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was not avarice which prompted him  
 when he said, "Considering the risk,  
 one hundred dollars is very little."

"Of course," said Courthorne. "Still,  
 it isn't worth any more to me, and  
 there will be your expenses. If it  
 doesn't suit you, I will do the thing  
 myself and find the boys another  
 guide."

He spoke indifferently, but Witham  
 was not a fool, and knew that he was  
 lying.

"Turn your face to the light," he  
 said sharply.

A little ominous glint became visible  
 in Courthorne's eyes, and there was  
 just a trace of darker colour in his  
 forehead, but Witham saw it and was  
 not astonished. Still Courthorne did  
 not move.

"What made you ask me that?"  
 he said.

Witham watched him closely, but  
 his voice betrayed no special interest  
 as he said, "I fancied I saw a mark  
 across your cheek. It seemed to me  
 that it had been made by a whip."

The deeper tint was more visible  
 on Courthorne's forehead, where the  
 swollen veins showed a trifle, and he  
 appeared to swallow something before  
 he spoke. "Aren't you asking too  
 many questions? What has a mark  
 on my face to do with you?"

"Nothing," said Witham quietly.  
 "Will you go through the conditions  
 again?"

Courthorne nodded. "I pay you  
 one hundred dollars—now," he said.  
 "You ride south to-morrow along the  
 Montana trail and take the risk of the  
 troopers overtaking you. You will  
 remain away a fortnight at my expense,  
 and pass in the meanwhile for me.  
 Then you will return as rancher Witham."

Witham sat silent and very still  
 again for more than a minute. He  
 surmised that the man who made the  
 offer had not told him all and there  
 was more behind, but that was, after  
 all, of no great importance. He  
 was prepared to go a good deal for  
 one hundred dollars, and his bare  
 life of effort and self-denial had grown  
 almost unendurable. He had now  
 nothing to lose, and while some impulse  
 urged him to the venture, he felt that  
 it was possible fate had in store for  
 him something better than he had  
 known in the past. In the meanwhile  
 the cigar he held went out, and the  
 striking of a match as Courthorne  
 lighted another roused him suddenly  
 from the retrospect he was sinking  
 into. The bitter wind still moaned  
 about the ranch, emphasizing its  
 loneliness, and the cedar shingles  
 rattled dolefully overhead, while it  
 chanced that as Witham glanced  
 towards the roof his eyes rested on  
 the suspended piece of rancid pork  
 which with a little flour and a few  
 potatoes had during the last few  
 months provided him with a sustenance.  
 It was of course a trifle, but it tipped  
 the beam, as trifles often do, and the  
 man who was tired of all it symbolized  
 straightened himself with a little mirth-  
 less laugh.

"On your word of honour there is no-  
 thing beyond the risk of a few days'  
 detention which can affect me?" he said.

"No," said Courthorne solemnly, know-  
 ing that he lied. "On my honour. The  
 troopers could only question you. Is it  
 a deal?"

"Yes," said Witham simply, stretch-  
 ing out his hand for the roll of bills  
 the other flung down on the table, and,  
 while one of the contracting parties  
 knew that the other would regret it  
 bitterly, the bargain was made.

Then Courthorne laughed in his usual  
 indolent fashion as he said, "Well, it's  
 all decided, and I don't even ask your  
 word. To-morrow will see the husk  
 sloughed off and for a fortnight you'll  
 be Lance Courthorne. I hope you feel  
 equal to playing the role with credit,  
 because I wouldn't entrust my good  
 fame to everybody."

Witham smiled dryly. "I fancy I  
 shall," he said, and long afterwards re-  
 called the words. "You see, I had am-  
 bitions in my callow days, and it's not  
 my fault that hitherto I've never had a  
 part to play."

Rancher Witham was, however, wrong  
 in this. He had played the part of an  
 honest man with a courage which had  
 brought him to ruin, but there was now  
 to be a difference.

(To be continued.)



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