

"No—no! Don't shoot! Yes, I'll go—only—don't shoot."

The abject cowardice the great man now displayed was almost pitiable. Bill's lip curled in disdain. He had expected that this man would have shown a bold front.

He had always believed Lablache to be, at least, a man of courage. But he did not allow for the circumstances—the surroundings. Lablache on the safe ground of the prairie would have faced disaster very differently. The thought of that sucking mire was too terrible. The oily maw of that death-trap was a thing to strike horror into the bravest heart.

"Which path?" Baptiste spoke, waving his hand in the direction of the mountains.

Lablache moved cautiously forward, testing the ground with his foot as he went. Then he paused again and eyed the mountains.

"The right path," he said at last, in a guttural whisper.

"Then start." The words rang out cuttingly upon the night air.

Lablache fixed his eyes upon the distant peak of the mountain which was to be his guide. He advanced slowly. The Breeds followed, Jacky and Bill bringing up the rear. The ground seemed firm and the money-lender moved heavily forward. His breath came in gasps. He was panting, not with exertion, but with terror. He could not test the ground until his weight was upon it. An outstretched foot pressed on the grassy path told him nothing. He knew that the crust would hold until the weight of his body was upon it. With every successful step his terror increased. What would the next bring forth?

His agony of mind was awful.

He covered about ten yards in this way. The sweat poured from him. His clothes stuck to him. He paused for a second and took fresh bearings. He turned his head and looked into the muzzle of Baptiste's revolver. He