

Coolidge Dane

Wunpost



Dane Coolidge

Wunpost

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23162283

Wunpost:

Содержание

CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	12
CHAPTER III	23
CHAPTER IV	33
CHAPTER V	44
CHAPTER VI	52
CHAPTER VII	64
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	67

Coolidge Dane

Wunpost

CHAPTER I

THE DEATH VALLEY TRAIL

The heat hung like smoke above Panamint Sink, it surged up against the hills like the waves of a great sea that boiled and seethed in the sun; and the mountains that walled it in gleamed and glistened like polished jet where the light was struck back from their sides. They rose up in solid ramparts, unbelievably steep and combed clean by the sluicings of cloudbursts; and where the black canyons had belched forth their floods a broad wash spread out, writhing and twisting like a snake-track, until at last it was lost in the Sink. For the Sink was the swallower-up of all that came from the hills and whatever it sucked in it buried beneath its sands or poisoned on its alkali flats. Yet the Death Valley trail led across its level floor—thirty miles from Wild Rose Springs to Blackwater and its saloons—and while the heat danced and quivered there was a dust in the north pass and a pack-train swung round the point.

It came on furiously, four burros with flat packs and an old man who ran cursing behind; and as he passed down into the Sink

there was another dust in the north and a lone man followed as furiously after him. He was young and tall, a mountain of rude strength, and as he strode off down the trail he brandished a piece of quartz and swung his hat in the air. But the pack-train kept on, a column of swirling dust, a blotch of burro-gray in the heat, and as he emptied his canteen he hurled it to the ground and took after his partner on the run. He could see the twinkling feet, the heave of the white packs, the vindictive form dodging behind; and then his knees weakened, his throbbing brain seemed to burst and he fell down cursing in the trail. But the pack-train went on like a tireless automaton that no human power could stay and when he raised his head it was a streamer of dust, a speck on the far horizon.

He rose up slowly and looked around—at the empty trail, the waterless flats, the barren hills all about—and then he raised his fist, which still clutched the chunk of quartz, and shook it at the pillar of dust. His throat was dry and no words came, to carry the burden of his hate, but as he stumbled along his eyes were on the dust-cloud and he choked out gusty oaths. A demoniac strength took possession of his limbs and once more he broke into a run, the muttered oaths grew louder and gave way to savage shouts and then to delirious babblings; and when he awoke he was groveling in a sand-wash and the sun had sunk in the west.

Once more he rose up and looked down the empty trail and across the waterless flats; and then he raised his eyes to the eastern hills, burning red in the last rays of the sun. They were

high, very high, with pines on their summits, and from the wash of a near canyon there lapped out a tongue of green, the promise of water beyond. But his strength had left him now and given place to a feverish weakness—the hills were far away, and he could only sit and wait, and if help did not come he would perish. The solemn twilight turned to night, a star glowed in the east; and then, on the high point above the mouth of the canyon, there leapt up a brighter glow. It was a fire, and as he gazed he saw a form passing before it and feeding the ruddy blaze. He rose up all a-tremble, crushed down a brittle salt-bush and touched it off with a match; and as the resinous wood flared up he snatched out a torch and carried the flame to another bush. It was the signal of the lost, two fires side by side, and he gave a hoarse cry when, from the point of the canyon, a second fire promised help. Then he sank down in the sand, feebly feeding his signal fire, until he was roused by galloping feet.

A half moon was in the sky, lighting the desert with ghostly radiance, and as he scrambled up to look he saw a boy on a white mule, riding in with a canteen held out. Not a word was spoken but as he gurgled down the water he rolled his eyes and gazed at his rescuer. The boy was slim and vigorous, stripped down to sandals and bib overalls; and conspicuously on his hip he carried a heavy pistol which he suddenly hitched to the front.

“That’s enough, now,” he said, “you give me back that canteen.” And when the man refused he snatched it from his lips and whipped out his ready gun. “Don’t you grab me,” he warned,

“or I’ll fill you full of lead. You’ve had enough, I tell you!”

For a moment the man faced him as if crouching for a spring; and then his legs failed him and he sank to the ground, at which the boy dropped down and stooped over him.

“Lie still,” he said, “and I’ll bathe your face—I was afraid you were crazy with the heat.”

“That’s all right, kid,” muttered the man, “you’re right on the job. Say, gimme another drink.”

“In a minute—well, just a little one! Now, lie down here in the sand and try to go to sleep.” He moistened a big handkerchief and sopped water on his head and over his heaving chest, and after a few drinks the big frame relaxed and the man lay sleeping like a child. But in his dreams he was still lost and running across the desert, he started and twitched his arms; and then he began to mutter and fumble in the sand until at last he sat up with a jerk.

“Where’s that rock?” he demanded, “by grab, she’s half gold—I’m going to take it and bash out his brains!” He rose to his knees and scrambled about and the boy dropped his hand to his gun. “I’m going to *kill* him!” raved the man, “the danged old lizard-herder—he went off and left me to die!”

He felt about in the dirt and grabbed up the chunk of quartz, which he had lost in his last delirium.

“Look at *that!*” he exclaimed thrusting it out to the boy, “the richest danged quartz in the world! I’ve got a ledge of it, kid, enough to make us both rich—and John Calhoun never forgets a friend! No, and he never forgets an enemy—the son of a goat don’t

live that can put one over on *me*! You just wait, Mister Dusty Rhodes!”

“Oh, was that Dusty Rhodes?” the boy piped up eagerly. “I was watching from the point and I *thought* it was his outfit—but I don’t think I’ve ever seen you. Were you glad when you saw my fire?”

“You bet I was, kid,” the man answered gravely, “I reckon you saved my life. My name is John C. Calhoun.”

He held out his hand and after a moment’s hesitation the boy reached out and took it.

“My name is Billy Campbell and we live in Jail Canyon. My mother will be coming down soon—that is, if she can catch our other mule.”

“Glad to meet her,” replied Calhoun still shaking his hand, “you’re a good kid, Billy; I like you. And when your mother comes, if it’s agreeable to her, I’d like to take you along for my pardner. How would that suit you, now—I’ve just made a big strike and I’ll put you right next to the discovery.”

“I—I’d like it,” stammered the boy hastily drawing his hand away, “only—only I’m afraid my mother won’t let me. You see the boys are all gone, and there’s lots of work to do, and—but I do get awful lonely.”

“I’ll fix it!” announced Calhoun, pausing to take another drink, “and anything I’ve got, it’s yours. You’ve saved my life, Billy, and I never forget a kindness—any more than I forget an injury. Do you see that rock?” he demanded fiercely. “I’m going to follow

Dusty Rhodes to the end of the world and bash out his rabbit brains with it! I stopped up at Black Point to look at that big dyke and what do you think he done? He went off and *left* me and never looked back until he struck them Blackwater saloons! And the first chunk of rock that I knocked off of that ledge would assay a thousand dollars—gold! I ran after that danged fool until I fell down like I was dead, and then I ran after him again, but he never so much as looked back—and all the time I was trying to make him rich and put him next to my strike!”

He stopped and mopped his brow, then took another drink and laughed, deep down in his chest.

“We were supposed to be prospecting,” he said at last. “I threw in with him over at Furnace Creek and we never stopped hiking until we struck the upper water at Wild Rose. How’s that for prospecting—never looked at a rock, except them he threw at his burros—and this morning, when I stopped, he got all bowed up and went off and left me flat. All I had was one canteen and the makings for a smoke, everything else was on the jacks, and the first rock I knocked off was rotten with gold—he’d been going past it for years! Well, I *stopped*! Nothing to it, when you find a ledge like that you want to put up a notice. All my blanks were in the pack but I located it, all the same—with some rocks and a cigarette paper. It’ll hold, all right, according to law—it’s got my name, and the date, and the name of the claim and how far I claim, both ways—but not a doggoned corner nor a pick-mark on it; and there it is, right by the trail! The first jasper that comes

by is going to jump it, sure—don't you know, boy, I've got to get *back*. What's the chances for borrowing your mule?"

"What—Tellurium?" faltered the boy going over to the mule and rubbing his nose regretfully, "he's—he's a pet; I'd rather not."

"Aw come on now, I'll pay you well—I'll stake you the claim next to mine. That ought to be worth lots of money."

"Nope," returned Billy, "here's a lunch I brought along. I guess I'll be going home."

He untied a sack of food from the back of his saddle and mounted as if to go, but the stranger took the mule by the bit.

"Now listen, kid," he said. "Do you know who I am? Well, I'm John C. Calhoun, the man that discovered the Wunpost Mine and put Southern Nevada on the map. I'm no crazy man; I'm a prospector, as good as the best, if I am playing to a little hard luck. Yes sir, I located the Wunpost and started that first big rush—they came pouring into Keno by the thousands; but when I show 'em this rock there won't be anybody left—they'll come across Death Valley like a sandstorm. They'll come pouring down that wash like a cloudburst in July and the whole doggoned country will be located. Don't you want to be in on the strike? I'm giving you a chance, and you'll never have another one like it. All I ask is this mule, and your canteen and the grub, and I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you half my claim, and I'll bet it's worth millions, and I'll bring back your mule to boot!"

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed the boy and was scrambling swiftly down when he stopped with one hand on the horn. "Does—does

it make any difference if I'm a girl?" he asked with a break in his voice, and John C. Calhoun started back. He looked again and in the desert moonlight the boyish face seemed to soften and change. Tears sprang into the dark eyes and as she hung her head a curl fell across her breast.

"Hell-no!" he burst out hardly knowing what he said, "not as long as I get the mule."

