great impo’tance to discuss with yo’, suh.”

“All right,” said Vance, in his cheeriest tones. “I trust Miss Louise is well?”

“Quite well, suh; quite well, thank yo’.”

As Vance ate his supper a satisfied feeling of contentment with the whole world intruded itself upon him. His advancement in his profession was certainly gratifying. He had received several valuable hints while in Butte City in regard to a new silver mining company that was about to be organized, in which he was thinking seriously of investing a little money. The price was only ten cents a share, which he had been assured, on what seemed to him very excellent authority, would be worth a dollar a share before twelve months’ time. His investment at Waterville was certainly a good one, and he heartily believed Col. Bonifield had good news to tell him about Gray Rocks. In addition to this, he was once more near Louise, that fair vision of loveliness, whose tender blue eyes seemed ever near him. He dropped a coin into the hand of the waiter as he rose from the table, and stopped in the hallway to caress a lovely little child which he found playing hide-and-seek with an older companion, and then made each a present of money with which to buy bon-bons. He hummed softly to himself the air of an old love song as he went leisurely to his room. 134

Soon after, he was enjoying a choice Havana with Col. Bonifield sitting in a chair opposite him, smoking his briar-root, blowing blue rings of smoke leisurely toward the ceiling. Vance was animated, and spoke glowingly of the prospects of Waterville. Presently Col. Bonifield said:

“Mr. Gilder, we have reached the 300 foot level, suh,” and then lapsed into silence.

“Have you cross-cut into the vein yet?” asked Vance.

“Mr. Gilder,” said the old miner, as he rose from his chair and walked back and forth in a stately manner, “we have cross-cut, suh, into where the vein ought to have been, but it is not there, suh. I must confess to yo’, suh, that I am greatly disappointed, but the disappointment, I am sure, suh, is only tempoary. Of course it is much richer, suh, than it was at the 200 foot level, but it is not rich enough, suh, to work, by a pow’ful sight.” 135

"We have cross-cut, suh, into where the vein ought to be, but it is not there, suh."

This information was a great disappointment to Vance, for he had fully shared the old miner's belief that they would strike the rich ore at the 300 foot level.

"I will admit, Col. Bonifield, that I am somewhat disappointed, and of course you are. Under the circumstances, what do you advise?"

"Yo' honor me, suh, indeed yo' do, Mr. Gilder, to ask my advice, because, suh, I know my advice is good. 136
Whether yo', Mr. Gilder, will so regard it, remains to be seen. If yo' can furnish about four thousand dollars mo' money, I will start to-morrow mornin' fo' the 400 foot level, and we will then cross-cut, suh, into a vein of pow'ful rich ore. I assure yo', suh, I never was mo' sincere in my life than I am in makin' this statement, suh."

Vance possessed the confidence of youth, and his belief in Gray Rocks was not to be shaken at the first disappointment, while before him rose up, as from a mist, the pleading face of Louise, and he fancied she was asking him to still believe in her father.

Yo' overpow'r me, suh.

He took his check book from his pocket and wrote a check for $4,000, and signing it, handed it to the old miner, saying: "How long, with the present force of men, will it take to reach the 400 foot level?"

"My dear Mr. Gilder," said the colonel, accepting his check, and clasping his hand, "yo' quite ovehpow'r me, yo' do indeed, suh. Yo' may have been bawn in the nawth but yo' are a Virginian still at heart, with the warm blood cou'sin'through yo'r veins I think, suh, that within three or fou' mouths we can reach the fou' hund'ed foot level. I told yo'r father that Gray Rocks was a sure winner, and I am proud, suh, to repeat the statement to you."

"I don't know," said Vance, "whether you will strike it at the four hundred foot level or 137
not, but I assure you, Colonel Bonifield, that I have every faith in your sincerity, and I am anxious to develop the mine as rapidly as possible. If my investment should prove a total loss, I assure you I would never hold you responsible."

"I am gettin' along in years, Mr. Gilder," said the Colonel, "and while I have not struck it yet, I have every confidence, suh, that we will if we stay by Gray Rocks. My little Louise, of cou'se, was disappointed like myself. We both feared, suh, yo' would be veihy much disappointed; and I assure yo', suh, we cared a great deal mo' about yo'r disappointment than we did about our own. To tell yo' the truth, suh, that little girl of mine had mo' faith in yo'r looking at this matteh philosophically than I did; but," continued the Colonel, pressing Vance's hand, "I misjudged yo', Mr. Gilder, I did indeed, suh, and I apologize fo' it."

After Colonel Bonifield had taken his departure, Vance commenced looking over his accumulated mail. The first thing that claimed his attention was a copy of the *Banner* containing his article, "Two Honorable Exceptions." He read it carefully through again with evident pride. Not a word or a single sentence had been cut out. This was gratifying to him, and seemed proof that the managing editor had confidence in his ability to select the wheat from the chaff. He laid down the paper and began opening his letters. Presently the song he was humming died on his lips. He sat upright and stared at a letter which he held in his hand. It read as follows:

Banner Office, New York City.

DEAR SIR:—

I am directed by the managing editor to advise you that your services are no longer required. Enclosed find check in payment of your salary to date.

J Respectfully,

J. M. M.,

Ass't Managing Editor.
To Vance Gilder, Esq.

He arose from his chair and rapidly paced the room, while great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. What had he done to merit such humiliation? The idea that it might be a practical joke for a moment found lodgment in his thoughts, but he quickly dismissed the hallucination. Again he took up the paper and re-read the article, "Two Honorable Exceptions." He endeavored logically to think out a solution of his dismissal. 138


"Vance's dismissal."

The more earnestly he thought over the situation, the more distinctly he remembered the prejudiced views the chief seemed to entertain in regard to western enterprises and investments. "He certainly wants the truth," soliloquized Vance, "and I will stake my life there is not a sentence in this article," and he struck the paper vigorously with his hand, "but what is true. The article might almost be regarded as an advertisement for the great mining camp of Butte City, yet it was news, and not nearly so strong as it might be and still keep within the bounds of truth. The same is equally true as to what I have said in regard to the agricultural and other resources of Waterville."

He sat far into the night, discussing with himself this unlooked for calamity. Once, and only once, did the idea occur to him that possibly the chief had sent him into the northwest to systematically destroy confidence concerning western investments. He was too honorable, however, to harbor the thought, and quickly dismissed it as too contemptible to be entertained. The only consolation he could find—and that was certainly a very meager one—was that in all probability a letter of explanation would soon come, that would clear away the misunderstanding. In the meantime he would patiently wait, keeping his own counsel. 139

He looked over his check book, and found he had, all told, some six thousand dollars to his credit, besides the four thousand dollars he had that evening given to Colonel Bonifield. He sat by his window and considered the advisability of returning at once to New York and demanding an explanation. Such a course would take him away from Gold Bluff, from Gray Rocks, and from Louise.

CHAPTER XVII.—An AWAKENING.

VANCE GILDER was not of a morose nature. The following morning he ate as hearty a breakfast as ever, and while smoking his morning cigar, acknowledged to himself that he had fallen in love with the picturesque scenery of the mountains, rivers, valleys and everything about him was restful, while an alluring contentment stole into his heart. He congratulated himself that he was far away from the hot and crowded metropolis of the Atlantic seaboard. Here, far removed from "the busy marts of men," and the restless commotion of commerce and traffic, he could rest and wait. 140

The day passed quickly by; the afternoons and evenings usually in the society of Louise. They were bewildering days in their completeness. The night claimed the day all too soon when in her society.

He was surprised, after the first shock of disappointment had passed away, to find how indifferent he was becoming in regard to the loss of his position on the *Banner*.

One morning he awakened to a keen sense of incompleteness where completeness had dwelt. Also around Gold Bluff, he covered a vein of discontent where contentment had reigned supreme. His love of the mountains, the rivers, and the picturesque scenery was but a prelude of promise, thumbing sweetly of the great, unselfish love awakened in him for Louise. 141

This unrest dated from a certain evening when Louise first sang for him. He was quite entranced by the full, rich volume of her contralto voice.

She began by striking the chords in a hesitating way; but presently the genius of her musical nature seized her with its wonderful power, and she sang with wild abandon:

'We seemed to those who saw us meet
The casual friends of every day;
His courtesy was frank and sweet,
My smile was unrestrained and gay.

But yet, if one the other's name
In some unguarded moment heard,
The heart you thought so free and tame
Would flutter like a frightened bird."

As she sang Vance gave himself up to the intoxication of the moment. His soul broke through the barriers and went out to hers, and as the song died on her lips, and the music ceased with a few reluctant farewell

chords, he knew that a great and tender love had sprung up in his heart—a love that was not for a day, but for all time.

"Miss Bonifield," said Vance, with emotion, "you are, indeed, a constant surprise to me. Your playing is certainly superb, while your voice; not only soft and musical, but has great range. To hear you sing fills me with a longing to be a better man." 142

"Thank you," said Louise, "I seldom play or sing excepting for papa. Your compliment, however, is highly appreciated."

"As long as I remain in Gold Bluff I hope I will be privileged in hearing you sing occasionally."

"We will promise not to ostracize you altogether, Mr. Gilder," said Louise, laughingly, "but may I ask how long you expect to remain with us?" There was just enough hesitation in the question to suggest interest.

"I do not know," replied Vance. "I presume you think it is strange that I have remained as long as I have. To be frank with you, Miss Bonifield, I have lost my position on the *Banner*."

"Lost your position!" said Louise, with unmistakable concern.

"I am indeed sorry," replied Vance, "whether it is a misfortune or not. I had an offer to-day to take charge of the *Gold Bluff Prospector*, and am thinking seriously of accepting."

"You quite astonish me," said Louise, "but I know papa will be delighted if you conclude to remain permanently in Gold Bluff." 143

"Of course," said Vance thoughtfully, "there is quite a difference between the New York *Banner* and the *Gold Bluff Prospector*—one a cosmopolitan daily and the other a country newspaper without any special circulation. It would only be profitable to me as I increased its circulation and its importance to advertisers. I shall not decide for a few days. I may receive some explanation from the *Banner* that will put a different light upon my dismissal." 144

"Lost your position!" said Louise, with unmistakable concern.

"I have almost made up my mind that I should like to remain in Gold Bluff," continued Vance, looking inquiringly at Louise. "My confidence in Gray Rocks is growing daily, and I believe it is only a question of a short time until your father's efforts will be crowned with success."

"Mr. Gilder," replied Louise, feelingly, "I thank you for your confidence and faith in my father. It seems that nearly every one disbelieves in his final success. I cannot tell why, yet my faith is unbounded. Even sister Virgie has lost hope, and at times papa is greatly discouraged because sister and Aunt Sally talk as they do; but I am sure in time he will be able to fully prove how mistaken they are in their judgment."

As Vance rose to go he took her hand and said "Miss Bonifield, you certainly are a noble daughter, and your father is pardonable for wishing to keep you with him in this western country. I am beginning to understand what a great strength and support you must be to him."

"Thank you," replied Louise, "I am sure you overestimate the assistance I am to my father, but my greatest pride is in doing something that will add to his comfort, and I am sure papa cannot want me with him more than I wish to remain."

Vance had become accustomed to Louise's frankness of speech, yet he received a shock that thrilled him with delight when she said, "I shall be very happy, Mr. Gilder, if you conclude to remain in Gold Bluff. You have no idea how lonesome I should be if you were to go away."

Vance's heart beat wildly, and something seemed to rise up in his throat as he attempted to thank her. The expression of his face evidently betrayed his feelings, for she quickly drew away, and with a formality that was new to Vance she bowed stiffly and said "Good night." After leaving the Bonifield's home, he followed the road which led up the mountain side toward Gray Rocks. The moon, large and round, was just lifting itself above the eastern horizon. He walked on past the shaft, where the night force of men were busy working 145

away toward the 400 foot level, and soon found himself near the old prospect shaft on the Peacock. The valley where the little city of Gold Bluff nestled was far beneath him. He saw a light glimmering from one of the windows in the Bonifield home, and interpreted it as a beacon of hope.


Past the old shaft.

He repeated over and over again Louise's words relative to his remaining in Gold Bluff.

"Yes," said he, "I will remain, no matter what the explanation may be from the *Banner* office," and filled with this decision, he returned to his hotel.

One evening, about a week after receiving the letter dismissing him from the *Banner* force, the mail brought a copy of that great New York paper. Vance eagerly perused it to see if it contained his last communication. No, it had been rejected, but in its stead he found an article entitled "Two Western Towns." It was a three-column article devoted to Butte City and Waterville. It referred in the most vindictive manner to the members of the Waterville Town Company, and classed them as a lot of town site boomers. It warned eastern people not to be caught and misled by such wildcat speculations as were offered by them in the great Thief River Valley.

It said the valley was one immense lava bed, interspersed with sage brush thickets, alkali swamps and basalt plains. The wonderful water-power, it claimed, was an absolute myth; and, in fact, the printed statements in the circulars of these "town boomers" were deliberate lies. Another 146
thing which eastern investors should bear in mind, the paper went on to say, was the fact that the property which had been platted into town lots was still government land. The town company had no title, and, perhaps, never would have. It branded the whole enterprise as the most gigantic confidence game that had ever been perpetrated on an unsuspecting public.

It further said the swindling operations of these irresponsible and restless town boomers of Waterville were only exceeded in point of adroitness by the mining operations in and around Butte City, Montana. The article said the mountain sides at Butte City were perforated with prospect holes, where hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of dollars of eastern people's money had been expended by local managers in riotous living and debauchery, and claimed that it was a safe estimate to say that for every thousand dollars put into prospect shafts in and about Butte City, not more than one dollar had been taken out.

It spoke of the inhabitants of both Butte City and Waterville as plebians of the lowest sort and condition of life.

The worst cut of all to Vance, however, was the closing paragraph, where it stated that it was the habit of promoters of these western towns to bribe indiscriminately correspondents of eastern papers, and that many were weak enough to fall, which was not only unfortunate for the journal publishing these flattering falsehoods, but a base injustice to the eastern investor, who was led captive with his savings into western "booms" through the machinations of unprincipled correspondents. 147

If Vance had been nonplussed on receipt of the assistant's letter, he was now stunned. He thought very little about his own investment in Waterville, but rather, what would his old associates on the *Banner* think of him? He regarded the article as a direct thrust at himself and his integrity.

After waiting a few days and receiving no further communication from the *Banner* office, and feeling too much humiliation to write to his city friends until time had dulled the blow, he concluded to go to Waterville and see if he could not make arrangements with the Town Company whereby he could return at once the money invested by his old associates in Waterville town lots.

The more he thought over the refuting article in the *Banner* the more indignant he became. "There is not a manufacturer or other institution in the east rich enough," said he to himself, "to stand such wholesale boycotting as this western country is constantly subjected to by the eastern press. It is not conservatism; it is downright injustice. I have not been long in the west, it is true, but my respect for it and its people is growing. Even Chicago, with all her greatness, energy and achievements, is belittled by the boycotting press of the east!

"By birth I am a Gothamite, and by education I am an eastern man, but my patriotism for America and all that is American has never prevented me from turning up my trousers when there is a heavy fog in London?"

CHAPTER XVIII.—VANCE RETURNS TO WATERVILLE.

T was on an October morning that Vance started for Waterville. A light frost the night 148
before had made the air sharp and crisp. The frost disappeared, however, before the genial warmth of the rising sun, while the russet leaves grew brownerer and as the wind stirred them, sang brokenly of old age.

October is the scenic month in the mountains. You seem to stand in Nature's picture gallery. The box-alder leaves are as changeable in color as a blushing maiden. From the low foothills on up the sides of the mountains to the timber line, the elms, the box-alders, and poplars grow in profusion. The leaves vary in color from the deepest green to the brightest scarlet, the most golden yellow, or the somberest brown. The colors are intermingled in this gorgeous panoramic scene with a charm and beauty that baffles the most skilled artist's touch to reproduce on canvas.

Vance was seated beside Steve Gibbons on the top of the stage coach, as they whirled along in meditative silence. The evening before Louise had sung for him. It was music fit for the gods—so rich, so deep, so plaintively low, so fascinating. He could see her even now, standing on the wide old porch as she bade him good-bye. The mild October breeze that stirred the ringlets of her golden hair seemed laden with worshipers 149
of hope for Vance, the lover, and he interpreted her every word and smile as a token reciprocal of his own deep love.

Presently Vance was brought back from his day dreams to the present by Steve Gibbons remarking:

"Things ain't so powerful brisk down at Waterville jes' now."

"Why, how is that?' asked Vance.

"Oh, I dunno," replied Gibbons, as he waked up his leaders with a spirited crack of his whip, "can't say jes' what is the matter. But I can tell ye one thing, pardner," he went on, "I'm mighty glad I'm not in the real estate business. In my opinion, them real estate agents down thar will be jumpin' sideways for a sandwich before the winter's over."

Vance was noticeably depressed by Gibbons' remarks. He was going to Waterville for the express purpose of disposing of his New York friends' property, in which they had invested on his recommendation. He cared very little about his own investment. He was willing to wait, or even to lose it all, if he could only prevent them from sustaining loss on their purchase.

It was late that night when they reached Waterville. Vance was delighted to find that Homer Winthrop was registered at the hotel. They met the following morning at the breakfast table. The conduct of the usually polite and entertaining Winthrop was changed to a sternness for which Vance was at a loss to account. As they arose from the table, Vance went out with Winthrop and asked him how he was progressing in the lot selling business.

"How am I progressing?" repeated Winthrop, as he turned and looked coldly at Vance. "I am through. I 150
have left Butte City for good."

"Why, how is that?" asked Vance in some surprise. Winthrop was silent for a moment, and then replied: "It is rather strange, Mr. Gilder, for you to ask such a question after writing the article you did for that New York paper. The *Inter Mountain Blade* and the *Butte City Miner* both copied the letter. It is hardly necessary for me to observe," he went on, "that it rendered it impossible for me to sell another lot in Butte City. Those who had purchased became so infuriated that I deemed it best for personal safety to leave the town."

