

# EMERSON WILLIS GEORGE

MY "PARDNER" AND I

Willis Emerson  
**My "Pardner" and I**

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**Emerson W.**

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# Willis George Emerson

## My «Pardner» and I / Gray Rocks, A Story Of The Middle-West, Illustrated

“Beneath yon rocky peak that hides  
In fleecy clouds its snow-flecked crest;  
Beneath those crimson crags abides  
The fairest queen of all the West.”

### PREFACE

The breaking of a twig in some vast forest, or the dull echo of a miner’s pick in a rugged mountain canyon, alike suggest the solitude of Nature. The unwritten history of mining prospectors who search for yellow gold, or the advance guards of our civilization in the rich valleys of the West, are replete-with interest and dramatic incident. The “boom” town builder also plays a most conspicuous part in this unwritten drama.

There are no frayed-out remnants of a former greatness to be found on the frontier. A man sells for his intrinsic worth – no more, no less. Conditions that made men great in former generations are here active. and develop manhood in its highest form.

There is hardly a cross-road hamlet without its hotel, and usually a “Dick Ballard” presides. “Brainy men.” such as composed the Waterville Town Company, may be found wherever a new town is building, while a “Rufus Grim” is usually the autocrat of the mining camp.

The old “Colonel” represents a class of sturdy miners whose untiring labor occasionally gives to the world the golden keys of some fabulously rich discovery; while the greater number dedicate their lives to a fruitless search for hidden treasures, and finally die of disappointment and a broken heart.

“Louise,” in her unswerving devotion to her father, is a specimen of superior womanhood whose duplicate may be found in many a ranchman’s home throughout the nestling valleys of our y re at West.

Sometimes I imagine I was with “J. Arthur Boast” in his hiding place when he wrote that last letter and saw the spectral ghost that ever kept him company. The retribution perhaps was just, yet my sympathy lingers around the old prospect shaft.

Many of my readers will doubtless desire to express their criticism of GRAY ROCKS. Nothing will afford me more pleasure than to receive just criticisms, for it will at least enable me to escape similar errors in other stories that I am now engaged in writing.

Sincerely,

ELM REST, August 20, 1894.

No. 1363 Central Park Boulevard, Chicago.

## CHAPTER I. – VANCE GILDER

VANCE GILDER had an ambition. It was to be a great journalist.

The sunshine that gleamed in at his western windows disclosed most luxurious apartments – indicating refinement and culture. The bric-a-brac; the leathern walls stamped with gilt; the frieze of palm-leaves; the chandelier; the richly carved book-case, filled with tawny-covered volumes; the upright piano, and a guitar which stood sentinel-like in a retired corner; together with India rugs and tiger skins on the floor before an open grate, half hidden by a large Japanese fan – bespoke wealth as well as refined taste.

Seated at an open escritoire with writing materials before him, on the evening of a June day, was Vance Gilder.

He was not more than twenty-five, of medium height, dark brown hair, soft and wavy as the silk of Indian corn, large brown eyes, a clear complexion, an aquiline nose, and a rather heavy, dark moustache, which in part hid a well-formed mouth.

Before him lay numerous packages of papers, but they were not claiming his attention. He was perusing a billet-doux written in a lady's hand.

There was a refinement and gentleness in his face, while his dress and surroundings indicated a serious elegance, rich but unaffected.

“Who can she be?” was the exclamation that escaped him as he again read the letter which he held in his hand.

Tossing it down, he walked back and forth across the room with measured strides.

Stopping before the mantel, he lighted a cigar. “Louise Bonifield,” he ejaculated, between puffs of smoke, which he blew away in rings toward the ceiling, “where have I met her?”

Where have I seen that name?”

Walking back to the escritoire, he took up the letter and read aloud:

Murray Hill Hotel, June 18.

Kind Sir:

Father and I arrived in the city last night. He wishes me to call on you at three o'clock this afternoon; business of special importance to himself.

Respectfully,

LOUISE BONIFIELD.

To Vance Gilder, Esq.

“No,” he said aloud, “I do not remember Miss Louise Bonifield. It is doubtless very stupid of me, and all that, but if ever I even heard the name before, it certainly has passed from my memory. She says three o'clock,” and glancing at the French time-piece which helped to make up the furniture of his room, he saw it was preparing to strike the hour of three.

Scarcely had the sound of the mellow cathedral bell died away, when the door-bell clanged out like a harsh echo of the clock's last stroke.

The servant brought in a card bearing the name of “Louise Bonifield,” and received instructions to admit the visitor at once.

The rustling of skirts was soon heard in the hallway.

With the deportment of a queen, she accepted the proffered chair and raised to Vance's face a pair of laughing blue eyes that might be dangerous. The parting of her rosy lips displayed her ivory teeth to advantage, while her evident embarrassment tinged with pink her beautiful cheeks.

“I called,” she stammered, “to see Mr. Vance Gilder.”

“At your service,” he replied, bowing low.

“But really, sir, are you Mr. Gilder?”

"I believe," he replied, "that I enjoy the doubtful honor of that appellation."

The half-hesitation of the visitor as she stood in the open door might have suggested momentary confusion, but reassurance seemed to assert itself as she complied with the melodious invitation of Vance Gilder to enter and be seated.

This vision of loveliness that entered the bachelor apartments of Vance Gilder might have been eighteen years old, but certainly no more. In stature she was of medium height, rather slender, and sustained herself "It must be," she faltered, with increasing embarrassment, "all a mistake."

Vance Gilder, with all his boasted matter-of-fact principles, was wonderfully interested in his fair visitor. She evidently was a stranger in the city, or a skilled actress. In referring to her afterwards, he spoke of her as a "dream of loveliness."

He was too chivalrous to permit his visitor's embarrassment to increase if he could help it and quickly assured her that it was not a very serious mistake, and asked in what way he could serve her, at the same time saying he regretted exceedingly that he did not answer the description of the Vance Gilder for whom she was seeking.

"The Mr. Gilder for whom I am looking," said his fair visitor, "is a much older gentleman than you. He visited father some three years ago, at Gold Bluff, Idaho, and owns an interest in Gray Rocks, my father's mine. My father is very anxious to meet Mr. Gilder; in fact, we have come all the way from Idaho expressly for that purpose. He would have called in person, but was taken ill last evening – so ill, indeed, that we found it necessary to summon a physician. We are stopping at the Murray Hill Hotel. I fear my father will be greatly disappointed."

A shade of sadness stole over the usually buoyant face of Vance Gilder.

"I think I understand," said he. "I bear the name of my father, who, after spending several months in the mining districts of Idaho, went to California, where he remained over a year, endeavoring to regain his health. He returned home a little less than two years ago and died within two months after his arrival.

"As his living representative, and in honor of his memory," said he, with feeling, "if there is any way in which he could have served you or your father, had he lived, I will volunteer, to the extent of my ability, to act in his stead."

"It certainly is very kind of you," she replied, "but I am distressed at this intelligence, and know my father will be also. We learned to think a great deal of Mr. Gilder during his few months' stay at Gold Bluff. You can certainly do my father a great service by calling on him."

"I shall take great pleasure," said Vance, in his earnest way, "in doing so. I am employed on the *Banner*, and my duties will prevent me calling before tomorrow at ten o'clock, but at that hour, tell your father he may expect me."

She had risen while he was speaking, and with a face full of sympathy and kindness, thanked him for his promise; and before he realized what was transpiring, the hall door closed and she was gone.

The house from which she had taken her leave was one of the best overlooking Central Park, in New York City. Vance Gilder, the elder, was a man of great determination of character, and had accumulated a fortune while yet in the prime of life. He built for himself this house. It was surrounded by elegantly kept gardens and velvet lawns.

He retired from business late in the '60's, intending to devote himself to his wife and only son, then a mere child, and his library. Scarcely a year of such enjoyment was allowed him before his wife sickened and died, leaving him his son and his fortune. It was hardly more than natural that he should lavish a great deal of attention and wealth upon his child.

