

Singing Bob

By W. R. Gilbert

SINGING Bob and Lily Steve had been friends since first they came into the camp, both having made their entrance upon the same day, and having grown intimate over a glass of something hot. Perhaps the total difference in the appearance and in the nature of the two men drew them together; anyway, they were seldom apart. They worked upon the same claim, shared in everything, and spent their leisure in taking long stretches over the surrounding country.

Singing Bob was a big, burly, handsome man. The sun had tanned his skin to the color of the red earth, from out the setting of which a pair of eyes, blue as the summer sky, and heavily fringed with long, misty black lashes, laughed continually. He was careless in his dress, as diggers as a rule are; but for all that nothing ever seemed to hang ungracefully upon his magnificent limbs. His blue shirt, as a rule, was stained with earth and torn with pushing through the undergrowth in the pine woods. His long, brown wavy hair was pushed back from his broad brow, and fell almost upon his shoulders.

He had earned his name through his voice; he sang like an angel, clear as a bell, flexibly as a lark; he could trill and shake in a way which would have made many an educated singer envious. He could have made his fortune as a concert singer, but perhaps he had sufficient reasons for avoiding civilized parts; most probably he had. However that might be, he came to the diggings, and gave his fellow gold-seekers the benefit of his musical talent.

Taken all through he was a rough sort of fellow, with off-hand manners, and a loud voice. When he laughed one feared for the upper half of his head; he opened his mouth so wide it seemed as though it must come off, and showed a double row of teeth which would have made a dentist despair. He was a popular man in the camp, because he was perfectly fearless and perfectly good tempered.

Lily Steve was a very different man. He was small in stature, below the medium height, and with all that conceit and self-esteem which is so usual with very little men. His face was pretty. The sun seemingly had no power to tan his pink and white skin. His hair was golden, as were his short beard, and moustache. His clothes were always spotless, even after a hard day's work in the gulch. Apparently the earth had no power to soil him.

It was to this general spotlessness that he owed his name, "Lily Steve". Diggers are quick to take notice, and name a man from any little peculiarity he may possess; and in a diggers' camp cleanliness is a decided peculiarity. They tried to laugh him out of it at first, but as Singing Bob said, "It was a matter of taste. Lily Steve was doubtless fond of washing; p'raps—who could tell?—it reminded him of something in the past. Some men like as not got drunk to bring their fathers and mothers back to their memory and the days of their youth generally; for his part, he thought it was a good plan to let folks run their own affairs. There were more objectionable things than cleanliness. He liked the smell of the earth about his things; upon his own shoulders a perfectly spotless shirt had a lazy, uncomfortable, all-over-alike sort of appearance, which wearied his eyes; but upon Lily Steve it was different. To have one perfectly clean man in the camp conferred a distinction upon it, which, no doubt, would make other camps envious. Like as not, they'd be for copying it, but it would not be the real thing—only a base imitation; they'd have the comfort of knowing that."

So Lily Steve was simply nick-named and left in peace. He had a bold champion, who towered head and shoulders above the rest of the men in the camp, and whose aim was sure—that may have had something to do with it.

"Hunter's Pocket," as the settlement was called, was in a fairly flourishing condition; not so flourishing as to bring hundreds flocking to it, but with a reputation which daily increased the population. There was one long street, with two branches which struck off crosswise, a rough chapel, a store, and lastly an hotel.

Paradise Hotel scarcely deserved its name. True, there was plenty of light in it, and plenty of spirits, but neither was celestial; one thing alone justified its ambitious misnomer—the presence of a goddess.

Mariposas was a beauty, there was not the slightest doubt about that; tall and slim as a young pine tree, lissom as a willow, graceful and agile as a wild deer, her eyes large and dark, her skin softly ruddy as a peach which the sun has kissed passionately, her lips full and red, the upper one short and slightly lifted, showing even when she was not laughing a faint gleam of her white teeth; the under one cleft in the centre like a cherry, her nose short and straight, her chin gently

rounded, her little head set firmly and proudly upon her white throat, her burnished brown hair falling in wavy masses to her knees, and caught in at the nape of her neck with a ribbon—such was Mariposas, the Goddess of the Paradise Hotel, the darling and pride of Hunter's Pocket.

Who was her father and who was her mother no one appeared to know. Some said that, so far as paternity was concerned, she was indebted to one, Jim, who had been found dead in the bush, shot through the heart, some seventeen years previously, with the infant clasped in his arms; but as for the mother—about her everyone was perfectly ignorant.

However, the child was adopted by the camp, fed and clothed from a general fund, and in time installed as presiding Goddess of the Paradise Hotel. Here she dispensed drinks to the thirsty, refused them to the inebriated, sang snatches of

songs to the company, and even, when in a specially gracious mood, danced to them.

Singing Bob and Lily Steve were at work on their claim; there was silence between them only broken by the sharp sound of the picks as they came in contact with the quartz, and the chattering of a jay-bird which had settled upon a mound of the red earth, and was watching operations with his head cocked knowingly upon one side.

It was a curious sort of silence, one that they both apparently noticed, for now and again they would glance at each other, then without speaking go on with their work again. It was not that they had no time for talk, for the picks were lifted but laggingly, and often rested upon the ground while they took a survey of the surrounding country.

Seemingly both found more beauty to



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