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the right, where the settlement lay, than to the left, where the pine-crowned hills lifted themselves up high towards the blue sky. Perhaps the scorching sun which blazed down upon them that hot January afternoon made their thoughts turn longingly towards the Paradise Hotel, and the cool drinks which were being dispensed there. Singing Bob put down his pick, lifted his arms high above his head, leaned slightly backward, and stretched himself; then stooping, picked up a bit of quartz and looked at it thoughtfully, passing his shirt sleeve across it once or twice. The sun shone down upon it, making the iron pyrites glitter and the gold crystals sparkle. He tossed it from one hand to the other, then let it fall.

"Plenty of gold here, Steve," he said, slowly.

The other man started and turned—their eyes met; there was a curious, questioning, anxious look in both.

"Plenty," he answered.

"Enough to make a man rich in a couple of months if he worked honest," he continued.

"Yes," the other said, curtly.

"There's some as would give a good price for this claim," Bob continued, meditatively. "It's my 'pinion it's a pocket, and a deep one; if we was wanting to quit we'd be able to raise a tidy sum on it."

"Yes."

"But we ain't."

"And if one of us," Bob said, speaking still in an abstract sort of way, "had found the life distasteful, and wished to leave his partner—if he hated the dirt, and the hard labor, and had friends as he'd like to go home to—the other would be willing like as not to pay him a good round sum for his share of the claim; but, looking anxiously at his companion, "there ain't either of us feels like that?"

"No."

Bob heaved a sigh, took up his pick again, let it fall, then, seating himself upon a heap of earth, took up the fragments of quartz which sparkled with sprays of native gold, and crushed them into atoms with a hammer.

"Some men," he said, softly, glancing at Steve, and catching his eyes fixed upon him, "have a hankering after England when they've made something of a pile, and the sweetheart they left there—they didn't leave any sweetheart?"

"No."

Bob sighed again and went on:—

"And some want to see the father and mother?"

"Yes—mine both died years ago."

"Just so," with attempted cheerfulness; "we're different, we're enough for each other."

No answer this time. Bob looked at the fair, pretty boyish face; it was pink all over, pink as an honest, genuine blush could make it; he turned away, and sighed again. The jay-bird on the earth heap strutted up and down like a sentinel on guard, chattering noisily and screaming now and then; the wind blew from the pine woods, bringing the pungent smell with it; the evening was very warm. Steve let fall his pick, brushed a few earth specks from his shirt, washed his face and hands in an unconscious sort of way, then looked at his partner.

"I'm going to turn it up for to-day," he said.

"Ah!" Bob returned slowly, "Well, I'll put in a bit more work, I think."

Steve lingered a moment as though he would have said more with a little encouragement, but Bob was so deeply engaged in his work that he felt a sort of delicacy in disturbing him, and turned away, walking slowly and thoughtfully, as though undecided about something. The jay-bird watched him go, then came nearer to Bob, pecked at his shirt sleeve, pulled at his red handkerchief, and took other liberties, keeping his sharp eyes on the handsome face and hammer alternately. Bob glanced at him, smiled and sighed at one and the same time, then let his hands fall idly between his knees.

So he sat for some time, then looked round. He wanted to say something, and there was no one to say it to. Thought scarcely unburdens one's mind, speech is always a relief. He looked at the earth, the sky, the quartz, and finally at the bird. There was something so

human about the little creature that he decided to make him his confidant.

"You see," he said, gravely, giving the bird his whole attention, "it's like this: me and Steve, we've been partners since we came to this here Hunter's Pocket. He being a bit weakly, and having habits which isn't usual in these parts, I've been obliged to stand up for him and fight his battles, so to speak, which, naturally, makes me a bit partial to him—being partners, you see, we've been used to share everything, luck and all. But there's sometimes a thing happens to a man when sharing can't be the order of the day; that time's when a man falls in love."

The bird shut his eyes for a moment, then turned them up and looked sentimental, as much as to say, "It's the same with us."

"You see," Bob went on, slowly, "Steve hasn't said anything to me, and I haven't, so to speak, mentioned the fact to him; but there it is, we two partners have set our hearts on Mariposas, and the question is: Who'd make her the best husband?"

The bird grew restless; perhaps he thought that was a tame ending to a love story. Doubtless he had expected that Bob would at least wish to fight for the girl. He hopped away with one bright eye turned round to the digger, then changing his mind, perhaps feeling a bit curious, came back, and began pecking at the blue shirt again.

"Which'd make her the best husband?" Bob repeated. "Not," with a shake of his head, "that I can say she's given either of us 'casion to think that she'd take us into partnership; but if I thought that Steve would suit her better than me and make her happier, I'd cut my throat before I'd say a word as might disturb her."

The bird intimated by a low, guttural sound that this was a most laudable sentiment, then, perching himself upon the digger's leg, nestled up to him.

