

Hills of the Wind

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His own words suggested to Meekins a startling new line of thought. At first it was too subtle and tentative for expression. Silently he worked it out, and slowly.

"I've got it!" he muttered after a time. "That lost gold mine is here somewheres. That greasy breed found it, got scared out, an' was tellin' Lamonte how to find it by these wind noises. Lamonte writ it down to kinder remember it, so he'd know when he come to the spot. (Whisht Slack'd come. My leg's painin' like—). Then that fool breed gets crazy, an' is sorry for givin' up the secret, or was sorry he gave away about the gold, or somethin', pumps a bullet into Lamonte, an' steals the paper back. That's what!"

At the end of an hour the unearthly music had ceased; the craterlike opening in the rocks was as quiet and restful as a cavern should be.

Red explained this phenomenon to his friend the boulder. "The wind's died out or shifted, I guess."

As Meekins idly scanned the rocky wall at his back he suddenly gave a cry of startled joy. A two-foot vein of white quartz showed little splashes of bright yellow where the peeping sun threw a shaft of light on its face. He squirmed over on his side, drew a knife from his pocket, and picked at one of these.

"By hokey, it's gold!" he said in an awed voice. "I've found the Lost Mine, sure as shootin'!"

THEN he lay gazing in quiet content at the vein of richness. For another hour he lay waiting for the advent of the relief. The ring of ironed hoofs on the stony path raised a medley of echoes. Some other man that rode with him laughed, and myriad fiends cackled in this freakish place.

"Whisht I had a foghorn to try this out," Red joked at himself.

From where he lay Meekins saw a horse's head poke through the narrow inlet on the right. "I'll give her one boost," he chuckled, "an' touch up Slack's nerve, jus' for fun."

With that he bellowed like a bull, and wild beasts seemed to fill the arena with their rage. Red saw the riders check their horses in dismay and peer about the place.

"Guess I'd best not get too gay," he muttered. "Slack'll bolt." He hardly raised his voice about a whisper as he called, "Here I am, Slack. Yours truly, Red Meekins."

Reassured, Slack pushed his horse into the huge potlike place and, sighting Meekins, slipped from the saddle.

"Hope you had your breakfast, Bill," Red observed ironically.

"I come soon's I saw you wasn't turnin' up," Slack offered in extenuation of his delay. "Are you hurt?"

"My left leg's on strike an' won't walk none," Meekins answered. "Glad you fetched that spare hoss."

"I rounded up Dave here to come along an' help look for you," Slack continued. "We'll lift you to the saddle now. Can you sit a hoss?"

"Soon's I've finished a little business I come here for to transact," Red answered quaintly. He winked at Dave as he asked, "Slack, you're workin' for me by the day ain't you?"

"I allow I am."

"But on this extra occasion that don't go," Meekins said. He pointed a finger at the rocky wall across the narrow cleft and added, "Jus' stake that vein of quartz carryin' free millin' gold in the name of Meekins, Slack & Co. Guess we'll call her the Ghost Mine."

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