

"Get out!" Ridgeley repeated. "I'm convinced this is a wildcat. Don't get angry," he said, seeing the red flush into Carl's face—"Mr. Glover, I'm a plain man, and I always state my thoughts in a blunt, unvarnished way. I am not trying to insult you or throw any reflection on your uncle's business ventures. You asked my opinion, and I gave it. This is a wildcat. It makes no difference to me whether you develop it or not. Suppose it is shady, intentional, a fixed plan to water the stock and do the public, it makes no difference to me. Only, I like to see a square deal."

"You insinuate then," Carl said with sudden dignity, "that my uncle is aware of its real value."

"I insinuate nothing, young man. I have been in the mining game for fifty years, and there isn't any part of it unknown to me. There is nothing to be gained by insinuating, knocking, or blackmailing anyone's holdings. Wherever there are mining properties, there are wildcats. Take this Cobalt country all through. There aren't above a score of valuable claims in all with a capitalization of about fifty millions. When you count the entire capitalization it aggregates two hundred millions. Look at the amount of money staked for which returns are decidedly uncertain. These places are boomed, boomed to the public. My God! Glover, don't you know there are professional boomers in this very camp, paid to keep various stocks on the upward run? It is done to-day. It's been done always, everywhere. I don't say your uncle's property is being developed in that way, but it looks suspicious. Ground poor, foreman a rascal, an inexperienced man put in to take charge! What have you to say regarding that?"

"I respect your scientific views, Mr. Ridgeley," Carl answered rather constrainedly, "but I cannot entertain any suspicions against my uncle. If you knew what he has done for me!"

"A man might do everything for his own blood, but be a vampire on the public. How much does the average business man care for the public? As much as he can get dollars out of it! You've seen life, Glover, and you know the claws."

"Taking for granted, then, that this is valueless, my work for the next four weeks will amount to nothing. Good encouragement, that!"

"Practice, it will be the best of practice and will stand you in good stead should you ever need to do the like again, the best of training, in fact. I appreciate your work so much that I am prepared to take you on as assistant to one of my foremen should you care to leave your uncle's service when he takes charge."

"Thank you, I am much gratified. I had no idea I had made such headway."

"I feel sorry you have been put into a delicate position. It is probably just as well that you should know the camp looks upon your property as in the 'cat' class; there is no discredit to you, however."

"Does Freeman know this?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And he is simply putting in time to draw his pay?"

"Exactly, or perhaps he is in on the game."

"I decline to recognize any game."

"You will get your eyes opened before you have been in Cobalt a year. Take up any daily paper and you will find columns upon columns of wildcat advertising at fifteen cents, twenty, fifty cents a share, with an engineer's report, list of directors, summary of development made, etc., etc. Get up with your own feet on the silver ground and there isn't a blessed stick in sight where these paper mines are placed. Search those same papers and you won't find the Ridgeley mines blocked out in mammoth letters. No, by my honor, they don't need a well of ink and a mountain of type to voice their worth. They are known to real investors, and they stand right here in substance before all comers."

"But," Carl objected, "once they are developed they invite inspection."

"Certainly. The ore-house is stocked with ore, or there are cars

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