Saying this, Winthrop turned abruptly and left Vance, who was for a moment unable to make a reply. Homer Winthrop's words both astonished and chilled him.

A little later he visited the Town Company's office, where he found Marcus Donald, the resident director, and Homer Winthrop in deep consultation. Donald was a man of commanding presence. His associates often remarked that Marcus Donald's face was worth $10,000 in an important trade of any kind. He was dignified and commanding in appearance, and when one talked with him, the most skeptical fell into the habit of believing every word that fell from his lips. Vance discovered that he was not wanted, but he determined to vindicate himself, and said:

"Gentlemen, pardon me for interrupting, but I must ask your indulgence for a few moments. I wish you would read this article. I am humiliated enough without any further complications or misunderstandings."

He handed Marcus Donald a copy of the *Banner*. Donald adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles and read 151
aloud the entire article, "Two Western Towns." When he had concluded, Vance turned toward Winthrop.

"Is that the letter you referred to?"

He handed Marcus Donald a copy of the Banner.

"Why, yes," said Winthrop, "but how is this?" said he, picking up the paper. "The Butte City papers published only that part of the article referring to Waterville; but how came you to write such a letter at all,

Mr. Gilder? You certainly know there is not a syllable of truth in it from beginning to finish."

Vance looked first at Winthrop and then at Donald, and replied, "I did not write it." He then proceeded to give them a history of his dismissal. 152

"This was written," tapping the paper with the back of his hand, "evidently to counteract the influence and effect of what I had written the week before."

"Of course that puts it in a different light," said Donald, rising and extending his hand to Vance. "I could not believe it possible that you, Mr. Gilder, could be guilty of writing such a libelous article as this is."

Winthrop also accepted the explanation as eminently satisfactory, and sympathized with Vance in the loss of his position on the great New York daily.

"It has completely killed the lot selling business for me in Butte City," said he, "but fortunately for us, we have made some very excellent sales during the past few weeks, and the Town Company' has sufficient money in the treasury to pay all its debts, and the last obligation will be paid off before twelve o'clock to-day."

"Yes," said Marcus Donald, "they will all be paid off, but it will leave the treasury in a depleted condition; but the future, I believe, is all right. I hope you will not lose faith, Mr. Gilder, in Waterville's prospects."

"No," said Vance, "I have unbounded faith in Waterville, but I would like very much to have the Town Company, if possible, return the $2,500 which I invested for my New York friends. It would save me much embarrassment if I could return them their money'. They doubtless know I have been dismissed from the force, and have read this last article, which puts an entirely' different coloring on this western country' from what I represented."

"You must know," said Winthrop, "that what you seek is next to impossible. The money has been paid into the treasury, and no difference how friendly I personally feel toward you, or how much the resident director, Mr. Donald, may wish to return the money, it cannot possibly be done without an action of the directors." 153

At this juncture, Marcus Donald invited Vance to take a scat by his desk, and he would explain to him carefully and fully the situation, and believed he could prove to him conclusively why he was acting for his New York friends' best interests in leaving the investment as it was.


Donald explains.

Donald produced a great many maps and carefully spread them out on the table, adjusted his spectacles carefully, and with his $10,000 face looked squarely into Vance's, and proceeded to go over the old, old story of the unlimited natural resources of the valley. He discussed at length, and in a very entertaining and convincing manner, the number of acres of land already in cultivation, the probable annual increase acreage of farm land; figured out results that amounted to millions of dollars. He then carried Vance from one side of the map to the other, up to the top, then down to the bottom and back again to the point where they had first started; indeed, he quite enthused Vance in regard to the future prospects and final outcome of Waterville.

He also confirmed Winthrop's statement in regard to their inability to take any money out of the treasury for the purpose suggested without first having an action of the directors. 154

"I advise you to write to your New York friends," continued Donald, "and tell them their investment is all right, *if*—mark, I say *if*—they have the nerve to stay with it a year or such a matter. Of course this article in the *Banner* hurts us immensely. It is simply a highhanded piece of boycotting; but the west has received similar injustice at the hands of the great New York dailies times without number in years gone by."

Acting on Marcus Donald's advice, Vance wrote a letter that day to his New York friends, and afterwards felt better for having done so. He determined to remain a week or two at Waterville, and see if there was any demand for real estate. Before many days, he began to understand the wonderful, far-reaching effects of the late article in the *Banner*. Rival surrounding towns copied it, and with double-leaded editorials called attention to a town that had over-reached itself. They denounced the various members of the Waterville Town Company as villainous sharks, and predicted that the boom had been pricked with a needle that would let all the wind out of it.

The transient class of real estate agents and hangers-on, who had been doing a rather thriving business, said, "Boys, this ends it," as they blew the foam from their glasses of beer, "we might as well go somewhere else as wait and see the dog-fennel grow in the streets of Waterville."

One day Vance called on J. Arthur Boast at his office. He found him as elegantly dressed as ever, and engaged in tying up bundles of legal papers, deeds, contracts, etc. "Are you getting ready to move away from Waterville?" asked Vance. 155

"No, I am not going away; that is, not permanently," replied Boast, as he stooped to brush a speck of dust from his highly polished shoes, "but I do not presume we will have any use for deeds or contracts for some time to come, and I am therefore putting them away out of the dust until the boom opens up again."

"You talk a little discouragingly," said Vance.

"Discouragingly!" said Boast, as he seated himself on the table in front of Vance. "Discouragingly! Why, didn't I tell you the Town Company would ruin Waterville? I was away only two weeks visiting, as you know, at Gold Bluff, but while I was gone they inflated prices of property; made promises right and left that were quite impossible for them to fulfill. The newspapers all over the country are denouncing them, and the result of it is that Waterville is dead! I say dead, and I mean dead, and all on account of the Town Company."

"Do you suppose," asked Vance, "that you could possibly' sell my twenty-five lots?"

Boast looked absently' out of the window and said, "I might sell them in time by putting them on my special bargain list."

"At what price?" Vance ventured to ask.

"Let me see," said Boast, "you paid $2,500 for them, did you not?"

"Yes," replied Vance.

"Oh, well," said Boast, "I might be able to get $500 for them, but it would be a pretty green sort of a

tenderfoot that I could load them on at even that price. But what's the use," said he, facing around toward Vance and still sitting on the table, "what's the use of losing your nerve? Within one or two years Waterville will be all right. She can't be kept down. She has natural resources; the richest farm lands in the world; the greatest water power of any inland city in the United States; marvelous veins of coal; inexhaustible quarries of rock; unsurpassed forests of timber; and abundance of water for irrigating purposes. 156

Why, dang it, old fellow," said he, slapping Vance on the shoulder, "Waterville s all right. All you've got to do is to hold on to your nerve and your lots, and you will come out on top."


Boast smiled wickedly.

"That's all very well," replied Vance, "but the ray of hope you hold out is too far away to be very satisfactory at the present time."

"Every tenderfoot," replied Boast, "needs a certain amount of experience in order to acclimate him to this western country. Your experience is just now beginning. After a little Colonel Bonifield will strike it rich on Gray Rocks, Waterville will also come out of the kinks, and there you are, a rich man. By the way, the Colonel must be pretty well along toward the 400 foot level, Waterville will also come out of the kinks, and there you are, a rich man. By the way, the Colonel must be pretty well along toward the 400 foot level, is he not:"

"I believe he is making very satisfactory progress," replied Vance.

"If the old man should strike it rich," said Boast, "I would not mind connecting myself with his family. Of course, I am not so hard to please as you New York fellows." He looked archly at Vance and smiled wickedly as he made this remark.

Vance was indignant at the cold-blooded insinuation of Boast, and replied: "While you may have no objections, I don't doubt you will meet some pretty knotty ones before you succeed in winning Miss Bonifield." 157

"Possibly," replied Boast, coolly. "Nevertheless, if the old Colonel strikes it in Gray Rocks, it's worth a trial, anyway; but come, there's no use in quarreling over something that hasn't happened, or being down-hearted about a busted boom, so long as a fellow has a bottle of red liquor."

Vance did not wait for him to go through the ordeal of condemning himself as a drunken profligate, but let him to finish tying up his papers and drink the contents of his bottle alone.

CHAPTER XIX.—THE INDIGNATION MEETING

VANCE had been in Waterville something over a week, and his enthusiasm was noticeably subdued. One evening he discovered that a great many citizens were assembling in the Town Hall. He joined the crowd, and found it was composed of representative of nearly every family in Waterville. 158

The meeting was called to order with J. Arthur Boast in the chair. It was an indignation meeting. Instead of huzzaing for the Waterville Town Company, its members were being vigorously denounced. A speaker addressed the chair, and among other things said:

"Where is our sash, blind and door factory? Where is our foundry? Where is our woolen mill? Where are our canning factories? Where is our great smelting plant, and other manufacturing enterprises which have been promised us by the Waterville Town Company? When we see anything in a newspaper we have a right to believe what it says. Outside of Waterville, the newspapers claim the members of the Waterville Town Company to be a lot of restless town site boomers. I believe what I see in the papers. The dog-fennel is already growing in our streets—our town is dead; not one stranger in a week alights from the train at Waterville. We have been deceived, and it is now time for an indignant community to assert its rights, take the reins of government, so to speak, in our own hands, and give the Waterville Town Company to understand that no more bonds of any kind will be voted or subsidies given." 159

A number of other speakers expressed themselves in bitter terms against the Waterville Town Company. The chairman, J. Arthur Boast, finally addressed the meeting, and with his thin, piping voice advise moderation.

He said it was true that, during his absence, prices had been unfortunately inflated, and a reaction had set in. He reminded his hearers that he was still in the real estate business, and by listing their property with him he would try to put it on his "special bargain list," and thought possibly he could, in time, re-establish confidence and create a new era of activity in the real estate business.

Boast was very careful not to openly charge the depression in Waterville to anyone in particular, but his insinuations left no room to doubt he meant the Waterville Town Company.

It seemed to be the sense of the meeting that retrenchment was in order. One speaker advised the closing of the public school. The suggestion seemed to meet with favor. Old Dick Ballard pushed his way through the crowd, and addressing the chairman, begged the crowd to listen to reason. "You know," he continued, "that I'm your school director in this township. The office sought me; I didn't seek the office. Retrenchment in any other line exceptin' the closin' down of our public school is, perhaps, all right; but do not take a step backward. Our public school system is our pride, and should appeal to the patriotism of every one here." In conclusion, he offered to give an entertainment with his State Militia Company for the benefit of the public 160

school of Waterville. Hi is remarks would probably have been effective had not a fiery speaker followed him and advanced the idea that by discontinuing the public school it would be a direct rebuke to the Waterville Town Company.

“Let it be noised abroad,” said he, “that the residents of Waterville refuse to pay any school taxes, and then the Waterville town Company will begin to understand that we must be consulted, or we will thwart their schemes of booming this town. All they care for, anyway, is the money there is in selling town lots.”

The speaker then asked Dick Ballard how much money was in the teacher’s fund of the school treasury. Ballard said he did not know, but he could find out in a day or two. The speaker then addressed the chair, and said:

“I move you, sir, that it is the sense of this public demonstration that we quit paying taxes to support a public school in Waterville, and when the funds now on hand are exhausted that our school be closed.” The motion almost unanimously prevailed. There were a few feeble protests, but they were not recognized by the presiding officer.

A little later Vance felt some one plucking at his sleeve, and old Dick Ballard motioned him to follow.

“Now, sir,” said Ballard, in a deep whisper when they were alone, “there is some mighty important work to be done. Be in the parlor of my hotel in half an hour from now. Say nothin’.” At this Dick Ballard, with a mysterious look on his face, turned and hurried away.

A little later Vance walked over to the hotel and found Dick Ballard, Homer Winthrop, and Marcus Donald. They apparently were waiting for him. Ballard was very careful to lock the door securely. 161


Ballard locked the door.

He then turned and said: “Now, gentlemen, we have business of importance on hand. Yes, sir, the time has come for us to act, and act promptly. Hold on—just wait a moment until I read you a letter. This is private,” said he, tapping a letter which he unfolded with a great flourish. “This is from General Ira House, the greatest town builder in the world. Now, here’s what he says:

“‘I will settle my board bill, no, hold on; that isn’t the place. Here it is: ‘Tell the people to be patient. The darkest hour is just before the dawn. Waterville is all right.’.rdquo;

“What do you think of that, gentlemen?” said he, folding the letter and putting it into his pocket. “I tell you, General House can come as near breakin’ the shell and gettin’ at the meat of the kernel as any man I ever knew’. He’s brainy, and no mistake. Our citizens are excited,” Ballard went on, “and in their excitement they are foolish. They’re attemptin’ to bite the hand that is feedin’ us all. ‘The Town Company has made this town. I address my remarks, Mr. Gilder, to you. Modesty forbids, sir, that I should say to my friends, Mr. Donald and Mr. Winthrop, that which I unhesitatingly proclaim to an outside party. Now let me ask, Mr. Gilder, if I didn’t tell you long ago that the members of the Waterville Town Company were the brainiest men this country had ever produced?”

"I believe you made that remark,” replied Vance. 162


“They are the brainiest lot of men this country has ever produced.”

“Yes, sir, and I am proud to repeat the statement, and in the letter which I have just read to you I have the evidence, the *prima facie* evidence, that Watcrville is only restin’, as it were, preparatory to enterin’ the free-for-all hurdle race, and makin’ the fastest time on record. Yes, sir, her time will be a record breaker, and she will distance all would-be competitors, notwithstandin’ the slanderous and libelous articles now goin’ the rounds in the press.’ 163

“We now,” continued Mallard, “are a ways-and-means committee. The closing of our public school would indeed be a calamity. They asked me over at the town meetin’ how much money was in the school treasury. I

told them I didn't know. I beg you gentlemen's pardon for my reply, I do know. There is not a cent. I was forced into the awkward position of tellin' a falsehood for the good of my adopted city, Waterville. Now, gentle men, what do you advise?"

"I think," said Donald, "that our taxpayers proper are not objecting to the expense of our public school. The Waterville Town Company owns fully three-fourths of all the property in Waterville, and we want the school to go on. The citizens who are the loudest in denouncing the expense, and calling most vigorously for retrenchment, as a matter of fact, do not pay a penny of tax."

"You're right," said Dick Ballard, glowingly, "that's the talk! There's argument in your remarks, Mr. Donald, and if I had them printed on dodgers I would regard it as a personal privilege to deliver copies to members of my State Militia Company, and issue a general order to have them distributed over the entire town."

"I wish to call your attention to one thing," continued Ballard. "No member of my State Militia Company voted to discontinue our public school; no, sir, not one."

Winthrop was called on for remarks, and observed that the demonstration was a hasty action that would not be approved, probably, by the people themselves on mature reflection. "A few weeks ago," he went on, "these same people were hurrahing; for the Waterville Town Company. They expect us to perform wonders in a few weeks' time, that in reality require months, and even years. I fully believe the present depression will be followed by a healthy activity that will satisfy the most pronounced pessimist in Waterville." 164

"Gentlemen." said Dick Ballard, "there are four of us. Miss Virginia Bonifield is a most exemplary young lady, while, as a teacher, she is without a peer. I stand ready to pledge myself for one-fourth of her salary. Her salary for the entire year is $500.

"Put me down for one fourth," said Vance.

"I will gladly pay one fourth," said Marcus Donald, "and my check is ready at any time."

"Count me in on the deal," said Homer Winthrop "Just one thing, gentlemen," said Dick Ballard, "I am pretty well acquainted with Miss Virginia Bonifield.

She posseses the spirit of independence to a very large degree. She is, indeed, the daughter of her father, Colonel Bonifield. If she knew that her salary was comin' from a private source, why, you could not get her to touch a dollar of it, therefore I think it best to consider this compact and agreement strictly confidential."

Dick Ballard's views met with the approval of his associates, and then the conversation became general. Vance inquired when the Town Company would probably hold another meeting.

"Not for some time, from present indications," replied Winthrop. 165

"No," replied Marcus Donald, "I have to-day received a letter from Colonel Alexander, and he says it will be necessary, on account of pressing business in the Wharfage and Dockage Company down on the Gulf coast, to defer holding another Town Company meeting for some months. The only thing we can do," continued Donald, "is to keep a good grip on our holdings here and wait. The dark days will roll by like so many clouds and the sun will shine again. Waterville will be in the ascendency. Strangers will be coming in, bringing money for internal improvements; this great valley will be settled up, and successful activity, in my judgment, will take the place of the present unfortunate depression."

Vance continued his stay in Waterville several days longer than he had at intended. His frequent consultations with Horner Winthrop and Marcus Donald led him to believe they were two of the most honorable men he had ever met. Possibly they were wrong in their judgment about Waterville, but they certainly were sincere. They seemed like men who had been fighting for a goal against bitter odds. The goal was finally reached when the last obligation of the Waterville Town Company had been paid. They were left practically penniless, or at best, with very little money; yet they were content to wait until time should lift then out of the trough of the sea upon the waves of commercial activity again, which they fully believed would come.

When Vance started for Gold Bluff, he said he might see them again in a couple of weeks, and again, he might not see them for a year or longer. He was wholly undecided what to do. 166

Arriving at Gold Bluff in the evening, Vance made a hasty toilet and called upon the woman he secretly loved so devotedly. She welcomed him warmly. Soon after, they were seated in the little parlor where Vance had spent so many happy evenings.

The Colonel greeted him enthusiastically.

The open grate was crackling and burning cheerily with a bright wood fire, and seemed to add warmth to the welcome extended.

"Am delighted to see yo', Mr. Gilder, I am indeed, still. We have at last reached the 400 foot level. Tempo'ary embarrassments will soon be relegated into antiquity, yes, suh; a few days longer, a few days mo' of waitin', suh, and the struggle for a livin' will be oveh with. No matteh how much we may fight against it, we are bound to be wealthy. Of cou'se it'll take a few days yet, but only a few."

It was evident that the Colonel was greatly in earnest. It was a welcome hope to Vance. He briefly related to the Colonel and Louise concerning the depression at Waterville, but that he still had hopes that eventually—he did not pretend to say exactly when, but some time in the future—his investment in Waterville town lots would turn out all right.