"Then write out that notice for Wilhelmina Campbell—I guess that's my legal name."

"It's a right pretty name," conceded Calhoun as he mounted, "but somehow I kinder liked Billy."

CHAPTER II

THE GATEWAY OF DREAMS

Standing alone in the desert, with her face bared to the moonlight and her curls shaken free to the wind, Wilhelmina smiled softly as she gazed after the stranger who already had won her heart. His language had been crude when he thought she was a boy, but that only proved the perfection of her disguise; and when she had asked if it made any difference, and confessed that she was a girl, he had bridged over the gap like a flash. "Hell—no!" he had said, as men oftentimes do to express the heartiest accord; and then he had added, with the gallantry due a lady, that Wilhelmina was a right pretty name. And tomorrow, as soon as he had staked out his claim—their claim—he was coming back to the ranch!

She started back up the long wash that led down from Jail Canyon, still musing on his masterful ways, but as she rounded the lower point and saw a light in the house a sudden doubt assailed her. Tellurium was her mule, to give to whom she chose, but he was matched to pull with Bodie when they needed a team and her father might not approve. And what would she say when she met her mother's eye and she questioned her about this strange man? Yet she knew as well as anything that he was going to make her rich—and tomorrow he would bring back the mule.

All she needed was faith, and the patience to wait; and she took her scolding so meekly that her mother repented it and allowed her to sleep in the tunnel.

The Jail Canyon Ranch lay in a pocket among the hills, so shut in by high ridges and overhanging rimrock that it seemed like the bottom of a well; but where the point swung in that encircled the tiny farm a tunnel bored its way through the hill. It was the extension of a mine which in earlier days had gophered along the hillside after gold, but now that it was closed down and abandoned to the rats Wilhelmina had taken the tunnel for her own. It ran through the knife-blade ridge as straight as a die, and a trail led up to its mouth; and from the other side, where it broke out into the sun, there was a view of the outer world. Sitting within its cool portal she could look off across the Sink, to Blackwater and the Argus Range beyond; and by stepping outside she could see the whole valley, from South Pass to the Death Valley Trail.

It was from this tunnel that she had watched when Dusty Rhodes went past, a moving fleck of color plumed with dust; and when the sun sank low she had seen the form that followed, like a man yet not like a man. She had seen it rise and fall, disappear and loom up again; until at last in the twilight she had challenged it with a fire and the answer had led her to—him. She had found him—lost on the desert and about to die, big and strong yet dependent upon her aid—and when she had allowed her long curls to escape he had stood silent in the presence

of her womanhood. She wanted to run back and sleep in her tunnel, where the air was always moving and cool; and then in the morning, when she looked to the north, she might see the first dust of his return. She might see his tall form, and the white sides of Tellurium as he took the shortest way home, and then she could run back and drag her mother to the portal and prove that her knight had been misjudged. For her mother had predicted that the prospector would not return, and that his mine was only a blind; but she, who had seen him and felt the clasp of his hand, she knew that he would never rob *her*. So she fled to her dream-house, where there was nothing to check her fancies, and slept in the tunnel-mouth till dawn.

The day came first in the west, galloping along the Argus Range and splashing its peaks with red; and then as the sun ascended it found gaps in the eastern rim and laid long bands of light across the Sink. It rose up higher and, as the desert stood forth bare, the dweller in the dream-house stepped out through its portals and gazed long at the Death Valley Trail. From the far north pass, where it came down from Wild Rose, to where Blackwater sent up its thin smoke, the trail crept like a serpent among the sandhills and washes, a long tenuous line through the Sink. Where the ground was white the trail stood out darker, and where it crossed the sun-burnt mesas it was white; but from one end to the other it was vacant and nothing emerged from north pass. Billy sighed and turned away, but when she came back there was a streak of dust to the south.

It came tearing along the trail from Blackwater, struck up by a galloping horseman, and at the spot where she had found the lost man the night before the flying rider stopped. He rode about in circles, started north and came dashing back; and at last, still galloping, he turned up the wash and headed for the mouth of Jail Canyon. He was some searcher who had found her tracks in the sand, and the tracks of Tellurium going on; and, rather than follow the long trail to Wild Rose Springs, he was coming to interview her. Billy ran down to meet him with long, rangey strides, and at the point of the hill she stood waiting expectantly, for visitors were rare at the ranch. Three restless lonely weeks had dragged away without bringing a single wanderer to their doors; and now here was a second man, fully as exciting as the first, because he was coming up there to see *her*. Billy tucked up her curls beneath the brim of her man's hat as she watched the laboring horse, but when she made out who it was that was coming she gave up all thought of disguise.

"Hello, Dusty!" she called running gayly down to meet him, "are you looking for Mr. Calhoun?"

"Oh, it's Mister, is it?" he yelled. "Well, have you seen the danged whelp? Whoo, boy—where is he, Billy?"

"He went back!" she cried, "I lent him my mule. He told me he'd made a rich strike!"

"A rich *strike*!" repeated the man and then he laughed and spurred his drooping mount. He was tall and bony with a thin, hawk nose and eyes sunk deep into his head. "A rich strike, eh?"

he mimicked, and then he laughed again, until suddenly his face came straight. "What's that you said?" he shouted, "you didn't lend him your *mule*! Well, I'm afraid, my little girl, you've made a mistake—that feller is a regular horse-thief. Is your mother up to the house? We'll go up and see her—I'm afraid he's gone and stole your mule!"

"Oh, no he hasn't," protested Billy confidently, running along the trail beside him, "he went back to stake out his claim. He found some rich ore right there at Black Point, and he's going to give me half of it."

"At Black P'int!" whooped Dusty Rhodes doubling up in a knot to squeeze out the last atom of his mirth, "w'y I've been past that p'int for twenty years—it's nothing but porphyry and burnt lava! He's crazy with the heat! Where's your father, my little girl? We'll have to go out and ketch him if we ever expect to git back that mule!"

"He's working up the canyon," answered Billy sulkily, "but never you mind about my mule. He's mine, I guess, and I loaned him to that man in exchange for a half interest in his mine!"

"Oh, it's a *mine* now, is it?" mocked Dusty Rhodes, "next thing it'll be a mine and mill. And he borrowed your mule, eh, that your father give ye, and sent ye back home on foot!"

"I don't care!" pouted Billy, "I'll bet you change your tune when you see him coming back with my mule. You went off and left him, and if I hadn't gone down and helped him he would have died in the desert of thirst."

“Eh—eh! Went off and *left* him!” bleated Dusty in a fury, “the poor fool went off and left *me*! I picked him up at Furnace Crick, over in the middle of Death Valley, and jest took him along out of pity; and all the way over he was looking at every rock when a prospector wouldn’t spit on the place! He was eating my grub and packing his bed on my jacks; and then, by the gods, he wants me to stop at Black P’int while he looks at that hungry bull-quartz! I warned him distinctly that I don’t wait for no man—did he say I went off and left him?”

“Yes, he did,” answered Billy, “and he says he’s going to kill you, because you went off and took all his water!”

“Hoo, hoo!” jeered Dusty Rhodes, “that big bag of wind?” But he ignored what she said about the water.

They splattered through the creek, where it flowed out to sink in the sand, and passed around the point of the canyon; and then the green valley spread out before them until it was cut off by the gorge above. This was the treacherous Corkscrew Bend, where the fury of countless cloudbursts had polished the granite walls like a tombstone; but Dusty Rhodes recalled the time when a fine stage-road had threaded its curves and led on up the canyon to old Panamint. But the flood which had destroyed the road had left the town marooned and the inhabitants had gone out over the rocks; until now only Cole Campbell, the owner of the Homestake, stayed on to do the work on his claims. In this valley far below he had made his home for years, diverting the creek to water his scanty crops; while in season and out he labored on the

road which was to connect up his mine with the world.

His house stood against the hill, around the point from Corkscrew Bend, old and rambling and overgrown with vines; and along the road that led up to it there were rows of peaches and figs, fenced off by stone walls from the creek. Dusty rode past the trees slowly, feasting his eyes on their lush greenness and the rank growth of alfalfa beyond; until from the house ahead a screen door slammed and a woman gazed anxiously down.

“Oh, is that you, Mr. Rhodes?” she called out at last, “I thought it was the man who got lost! Come up to the house and tell me about him—do you think he will bring back our mule?”

He dismounted with a flourish and dropped his reins at the gate; then, while Billy hung back and petted the lathered horse, he strode up the flower-entangled walk.

“Don’t think nothing, Mrs. Campbell,” he announced with decision, “that boy has stole ’em before. He’ll trade off that mule fer anything he can git and pull his freight fer Nevada.”

He paced up to the porch and shook hands ceremoniously, after which he accepted a drink and a basketful of figs and proceeded to retail the news.

“Do you know who that feller is?” he inquired mysteriously, as Billy crept resentfully near, “he’s the man that discovered the Wunpost mine and tried to keep it dark. Yes, that big mine over in Keno that they thought was worth millions, only it pinched right out at depth; but it showed up the nicest specimens of jewelry gold that has ever been seen in these parts. Well, this Wunpost,

as they call him, was working on a grubstake for a banker named Judson Eells. He'd been out for two years, just sitting around the water-holes or playing coon-can with the Injuns, when he comes across this mine, or was led to it by some Injun, and he tries to cover it up. He puts up one post, to kinder hold it down in case some prospector should happen along; and then he writes his notice, *leaving out the date*— and everything else, you might say.

“Wunpost Mine,” he writes, “John C. Calhoun owner. I claim fifteen hundred feet on this vein.”

