

her. Nellie was a curious girl, very free with her father's customers and up to any amount of "chaff," but she drew a strongly marked line, beyond which like Carute of old she decreed "thus far shall thou go but no farther." Fun and jokes she would allow but not a single liberty, and when Bob put his arm round her waist she sprang away from him, her dark eyes blazing with indignation. "No you don't," she cried hotly. "How dare you? I thought you were a friend, Mr. Dunham."

"And so I trust I am," said Bob somewhat lamely.

"Then why don't you treat me as such, and not merely as a saloon keeper's daughter?" retorted the girl, and Bob confessed afterwards he felt meaner than a Chinaman. He stammered out some apology and promised never to offend again, whereupon Nellie forgave him and was all smiles once more.

She was a beautiful woman with jet black hair and eyes, and a lithe active figure. As she did not inherit her good looks from her father, who had none such to boast of, I presume she took after her mother, who was said to have been an actress of some sort and had died years before. However that may be, she was a fine girl and had had many an offer of marriage, but had refused them all for one reason or another, which did not seem to trouble old Tucker, who rightly supposed she was an attraction that brought grist to his mill, and she was to be seen at most of the race meetings, mounted on her horse Melbourne, the two forming as handsome a pair as you could wish to gaze upon, for in those days Melbourne was a magnificent five year old thoroughbred, fit for a princess to ride, and Nellie sat him with an ease and grace that made the picture perfect. How old Tucker had become possessed of such a valuable animal was a mystery, probably for some gambling debt, but to return to my tale.

"Don't let on that I told you Mr. Dunham," said Nellie in a low voice, as she stood beside his chair, "but I would not have much to do with those two in the other room, if I were you."

"No? And why not Nellie?" asked Bob, looking up with a careless laugh.

"Oh I dunno," the girl rejoined, "I don't like 'em."

"Ain't they square?" enquired Bob.

"Square enough I dare say, but don't trust 'em over far" was the answer.

"All right Nellie, and thanks for the warning," said Bob as he pushed his plate away and finished his tankard of ale.

In spite of what Nellie had said it was not long before Bob found his way into the other room where Tucker and the two were playing euchre. Jake King and Bill Norris were professional gamblers, the former having drifted down from San Francisco where he had been badly "wanted,"

while the latter hailed from Sidney with a doubtful reputation. Old Tucker was the best of the three, and he was no great shakes, so you will allow that it was a pretty shady crowd. But Bob did not mind, for he declared any company was better than merely his own, of which last he had too much at his farm at Eulalong. Call him foolish if you will, but recollect that much solitude is apt to make one callous as to the choice of companions, just as hunger gives a relish to the coarsest viands. Bob liked Nellie better than anyone he had seen from Brisbane to Adelaide, but his feelings towards her were of a free and easy nature, and had not as yet struck very deep, so there was no difficulty in persuading him to take a hand, and after a game or two of euchre Jake King proposed four handed poker.

You will agree with me that for pure gambling at cards poker beats all other games hollow and a good deal of money was soon on the table, but what struck Bob afterwards—though not at the time—was that nearly invariably both Tucker and Norris threw up their cards, leaving King and himself to play the hands out.

There is no occasion to relate the particulars of the game minutely, suffice be it to state that after various turns of both good and bad luck, Jake King "bluffed" Bob out of his last sovereign, and it being then midnight he yawned, gathered up the money and rose to go, when Bob cried out "Oh it's early yet; I'll have another try if Tucker will be my banker."

"Better stop, for to-night Mr. Dunham," said Tucker, in which opinion Bill Norris appeared to concur, but Bob persisted, and King required no pressing to continue. The first round or two Bob won slightly, then he was dealt a hand, and drew three cards, King drawing one, and Tucker and Norris two apiece. Bob put down his cards in the manner of one who has concluded not to play, but immediately seized them again with a careless smile and put down ten pounds. Jake King who had noted both the action and the smile covered Bob's ten with twenty pounds. The other two players threw down their cards as usual, leaving the game between Jake and Bob, the former of whom could scarcely conceal a contemptuous sneer as he glanced at his adversary, who was seemingly bluffing so badly, since without looking at his cards, he hesitated, laughed awkwardly, and kept raising Jake everytime, borrowing money from Tucker until finally Jake planted down his last note, and Bob having covered it, was "called." As he placed his four aces on the table a very ugly look came over the face of Jake, who made a quick almost imperceptible movement with his hand towards the pack of cards on his left, but at an ominous clicking sound from the direction of Bob's

chair, he simply tossed up his cards exclaiming with a harsh laugh, "That is the first time I ever mistook four aces for a bluff."

Bob said nothing, but collecting his winnings he crammed them into his pocket with the exception of the amount borrowed from Tucker, which he repaid.

"Won't you stand a drink before you go Mr. Dunham?" said Jake as Bob rose and made for the door, "I'm dead broke."

Bob took a couple of sovereigns on the table without a word and immediately left the room. Jake glanced at Bill Norris and swore softly, but the latter broke into a volley of oaths asking his confederate whether he would take a hint in future and stop before making a dead fool of himself. Jake passed over the strong language without notice and handing one of the sovereigns to Tucker told him to get a bottle of champagne and provide Norris and himself with a room to sleep in.

The apartment to which Tucker conducted the pair adjoined Nellie's bedroom, being separated therefrom by a thin partition. Nellie had retired for the night, and having extinguished her light, was dropping off to sleep, when she was roused by the opening of the champagne. This was a common occurrence, and she would speedily have composed herself again, had she not caught sound of Mr. Dunham's name. Nellie was not, you are aware, a refined girl, and had none of those nice notions which people properly brought up have, regarding listening to a private conversation, so noiselessly slipping out of bed she stepped across the floor and placed her ear to the partition.

"I tell you," she heard the voice of Jake King saying in low tones, "that by starting early we shall be two good hours ahead of him, as he has to go to the bank, and we can easily be ready for him by the time he reaches Lonely Creek, which is just the spot for our purpose, so solitary and unfrequented that we may be in Sidney and on the sea before there is any wind of the affair."

"I don't half like it," was the reply of Norris, "but it will be a big haul, and is worth the risk."

"Risk! there is no risk," Jake answered. "Lonely Creek is five miles away from anywhere, and —" here the speaker's voice was lowered, so that Nellie could no longer distinguish what was said, but she had heard enough to know that robbery, if not murder, was being plotted against Bob, and since the reputation of her father's house was such as to make it better not to court publicity, she determined to advise Bob secretly and persuade him either to postpone his journey back to Eulalong or take another route to that by Lonely Creek. She listened for some time longer, but the conspirators talked in such low tones that she could