"On gen'al principles," said Colonel Bonifield, "I am not favo'able to real estate spec'lations. I presume, suh, the reason is I know so vehy little about them, but when it comes to a mine, suh,'.pecially like Gray Rocks, I inva'ably know, suh, what I am talkin' about. Louise," said the Colonel, looking at his daughter, "let us have some music. I see Mr. Gilder is vehy tired, and we will talk no mo' business this evenin'." 167

Louise opened the piano and sang for them. There was a plaintive sweetness in the girl's voice that made Vance's heart pulse with delicious contentment. Hope played back and forth among the chords as the music swelled and surged in sweet, symphonious strains. While she was singing, he felt how easy it would be to declare his love, but when she had ceased, and the last vibrations of music had died away, he knew he lacked the courage.

Vance would be called a brave man in the daily walks of life, and yet, as Louise's lover, he was the most arrant of cowards.

CHAPTER XX.—THE STAGE IS ROBBED.

HE next morning Vance met his old acquaintance, Hank Casey. 168

"Good morning, Mr. Casey," said Vance, cheerily.

"Hello, pardner," was the laconic and somewhat dejected reply.

"I haven't seen you for some time," said Vance.

"No, I've been prospectin' round these 'ere diggin's, but I guess I won't stay much longer. The court decided agin Steve Gibbons an' me. I think I'll go back to Butte City afore long. She's the pertest minin' camp in the 'hull country."

"You say the court has decided against you?" repeated Vance.

"Yes," he replied, "Steve Gibbons an' we had a law suit agin' Rufus Grim over the Peacock. B. Webster Legal is a pretty cute lawyer, an' for a time he made it bilin' hot for old Grim, but somehow on the show-down we got done up. It don't make much difference how cute a feller's lawyer is, when the court's prejudiced all out o' shape. I sometimes think old Grim has a 'nuf sight better title to the court of this 'ere district than he has to the Peacock mine."

"Your friend Gibbons," said Vance, "told me sonnies thing of this law suit, and I rather expected, with the 169 assistance of an attorney like B. Webster Legal, you would succeed in establishing your claim. You have my sympathy if an injustice has been done you."

"Oh, it wa'n'. no fault of Lawyer Legal, I can tell you, he's a hummer, and a mighty social chap in the bargain; but this 'ere game isn't played to a finish yet, pardner, not by several great, big moves on the chess board. You see, we've appealed it to the higher courts, but they're so dangnation slow that a feller had better get a hustle on hisself while he's waitin' for a decision or he'll starve. When old Grim has his neck broken, honest people may then get their just deserts." He seemed dejected, and soon after took his leave, saying that he was going into the mountains to do a little prospecting.

The Peacock mine was constantly increasing its output of the yellow metal. Nearly every stage carried shipments of gold bullion to the mints. Rufus Grim was growing richer and more pompous. His satellites and admirers noticeably increased after the courts had decided in his favor.

In the meantime the pumps in Gray Rocks had broken down and delayed the work several weeks. Vance was in a state of feverish anxiety. He longed to be relieved from the mental strain and know whether he was a half owner in a gold mine that produced in paying quantities, or only a half owner in a worthless shaft in the mountain side.

He retired one evening at an early hour, tired out and thoroughly disgusted with his achievements in the west. He was awakened about two o'clock in the morning by a great commotion going on below. Hastily dressing himself, he went down to the bar-room, where he found everything was wild with excitement. The 170 stage coach had been robbed, and it was reported that Steve Gibbons was dead. Hasty preparations were being made to form a posse and start in pursuit of the highwaymen.


Vance was awakened.

The express company had some heavy consignments of gold bullion sent from the Peacock mine, and it was reported missing. Vance signified his willingness to join in the pursuit, and was furnished with a horse, and soon after they started pell-mell down the mountain road from Gold Bluff in the direction of Waterville, to the point where the robbery had taken place.

Rufus Grim offered $1,000 for the capture of the perpetrators, which, together with a large sum offered by the express company, stimulated a feverish interest in the chase.

The sun was just coming up when they reached the place where the robbers had sallied forth from a neighboring mountain gorge the morning before and committed their lawless work. About two miles beyond, they found the only two passengers of the ill-fated stage coach. A gentleman and his wife from the east had been visiting Colonel Boast, the rich rancher who lived near Gold Bluff, and were returning to their eastern home. The gentleman had been relieved of his wallet, containing some $2,000, also his watch, diamond pin, and his wife of her jewelry. They were left in a destitute condition, and were waiting to take the next stage back to Gold Bluff to secure such aid from Colonel Boast as would enable them to continue their homeward journey.

They said there were five of the robbers. When they commanded Steve Gibbons to stop, he whipped up his 171 horses, and received a bullet through his body for his attempted bravery. He fell from the stage coach and sustained serious injuries.

They started pell mell down the mountain road.

The robbers quickly stopped the horses, relieved the two passengers of their possessions, secured the express matter and started for the mountain wilds, taking with them the four dapple-gray horses that Steve Gibbons had prided himself so much in driving.

Gibbons had been carefully cared for by the mountain rancher and his wife, where the two passengers were stopping. A physician had been sent for and dressed his wounds. He said Gibbons would get well; the bullet had struck a rib and glanced off. 172

After learning these meager details, the posse pushed on into the mountains in hot pursuit. They were under command of the sheriff of the county. The trail of the desperadoes was easily followed. Along in the afternoon, the sheriff called a halt for refreshments. The horses were tethered with lariats to some trees that grew near a mountain stream, and permitted to graze while the men refreshed themselves with lunches which they had brought along.

“We’re twenty-four hours behind the rascals,” said the sheriff, “and I don’t know whether we’ll overtake them or not.” Some of the men were eager to go on, and others were ready to give up the chase. After a rest of an hour or such a matter, the order was given to again mount, and the trail was followed until darkness set in. Sleeping on the ground with the starry canopy for a covering was a new experience for Vance, but he was determined not to show the white feather. What others endured he would endure.

About ten o’clock the next morning, they came to a mountain gorge and followed the trail to a point where it seemed quite impossible for a horseman to ascend, it was so steep and rugged. The sheriff and a few of his men dismounted and went on ahead, looking for the trail. They found horses’ tracks, but where could they have gone? The grass was deep and heavy in the center of the gulch, and fringed with trees and boulders on either side. Finally the sheriff returned and reported the trail as lost. "They have evidently come into this ‘pocket’ of a canon to throw us off their trail. We will have to return to the mouth of the gorge and see in what other direction the trail leads.” 173

The afternoon was spent in searching for the lost trail. Night overtook the party again, and rations were very short. Their meal was a frugal one, and far from satisfying the hunger of men who had ridden hard all day. The horses were securely fastened and the party lay down to sleep. Vance made his bed on some bunch grass that grew under the wide-spreading branches of a mountain pine. He could plainly hear the rippling of a stream which ran near by, and when deep silence settled down over the landscape, save the occasional snort of one of the horses, the singing of the stream grew louder and louder. The smell of pine added to the deliciousness of his novel and strange surroundings. Weariness soon overcame the discomforts of his improvised bed, and he sank to sleep. Suddenly he awoke in the middle of the night, but found everyone else was deep in slumber, save the two guards that had been left on duty a few yards from the camp. The stars were winking at him from above; a wolf was howling a dismal cadence, and was answered by another far away in a different direction. An owl hooted its discordant strain from the dead branch of a tree a short distance away.

He closed his eyes, and thought of the wonderful change that a few months had brought into his life; but these thoughts one after another vanished; and still other fancies went pell-mell through his imagination in the panorama of thought. Presently a face appeared on this mental canvas—so sweet, so tender, so trusting, and wreathed in that smile he knew so well. He started, opened his eye and murmured, “Louise.” 174

The wolf howled again in the distance, and he thought he detected a snappish twang in its concluding barks, and wondered if it foreboded danger. Occasionally one of the horses would snort and stamp on the ground, and then go on munching, munching, the grass on which they were feeding. Finally he dozed again and slept. He thought it was only a moment afterward, when someone shook his shoulder and told him to get up. He opened his eyes and found it was morning.

He hastily sprang up and found there was considerable excitement among his associates. The sheriff was missing. About a half hour later he came into camp and said he had been out looking for the trail, but could

find nothing of it. He said they might as well return home.

Vance was not sorry of this decision, for he was hungry and tired and sore. There were mutterings, however, among some of the sheriff's posse, and they whispered among themselves as if they suspected their chief of crooked work.

It took them two days to return to Gold Bluff. They found Steve Gibbons at the hotel, and able to sit up. The robbers had all worn masks, and it was impossible for him to give a description of any of them. The representative of the express company was evidently disappointed that the sheriff had not been able to find the desperadoes; $10,000 of gold bullion had been stolen, as well as other valuable express matter.

A few days later, Steve Gibbons declared that he was able to resume his place on the stage coach, but it transpired that two of his bondsmen had asked to be relieved This was an insinuation that some one regarded him as an accomplice in the unfortunate stage robbery. He investigated and found it was Rufus Grim who had advised two of his bondsmen to be a little careful. During the day, through Vance's assistance, Gibbons succeeded in giving a satisfactory bond. 175

That evening, a little the worse for drink, he accosted Rufus Grim at the post office, where the Gold bluff villagers were wont to congregate on the arrival of the evening coach.


Gibbons is hilarious.

Steve Gibbons was evidently the agressor. "Look'ee here, Mr. Grim," said Steve Gibbons, approaching him, "you've been interferin' with me for a good many years, and it's time you was lettin' up."

"I don't know, Mr. Gibbons," said Grim, "that I have ever interfered with you. I have plenty of business of my own to look after, without bothering with other people's."

"That's all right, pardner," said Gibbons, "but there's somebody likely to wish they'd never been born if they don't quit foolin' with me. You advised some of my bondsmen to take their names off from the bond, but I've got other friends, and jes' as many of 'em as you have, and don't you forget it!"

"There must be some mistake, Mr. Gibbons," said Grim, very coolly.

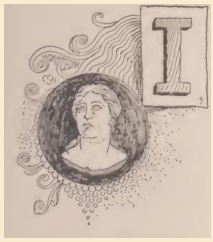
"I know," said Gibbons, "jes' what I'm talkin' about. You have tried to infer that I was mixed up in the robbery of the stage coach, and I say you are an unprincipled old scoundrel, and a liar in the bargain. If I was as strong as I was before I was shot, I'd maul the earth with you. You stole the Peacock mine from Hank Casey an' me, an' I've my suspicions that you bought judge and jury to beat us in our law suit." 176

One would have thought that Grim would have become very angry, but instead, he tried to pacify the irate and angry Steve Gibbons. It seemed to anger Gibbons beyond description that he could not disturb the even temper of Rufus Grim, and finally, in a burst of anger at Grim, Gibbons said: "You'd better have your life insured, old man, for somebody's goin' to be revenged, and the day of judgment ain't very far 'way, nuther."

At this threat, Grim turned quickly and reached for his revolver. Gibbons was unarmed. A moment later, Grim seemed to master himself, and turning away, walked down the street.

Hank Casey put his arm through Steve Gibbon's and led him to the hotel. Gibbons was hilarious, but Casey felt that in his hilarity he had been very indiscreet. The next morning, however, he mounted the stage coach on his regular run between Gold Bluff and Waterville.

CHAPTER XXI.—REACHING THE 400 FOOT LEVEL.



IN the excitement incident to Col. Bonifield's cross-cutting into the vein, the stage robbery, and the bewildering evenings spent in the society of Louise, Vance quite forgot about his hopes and fears relative to his investment in Waterville. 177

One evening he was out for a walk near the Bonifields'. Louise was standing on the porch. He lifted his hat, and she waved a dainty little handkerchief, and came down the road to meet him. There was a troubled expression on her face which Vance had never seen before. It cut him to the heart, and he feared some great calamity had befallen her.

"Mr. Gilder," said she, after the morning salutation, "my father is very despondent this morning, and while he desires greatly to see you, yet he is so broken down that I do not know whether he will be able to see anyone until this afternoon."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Vance, in alarm. They were walking along toward the Bonifield residence as they talked.

"So you have not heard?" said Louise, looking up with her big, blue eyes. Vance looked at her in astonishment. "You have not heard," she repeated, "that they have finished cross-cutting?" 178

"No," replied Vance.

"Yes, they have finished the work," repeated Louise, and then almost broke down in tears. He led her to a seat on the broad porch where the morning sun shone full and warm, and begged her to calm herself, and tell him what had happened to her father.

"Is it not quite enough?" said she, looking up at Vance through her tears, "another disappointment is father's only reward."

Vance was shocked, for this disappointment meant a great deal to him.

“Is it possible,” he ejaculated, “and your father was so confident only the other night!”

“You will not be angry with father?” said Louise, laving her hand on Vance’s arm.

“Angry,” replied Vance, “no; why should I be? He and I are jointly interested in results. If they are unfavorable, why, he cannot be more disappointed than I am. Had he been successful, we would have been equal partners as well.”

“Thank you,” said Louise, “I pity my poor father so much.” She dried her eyes a little and then went on: “Aunt Sally was so querulous with papa last evening when she heard the result, and it made papa very unhappy; indeed, he did not sleep any during the night, though I have comforted him as well as I could.”

“And have not slept a wink?” said Vance, looking at her keenly.

“How could I, when papa was so troubled?”

Vance was silent. Presently he spoke: “I will confess I never was more disappointed in my life. I was so hopeful your father would be successful. Mind,” he continued, hastily, glancing at Louise, “I attach no blame to him.” 179

“You will not be angry with father, will you?”

“Thank you,” she murmured, and Vance went on, “No, I do not blame him, neither do I blame myself. Hundreds, yes, thousands have pursued the same course. Some of them have been successful, and others, ourselves included, have not. I regret that your father should have spent so many years of his life in that useless prospect shaft.” 180

“There is hope yet, Mr. Gilder.”

“Hope,” said Vance quickly, “where?”

“The ore,” she continued, “is richer than at the 300 foot level.”

“And do you believe—?” commenced Vance.

“Do not ask me, please, Mr. Gilder, what I believe at this time. Mr. Grim was here early this morning and left a proposition with papa. He has not the heart, he says, to tell you of it, and requested me to do so. You know, Mr. Grim,” she continued, “is said to be a very good business man. He has examined the ore found at the 400 foot level, and says it is much richer than at the 300 foot level. He offers now, if you and papa will give him a half interest in the mine, to furnish the money to sink the shaft to the 500 foot level.”

“So,” said Vance, reflectively. Presently he said: “If Rufus Grim has confidence to go to the 500 foot level, why not your father and I?”

“But it will cost $6,000, Mr. Gilder, and neither papa nor I could think of asking you to put any more money into Gray Rocks.”

“I do not think your father should take it to heart so; indeed, I do not.”

“He does not care for himself, and neither do I care for myself, Mr. Gilder, but we do care for you.” Vance started and the blood mounted to his face “You have been so kind to my father and placed such unbounded confidence in his judgment, and now it seems as if it were impossible for him ever to repay you, unless—,” she hesitated. 181

“Unless what?” asked Vance, impatiently.

“Unless you would be willing to join father in giving a half interest in Gray Rocks to Mr. Grim, and let him go on and develop the mine.”

“What does your father advise? What does he say?”

“He wants to go on to the 500 foot level, Mr. Gilder, and says he will give his own half interest in Gray Rocks to Mr. Grim rather than let the work stop at the 400 foot level. Father believes that at the 500 foot level they will strike ore as rich as any that has been discovered on the Peacock, and it looks as if Mr. Grim thought the same way, else he would not be so willing to advance the money.”

“Have you confidence in Mr. Grim?” asked Vance.

“We have always distrusted him,” replied Louise, “but perhaps he is not so bad and mean as we have thought.”

“And do you think,” asked Vance, “that ore will be discovered at the 500 foot level?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, “but I hope so.”

“Would it not be better,” urged Vance, “to give it all up and leave these wild mountains and return to civilization, so to speak, where your father could enjoy the remaining years of his life in peace and contentment?” His words were full of earnestness, and he spoke with great deliberation.

“If such an opportunity should present itself,” said Louise, “I know my father would refuse it, for he is so high-spirited, and moreover, he believes that a little more work, and a little more time and expense on Gray Rocks, and his prophecy will be fulfilled.”

Vance rose to go, but still lingered near the beautiful girl, as if she were a balm to his evident disappointment. Finally he said: “You say it will require $6,000. Now, if you had $6,000, Miss Louise, and it was every dollar you had in the world, what would you do with it?” 182

“I would sink the shaft on Gray Rocks to the 500 foot level,” she replied quickly. “Shall I tell my father,” she asked, as Vance started to go, “that you are favorable to Mr. Grim’s proposition?”

“No,” replied Vance, doggedly, “I have no confidence in Rufus Grim. You may tell your father that I say not to worry any more. With your permission, I will return in a couple of hours, and will then be glad to see him.”

Louise seemed ignorant of any knowledge of Vance’s passionate love for her. Her mind and thoughts were so entirely in sympathy with her father, whom she loved so dearly and so devotedly. As Vance bade her good-bye, she took his outstretched hand as if he had been her benefactor, instead of only her father’s friend.

“Your judgment,” said Vance, “has decided me; we will go on blasting—down, down, down—through solid rock toward an unknown doom. How it will end remains to be seen.” Before Louise could make a reply, he had turned and walked rapidly away toward his hotel.

Looking carefully over his accounts, he found he still had to his credit, in the Chemical National Bank of New York city, barely $6,000. He paced the floor for a full half-hour in deep thought. Finally he paused and said aloud, “she would advance her last dollar to sink the shaft to the 500 foot level—a weak, little, lovely woman, yet stronger in her affections and devotion than a regiment of soldiers. Yes, I will do it; I will gamble my last dollar—for it is nothing better than a gamble, and yet—well, who knows? We may strike it after all.” 183

He drew a check for the amount, making it payable to Colonel Ben Bonifield. Before signing it, he looked at it long and thoughtfully. “Why do I do this? Is it my faith in Gray Rocks? No. Is it my faith in Colonel Bonifield? No. Is it my faith in Louise? Yes, a thousand times, yes.” His hand trembled a little as he signed his name to the check. It was the last throw of the dice. He felt that he had in a measure passed his word to Louise. There was a question of daily bread that must now be solved. The question was immediately ahead of him. He would call on Colonel Bonifield and then devote himself to the bread question. Yes, he would solve it.

