

business of the fascinating monte or keno; for when the potent drugs of the gambling-hell had deadened his senses to all besides, he still retained a knowledge of the locality where he had obtained his scattered hoard, and informing the listening crowd with drunken stammer that there was "plenny mor' wher 'at came from," again sought the new diggings, there to remain until a too plethora purse suggested that its unusual weight could be as easily lightened as the last.

With scenes like these daily enacted, it is no wonder that the tide swelled strongly toward the Sierra. Under their influence, thither George Hanson wended his way, only to find that the crowd before him had prospected the desirable places. After trying some unprofitable diggings with indifferent success, he repacked his mule and journeyed still farther up the river, until one evening, nearly six months after his departure from San Francisco, tired and fevered, he pitched his tent in sight of the snowy summit of Mount Shasta, that towered in the far distance above all its lesser rivals of the Sierras.

The next morning when he opened his eyes he was too delirious to recognize the form which bent over him as that of Colorado Bill, the miner whose graphic delineations of gold-hunting and heavy betting in the Sacramento hotel had insensibly given the direction to his own wanderings. George was down with the terrible miners' fever; and had not some kind providence led the footsteps of Colorado Bill to his bedside, his search for treasure might have had then and there summary ending.

Colorado Bill—thus called from a brief residence on the great river of that name in Lower California—despite his rough exterior, shaggy beard and somewhat dissipated habits, possessed a warm heart. He at once took up his abode in George's tent, nursing the patient in the intervals of work with the patience and tenderness of a sister of charity.

Hanson came to his senses after a fortnight's fight with the fever demon, and no words could express his gratitude when he discovered the extent of his obligation to the tall miner who had stood like a guardian angel between himself and death.

Colorado Bill, on his part, was pleased to think that what he considered nothing but mere duty was so well appreciated. His wandering habits had not utterly destroyed a certain refinement of feeling consequent upon a fair early education, and he therefore longed for a companion other than one whose friendship invariably manifested itself by the mysterious production of four aces in a game of draw poker, and thus showed designs on his dust incompatible with the professions of a Pythian.

The two friends were so well pleased with each other that they made common property with everything, and struck a compact that each would share with the other any good fortune which might befall him.

Up to the morning on which our story opens, the location selected had not proved equal to its promise. For many days they had toiled with pick and spade, but beyond a small quantity of some gold worth but a few dollars, their exertions had availed them nothing. When they had turned in on the preceding evening, Colorado Bill had given vent to his feelings.

"It's too bad, George," he had said. "We'll try the hole one more day; and if we don't come to the dust, let's git."

And now their highest hopes were realities; yet to the two men the dull metal on which they gazed bore different meanings. To Bill it was simply the agency through which his rolicking animal life found its natural expression. To George, with his strong love and undying faith, it meant hope for himself and happiness for Nellie.

The shades of evening found them five hundred ounces richer than when they had commenced work in the morning. At this rate—though, of course, the first day's find was generally the heaviest—they knew—that a handsome competence was only a question of a few weeks' labor. So they worked steadily a fortnight longer. Then their provisions ran low, and Colorado Bill suggested to George that it might be better for him to run down to Sacramento, or perhaps farther, and lay in a fresh supply of grub.

"Tell you what it is, George," he continued, as they sat on the hillside in the warm autumn evening, "you're set me thinking with what you told me about Nellie. More than three months since, when I was down in 'Frisco, I got acquainted with a pretty little girl under somewhat singular circumstances. One afternoon, when I had been thinking of the idle, shiftless life I led, a melancholy stole over me. I couldn't get rid of it. To shake it off, I started out for a walk, and after strolling about some time, thought I would like to take a look at old ocean, and so wandered down the Cliff road. All at once there was a tremendous commotion ahead—carriages whirling right and left, while between them all rose a cloud of dust coming nearer and nearer. A puff of wind from the sea cleared things up, and then I saw two horses streaking like lightning toward me. A lady held the lines, and a white-livered cur, without giving her a thought, tried to save himself by jumping from the carriage. I never saw such a scornful look as a woman's face as was on hers when she saw that. The man scarcely touched the ground before I sprang to the horse's head, and succeeded in checking them after they had dragged me a short distance. The lady never seemed a bit afraid, only after I had assisted her to alight she handed me her riding-whip.