“And jest to show you, Mrs. Campbell, what an ignorant fool he is—he spelled One Post, W-u-n! That’s where he got his name!”

“I think that’s a *pretty* name!” spoke up Billy loyally, as her mother joined in on the laugh. “And anyhow, just because a man can’t spell, that’s no reason for calling him a fool!”

“Well, he *is* a fool!” burst out Dusty Rhodes spitefully, “and more than that, he’s a crook! Now that is what he done—he covered up that find and went back to the man that had grubstaked him. But this banker was no sucker, if he did have the name of staking every bum in Nevada. He was generous with his men and he give ’em all they asked for, but before he planked down a dollar he made ’em sign a contract that a corporation lawyer couldn’t break. Well, when Wunpost said he’d quit, Mr. Eells says all right—no hard feeling—better luck next time. But when Wunpost went back and opened up this vein Mr. Eells was Johnny-on-the-spot. He steps up to that hole and shows his

contract, giving him an equal share of whatever Wunpost finds—and then he reads a clause giving him the right to take possession and to work the mine according to his judgment. And the first thing Wunpost knowed the mine was worked out and he was left holding the sack. But served him right, sez I, for trying to beat his outfitter, after eating his grub for two years!”

“But didn’t he receive *anything*?” inquired Mrs. Campbell. “That seems to me pretty sharp practice.”

She was a prim little woman, with honest blue eyes that sometimes made men think of their sins, and when Dusty Rhodes perceived that he had gone a bit too far he endeavored to justify his spleen.

“He received *some*!” he cried, “but what good did it do him? Eells give him five hundred dollars when he demanded an accounting and he blowed it all in in one night. He was buying the drinks for every man in camp—your money was all counterfeit with him—and the next morning he woke up without a shirt to his back, having had it torn off in a fight. What kind of a man is that to be managing a mine or to be partners with a big banker like Eells? No, he walked out of camp without a cent to his name and I picked him up Tuesday over at Furnace Crick. All he had was his bed and a couple of canteens and a little jerked beef in a sack, but to hear the poor boob talk you’d think he was a millionaire—he had the world by the tail. And then, at the end of it, he’d be borrying your tobacco—or anything else you’d got. But I never would’ve thought that he’d steal Billy’s mule—that’s gitting pretty

low, it strikes me.”

“He never stole my mule!” burst out Wilhelmina angrily. “I expect him back here any time. And when he does come, and you hear about his mine, I’ll bet you change your tune!”

“Ho! Ho!” shouted Rhodes, nodding and winking at Mrs. Campbell, “she’s getting to be growed-up, ain’t she? Last time I come through here she was a little girl in pigtails but now it’s done up in curls. And I can’t say a word against this no-account Wunpost till she calls me a liar to my face!”

“Billy is almost nineteen,” answered Mrs. Campbell quietly, “but I’m surprised to hear her contradict.”

“Well, I didn’t mean that,” apologized Wilhelmina hastily, “but—well anyhow, I *know* he’s got a mine! Because he showed me a piece of quartz that he’d carried all the way, and he must have had a reason for *that*. It was just moonlight, of course, and I couldn’t see the gold, but I know that it was quartz.”

“Ah, Billy, my little girl,” returned Dusty indulgently, “you don’t know the boy like I do. And the world is full of quartz but you don’t find a mine right next to a well-worn trail. Have you got that piece of rock? Well now you see the p’int—he took it *away*! Would he do that if his mine was on the square?”

“Well, I don’t know why not,” answered Billy at last and then she bowed her head and turned away. They gazed after her pityingly as she ran along the ditch and up to the mouth of her tunnel, but Billy did not stop till she had threaded its murky passageway and come out at her gate of dreams. It was from there

that she had seen him when he was lost in the Sink, and she knew her dream of dreams would come true. He was going to come back, he was going to bring her mule, and make her his partner in the mine. She looked out—and there was his dust!

CHAPTER III

DUSTY RHODES EATS DIRT

Billy gazed away in ecstasy at the dust cloud in the distance, and at the white spot that was Tellurium, her mule; and when the rider came closer she skipped back through the tunnel and danced along the trail to the house. Dusty Rhodes was still there, describing in windy detail Wunpost's encounter with one Pisen-face Lynch, but as she stood before them smiling he sensed the mischief in her eye and interrupted himself with a question.

"He's coming," announced Billy, showing the dimples in both cheeks and Dusty Rhodes let his jaw drop.

"Who's coming?" he asked but she dimpled enigmatically and jerked her curly head towards the road. They started up to look and as the white mule rounded the point Dusty Rhodes blinked his eyes uncertainly. After all his talk about the faithless and cowardly Wunpost here he was, coming up the road; and the memory of a canteen which he had left strapped upon a pack, rose up and left him cold. Talk as much as he would he could never escape the fact that he had gone off with Wunpost's big canteen, and the one subject he had avoided—why he had not stopped to wait for him—was now likely to be thoroughly discussed. He glanced about furtively, but there was no avenue of escape and he started off down to the gate.

“Where you been all the time?” he shouted in accusing accents, “I’ve been looking for you everywhere.”

“Yes, you have!” thundered Wunpost dropping down off his mule and striding swiftly towards him. “You’ve been lapping up the booze, over at Blackwater! I’ve a good mind to kill you, you old dastard!”

“Didn’t I tell you not to stop?” yelled Rhodes in a feigned fury. “You brought it all on yourself! I thought you’d gone back—”

“You did not!” shouted Wunpost waving his fists in the air, “you saw me behind you all the time. And if I’d ever caught up with you I’d have bashed your danged brains out, but now I’m going to let you live! I’m going to let you live so I can have a good laugh every time I see you go by—Old Dusty Rhodes, the Speed King, the Wild Ass of the Desert, the man that couldn’t stop to get rich! I was running along behind you trying to make you a millionaire but you wouldn’t even give me a drink! Look at *that*, what I was trying to show you!”

He whipped out a rock and slapped it into Rhodes’ hand but Dusty was blind with rage.

“No good!” he said, and chucked it in the dirt at which Wunpost stooped down and picked it up.

“You’re a peach of a prospector,” he said with biting scorn and stored it away in his pocket.

“Let me look at that again,” spoke up Dusty Rhodes querulously but Wunpost had spied the ladies. He advanced to the porch, his big black hat in one hand, while he smoothed

his tousled hair with the other, and the smile which he flashed Billy made her flush and then go pale, for she had neglected to change back to skirts. Every Sunday morning, and when they had visitors, she was required to don the true habiliments of her sex; but her joy at his return had left no room for thoughts of dress and she found herself in the overalls of a boy. So she stepped behind her mother and as Wunpost observed her blushes he addressed his remarks to Mrs. Campbell.

“Glad to meet you,” he exclaimed with a gallantry quite surprising in a man who could not even spell “one.” “I hope you’ll excuse my few words with Mr. Rhodes. It’s been a long time since I’ve had the pleasure of meeting ladies and I forgot myself for the moment. I met your daughter yesterday—good morning, Miss Wilhelmina—and I formed a high opinion of you both; because a young lady of her breeding must have a mother to be proud of, and she certainly showed she was game. She saved my life with that water and lunch, and then she loaned me her mule!”

He paused and Dusty Rhodes brought his bushy eyebrows down and stabbed him to the heart with his stare.

“Lemme look at that rock!” he demanded importantly and John C. Calhoun returned his glare.

“Mr. Rhodes,” he said, “after the way you have treated me I don’t feel that I owe you any courtesies. You have seen the rock once and that’s enough. Please excuse me, I was talking with these ladies.”

“Aw, you can’t fool me,” burst out Dusty Rhodes vindictively,

“you ain’t sech a winner as you think. I’ve jest give Mrs. Campbell a bird’s-eye view of your career, so you’re coppered on that bet from the start.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Wunpost drawing himself up arrogantly while his beetle-browed eyes flashed fire; but the challenge in his voice did not ring absolutely true and Dusty Rhodes grinned at him wickedly.

“You’d better learn to spell Wunpost,” he said with a hectoring laugh, “before you put on any more dog with the ladies. But I asked you for that rock and I intend to git a look at it—I claim an interest in anything you’ve found.”

“Oh, you do, eh?” returned Wunpost, now suddenly calm. “Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Rhodes. You wasn’t in my company when I found this chunk of rock, so you haven’t got any interest—see? But rather than have an argument in the presence of these ladies I’ll show you the quartz again.”

He drew out the piece of rock and handed it to Rhodes who stared at it with sun-blinded eyes—then suddenly he whipped out a case and focussed a pair of magnifying glasses meanwhile mumbling to himself in broken accents.

“Where’d you git that rock?” he asked, looking up, and Wunpost threw out his chest.

“Right there at Black Point,” he answered carelessly, “you’ve been chasing along by it for years.”

“I don’t believe it!” burst out Dusty gazing wildly about and mumbling still louder in the interim. “It ain’t possible—I’ve been

right by there!”

“But perhaps you never stopped,” suggested Wunpost sarcastically and handed the piece of rock to Mrs. Campbell.

“Look in them holes,” he directed, “they’re full of fine gold.” And then he turned to Dusty.

“No, Mr. Rhodes,” he said, “you ain’t treated me right or I’d let you in on this strike. But you went off and left me and therefore you’re out of it, and there ain’t any extensions to stake. It’s just a single big blow-out, an eroded volcanic cone, and I’ve covered it all with one claim.”

“But you was *traveling* with me!” yelled Rhodes dancing about like a jay-bird, “you gimme half or I’ll have the law on ye!”