As his son grew to manhood, his father discovered a recklessness and extravagance which was sadly at variance with those economic principles which he himself had so studiously practiced. Vance stood fairly well in his classes, and after graduating at Princeton, went abroad, visiting the principal cities of Europe, and spending money in such a lavish way that at the expiration of a year his father

summoned him home and remonstrated with him severely on his manner of living and his expensive habits.

Piqued at the rebuke, he quarreled with his father, and started out to make his way in the world alone. The estrangement was of short duration, however, and soon after the reconciliation he secured a position on the \_\_Banner\_\_, and assiduously devoted himself to the study of journalism. He gave up his follies and fast living, and found more enjoyment in his work on the *Banner* than he had ever found in swell dinners and midnight carousals at his club.

## CHAPTER II. – THE OLD MINER

THE ROOM in which we have introduced Vance Gilder to the reader, in the home overlooking Central Park, had been his from childhood, and furnished by his father in its present luxurious style, as a reward for his devotion to the profession of journalism.

His father had invested his income in real estate, and in the lapse of years found himself possessed of a fortune many times greater than he had ever anticipated. He traveled a great deal over the west, and at Gold Bluff, Idaho, he found in Ben Bonifield, the owner of Gray Rocks, a playmate of his youth.

Ben Bonifield had staked out a claim which he called “Gray Rocks,” and had worked away for several years with pick and shovel, believing that some day he would “strike it rich” – and from the output of other mining properties in that vicinity, it seemed as if his expectations might be realized some day.

He deeded a half interest in his mine to the elder Gilder, in consideration of certain moneys advanced him to develop the property. This one investment was the only one that Mr. Gilder ever made outside of New York City, and it is quite probable that in making this one it was not so much an investment as a desire to assist his boyhood’s friend. The deed which Ben Bonifield gave had been duly recorded, but in his travels on the Pacific coast he had in some way mislaid it, and on his return to New York City he had died without ever having mentioned the matter to his son. When his father died, Vance was bowed down with grief, while the old Scotch house-keeper and her husband could not have mourned more sincerely had the elder Gilder been related by the nearest ties of blood.

Vance found his father had not only left a fortune, but also a will. The date of this instrument showed that it was executed during the months of their estrangement, and had never been changed. The important part of the will, for this narrative, was a clause limiting Vance to an annuity of \$5,000, provided he remained at the old homestead and gave employment and a home to the Scotch house-keeper and her husband; but the title to the vast property which he owned was not to pass into his custody until he was forty years of age.

To the credit of the son, it can be said that he entertained no enmity towards his father because of this provision, but regarded it as simple justice. In the meantime, he devoted himself with more energy than ever to his profession, was economical in his habits, and had the consolation of knowing that he was being advanced from time to time on the *Banner*, until he was now regarded as one of the most trusted men on that great journal.

To be a member of the *Banner* staff of newsgatherers was a position to be envied by those similarly employed on less imposing journals. His associates – the city editor, the religious editor, the dramatic critic, the police reporter, and the heads of several other departments – were in the habit of discussing the topics of the times from a strictly democratic standpoint, with the regularity with which day follows night.

The “old man,” or managing editor, could not take a deeper interest in the columns of the *Banner* than did his faithful coterie of assistants. The managing editor prided himself on his ability to recognize and command intellectual forces.

With the breaking of the dawn anew paper, filled with news deftly gathered from the four corners of the earth, was ushered into life, teeming with the world’s history of a day, to be discussed by the banker, the politician, and the professional and non-professional classes over the breakfast-table. Each issue was a daily history possessing a soul and character distinctly its own, which collectively made up the policy of one of the greatest journals of New York City. Before high noon of each day a newspaper has generally served its purpose – dies; is a thing of the past, and the record of events found in its columns becomes ancient history.

The following morning at ten o'clock, agreeable to his promise, Vance Gilder was at the Murray Hill Hotel, and sent up his card to Ben Bonifield. Instead of receiving in his room, the old gentleman joined Vance in the lobby. He was a typical character – once seen, never forgotten. An old Virginian by birth and education, he still retained the courtly polish of one of the southern aristocracy, which many years of mining life had not been able to wholly destroy. In stature he was fully six feet, and rather portly; his oval face was smooth-shaven, save an iron-gray moustache. He wore his hair rather long, and the rim of his black felt hat was broad as a sombrero. His Prince Albert coat of broad-cloth was of old-time date, and suggested a revival of ancient gentility.

“Glad to see yo’, suh; am delighted to meet a son of my old friend, Colonel Gilder.”

He clasped Vance’s hand warmly, and his face was full of sympathy as he referred to the recent information he had received concerning Mr. Gilder’s death. They soon found seats in a retired corner of the lobby, and after assuring Vance that he had entirely recovered from his recent illness, the old gentleman plunged into business.

“Yo’ know, of cou’sse, that yo’r father owned a one-half interest in Gray Rocks?”

“No, I was not aware of the fact until your daughter named it to me yesterday,” replied Vance.

“Yo’ su’prise me, suh, yo’ really do,” said the old miner, “but it is true, nevertheless, and the deed is on record; and what is mo’, suh, Gray Rocks is destined to be the richest gold mine in Idaho. Yo’ see, I have been workin’ away on Gray Rocks for seven years – kep’ right at it, winter an’ summer, and while I have not ‘struck it’ yet, I am positive, suh, that if I had a little mo’ money to push the work, my most sanguine expectations would be mo’ than re’lized. We are now on the 200 foot level, but it seems, suh, it is not deep enough. A most wonderful showin’, in my opinion, suh, will be made when the 300 foot level is reached, and we have cross-cut into the vein.”

“I am not very well versed in regard to mining, in fact know next to nothing about it, but of course, as I am a half owner in a gold mine, I am naturally interested in having it developed.”

“Well, suh,” said the old gentleman, “yo’ see I am. I know all about mines. Yes, suh, I assure yo, on my honor, that I can tell ‘pay dirt’ as far as I can see it, suh, if I am sixty-five years old, Yo’ see, suh,” continued the old miner, “let us suppose this table is the top of the mountain. Now, where I place this ink-stand, is Gray Rocks; just beyond, here where I lay this pen-stalk, is the Peacock mine. It joins us directly on the nawth. The Excelsior is at this point, where I lay my eye-glasses, directly south of Gray Rocks. Both of them, suh, are payin’ immense dividends, and befo’ a year, with proper management, Gray Rocks will be doin’ the same. When he learned, suh, that I only had a half interest, he refused to talk with me any mo’ about it. He said he wanted all or none. Confidentially, Mr. Gilder, I consider old Grim the most ill-mannered man in the Fish River minin’ district, and us miners, suh, usually form a pretty correct idea of mankind in gene’l. I have been minin’ it now fo’ over thirty years, and while I have never ‘struck it’ yet, I assure yo’ on my word, suh, that I have mo’ confidence in Gray Rocks to-day than ever befo’.”

“Of course, Col. Bonifield,” said Vance, “I know nothing about your technical expressions of ‘sinking-shafts,’ ‘cross-cutting,’ and all that sort of thing, but I remember now of my father speaking of you on several occasions, and I doubt not, if he were living, he would gladly assist you in any way in his power. Personally, my means are limited, but if your wants are not too great, I will gladly give you my assistance.”

“Give me yo’re hand, suh! Why, Mr. Gilder, yo’re a gentleman that I’m proud to meet, suh.

“What we must do, suh, is to sink the shaft on Gray Rocks to a 300 foot level, and we will cross-cut into a vein of wealth, suh, that will make yo’ rich as a Vanterbilt. Yes, suh; take my word fo’ it. Now,” he continued, “there is old Grim; he owns a majority of the stock in the Peacock, and he wanted to buy out Gray Rocks, but of the old school, belonging to one of the oldest and proudest families of Virginia – yes, suh. Now, you have a half interest in Gray Rocks, and if yo’ can furnish the money, Mr. Gilder, to sink the shaft to the 300 foot level, I will go back to Gold Bluff and immediately commence the work – and mind, Mr. Gilder, I give yo’ my word that yo’ will never lose a dollar; no,

suh, Gray Rocks is a sure winner. The claim is patented and our title is perfect; but we must do mo', suh; we must sink our shaft, and it costs money to sink shafts, and a pow'ful sight of hard work into the bargain, suh. I came to New York especially to see yo're father and have him help me by advancin' a little mo' money. He paid me \$1,000, suh, fo' a half interest in Gray Rocks. I told him, and I tell yo' now, it will bring yo' a million. Yes, suh, I pledge yo' my word it will."