"If you will give that away, what he de-

serves," said she, pointing to the man who was now coming up, "I will be obliged to you."

"Of course I didn't like to insult a man with whom I had no quarrel; but when he was close to me, I saw it was Jim Lascollie, the biggest gambler in California, and the worst, who cleaned me out of six months' dust one night on Geese Flat with loaded dice. The rascal knew me at once, and commenced to feel in his breast-pocket, but I had him covered before he could draw. I knocked his revolver out of his hand into the sea, and then gave him a horse-whipping that I guess will refresh his memory before he does another green miner. He slunk away toward the cliffs. At the lady's invitation, I took a seat by her side. She didn't say anything until we got clear of the crowd which now began to surround us, when she commenced:

"How can I sufficiently thank you for what you have done for me?"

"Oh," I answered, "I'd stop a horse for any lady."

"It was not that—I meant the other thing," she exclaimed, with a scornful gesture in the direction Lascollie had taken.

"If you mean Lascollie's thrashing," I replied, "I owed him that on my own account;" and then I went over my little story about Geese Flat.

"I never saw such a change as passed over her face when I told her that."

"A gambler!" she almost screamed. "Mr. Norton always said he was one of the most prominent dealers in San Francisco."

"So he is—at the cards," I answered; "but his name's Lascollie, not Norton, and I'm sorry if he's a friend of yours."

"She laughed gayly."

"I don't generally ask gentlemen to horse-whip my friends, so make yourself easy on that score. In San Francisco one cannot make such nice distinctions among acquaintances as in the States. But as for that man—Norton or Lascollie—I hate him!"

"By Jove, George," she spit out these words like a wildcat, but in a minute afterward she was herself again—all smiles; and she so saucily tossed her little head, all covered with beautiful curly hair, and her blue eyes looked so bewitchingly into mine, that I found myself fairly in love with her."

"You have good taste, Bill," interrupted George; "Nellie has blue eyes and curly hair. But was that all you saw of your beauty?" he continued.

"No. She asked me to come and see her. I went two or three times, and tried to find out more about her, but did not learn much. Whenever I began to question her, she would pat my bearded mouth with her little hand."

"Sh—sh!" she said; "we might make each other very unhappy were we to tell everything we had ever done."

"The long and short of it, George, was that I acted as I suppose many another fool has done before me. I asked her to wait until fall, and told her when I had made another pile I would come down and marry her, if she would have me."

"You marry me!" she cried, with an unnatural shriek of laughter that made me almost repent my proposal.

"Yes, if you don't think you're too good for me."

"Her eyes flashed for an instant, and she looked at me very hard. Seeing I meant what I said, she suddenly softened."

"Bill," she replied, "I never could be good enough for you. I hardly know what may happen before fall. At any rate, if you are of the same mind, come back to me then."

"I was so angry at this short dismissal that I did not even bid her good-by, but tore off my buckskin belt, full of double eagles, and dashed it on the table."

"There's something for you to remember me by till fall," I said, and rushed into the street before she could say anything further or prevent my going."

"Just like you, Bill," exclaimed George, when his companion ended—"the best friend and the truest to man or woman; but I hardly like the looks of things. What business had any woman to be driving with a man like Lascollie?"

"Stop, George!" interrupted his friend, in a husky voice; "not a word against Mary! Remember she said that Lascollie was only known to her as the merchant Norton. I'll marry her if she'll have me; for, George," said he, gently, "I feel toward her as you do to Nellie—I love her."

"Then God give you all the happiness you wish for," earnestly answered his mate.

"Amen," replied Bill, reverently.

"So you see, George," he continued, "that it's about time for me to go down to 'Frisco. I must see Mary, and it will only take me a few days longer."

So it was resolved that Colorado Bill should go down to the metropolis.

George had not heard from Nellie for a long time, but this circumstance gave him no uneasiness. He thought that in his wanderings his letters had miscarried, and in their present isolation there had been no chance of communication with the outer world until now. He therefore sent a long letter to her by his comrade, containing an account of their unexpected good luck, with a promise of soon coming in person to San Francisco.

In the meantime he worked long and steadily in the treasure guleh, and day by day added to the pile of yellow dust safely coaxed in a corner of the log cabin which they had built for their greater protection.