“Hop to it!” invited Wunpost, “nothing would please me better than to air this whole case in court. And I’ll bet, when I’ve finished, they’ll take you out of court and hang you to the first tree they find. I’ll just tell them the facts, how you went off and left me and refused to either stop or leave me water; and then I’ll tell the judge how this little girl came down and saved my life with her mule. I’m not trying to play the hog—all I want is half the claim—but the other half goes to Billy. Here’s the paper, Wilhelmina; I may not know how to spell but you bet your life I know who’s my friend!”

He handed over a piece of the paper bag which had been used to wrap up his lunch, and as Wilhelmina looked she beheld a copy of the notice that he had posted on his claim. No knight errant of old could have excelled him in gallantry, for he had given her

a full half of his claim; but her eyes filled with tears, for here, even as at Wunpost, he had betrayed his ineptitude with the pen. He had named the mine after her but he had spelled it "Willie Meena" and she knew that his detractors would laugh. Yet she folded the precious paper and thanked him shyly as he told her how to have it recorded, and then she slipped away to gloat over it alone and look through the specimen for gold.

But Dusty Rhodes, though he had been silenced for the moment, was not satisfied with the way things had gone; and while Billy was making a change to her Sunday clothes she heard his complaining voice from the corrals. He spoke as to the hilltops, after the manner of mountain men or those who address themselves to mules; and John Calhoun in turn had a truly mighty voice which wafted every word to her ears. But as she listened, half in awe at their savage repartee, a third but quieter voice broke in, and she leapt into her dress and went dashing down the hill for her father had come back from the mine. He was deaf, and slightly crippled, as the result of an explosion when his drill had struck into a missed hole; but to lonely Wilhelmina he was the dearest of companions and she shouted into his ear by the hour. And, now that he had come home, the rival claimants were laying their case before him.

Dusty Rhodes was excited, for he saw the chance of a fortune slipping away through his impotent fingers; but when Wunpost made answer he was even more excited, for the memory of his desertion rankled deep. All the ethics of the desert had been

violated by Dusty Rhodes and a human life put in jeopardy, and as Wunpost dwelt upon his sufferings the old thirst for revenge rose up till it quite overmastered him. He denounced Dusty's actions in no uncertain terms, holding him up to the scorn of mankind; but Dusty was just as vehement in his impassioned defense and in his claim to a half of the strike. There the ethics of the desert came in again; for it is a tradition in mining, not unsupported by sound law, that whoever is with a man at the time of a discovery is entitled to half the find. And the hold-over from his drinking bout of the evening before made Dusty unrestrained in his protests.

The battle was at its height when Wilhelmina arrived and gave her father a hug and as the contestants beheld her, suddenly transformed to a young lady, they ceased their accusations and stood dumb. She was a child no longer, as she had appeared in the bib overalls, but a woman and with all a woman's charm. Her eyes were very bright, her cheeks a ruddy pink, her curls a glorious halo for her head; and, standing beside her father, she took on a naïve dignity that left the two fire-eaters abashed. Cole Campbell himself was a man to be reckoned with—tall and straight as an arrow, with eyes that never wavered and decision in every line of his face. His gray hair stood up straight above a brow furrowed with care and his mustache bristled out aggressively, but as he glanced down at his daughter his stern eyes suddenly softened and he acknowledged her presence with a smile.

“Are they telling you about the strike?” she called into his

ear and he nodded and smiled again. "Let's go up there!" she proposed but he shook his head and turned to the expectant contestants.

"Well, gentleman," he said, "as near as I can make out Mr. Rhodes *has* a certain right in the property. Mr. Calhoun was traveling with him and eating his grub, and I believe a court of law would decide in his favor even if he did go off and leave him in the lurch. But since my daughter picked him up and supplied him with a mule to go back and stake out the claim it might be that she also has an equity in the property, although that is for you gentlemen to decide."

"That's decided already!" shouted Wunpost angrily, "the claim has been located in her name. She's entitled to one-half and no burro-chasing prospector is going to beat her out of any part of it."

"But perhaps," suggested Campbell with a quick glance at his daughter, "perhaps she would consent to take a third. And if you would do the same that would be giving up only one sixth and yet it would obviate a lawsuit."

"Yes, and I'll sue him!" yammered Rhodes. "I'll fight him to a whisper! I'll engage the best lawyers in the country! And if I can't git it no other way—"

"That'll do!" commanded Campbell raising his hand for peace, "there's nothing to be gained by threats. This can all be arranged if you'll just keep your heads and try to consider it impartially. I'm surprised, Mr. Rhodes, that you abandoned your

pardner and left him without water on the desert. I've known you a long time and I've always respected you, but the fact would be against you in court. But on the other hand you can prove that you rode out this morning and made a diligent search, and that in itself would probably disprove abandonment, although I can't say it counts for much with me. But you've asked my opinion, gentlemen, and there it is; and my advice is to settle this matter right now without taking the case into court."

"Well, I'll give him half of my share," broke out Wunpost fretfully, "but I promised Billy half and she is going to get half—I gave her my word, and that goes."

"No, I'll give him half of mine," cried Billy to her father, "because all I did was lend him Tellurium. But before I agree to it Mr. Rhodes has got to apologize, because he said he'd steal my mule!"

"What's that?" inquired her father holding his ear down closer, "I didn't quite get that last."

"Why, Dusty Rhodes came up here to look for Mr. Calhoun, and when I told him that I had loaned him my mule he said Mr. Calhoun would *steal* him! And then he went up and told Mother all about it and said that Mr. Calhoun would do *anything*, and he said he'd probably take Tellurium to Wild Rose and trade him off to some *squaw*! And when I defended him he just whooped and laughed at me—and now he's got to *apologise*!"

She darted a hateful glance at the perspiring Dusty Rhodes, who was vainly trying to get Campbell's ear; and at the end

of her recital there was a look in Wunpost's eye that spoke of reprisals to come. The fat was in the fire, as far as Rhodes was concerned, but he surprised them all by retracting. He apologized in haste, before Wunpost could make a reach for him, and then he recanted in detail, and when the tumult was over they had signed a joint agreement to give him one third of the mine.

"All right, boys," he yelled, thrusting his copy into his pocket and making a dash for his horse. "One third! It's all right with me! But if we'd gone to the courts I'd got half, sure as shooting! 'Sall right, but just watch my dust!"

CHAPTER IV

THE TREE OF LIFE

As the evening came on they walked out together, Wunpost and the worshipful Wilhelmina, and from the portals of her House of Dreams they looked out over the Sink where they had met but the evening before. Less than a single day had passed since their stars had crossed, and already they were talking of life and eternal friendship and of all the great dreams that youth loves. Each had given of what they had without counting the cost or considering what others might say; and now they walked together like reunited lovers, though their friendship was not twenty-four hours old. Yet in that single eventful day what a gamut they had run of the emotions which make up the soul's life—of dangers boldly met, of mutual sacrifice and trust and the joys of vindication and success. They had staked all they had in the greatest game in life and, miracle of miracles, they had won. They had sought out each other's souls in the murk of death and doubt and each had been proven pure gold; yet even youth, for all its madness, has its moments of clairvoyance and Billy sensed that her joy could not last. It was too great, too perfect, to endure forever, and as she gazed across the desert she sighed.

“What's the matter?” inquired Wunpost who, after a few hours' sleep, had awakened in a most expansive mood; but she

only sighed again and shook her head and gazed off across the quivering Sink. It was a hell-hole of torment to those who crossed its moods and yet in that waste she had found this man, who had changed her whole outlook on life. He had come up from the desert, a sun-bronzed young giant, volcanic in his loves and his hates; and on the morrow the desert would claim him again, for he was going back to his mine. And her father was going, too—Jail Canyon would be as empty as it had been for many a long year—and she who longed to live, to plunge into the swirl of life, would be left there alone, to dream.

But what would dreams be after she had tasted the bitter-sweet of living and learned what it was that she missed; the tug of strong emotions, the hopes and fears and heartaches that are the fruits of the great Tree of Life? She wanted to pluck the fruits, be they bitter or sweet, and drain the world's wine to the dregs; and then, if life went ill, she could return to her House with something about which to dream. But now she only sighed and Wunpost took her hand and drew her down beside him in the shade.

“Don't you worry about *him* kid?” he observed mysteriously, “I'll take care of him, all right. And don't you believe a word he said about me stealing horses and such. I'm a little rough sometimes when these jaspers try to rob me, but I never take advantage of a friend. I'm a Kentucky Calhoun, related to John Caldwell Calhoun, the great orator who debated with Webster; and a Kentucky Calhoun never forgets a kindness nor forgives an intentional injury. Dusty Rhodes thinks he's smart, getting a

third of our mine after he went off and left me flat; but I'll show that old walloper before I get through with him that he can't put one over on me. And there's a man over in Nevada that's going to learn the same thing as soon as I make my stake—he's another smart Aleck that thinks he can job me and get away with highway robbery."

"Oh, is that Judson Eells?" broke in Billy quickly and Wunpost nodded his head.

"That's the hombre," he said his voice waxing louder, "he's one of these grubstake sharks. He came to Nevada after the Tonopah excitement with a flunkey they call Flip Flappum. That's another dirty dog that I'm going to put my mark on when I get him in the door—one of the most low-down, contemptible curs that I know of—he makes his living by selling bum life insurance. Phillip F. Lapham is his name but we all call him Flip Flappum—he's the black-leg lawyer that drew up that contract that made me lose my mine. Did Dusty tell you about it—then he told you a lie—I never even read the cussed contract! I was broke, to tell you the truth, and I'd have signed my own death warrant to get the price of a plate of beans; and so I put my name in the place where he told me and never thought nothing about it.

