

the same bein' due, o' course, to Creepin' Kolker and Tune-Up's kind and generous throwin' o' three acres and two kings into the sky-pilot's hand every other deal o' the cards. For they'd tamed her down to a one-bit ante, and explained to him the meanin' of a straight, and a full house, and a bob-tail flush, and how to count out the cards, and hold 'em so the rest o' the table couldn't see 'em too easy, and not beam like a risin' sun every time he happened to hold three of a kind in his hand.

"But when Bill waits to put out the lamps that night, whistlin' kind o' soft and gentle to hisself at what he sees, the sky-pilot wakes up and finds hisself three dollars and ninety cents in the hole, for all them four old reprobates can do to pump royal flushes into his hand. Which loss puts the gang onto the whole lay-out, that night, while the sky-pilot is a-prayin' to his Maker for strength, and rehearsin' his wickedness and his woes, as open as if he was singin' down some blind-canon in the Barren Grounds. For this here angel-buster, as I said b'fore, was mendin'-up in the mountains out there on a four-hundred dollar grant from his little gospel-joint down East, and lays out he ain't a-goin' to do any gamblin' with this college money, seein' he hadn't even enough of his own left for a sleeper goin' home.

"And when the mail came through, next day, things looked even worse than ever for this here sky-pilot, for he goes to Bill kind o' white and treemerin', and says as how the home folks can't send him out the second remittance, and that he'll have to go down to Red-Tail Crossin' with the mail-carrier and start East that night. He don't indulge in no open bleatin', but Bill, a-standin' back and eyein' him as he goes out to take his mornin' breathing-exercises, can see he's sure broken up about goin' back East without gittin' his cure.

"Which same he lays out to the poker-gang in the sun-parlour, while the old judge is blaspheming his bad leg and Captain Jade is profanin' over his mornin' pint o' liquid misery from Bill's sulphur-springs.

"And the Doc was tellin' me he'd be as sound as a dollar ag'in, with another two months o' this altitood', and good-livin', says Bill, quite impartial. So they talks it over, man to man, and when the sky-pilot comes down kind o' solemn and white round the gills, they all shakes hands with him, and lays out as they're mighty sorry to lose him. Which same touches him some keen, and leaves him kind o' blinkin' his pale blue eyes, so's not to show no unmanly tears. Then the old judge up and says as they ought to have one hand round, just for the sake o' old times, and the sky-pilot shakes his head and says 'No,' and Captain Jade suggests just one little pack-pot for the fun o' the thing. But still the sky-pilot hangs back, and then Tune-Up rubs him down a bit, and then Creepin' Kolker wheedles and lures him on a little more, and the final outcome is that Bill lends the angel-buster a ten-dollar bill, and he's sittin' at the table with the other four card-sharps, havin' what he sure allows is his last game o' poker on this terrestrial globe. Which same it was.

"Creepin' Kolker is dealin', and when the sky-pilot gits his chips, they all antes quiet and solemn.

"Can't you open?" inquires Creepin' Kolker.

"I can!" says the Sky-pilot, beam-in' and blinkin' over his cards.

"But the others keep uncommon quiet and solemn.

"How many?" says Creepin' Kolker.

"Two cards," says the sky-pilot.

"And he takes up the cards, and turns 'em over, and rubs his chin, and grins outright.

"But they all stay in, none the less, and at a kick under the table from Creepin' Kolker they all start waggin' and smilin' over their hands, all but Tune-Up.

"I quit!" he says, throwin' down his hand.

"And he moves round to the sky-pilot, and looks at his hand over his shoulder, and gives a soft whistle,

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