Nason Frank Lewis

The Blue Goose

Frank Nason

The Blue Goose

Nason F.

The Blue Goose / F. Nason — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Nason Frank Lewis
The Blue Goose

"*So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise and behold a shaking, and the bones came together bone to bone.*

"*And, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, but there was no breath in them.*

"*Son of man, prophesy unto the wind. Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these that they may live.*

"*And the breath came into them and they lived.*"

To MY FRIEND OF TWENTY-ONE YEARS, CHARLES EMERSON BEECHER

who, with infinite skill and patience, has breathed the breath of life into the dry bones of Earth's untold ages of upward struggle, who has made them speak of the eternity of their past, and has made them prophesy hope for the eternity to come, this book is dedicated by the author.

CHAPTER I
The Blue Goose

"*Mais oui!* I tell you one ting. One big ting. Ze big man wiz ze glass eyes, he is vat you call one slik stoff. Ze big man wiz ze glass eyes."

"The old man?"

"Zat's him! One slik stoff! *Écoutez!* Listen! One day, you mek ze gran' trip. Look hout!" Pierre made a gesture as of a dog shaking a rat.

The utter darkness of the underground laboratory was parted in solid masses, by bars of light that spurted from the cracks of a fiercely glowing furnace. One shaft fell on a row of large, unstoppered bottles. From these bottles fumes arose, mingled, and fell in stifling clouds of fleecy white. From another bottle in Pierre's hands a dense red smoke welled from a colourless liquid, crowded through the neck, wriggled through the bar of light, and sank in the darkness beneath. The darkness was uncanny, the fumes suffocating, the low hum of the furnace forcing out the shafts of light from the cracks of the imprisoning walls infernally suggestive.

Luna shivered. He was ignorant, therefore superstitious, and superstition strongly suggested the unnatural. He knew that furnaces and retorts and acids and alkalies were necessary to the refinement of gold. He feared them, yet he had used them, but he had used them where the full light of day robbed them of half their terrors. In open air acids might smoke, but drifting winds would brush away the fumes. Furnaces might glow, but their glow would be as naught in sunlight. There was no darkness in which devils could hide to pounce on him unawares, no walls to imprison him. The gold he retorted on his shovel was his, and he had no fear of the law. In the underground laboratory of Pierre the element of fear was ever present. The gold that the furnace retorted was stolen, and Luna was the thief. There were other thieves, but that did not matter to him. He stole gold from the mill. Others stole gold from the mine. It all came to Pierre and to Pierre's underground furnace. He stood in terror of the supernatural, of the law, and, most of all, of Pierre. In the darkness barred with fierce jets of light, imprisoned by walls that he could not see, cut off from the free air of open day, stifled by pungent gases that stung him, throat and eye, he felt an uncanny oppression, fear of the unknown, fear of the law, most of all fear of Pierre.

Pierre watched him through his mantle of darkness. He thrust forward his head, and a bar of light smote him across his open lips. It showed his gleaming teeth white and shut, his black moustache, his swarthy lips parted in a sardonic smile; that was all. A horrible grin on a background of inky black.

Luna shrank.

"Leave off your devil's tricks."

"*Moi?*"

Pierre replaced the bottle of acid on the shelf and picked up a pair of tongs. As he raised the cover of the glowing crucible a sudden transformation took place. The upper part of the laboratory blazed out fiercely, and in this light Pierre moved with gesticulating arms, the lower part of his body wholly hidden. He lifted the crucible, shook it for a moment with an oscillatory motion, then replaced it on the fire. He turned again to Luna.

"Hall ze time I mek ze explain. Hall ze time you mek ze question. *Comment?*"

Luna's courage was returning in the light.

"You're damned thick-headed, when it suits you, all right. Well, I'll explain. Last clean-up I brought you two pounds of amalgam if it was an ounce. All I got out of it was fifty dollars. You said that was my share. Hansen brought you a chunk of quartz from the mine. He showed it to me first. If I know gold from sulphur, there was sixty dollars in it. Hansen got five out of it."

Pierre interrupted.

"You mek mention ze name."

"There's no one to hear in this damned hell of yours."