"It was a grubstake, that's all I knew, giving him half of what I staked in exchange for what I could eat; but it turned out afterwards it was like these fire insurance policies, where a man never reads the fine print. There was more jokers in that contract than in a tinhorn gambler's deck of cards—he had me peoned

for life—and after I'd given him half my strike he came out and claimed it all. Well, no man would stand for that but when I went to make a kick there was a rat-faced guard there waiting for me. Pisen-face Lynch they call him, and if he was half as bad as he looks he'd be the wild wolf of the world; but he ain't, not by a long shot, he just had the drop on me, and he run me off my own claim! I came back and they ganged me and when I woke up I looked like I'd been through a barbed-wire fence.

“Well, after that, as the nigger says, I began to think they didn't want me around there, and so I pulled my freight; and it wasn't a month afterwards that the ore all pinched out and left Judson Eells belly up. If he lost one dollar I'll bet he lost fifty thousand, besides tipping his hand on that contract; and I walked clean back from the lower end of Death Valley just to see how his lip was hung. He's a big, fat slob, and when times are good he goes around with his lip pulled up, so! But this time he looked like an old muley cow that's come through a long, late spring—his lip was plumb down on his brisket. So I gave him the horse-laugh, paid my regards to Flip and Lynch, and came away feeling fine. Because I'll tell you Billy, sure as God made little fishes, there's a hereafter coming to them three men; and I'm the boy that's going to deal 'em the misery—you wait, and watch my smoke!”

He smiled benevolently into Billy's startled eyes, and as the subject seemed to interest her he settled himself more comfortably and proceeded with his views on life.

“Yes sir,” he said, “I'll put a torch under them, that'll burn

'em off the face of the earth. Did you ever see a banker that wasn't a regular robber—with special attention to widows and orphans? Well, take it from me, Billy, they're a bunch of crooks—I guess I ought to know. I was just eleven years old when they foreclosed the mortgage and turned my mother and us kids into the street; and since then I've done everything from punching cows to highway robbery but I've never forgot those bankers. That's how come I signed up with Judson Eells, I thought I was sticking him good; but he was playing a system and they didn't anybody tumble to it until I discovered the Wunpost.

“W'y, there wasn't a prospector in the state of Nevada that hadn't worked old Eells for a grubstake. We thought he was easy, kind of bugs on mining like all the rest of these nuts, but the minute I struck the Wunpost—*bing*, he's there with his contract and we find where we've all been stung. We're tied up, by grab, with more whereases and wherefores, and the parties of the first part, and so on, than you'd find in a book of law; and the boys all found out from what he did to me that he had us euchered at every turn. I thought I could fool him by covering up the hole—”

“Oh, did you do that!” burst out Billy reproachfully, “and I made Dusty Rhodes apologize!”

“Never mind,” said Wunpost, “that was nothing but jaw-bone. He just said it to get a share in our mine.”

“No, but listen,” protested Billy, “that isn't what I mean. Do you think it was right to deceive Eells?”

“Was it *right*, kid!” laughed Wunpost. “That ain't nothing to

what I'm *going* to do if I ever get the chance. Didn't he hire that black-leg lawyer to draw up a cinch contract with the purpose of grabbing all I found? Well then, that shows how honest *he* was—and now I'm out after his scalp. I've got to raise a stake, so I can fight him dollar for dollar; and then, sure as shooting, I'm going to bust his bank and make him walk out of camp. Was it right—say, that's a good one—you ain't been around much, have you? Well, that's all right, Billy; I like you, all the same."

He nodded approvingly and Billy sat staring, for her world had gone topsy-turvy again. She had wanted to leave Jail Canyon and go out into the world, but was it possible that there existed a state of society where there was no right and wrong? She sat thinking a minute, her head in a whirl, and then she came back again.

"But when you covered up this mine and tried to keep it for yourself, he—had Mr. Eells ever done you any harm?"

"Well, not yet, kid—that is, I didn't know it—but believe me, his intentions were good. The time hadn't come, that's all."

"He was your friend, then," contended Billy, "because Dusty Rhodes said—"

"Dusty Rhodes!" bellowed Wunpost and then he paused. "Go on, let's get this off your chest."

"Well, he said," continued Billy, "that Mr. Eells gave you everything and that you lived off his grubstake for two years; so I don't think it was right, when you finally found a mine—"

"Say, listen," broke in Wunpost leaning over and tapping her on the knee while he fixed her with intolerant eyes, "who's your

friend, now—Dusty Rhodes or me?”

“Why—you are,” faltered Billy, “but I don’t see—”

“All right then,” pronounced Wunpost, “if I’m your friend, *stay with me*. Don’t tell me what Dusty Rhodes said!”

“That’s all right,” she defended, “didn’t I make him apologize? But I’m *your* friend, too, and I don’t think it was right—”

“Right!” thundered Wunpost, “where do you get this ‘right’ stuff? Have you lived up this canyon all your life? Well, you wait until tomorrow, when the rush is on, and I’ll show you how much *right* there is in mining! You come down to the mine and I’ll show you a bunch of mugs that would rob you of your claim like *that*! I’m going to be there, myself, and I’m going to borrow that pistol that you stuck in my ribs the other night; and the first yap that touches a corner or crosses my line I’ll make him hard to catch. And then will come the promoters, with their diamonds and certified checks, and they’ll offer you millions and millions; but you stay with me, kid, if they offer you the sub-treasury, because they’ll clean you if you ever sign up. Don’t sign nothing, see—and don’t promise anything, either; and I’ll tell you about *me*, I’ll do anything for a friend—but that’s as far as I go. They ain’t no right and wrong, as far as I’m concerned. I’m like a danged Injun, I’ll keep my word to a friend no matter how the cards fall; but if that friend turns against me I’ll scalp him like *that*, and hang his hide on the fence! So now you know right where you’ll find me!”

“Well, all right,” retorted Billy, whose Scotch blood was up, “and I’ll tell you right where you’ll find *me*. I’ll stay with my

friends whether they're right or wrong, but I'll never do anything dishonest. And if you don't like that you can take back your claim because—"

"Sure I like it!" cried Wunpost, laughing and patting her hand, "that's just the kind of a friend I want. But all the same, Billy, this is no Sunday School picnic—it's more like a dog fight we're going to—and the only way to stand off that bunch of burglars is to hit 'em with anything you've got. You've got to grab with both hands and kick with both feet if you want to win in this mining game; and when you try to fight honest you're tying one hand behind you, because some of 'em won't stop at murder. Eells and Flip Flap and their kind don't pretend to be honest, they just get by with the law; and if you give 'em the edge they'll soak you in the jaw the first time you turn your head."

"Well, I don't care," returned Billy, "my father is honest and nobody ever robbed him of his claim!"

"Hooh! Who wants it?" jeered Wunpost arrogantly. "I'm talking about a real mine. Your old man's claims are stuck up in a canyon where a flying machine couldn't hardly go and about the time he gets his road built another cloudburst will come along and wash it away. Oh, don't talk to me, I *know*—I've been all along those peaks and right down past his mine—and I tell you it isn't worth stealing!"

"And I've been up there, too, and helped pack out the ore, and I tell you you don't know what you're talking about!"

Billy's eyes flashed dangerously as she sprang up to face him

and for a minute they matched their wills; then Wunpost laughed shortly and stepped out into the open where the sun was just topping the mountains.

“Well all right, kid,” he said, “have your own way about it. It makes no difference to me.”

“No, I guess not,” retorted Billy, “or you’d find out what you were talking about before you said that my father was a fool. His mine is just as good as it ever was—all it needs is another road.”

“Yes, and then *another* road,” chimed in Wunpost mockingly, “as soon as the first cloudburst comes by. And the price of silver is just half what it was when Old Panamint was on the boom. But that makes no difference, of course?”

“Yes, it does,” acknowledged Billy whose eyes were gray with rage, “but the flotation process is so much cheaper than milling that it more than evens things up. And there hasn’t been a cloudburst in thirteen years—but that makes no difference, of course!”

She spat it out spitefully and Wunpost curbed his wit for he saw where his jesting was leading to. When it came to her father this unsophisticated child would stand up and fight like a wildcat. And he began to perceive too that she was not such a child—she was a woman, with the experience of a child. In the ways of the world she was a mere babe in the woods but in intellect and character she was far from being dwarfed and her honesty was positively embarrassing. It crowded him into corners that were hard to get out of and forced him to make excuses for himself,

whereas at the moment he was all lit up with joy over the miracle of his second big strike. He had discovered the Wunpost, and lost it on a fluke; but the Willie Meena was different—if he kept the peace with her they would both come out with a fortune.

“Never mind now, kid,” he said at last, “your father is all right—I like him. And if he thinks he can get rich by building roads up the canyon, that’s his privilege; it’s nothing to me. But you string along with me on our mine down below and there’ll be money and to spare for us both; and then you can take your share and build the old man a road that’ll make ’em all take notice! About twenty thousand dollars ought to fix the matter up, but if we get to gee-hawing and Dusty Rhodes mixes in there won’t be a dollar for any of us. We’ve got to stand together, see—you and me against old Dusty—and that will give us control.”