Strong with resolution, and with a judgment sadly warped because of his love for Louise, he returned to the Bonifield home. Louise met him at the door, and he went with her into the spacious parlor, where a wood fire was burning brightly in the open grate.

“I delivered your message to my father,” she said, “and he has fallen into a restful sleep.”

“Do not disturb him,” said Vance, “in this envelope is a check for $6,000. Tell him to start to-morrow morning for the 500 foot level.”

The impulsive Louise took the proffered envelope from Vance with hands that trembled noticeably, while two great tears dimmed her lustrous blue eyes. “Why have you done this?” she asked.

It is probable that Vance would then and there have told her why, had not Colonel Bonifield appeared in the door. “Mr. Gilder,” said he, “Yo’r presence in my house brings sunshine with it. Yo’ know the worst. Louise tells me she has informed yo of the unfo’tunate geological fo’mation to be found at the 400 foot level in Gray Rocks?” 184

Louise turned from Vance to her father while he was speaking, and buried her face on his breast, weeping in stilled sobs. When Colonel Bonifield asked her why she was weeping, she handed him the envelope, and pillowed her head deeper on his breast. He opened the envelope and carefully scanned the check. The old man’s eyes were dimmed with tears of gratitude.


“Suh,” said the Colonel.

One arm was about his daughter, and the other he extended toward Vance, who accepted the proffered hand.

“Suh,” said the Colonel, “Yo’ ovehpoweh me with yo’r confidence. I have been workin’ away so long on Gray Rocks, suh, that I can’t blame my friends if they should lose heart. But, suh, somethin’ keeps a tellin’ me that my effo’ts will yet be rewarded. Yo’ honor me by sharin’ my confidence in the outcome of Gray Rocks; yo’ do, indeed, suh. There’s good blood, Mr. Gilder, cou’sin’ through yo’r veins, and there’s a crown awaitin’ yo’ when once we’ve reached the 500 foot level; yes, suh. I may neveh have mentioned it to yo’, but I once told yo’r father that if he would stay by Gray Rocks, it would make him a millionaire. I have forgotten whether I ever made the obse’vation to yo’ or not, but I wish to assure yo’ at this time, Mr. Gilder, in the presence of Louise, suh, that yo’r confidence in Gray Rocks is well-founded, and she will make yo’ richer than all the possessions left yo’ by yo’r worthy father; yes, suh, much richer.” Louise dried her tears and soon was cheerful as a mountain thrush that had never known a sorrow. The old Colonel declared he had never felt better in his life, and that work should be commenced early the following morning. 185

On his way back to the hotel, Vance called at the office of the Gold Bluff *Prospector*.

“Where is your typo?” asked Vance in the course of the conversation.

“Haven’t got any,” replied the proprietor, “he left this morning on the stage. We’ll not be able to get out an issue of the paper this week unless we find someone that can set type. Say,” said he, “why can’t I sell my printing office to you?”

“I’m not able to buy,” replied Vance.

“Well, I’ll lease it to you.”

“On what terms,” asked Vance.

“I’d lease it to you for one year for half its earnings,” replied the good-natured proprietor, who never was known to have enough energy to walk across the street to solicit an advertisement.

“What will it earn in a year?”

“Oh, twelve or fifteen hundred dollars—subscriptions and advertisements. I own the building. I call this the reception and editorial room; the other is the composing room, while the one back of where we are sitting is where the printer usually sleeps.”

In Vance’s college days, he had been one of the trio who had edited a college paper, set their own type, made up their own forms and circulated the issue after night, contenting themselves, for a compensation, with the general wonderment of their fellow-students as to who were the publishers. He felt that he was capable of acting as type-setter, as well as writing editorials, on the Gold Bluff *Prospector*. He examined the room designated as the sleeping apartment of the printer, and found it comfortable, yet very plain.

He told the proprietor he thought very favorably of his proposition, and believed he would accept it. The printing was done on an old-fashioned hand press, which would require the assistance of a boy for a couple of hours once a week. 186


Vance moves.

Aside from this, Vance believed he was competent to handle all the details and labor connected with the paper. Before he retired that night, arrangements had all been made, the lease drawn and signed, and Vance commenced operations the next morning as the proprietor of the Gold Bluff *Prospector*. He moved his trunk and personal effects into the shabby back room, to be used in the future as his sleeping apartment. He settled his hotel bill, and found that he had less than $3.00 in his pocket on which to begin the struggle for bread.

It was a new experience, not without its novelty and excitement in anticipation, however. After he had arranged his room quite tidily, he commenced setting type, and smiled good humoredly to himself as he thought of the change from the great New York *Banner* to the *Prospector*. Yes, he had made sacrifices; and would he not willingly make any more to remain near the woman he loved with a love that surpasseth understanding.

CHAPTER XXII.—STARTING THE BOOM.

IXTEEN hours a day for three days was Vance’s first experience on the *Prospector*. All day and far into the evening he set type and made up forms, until finally the paper was ready to be brought out. It contained the retiring proprietor’s bow to the public, and Vance’s announcement. 187

The next evening he called at the Bonifields’. Louise greeted him more kindly than ever. The Colonel, after assuring him that excellent progress was being made on Gray Rocks, turned the conversation to Vance’s new venture.

“Vehy creditable, suh; vehy creditable, indeed,” said he, glancing at a copy of the *Prospector* which he had been reading. “Louise and I think yo’ve made an excellent beginnin’, suh, vehy excellent.”

“Indeed we do,” said Louise; “we have often heard, though, that editors were quite exclusive, and we didn’t know but that was the reason you have not called on us for so long a time.”

“Well, that is the reason,” responded Vance, jestingly. “As managing editor of the *Prospector*, I have been exclusively engaged in setting type, making up forms, etc.”

They laughed at Vance’s remark, and complimented him on being able to impersonate all the functionaries of a printing establishment. In the midst of their conversation, Aunt Sally appeared at the door of the parlor, and courtesying low to Vance, said: 188

“Good evenin’, Mr. Gilder; I ‘low I’ve been wantin’ to sec yo’ fo’ some time, suh.”

Vance returned the salutation by rising and bowing politely. As he sat down he noticed the Colonel was greatly disturbed, as if he feared a storm was approaching.

“Mr. Gilder,” commenced Aunt Sally’, “I consider it my duty to inform yo’ that yo’ are makin’ as big a fool of yo’self as my brother is of hisself.”

“Come, sister,” said the Colonel, “come, come.”

“Benjamin,” said Aunt Sally, looking hard at him over her spectacles, “I shall have my say. I consideh it a duty that I owe Mr. Gilder to inform him that he is squanderin’ his money. There is not a chance in ten

thousand; no, suh, not one, fo' yo' to eveh get back a penny of the money yo've given my brother. Besides, yo're only encouragin' Benjamin to fool his time away. I have mighty neah worn my life out takin' care of him, Virgie and Louise. Virginia has a good deal of sense—a heap mo', I am proud to say, than Benjamin or Louise has."

"I hope, Mr. Gilder," observed the Colonel, "that yo'll remember an obse'vation I made some time ago in regard to my sister——"

"What have yo' been sayin' about me?" asked Aunt Sally, and she looked threateningly at him. The Colonel paid no attention to his sister's remark, and went on:

"Yo' will remember I obse'ved at one time, suh, that my sister was a most ext'ao'dina'y woman; yes, suh, most ext'ao'dina'y; she is possessed of a most rema'kable intellect. 189

There are times, suh, when it's necessary for me to put my foot down.

There is, however, a slight disagreement in regard to our judgment relative to Gray Rocks. She is vehy set in her ways, vehy, indeed; and, I am sorry to say, doesn't share in our belief relative to the final outcome of our minin' property."

"Benjamin," said Aunt Sally, still looking at him over her spectacles, "it is not a *slight* difference of opinion; it's a vehy *wide* one, indeed. If yo' had a hundred thousand dollars to-day, suh, yo'd be grub-stakin' all the 190
pesky mines in the mountains around Gold Bluff; yo' know yo' would. There are times, suh, when it's necessary fo' me to put my foot down, and I ain't goin' to neglect my duty any longer. Mr. Gilder has got to know the true situation, and if he has no mo' sense than to go on givin' yo' money to dig a worthless hole in the earth, why, I'll wash my hands of him, and have the consolation of knowin' that I told him befo' hand what he might expect." Vance would have been amused, had he not observed the pained expression on Louise's face and the evident discomfiture of Colonel Bonifield. In reality, it was an opportune time for him to make an observation that he had long wanted understood between the Colonel and himself, and therefore he said:

"I am highly honored, Miss Bonifield, by your advice. Your brother, the Colonel, has been very enthusiastic in regard to Gray Rocks."

"Don't I know it?" interrupted Aunt Sally. "Haven't I told him he was makin a fool of hisself?"

"Well," continued Vance, "I will not go quite so far in my remarks as that, but I will say this—that it would please me very much to have the Colonel's assurance that if he fails to find the wealth he has been looking for so many years when the 500 foot level is reached, that he will abandon work on Gray Rocks and accept certain offers of a pecuniary nature in the east, which I have in mind."

"Well, if I knew," replied Aunt Sally, "that there was to be an end to this thing, I'd have mo' patience in waitin' but my land! he no sooner gets to one level than he wants to push on to the next hund'ed foot level, and goodness gracious! there's no end to it! Why, if Benjamin had his way, and his life was spared long 191
enough, I 'low he'd have a hole clear through the earth!"

The Colonel was noticeably disturbed. He had risen and was walking back and forth in a nervous, yet dignified way.

"Yo'r request, Mr. Gilder," he finally said, "shall be complied with, suh, and in complyin' with it, I hope that I also pacify my sister. I give yo' my word of honor, suh, that when the 500 foot level is reached, and we have cross-cut into the vein of wealth that I feel positive, yes, suh, positive, is waitin' to be brought to the light of day—if, I say, we should again be disappointed, then I am ready to give up my labors on Gray Rocks; yes suh, give up my life's work. Of course, suh, yo' cannot undehstand and perhaps neveh will, the magnitude of this promise." There were tears in the Colonel's voice, as well as in his eyes, when he ceased speaking.

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Aunt Sally, as she raised her hands in an attitude of supplication and thanksgiving. "I feel now there's goin' to be an end of this tomfoolery, and I'll not say another word, nary a

word, until the 500 foot level is reached." She turned to Vance as she started to leave the room, and bade him good-evening, and assured him that in her opinion she had accomplished a "mighty sight of good."

As soon as the door closed behind her, Vance turned to the Colonel and begged him not to take the slightest notice of what his sister had said, for he knew her peculiarities and thought nothing of them. He also thanked him for his promise. Vance's words seemed to relieve the Colonel greatly, and he became almost himself again before the evening was over, and narrated to Vance with a fair degree of enthusiasm how nicely 192
the pumps and other machinery in the mine were working.

Afterwards Louise favored them with music, and Vance quite forgot himself, so pleasantly was he entertained, until, glancing at his watch, he found it was almost eleven o'clock. Soon after, he took his departure, and with a light heart wended his way to the printing office.

His infatuation for Louise was of an ennobling character. He was a fatalist in this: that he believed when the time came for him to speak his heart to her he would have courage to do so, and contented himself in loving blindly on.

When he awoke next morning he found a heavy snow had fallen. Nothing like it had happened in Gold Bluff before in many years. A great many of the mines were necessarily shut down on account of the scarcity of fuel to operate the engines. During the next four weeks snows kept falling heavier and heavier, and in a measure cut off communication with the outer world.

Vance applied himself industriously to his paper, widening his acquaintanceship among the people of Gold Bluff, solicited advertisements, and succeeded far beyond his expectations.

His friends complimented him on the neat appearance of the *Prospector*. It was filled with excellent reading matter, and its circulation was constantly increasing.

Another heavy snow storm during the holidays rendered the roads quite impassable and finally work on Gray Rocks was necessarily suspended, nor was it resumed until late the following spring. In the meantime 193
matters were progressing slowly in the great Thief River Valley. There had been no meeting of the Waterville Town Company. Homer Winthrop and Marcus Donald regularly opened up the Town Company's office every morning and closed it every evening. Time hung heavy on their hands. Thus passed the winter months away in weary waiting for a boom in real estate that seemed stubborn and would not come.

Dick Ballard called one afternoon in early April, and suggested that his finances were running rather low, and if it would be convenient he would like a check for Homer Winthrop's board.

Winthrop was a proud fellow and disliked to admit that he was, in the ordinary parlance, "broke."

Homer suggested to Ballard the advisability of purchasing a few lots in Eagle's Addition to Waterville. "Or," said Winthrop, "We can let you have a couple of lots adjoining your hotel. You've been a good friend of ours and we would let you have them cheap, awfully cheap."

Dick Ballard sat back in his chair, inserted his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest, and said: "Now, lookee here, Winthrop, I have been your friend, haven't I?" Winthrop acknowledged that he had. "I've been your friend, Mr. Donald, haven't I?" said Ballard, pointing his index finger straight at Donald.

"I think you have," replied Donald, laughingly.

"Yes, I've been Colonel Alexander's friend; I've been General Ira House's friend; I've been B. Webster Legal's friend; in fact, gentlemen, I've been a friend to the Waterville Town 194
Company from start to finish." He brought his hand clown upon the table in front of him with threat vehemence as he made this remark. "Yes sir," he went on, "I have been a friend to you and to your enterprise, but when it comes, Homer Winthrop, to selling your uncle any Waterville town lots, why, you don't know me. Oh, no; Dick Ballard usually knows which side his bread's buttered on, and, between ourselves, I wouldn't give you a square meal of victuals for any lot you've got in Eagle's addition. No, sir, Mr. Winthrop, money is what I want, and pardon me for observing, money is what I, politely, but nevertheless firmly, insist that you must produce—if not to-day, perhaps tomorrow, and liquidate that little matter of board which has now been running for some three months."

Presently he walked over toward the window and looked wistfully out over the sage brush landscape. "The grass is beginin' to grow," said he, "and I see it is startin' in the streets as well as on the beautiful lots you have for sale. Remember, gentlemen," said Ballard, as he turned and expectorated a vigorous "pit-tew" of tobacco juice toward the stove, "what I have said to you never has, nor never will, escape the lips of Dick Ballard; no, sir, I'm your friend, but don't try to work me with any town lots in payin' board bills."

Winthrop was noticeably' non-plussed. Donald was laughing contentedly and quietly' to himself at Winthrop's discomfiture. Ballard looked on and chuckled, as much as to say, "I am a heap sight smarter than you fellows give me credit for." Finally he broke the silence by suddenly asking:

"Mr. Winthrop, what is your lot worth next to my hotel?"

"Five hundred dollars," replied Winthrop, looking up.

"I hope you'll get it," said Ballard; "yes, I hope you'll sell it for a thousand—but I'll tell you somethin'," said he, shutting one eye and looking hard at Winthrop with the other, "I wouldn't trade you our militia company's new snare drum for both those condemned lots; no, sir," and he turned laughingly toward the door.

Just here he came face to face with Miss Virginia Bonifield.

Ballard lifted his hat and bowed low, for she was one of his boarders who paid promptly. After speaking pleasantly to Marcus Donald and Homer Winthrop, she said:

"I am very glad you are here, Mr. Ballard, I want to ask your advice." Dick Ballard was all attention, for if 195
there was any one thing he liked to do better than another—barring a drill exercise with his state militia company—it was to give advice. Homer Winthrop, noticeably confused, pushed the best chair forward and invited Miss Bonifield to be seated.

"Thank you," said she, looking kindly at Homer, who, in turn, hushed scarlet. "What I wish to ask is in

regard to an investment in Waterville.'

"Why, in what way?" asked Dick Ballard.

"In regard to making a purchase of town lots as an investment."

Ballard coughed immoderately, cleared his throat several times, "a-hemmed," got red in the face, looked helplessly toward Marcus Donald, and finally said:

"Nothin' like it in the world, Miss Bonifield; best investment on earth. There's not another place in the United States will come out of the kinks like Waterville. No, sir; if I had a million I'd plant every dollar of it in Waterville, every dollar. My land!" said he, glancing at his watch, "it is three o'clock! Well, I must be goin'." With this he took up his hat and hastily left the room. 196

"Is this a map of the town?" asked Miss Virgie Bonifield, rising and approaching a map that hung on the wall near where Marcus Donald was seated.

"Yes, that is one of the best maps that has ever been gotten out," said Marcus Donald, adjusting his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"And where is Eagle's Addition?" Marcus Donald pointed it out.

"And what are you selling lots for in that part of town?"

"Well, really, Miss Bonifield," said Donald, stammering a little, "we haven't been selling very many lots—that is, not recently. I will refer you to Mr. Winthrop; he has charge of all such matters, and perhaps he can give you better advice than I can."

"But what do *you* advise in regard to investments in Waterville?" she asked, abruptly.

"Oh, you know we believe in Waterville, Miss Bonifield; we believe it is destined to be one of the greatest cities in the United States. Of course there has not been any marked activity during the past winter, but we are expecting business to open up well, most any time now."

She turned to Winthrop, and seating herself beside his desk, asked him to point out what he considered one of the most desirable corners in Eagle's Addition. Usually Winthrop prided himself on his ability to make sales of lots, and he was quite willing to sell to anybody rather than the woman by his side. He had been so hard pressed for ready-money during the winter and spring that he had shut himself out, so to speak, from all society, for the reason that he was destitute of even spending money of the most ordinary character. After studying some time, he put his pencil reluctantly down on the map and said: 197

"I consider these lots as desirable as any in Eagle's Addition."

"And what are you selling them for?"

"We are asking $100 a lot," said he, "but we are not selling any just now, Miss Bonifield, at all."

She looked at the map a few minutes, and then said, "You think these are about the best lots in the Addition, do you?"