"Steve's clean, and Steve's a gentleman," Bob went on, stroking the bird softly with one finger. "He'd treat her like a lady always, speak gently to her, and not offend with any rough ways; but he's weakly, he couldn't protect her 'gainst rudeness or insult as I could; he couldn't love her as I could. Great God!" bringing one hand down heavily upon his knee, while with the other he held the bird in a firm, gentle clasp, "how I'd love her if she'd have me!" His face flushed, his great breast heaved, the red blood crept up under his bronzed skin, his blue eyes grew tender, then he lifted his voice and sang:—

Mariposas, Mariposas, idol of this heart of mine;
Mariposas, Mariposas, all the love I have is thine.
Could I tell thee how I love thee,
wouldst thou laugh or smile at me?
Mariposas, Mariposas, say, what would your answer be?"

He paused a moment, then sang the same words again. They had come to him as a sort of inspiration some few days before; previously, as he gravely told himself, "he had not known he was one of those darned poet chaps". He was a little ashamed of the weakness, but found the constant repetition of the poor verse, adapted to the tune of a camp hymn, very soothing and comforting. The words softened his nature, and almost brought the tears into his eyes. They made him blissfully miserable, and in this misery he took a melancholy pleasure, as some do in picturing the scene of their own death-bed, the leave-takings, the last touching words they will breathe, and the quiet, happy smile which will set their lips as they hear the angels calling, and see the gates of Heaven open.

Having tired out the patient bird, who backed from his hand, ruffling all his feathers the wrong way, and hopped away, he rose from his seat, then turned quickly as a low ripple of laughter fell upon his ears.

Such a vision met his gaze as made his great frame tremble. Mariposas, with a teasing smile upon her beautiful face, was standing just behind him; she had been a listener to his idiosyncrasy.

"That's a fine song, and no mistake, Bob," she said, standing some little distance from him, and flashing defiant glances at him from her dark eyes. "The lady'd be obliged to you for making

her name so public. The magpies'll be calling it out to-night."

She paused; he had no word to say, but just stood before her drinking in her beauty, longing, yet afraid, to fall down and worship her.

"Where's Steve?" she said, sharply, stooping down to the bird, who was examining her shoe-lace minutely.

"Gone home," Bob said, finding his tongue. "He'll be at the Paradise by this time likely. Did you want him?"

"One's always pleased to see Steve," she said, eyeing the stained clothes of the splendid specimen of manhood before her with great displeasure. "He keeps himself decent." She paused again. Bob had nothing to say; he looked down at his own clothes and sighed. "Well," she said, sharply, after a moment, "have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"No," he answered humbly. "Some can keep clean, some can't. If," sheepishly, "I had a wife, now—"

"A wife!" interrupting him. "D'you suppose any decent woman would undertake you? Not she."

His expression grew quite hopeless.

"You think not?" he said, so sadly that her heart might have been touched. "Well," stooping down and picking up his tools, "I've feared the same myself. It's a bad job, but somehow," looking himself slowly over, "the earth seems to have a spite against me."

"Steve can keep clean."

"Yes," agreeingly, "it's curious, but that's so. You're quite right. Steve's the better man of us two."

She tossed her head and blushed rosy red, but neither agreed nor disagreed with him.

"I'm going back now," she said, after a little pause. "I came for a walk to get a breath of fresh air. It isn't often I'm down in the gulch—it's not an inviting place. Are you leaving work now?"

"Yes," Bob answered; "but I'll wait awhile till you've gone. You'd not like to be seen walking with me."

He spoke quite simply, and scarcely understood why she pouted her pretty lips—putting it down as meaning that that she certainly would not like to do. He stood watching her, then suddenly she turned away.

He watched her, hoping that perhaps she would turn her head; but she did not. She went slowly, though, and suddenly sat down on an earth-heap. He wondered why she was resting. He went to her. She was holding one foot as though it pained her, but her eyes laughed round at him and her cheeks were as red as a rose.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"No," she answered, while her lips twitched amusedly; "at least, nothing much; I've sprained my ankle. I shall have to stop here till it is better."

"Can't you walk?" he asked, looking troubled.

"No," she answered shortly.

He stood by her side, scarcely knowing what to do. He could have taken her up in his arms and carried her as easily as though she had been a baby. The very thought of holding her so made him tremble; but, then, she would never let him. "I wish Steve were here," he said.

"Why?" sharply. "What could Steve do that you cannot?"

"Steve could help you; you wouldn't mind him, he's clean."

"Steve couldn't carry me."

"No, that's true. Steve's but a weakly chap, but—loyally—he's clean!"

"Go and fetch someone to help me."

"And leave you here alone? Not I."

He looked down upon her, at her lovely hair, at her laughing eyes; then he looked at her white dress. "Will it wash?" he asked, touching it.

"Oh, yes."

"Then let me carry you."

Her eyes sought the ground, the smile round her lips grew merrier; she began pushing the loose stones about with her fingers.

"May I?" he said, eagerly.

She looked up with defiant eyes. "Well, I suppose I must get home," she answered.

He waited for no more, but caught her up in his arms and held her closely clasped. For a moment he paused while he battled with, and conquered, an inclination to stoop and kiss her, then, turning his face from hers, he swung away towards the huts.

She smiled to herself, and laid her