"*Non*," Pierre answered. "You mek mention in zis hell. Bimby you mek mention," Pierre gave an expressive upward jerk with his thumb, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll look out for that," Luna answered, impatiently. "I'm after something else now. I'm getting sick of pinching the mill and bringing the stuff here for nothing. So are the rest of the boys. We ain't got no hold on you and you ain't playing fair. You've got to break even or this thing's going to stop."

Pierre made no reply to Luna. He picked up the tongs, lifted the crucible from the fire, and again replaced it. Then he brought out an ingot mould and laid it on a ledge of the furnace. The crucible was again lifted from the fire, and its contents were emptied in the mould. Pierre and Luna both watched the glowing metal. As it slowly cooled, iridescent sheens of light swept over its surface like the changing colours of a dying dolphin. Pierre held up the mould to Luna.

"How much she bin?"

Luna looked covetously at the softly glowing metal. "Two hundred."

"*Bien.* She's bin ze amalgam, ze quart', ze hozer stoff. Da's hall."

Luna looked sceptical.

"That's too thin. How many times have you fired up?"

"Zis!" Pierre held up a single emphasizing finger.

"We'll let that go," Luna answered; "but you listen now. One of the battery men is off to-night. I'm going to put Morrison on substitute. He's going to break a stem or something. The mortar's full to the dies. We're going to clean it out. I know how much it will pan. It's coming to you. You divide fair or it's the last you'll get. I'll hide it out in the usual place."

"Look hout! Da's hall!"

The other laughed impatiently.

"Getting scared, Frenchy? Where's your nerve?"

"Nerf! Nerf!" Pierre danced from foot to foot, waving his arms. "*Sacré plastron!* You mek ze fuse light. You sit on him, heh? Bimeby, pretty soon, you got no nerf. You got noddings. You got one big gris-spot on ze rock. Da's hall." Pierre subsided, with a gesture of intense disgust.

Luna snapped his watch impatiently.

"It's my shift, Frenchy. I've got to go in a few minutes."

"*Bien!* Go!" Pierre spoke without spirit. "Mek of yourself one gran' *folie*. *Mais*, when ze shot go, an' you sail in ze air, don' come down on ze Blue Goose, on me, Pierre. I won't bin here, da's hall."

Luna turned.

"I tell you I've got to go now. I wish you'd tell me what's the matter with the old man."

Pierre roused himself.

"Noddings. Ze hol' man has noddings ze mattaire. It is you! You! Ze hol' man, he go roun' lak he kick by ze dev'. He mek his glass eyes to shine here an' twinkle zere, an' you mek ze gran' chuckle, 'He see noddings.' He see more in one look dan you pack in your tick head! I tol' you look hout; da's hall!"

Luna jammed his watch into his pocket and rose.

"It's all right, Frenchy. I'll give you another chance. To-day's Thursday. Saturday they'll clean up at the mill. It will be a big one. I want my rake-off. The boys want theirs. It all comes to the Blue Goose, one way or another. You think you're pretty smooth stuff. That's all right; but let me tell you one thing: if there's any procession heading for Cañon City, you'll be in it, too."

Cañon City was the State hostelry. Occasionally the law selected unwilling guests. It was not over-large, nor was it overcrowded. Had it sheltered all deserving objects, the free population of the State would have been visibly diminished.

Pierre only shrugged his shoulders. He followed Luna up the stairs to the outer door, and watched the big mill foreman as he walked down the trail to the mill. Then, as was his custom when

perturbed in mind, Pierre crossed the dusty waggon trail and seated himself on a boulder, leaning his back against a scrubby spruce. He let his eyes rest contentedly on a big, square-faced building. Rough stone steps led up to a broad veranda, from which rose, in barbaric splendour, great sheets of shining plate-glass, that gave an unimpeded view of a long mahogany bar backed by tiers of glasses and bottles, doubled by reflection from polished mirrors that reached to the matched-pine ceiling.

Across the room from the bar, roulette and faro tables, bright with varnish and gaudy with nickel trimmings, were waiting with invitations to feverish excitement. The room was a modern presentation of Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla, the bar, stimulated to the daring of Charybdis across the way, and Charybdis, the roulette, sent its winners to celebrate success, or its victims to deaden the pain of loss.

