

stories of a similar nature that were in circulation. So Christmas spent as his had been had no particular interest for Old Platte, and was pretty much the same as any other kind of day upon which there would be an equally good excuse for stopping work and getting venomously drunk. At any rate, the memories that clung around that Pike county whisky-shop were none of the pleasantest or most gratifying; and with a grunt of general dissatisfaction he rekindled his pipe, put a couple of sticks on the fire and allowed his mind to slide off into a more congenial train of reflection.

To Thompson, Gentleman Dick's words had come as a sort of revelation. He knew well enough that Christmas came in December, and also upon what day of that month it fell, but of late the days had gone by so monotonously, and had so little to distinguish them one from another, that he had kept no account of them, and had no idea that it was so near. Some indefinable influence that he could not account for had of late sent his mind groping into old and better channels, and consequently when he was reminded of the presence of Christmas he felt disposed to accord it a measure of consideration rather different from that with which several of its predecessors had met. Like Old Platte, he had regarded it as a good day to go on a "bust" and initiate a "drunk" of more or less duration, but just now he seemed as if inclined to take a different view of it. His eyes could take a clearer and healthier view of the past than he had for a long time had, and its old memories and scenes flocked up before him now, bright through the dim mist that time had cast over them, and fresher and sweeter than ever by contrast with the gloomy present. The snow-shoes slid from his lap and one by one the thongs of buckskins dropped upon the floor, as he leaned back in the corner of the broad chimney, his face resting upon his sinewy hand and his eyes looking through the fire into the world of the past.

Old Platte lay curled up in his bearskins and blankets fast asleep, but the other still sat by the fire in the same position—still dreamily thinking. How long he had sat there he did not know. The fire had sunk into a glowing heap of coals, fast changing into soft white ashes, on which now and then a melting snow-flake that had stolen down through the chimney would fall and disappear with a short angry sizz, and the shadows in the cabin were deep and dark. Suddenly it seemed to him in his dreaming that a voice called him by name, and he awoke from his reverie with a chill and a shudder and a sense of indefinable dread creeping over him—a dread of what, he could not tell. A handful of chips blazed up brightly and lit up the cabin with their flickering light as he turned nervously toward the patient, quiet face behind him. The eyes, shaded by the long black eyelashes, were still on the fire, and while he was confident that he had not been called, he was dimly conscious of a great change that had taken place. As he still looked anxiously at the faded features, the eyes left their long watching of the embers and were raised to meet his. He felt he was wanted, and was by his side in a moment: "How d'yer feel, old man?"

Gentleman Dick smiled as he laid his wasted fingers across the sturdy brown hand that leaned on the edge of his bunk, and turning with difficulty on his pillow, he said in a voice scarce above a whisper, "Thompson, old fellow, you and Platte have been kind, very kind, to me. I won't trouble you much more now. I'm going to say—good-bye to you ;