The old gentleman's words, his enthusiasm, his southern courtliness, and his unmistakable belief in Gray Rocks, carried Vance quite away, in anticipation of his half-ownership in a gold mine. He mentally computed the amount of money he had in the bank, and felt that he would willingly check out his last half-dollar to sink the shaft on Gray Rocks to a 300 foot level.

He had to his credit in the Chemical National Bank some fifteen thousand dollars, and finally ventured to ask about how much it would take to do the work.

"Why, yo' see, suh," replied the old miner, "the mo' a fellow has, the quicker he can sink a shaft. Now, I could get along at present with, say \$1,500, but \$2,000 would be betteh, and \$2,500 would be a great plenty."

"Very well," replied Vance, "I'll advance you \$2,500, and can bring it to you within a couple of hours."

The old gentleman was highly delighted with Vance's ready acquiescence in the matter, and shook his hand warmly, assuring him that he was a very true Virginian. Taking his leave, he quitted the hotel, and in less than two hours paid to Col. Bonifield \$2,500.

The old gentleman was very urgent for Vance to remain and lunch with him.

"My Louise, suh," he said, "will be delighted to see yo'.

Now, suh, there's one girl in a thousand. I call her a diamond in the rough, suh. She stays by the old man, and has just as much faith in the ultimate outcome of Gray Rocks as I have, I sometimes think, suh, that I ought not to keep her away so far from civil'zation, so to speak, among the mountains; but she says, 'We will wait until we strike it.' I assure yo', suh, she is a wonderful comfort to me."

Vance endeavored to persuade the old gentleman to bring his daughter and stop at his house for a few days, but the old miner explained that his stay could not be prolonged; that he was impatient to begin work on the mine, sinking the shaft to the 300 foot level, and then commence cross-cutting. He insisted that he must start for Gold Bluff by the evening train.

Ascending to the ladies' parlor, Vance waited until the old miner brought his daughter to bid him good-bye. As she came into the room on the arm of her stately father, Vance had hard work to convince himself that such a queenly girl as stood before him could have grown to such loveliness among the mountains of the northwest.

### CHAPTER III. – THE BANNER FORCE

A GREAT metropolitan journal like the *Banner*, has a tendency to swallow up individual characteristics in its own self-importance. A man may be ever so clever with his pen, and contribute the most readable articles day after day and year after year, and yet not one reader in ten thousand has any idea whose composition he is perusing.

Vance Gilder was only one of the force, and yet he was a favorite with his associates. He sometimes dreamed of promotion, and the time when he would be a correspondent of note, or possibly at the head of some important department on that great paper. Visions of special work which would call him not only to different parts of his own country, but to foreign parts as well, charmed him into contentment and renewed energy.

Only once during his connection with the *Banner* had he made anything like a “hit.” He had on one solitary occasion succeeded in “scooping” the other New York journals in a most masterly manner. Indeed, to Vance belonged the credit of having completely humiliated the other dailies with an article under flaming headlines and double-leaded. As a compensation, he was sent for by the chief, and received that august person’s special thanks. This was a mark of distinction, for it was seldom that he paid compliments. On the other hand, if the work was not up to the standard, the staff generally heard from him in a volley of profanity that caused them to doubt the permanency of their positions.

On the night after Ben Bonfield started for Gold Bluff, Vance found himself thinking a great deal about Gray Rocks. To a young man of twenty-five, fifteen years seems a long time to wait for the possession of one’s property. There is a certain fascination about the idea of owning a gold mine, and this charm had taken possession of Vance to a degree far beyond that which he was willing to admit, and between the lines of copy, he speculated on the future and built many castles in the air.

The half interest which his father owned in Gray Rocks had not been named in the will, and as Vance was his only heir, it naturally occurred to him that in case the old miner should “strike it rich,” he would find himself with a handsome competency long before his fortieth birthday.

For the first time during the years of his connection with the *Banner*, a feeling of dissatisfaction stole over him, and he was glad Colonel Bonfield had been so prompt in returning to Gold Bluff, for he felt the work of sinking the shaft on Gray Rocks should be commenced at the earliest possible moment. There was also a feeling of regret deep down in his heart that he had not had an opportunity to know more of the fair Louise, the remembrance of whose laughing blue eyes and perfect freedom from affectation hovered near him with a distinctness that he had never before experienced with any of his young lady friends. He was in this state of mind when the police reporter came in and declared that he was disgusted with the scarcity of crime.

“I say, Vance,” said he, “it’s getting to be a pretty pass when a fellow has to rummage all over the city for a few crumbs of accidental deaths, street brawls and shooting affairs.”

Before Vance had time to reply, the religious editor commenced swearing about the uninteresting sermons he was compelled to write of late.

The dramatic critic observed that lie presumed writing sermons was a rather stupid business, but if the reading public could endure them, the religious editor ought to be able to, at \$60 a week.

The religious editor said, “by Gad! old boy, you’re about right,” and begged a cigarette of the dramatic critic, declaring that he did not know with whom he would rather smoke than a representative of the footlights. He then slapped Vance on the shoulder in a jocular way, and asked him what made him so quiet.

“Scoops are scarce,” replied Vance, without lifting his eyes from the copy he was revising.

“Scarce!” chimed in the city editor, “I should say so. We have not had such a thing as a ‘scoop’ about the office for six months.”

“Journalism,” observed the dramatic critic, “is, without question, the king of professions. Here we see life in its every phase.”

“I am beginning to think,” said Vance, “that journalism is a drudgery without hope or reward.”

“You astonish me,” replied the religious editor. “Why, Vance,” he continued, knocking the ashes from his cigarette, “a fellow with as bright a future in the profession as you have, making such a remark as that, causes me to think you are growing cynical. Think of the opportunities which journalism affords.”

“What opportunities,” replied Vance, “have I, or you, or any other members of the staff, excepting those we have no right to take advantage of? I freely admit that there is a fascination about the profession of journalism; an influence, if you please, that holds us in the rut, much the same as the current of a mighty river – always drawing everything into the center where the current is swiftest – but the individuality of the most talented among us is completely lost in the great octopus that we are *daily* and nightly striving with our best efforts of brawn and brain to keep supplied with news.”

“Bravo!” shouted the police reporter. “There is not an ordinary prize-fighter in the land but has more individual reputation than any of us. Vance is about right in his position.”

At this juncture of their conversation, a note was handed to Vance. It was a polite request to report at the chief’s private room at ten o’clock the next morning. After hastily glancing over it, Vance read it aloud.

“I say, Vance, old boy, that’s a little rough; and still,” continued the religious editor, between vigorous puffs of his cigarette, “it may be a step up.”

It was an open question with members of the force whether a formal summons into the presence of the chief, without any intimation of the nature of the interview, was a good omen or otherwise.

“Possibly,” responded Vance, “but I rather surmise it is a step out.”

“The evil is sufficient unto the day thereof,” observed the dramatic critic. “It is twelve o’clock, boys; let us adjourn to the ‘realm of pie,’ and there we will discuss the unlooked-for summons.”

A half dozen as jolly young fellows as could be found anywhere, were soon seated in a private room at Thompson’s cafe, partaking of the reporter’s stereotyped lunch. As a result of their deliberations, there were many hopeful expressions made for the benefit of Vance. There was an under-current, however, of unmistakable belief, which Vance was not slow to perceive and share, that his interview with the chief would not result satisfactorily.

The dramatic critic soon drifted to the leeward of the question, and with almost forced vivaciousness recounted the latest hit of a jolly little soubrette dancer at Madison Square Gardens. His description was not only interesting, but a welcome diversion from the somber subject that might mean a separation of Vance from the staff. The religious editor took up the cue where the dramatic critic let go, and commenced swearing in newspaper parlance about the unsatisfactory work he was doing in his department.

