

and the luckless one slunk into the crowd.

But the more Scotty looked on, the more certain he became. A wealthy sheepman was "keeping cases," and losing everything else. The regularity with which the dealer raked in the bets made Scotty suspicious. He watched the dealer. It was a sure thing for the "house." The sheepman stood no more chance of winning, except through courtesy, than one of his lambs would in a tussle with a bobcat.

"Now, as he's bettin' twenty on a card," said Scotty to himself, "it looks to me as if the house would rather have his money than mine if I hold my bets down to two. So I reckon I've got as sure a thing as the house if I 'copper' him." He shoved forward ten dollars, and asked for a stack of "reds."

Scotty's reasoning proved correct on the first turn. The sheepman had played the king "to lose" and the jack "to win." Scotty played a "copper" on the jack, and played the king "open." When the cards came up, the dealer raked in the sheepman's bets, and "sized up" Scotty's chips with a frown. By the time the deal was out the ranchman was calling for more chips, and Scotty had four times as many as he started with. The dealer was showing some ill temper.

"You're poorty lucky," he snarled, as he eyed Scotty's accumulations. "Would it be jest the same to you if you made your bets a leetle quicker? 'Taint always polite to 'copper' other gent's judgment."

"If it's all the same to you," returned Scotty, "I'll make my bets when I damn please, so long as I don't delay the game. The house is doin' well enough not to bother about me."

With this kindly thrust, Scotty proceeded to collect his hard-wrung blackmail. Whenever the chief pigeon was plucked of twenty dollars, the dealer paid the price of silence by handing over two to his successor, and by the time the ranchman's buckskin bag had been drained of its gold, Scotty was smiling behind a rampart of chips negotiable at the "bank" for nearly one hundred and fifty dollars.

"Think you're good, eh?" sneered the dealer, after the sheepman had confessed his penury and sought the bar.

"Some," smirked Scotty. "But if it's all the same to you, we'll try another box."

"They all look alike to me," hummed the dealer, with professional indifference. He drew another faro-box from the drawer of the table, handed it to Scotty for inspection, and the game began.

In less than half an hour Scotty stood before the bar, and spent

his last quarter for a drink—spent it with the contempt a prodigal feels for the dregs of his purse. He gulped down the liquor with a sinking heart, his blitheness wilted under the smart of his ignominious position. He had gambled away the last dollar that belonged to the boys. Without money he would expose his hand to Sam. He would have to go back with his mission a failure, without a pound of grub.

He stumbled through the darkness toward the livery-stable, and into his befuddled brain sneaked the suggestion that the six-shooter at his hip would be the best means of ridding him of his disgrace. The lights from the railroad station cut through the gloom and showed him the way to the little footbridge that spanned the arroyo, now half-filled with slimy water. Just as he stepped upon the first plank, a crouching form rose before him.

"Hanzupp!" came in a growl from the hulking shadow.

All thought of self-destruction was instantly smothered by the instinct of self-preservation, and Scotty's palms sought a perpendicular.

"Dig!" growled the shadow.

"I'm down to bed-rock, pardner," chirped Scotty, for whom highwaymen at the moment had no terrors.

"Come across. I seen you make a drag at bank."

"Maybe you did," said Scotty, peering for a good glimpse at the man, "but they got me for all I had before I left."

"I'm from Mizoo." And the highwayman rummaged through Scotty's pockets for confirmation, which was soon obtained.

The gleam from the station lamps for an instant rested on his evil face; and in the ugly welt across the cheek Scotty recognized the gambler whose seat he had taken.

"I'll keep the pog-gun," he said, as he tucked Scotty's six-shooter into his belt. "And as fer you—w'y—"

The sullen swash made verbal abuse superfluous. Scotty splashed about in the three feet of slimy water, and dragged himself to the bank of the arroyo, where he lay, a sputtering, spewing huddle of degradation.

After spending the rest of the night at the livery-stable, he met Sam at the Happy Days saloon, and endeavored with oozing jauntiness to plead the virtues of the claim. But capital is seldom impressed by bedraggled wretchedness. Capital paid for a drink (which Scotty ardently desired), but stubbornly refused to invest four thousand dollars in a fifth interest in a mining enterprise, the whole of which might be obtained by patience and a negligible outlay in cash.



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