At the far end of the room a glass-covered arcade stood in advance of doors to private club-rooms. At the arcade an obliging attendant passed out gold and silver coins, for a consideration, in exchange for crumpled time-checks and greasy drafts.

Pierre grinned and rubbed his hands. Above the plate glass on the outside a gorgeous rainbow arched high on the painted front. Inscribed within, in iridescent letters, was: "The Blue Goose. Pierre La Martine." Beneath the spring of the rainbow, for the benefit of those who could not read, was a huge blue goose floating aimlessly in a sheet of bluer water.

This was all of the Blue Goose that was visible to the eyes of the uninitiated; of the initiated there were not many.

Beneath the floor was a large cellar, wherein was a fierce-looking furnace, which on occasion grew very red with its labours. There were pungent jars and ghostly vessels and a litter of sacks, and much sparkling dust on the earthen floor. All this Pierre knew, and a few others, though even these had not seen it.

Beneath the shadow of the wings of the Blue Goose dwelt a very plain woman, who looked chronically frightened, and a very beautiful girl who did not. The scared woman was Madame La Martine; the unscared girl passed for their daughter, but about the daughter no one asked questions of Pierre. About the Blue Goose, its bar, and its gaming-tables Pierre was eloquent, even with strangers. About his daughter and other things his acquaintances had learned to keep silence; as for strangers, they soon learned.

Obviously the mission of the Blue Goose was to entertain; with the multitude this mission passed current at its face value, but there were a few who challenged it. Now and then a grocer or a butcher made gloomy comments as he watched a growing accumulation of books that would not prove attractive to the most confirmed bibliophile. Men went to the Blue Goose with much money, but came out with none, for the bar and roulette required cash settlements. Their wives went in to grocers and butchers with no money but persuasive tongues, and came forth laden with spoils.

Pandora could raise no taxes for schools, so there were none. Preachers came and offered their wares without money and without price, but there were no churches. For the wares of the preachers flushed no faces and burned no throats, nor were there rattles even in contribution boxes, and there was no whirr of painted wheels. Even the hundred rumbling stamps of the Rainbow mill might as well have pounded empty air or clashed their hard steel shoes on their hard steel dies for all the profit that came to the far-away stockholders of the great Rainbow mine and mill.

So it came to pass that many apparently unrelated facts were gathered together by the diligent but unprosperous, and, being thus gathered, pointed to a very inevitable conclusion. Nothing and no one was prosperous, save Pierre and his gorgeous Blue Goose. For Pierre was a power in the land. He feared neither God nor the devil. The devil was the bogie-man of the priest. As for God, who ever saw him? But of some men Pierre had much fear, and among the same was "the hol' man" at the mill.

CHAPTER II
The Old Man

After leaving the Blue Goose Luna went straight to the superintendent's office. He was nettled rather than worried by Pierre's cautions. Worry implied doubt of his own wisdom, as well as fear of the old man. Superintendents had come to, and departed from, the Rainbow. Defiant fanfares had heralded their coming, confusion had reigned during their sojourn, their departure had been duly celebrated at the Blue Goose. This had been the invariable sequence. Through all these changes Pierre was complacently confident, but he never lost his head. The bottles of the Blue Goose bar were regularly drained, alike for welcoming and for speeding the departing incumbent at the Rainbow.

The roulette whirred cheerfully, gold and silver coins clinked merrily, the underground furnace reddened and dulled at regular periods, and much lawful money passed back and forth between the Blue Goose and its patrons. Not that the passing back and forth was equal; Pierre attended to that. His even teeth gleamed between smiling lips, his swarthy cheeks glowed, and day by day his black hair seemed to grow more sleek and oily, and his hands smoother with much polishing.

Pierre read printed words with ease. That which was neither printed nor spoken was spelled out, sometimes with wrinkling of brows and narrowing of eyes, but with unmistakable correctness in the end. From the faces and actions of men he gathered wisdom, and this wisdom was a lamp to his feet, and in dark places gave much light to his eyes. Thus it happened that with the coming of Richard Firmstone came also great caution to Pierre.

The present superintendent blew no fanfares on his new trumpet, he expressed no opinion of his predecessors, and gave no hint of his future policy.