The police reporter came in for a description of a “knock-out” he had witnessed in the Bowery, and for the edification of his associates, explained the difference between a “shoulder-strike” and an “undercut.”

On returning to their respective posts of duty, there was but little said, but it was noticeable that Vance was bid good night with more consideration than usual.

As Vance hurried along toward the elevated road, his thoughts were again filled with that demure little Louise, a product of the great mountains of the west. With her had come a hope – perhaps only a visionary one – stimulated by the enthusiasm of the old miner. He did not pause to analyze the sustaining hope which he experienced; he only knew that it took off the keen edge of anxiety which otherwise he would have felt concerning his coming interview with the chief.

## CHAPTER IV – A SUPPER PARTY

AT TEN O'LOCK the following morning, Vance sent in his card to the chief, and was immediately admitted to his presence. "Good morning, Mr. Gilder."

"Good morning, sir," was Vance's prompt reply.

"I sent for you," said the chief, as he industriously looked over a bundle of papers on his desk, "To discuss a matter I have had in mind for some time."

"Yes, sir," was Vance's laconic reply.

The chief having found the paper he evidently had been searching for, motioned Vance to be seated, and turning to him, asked:

"Have you ever traveled much in the west?"

"Have never been west of Buffalo."

"Your work," observed the chief, "has been very satisfactory – I may say, especially so – and it is the policy of the *Banner* not only to reward those who have talent, but also to keep pace with the times, and give its readers reliable information upon all questions of moment and importance. The great Northwest has been opening up for the last half century. There have been booms and counter-booms out in that country, spasmodically, for many years, and a great many fortunes have been lost by ill advised investors, but I am not personally familiar with anyone who has bettered his condition in western speculations. Just at the present time the northwest is attracting, as you are doubtless aware, considerable attention, and the effort to popularize it by the western press, seems unabating. Our eastern people, even some of the oldest families of New York, are becoming poisoned with the virus of western investments. My private opinion is that instead of receiving dividends on these holdings, they will lose principal and all.

"We want," said he, "a level-headed correspondent in that western country. Mark, I say level-headed, for the reason that not infrequently an eastern man, especially if he is unacquainted with the wonderland of the west, loses his head, figuratively speaking, and becomes won over by the fairy tales of prospective wealth, as told by the average real estate boomer.

"You, Mr. Gilder," said the chief, eyeing Vance with great directness, "have been selected for this important position of trust. I might," he continued, as if it were an afterthought, "modify my remarks by saying there are some places in the west worthy of credence, possessing real merit; but in nine cases out of ten, the new towns that are ringing up throughout the north western portion of the United States are, in my judgment, intangible as moonshine. In short, there is entirely too much capital flowing from the east into those wildcat western speculations, and we desire to give a series of letters descriptive of that country to the readers of the *Banner*, containing the facts stripped of all allurements, and dissuade them from such unstable investments as are daily being made.

"I deem," continued the chief, "these few suggestions necessary for your good in governing the character of your correspondence from that western country to the columns of the *Banner*. I shall expect you to be ready tomorrow evening, and start on the six o'clock train. As you will probably be away for some time, it would be well for you to arrange your private affairs accordingly.

Call tomorrow at eleven o'clock, and I will have ready the necessary credentials, transports and instructions."

Vance bowed his acquiescence and turned to go, when the chief said, "By the way, instead of \$40 a week, your present salary, you will receive \$60 and expenses, which doubtless will be satisfactory."

Vance attempted to express his appreciation of the confidence that had been reposed in him, of so important an undertaking; but the chief waved him to silence and muttered something about "time being money," and at once turned to other affairs that were awaiting his attention.

That afternoon Vance was not found among the staff, and a new man occupied his chair. He called on Thomas Patten, Esq., the attorney who had represented the Gilder family for many years, and named in his father's will as trustee, and explained to him his promotion, telling him he would start for the west the next evening.

His old associates at the *Banner* were asking questions of one another as to what had transpired between Vance and the chief, but no one seemed to know anything about it, except that a new man was on duty and Vance absent.

At half past eleven o'clock that night the dramatic critic hurried in from the street and passed word around among the coterie that a surprise was waiting for them over at Thompson's cafe. Thompson's is, and has been for many years, a favorite resort for newspaper men. Vance Gilder was well known to the manager as a member of the *Banner* staff, and when that afternoon he requested that a lunch something better than the ordinary be prepared, he was assured that everything would be in readiness.

The dramatic critic ushered his associates into a private room precisely at twelve o'clock. Vance was in waiting, and a warm greeting was exchanged. The religious editor declared that he believed a conspiracy of gigantic proportions had been laid to entrap the meek and lowly, but, nevertheless, he took his place with alacrity at the table to enjoy the modest but excellent feast prepared for the occasion.

A few bottles of rare old wine added interest to the surprise which Vance had so cleverly arranged. After the glasses had been tilled and drained, the political editor moved that an explanation was in order.

"My friends," said Vance, "the most important disclosure I have to make is that my salary has been raised to \$60 a week."

The religious editor said, "By Gad," and fell from his chair, declaring that his nerves were so unstrung that it would require another glass of wine to restore them. After Vance had carefully narrated his interview with the chief, he received the hearty congratulations of his associates. Each vied with the others in wishing him unbounded success as a western correspondent for the *Banner*. "I understand," said the political editor, after clearing his throat with a glass of wine, "that the west is teeming with opportunities in a political way; and I would not be surprised," he added, "if the Honorable Vance Gilder would be the next thing we hear of, as mayor of some municipality in the Rocky Mountain region, or possibly as a member of Congress from the Third District."

"Or still better," observed the religious editor, "president of one of those bonanza gold mines that advertise themselves as being the greatest dividend paying properties in the world."

"What's the matter," said the police reporter, "of being moderate in your expectations? Suppose Vance secures the position of judge of the police court in one of those western towns, where from a dozen to twenty drunks and brawls occur every twenty-four hours – ye gods! what a country for rich morsels of crime!"

It was conceded by all that Vance would have abundant opportunity for making investments here and there in the growing west that would materially increase his financial prospects.

"Sixty dollars," said the dramatic critic, as he finished his third glass of wine, "is quite a step up, but evidently a mere bagatelle to the 'pick-ups' on the side, in a new country that is just developing like the west is at the present time."

That Vance was one of the luckiest fellows living was the verdict of all his associates. After the lunch had been disposed of and a good-night glass of wine drunk to Vance's success, he bade his companions good-night, and was soon being driven rapidly up Eighth Avenue to Central Park, west.

On reaching his room he began to feel more than ever that he had awakened to find himself famous, and that a great honor had been thrust upon him.

His gratitude to his chief was unbounded, but like the young and ambitious everywhere, his own personal advancement in a financial sense was a consideration not to be overlooked. While he

knew personally very little about the Western country, the many allusions of his companions to the rare opportunities which awaited him in the new world he was about to visit filled him with a vague, indescribable sense of importance.

As he retired for the night, he assured himself that Gold Bluff, Idaho, would be one of his objective points, and hoped he would be there when the shaft reached the 300 foot level. He was beginning to share the old miner's enthusiasm and confidence in Gray Rocks.

He drifted away into a restful sleep, while visions of a lovely girl in early womanhood, with beautiful blue eyes, "gentle grace and sovereign sweetness," rose in a mist before him, and he dreamed he was at Gold Bluff.

## CHAPTER V. – AN ODD CHARACTER

A TRIP from New York to the inter-mountain country of the west, with the present railroad facilities of palatial Pullmans and dining cars, is now an every-day affair. The traveler is surrounded by every comfort. Vance Gilder was more than ever in love with the change, as the cars rumbled on through dell and forest, across broad stretches of beautiful valley country, and ever and anon rushing over an iron bridge that spanned some beautiful stream of water, some of them calm and peaceful, and others rushing madly along, breaking into white spray over rocky ripples, and then hurrying on again as if they were running a race with time.

As he approached the Rocky Mountain country, and for the first time in his life gazed upon that mighty range of Nature's towering masonry, he was almost intoxicated with the new sights to be seen on the "crown of the continent."

