

"Well," responded Carteret with a smile, "I fancy that state of affairs could be altered, and in the first place I venture to predict that the result you desire could be brought about within the coming twelve months by merely leaving those shares alone. Anyway, we can talk over the matter later on, and with that in view you might come down to the ranch with me to-morrow."

The blood swept into Sydney's face, and he could feel his heart beating exultantly.

"May I telegraph that news to Miss Carteret, sir?"

"Yes," laughed Carteret. "I think you could go—so far. In the meanwhile, however, you are not authorized to go any farther."

Sydney left him soon after this, and he and Hilton and the man from Long Divide held a feast that evening. On the morrow he started for the ranch with Carteret, and though his companion confined his conversation to mining matters during the journey, he called Sydney to his room and sent for Clare shortly after they arrived.

"It seems that you would be content to marry Sydney?" he inquired when she came in.

"Yes," replied Clare, simply.

"In spite of the fact that he is by no means overburdened with money?"

"That wouldn't count in the least."

"Well," said Carteret, with a twinkle in his eyes, "there was a time when I had looked forward—in case neither of you objected—to giving you to him, and I see no very strong reason for changing my mind now." He turned to Sydney. "I suppose, if it appeared advisable, you would be willing to fill my place as a director of the Long Divide?"

Sydney started with astonishment; and when he expressed his unalloyed satisfaction with the prospect, Carteret nodded.