“Well, I didn’t start the quarrel,” said Billy, beginning to blink, “but it makes me mad, just because father won’t give up to have everybody saying he’s crazy. But he isn’t—he knows just exactly what he’s doing—and some day he’ll be a rich man when these Blackwater pocket-miners are destitute. The Homestake mine produced half a million dollars, the second time they opened it up, and if the road hadn’t washed out it would be producing yet and my father would be rated a millionaire. If he would sell out his claims, or just organize a company and give outside capitalists control—”

“Don’t you do it!” warned Wunpost, who made a very poor listener, “they’ll skin you, every time. The party that has control

can take over the property and exclude the minority stockholders from the ground, and all they can do is to sue for an accounting and demand a look at the books. But the books are nothing, it's what's underground that counts, and if you try to go down they can kill you. I learned that from Judson Eells when he put me out of Wunpost—and say, we can work that on Dusty! We'll treat him white at first, but the minute he gets gay, it's the gate—we'll give him the gate!”

He pranced about joyously, vainly trying to make her smile, but Wilhelmina had lost her gaiety.

“No,” she said, “let's not do that—because I made him apologize, you know. But don't you think it's possible that Judson Eells will follow after you and claim this mine too, under his contract?”

“He can't!” chuckled Wunpost starting to do a double-shuffle, “I fooled him—this isn't Nevada. And when I found the Wunpost I was eating his grub, but this time I was strictly on my own. I came to a country where I'd never been before, so he couldn't say I'd covered it up; and that contract was made out in the state of Nevada, but this is clear over in California. Not a chance, kid, we're rich, cheer up!”

He tried to grab her hand but she drew it away from him and an anxious look crept into her eyes.

“No,” she said, “let's not be foolish.” Already the great dream had sped.

CHAPTER V

THE WILLIE MEENA

The morning had scarcely dawned when Wilhelmina dashed up the trail and looked down on the Sink below; and Wunpost had been right, where before all was empty, now the Death Valley Trail was alive. From Blackwater to Wild Rose Wash the dust rose up in clouds, each streamer boring on towards the north; and already the first stampeders had passed out of sight in their rush for the Black Point strike. It lay beyond North Pass, cut off from view by the shoulder of a long, low ridge; but there it was, and her claim and Wunpost's was already swarming with men. The whole town of Blackwater had risen up in the night and gone streaking across the Sink, and what was to keep those envious pocket-miners from claiming the find for their own? And Dusty Rhodes—he must have led the stampede—had he respected his partners' rights? She gazed a long moment, then darted back through the tunnel and bore the news to her father and Wunpost.

He had slept in the hay, this hardy desert animal, this shabby, penniless man with the loud voice of a demagogue and the profile of a bronze Greek god; and he came forth boldly, like Odysseus of old when, cast ashore on a strange land, he roused from his sleep and beheld Nausicaa and her maidens at play. But as Nausicaa, the princess, withstood his advance when all her

maidens had fled, so Wilhelmina faced him, for she knew full well now that he was not a god. He was a water-hole prospector who for two idle years had eaten the bread of Judson Eells; and then, when chance led him to a rich vein of ore, had covered up the hole and said nothing. Yet for all his human weaknesses he had one godlike quality, a regal disregard for wealth; for he had kept his plighted word and divided, half and half, this mine towards which all Blackwater now rushed. She looked at him again and her rosy lips parted—he had earned the meed of a smile.

The day had dawned auspiciously, as far as Billy was concerned, for she was back in her overalls and her father had consented to take her along to the mine. The claim was part hers and Wunpost had insisted that she accompany them back to the strike. Dusty Rhodes would be there, with his noisy demands and his hints at greater rights in the claim; and in the first wild rush complications might arise that would call for a speedy settlement. But with Billy at his side and Cole Campbell as a witness, every detail of their agreement could be proved on the instant and the Willie Meena started off right. So Wunpost smiled back when he beheld the make-believe boy who had come to his aid on her mule; and as they rode off down the canyon, driving four burros, two packed with water, he looked her over approvingly.

In skirts she had something of the conventional reserve which had always made him scared of women; but as a boy, as Billy, she was one partner in a thousand, and as carefree as the wind. Upon the back of her saddle, neatly tied up in a bag, she carried

the dress that she would wear at the mine; but riding across the mesa on the lonely Indian trail she clung to the garb of utility. In overalls she had ridden up and down the corkscrew canyon that led to her father's mine; she had gone out to hunt for burros, dragged in wood and carried up water and done the daily duties of a man. Both her brothers were gone, off working in the mines, and their tasks descended to her; until in stride and manner and speech she was by instinct, a man and only by thought a woman.

The years had slipped by, even her mother had hardly noticed how she too had grown up like the rest; and now in one day she had stepped forth into their councils and claimed her place as a man. Yes, that was the place that she had instinctively claimed but they had given her the place of a woman. When it came to prospecting among the lonely peaks she could go as far as she chose; but in the presence of men, even as an owner in the great mine, she must confine her free limbs within skirts. And, though she had come of age, she was still in tutelage—with two men along to do her thinking. Wunpost had made it easy, all she had to do was stand pat and agree to whatever he said; and her father was there to protect her in her rights and preserve the family honor from loose tongues.

They skirted the edge of the valley, keeping up above the Sink and crossing an endless series of rocky washes, until as they topped the last low ridge the Black Point lay before them, surrounded by a swarm of digging men. It jutted out from the ridge, a round volcanic cone sticking up through the shattered

porphyry; and yet this point of rock, all but buried in the wash of centuries, held a treasure fit to ransom a king. It held the Willie Meena mine, which had lain there by the trail while thousands of adventurers hurried past; until at last Wunpost had stopped to examine it and had all but perished of thirst. But one there was who had seen him, and saved him from the Sink, and loaned him her mule to ride; and in honor of her, though he could not spell her name, he had called it the Willie Meena.

Billy sat on Tellurium and gazed with rapt wonder at the scene which stretched out below. Wagons and horses everywhere, and automobiles too, and dejected-looking burros and mules; and in the rough hills beyond men were climbing like goats as they staked the lava-crowned buttes. A procession of Indian wagons was filing up the gulch to haul water from Wild Rose Spring and already the first tent of what would soon be a city was set up opposite the point. In a few hours there would be twenty up, in a few days a hundred, in a few months it would be a town; and all named for her, who had been given a half by Wunpost and yet had hardly murmured her thanks. She turned to him smiling but as she was about to speak her father caught her eye.

“Put on your dress,” he said, and she retired, red with chagrin, to struggle into that accursed badge of servitude. It was hot, the sun boiled down as it does every day in that land where the rocks are burned black; and, once she was dressed, she could not mount her mule without seeming to be immodest. So she followed along behind them, leading Tellurium by his rope, and entered her

city of dreams unnoticed. Calhoun strode on before her, while Campbell rounded up the burros, and the men from Blackwater stared at him. He was a stranger to them all, but evidently not to boom camps, for he headed for the solitary tent.

“Good morning to you, gentlemen,” he called out in his great voice; “won’t you join me—let’s all have a drink!”

The crowd fell in behind him, another crowd opened up in front, and he stood against the bar, a board strewn thick with glasses and tottering bottles of whiskey. An old man stood behind it, wagging his beard as he chewed tobacco, and as he set out the glasses he glanced up at Wunpost with a curious, embittered smile. He was white-faced and white-bearded, stooped and gnarled like a wind-tortured tree, and the crook to his nose made one think instinctively of pictures of the Wandering Jew. Or perhaps it was the black skull-cap, set far back on his bent head, which gave him the Jewish cast; but his manner was that of the rough-and-ready barkeeper and he slapped one wet hand on the bar.

“Here’s to her!” cried Wunpost, ignoring the hint to pay as he raised his glass to the crowd. “Here’s to the Willie Meena—some mine!”

He tossed off the drink, but when he looked for the chaser the barkeeper shook his head.

“No chasers,” he said, “water is too blasted scarce—that’ll be three dollars and twenty-five cents.”

“Charge it to ground-rent!” grinned Wunpost. “I’m the man

that owns this claim. See you later—where’s Dusty Rhodes?”

“No—*cash!*” demanded the barkeeper, looking him coldly in the eye. “I’m in on this claim myself.”

“Since when?” inquired Wunpost. “Maybe you don’t know who I am? I am John C. Calhoun, the man that discovered Wunpost; and unless I’m greatly mistaken you’re not in on anything—who gave you any title to this ground?”

“Dusty Rhodes,” croaked the saloon-keeper, and a curse slipped past Wunpost’s lips, though he knew that a lady was near.

“Well, damn Dusty Rhodes!” he cried in a passion. “Where is the crazy fool?”

He burst from the crowd just as Dusty came hurrying across from where he had been digging out ore; and for a minute they stood clamoring, both shouting at once, until at last Wunpost seized him by the throat.

“Who’s this old stiff with whiskers?” he yelled into his ear, “that thinks he owns the whole claim? Speak up, or I’ll wring your neck!”

He released his hold and Dusty Rhodes staggered back, while the crowd looked on in alarm.

“W’y, that’s Whiskers,” explained Dusty, “the saloon-keeper down in Blackwater. I guess I didn’t tell you but he give me a grubstake and so he gits half my claim.”

“*Your* claim!” echoed Wunpost. “Since when was this your claim? You doddering old tarrapin, you only own one-third of it—and that ain’t yours, by rights. How much do you claim, I say?”

“W’y—I only claim one third,” responded Dusty weakly, “but Whiskers, he claims that I’m entitled to a half—”

“A half!” raged Wunpost, starting back towards the saloon. “I’ll show the old billygoat what he owns!”

He kicked over the bar with savage destructiveness, jerking up a tent-peg with each brawny hand, and as the old man cowered he dragged the tent forward until it threatened every moment to come down.

“Git out of here!” he ordered, “git off of my ground! I discovered this claim and it’s located in my name—now git, before I break you in two!”

“Here, here!” broke in Cole Campbell, laying a hand on Wunpost’s arm as the saloon-keeper began suddenly to beg, “let’s not have any violence. What’s the trouble?”