Notwithstanding his enjoyment of the new and varied scenery, he was glad enough to abandon the cars at Butte City, after four days and nights of continuous riding.

Butte City is said to be, not only the greatest mining camp in Montana, but the greatest in the world. They boast of the many millions that are brought to the light of day by the magic wand of the miner's pick. Vance found lodging at the Mercury Hotel, and early the next morning, after breakfasting heartily, started for a walk.

The town is built on a side-hill, gently rising from the depot grounds westward to a very considerable elevation. He paused now and then to inspect the architecture of some of the buildings, and then looked away toward the smelter districts, at the black clouds of smoke which the chimneys were belching forth, and falling over the city like a veil of mourning.

Presently he was accosted by an individual of grizzly beard and good-matured countenance, who said: "Hello, pard; how d'ye do? Sizin' up these diggins' be ye?"

As Vance eyed his questioner rather critically and acknowledged the salutation, the fellow reached him a card which bore the name "Hank Casey." While Vance was glancing at the card, his new acquaintance said:

"I reckon you be from down east? I come from thar a long time ago. You'll notice from my card that I'm in the real estate business; also have some fine minin' propositions."

"Yes," replied Vance, "I am from the east, but do not know as I care to make any investments."

"Well, now, look'ee? here, stranger. I 'spect I might give you a pinter or two that may not come amiss. This 'ere town is chuck up full of dead beats and black legs, who make it their business to run every new feller in that comes from down east. Now Hank Casey do a straight-for'ard, legitimate business – that's me," said he, as he tucked his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and straightened himself to his fullest height.

Vance was amused by this odd character, and determined to learn from him what he could concerning Butte City and the claims made for it. He therefore asked, "What population have you and what are your resources?"

"Over fifty thousand people, above an' below. You see, thar's several thousand of us in this town below ground, workin' away with shovel an' pick. I reckon as how you'll see a fair sample of our miners if you're on the streets tonight. As for resources – why, pardner, thar's no end to 'em. We took out mighty near forty million dollars from our mines last year, an' thar's ore enough in sight to keep on minin' at the same rate for a hundred years to come. What d'ye think o' that?"

Vance replied that it certainly was a most extraordinary statement.

"What other towns have you in this state," asked Vance.

"None to speak of," was the prompt reply. "Butte City is the pertest town in any o' these western diggings. Thar's not another town in Montana as can tech one side of us, for money, marbles, or chalk. To be sure," he went on, in a condescending tone, "we have lots o' towns in this 'ere state, sech

as they be; lots o' minin' camps, but they are merely blacksmith-shops-on-the-crossroads,' compared with Butte City. D'ye see that Corner lot over thar'. Five years ago I owned the ground whar' that buildin' stands. I bought it for \$300, held it just thirteen months, and sold it for \$4,000 spot cash."

"Why that was an immense profit," said Vance, with more interest than he had yet manifested in Hank Casey's description of Butte City. Hank Casey smiled contentedly and expectorated an accumulation of tobacco juice with a resounding "pit-tew" on the side walk, and said: "You call that a good profit? Why, pardner, I bought stock in the Blackbird mine at twelve cents a share when the company was fust organized, and now its worth \$300 a share and payin' an immense dividend monthly. That's what I call a good investment; but as fer that speck," said he, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the corner lot, "that don't amount to nothin'."

"Do you know where Gold Bluff, Idaho, is?" asked Vance.

"I reckon I ought to know," replied the boomer; "me an' Steve Gibbons were the fust prospectors in that 'neck o' the woods.' Steve an' I claim to own the Peacock, but old Rufus Grim, the biggest scoundrel in Idaho yes, the biggest in this whole minin' country claims to own it, and has got possession, and I've learned, in this western country 'specially, that possession is not only nine points of the law, but mighty near ten. Of course, a gold mine like the Peacock is a mighty handy thing to have in the family, but as a general rule, they're mighty unsartin. Give me a silver or copper mine every time."

Vance assured his new-found acquaintance that he was under many obligations for the information received, and said he hoped to meet him again. Hank Casey, however, was not to be disposed of in this way, and walked along with Vance. Presently he called his attention to some vacant lots across the street.

"D'ye see them lots over thar? I can sell you one o' them fifty-foot lots at \$3,500. an I'll bet diamonds against peanuts it'll be a rich buy at \$10,000 before two years. By the way, stranger, what's the matter with you takin a leetle 'flyer' in Butte City dirt? Buy a few lots, stop here with us for six months, sell 'em out agin for 100 per cent, profit, an' that'll pay all the expenses of your western trip. See? said he, touching Vance gently in the ribs with his elbow.

"Yes; I see," said Vance, "I see very clearly, or would, were it not for the smoke. It smells like sulphur. Does it come from some of your mills or smelters?"

"Now, look'ee here, pard, you're just like every other down-easter. They're always kickin' 'bout this smoke.

Now, let me tell you; if we didn't have that 'ar smoke we wouldn't have any Butte City, and besides, it kills the bacteria, molecules, an' all that sort o thing. It's mighty healthy here, I can tell you, an' a mighty pert town into the bargain."

Vance coughed immoderately, but Hank Casey who was acclimated, assured him that he was at that moment breathing the healthiest air that ever his lungs were filled with.

In the course of their walk, the boomer kept up a constant conversation, explaining different points of interest, pointing out the different mining properties in sight and telling their names, until Vance felt that he had been very fortunate in falling in with one so conversant with Butte City. At parting, Vance bade his new-found friend good day, and promised to call at his office before leaving the city.

When he returned to the hotel, he commenced his first letter to the *Banner*, but it was not finished until late that night. When it appeared in the great New York journal it surprised, in point of brilliancy and interest, even his warmest friends. His descriptions were so vivid and lifelike, and his characters so droll, and withal teeming with information, that a score of letters came to the managing editor, assuring him of the great pleasure and profit they had experienced in its perusal. Of course, Vance knew nothing of this at the time, but devoted himself with unceasing diligence in searching out reliable information, and then training it into weekly letters.

Butte City began to impress him as a place of more importance than he had at first thought. He learned that almost one million of dollars was paid out monthly to the miners alone, and they, as a class, are “hail fellows well met,” who believe in the doctrine of keeping money in constant circulation.

He noticed in many of the mercantile houses that when the day clerks went off duty at six o'clock in the evening, another set of clerks came on, and the shops and stores, by the aid of brilliant electric lights, continued business twenty-four hours out of the day the year around.

Vance frequently thought of his conversation with the managing editor, and what he had said about western towns and the over-enthusiastic town boomer. In Hank Casey he felt he had found a typical character that fully came up to all the managing editor had inferred, and had frequently used him as an inspiration, but was becoming more and more convinced that Butte City was one of those solid, substantial places which the managing editor had classed as exceptions to the rule.

## CHAPTER VI – THE TOWN BOOMER

ABOUT TWO WEEKS after Vance Gilder arrived in Butte City, he noticed one morning that everybody was talking about a new town, and each was asking the others what they thought about it. Glancing at the hotel register, he saw the name, Homer Winthrop, of Waterville, Idaho.

In looking over the *Butte City Miner* and the *Inter-Mountain Blade*, both healthy dailies and well edited, he was somewhat astonished to find a full-page advertisement in each of the papers, setting forth in blazing splendor the great Thief River Valley, and signed by Homer Winthrop as agent, announcing that he would be at the Mercury Hotel for a short time, and inviting those who were interested in investing a little money in a purely agricultural city, to come early and “get in on the ground floor.”

The advertisement represented Waterville as being in the midst of the great Thief River Valley, with the largest water power in the country, surrounded by an agricultural district of two million acres of the richest land the sun ever shone down upon. He termed the new town of Waterville the “City of Destiny,” and said the price of town lots would quadruple in a few years’ time.

Vance was at once interested. “Here,” said he to himself, “is a genuine town boomer, and as the fellow is stopping at this hotel, it will be an easy matter to learn just how this boom business is operated. It will make an excellent article for the *Banner*.”

Accordingly, about eleven o’clock that forenoon he called to see the irrepressible town boomer and hear what sort of a marvelous story he had to tell about Waterville.