Winthrop almost inaudibly assented. "Well, no—hardly—Miss Bonifield; the fact is," he faltered, "we do not care to make any sales at the present time. We are rather expecting some information a little later; we—we expect to hold a Town Company meeting, and may conclude to reduce the price of lots—and—"

"Or you may raise the prices," said she, looking archly at Homer. "Is it not so."

"P—possibly," replied Winthrop.

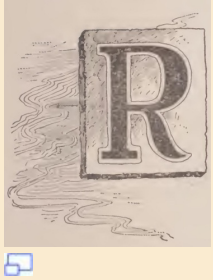
"Well, I wish to purchase four lots on the corner you have indicated. Here is the money," said she, laying down a roll of bills on his desk, "please fix up the deed and leave it at the hotel for me as soon as it is convenient."

"But—hold on," said Homer. She had risen and started toward the door. "You do not mean to make a purchase of lots? I really have not advised it; you'd better reconsider—think it over a few days." All of this was stammered out by Winthrop in a hurried and confused manner.

"But I have considered," said Miss Virginia Bonifield, smiling in her own imperious way. "I have fully considered, Mr. Winthrop, and desire to make the purchase. Good day." She was gone. 198

Donald sat looking over his spectacles, while an astonished and amused smile played over his "$10,000 face." Winthrop looked at the roll of bills spread out before him, and then turning to Marcus Donald, ejaculated, "Thank God, the boom has started!"

CHAPTER XXIII.—RUFUS GRIM S AMBITION.



RUFUS GRIM was not pleased with Vance's management of the Gold Bluff *Prospector*. A number of items had appeared in the columns of that paper which tended to vindicate Steve Gibbons from all suspicion or connection with the stage coach robbery. Grim considered this an indirect thrust at himself. His money had made him a lion among the people of Gold Bluff, but for some unaccountable reason he was unable to secure Vance Gilder's good opinion. 199

He secretly had an ambition to represent the people of Idaho in the halls of congress, and felt it would never do to let matters go on with his own town paper prejudiced against him. On several occasions he had made overtures to Vance of a friendly nature, but had, invariably, been repulsed. On one occasion he had endeavored to compliment Vance, and

told him patronizingly, in his uncouth, pompous way, that he was very glad such a scholarly gentleman had charge of the *Prospector*, and that he considered him the most refined and cultured gentleman in Gold Bluff. Vance had coldly replied, "It is an admirable thing, Mr. Grim, to be a cultured and refined man, but it is far 200
better to be a manly man." Grim had agreed with him, while Vance went quietly on setting type. The rich miner was irritated at his own lack of words when in Vance's society. With others he was boastful as ever—bragged of his gold, and in his own domineering way, attempted to subdue everything with which he came in contact.


'Rufus Grim.

Those who knew his home life best said he was afraid of his wife. She was all formality, and Grim, in his way, honored her, and at the same time, feared her. It was whispered that he found more pleasure in his stepdaughter's society than in his wife's.

Bertha, with her handsome face and lisping speech, humored her mother's whims of formality, and tickled the uncouth vanity of her step-father, on whose bounty she was dependent. She was an artful, cooing, little woman, full of strategy and deceit, and hopelessly untruthful. Her clandestine meetings with her cousin, Arthur Boast, were numerous, while in her heart she felt an infatuation for Vance Gilder, and was secretly intensely jealous of Louise Bonifield. Outwardly, she courted Louise, and never missed an opportunity of calling her "her own dear darling," and telling her how very pretty she was.

In the early days of June Arthur Boast returned permanently to Gold Bluff, and at first paid a great deal of attention to Louise, not as a lover, but rather as a friend of the family, and by every artifice known to his cunning endeavored to enlist her sympathy. He frequently observed that no one was his 201
friend, and it pleased him to hear Louise say that "she was his friend, and always had been." He said nothing derogatory of Vance's character, but his insinuations were of a wicked nature.

Vance was at a loss to understand why Boast had left Waterville, especially as it was rumored that a great boom was going on at that place.

One day Vance received a note from Arthur Boast asking him to call at the hotel that evening. He said he was indisposed and could not leave his room, otherwise he would call at the printing office.

It was after eight o'clock when Vance called at the hotel, and was at once ushered into J. Arthur Boast's room. He found Boast dressed as elegantly as ever, in fact, he was scrupulously attired, and resting on a divan. He seemed weak, and was quite pale. He no longer spoke in a thin, piping voice, but in a quiet, manly way, that at once interested Vance.

"I sent for you, Mr. Gilder, because I was lonely and wanted to talk with you. I suppose you think I am supremely selfish in this, as everything else, but I have been almost sick for the last week."

"We are admonished to visit the sick," said Vance, good-naturedly, "and I am sure it is only natural that one indisposed should like company."

"It is very kind of you to come, I'm sure," Boast went on, "I have been worried a good deal about a certain misunderstanding that seemingly exists between us." Vance assured him that he knew of no misunderstanding.

"No," said Boast, "not an open misunderstanding; but then I feel that you have misunderstood me from the first, Mr. Gilder, and perhaps, in a measure, I have done you the injustice of not always interpreting your acts 202
as I should have done. I do not know whether there is any philosophy in the circumstances which seem to shape my life or not."

"We are told," said Vance, "that in our strength and manhood we should shape circumstances rather than let circumstances shape us."

"That's it," said Boast, "the eternal trying to shape circumstances brings on an endless conflict, not only between men, but a conflict with one's own self. I have almost made up my mind that it is quite impossible for a man to shape his destiny. Now, as a matter of fact, I respect you, Mr. Gilder, highly, and have confidence in your ability and judgment. I think you are making a great success of the *Prospector*. It is impossible," he went on, "for me to tell you why I have this confidence or this respect. I also know that you cordially dislike me, but why, I do not know, and perhaps you could not tell yourself."

Vance was surprised at this philosophic turn of mind, and began to think he had misunderstood J. Arthur Boast all along.

"I cannot help but feel complimented," said Vance, "by your kind words. I will admit that I have never stopped to analyze my feelings very closely in regard to yourself, and will not deny that I have been unable to discover any affinity between us. Perhaps I have misjudged you. If so, I can do no less than make proper amends."

"You speak as if you would be my friend." said Boast, "friends with me are very scarce. My highest ambition 203
has ever been to make friends, and yet it requires no words of mine to tell you what a miserable failure I have made of it all. I would like to be Rufus Grim's friend, but he won't let me. He does everything he can to influence my cousin, Bertha Allen, against me, but in that he is making a complete failure. She is my friend," said he with animation. "I suppose you know that Mrs. Grim is very ill?"

"No," said Vance; "I had not heard of it."

"Yes, she has never been very rugged, and I understand her present illness is of a very serious nature. She is so many years older than her pompous lord and master, that it would not be surprising to hear of her death at any time. Personally, I should regret it, not only on account of my aunt, but also on account of Bertha. I dread to think what may happen if my aunt should die."

"You do not regard her sickness so seriously as that?" asked Vance.

"She is certainly very ill," was Boast's reply. "I would like to go and see her, but I do not presume Rufus Grim would let me into the house. But what I desired most to say," continued Boast, brightening up and changing the conversation, "is this: I would like to have you be my friend. I wish to be yours."

Vance was astonished, and for a moment could not reply. Finally he said, "I cannot do less, Mr. Boast, than

meet you half way in such a laudable ambition, I am sure."

"Ambition," repeated Boast, "what a detestable word! I sometimes think ambition has been the cause of all my misfortune. I have wanted wealth all my life, but have not succeeded to any great extent. I ought to be in Waterville now, selling town lots and lands. There's great activity down there. I have the ambition but not the strength. You may not know it, but my health is seriously impaired. I do not seem to have any vitality." 204

Vance expressed his sympathy, but Boast seemingly did not notice his remarks, and said, "if a man has a clearly defined principle of life to follow, why cannot he adhere to it?"

"I think he can," replied Vance. "No life, in my judgment, has ever been a success unless a well-defined principle of action is first laid out, and then lived up to."

"I wish I could believe your philosophy," said Boast. "The dual nature in me continually divides me.

I go to sleep at night filled with the most laudable ambitions; I wake up the next morning and pursue an entirely different course, and therein lies the conflict—but I know, Mr. Gilder, I am boring you."

Vance assured him that he was not, but soon afterward took his leave, and as he walked along toward his home, he mused thoughtfully over his interview with J. Arthur Boast. What a different light had been thrown on his character! "Yes," said he, "I will be his friend. I have misunderstood him."

The next morning the town was startled by the announcement that Mrs. Grim was dead. The church bell tolled fifty-six times. Bertha Allen was prostrated with grief, while the rich mine owner had the entire sympathy of the people of Gold Bluff. Rufus Grim did nothing by halves, and there could not have been a more splendid show of grief than that for which his arrangements provided. 205

The works on the Peacock were stopped, and the men, on full pay, invited to the funeral. It was an imposing affair. The crape on Mr. Grim's hat was of the widest pattern, and jet studs took the place of his diamond. His black suit fit his plump form well, and he seemed subdued with genuine grief. Bertha Allen looked very fair and interesting in her costume of black. She clung dependently to Mr. Grim's arm during the burial service, and looked unusually pretty, notwithstanding the marks of grief and weeping upon her handsome face; indeed, she enlisted the sympathy of all who saw her.

The following day work on the Peacock was started up again, and the deep, resounding blasts down below the earth's surface told of more gold flowing towards the coffers of Rufus Grim.

The machinery in Gray Rocks mine had been behaving badly. Several big breaks had occurred, and work had been delayed at one time for two weeks. The days glided by, and October had come again. The rocks high up the mountain, overlooking Gold Bluff, reflected the autumn sun, while the forests on the mountain side were ablaze with fiery autumn tints—nature's superb clothing.

Colonel Bonifield had ceased, in part, to be the enthusiast of former days. Perhaps he felt that he had passed his word to give up work on Gray Rocks if disappointment should again reward his efforts, and possibly it saddened him.

One evening Vance and Louise had called on Bertha Allen. She was beautiful as ever, and lisped in sweet intonation. Her dress indicated the grief that still rested upon her. That evening, after her callers had taken their leave, Rufus Grim joined Bertha in the parlor of his luxuriant home. The weeks that had intervened since the death of his wife had not made him entirely forget the proper melancholy tone which formality, at least, demanded he should exhibit. 206

Bertha seemed frightened with some secret fear and anxiety. She knew too well that a crisis in her life was approaching. Yes, Rufus Grim came to declare himself.

He was confident, as he always was, of the result, nevertheless, there was a timidity that prevented him from feeling the full assurance that he would have liked. He sat down beside her, and after a few commonplace remarks, he said, in a voice low, yet audible: "Bertha, I have something to say to you."

"Yes," she lisped innocently enough, and looked up into his face.

"What I have to say," Grim went on, in a husky voice, "cannot be a matter of news to you. You must know that I love you; yes, love you with my whole heart." His hands trembled and his voice was unsteady.

"You've always been so very kind to me," lisped Bertha, and there was gratitude in her voice.

"Heaven knows I have tried to be, and that I have guarded you with jealous care ever since you were a little girl and came under my protection." He had taken her hands, but they were unresponsive. "No man," continued Grim, "could love you more than I have for many years. Of course you knew what my feelings were—you must have known, for have I ever failed to satisfy your every wish and want?"

"Never," murmured Bertha, as she leaned her head against his breast 207

"Yes, I have protected you," he went on, as he laid one arm about her slender form, "I have kept you from the young scape-grace, your cousin, Arthur Boast. I feared he was trying to make love to you, and for that reason forbade him the house."

"Yes," whispered Bertha, "I love you so much."

"Oh, how could you think such a thing?" said she, in her soft, cooing way, yet with a half-indignant intonation in her voice.

"Oh, I am perfectly content now," replied Grim, and his old, pompous air and manner of speech began to assert themselves. "Of course I could not show you my heart in all its tenderness—I was a husband and had to control myself—but now, it seems as if all obstacles have been removed. Do you love me, Bertha? I have thought many times that I could read my answer in your eyes, but I long to hear you say so." 208

"Yes," whispered Bertha, "I love you so much."

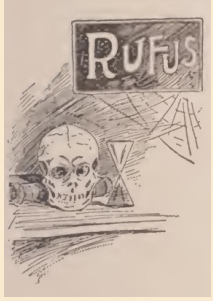
In his daily walks, Rufus Grim was an over-bearing, selfish man, but now he was softened, and his emotion was very great. He looked tenderly and longingly on the drooping head beside him, and was for a time completely absorbed in the intensity of his love for the artful girl at his side.

Yes, she was fooling him. She was the affianced wife of J. Arthur Boast, and yet she must play her part.

"And may I one day call you wife?" said Rufus Grim, pressing her closely to him and kissing her reverently on the forehead. "Say in a year from now," he pleaded.

"Yes," she lisped, gently pressing his hand, "it shall be as you say." As a matter of truth, she was mentally speculating how she could get out of this horrible scrape. He had said in a year—that was a long time. She would have ample opportunity to free herself in some way. Arthur must help her.

CHAPTER XXIV.—THE GOLDEN MAUSOLEUM.



GRIM was a happy man. He would conceal his joy for one short year, and then—and then —. He had at last reached the top-most craig of all his worldly hopes. Wealth was his, and now he had secured the promise of Bertha Allen to be his wife. He called at his lawyer's office the next day and told him he wished to add a codicil to his will. He spoke in his usual loud and confident way, and seemed to constantly remember that he was not only the richest man in Gold Bluff, but, by big odds, the most fortunate. 209

The lawyer knew his client. He knew his whims and wisely humored his eccentricities. It needed but little encouragement and flattery to set Rufus Grim going, recounting the steps he had carved out for himself on life's journey, and the pinnacle to which he had climbed.

Arthur Boast came in and took a seat in the outer room, Grim requested the lawyer to close the door, and asked him what he let that young scoundrel come about the premises for. Then he seemed to remember that he was the victor, and why should he still hold malice? After a little, he again referred to the matter of changing his will, and when the lawyer was ready, he dictated a codicil bequeathing all his possessions unconditionally to Bertha Allen, to which he attached his signature. The lawyer showed no signs of astonishment at Rufus Grim's action, though he guessed the relationship that existed between his client and Bertha Allen. 210

That evening a clandestine meeting between Bertha and her cousin, Arthur Boast, had been arranged.


The clandestine meeting.

Her first words, after the greeting and a kiss of welcome, were in regard to the ordeal she had passed through with Mr. Grim.

“To think, Arthur,” lisped Bertha, “of that old fool asking me to be his wife! Why, I really thought I would die, I did indeed!”

“And what did you say?” asked Boast.

“Why, you sweet old darling, what could I say but give him to understand that perhaps I was willing? I told him to wait a year, and then—.”

“Yes, and then?” hissed Arthur, through his teeth.

“Oh, don’t be foolish, my own darling,” said she, slipping her arms about his neck, “you know I was only pretending; you know that I loathe him, but I have been dependent on his bounty for so many years. I am only too ready, Arthur, to go with you; yes, to the ends of the earth.” She caressed him tenderly, and Arthur’s ill-feeling gave way before her tender entreaties.

He had heard Rufus Grim dictating the codicil to his will, and had been fired with a mad jealousy, but she had confessed all at their first meeting, and he felt relieved. He would not tell her of the codicil to the will; no, not now.

"We must not delay our marriage much longer,” said Bertha, sweetly, “we really must not, Arthur; you must save me from that old bear. Oh, how I hate him!” 211

“Did he attempt to caress you?” asked Arthur.

“Yes,” replied Bertha, slowly, “but he only kissed me once.”

“Only kissed you once!” cried Arthur, and with a savage oath he pushed her from him.

“Arthur, you’ll break my heart,” she cried in stifled pain, and creeping closer to him she clasped his arm with both her hands. “He kissed me on the forehead. How could I help it? He is so overbearing and so determined—I did not know but he would turn me away from his home unless I humored and fooled him. Won’t you forgive me? How could I help it?”

“Yes,” said Arthur, clasping her passionately to his breast, “yes, I’ll forgive you; but you must go away from Rufus Grim’s house, and I will arrange matters and soon we will be married.”

“You make me so happy, Arthur; I could starve, yes, starve willingly with you, rather than live with any other man on earth.”

“I think we had better be married soon,” said Arthur, “say in two weeks?”

“Impossible!” lisped Bertha.

“No, not impossible,” replied Boast, almost savagely,

“I say we must be married in two weeks. I will take you to my father’s for a little while, after which we will commence housekeeping.”

“Why, Arthur,” protested Bertha, “you are the most unreasonable man living; you are, indeed. How can I be married in two weeks? It’s such a short time since mamma died.” 212

“It must be as I say,” replied Arthur, determinedly, “it is for your good. You are left alone in the world, and, Bertha, I love you with the only love that I have ever given to any human being. There, don’t cry; dry your eyes, my darling, and make up your mind that I know what is for your good.” She finally gave in, and the compact was sealed with a lover’s kiss and a tender embrace.

The next day was one to be long remembered. Colonel Bonifield called at the *Prospector* office and told Vance that, at last, they had reached the 500 foot level.


Vance at the case.

“Yes,” said the Colonel, with more enthusiasm than he had exhibited for some months, “we have cert’nly had mo’ trouble, suh, in goin’ these last hund’ed feet than all the other distance put together, but we have kep’ right along, and finally, suh, we are 500 feet below the groun’. Of cou’se, there’s a lot of work yet to do; in fact, a pow’ful lot, in cross-cutting into the vein, but a week’s work, with my present fo’ce of men, will finish the drift-shaft. It’s a vehy proud moment of my life, suh, to tell yo’ that afteh all the trials and delays we have had, that finally we are down to the 500 foot level. There’s a little matteh, Mr. Gilder, that I want to speak to yo’ about. I’m goin’ to be a little short of money. I think, possibly, suh, I have enough fo’ about three or fou’ days’ work yet. We have about fo’ty men workin’, and I am anxious to keep them until we finish cross-cuttin’.”