“Why, this old spittoon-trammer,” began Wunpost in a fury, “has got the nerve to claim half my ground. I’ve been beat out of one claim, but this time it’s different—I’ll show him who owns this ground!”

“I just claim a quarter of it!” snapped old Whiskers vindictively. “I claim half of Dusty Rhodes’ share. He was working on my grubstake—and he was with you when you made your strike.”

“He was not!” denied Wunpost, “he went off and left me. Did you find his name on the notice? No, you found John C. Calhoun and Williemeena Campbell, the girl that loaned me her mule. We’re the locators of this property, and, just to keep the peace,

we agreed to give Dusty one third; but that ain't a half and if you say it is again, out you go—I'll throw you off my claim!"

"Well, a third, then," screeched Old Whiskers, holding his hands about his ears, "but for cripes' sake quit jerking that tent! Ain't a third enough to give me a right to put up my tent on the ground?"

"It is if I say so," replied Wunpost authoritatively, "and if Williemeena Campbell consents. But git it straight now—we're running this property and you and Dusty are *nothing*. You're the minority, see, and if you make a crooked move we'll put you both off the claim. Can you git that through your head?"

"Well, I guess so," grumbled Whiskers, stooping to straighten up his bar, and Wunpost winked at the crowd.

"Set 'em up again!" he commanded regally and all Blackwater drank on the house.

CHAPTER VI

CINCHED

Having established his rights beyond the peradventure of a doubt, the imperious Wunpost left Old Whiskers to recoup his losses and turned to the wide-eyed Wilhelmina. She had been standing, rooted to the earth, while he assaulted Old Whiskers and Rhodes; and as she glanced up at him doubtfully he winked and grinned back at her and spoke from behind the cover of his hand.

“That’s the system!” he said. “Git the jump on ’em—treat ’em rough! Come on, let’s go look at our mine!”

He led the way to Black Point, where the bonanza vein of quartz came down and was buried in the sand; and while the crowd gazed from afar they looked over their property, though Billy moved like one in a dream. Her father was engaged in placating Dusty Rhodes and in explaining their agreement to the rest, and she still felt surprised that she had ever consented to accompany so desperate a ruffian. Yet as he knocked off a chunk of ore and showed her the specks of gold, scattered through it with such prodigal richness, she felt her old sense of security return; for he had never been rough with her. It was only with Old Whiskers, the grasping Blackwater saloon-keeper, and with the equally avaricious Dusty Rhodes—who had been trying to steal

more than their share of the prospect and to beat her out of her third. They had thought to ignore her, to brush her aside and usurp her share in the claim; but Wunpost had defended her and protected her rights and put them back where they belonged. And it was for this that he had seized Dusty Rhodes by the throat and kicked down the saloon-keeper's bar. But she wondered what would happen if, at some future time, she should venture to oppose his will.

The vein of quartz which had caught Wunpost's eye was enclosed within another, not so rich, and a third mighty ledge of low-grade ore encased the two of them within its walls. This big dyke it was which formed the backbone of the point, thrusting up through the half-eroded porphyry; and as it ran up towards its apex it was swallowed and overcapped by the lava from the old volcanic cone.

"Look at that!" exclaimed Wunpost, knocking off chunk after chunk; and as a crowd began to gather he dug down on the richest streak, giving the specimens to the first person who asked. The heat beat down upon them and Campbell called Wilhelmina to the shelter of his makeshift tent, but on the ledge Wunpost dug on untiringly while the pocket-miners gathered about. They knew, if he did not, the value of those rocks which he dispensed like so much dirt, and when he was not looking they gathered up the leavings and even knocked off more for themselves. There had been hungry times in the Blackwater district, and some of this quartz was half gold.

An Indian wood-hauler came down from Wild Rose Spring with his wagon filled with casks of water, and as he peddled his load at two-bits a bucket the camp took on a new lease of life. Old Whiskers served a chaser with each drink of whiskey; coffee was boiled and cooking began; and all the drooping horses were banded together and driven up the canyon to the spring. It was only nine miles, and the Indians would keep on hauling, but already Wunpost had planned to put in a pipe-line and make Willie Meena a town. He stood by Campbell's tent while the crowd gathered about and related the history of his strike, and then he went on with his plans for the mine and his predictions of boom times to come.

"Just you wait," he said, bulking big in the moonlight; "you wait till them Nevada boomers come. Things are dead over there—Keno and Wunpost are worked out; they'll hit for this camp to a man. And when they come, gentlemen, you want to be on your ground, because they'll jump anything that ain't held down. Just wait till they see this ore and then watch their dust—they'll stake the whole country for miles—but I've only got one claim, and I'm going to stay on it, and the first man that jumps it will get this."

He slapped the big pistol that he had borrowed from Wilhelmina and nodded impressively to the crowd; and the next morning early he was over at the hole, getting ready for the rush that was to come. For the news of the strike had gone out from Blackwater on the stage of the evening before, and the moment

it reached the railroad it would be wired to Keno and to Tonopah and Goldfield beyond. Then the stampede would begin, over the hills and down into Death Valley and up Emigrant Wash to the springs; and from there the first automobiles would burn up the ground till they struck Wild Rose Canyon and came down. Wunpost got out a hammer and drill, and as he watched for the rush he dug out more specimens to show. Wilhelmina stood beside him, putting the best of them into an ore-sack and piling the rest on the dump; and as he met her glad smile he laid down his tools and nodded at her wisely.

“Big doings, kid,” he said. “There’s some rock that’ll make ’em scream. D’ye remember what I said about Dusty Rhodes? Well, maybe I didn’t call the turn—he did just exactly what I said. When he got to Blackwater he claimed the strike was his and framed it up with Whiskers to freeze us out. They thought they had us jumped—somebody knocked down my monument, and that’s a State Prison offense—but I came back at ’em so quick they were whipped before they knew it. They acknowledged that the claim was mine. Well, all right, kid, let’s keep it; you tag right along with me and back up any play that I make, and if any of these boomers from Nevada get funny we’ll give ’em the gate, the gate!”

He did a little dance and Billy smiled back feebly, for it was all very bewildering to her. She had expected, of course, a certain amount of lawless conduct; but that Dusty Rhodes, an old friend of their family, should conspire to deprive her of her claim was almost inconceivable. And that Wunpost should instantly seize

him by the throat and force him to renounce his claims was even more surprising. But of course he had warned her, he had told her all about it, and predicted even bolder attempts; and yet here he was, digging out the best of his ore to give to these same Nevada burglars.

“What do you give them all the ore for?” she asked at last. “Why don’t you keep it, and we can pound out the gold?”

“We have to play the game, kid,” he answered with a shrug. “That’s the way they always do.”

“Yes, but I should think it would only make them worse. When they see how rich it is maybe someone will try to jump us—do you think Judson Eells will come?”

“Sure he’ll come,” answered Wunpost. “He’ll be one of the first.”

“And will you give him a specimen?”

“Surest thing—I’ll give him a good one. I believe that’s a machine, up the wash.”

He shaded his eyes, and as they gazed up the winding canyon a monster automobile swung around the curve. A flash and it was gone, only to rush into view a second time and come bubbling and thundering down the wash. It drew up before the point and four men leapt out and headed straight for the hole; not a word was said, but they seemed to know by instinct just where to find the mine. Wunpost strode to meet them and greeted them by name, they came up and looked at the ground; and then, as another machine came around the point, they asked him his price, for

cash.

“Nothing doing, gentlemen,” answered Wunpost. “It’s too good to sell. It’ll pay from the first day it’s worked.”

He went down to meet the second car of stampeders, and his answer to them was the same. And each time he said it he turned to Wilhelmina, who gravely nodded her head. It was his mine; he had found it and only given her a share of it, and of course they must stand together; but as machine after machine came whirling down the canyon and the bids mounted higher and higher a wistful look came into Wilhelmina’s eye and she went down and sat with her father. It was for him that she wanted the money that was offered her—to help him finish the road he had been working on so long—but she did not speak, and he too sat silent, looking on with brooding eyes. Something seemed to tell them both that trouble was at hand, and when, after the first rush, a single auto rumbled in, Billy rose to her feet apprehensively. A big man with red cheeks, attired in a long linen duster, descended from the curtained machine, and she flew to the side of Wunpost.

It was Judson Eells; she would know him anywhere from the description that Wunpost had given, and as he came towards the hole she took in every detail of this man who was predestined to be her enemy. He was big and fat, with a high George the Third nose and the florid smugness of a country squire, and as he returned Wunpost’s greeting his pendulous lower lip was thrust up in arrogant scorn. He came on confidently, and behind him like a shadow there followed a mysterious second person.

His nose was high and thin, his cheeks gaunt and furrowed, and his eyes seemed brooding over some terrible wrong which had turned him against all mankind. At first glance his face was terrifying in its fierceness, and then the very badness of it gave the effect of a caricature. His eyebrows were too black, his lips too grim, his jaw too firmly set; and his haggard eyes looked like those of a woman who is about to burst into hysterical tears. It was Pisen-face Lynch, and as Wunpost caught his eye he gave way to a mocking smirk.

“Ah, good morning, Mr. Eells,” he called out cordially, “good morning, good morning Mr. Lynch! Well, well, glad to see you—how’s the bad man from Bodie? Meet my partner, Miss Wilhelmina Campbell!”

He presented her gallantly and as Wilhelmina bowed she felt their hostile eyes upon her.

“Like to look at our mine?” rattled on Wunpost affably. “Well, here it is, and she’s a world-beater. Take a squint at that rock—you won’t need no glasses—how’s that, Mr. Eells, for the pure quill?”