He was quickly admitted into a reception room by a young gentleman who assured him that Mr. Winthrop would soon be at leisure, and begged him to be seated, calling his attention to the numerous maps on the walls, one of which covered nearly the entire side of the room.

Winthrop’s young assistant seemed to know his business, and at once commenced the preliminary skirmish of interesting Vance in the great Thief River Valley, and especially town lots in Waterville; but as Vance did not evince any inclination to purchase, the young fellow endeavored to so impress him by calling his attention to the advertisements in the morning papers. Every once in a while he would tip-toe over to the door where the great town-boomer, Homer Winthrop, was holding a private conversation with a would-be purchaser. He would put his ear to the keyhole and listen for a moment, and then come tip-toeing back and assure Vance Mr. Winthrop would soon be at leisure.

Presently the door opened and a gentleman in miner’s garb came out, and Vance was immediately shown in. As he entered the private room of Homer Winthrop, he involuntarily paused to study, if but for a moment, the face of the man who had arrived in Butte City late the night before, and now had everyone in the place agog over the prospects of a new town that had just been laid out on paper in the Thief River Valley.

Homer Winthrop, with all the easy grace of a Chesterfield, motioned his visitor to a seat, pushing a box of very superior Havanas toward him, and invited him to join him in burning a weed. He was a man above the average height, inclined to be rather slender, and possessed a rather good looking face, beaming with good nature and apparent frankness; a pair of intelligent dark eyes that laughed and smiled with as much expression as the face, changeable, however, into intenseness and earnestness seldom met with; a broad, intellectual forehead; a rather square chin, indicating great determination of character. To this add a luxuriant head of dark hair, and moustache, otherwise a clean-shaven face, and the reader will have a fair idea of his appearance.

He was evidently an adept in reading human nature, and knew his man on sight; had seen much of western life – and yet it required no second interview to discover in him the polished manners and easy grace of one who has seen much of refinement and culture. He could have entered into the gaieties of a reception in a Fifth Avenue mansion with as little effort as he had stirred up a city of

50,000 people in a few hours over the magnificent prospects of a new town that was just budding into existence.

Vance accepted the proffered cigar, and they easily engaged in conversation. They discussed the great output of ore from the mines of Butte City, and the wonderful development of the western country during recent years; the magnificent mining properties that had been opened up; and, in fact, nearly everything except Waterville and the great Thief River Valley. Homer Winthrop with the skill of a tactician, narrated incidents and legends of different miners who had devoted a lifetime in searching for the precious metal and finally “struck it rich” in some out-of-the-way, unexpected place.

Vance finally inquired in regard to the new town of Waterville, and was not a little surprised at the conservative reply he received, wholly devoid of any enthusiasm.

“Oh,” said Winthrop, “we have a very excellent agricultural country in the valley. We are building our new town of Waterville on the rapids of the Thief River. It has, perhaps, the greatest water power of any inland city in the United States. Many believe a great city will eventually be built at that point. We also have a great deal of capital invested in the construction of irrigating canals, reclaiming the valley lands from their present arid condition and converting them into productive farms.” He also went on, in a voice full of rhythm that was almost musical in its intonation, explaining in a modest way why many people believed in the future of the place, touching on the numerous natural resources that were apparent to everyone sufficiently interested to visit the valley and see for himself.

Vance was deeply interested in Homer Winthrop’s appearance, and later found himself charmed with his new acquaintance more than he cared to admit, even to himself. On taking his leave, he promised to call again the next day. As Vance stepped into the reception room, he found it almost filled with miners and tradesmen who were waiting for an interview with Mr. Winthrop, and he rightly guessed that a profitable business was being done.

In thinking over his interview with the town boomer of Waterville, Vance was compelled to admit that he was one of the most attractive individuals with whom he had ever come in contact. That afternoon he finished a letter to the *Banner*, but it contained no reference to Waterville.

The result of his second interview was that he accepted an invitation to visit the new town, which was some two hundred miles distant. Agreeable to this arrangement, they left Butte City early one morning, and that evening reached Waterville.

Vance was not particularly attracted by the general appearance and “lay” of the new town site. It appeared crude and unfinished, and abounded with sage brush and sand. The waters of the rapids, however, in their mad rushing as they went foaming down the narrows like race horses, impressed him with a belief that nothing had been overdrawn in regard to this great natural power, which had been idling its time away for centuries.

Homer stood by his side on the rocky bank, but said nothing.

Presently Vance looked up and said: “What a wonderful power is going to waste in these rapids!”

“It will soon be harnessed,” replied Winthrop, “and this vast power utilized in many manufacturing enterprises. I do not feel,” he continued, “that I am over-estimating facts, Mr. Gilder, when I say there is power enough here to turn every spindle in every woolen mill and factory in the United States.”

“My only surprise,” replied Vance, “is that these waters have not been put to use long before this.”

That night at the hotel Vance felt he was indeed “roughing it.” He rose in the morning feeling but little refreshed, and sat down to a very unpalatable breakfast, and immediately afterwards started with Homer Winthrop on a drive through the valley.

The farmers were busy harvesting their grain, and on inquiry they learned the yield of wheat was from forty to seventy bushels to the acre, and that oats yielded from sixty to one hundred bushels to the

acre. Vance was greatly astonished, and became almost enthusiastic over the agricultural possibilities of the valley.

“Why,” said he, “Mr. Winthrop, there is no question but this is destined to be one of the richest agricultural valleys in the world. In my work on the *Banner* I have had occasion to look up statistics on grain products, and if these farmers are telling the truth in regard to the yield of their crops, there is no other place like it in the United States.”

A moment after, he was chagrined to think he had given way to such a burst of enthusiasm. It would have been better for him to remain a listener, and allow Winthrop to grow enthusiastic in praise of the country. Winthrop, however, took no advantage of Vance’s earnestness.

The day was a perfect one; the sun was shining, and yet there was a cool, invigorating breeze sweeping gently down from the snow-capped Tetons. Driving rapidly and pleasantly along, they at last found themselves near the foot-hills on a slight elevation overlooking the valley to the west. Alighting from the carriage, Vance followed Winthrop’s lead, and soon they found themselves on a table rock, at a sufficient elevation to see for many miles to the north, south and west. For a few minutes Vance contemplated the sight in silence, and then said: “This is indeed a grand sight.” Turning to Winthrop, he continued:

“I have seen many beautiful sights – the Green and White Mountains of New England, the Cumberland of Virginia, and the mighty Rocky Mountains through Colorado but standing here on the foot hills, with the mountains rising behind us to the sky, with their hoary crests even on this July day capped with snow, and these mountain streams, foaming cataracts, all shimmering in the sunshine, making sweet and restful harmony in their ceaseless flow, surpasses anything I have ever seen. The valley itself looks like a vast green sward stretching before us like a map. The yellow shocks of golden grain in the farming districts are suggestive of what may be in years to come. No man can look upon such a promising picture and not be convinced of the commercial importance which will attend the development of this valley.”

During Vance’s outburst of ecstasy, Homer Winthrop said nothing, merely acquiescing, in a modest way, to all Vance expressed.

Returning to Waterville, they partook of a sumptuous repast, which Winthrop had ordered especially prepared, Consisting principally of mountain trout, caught that morning in the Thief River.

After lunch Vance accepted an invitation to smoke and walk out over the town site.

“This,” said Winthrop, “is block fourteen of Eagle’s addition. You see it is less than three blocks from the center of the town. It is one of the choicest blocks we have. If you want me to give you some advice, Mr. Gilder, I will do so, and say, buy a few of these lots. The price is only \$100 each, and, in my judgment, they will be worth \$500 before five years from to-day.”

Vance looked away into the distance at the farm lands, and the music of the sickle was borne lazily to him by a gentle breeze; then he turned his gaze toward the river, where the roaring waters were crowding down the rapids, proclaiming in thundering tones that Waterville was an exception to the rule. After a little he turned to Homer Winthrop and said: “I have been advised to keep clear of these new towns. The person who gave me this advice told me there were a few honorable exceptions to the rule. I must believe, from what I have seen, that Waterville is an exception. I will take twenty-five of these lots, and you may fix up the deed for them as soon as possible.”