One evening, nearly a month after the departure of his comrade, and when his return was daily expected, George, having finished his frugal supper, ascended a small knoll behind the cabin that overlooked the beautiful valley beyond. The setting sun flashed a thousand gold and crimson tints on the snowy summits of the Sierras, that rose in the north and east cold and inaccessible as the icebergs of the frozen zone. In the vale below, the temperature was warm and pleasant, and for several evenings past George had gone up the hill, and from thence looked down the valley, hoping to see some sign of his returning partner. Hitherto he had been unsuccessful, but now, as he gazed far down the winding course of the brook, he thought he saw Bill's mule on a rise of ground in the dim distance, slowly plodding its way through a space of five blasted tree trunks that gave an open view of the track. It was so far away, and the twilight was coming on so fast, that he was not altogether certain it was his partner; but he knew that, thus remote from all civilization, the owner of the beast could be none other than Bill. His heart swelled with the thought that he would soon hear from his darling wife. He pictured her delight on receiving the news of his great success, and thought, too, now that Bill had returned, there would soon be an end of toil, and that with the fruits of his labor Nellie should once more have all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed. "How well," he thought, "she had deserved it, for her trust and her patient waiting!" and he resolved that hereafter he would gratify her every wish.

By this time the twilight was rapidly coming on, but before leaving his post, George looked again in the direction of the trail. Did his eye deceive him, or had a deceitful mirage evolved from the haze another mule, the reflection of the first? There, indeed, was another mule and trailing over its side were the long folds of a woman's riding-habit. His heart gave a great bound. There was something in the manner and gesture of the fair equestrian which over at that distance seemed familiar to him. Could it be Nellie, so tired of waiting that she could not resist the opportunity of thus surprising him? There was no mistaking the other ride now. That was Colorado Bill. George could see him, as they rode up from the vale below laughing and chatting with his companion, and carefully turning aside the long branches which interposed themselves in the pathway.

George, though half ashamed of the emotion felt angry with Bill. Somehow he could no longer bear to think that any other than himself should be so attentive to Nellie.

They were now directly below him, though the trail circled the hill for more than a mile before it paused at the door of the cabin. Could that indeed be Nellie? There was a certain something—a strange feeling of communion—that repelled him the more he gazed.

A harsh, weird laugh, shrill as the night hawk's cry, floated up from the valley below. He breathed a sigh of relief. No; that woman with her bold strident mirth, could not be his wife, his timid, gentle Nellie, who always seemed to shrink from any action that belied the modesty and attractiveness of her sex.

"It must be Bill's wife," he thought; and he determined that the pair should have a hearty welcome.

He entered the cabin, spread the table, and made the best display of provender that his exhausted store would allow. The coffee-pot hissed merrily on the embers in the fireplace when he heard the clatter of hoofs on the gravel without. The door opened, and his partner entered with a lady, whose face was partly concealed by her veil.

"Hallo, George!" he cried; "I have brought my wife. Look at my pretty little bird Mary," he continued, removing the veil from her face, "this is partner George—George Hanson."

With a cry that echoed far and near through the canon, starting the wild eagle from his eyrie and the huge grizzly from his lair, the lady sank senseless on the floor. Bill rushed to her aid; but glancing at his comrade's face, he was struck by its deathlike pallor.

"George, my boy," he exclaimed, "in Heaven's name what ails you? What's the meaning of all this?"

"Bill, it's Nellie!"

He rushed to the open door; the ring of hoofs sounded sharp and clear through the still night and Colorado Bill was left alone in his misery. Yet only for a brief space. No sooner had the bewildered miner comprehended the terrible truth than, utterly disregarding the covering heap on the floor, he started in pursuit. For hours he wandered through the forest, but his flinty rocks and hills only echoed back in mockery his call to his fugitive friend.

In the gray light of dawn Colorado Bill reentered his cabin. It was tenantless. The room was torn up from the couch that hid their gold dust, and most of it was gone. To Mary alone had he spoken of this secret hiding-place. It store of wealth had furnished many a theme of converse during their long ride to the Sierras. He did not wonder at its disappearance nor mourn over his lost treasure. He knew that to such a woman any crime was light in comparison with the treachery that must have been thoroughly engrained in her nature ere she could so coolly and deliberately trample on the trust of a man like George. For his own disappointment he did not care. Since last night all affection for her seemed dead. He only blamed himself for not tracing out her antecedents before he had given her his faith, and, above all, he cursed his reluctance in not following up a clue to Nellie's

disappearance, when he found she had vanished from the place where George left her in San Francisco.

