

THE WILDCATTERS

A Tale of the Cobalt Country.
S. A. White

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CHAPTER XX.

ALL the hours of that next day Carl Glover fought in the silence of his room with the demon which was loose within him. Shame, humiliation and remorse mingled together to make him writhe at what he had done. His soul revolted at the sudden passion, yet he knew it would conquer him if placed in the least temptation. As evening drew near he felt the blood-call stronger and stronger. The green of the cloth and the yellow of the gold was in his eyes. The glare and the throng seemed round him and the lust of winning was saliently predominant.

With hands clenched behind his back Carl paced up and down the room as he had done all the sleepless night before, fighting the demon's influence at his heart. Tonight the Clan was waiting in its luxury of appointment for him. His companions expected the re-appearance of the luckiest man in Cobalt. These were men and women who played through the same force of habit that caused them to indulge in whist over home tables in their native cities. The Clan was waiting with passive power for this great majority and with growing allurements for some who had yet to travel the longest road of life.

For Carl it waited with all hell's compelling force, a force which was not of earth since it reached beyond the precincts of the grave. The hereditary fire that had consumed his father's hopes and self burned in Carl's veins.

When the first night shadows darkened the panes and the lights of The Clan shone out like evil lamps to point his way Carl's burning desire almost overpowered him. His cheeks were white and drawn with resistance. In the eyes was a haunted look of horror. Great drops of the essence which we know as bitter agony hung upon his forehead. For hours he wrestled with unseen impish hands that seemed to be dragging his feet towards the threshold. He pulled the blinds tightly so as to shut out the world. He tried to read. He tried to work. He tried everything but thinking of the accursed wheel, yet to no end! A grip which was more than his human strength held him in thrall. Unsteadily he arose and found his hat. Then he half opened the door. There he turned back, opened it again, and once more turned back.

Oh! heaven, for something to hold! Something that would keep him there! He strove to pray, but the words seemed only a hollow mockery. What right had he to pray when there was no penance in his heart, nothing but evil flame?

Then there rose to him Jean Thurston's face, pure, fair, serene and holy. At the picture he cried aloud in agony.

He had severed her heart from him by an act of folly. "Far above her!" she had said. She did not know how far below; and the demon was still pulling him lower.

"Something of hers!" he thought. With quick search he took out the things from his trunk and seized a glove of Jean's, a tender, scented keepsake. He held it up reverently while his eyes grew moist, but at his heart the thwarted summons was still drumming. He felt as if he must go. Carl turned away with a groan of defeat, laying the glove back with one last look. But in the one last look he saw something else that brought a cry from him, a cry which was like triumph. Carl stooped and took from the confusion of things an object that he covered with kisses, tears falling as he did so. His heart full of a great mastering thankfulness, the tempted man turned his face to the mirror. The demon light was gone! The features were pale and marked with suffering, but each lineament held a new radiance of quiet joy.

Mother! O Mother! Carl whispered, kissing again the object which he held. It was his dead mother's prayer-book, the cover of white vellum soiled and worn and its corners tinted with knots of faded violets. The spirit of the living had proved powerless. The mother love was stronger to save than the betrothal love.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE meeting of those interested in Graham's property took place some days later. Carl's uncle had taken a decided turn for the better, although the physician said it would be months before he could take any part in business enterprises. He had been moved during the day

hours into the room which Carl used as a study, and where all his books were kept. It was a cosy spot, with a big couch by the afternoon window. In this room the meeting was called. Jacob Graham lay on the couch. The others were ranged in front round a small table when Carl came in.

His uncle had never named the men who were financing the development of the mine, and Carl had never inquired. Imagine his surprise when he saw at the table Colonel Theodore, Freeman, Giles, and Jasper, a lawyer from Toronto, who, Carl remembered, had defended Whitmore in his college scrape.

"Here you are!" Theodore exclaimed as Carl entered. "We have been waiting on you."

"Carl, these are the men financially interested in our mine and without whose assistance I could not carry on the work," said his uncle. "I am much indebted to them."

"I am pleased to find you here, gentlemen. I have known you in a friendly way and I hope our business connections will be as pleasant as our friendship," Carl said cordially enough. At once they commenced the discussion of their plans.

"Have you drafted any forms or suggestions?" Graham asked.

"Yes," Theodore replied. "Jasper has a crude outline of the whole thing. Of course it can be modified at the suggestion of anyone if the opinion is approved by the rest. Jasper, just explain what will have to be done."

Caleb Jasper, to Carl's eye, was a man who had seen hardship. His figure was lean and spare. The hair fell over his furrowed brow in thin, sandy threads. The face was clean-shaven, shrewd and hard, with eyes that shifted. He arose, papers in hand, to give them the needed information.

In the first place," he began, "the company which we are about to form must be characterized by a striking and substantial name. There is much in a name. Those of you who have had anything to do with public sentiment will be fully aware of that fact. Before giving my suggestion, perhaps some of you have one of your own?"

The rest declared they had no name ready to offer.

"Then," Jasper continued, "I would suggest CONSOLIDATED DIAMOND COBALT as a suitable name for the property and company."

"Excellent!" Theodore exclaimed. "I don't think we need search farther. Do we, gentlemen?"

A murmur of approval assured him that the name was agreeable to all. Carl had to admit it was a striking one and suggestive of a strong company behind it.

"Next," the lawyer went on, "our capital should be at least \$2,500,000. I would call it fully paid and non-assessable. The first allotment of shares should be about 200,000, which I would offer at 25 cents a share for one month or so. Then the price might be advanced to 50 cents. We can put on a second allotment and so on, gradually increasing the price. Freeman has a detailed account of the property and the development which can be used in advertising. Then we have the engineer's report, which will also be used."

"What engineer?" Carl asked.

"C. O. Bretham," Jasper answered. "He is an expert."

Now Carl didn't know Bretham and therefore didn't know he was one of the self-styled "experts" who were over-running Cobalt.

"I never heard of him," he said. "Why didn't you get a man like Kingswell? It would have paid. Everybody knows him and the public would have faith in his report."

"He was engaged some miles north," Jasper said. "Bretham is an expert, too. Then there is the matter of the officers and the directors, gentlemen. I shall give my suggestions, but please remember all this is but one opinion. I do not wish to dictate in any way."

"Everything has been quite satisfactory so far," Col. Theodore assured him. "I cannot see where it could be improved."

"Nor we!" said Graham and Giles. "For president, of course we shall have Mr. Graham," the lawyer resumed. Col. Theodore, Giles, and Freeman clapped their hands in approval. The uncle made some weak protests which were drowned.

Carl sat silent. A strange distrust was coming over him. On what were they building all this scheme? On a wildcat?

He was about to speak when Caleb Jasper's cold, hard

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