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I passed, as I entered the shop, a splendid horse hitched outside. It was a fine, large roan, well built for travelling; and in my then frame of mind I imagined from a casual glance that it was a horse especially selected for its lasting qualities, should an emergency require them to be put to a test. The owner of the animal, the person who had caused so much nervousness on the part of Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth, was a man nearly six feet in height, weighed fully two hundred pounds, was at least sixty-five years of age, and was very erect and commanding in his appearance. I noticed all this at a careless glance, as also that his hair was dark, though slightly tinged with gray, and his features very prominent. His nose was very large, his mouth unusually so, and he had a pair of the keenest, coldest small gray eyes I have ever seen; while he wore a large, plain gold ring on one of the fingers of his left hand.

I made no remark to him or to any person about the place, and merely assumed for the time being to be a village loafer myself. But I noticed, without showing the fact, that the man occasionally gave me a keen and searching glance. When the work had been completed by Walker, I stepped outside and made a pretence of being interested, as any country gawky might, in the preparations for the man's departure; and was patting the horse's neck and withers as the stranger came out with the saddle and began adjusting it, when I carelessly assisted him in a free-and-easy country way.

There were, of course, a number of people standing about, and a good deal of senseless chatting going on, which the stranger wholly refrained from joining in; but while we were both at work at the saddle, he said, without addressing me, but in a way which I knew was meant for my ears: "Stranger, do you know where Old man Crane lives?"

I took my cue from the manner in which this was said, and followed it to the best of my ability. I was now as certain as either of my friends that the man was a blackleg of a dangerous order, whatever his special line of roguery might be. We were both busy at the saddle on the side of the horse where there were the fewer loungers, and being close together, I replied in the same tone of voice:

"Cross the river to the east, take the main road up through the woods until you come to Jesse Miller's farmhouse. Then