The deed and abstract were delivered to Vance that afternoon, and his check for \$2,500 was duly deposited in Homer Winthrop’s pocket.

“I may have been foolish,” said Vance, “to act so hastily in this matter.”

Winthrop turned to him, and placing a hand on either shoulder, looked squarely into his companion’s eyes, and said:

“My belief, Mr. Gilder, is that you have acted wisely, and if you will keep these lots five years, you will thank me for suggesting the advisability of making the purchase. I have but one request to make – that you will wait five years before passing judgment on my advice.”

“Your request is cheerfully granted,” replied Vance with great earnestness, and the two men clasped hands, and a bond of friendship was thereby woven.

## CHAPTER VII. – A VISIT TO WATERVILLE

A NEW WESTERN TOWN is usually provided with a public square, and the business houses and shops are arranged along the four sides of it in sentinel-like position, the corner lots going at a premium, and where the most substantial buildings are erected. Waterville, however could not boast of a public square, but it had two iron bridges spanning the Thief River.

A large stone grist mill had been built on the side of the river opposite the town, and on the elevated ground beyond, it was said the State Agricultural College was to be built.

It was a favorite pastime with the real estate agents to sit on the depot platform, and while waiting for the incoming trains, to whittle pine sticks into shavings, telling of the different manufactories, state institutions, colleges and asylums, etc., that would be located in the near future at Waterville.

That evening after Vance had made his purchase of town lots he strolled away by himself across the great iron bridge, and gave himself up to meditation. Had he acted wisely? Would Waterville after all prove a “boom town” and his investment a losing one? Was Homer Winthrop, with his suave manners and great earnestness, which at times seemed to carry conviction to the hearts of all who heard him express himself, the noble specimen of manhood he appeared to be, or were his fascinations merely the arts of the ordinary skilled western boomer? Would the managing editor approve his action in purchasing lots in such a new and undeveloped place as Waterville?

It is a common experience with mankind, that after a doubtful transaction has been consummated, we can deliberate with far more intentness of thought than before the trade was made.

A peculiarity of a western town is its plentifulness of real estate agents, who seem to travel in swarms, and find an abiding place in the town that promises the greatest activity.

After a reaction sets in and hard times overtake them, this peculiar class usually pick up their “ink-horns” and fly, as from a pestilence.

Another peculiarity is, that if a trade is made with a “tender-foot” everyone in the village usually knows of it in a very few hours.

As Vance was returning from his walk he was met on the outskirts of the village by a number of this class of hangers-on, who make their living by selling town lots on commission. Each one was desirous of saying “just a word” to Vance in private.

The story of one was practically the story of all. They advised him to stop and think what he was losing by not buying more property in Waterville. One particularly long, lank individual, who wore a sombrero and high-topped boots, assured him that “the opportunity of a lifetime was at that very minute knocking at his door; it might never come again.”

“You might go away from Waterville,” said he, “and come back here in a few mouths’ time, and you’ll find the town lots I can sell you to-day for a mere song, going at ten times the price that you can buy them for now. My name is Steve Gibbons, and I presume I am doing the biggest real estate business in Waterville. I sell more lots than any other half dozen agents in town. You’ve made a great mistake, Mr. Gilder,” said he, “in buying of the Town Company. Of course, this is confidential, but if you had come to me instead of buying of Winthrop, I could have saved you big money.”

“What do you mean by ‘the company’?” asked Vance.

“Why, you see, the Waterville Town Company own mighty near all the property in town.

That man Winthrop is a member of the company. Now, while I have not as many lots for sale as the Town Company, my prices beat them all holler.”

“Do you think,” asked Vance, “that Mr. Winthrop charged me too much for my lots?”

“Think!” said Steve Gibbons, “think? why, pardner, all the agents in town are laughin’ about it; he took you in.”

Vance bit his lips, and mentally concluded to investigate very thoroughly before he quit Waterville.

“You see,” Gibbons went on, “all us fellers are down on the Town Company. We don’t like corporations, nohow; they don’t give us honorable-intentioned fellers a fair chance. We are the men that’s buildin’ up this here town – givin’ it the bone, and the sinew, and the standin’, so to speak. Don’t you see?”

“Yes,” said Vance, “I understand,” and begging to be excused, he turned and walked away from the “honorable-intentioned” Steve Gibbons, and soon after sought the privacy of his own room in the Ballard House.

Dick Ballard was a Grand Army man, and kept the only hotel of any importance in Waterville. The only thing first-class about it was the price for lodging. Immediately after the average traveler settled his bill at the Ballard, there was generally a half-distinct impression in his mind that he had been stopping at a first-class hotel, but the remembrance of three kinds of meat cooked in the same kettle was not easily forgotten.

As Vance sat in his room, in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, there came a gentle knock on his door. He quickly admitted his visitor, and found it was Dick Ballard, the proprietor.

“I reckon,” said he, as soon as he stepped in, “you’ll be one of us by and by. Bought property already, and a mighty good buy you’ve made of it, too. Oh, you know a good thing when you see it; you bet yer life you do.”

“Do you think,” said Vance, “the lots I purchased were reasonable at the price?”

“I should say so; yes, sir, mighty cheap. This here town is comin out of the kinks in fine shape. We’ll have a drum corps in our State militia before another year; you bet we will. I presume you know we have the finest drilled company at Waterville, outside the regular army, in the state?”

“I have been told,” said Vance, “that I paid too much for the property. I am more interested in learning the truth or untruth of the statement than I am about your militia company.”

“Who told you that?” asked Ballard, with indignation. As Vance did not answer, the hotel proprietor went on to say: “I’ll bet it was J. Arthur Boast. Now, look’ee here, Mr. Gilder, you can’t believe everything these fellers tell you.”

The truth of this remark pressed itself on Vance so forcibly, and his indignation getting the better of him, he turned upon Dick Ballard and said bitterly:

“Who in thunderation can I believe?”

“You can believe me, sir, and I’ll produce prima facie evidence of everything I say. This town is all right; your investment is a good one, and the man who says it is not is surely trying to stick his nose into other people’s business – but, say, hold on a minute,” said Ballard, as if he had forgotten something, “will you take a drink?” and he produced a bottle from his pocket.

“No, thank you,” said Vance.

“Well, if you don’t mind, I will,” said the landlord, as he proceeded to treat himself to a liberal portion of the contents of his bottle.

“Now,” said he, as he sat down smacking his lips, “everything I tell you is prima facie. I know how it is; some of these fellows have been trying to make you dissatisfied with your purchase. I am not selling town lots. My business is to run this hotel and see that everybody has a fair deal.”

“Who is the Town Company?” asked Vance.

“The Town Company, sir, consists of some of the most remarkable men in this country. They are strong men, brainy men; they are hustlers; and I,” said Ballard, rising to his feet, “I am their friend. This man, Homer Winthrop,” he went on, “carries more gray matter about on his brain than all the shark real estate agents in Waterville put together. He is one of the company, but you’ll see them all before long; and when you do, I know you’ll agree with me in saying they are the cleanest cut lot of men on the continent. Winthrop is a great man, but there are others in the company that are a mighty sight stronger than he is. They are all men of honor, and their integrity is prima facie.”

“Prima facie” seemed to be a favorite expression of Dick Ballard’s. After he had delivered himself in the strongest language at his command, he treated himself to another drink and retired.

Vance sat far into the night, looking out at his window into the mellow moonlight, listening to the ceaseless roar of the waters and the yelping coyotes in the distance, which were answered by half a dozen dogs in different parts of the town. At times he regretted his purchase, and again he felt it must, in the very nature of things, increase many times in value in a few years.

The moon came up the eastern sky, and seemed to hang in space like a ball of fire, beckoning him to return to his eastern home before disaster overtook him. The three great Tetons of the mountain range bearing their name stood out in bold relief, throwing long, menacing shadows directly towards him. The shimmering of the soft moonbeams glistened on the restless waters of the musical river, whose alluring song of promise and power was wafted to him on the night wind.

