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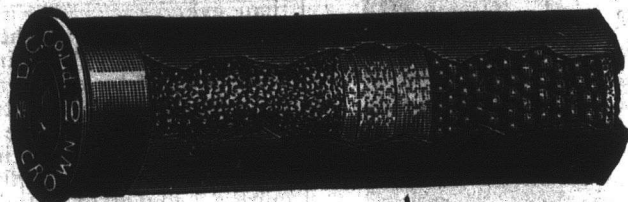
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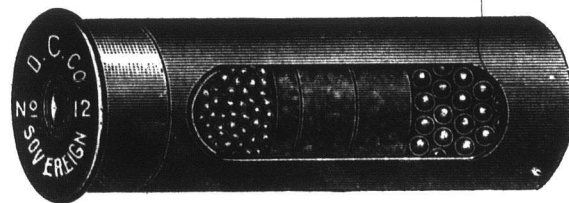
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so I just ran out to see if something couldn't be done. I tell you, Bill looked eight feet high, and his eyes were bloodshot and crazy, and he kind of sobbed when he breathed—and if you ever looked down the wrong end of a frontier Colt, you can imagine my feelings for yourself. But I went straight up to him and wrested his gun away and stood in front of him so Pa couldn't shoot him from the house. Fine? I should say it was—nobody was more surprised than me, I'm sure, and I'm surprised now! But I guess I knew pretty well Bill wouldn't have hurt me for the world; though, looking back at it, I can't see how I didn't choose underneath the bed.

"Well, I led him back to the bunk-house and made him sit down on the wooden steps. The tears were rolling down his face and I felt too sorry for him to say a word. They say a girl always likes a bad man—not that Bill was really bad, you know—only unfortunate that he should have complicated his biennial bust with a quarrel with Jackson. When he saw Pa prancing towards us he begged like mad for the pistol to kill himself with; and I almost felt like giving it to him when he talked about wearing stripes and perhaps being sent up for years. But I felt sure I could handle Pa; and, anyway, Bill was sort of my dog you know, and I wasn't going to let anybody hurt him. But I had a tough time with Pa. Pa is such a stickler for law and order. Wanted to take him off to the county-seat and lay a felony charge against him. He hadn't been deputy sheriff very long, you see, made it worse by saying that it was all about a woman—never mentioning that I was the woman and Jackson had said something then . . . Well, Bill was such a gentleman that he wouldn't bring my name into it. Said 'woman,' like that, till I wonder Pa didn't burst.

"It was then that I felt what training can do for a man—with Pa, I mean—and how wise I had been to always keep the upper hand of him. He was determined to settle Bill out of hand—was positively prejudiced against him—and for a time it looked as though I was nowhere in the scrimmage. And I think he was cut up too about my liking Bill so well, for of course (didn't I tell you?) Bill was just silly about me—always had been since Ah Sue gave him that chicken tamale on the doorstep—wore things next his heart and all that, and thought anything sacred I had ever touched. The whole ranch is a sort of church to Bill, you know.

"Well, as I said, Pa was awful. He paced up and down like a royal Nubian lion, while I, with my heart in my mouth, did Little Spangles in the wild beast's cage. Little Spangles won out, of course, though once or twice it was a pretty close call. But at last Pa quieted down and went off, quite mild, to find Mr. Jackson. But he didn't find Mr. Jackson. Nobody ever has. He disappeared like an orange under a conjuror's hat. All that's left of him is up-stairs in two trunks and a debit balance of a hundred and thirteen dollars on the pay-roll. I think he must have changed his name and quit the country. If you had ever been up against Bill I guess you'd have done it too. Anyway, peace descended like a beautiful dream, and Bill stayed Dago foreman instead of going into the jute business at San Quentin Prison. I dare say he might never really have got there, but he might have, you know, and he didn't want to try.

"That's all more than a year old now and Bill has never been on a tear since. He says it was all my running out at him and looking down his pistol, but I tell you it was the scare he got from Pa! It wasn't as though he really liked it, you know—drinking. I mean—but sometimes he'd come to the place where he simply couldn't go on, and was so hopeless and desperate and miserable—that was his last biennial bust, for now, of course, he has got something to live for and it's all different, and he's become one of the little saints of the Y. M. C. A. They say he's the pinkest thing in the room when he gets up and does solemn warning, though I think it's rather fine of him, don't you? And

the fun of it is that he runs a boxing class there too, and punches their little heads off afterwards. Oh, Bill's a great boy, and they're going to make him president . . . Oh, dear, once I get started talking about Bill I never seem to know when to stop. Why do you look so grave, Captain? Aren't you pleased?"

"I have something to say about Bill, too," he returned slowly.

"His early life and his early scrapes," she said, "and how you don't believe it will last? There isn't much about Bill I don't know already—his being sent away from England and how they never wanted to see him again."

"I am out here to take him back," said the Captain.

"He won't go easy," said the girl. "I am not so sure," said the Captain. "Circumstances have altered."

I don't see very well how he can refuse. I—we—the family, I mean, are delighted to hear that he has retrieved himself and risen superior to the boyish follies that threatened to engulf him. Let me express to you our deep sense of obligation—our gratitude—for your evident kindness to him at a time when he needed it most."

"I don't think I care to receive the family gratitude," she answered coolly. "What did they ever do for Bill but give him the cold shoulder from the time he was left an orphan at twelve?"



"tramped up the three steps . . . like a mule battery going into action"

Sent him to Eton and Oxford as a preparatory step to giving him a thousand pounds and telling him to scoot. You can imagine how well equipped he was to strike out for himself. Couldn't even spell English till I got after him with a speller, and had to work nights before he could write a page without at least six school-boy's mistakes. The only thing he really knew was 'Paradise Lost,' which had been crammed into him for the army. He must have found it nice and useful."

"He was given his chance," said the Captain, "and, like many another, he wouldn't take it. He was put into a good regiment and received an allowance that with economy would have amply sufficed to let him hold his head up. Then he went the pace and was forgiven. Then he went the pace again and wasn't. He has no right to complain."

"Oh, but he doesn't," she exclaimed hastily. "I wouldn't have you think that for anything."

"But you seem to do it for him," said the Captain.

"I don't suppose my opinion matters particularly."

"Well, it was enough to bring me from England," said the Captain. "What you think or don't think has suddenly become of great importance to many people."

"Don't you think it is about time to tell me why?" she asked. "You have hinted and hinted till I feel like a person in a detective story—and I