Eells looked at the specimen, then looked at it again, and slipped it into his pocket.

“Yes, rich,” he said in a deep bass voice, “very rich—it looks like a mine. But—er—did I understand you to say that Miss Campbell was your partner? Because really you know—”

“Yes, she’s my partner,” replied Wunpost. “We hold the controlling interest. Got a couple more partners that own a third.”

“Because really,” protested Eells, “under the terms of our

contract—”

“Oh, to hell with your contract!” burst out Wunpost scornfully. “Do you think that will hold over here?”

“Why, undoubtedly!” exclaimed Eells. “I hope you didn’t think—but no matter, I claim half of this mine.”

“You won’t get it,” answered Wunpost. “This is over in California. Your contract was made for Nevada.”

“It was made *in* Nevada,” corrected Judson Eells promptly, “but it applied to all claims, *wherever found!* Would you like to see a copy of the contract?” He turned to the automobile, and like a jack-in-the-box a little lean man popped out.

“No!” roared Wunpost, and looked about wildly, at which Cole Campbell stepped up beside him.

“What’s the trouble?” he asked, and as Wunpost shouted into his ear Campbell shook his head and smiled dubiously.

“Let’s look at the contract,” he suggested, and Wunpost, all unstrung, consented. Then he grabbed him back and yelled into his ear:

“*That’s* no good now—he’s used it once already!”

“How do you mean?” queried Campbell, still reaching for the contract; and the jack-in-the-box thrust it into his hands.

“Why, he used that same paper to claim the Wunpost—he can’t claim every mine I find!”

“Well, we’ll see,” returned Campbell, putting on his glasses, and Wunpost flew into a fury.

“Git out of here!” he yelled, making a kick at Pisen-face

Lynch; “git out, or I’ll be the death of ye!”

But Pisen-face Lynch recoiled like a rattlesnake and stood set with a gun in each hand.

“Don’t you think it,” he rasped, and Wunpost turned away from him with a groan of mortal agony.

“What does it say?” he demanded of Campbell. “Can he claim this mine, too? But say, listen; I wasn’t *working* for him! I was working for myself, and furnishing my own grub—and I’ve never been through here before! He can’t claim I found it when I was under his grubstake, because I’ve never been into this country!”

He stopped, all a-tremble, and looked on helplessly while Cole Campbell read on through the “fine print”; and, not being able to read the words, he watched the face of the deaf man like a criminal who hopes for a reprieve. But there was no reprieve for Wunpost, for the paper he had signed made provision against every possible contingency; and the man who had drawn it stood there smiling triumphantly—the jack-in-the-box was none other than Lapham. Wunpost watched till he saw his last hope flicker out, then whirled on the gloating lawyer. Phillip F. Lapham was tall and thin, with the bloodless pallor of a lunger, but as Wunpost began to curse him a red spot mounted to each cheek-bone and he pointed his lanky forefinger like a weapon.

“Don’t you threaten me!” he cried out vindictively, “or I’ll have you put under bond. The fault is your own if you failed to read this contract, or failed to understand its intent. But there it stands, a paper of record and unbeatable in any court in the

land. I challenge you to break it—every provision is reciprocal—it is sound both in law and equity! And under clause seven my client, Mr. Eells, is entitled to one-half of this claim!”

“But I only own one-third of it!” protested Wunpost desperately. “I located it for myself and Wilhelmina Campbell, and then we gave Dusty Rhodes a third.”

“That’s beside the point,” answered Lapham briefly. “If you were the original and sole discoverer, Mr. Eells is entitled to one-half, and any agreements which you have made with others will have to be modified accordingly.”

“What do you mean?” yelled a voice, and Dusty Rhodes, who had been listening, now jumped into the center of the arena. “I’ll have you to understand,” he cried in a fury, “that I’m entitled to a full half in this claim. I was with this man Wunpost when he made the discovery, and according to mining law I’m entitled to one-half of it—I don’t give *that* for you and your contract!”

He snapped his fingers under the lawyer’s nose and Lapham drew back, startled.

“Then in that case,” stated Wunpost, “I don’t get *anything*—and I’m the man that discovered it! But I’ll tell you, my merry men, there’s another law yet, when a man is sure he’s right!”

He tapped his six-shooter and even Lynch blanched, for the fighting light had come into his eyes. “No,” went on Wunpost, “you can’t work that on me. I found this mine and I’m going to have half of it or shoot it out with the bunch of ye!”

“You can have my share,” interposed Wilhelmina tremulously,

and he flinched as if struck by a whip.

“I don’t want it!” he snarled. “It’s these high-binders I’m after. You, Dusty, you don’t get anything now. If this big fat slob is going to claim half my mine, you can *law* us—he’ll have to pay the bills. Now git, you old dastard, and if you horn in here again I’ll show you where you head *out!*” He waved him away, and Dusty Rhodes slunk off, for a guilty conscience makes cowards of us all; but Judson Eells stood solid as adamant, though his lawyer was whispering in his ear.

“Go and see him,” nodded Eells, and as Lapham followed Rhodes he turned to the excited Wunpost.

“Mr. Calhoun,” he began, “I see no reason to withdraw from my position in regard to this claim. This contract is legal and was made in good faith, and moreover I can prove that I paid out two thousand dollars before you ever located a claim. But all that can be settled in court. If you have given Miss Campbell a third, her share is now a sixth, because only half of the mine was yours to give; and so on with the rest, though if Mr. Rhodes’ claim is valid we will allow him his original one-third. Now what would you say if I should allow *you* one-third, of which you can give Miss Campbell what you wish, and I will keep the other, allowing Mr. Rhodes the last—each one of us to hold a third interest?”

“I would say—” burst out Wunpost, and then he stopped, for Wilhelmina was tugging at his arm. She spoke quickly into his ear, he flared up and then subsided, and at last he turned sulkily to Eells.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll take the third. I see you’ve got me cinched.”

CHAPTER VII

MORE DREAMS

In four days time Wunpost had seen his interest dwindle from full ownership to a mere sixth of the Willie Meena. First he had given Billy half, then they had each given Rhodes a sixth; and now Judson Eells had stepped in with his contract and trimmed their holdings by a half. In another day or so, if the ratio kept up, Wunpost's sixth would be reduced to a twelfth, a twenty-fourth, a forty-eighth, a ninety-sixth—and he had discovered the mine himself! What philosophy or sophistry can reconcile a man to such buffets from the hand of Fate? Wunpost cursed and turned to raw whiskey. It was the infamy of it all; the humiliation, the disgrace, the insult of being trimmed by a lawyer—twice! Yes, twice in the same place, with the same contract, the same system; and now this same Flip Flappum was busy as a hunting dog trying to hire one of his partners to sell him out!

Wunpost towered above Old Whiskers, and so terrible was his presence that the saloon-keeper never hinted at pay. He poured out drink after drink of the vitriolic whiskey, which Whiskers made in the secrecy of his back-room; and as Wunpost drank and shuddered the waspish Phillip F. Lapham set about his complete undoing. First he went to Dusty Rhodes, who still claimed a full half, and browbeat him until he fell back to a third; and

then, when Dusty priced his third at one million, he turned to the disillusioned Billy. Her ideas were more moderate, as far as values were concerned, but her loyalty to Wunpost was still unshaken and she refused to even consider a sale. Back and forth went the lawyer like a shuttle in its socket, from Dusty Rhodes to Wilhelmina and then back once more to Rhodes; but Dusty would sign nothing, sell nothing, agree to nothing, and Billy was almost as bad. She placed a cash value of twenty thousand dollars on her interest in the Willie Meena Mine, but the sale was contingent upon the consent of John C. Calhoun, who had drowned his sorrows at last. So they waited until morning and Billy laid the matter before him when her father brought the drunken man to their tent.

Wunpost was more than drunk, he was drugged and robbed of reason by the poison which Old Whiskers had brewed; but even with this handicap his mind leapt straight to the point and he replied with an emphatic “No!”

“Twenty thousand!” he repeated, “twenty thousand devils—twenty thousand little demons from hell! What do you want to sell me out for—didn’t I give you your interest? Well, listen, kid—you ever been to school? Then how much is one-sixth and one-third—add ’em together! Makes *three*-sixths, don’t it—well, ain’t that a half? I ain’t educated, that’s all right; but I can *think*, kid, can’t I? Flip Flappum he wants to get control. Give him a half, under my contract, and he can take possession—and then where do *I* git off? I git off at the same place I got off over at Wunpost; he’s trying

to freeze me out. So if you want to do me dirt, kid, when I've always been your friend, go to it and sell him your share. Take your paltry twenty thousand and let old Wunpost rustle—serves him right, the poor, ignorant fool!”

He swayed about and Billy drew away from him, but her answer to Lapham was final. She would not sell out, at any price, without the consent of Wunpost. Lapham nodded and darted off—he was a man who dealt with facts and not with the moonshine of sentiment—and this time he fairly flew at Dusty Rhodes. He took him off to one side, where no one could listen in, and at the end of half an hour Mr. Rhodes had signed a paper giving a quit-claim to his interest in the mine. Old Whiskers was summoned from his attendance on the bottles, the lawyer presented his case; and, whatever the arguments, they prevailed also with the saloon-keeper, who signed up and took his check. Presumably they had to do with threats of expensive litigation and appeals to the higher courts, with a learned exposition of the weakness of their case and the air-tight position of Judson Eells; the point is, they prevailed, and Eells took possession of the mine, placing Pisen-face Lynch in charge.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.