Mr. Morrison, who oiled his hair and wore large diamonds in a much-starched, collarless shirt while at the bar of the Blue Goose, donned overalls and jumpers while doing "substitute" at the mill, and between times kept alive the spirit of rebellion in the bosoms of down-trodden, capitalist-ridden labour. Morrison freely voiced the opinion that the Rainbow crowd had experienced religion, and had sent out a Sunday-school superintendent to reform the workmen and to count the dollars that dropped from beneath the stamps of the big mill. In this opinion Luna, the mill foreman, concurred. He even raised the ante, solemnly averring that the old man opened the mill with prayer, sang hallelujahs at change of shift, and invoked divine blessing before chewing his grub. Whereat the down-trodden serfs of soulless corporations cheered long and loud, and called for fresh oblations at the bar of the Blue Goose.

All these things Luna pondered in his mind, and his indignation waxed hot at Pierre.

"The damned old frog-eater's losing his nerve; that's what! I ain't going to be held up by no frog-spawn."

He opened the office door and clumped up to the railing.

The superintendent looked up.

"What is it, Luna?"

"Long, on number ten battery, is sick and off shift. Shall we hang up ten, or put on Morrison?"

The superintendent smiled.

"Is it Morrison, or hang up?" he asked.

The question was disconcerting. The foreman shifted his footing.

"Morrison is all right," he said, doggedly. "He's a good battery man. Things ain't pushing at the Blue Goose, and he can come as well as not."

"What's the matter with Morrison?" The superintendent's smile broadened.

The foreman looked puzzled.

"I've just been telling you – he's all right."

"That's so. Only, back east, when a horse jockey gets frothy about the good points of his horse, we look sharp."

The foreman grew impatient.

"You haven't told me whether to hang up ten or not."

"I'm not going to. You are foreman of the mill. Put on anyone you want; fire anyone you want. It's nothing to me; only," he looked hard, "you know what we're running this outfit for."

The foreman appeared defiant. Guilty thoughts were spurring him to unwise defence.

"If the ore ain't pay I can't get it out."

"I'll attend to the ore, that's my business. Get out what there is in it, that's yours." He leaned forward to his papers.

The foreman shifted uneasily. His defence was not complete. He was not sure that he had been attacked. He knew Morrison of the Blue Goose. He knew the workings of the mill. He had thought he knew the old man. He was not so sure now. He was not even sure how much or how little he had let out. Perhaps Pierre's words had rattled him. He shifted from foot to foot, twirling his hat on his fingers. He half expected, half hoped, and half waited for another opening. None came. Through the muffled roar of the stamps he was conscious of the sharp scratch of the superintendent's pen. Then came the boom of the big whistle. It was change of shift. The jar of the office door closing behind him was not heard. At the mill he found Morrison.

"You go on ten, in Long's place," he said, gruffly, as he entered the mill.

Morrison stared at the retreating foreman.

"What in hell," he began; then, putting things together in his mind, he shook his head, and followed the foreman into the mill.

The superintendent was again interrupted by the rasping of hobnailed shoes on the office floor and the startled creak of the office railing as a large, loose-jointed man leaned heavily against it. His trousers, tucked into a pair of high-laced, large-eyed shoes, were belted at the waist in a conspicuous roll. A faded gray shirt, rolled up at the sleeves, disclosed a red undershirt and muscular arms. A well-shaped head with grey streaked hair, and a smooth, imperturbable face was shaded by a battered sombrero that was thrust back and turned squarely up in front.

The superintendent's smile had nothing puzzling now.

"Hello, Zephyr. Got another Camp Bird?"

"Flying higher'n a Camp Bird this time."

"How's that?"

"Right up to the golden gates this time, sure. It's straight goods. St. Peter ain't going to take no post-prandial siestas from now on. I'm timbering my shots to keep from breaking the sky. Tell you what, I'm jarring them mansions in heaven wuss'n a New York subway contractor them Fifth Avenue palaces." Zephyr paused and glanced languidly at the superintendent.

Firmstone chuckled.

"Go on," he said.

"I've gone as far as I can without flying. It's a lead from the golden streets of the New Jerusalem. Followed it up to the foot of Bingham Pass; caught it above the slide, then it took up the cliff, and disappeared in the cerulean. Say, Goggles, how are you off for chuck? I've been up against glory, and I'm down hungrier than a she-bear that's skipped summer and hibernated two winters."