He went sadly back to his old labor. Day by day he washed out the gold-dust, and many a time watched long and wistfully down the valley, hoping for the return of his lost partner. They met at last.

One noon, when Bill was eating his scanty dinner, he saw numerous dark forms sitting about from tree to tree, and gradually closing in around himself and the cabin. To grasp his gun and flee to its shelter was the work of a few seconds. He knew that successful resistance to the band of savages surrounding him was hopeless. But he had no idea of submitting to the terrible alternative of captivity and death by torture, and resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

The unerring aim of his ride through the loopholes with which the cabin was pierced brought many an Indian to the ground, and evidently so dismayed his foes that their constant hail of bullets against the hut slackened, giving Colorado Bill an opportunity to peer through a loop-hole and reconnoitre the situation. Just then he fancied that he was called by name. He looked towards the woods, and saw his lost comrade running towards the cabin. The savages desisted George at the same time, and opened fire upon him, while he returned their shots with his revolver.

Bill threw open the door as George stumbled heavily over the threshold, and in another instant secured it with its massive oaken bar. He found to his dismay that George was seriously wounded. A ball had struck him in the back, penetrating his lung, and it was with difficulty that he spoke. Bill carried him to his old bunk, but soon saw he was beyond relief. He lifted a cup of water to the lips of the dying man.

"If it was only the fever again, George!" he said as the tears rolled down his cheek.

"Don't take on so, old fellow," gasped George, feebly clasping his friend's hand. "It's all right. I came back again—to tell you about—Nellie. I didn't want you to think I hated you—for that. I felt that night—I could have killed you—and so I fled. I know you couldn't help it. I couldn't be angry with you. She—wasn't—worth it, Bill."

The wronged man had spoken his last. Colorado Bill stood by the dead body of the only true friend he had ever known, and a strong desire of vengeance rose in his breast.

"I only want to live now," he cried, "long enough to circumvent those howling fiends outside who have shot George."

He placed their small keg of powder in one corner, and snatching a lighted brand from the fireplace, threw open the door. The room was almost instantly filled with the clated savages. A dull, smothered report reverberated among the rocks, and once more unbroken quiet reigned throughout the valley.

Colorado Bill had gone to join his friend.

MATERNAL HEROISM.

On the twenty-seventh of January of 1798, a party of Indians killed George Mason, on Flat Creek, about twelve miles from Knoxville, Tennessee. During the night, he heard a noise at his stable, and stopped out to ascertain the cause, and the Indians, coming between him and the door, intercepted his return. He fled, but was fired upon, and wounded. He reached a cave, a quarter of a mile from his house, out of which, already weltering in his blood, he was dragged and murdered. Having done this, they returned to the house, to dispatch his wife and children. Mrs. Mason, unconscious of the fate of her husband heard them talking to each other as they approached the house. At first, she was delighted with the hope that her neighbors, aroused by the firing, had come to her assistance. But, perceiving that the conversation was neither in English nor German, the language of her neighbors, she instantly inferred that they were savages, coming to attack the house.

The heroine had, that very morning, learned how the double trigger of a rifle was set. Fortunately, the children were not awakened by the firing, and she took care not to awaken them. She shut the door, and barred it with benches and tables, and took down the well-charged rifle of her husband. She placed herself directly opposite the opening which would be made by forcing the door. Her husband came not, and she was too well aware that he was slain. She was alone, in the darkness. The yelling savages were without, pressing upon the house. She took counsel from her own magnanimity, heightened by affection for her children that were sleeping unconsciously around her. The Indians, pushing with great violence, gradually opened the door sufficiently wide to attempt an entrance. The body of one was thrust into the opening, and just filled it. He was struggling for admittance. Two or three more, directly behind him, were propelling him forward. She set the trigger of the rifle, put the muzzle near the body of the foremost, and in such a direction that the ball, after passing through his body, would penetrate those behind. She fired. The first Indian fell. The next one uttered the scream of mortal agony. This intrepid woman saw the policy of profound silence. She observed it. The Indians, in consequence, were led to believe that armed men were in the house, took three courses from the stable, and set it on fire. It was afterwards ascertained that this high-minded widow had saved herself and her children from the attack of twenty-five savages.