Vance was aghast. He knew not what to do, and he frankly confessed to the Colonel that the $6,000 which he had given him was, practically, every cent he had in the world of ready money; that he had written to Judge Patton, who had charge of his estate in New York city, and the judge interpreted his father’s will to require his residence in New York city in order to enjoy the annuity.

The Colonel thought a moment, and then said: “Don’t bother yo’self, Mr. Gilder, it’s a matteh of vehy little importance, anyway, I assure yo’, suh; I know my men. Most of them have been workin’ fo’ me oveh a year, and I feel perfectly confident they will stand by me until we finish the work, even if I haven’t the ready money with which to pay them. They’re a grand lot of fellows, I assure yo’ they are, and between yo’ and me, every one of them has great confidence in Gray Rocks; wonde’ful confidence, yes, suh.”

The Colonel bade Vance good-day and started for his mine, and Vance turned to his case with a heavy heart. 213

The winter was late in coming; though it was the first of November, yet the air was comparatively mild, and the breezes soft, yet invigorating.

That evening, Rufus Grim walked back and forth on his wide porch contemplating his own importance. After a little, he walked down through the village and followed a by-path along the mountain side, up toward the old prospect shaft on the Peacock. The night was still and beautiful. The moon was in the last quarter; but her rays were obscured by lazy, drifting clouds, that hung idly in the heavens.

Arriving at the old prospect shaft, he took off his hat, and pushed his fat fingers through his heavy hair. He even unbuttoned his coat and leaned against the low wall about the old shaft. Far below him were the lights of Gold Bluff shining from many windows. He looked toward his home and thought of Bertha. 214

“Yes, she loves me,” he mused aloud, “she is a darling little angel. I always thought she returned my love, and now I know it. What a coy way she has about her! What slender hands! Gad; but it was an ordeal, the declaring of my love for her, but I fancy no one could have done better. No, sir, Rufus Grim is always equal to any occasion.

“I have made myself what I am. After we are married, we will go to New York city and Washington. They will say I have the loveliest little wife in America—they cannot say otherwise. The men will envy me for owning such a jewel. How different she is from other women!

“Bertha!” he mused, “the loveliest name in the world! The little minx! Yes, she suspected that I loved her. She refused ‘em all for me; that scoundrel J. Arthur Boast, among the rest. He is a clever dog, though, and I rather feared him, but now it is all over.

“I wish my law-suit was settled; that is the only speck on my horizon, but the decision in the courts above, I feel sure, will be the same as in the lower courts. Yes, I am lucky; there’s none luckier on the whole face of the earth. I came into this camp with nothing—now look at my possessions.” He chuckled to himself, and in an absent way kicked his foot against the old wall.

“Here is the place I made the discovery. I presume I ought not to blame the dogs of war for being on my track, of course, they want a share of this rich mine, but d———— ‘em, they can’t have it. No, sir, it belongs to Rufus Grim! The gold I have will protect the unmined millions in the Peacock. 215

“Neither court nor jury shall stand before my ambition. My first, yes, my abiding ambition, is for gold, but with it has come a love that knows no brooking for Bertha. God bless her! She is so tender and so refined—-my cup is full to overflowing.

“They say I am successful. Whom shall I thank but myself? No one. I have climbed the rugged and uneven path alone, unaided. I have bent men to my way of thinking; I am greater than all of them; yes, greater than all. I’ll make my marriage a success too, and with my gold and my beautiful wife, I will commence living. No, I have never lived; I have merely slaved and existed, but now I am getting ready to commence.” 216

Thus Rufus Grim fed himself on his own egotism, and recounted life’s victories, resulting from his own exertions.

A dark form crouched near.

A dark form crouched near him, dimly outlined in the uncertain light. Presently it crept stealthily up behind him. There was a hurried rush, a whistling noise cut sharply through the air; a stifled cry, a heavy fall, and Rufus Grinds body plunged forward into the yawning mouth of the old prospect shaft, and his life’s work was over.

His anticipated happiness, his pompous joy, his earthly prosperity, his vanity and vain-glory, all were over. Had he died by any other method, it might have been said that it was well that his death occurred before he discovered that Bertha Allen, to whom he had given all that was tender in his coarse and pompous life, had cruelly deceived him.

It mattered not now, the decision of the higher courts of earth, but rather the decision of that higher court in heaven. A sounding splash from murky waters far below resounded back to the outer world like a farewell echo, and Rufus Grim’s mangled remains rested near the gold he loved so well. Yes, in the vault where his manhood had been bartered for gold, he slept. There was gold on every side—gold above him and gold beneath him—a priceless mausoleum. 217

Yes, at last, all that was mortal of the man of inordinate worldly ambition and restless energy, reposed in the monotonous sleep of unbroken stillness.

CHAPTER XXV.—CROSS-CUTTING IN THE MINE.

HE next day Rufus Grim was missed from the Peacock. His manager could not understand it. Never before had he absented himself from his office without giving the most detailed instructions in regard to work in the mine. When the following morning came and he was still absent, the manager's fears ripened into genuine alarm and soon all the people of Gold Bluff were discussing the mystery of Rufus Grim's disappearance. 218

A vigorous search was instituted, which resulted a few days later in finding his lifeless body at the bottom of the old prospect shaft. At the coroner's inquest it was decided that he had been murdered, as was evidenced by peculiar wounds on the back of his head.

He was laid to rest by the side of his deceased wife, with a demonstration that far excelled any funeral that had ever taken place in Gold Bluff. Such a cowardly murder excited the sympathy of all who knew him. They forgot the pompous, over-bearing owner of the Peacock, in listening to the minister's pious words of commendation over the mangled remains of Rufus Grim, the citizen.

The mystery surrounding his demise appealed to all law-abiding citizens to help hunt down the assassin. In the feverish excitement it was remembered that Hank Casey and Steve Gibbons were sworn enemies of the rich mine owner; indeed, the latter had even threatened his life in the presence of numerous witnesses. 219

The sheriff who had so ignominiously failed in running down the stage robbers, took the lead in trying to ferret out the murderer and bring him to justice. A few days after this, warrants were sworn out for the arrest of Steve Gibbons and Hank Casey, charging them with the crime. Gibbons was arrested, but Hank Casey could not be found. He had disappeared a few days after the murder, and no one knew where he had gone. Gibbons maintained a dogged silence and seemed much subdued and humiliated that not one of his many supposed friends came forward to sign his bond. Handcuffed and accompanied by the sheriff, heavily armed, he appealed in vain to many, but without success. Vance made himself quite unpopular by offering to sign Steve Gibbons' bond. The people were indignant and said it was carrying his ill-feeling toward Rufus Grim entirely too far. As he had no property excepting an interest in Gray Rocks mine, which was undeveloped, he was considered incompetent as a bondsman and promptly rejected.

One evening Vance worked very late setting type on the *Prospector*. It was past midnight when he went to his sleeping room. He was about to retire when he heard some one knocking at the printing office door. He admitted the visitor and found it to be J. Arthur Boast.

"Good evening, Mr. Gilder," said he, "I have come to see you on a little matter of great importance to myself."

"Come in," said Vance, "I have no light in this room; come on into my bedroom."

"You will remember a conversation we had," said Boast, "some time ago at the hotel." Vance assented that he did. "Well, I have come tonight to claim a little of the reciprocal friendship which you promised me." 220

"Circumstances," said Boast, "indeed, shape the destiny of man. Of this I am more and more convinced. To think of us sitting down together as friends a month ago would have been preposterous, and yet I am happy to know we meet as such to-night. What impelled me to send for you the night you visited me at the hotel, I am unable to explain; an impulse that I was not strong enough to overcome, compelled me to do it. I feel, Mr. Gilder, that I have much to be thankful for in your friendship, and yet it has all been brought about by a circumstance over which I had no control. It was not the result of a premeditated judgment, but the outcome of an impulse."

"I hope," said Vance, as he reached Boast a cigar and lit one himself, "that you have no regrets in regard to our late friendly understanding."

"No, indeed," replied Boast, "on the contrary I feel that I am one of the most fortunate men living. By the way," he continued, "this is an excellent cigar."

"Yes," replied Vance, "I received a box from one of my New York friends. It is a luxury that I am not able to indulge in very freely, unless some old chum happens to remember my isolation in these Western mountains and takes pity on me."

"Have I told you," asked Boast, "that I have quit drinking?"

"No!" replied Vance, in some surprise.

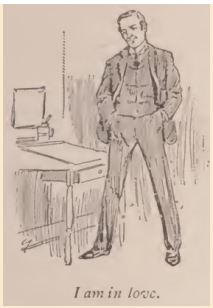
"Yes, I have given up red liquor altogether. The habit got a pretty strong hold on me and I was going down hill at a very rapid pace; indeed, I had quite given up any hope of ever being anything but a hard drinker. Scarcely had I reconciled myself to that belief, than a whim, a caprice, an impulse, or whatever you may call it, took hold of me and said, 'No more liquor, J. Arthur Boast; not another drop,' and from that day to this I have not tasted the abominable stuff." 221

Vance assured him he was glad to hear of the reformation.

"I am in love; desperately so,'.rdquo; said Boast.

"In love?" repeated Vance.

"Yes, I am in love with my cousin, Bertha Allen, and she reciprocates my own tender affection. On her


I am in love.

account, if not for my own, I am indeed glad the red liquor craze has been overcome, and that reminds me of the object of my visit.

222 “Bertha is such a stickler on formalities and so sensitive that I have had hard work to convince her our marriage should take place so soon after her mother’s death. Our arrangements were made to be married the day after to-morrow. Her step-father’s death, of course, complicated matters a little, and she thought we ought to postpone the affair. As usual, however,” continued Boast, “I have convinced her that she is wrong and I am right, and have finally gained her consent, on one condition, that you and Miss Louise will favor us with your presence and act as groomsman and bridesmaid.”

Vance was non-plussed at Boast’s remarks, and for a moment did not know what to say.

“It will be a very quiet affair,” continued Boast, “immediate relatives and all that—she has none, and neither have I, save my father and mother. We are to be married at my father’s. There’s no one Bertha thinks so much of as Louise. They have been chums for many years, and since you profess friendship for me, I feel sure you’ll not refuse my request.”

Vance promised to consider the matter and let him know the next day, after consulting Louise.

“Very well,” said Boast, “I will call to-morrow. It’s really too bad,” he went on, “that a weak little woman like Bertha should have had so much suffering during the last few months. Actuated by sympathy as well as love, I feel it my duty to set formalities aside, marry her, and thus insure to myself the privilege of protecting and caring for her as she deserves.”

223 “Yes,” said Vance, “she has had a great deal to endure. By the way, Mr. Boast, do you believe Steve Gibbons guilty of Mr. Grim’s murder?”

Boast relit his cigar before answering. “Mr. Gilder,” said he, after deliberating, “I hope Mr. Gibbons is innocent. I have tried to look calmly at his case, shrouded in mystery as it is. I have tried to blunt my ears to whisperings and prejudices and not jump with the multitude toward a hasty conclusion Of course, the circumstantial evidence against Mr. Gibbous is rather damaging. Mr. Casey’s disappearance and Gibbon’s continued silence as to his whereabouts, makes it look still worse. The probabilities are that nine out of ten of the people of Gold Bluff believe him to be guilty. They have built up a wall of circumstantial evidence that seems to be impregnable, and unless the public pulse is permitted to cool before his trial comes off, they very likely will convict him, To me, mercy seems much more preferable than a hasty judgment, Well, good-night, Mr. Gilder. I am sorry to have been compelled to call on you at such a late hour, but you know,” said he, with a jocular laugh, “it is an urgent case, and when you are as near to your nuptials as I am, I’ll forgive you if you should rout me out of bed at all hours of the night.”

“A strange man!” said Vance to himself when Boast was gone, “he talks like a philosopher. His judgment is seasoned with mercy. How could I have misunderstood him as I did? It’s rather odd that he and Bertha Allen are to be married. I know Louise will be surprised. After all, it’s best that he should marry Miss Allen, and the very fact that he makes her his wife at this time when she is left completely alone, really ennobles the fellow to me.”

The following day a favorable answer was given to Boast, and the marriage took place the next evening. It was indeed a quiet affair. Whether Colonel Boast and his wife approved of their only son marrying his cousin or not, Vance was unable to satisfactorily decide in his own mind; but he and Louise both acknowledged that they felt freed from an indescribable restraint after taking their departure.

Almost simultaneously with the announcement of J. Arthur Boast’s marriage was the discovery that Bertha Allen was the heiress of all the vast possessions of the murdered mine owner. Rufus Grims attorney became Arthur Boast’s trusted adviser. Work in the great Peacock mine continued, and within a week J. Arthur Boast 224 was in control of affairs; indeed, he seemed a changed man. His responsibilities seemed to subdue without irritating him. The people were quick to discover new elements of strength in the controller of the Peacock, and vied with each other in giving him encouragement.

Work on Gray Rocks had not been progressing so smoothly. Old Colonel Bonifield, fired with the enthusiasm of a Ponce de Leon, believed the forty odd men employed in cross-cutting the drift shaft from the 500 foot level would remain with him, although his finances were exhausted.

It was on Saturday night that he called his men about him and explained his temporary embarrassments.


The Colonel explains.

He paid them off in full, and assured them that three or four more days’ work with their united assistance, was all that was necessary to reach the gold he had been looking for so many weary years, and expressed confidence, in his chivalrous way, that all his employes would report the next Monday morning for work, and stay with him until the drift was finished. The following Monday morning, however, found but a half dozen men reporting for work, much to Colonel Bonifield’s surprise and disappointment.

The old Colonel went into the mine with his faithful adherents, and encouraged them by his undaunted energy. What could have been accomplished by forty men in the space of three days, would require fifteen or twenty days with his half dozen assistants. They lessened the size of the drift shaft, however, and this would make quite a saving of time. Throughout the week, the Colonel, with his handful of assistants, labored incessantly. When the next Monday morning came around, he found that only three reported for duty. This was indeed discouraging, but with a determination that knew no brooking, he went on.

225 Two days later, his three assistants advised him that their families were in want of the necessities of life, and while they still had unbounded faith in Gray Rocks, yet they owed a duty to their families first and before all else, and could not remain with him any longer.

After this, the engineer and fireman took turns in helping the Colonel. One man remaining in the engine room performed the work of both. After a couple of days of monotonous drilling and blasting, the Colonel one evening told Louise of his great discouragement.

“My deah daughter,” said the Colonel, “they have all dese’ted me; I am left alone to finish the work in the

mine as best I can. It's pow'ful humiliatin' to be dese'ted just when I am reachin' fo' the last round in the laddeh." Louise had slipped her arms around his neck while he was speaking.

"My dear father," she said, "why not go to Mr. Gilder; he has been so true to you, and I am sure, now that you are so near finishing your work, he will give you what assistance is needed."

The old man stroked his daughter's hair affectionately. "Yes, suh, yo' are right; he would help me if he could. No one seems to undehstand me, Louise, my deah child, except'n' yo'self and Mr. Gilder. I may as well tell yo' that I called on Mr. Gilder sev'al days ago fo' a little mo' money, and he told me the $6,000 which he had given us was practically every dollar he had in the world. It made my old heart bleed to see the pained expression on the noble young fellow's face—pained because he couldn't help me mo'. I explained to him that 226
it made no diff'ence; that my men—the rascals who have so shamefully dese'ted me—had confidence in Gray Rocks, and that they would stand by me fo' a few days longeh."

The Colonel walked back and forth in an agitated way, and held his head between his hands. "My God, it will drive me crazy," he exclaimed, "if the work is not finished." Louise was startled at his manner. She noticed that he appeared older than ever before, and condemned herself for not giving him more encouragement and help.

"Father, how can I help you?" she asked, imploringly.

"There is no way, my precious little child; come here to me." He seated himself and she nestled on his lap.

"To-morrow morning, father," said she, "now listen, for I am going to have my way—to-morrow morning I am going with you down to the 500 foot level and help you with the work. I'm not afraid, and I'm very strong, too."

"Why, what would Mr. Gilder say if he knew my little girl was down in a mine workin'." said the Colonel, 227
half amused at her earnestness, while he pressed her close and closer to him.

"Mr. Gilder?" repeated Louise, looking dreamily into the bed of red coals in the open grate, "we won't tell him. How heroic it was of him to give you every dollar he had in the world! Tell me, father, do you think any one else would have done so much?"

"No, suh," replied the Colonel, "there's betteh blood cou'sin' through his veins than any man I eveh saw. To be sure, he's a nawth'n man—that is, he was bawn in the nawth; but even the old state of Virginia neveh produced a manlier man."

True to her promise, the next morning found Louise with her father in the drift shaft, 500 feet underground. They had carried with them a well-filled lunch basket, and worked with a determination born of despair. Holes were drilled deep in the solid rock and filled with giant powder, then after lighting the fuse, they would retreat until the blast resounded in hollow mockery through the caverns of the earth. No sooner would the smoke clear away than they would drill again.

While Louise was drilling and putting forth all her strength in work that would have tried the courage of the hardiest miner, her father would take turns with her, and again he would measure the distance from the shaft to see how much farther they had to drift.

It was late in the evening, and *they* had been working on some time in silence, when the Colonel, after making a last measurement, shouted out in the stillness, "Well finish it to-night! Bring the powdeh, while I drill!" and presently another blast resounded like a death knell to hope, tearing away great sections of the adamantine rock. On, on they worked—drilling and blasting.

Louise had become well-nigh exhausted, and rested for a moment, when the Colonel shouted: "Drill on! Drill on! There's no time to lose!"

"But, father," cried Louise, "the powder is all gone. Shall we not send the engineer for more? There's hardly enough for more than another blast."

"No!" yelled the Colonel, almost like a maniac in vehemence, "I have no money fo' mo' powdeh. Let us use 228
what we have. Scrape the cans and put it all in one great blast. I will drill."

Where is the powdeh?

Louise was frightened. She feared her father was losing his mind. It might be, after all, that instead of benefitting him by her constant encouragement and belief in Gray Rocks, she had but added to his vain hallucination, and the shock of another failure might dethrone his reason. While she was thinking, she industriously applied herself to gathering from the different cans that had contained the giant powder all that was left into one. Yes, there was enough for one more blast, but not enough for two.

