

dollars as my fee for getting you off two cases might have sent you to prison for twenty years, maybe, hung you to the nearest tree."

The heavy body pulled itself together, the hands clinched. "Blackmail—you think I'll stand it?"

"Yes, I think you will. I want two thousand dollars to help a friend in a hole, and I mean to have it, if I think your neck's worth it."

Teeth, wonderfully white, showed through the shadow of the beard. "If I had to go to prison—or swing, as you say—do you think I'd go with my mouth shut? I'd pay up alone. The West would crack—holy Heaven! I know enough to make it sick. Go on and see! I've got the West in my hand." He opened and shut his fingers with a grimace of cruelty which shook Rawley in spite of himself.

Rawley had trusted to the inspiration of the moment; he had had no clearly defined plan; he had believed that he could frighten the old man, and by force of will bend him to his purposes. It had all been more difficult than he had expected. He kept cool, imperturbable and determined, however. He knew that what the croak quack said was true—the West might shake with scandal concerning a few who, no doubt, in remorse and secret fear, had more than paid the penalty of their offences. But he thought of Di Welldon and of his criminal brother, and every nerve, every faculty was screwed to its utmost limit of endurance and capacity.

Suddenly the old man gave a new turn to the even. He got up and, rummaging in an old box, drew out a dice-box. Rattling the dice, he threw them out on the table before him, a strange, excited look coming on his face.

"Play for it," he said in a harsh, croaking voice.