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Leek nor Viringhy thought of you. You started out for the Headland. At each end they thought you at the other—"

"Ah. . . But it's turned out rotten anyway," Huntoon said dismally.

"Viringhy was all in for cartridges."

"It seems Orion might have been held off with clubbed guns. My God, man,—with this ship-load, Orion can—"

"I know, but Huntoon—it's great to hear all this about you. There were times when I seemed to draw the whole black business for bringing you here—"

"I couldn't talk about it until I was clear. You wouldn't have turned me loose to wig-wag the enemy. . . Say we've got to hold the trail at the Pass—"

"I don't see how we can with empty guns," said I.

"There must be dynamite on the mining job—oh, hell, we've got to hold the trail at the Pass."

I was silent. Huntoon had not touched food since yesterday morning, and had only one drink of water which he had asked from Leek, who overtook him on the way to the Headland at the end of the fight. I found a canteen among the men—who were all thirsty—and helped him along as much as he would allow until we reached the Pass. Already there was dusk in the gorge. Many miners were massed there—the draw-bridge down. . . It struck me that Maconachie grinned in a queer fashion. I was busy connecting Huntoon with bacon sandwiches. The Pass began to jam with Viringhy's force filling in. The bulk of his men were left there. I wanted Viringhy to go ahead toward the valley. I didn't have glad tidings. We found a couple of mules for the rest of the distance. The trail had a dusty beaten look. The air was heavy, and Tropicana veiled in dusk. Huntoon had become strangely dear. Far down I heard the braying of mules. The day's blood-letting had made me weak. . . The thought of Mary Romany was like the vision of another world. Rapturous to my tired beaten faculties was the mere thought of her. I lost heart in that hour of ever being worthy to go back to her again—so infinitely higher and lovelier was the estate of her presence, than this crude worldliness of gold and war.

We rode down in the night. . . Empty pack-mules passed me on the way back toward the bridge. Others were noisy below. I hadn't seen so many mules before, and more were coming up the trail. It was like a mule-congress. I discovered a strange picket-line. The air was foreign with forage and beasts and cigarette tobacco. . . In the valley, I heard the women laughing. A few men were in Dole's drinking noisily. . . By this time I was mentally undone. Viringhy had gone ahead, and here was a sort of celebration on the part of the few left by the river. Had Orion taken the place? Was Romany a prisoner? Huntoon had not offered a word for the last two miles. I left him, and hurried into Headquarters as Viringhy came forth. The old Master held out his hand and laughed at me.

"If somebody could only have been there at the Headland, when the steamer turned and put out to sea," he remarked, and his eyes snapped with mysterious repression. I sat down and stared at him. "Tell me—didn't she look empty?" he questioned, draining the last essence of humor from the picture in his mind. . . Finally, he saw how far I had sunk, and explained: "That steamer is mine. She unloaded our cargo of guns and cartridges five days ago, some thirty miles North of Libertad. Seventy-five pack-mules were waiting there. They circled around Libertad and hung up on the shoulder of Moloch until to-day. I had to pull Orion's whole force to the Headland to get the train over the Pass. That's what all the manœuvring at the Headland was for. The trick was planned forty days ago up in Guyaquil. The pack-train is going back now—before Orion returns from the Headland. . . I've wanted to tell you, Tom. It was hard not to tell you—but I've found it bad luck to emit even the slightest crow ahead of time. . . No, my son, we don't need the Headland—and neither does Orion. . . To-morrow morning we all get to work gold-gathering—"

I went out to find Huntoon in the mulish night.

To be continued.

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