"Where is the powdeh?" cried the Colonel. She looked at her father, whose face was almost as white as the disheveled hair of his uncovered head. He had thrown aside his hat and coat, and was wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement.

"A moment, father," said Louise, laying her hand on his arm.

"Let me alone, I have no time to wait," he said.

"But listen, father, won't you? Listen to me just a moment."

"Well, what is it?" said he, impatiently, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"For thirteen years, father, you've been striving and striving to find gold in Gray Rocks; what if you are no nearer now than you were thirteen years ago? Will you be so terribly disappointed, father? Come, tell me you will not." She had her arms about his neck and was looking pleadingly up into his face. He pushed her from him.

"Yo' talk as if yo' doubted," said he. "I'm thirteen years nearer success to-night than the day I commenced. 229
It's vehy humiliatin' to me to think that yo', Louise, should doubt yo'r old father's judgment. Have yo' forgotten that my blood cou'ses in yo'r veins? Are yo', too, turnin' against me at the vehy last?"

"Oh, father," cried Louise, as she clung to him and buried her head on his breast, sobbing wildly, "don't speak to me so harshly! It will kill me! Have I not," said she, between her sobs, "stood by you and believed
with you, though all others, unless it was Mr. Gilder, turned against you? I believe now that you are right, 230
father, but it may be deeper down, and I was only trying to make the disappointment less hard in case disappointment should again be the result of our efforts."

"There, there, little girl," said the Colonel, stroking her head affectionately, "I do forgive yo', and yo' must forgive yo'r old, excitable father. Let us put in the powdeh; let us make the last blast, and let its resoundin' peals tell the whole world that we've done our best!"

"Yes, father; that we have indeed done our utmost; and after this blast we will go home and still have faith in Gray Rocks, though the whole world disbelieves."

"We have plenty of powdeh here," said the old Colonel, picking up the can, "to tear ten tons of rock into shreds."

The fuse was lighted and they retired for protection until the powder should ignite. Presently there was a deafening roar, as if the mountains were being split asunder. The Colonel grasped his daughter's hand with such a vise-like grip that it almost made her cry out with pain.

"The last blast!" shouted the old Colonel, when the reverberations had ceased, "the smoke will soon clear away, and then we shall see, yes, suh, we shall see!"

CHAPTER XXVI.—A STARTLING EDITORIAL.

VANCE knew nothing of Colonel Bonifield's discouraging labors in the mine. Indeed, he had 231
been so busy with other matters that he had not found time to call on the Bonifield's for over a week—a very unusual occurrence.

A few days prior to Louise's experience in her father's mine, Vance had been routed up by some one knocking on his window in the middle of the night. It proved to be none other than the missing Hank Casey, accompanied by Marcus Donald of Waterville. A consultation that lasted several hours followed. An understanding was finally reached, and it was agreed that Hank Casey should remain concealed during the daytime in Vance's room, and await developments.

"I may be laying myself liable to the law," said Vance, laughingly, "in concealing a man for whom a warrant has been issued, but, nevertheless, I believe what you tell me, and on our mutual friend, Marcus Donald's advice, I shall act my part unflinchingly."

"Of course," said Marcus Donald, "it's none of my affairs in one sense of the word, but when Mr. Casey came to Waterville, having walked all the way from Gold Bluff by a circuitous route, in order to avoid meeting any one, and told me that Mr. Gibbons was about to be unjustly arrested for murder, I at 232
once became interested, especially with Mr. Casey's knowledge of the affair."

"Ye see, pardner," said Hank Casey, addressing Vance, "I 'lowed things was goin' to be pipin' hot in these 'ere diggin's, fer I heered a rumour that Steve an' I was both to be arrested. I knowed' t'wan't no use fer both of us to lay 'round here till our hands an' feet were tied, so, sez I to Steve Gibbons, sez I, 'Steve, you make your perch here in Gold Bluff, an' don't you run nary an inch, and I'll scoot out an' try an' scare up some help an' turn the tables on these 'ere chaps. Of course, nuther of us liked Rufus Grim any too well; that is, we had no hankerin' love for him; but I 'low were not quite low enough down to commence murderin' people, even if they did cheat us out of a rich mine like the Peacock. This game ain't out yet," he went on, "the higher courts

may reverse the decision of the court below, and in that event Steve an' I will yet have justice, though it s been dangnation slow 'bout comin'."

"I am greatly astonished," said Vance, "at your revelation. It is entirely contrary to my theory of the case. I am beginning to feel, however, that my judgment amounts to but very little in this western country, though I must say I have received great encouragement from your words, Mr. Donald, in regard to Waterville property. I will throw a bomb into the enemy's camp by writing an editorial for the *Prospector* that will touch a tender place, if Mr. Casey is correct in his statement."

It so happened that on the very day that Louise and her father were working in the mine, the *Prospector* was issued, and contained the following editorial: 233

THE RUFUS GRIM MURDER.

The history of Rufus Grim's demise, though still shrouded in mystery, will doubtless, when the facts are known, startle the people of Gold Bluff even more than the murder itself. It is true that Steve Gibbons is accused and languishes in the county jail, and that a warrant is out for the arrest of his old associate, Hank Casey. In the excitement of the hour, our people may have interpreted circumstantial evidence as proof of guilt. As a matter of fact, not one jot or tittle of damaging evidence, in the Prospector's judgment, can be produced against these men.

The idea of suicide has been effectually set aside by the findings at the coroner's inquest. No one doubts that it was a cold-blooded, cowardly murder. We believe the murderer is in Gold Bluff to-day, and like the wolf of old, is clad in sheep's raiment.

Our people should understand the difference between circumstantial and real evidence. It is probably true that both Steve Gibbons and Hank Casey were on anything but friendly terms with Rufus Grim, but they were not his only enemies; indeed, there is one in Gold Bluff who was secretly, if not openly, a much greater enemy to the rich mine owner than either of the suspected parties.

It is time that prejudice gave way to reason, and that others, who profited much more by Rufus Grim's removal, should not only be suspected, but subjected to the crucial test of a thorough investigation.

This article set the people of Gold Bluff agog. The entire camp, from center to circumference, seemed startled by the boldness of Vance Gilder's double-leaded editorial. When J. Arthur Boast read the article, he was dazed by its audacity. He sent for his attorney, and throughout the afternoon a consultation that lasted far into the night was held.

Work on the Peacock was shut down the following morning at Boast's request, and the men assembled at the company's office. Boast, addressing the miners, said: 234

"You, doubtless, have read the editorial in yesterday's *Prospector*, written by a stranger and interloper in our midst, Mr. Vance Gilder, who foully accuses me of murdering Rufus Grim.


The people excited.

I am now going down to the office of the *Prospector*, and shall demand an *amende honorable*. So many of you as see fit may accompany me."

"Ay, ay!" the crowd shouted, "we are ready!" Indeed, the citizens of Gold Bluff almost to a man, sided with Boast, and said Vance was showing a cowardly venom at J. Arthur Boast's unexpected success and good fortune, that was neither dignified nor just. Boast led the way to the *Prospector* office, and was followed by a throng of determined miners and angry citizens, who were in a frame of mind that boded no good for Vance Gilder.

Louise Bonifield had just come over to the Prospector office with a message from her father, and met Arthur Boast at the office door. Louise tripped lightly into the office and saluted Vance with a cheery smile and good morning, while Boast paused in the doorway.

"Good morning, Mr. Gilder," said he, savagely.

"Good morning," replied Vance.

"Who wrote this editorial?" asked Boast, striking vigorously a copy of the *Prospector* which he held in his hand. "I tell you," continued Boast, "I never murdered Rufus Grim, and any man that says I did is a liar, abase scoundrel, and a contemptible whelp!"

"That's right! Ay, ay!" exclaimed the mob that was standing behind Boast, ready at a moment's notice to loot the printing office. 235

Vance was cool and collected. He noticed that Boast spoke in his old-time thin, piping voice, and his eyes were restless and glittered like a fiend's. The element of manhood and of the philosopher had wholly disappeared.

Louise stepped quickly forward before Vance could make a reply, and laying her hand on Boast's arm, said: "Arthur, you know I have always been your friend. I am sure Mr. Gilder has never accused you of murdering Mr. Grim. What do you mean?"

"But he has accused me," retorted Boast. "Read this!"

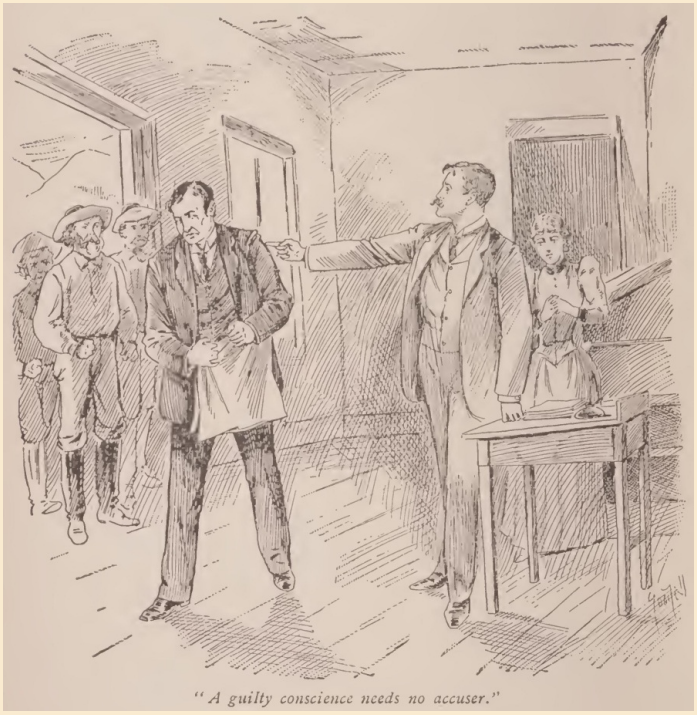
Vance stepped hurriedly from behind the case, and drawing Louise gently back, stood face to face with Arthur Boast. He was calm and determined. "Where," said he, "where have I accused you of murdering Rufus Grim? Point out the sentence in the article where your name even appears?"

"Well, you haven't used my name, but you might as well have done so."

"No," said Vance, as his eyes gleamed with fiercest indignation and anger, "I have not accused you, Arthur Boast, but you, by this act, with your mob of hirelings behind you, have accused yourself. Now you must, and by the eternals, shall answer to the law. A guilty conscience," he continued, "needs no accuser, and it is your

accusing conscience that has prompted you to come here and publicly charge yourself with the crime. Neither you, nor your host of admirers on full pay, can intimidate me. If you can pass through the test of a thorough investigation, and can be proved innocent, then I will have no more to say, but until you do this, I shall publicly accuse you and denounce you as the murderer of Rufus Grim!" 236

Vance towered up like a giant before the writhing and shriveling form of J. Arthur Boast.



"A guilty conscience needs no accuser."

"Well, I don't know that you have accused me in this editorial," whined Boast, "and I don't know as I need to take any steps of revenge until you dare to use my name in your paper. I guess I'll wait and see what my lawyer advises. Fall back, boys, I have nothing farther to say at this interview." 237

"But I have," said Vance, in thundering tones, "and before long I shall have much to say."

"Well, you won't say it through the columns of the Gold Bluff *Prospector*. It is my property; I have the bill of sale in my pocket."

"Yes," said Vance, "yours is the weapon of a coward; the unholy use of the power of money, but your plan of securing possession of the Prospector has no terrors for me. The copy of the *Prospector* that you hold in your hand contains the last editorial I ever expect to write for the paper. It may please you to know that my last dollar is gone; I am penniless, and without interference from you the *Prospector* has been issued for the last time under my management. I have been typo, managing editor, devil, form setter, city editor, publisher and everything else, trying hard to make an honest living. I am now through. You and your host of satellites will oblige me by leaving the premises. Come to-morrow morning and take possession. You'll not find me in the way."

Boast turned, and facing his mob of backers said, with the forced laugh of a whipped man:

"I thought I would squelch him, boys; he had to cave in, you bet." His voice was shrill and squeaky, and his braggadocio air, as he led his admirers away, hid but poorly his nervousness and agitation.

Vance and Louise were alone. Louise had stood by during the interview, startled and alarmed. She marvelled at Vance's strength; at his grandeur; at his nobleness; and when she heard him say that now he was penniless, she remembered the sacrifices he had made to help her father. He turned toward her and their eyes met. It came to her like an inspiration, that her respect and admiration for him in times past had been but a prelude to the pulsing love she now felt for him. She reached out both her hands toward him; he took them, and a moment later she was sobbing on his breast. No word had been spoken, but volumes had been interchanged in that one look.

The doorway was darkened. They quickly looked up, Louise through her tears, and Vance with a beaming countenance. Colonel Bonifield was surveying the situation with a look of genuine surprise on his face.

"Yo' almost pa'lyze me, suh," said the Colonel, "indeed yo' do. Why, Mr. Gilder, I sent my little girl oveh here to tell yo' that I had a matteh of vehy great impo'tance to talk oveh with yo', but she was gone so long, suh, that I became impatient and came oveh myself." 238

"Oh, papa," said Louise, "Mr. Gilder and Arthur have had a terrible quarrel!"

"A quarrel, suh; why, how is that?"

"I am always ready to talk with you, Colonel," said Vance, in a confused way, and unconsciously retaining one of Louise's hands.

"Well, now, if my little girl," said the Colonel "God bless her! will go oveh home and see about preparin' dinneh and lay an extra plate fo' yo', we'll have our talk and come oveh a little lateh."

While no word had been spoken between Vance and Louise, yet he believed that his great love had been understood and rewarded. He lifted her hand to his lips as she started to go, with that chivalrous respect so becoming in the knights of old. When she was gone, Vance turned and thought he saw a smile chasing rapidly over the Colonel's face.

“Wait a moment, Colonel,” said Vance, “I have some choice cigars that were sent me from New York. Here, try this one.”

“Thank yo’,” said the Colonel, “I neveh felt mo’ like smokin’ in my life than I do this mawnin’ As they lit their cigars, they walked out in front of the printing office. The morning sun mellowed the crisp and invigorating mountain air. Vance narrated his interview with Boast. The Colonel’s face clouded with a troubled expression. Presently he said: 239

“Mr. Gilder, we have at last finished our work on Gray Rocks.”

“I am very glad,” was Vance’s reply.

“Yo’ fo’ced me, suh, at one time,” said the Colonel, “to make a promise. When I pledge my word of honor, suh, as I did to yo’, it is sacred. Heretofore yo’ most naturally, Mr. Gilder, have asked me what I advised. I now come to yo’ and ask, what do yo’ advise?”

“Colonel Bonifield,” said Vance, “I am glad you ask me what I advise. You know, Colonel, when you first came to New York city, you thought that if you could only get to the 300 foot level you would cross-cut into a mine of untold wealth.”

“Yes, suh,” replied the Colonel, “that is so, and yo’ freely gave me the money to push the work.”

“Yes,” said Vance, and unconsciously with the toe of his boot he dug in the sand as if he was seeking the 300 foot level, “at the 300 foot level your efforts were not rewarded. Then you started for the 400 foot level.”

"Yes, suh,” said the Colonel, “and again you gave me the money.” 240

“Yes, yes,” said Vance, as the toe of his boot dug still deeper in the sand, “but again you failed. Then I gave you the last dollar of ready money I had in the world to sink the shaft on down to the 500 foot level.”

“Vehy true,” said the Colonel, “and would have given me mo’ if yo’ had had it.”

“Most assuredly,” said Vance, as his boot struck the rock that lay beneath the sand. “Yes,” said he, planting his heel firmly on the rock, “you have at last reached the 500 foot level. Heretofore, I have listened to your advice, and now I hope you will be guided by mine. I have been away from New York over two years. I have not left Gold Bluff for more than a year. I have remained close to Gray Rocks, alternately hoping and doubting that you would be successful. Colonel Bonifield, I have no regrets. You have been earnest and sincere, though sadly mistaken, in regard to this mining venture.”

“Well, well, suh,” said the Colonel, as he waited for Vance to go on.

“I have something to say to you, Colonel—I love your daughter with my whole heart, and more devotedly, it seems to me, than ever man loved woman before. I have a beautiful home in New York city, with ample means to care for her and you. My advice is that you and your lovely daughter, with those dependent upon you, come with me and we will leave these western wilds, so associated with disappointment, and go to my city home. This morning, for the first time, I have had reason to believe that your daughter reciprocated the great love I bear her. You are now an old man, Colonel, and while I have not a doubt in the world that if you would sink your shaft to the 600 foot level, say, or, perhaps to the 700 foot level, you would strike the vein of gold you have been looking for so many years; yet, what is the use, Colonel Bonifield, what is the use? My love for your daughter is very great, and I believe it is unselfish. A home of plenty awaits us. Hardships and disappointment alone have been the reward of our earnest efforts. Why not go away from it all? Yes, let us go and forget the trials, hardships, and hopes deferred of a frontiersman’s life, and let me help you spend the remaining years of your life in quiet, peace, and contentment.” 241

“Yo’ do me honor, suh,” replied the Colonel, as he brushed a mist from his eyes, “bawn in the nawth, yet yo’ possess the true chivalry of a southern gentleman. Yes, suh, yo’ do, indeed. It is true we sunk the shaft to the 300 foot level, and finally, to the 500 foot level, and you, suh, have fu’nished the money fo’ this great work. I thought my men would stay with me and help cross-cut into the vein, but I found, when I spoke to them about the matteh, that they only had confidence in Gray Rocks so long as there was money in my purse to pay their wages every Saturday night. When they dese’ted me, suh, I worked away alone, and finally that little girl, Louise, went down with me yeste’day early in the mawnin’, and we didn’t get home until after nine o’clock last night.”

"What!” said Vance, “Louise been working down in the mine?” 242

“Yes, suh, the hardest day’s work I eveh put in on Gray Rocks was yeste’day.”

“Why did you not let me know?” asked Vance, “I would have come and helped you most cheerfully, rather than have let her do the work of a man, and 500 feet under ground at that.”