## CHAPTER VIII. – AT THE MINE

THE next morning Vance was rather late in rising. Soon after he had taken his seat at the breakfast table, he was joined by an individual small in stature but tastily dressed. His eyes were restless, and he seemed on the point of making an observation several times before he finally did so.

“Very pleasant morning,” said he, looking up at

Vance and then hastily glancing at the sunshine that streamed in at the window.

“Yes, delightful,” was Vance’s reply.

Presently the stranger observed: “Sunny days are the rule, cloudy days the exception, at Waterville. At least that’s my experience during a year’s sojourn among the good people of this village.” There was a quaking sound in the fellow’s voice that attracted Vance’s attention, because it was different from others more than because there was anything charming about it. Vance wondered if this individual was not also in the real estate business. It seemed as if every one with whom you come in contact was a real estate agent. He was on the point of asking him what line of business he was engaged in, when the fellow, looking up from his plate, said, “Real estate is my line. My office is just across the street; you can see my sign from the window.” Looking out at the window, Vance saw a large real estate sign, with gold letters on a black back-ground, bearing the name of “J. Arthur Boast.”

“You are Mr. Boast, I presume,” said Vance, turning from the window.

“J. Arthur Boast, at your service.”

Half an hour later Vance Gilder was seated in the real estate office of J. Arthur Boast, looking over his special bargain list; not with a view of buying, but rather to gain information.

Boast talked a great deal, and in his fawning, insinuating manner, advised Vance, without saying so in so many words, to keep his eyes open when dealing with the Town Company. After Vance had carefully scanned his list of town lots, he was better satisfied than ever with his purchases.

Taking a bottle from his desk, Boast held it up toward the sunlight, and asked Vance if he would have some “red liquor.” Vance declined with thanks. Boast walked back and forth with the bottle in his hand, and in a quaking voice, meant to be confidential, told Vance that he had got to quit drinking; that red liquor was getting an awful hold on him. He seemed to be desirous of giving the impression that he was a hard drinker. Finally he poured out some of the contents of the bottle into a glass, and drank it down at one swallow. Afterwards he seemed quite wretched and his eyes were filled with tears. Vance concluded, notwithstanding all he had said against himself, that J. Arthur Boast was not a drinking man.

“That liquor is all right,” said Boast; “a very superior article, but it is a little early in the day for me to commence. It always half strangles me in the morning.”

As Vance was seeking information from which he could draw his own conclusions, he gave Boast all the opportunities possible to express himself in regard to Waterville and its people.

The fellow said nothing positive, yet there was an evil vein of insinuation in all that he did say not only in regard to the Waterville Town Company and every other real estate agent, but also against everybody in the town generally. Vance very much disliked the fellow, and afterwards learned that he was universally disliked and shunned by everyone in Waterville.

Instead of returning to Butte City with Winthrop that afternoon, Vance remained in Waterville, and arranged to take the early stage next morning for Gold Bluff, which was located some sixty miles northwest of Waterville, in the Fish River Mining District. He arrived in that Idaho mining town late the following night, registered at the Bluff House, and after a late supper retired to his room for a much needed rest.

The next morning he found, on inquiry, that Ben Bonifield’s mine was located about half a mile from town upon the mountain side, and he at once started out in that direction, to see how the work on the shaft, bound for the 300 foot level, was progressing.

The town of Gold Bluff was cozily nestled in a little valley, with abrupt mountains lowering away to the sky on either side of it. The mountains were covered with spruce and pine and mountain poplars up to the snow line, above which the barren rocks rose majestically towards the heavens. A refreshing stream meandered its course through the town, on one side of which were stores and shops, and on the other residences. Vance noticed that some of them were of modern architecture and neatly painted, while others were primitive in the extreme – relics of early mining; days. The town was rather quaint and picturesque, and made more so by a profusion of shade trees.

“Good morning,” said Vance, as he came up to Ben Bonifield, who, in miner’s costume, was working vigorously away at the frame-work of the shaft over Gray Rocks. The old man looked up with an astonished air, and said:

“Good mawnin’, suh.” Then, recognizing his visitor, he threw down his hammer and gave Vance’s hand such a squeeze in his powerful grasp that it almost made him cry out with pain.

“Why, suh,” cried the old miner, “I am almost pa’alyzed to see yo’. I am indeed, suh. Mr. Gilder, I welcome yo’ suh, to Gold Bluff and to Gray Rocks. Here, suh, are our possessions,” waving his hand toward the shaft. “Immediately upon my return from the city, Mr. Gilder, we commenced work in earnest, suh, and befo’ many weeks, I am proud to say, suh, we will reach the 300 foot level and be ready to cross-cut into the vein, suh. Yo’ don’t know,” said the old miner, again taking Vance’s hand, “how proud I am – yes, proud, suh, proud to be honored with a visit from yo’, I very much desire that yo’ pu’son’lly inspect the mine; and there is no better time than the present.”

Vance entered heartily into the tour of inspection, and at the old miner’s invitation, went down in the bucket, where the miners were at work. The old gentleman kept him there until he had explained everything to the minutest detail, and when Vance at last reached the top of the shaft he felt he had a far better idea of sinking shafts on mines than ever before.

“Come,” said the old miner, “my Louise will be most delighted to see yo’, suh; she will indeed.” Then turning, he gave some instruction to his foreman, telling him he would not return that afternoon, and together the old gentleman and Vance walked down the mountain side to the village of Gold bluff.

The old miner’s residence was a modest one, situated well back from the street, near some huge boulders – a natural pyramid of rocks, while a beautiful little spring of water flowed from near its base. There was a very pretty yard in front, filled with growing evergreens and mountain ash.

“I planted these trees myself, suh,” said the old miner, “years ago. They remind me of my old Virginia home. I was the fust one to set out shade trees in Gold Bluff; yes, still, the fust one.”

As Vance entered the yard, he paused a moment to contemplate the beauty and home-like appearance of the yard, and Ben Bonifield’s home, with its wide porches in front literally covered with honeysuckles, ivy, and vining roses.

Vance found Louise dressed as a mountain maid, instead of the fashionable young lady who had called on him in his New York home. She was not such a woman as poets rave about, and yet, withal, there was a grace – a charm – about her, that commanded admiration. Her hair, in the sunlight, was like one beautiful sheen of gold, with little ringlets here and there; her complexion was pink and white, and when under deep excitement a ruddy glow would mantle her cheeks. Her nose, while well formed, neither large nor small, was quite ordinary. Her mouth was a perfect Cupid’s bow, with lips like two red cherries. As Vance conversed with her that afternoon, he forgot the hair, forgot the delicately formed, rosy lips, forgot even the glow of pink which came and went over her fair cheeks, in looking into her talking eyes – so clear, so blue, and yet so trustful; even forgot the long brown lashes that fringed them with gentle protection. Her eyes were the crowning feature of her expressive face, which may not have been a beautiful one in the parlance of fashion, yet it was one that a student of human nature would term a face of intelligence; and after all, to the cultured, is there aught more beautiful?

As Vance sat with the old miner and his daughter on the porch of their cozy dwelling that afternoon, he forgot time. The sun went down behind the western mountains, leaving the beauty of an afterglow reflected on the waters of the mountain brooklet. The moon that was climbing up over the

eastern hills threw its rays aslant through the clinging roses that grew in profusion about the porch. A feeling of peace, and possibly a dangerous contentment, stole into his heart, and he murmured a thanksgiving to the fates. The unseen, potent force that binds us all, sooner or later, with a silken cord, was thonging him to a future destiny.

## CHAPTER IX. – THE STAGE DRIVER

FROM Gold Bluff Vance sent to the *Banner* one of his strongest descriptive letters. The inspiration of the new west, with its gorges, mountains, beautiful valleys and gurgling streams abounding with trout, tinged its every sentence.

His vivacious style, which had won for him the place he occupied on the *Banner*, was reinforced with the new and intoxicating sights of the picturesque. For two weeks he did little else than tramp through valleys, following up mountain streams on fishing jaunts, and felt that he was “roughing it” in a most delightful fashion. One night, coming in from a long tramp far up in the mountains, he found a large bundle of mail awaiting him that had been forwarded from Butte City. Among his letters was one from the chief, which read as follows:

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