

'The golden-haired Pennsylvanian's a jolly good investment, I should say,' Thistleton went on meditatively. 'Rolling in coin. A mint of money. She'll be really annoyed, too, if you don't come to her picnic, and, what's more, ride a donkey.'

'Is she rich?' Paul asked, with sudden and unexpected interest, as if a thought had instantly darted across his brain.

'Rich! Like Cræsus, so Armitage tells me. Rich as Pactolus. Rich as wedding-cake. Rich beyond the wildest dreams of avarice.'

Paul moved from his place at the corner of the mantel-piece, fiery red in the face now, and strolled as carelessly as he could across the room to the window. Then he opened his purse, counted the money furtively, and made a short mental calculation, unobserved. At the end of it he gave a very deep sigh, and answered aloud, with a wrench:

'Well, I suppose I ought to go. It's a precious hard pull; for I hate this sort of thing; but, then, I have claims—very special claims upon me.'

'Still, you'll go, anyhow?' Thistleton asked once more.

'Yes, I'll go,' Paul answered, with the air of a man who makes up his mind to have a tooth drawn.

'And you'll ride a donkey?'

'I suppose I must, if the golden-haired Pennsylvanian absolutely insists upon it. Anything on earth where duty calls one.'

And he sank, wearied, into the chair by the window.