“Well, hold on, Mr. Gilder, let me tell yo’. We had a goodly portion of giant powder yeste’day mawnin’, and yo’ve no idea how much assistance Louise gave me. I took the measu’ments a dozen times, suh, durin’ the day, and it seemed to me that by workin’ a little late, we might finally blast through into the vein.”

“Yes, Colonel, ‘where the vein might have been,’.rdquo; said Vance, with a merry twinkle in his eye, while he struck his heel in an absent way against the rock. The Colonel paid no attention to the interruption.

“Finally, suh, we made our last, drill, and filled it up with every grain of powdeh we had left. My little Louise had to dust every powdeh can in ordeh to have enough to make the last blast. We retired, suh, as usual, afteh I had lit the fuse, and yo’ ought to have heard that last blast go off! My daughter, suh, God bless her, tried to dull the disappointment that she felt sure was awaitin’ our effo’ts by gettin’ me to promise not to be too much disappointed; but I had confidence; yes, suh, right up to the last. Well, suh, the smoke finally cleared away, and my God! suh, my old eyes wept for joy!”

“What!” exclaimed Vance.

“Look at this piece of ore, Mr. Gilder; richer, yes, suh, richer than anything ever discovered in the Peacock. Yes, suh, my deah Gilder, we have made our last blast, and Gray Rocks is worth two million dollars. The agent of a rich minin’ corporation of Butte City made me an offer of that sum this mawnin’.” 243

CHAPTER XXVII.—AT LAST!

EFFECT on the people of a mining camp of one of those fabulously rich “strikes” like Gray Recks mine proved to be, may be imagined but cannot be described in words. Shopkeeper, citizen and miner alike, go wild with enthusiasm over so important a discovery. Congratulations were showered upon Colonel Bonifield and Vance from every quarter. Every one in Gold Bluff felt it his privilege to call at Colonel Bonifield’s home and pay his respects to one who had lived so long in their midst, and who had so persistently and so patiently maintained unbounded confidence in a proposition that was looked upon by others as a money-losing venture. 244

Independent of the fortune left him by his father, Vance was now a millionaire. In his prosperity he did not forget his old friends. He called on the sheriff and again offered himself as bondsman for Steve Gibbons. The bond was accepted, and a half hour later, Gibbons was released. Hank Casey surrendered himself, and was also immediately bailed out of custody.

One evening the stage coach brought to Gold Bluff Homer Winthrop and his young bride, *nee* Virgie Bonifield. It was a great surprise to the Bonifield household.

"And this accounts,” said Vance to Homer, after he had congratulated him, “this accounts for Marcus Donald hastening away from Gold Bluff.” 245

“Yes,” said Homer, “I could not think of having the ceremony take place without my old friend and associate, Marcus Donald, being present. We have traveled together so long, in adversity as well as in prosperity, that we are quite inseparable.”

“He is a great character,” replied Vance, “his disinterested assistance and help I have recently seen demonstrated in a marked degree.”

“He is one of the ‘salt of the earth,’.rdquo; replied Winthrop, enthusiastically, “he is not only a sunny day friend, but one in the hour of need—indeed, he is a man among men. By the way,” he continued, “I want to congratulate you with all my heart on the great Gray Rocks strike.”

“Thank you,” replied Vance, “the prosperity could never have come at a more opportune time. My finances was reduced to the last dollar when Colonel Bonifield broke the news to me.”

“I received your letter, written some ten days ago,” said Winthrop, “and have sold those twenty-five lots your New York friends purchased.”

“Thank God for that!” ejaculated Vance.

“Yes, I sold them for $800 apiece, or $20,000. As they only paid $2,500 for them, I hardly think they can complain at the profits. Oh, you have no idea what a city Waterville has become. The great waterpower has been effectually harnessed, the streets are paved; electric car lines, planing mills, and scores of other manufacturing concerns are in full operation. Our population is now numbered by thousands, instead of hundreds, while busy activity and prosperity are apparent on every hand.” 246

“You quite astonish me, old fellow,” replied Vance, “indeed you do; but I needed no greater proof of Waterville’s prosperity than your report of the sale of lots belonging to my New York friends. Once, old fellow, I gave you my promise to wait five years before passing judgment on your enterprise. Hardly half that time has elapsed, yet it gives me pleasure to assure you that I am already better satisfied with Waterville than I ever dared hope for.”

“Thank you,” said Homer, “your ‘Two Honorable Exceptions’ article in the New York *Banner* was indeed prophetic.”

“Yes,” said Vance, “while the prophecies of Col. Alexander, B. Webster Legal, Gen. Ira House, and other members of your Waterville Town Company, have been more than realized.”

“My associates,” said Homer, “in the great work of building up Waterville, have at last met with a compensation which I cannot but feel is a just one. Taking it all and all, they are a grand lot of fellows, each one a study within himself; nevertheless, collectively a phalanx of strength.”

“By the way,” he continued, “it was my noble little wife, Virgie, that started the boom last spring. She learned in some mysterious way that a private school fund had been created for her special benefit, and in order to return the money, purchased the first lots that we had sold for months and months, and from that day the boom started, until now—well, you’ll have to see the place to realize the wonderful changes and improvements.”

"Hers,” said Vance, “is certainty a sweet and noble character.” 247

“Yes, indeed,” replied Winthrop, laughingly, “I still think she is the most practical member of the Bonifield family.”

“Indeed,” said Vance, “I remember the allusion, and I beg to assure you that my opinion remains unchanged in regard to Louise.”

“I notice,” said Winthrop, “that our old acquaintance, J. Arthur Boast, has had quite a rise in the world—at the head of the Peacock mine, I understand.”

“Yes,” replied Vance, while a sorrowful expression swept over his face, “I fear his rise preceeds a mighty fall. Gibbons and Casey have been arrested for the Grim murder, but have given bonds, and are waiting for their attorney, B. Webster Legal, and to use one of Steve Gibbons’ expressions, ‘Things are liable to be sizzlin’ hot for Boast before long. ‘”

“Why,” interrupted Winthrop, “you cannot mean—”

“Yes,” continued Vance, “I do mean that J. Arthur Boast murdered Rufus Grim. I have the evidence. Hank Casey saw the act.”

“Why, you astonish me!”

“Casey,” continued Vance, “was at first afraid to report the matter, nor did he until he went to Waterville. You were away at the time, and he confided to Mr. Donald. His own and Steve Gibbons’ long years of warfare with Grim over the Peacock, he was afraid, would cause people to suspect them of the crime. He divined rightly. There is a great prejudice against both of them.”

“I never was more surprised in my life!” said Winthrop, "and while I never liked the fellow, yet I had no idea 248
he would commit murder.”

The next day a warrant was issued for the arrest of J. Arthur Boast, charging him with the murder of Rufus Grim. A most diligent search was made, but the officer was unable to find him. His wife was in tears and prostrated with grief, declaring she had no idea of his whereabouts.

It was the morning before Thanksgiving that Vance received a certain letter. It was from Arthur Boast, and read as follows:

At Home.

Dear Sir:

Why I write to you above all others, is more than I can tell. An impulse, actuated by some wandering spirit from the regions of darkness and the damned, forces me to it. The things I want to do, I am unable to accomplish. The acts I loathe and abhor, I am made a cat’s-paw of to perform by some unknown impelling force.

It may be that some men can shape their own destiny—mine has been shaped for me.

I have never seen the time I did not fear you, and cannot remember the time I did not hate and despise you. I sought your friendship for protection. When I needed your support, you turned against me.

Rufus Grim was my evil genius in this life, and he is more unbearable dead than living. Every night since I murdered him—yes, it was I who did the deed—he has visited me in my dreams All night long he walks up and down my bed-room—back and forth—and curses me. Sometimes I pull the covers well over my head, and try to sleep, but he pulls them off and rubs his cold, clammy hands threateningly over my face. He has found out also that I robbed the stage coach and bribed the sheriff.

I am tired of it all. I have not slept for ten nights. My brain is on fire. You want 249
vengeance, but I intend to cheat you—yes? I will cheat you—and in this way I find my only consolation.

An hour ago my attorney came to my hiding-place, and told me the higher courts had reversed the decision. When this is known all Gold Bluff will turn against me. Even now I can hear them hissing the words. Scoundrel! scoundrel! murderer! murderer! in tantalizing scorn.

My ambition has always been to be wealthy. Now I am so poor that if I continued to live and was not hunted down and sent to prison, I would not even have a crust of bread to eat.

Yes, Gibbons and Casey are now the owners of the Peacock mine—the higher courts have so decided. With their money, they’ll join you in persecuting me—but I’ll cheat them as well as you. Your longing for revenge shall not be satisfied.

At the old prospect shaft on the Peacock, where I struck the fatal blow that hurled Rufus Grim into eternity, you will find all that remains of the persecuted, despised and hated.

J. Arthur Boast.

To Vance Gilder.

A search was at once made, and his lifeless body found near the old prospect shaft.


At the old shaft,

A bullet wound in his temple, and the weapon still clutched in his hand, told of the maniac’s suicide.

The people of Gold Bluff were astonished at the rapidity with which history was being made. The sheriff was missing, and his absence gave color to Boast’s statement about the sheriff being an accomplice in the stage robbery.

The undisputed owners of the Peacock mine, Casey and Gibbons, the multi-millionaires, were entirely vindicated by Boast’s letter, and not a shadow of suspicion rested against 250
them; indeed, the citizens of Gold Bluff suddenly remembered that Mr. Henry Casey and Stephen Gibbons, Esq., were most excellent gentlemen. It was astonishing to find how many “friends” flocked around them to tender their congratulations.

It was Thanksgiving night, and Vance, with the members of the Bonifield household, was seated before the open grate, where a cheerful fire burned brightly. They had been talking 251
it all over, and the Colonel, in a subdued but satisfied way, thanked God that he had been permitted to live long enough to see a fulfillment of his life’s dream.

Both Louise and Virgie were animated and happy, and Homer Winthrop had been dilating upon Waterville’s wonderful prosperity.

Presently the door opened, and Aunt Sally came in. “Good evenin’, Mr. Gilder,” said she, in her rich Southern accent, “I ‘low this is the happiest day of our lives.”

“Yes, indeed,” replied Vance, “we owe many apologies to your brother for our seeming lack of confidence in Gray Rocks.”

She looked at him quickly over her spectacles, and replied, “Lack of confidence, Mr. Gilder? I’d like to know who lacked confidence in my brother Benjamin’s mine! Fo’ myself, I have believed from the first that Benjamin would strike it if I could only keep him workin’ away long enough.”

Vance was non-plussed, and was about to reply, when the Colonel interposed. “Yo’ see, suh,” said he, with a knowing twinkle in his eye, “I have often obse’ved to yo’ that my sisteh is a most ext’ao’dina’y person; yes, suh, most ext’ao’dina’y indeed. She has been a powehful support to me, suh, in my effo’ts.”

This seemed to partially pacify Aunt Sally. Presently she said, “I ‘spect, Mr. Gilder, yo’ are thinkin’ ‘bout a convehsation we had a few months ago in regard to sinkin’ the shaft. Of cou’se yo’ didn’t know how much strategy I had to resort to that I might keep Benjamin from getting disheartened. Of cou’se I won’t allow nobody to say anythin’ against my brother, but I ‘low he is the contrariest man livin’, I do indeed, suh. Time and again I have been fo’ced to pretend that I was opposin’ him, just to make him go on work in’ and sinkin’ that shaft, but at last it is all over with, and I’ve much to be thankful fo’ that I was spared so that I could keep on naggin’ at Benjamin and spurrin’ him up, until finally his effo’ts were rewa’ded.” Soon after, she embraced Louise and Virgie tenderly, and retired.

When she was gone, the Colonel looked up from the crackling fire, into which he had been gazing long and earnestly, and said, “I presume, Mr. Gilder, my sisteh is without question one of the greatest characters that ever lived, I do indeed, suh. I’m discoverin’, even to this day, new traits of superio’ity and strength in her. Indeed, suh, she is no o’dina’y woman. Though bawn in the South, and possessin’ in a high degree the very great refinement peculiar to our Southern ladies, yet at the same time her diplomacy in accomplishin’ great results equals the shrewdest Nawthe’n Yankee. Indeed, suh, she is a most rema’kable character; yes, suh, most rema’kable.” A little later Homer and Virgie retired, pleading weariness. “Do you know,” said Colonel 252
Bonifield, looking up from the fire again, “since our great discovery was made, I seem to want to do all my sleeping in the mawnin’.”

“Papa,” said Louise, “is too busy thinking over and over again his great good fortune to get sleepy; but my! how late he does sleep in the morning!”

“He has justly earned,” said Vance, “the rest he claims.’

“Indeed he has,” replied Louise, approaching her father and pushing gently back his long white locks, “you are my darling old papa,” she continued in a caressing way, “and may sit up as late as you like, and sleep until noon every day if it is your wish.”

“I’ll tell yo’, Mr. Gilder,” said the Colonel, rising and standing before the fire, “this little girl of mine is bound to spoil me; yes, suh; she always did humor me eveh since I can remembeh, and she is worse now than eveh befo’ Well, well, you’ll have to excuse me until I have another pipe of tobacco.” His elegant suit of black of the latest pattern added to his dignified appearance, and made a strange contrast, Vance thought, with the miner’s garb he had worn for so many years. He pushed through the portieres that opened into the library, and Louise and Vance were left alone, for the first time since the rich discovery had been announced.

A doubt came into Vance’s mind whether he was glad of it or not. Heretofore this noble girl whom he had loved so long and patiently had been in a measure dependent upon him—now she was an heiress. He fancied he detected a restraint in her conversation that was embarrassing. His own unworthiness rose up before him, and he was engulfed in the cowardice of a lover! What if she should refuse him? Cross-cutting into a pinched-out vein would be nothing in comparison with such a disappointment. Presently, at his request, she went to the piano, and sang for him.

She sang with far more feeling than ever before. Her heart was filled with a maiden’s dearest happiness—a 253
deep, reciprocal, unspoken love of limitless depth. Yes, with the unerring divination of a woman, she knew that Vance’s love was wholly hers. There was a love song before her, and under its cover, she would declare her own without restraint. She sang with the rapture of a mountain thrush, in notes so rich, so innocent, so plaintively low, so delightfully thrilling.

Vance listened with bated breath. There are pleasures so keen as to be painful. “I am so inferior to her,” he thought, with unselfish humility, “but to live without her is impossible.” Finally she ceased playing and turned toward him with the music of her soul radiant upon her face. A momentary silence followed.

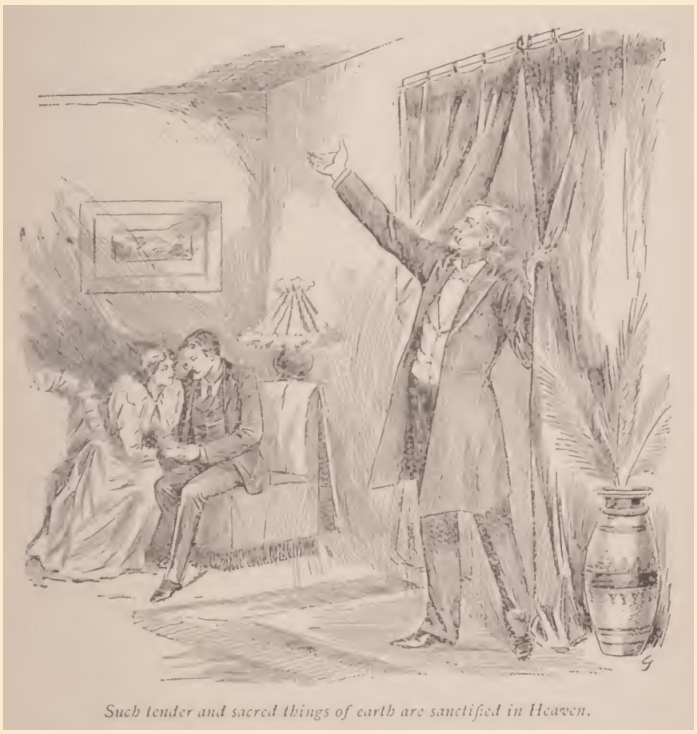
“Louise," said Vance, and there was a tremulous rhythm in his voice, notwithstanding he tried to crush it 254
into naturalness, “it may be news to you, but I can no more help loving you than I can help breathing.” He walked back and forth before the open grate. “Please do not look away from me,” he went on, “as if I were so unworthy—I know that well enough. I would rather love you without hope than have the unselfish devotion of all the other women of the earth at my feet.”

She had lifted her hands and covered her face. Her happiness was very great. She fears he would see it, vet he must know it, else she would be miserable.

“What I have said,” Vance went on, “may be nothing to you, but it is either life or death to me. To-morrow I shall leave Gold Bluff for ever unless you wish me to remain.” Vance stood before the open grate still and motionless, and when she looked up, she saw his face was white as marble. She rose from the piano with tear-stained cheeks, flushing pink as La France roses with morning dew-drops upon them. She came forward a few steps, and then paused. Her golden wealth of hair reflected the forelight, and made a halo about her 255
girlish face and form. Her full red lips were parted with the tender smile of youth, purity and love. She was thinking, “I am certain of his love; I am sure of mine for him, and I will give myself entirely, yes, wholly into his keeping.” With one hand over her beating heart, she held the other toward Vance. In a moment he was by her side, and raising her hand, pressed it passionately to his lips. In the deliciousness of love’s dream, he led her to a divan and seated himself beside her. His arms stole about her, her head rested on her breast, and there a devout lover’s affection was sealed with love’s first kiss.

A moment later the portieres parted, and in the doorway stood the Colonel. His long white hair fell back from his temples, and there was a look of gladness upon his countenance. He lifted up his face toward Heaven, and in tones that were scarcely audible, said: “Such tender and sacred things of earth are sanctified in Heaven.”

Yes, again the Shuttle of Fate wove into the web of Destiny the better attributes of a manly man and the ennobling love of a gentle woman.



Such tender and sacred things of earth are sanctified in Heaven.

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