"Good! Guess Bennie will fix us up something. Can you wait a few minutes?"

"I think I can. I've been practising on that for years. No telling when such things will come in handy. You don't object to music, Goggles?"

"Not to music, no," Firmstone answered, with an amused glance at Zephyr.

Zephyr, unruffled, drew from his shirt a well-worn harmonica.

"Music hath charms," he remarked, brushing the instrument on the sleeve of his shirt. "Referring to my savage breast, not yours."

He placed the harmonica to his lips, holding it in hollowed hands. His oscillating breath jarred from the metal reeds the doleful strains of *Home, Sweet Home*, muffled by the hollow of his hands into mournful cadences.

At last Firmstone closed his desk.

"If your breast is sufficiently soothed, let's see what Bennie can do for your stomach."

As they passed from the office Zephyr carefully replaced the harmonica in his shirt.

"I'd rather be the author of that touching little song than the owner of the Inferno. That's my new claim," he remarked, distantly.

Firmstone laughed.

"I thought your claim was nearer heaven."

"The two are not far apart. 'Death, like a narrow sea, divides.' But my reminiscences were getting historical, which you failed to remark. I ain't no Wolfe and Pierre ain't no Montcalm, nor the Heights of Abraham ain't the Blue Goose. Pierre's a hog. At least, he's a close second. A hog eats snakes and likewise frogs. Pierre's only got as far as frogs, last I heard. Pierre's bad. Morrison's bad. Luna ain't. He thinks he is; but he ain't. I'm not posting you nor nothing. I'm only meditating out loud. That's all."

They entered the mill boarding-house. Bennie, the cook, greeted Zephyr effusively.

"Goggles invited me to pay my respects to you," Zephyr remarked. "I'm empty, and I'm thinking you can satisfy my longing as nothing else can do."

Zephyr addressed himself to Bennie's viands. At last he rose from the table.

"To eat and to sleep are the chief ends of man. I have eaten, and now I see I am tired. With your consent, uttered or unexpressed, I'll wrap the drapery of my bunk around me and take a snooze. And say, Goggles," he added, "if, the next time you inventory stock, you are shy a sack of flour and a side of bacon, you can remark to the company that prospectors is thick around here, and that prospectors is prone to evil as the sparks fly upward. That's where the flour and bacon are going. Up to where St. Peter can smell them cooking; leastways he can if he hangs his nose over the wall and the wind's right."

CHAPTER III
Élise

Bennie was an early riser, as became a faithful cook; but, early as he usually was, this morning he was startled into wakefulness by a jarring chug, as Zephyr, with a relieved grunt, dropped a squashy sack on the floor near his bunk. Bennie sprang to a sitting posture, rubbing his sleepy eyes to clear his vision; but, before he could open his eyes or his mouth beyond a startled ejaculation, Zephyr had departed. He soon reappeared. There was another chug, another grunt, and another departure. Four times this was repeated. Then Zephyr seated himself on the bunk, and, pushing back his sombrero, mopped his perspiring brow.

"What the – " Bennie started in, but Zephyr's uplifted hand restrained him.

"The race is not to the swift, Julius Benjamin. The wise hound holds his yap till he smells a hot foot. Them indecisive sacks is hot footses, Julius Benjamin; but it isn't your yap, not by quite some."

"What's up, Zephyr?" asked Bennie. "I'm not leaky."

"Them gelatinous sacks," Zephyr went on, eyeing them meditatively, "I found hidden in the bushes near the mine, and they contain mighty interesting matter. They're an epitome of life. They started straight, but missed connections. Pulled up at the wrong station. I've thrown the switch, and now you and me, Julius, will make it personally conducted the rest of the trip."

"Hm!" mused Bennie. "I see. That stuff's been pinched from the mill."

"Good boy, Julius Benjamin! You're doing well. You'll go into words of two syllables next."

Zephyr nodded, with a languid smile.

"But, to recapitulate, as my old school-teacher used to say, there's thousands of dollars in them sacks. The Rainbow ain't coughing up no such rich stuff as that. That rock is broken; ergo, it's been under the stamps. It's coarse and fine, from which I infer it hasn't been through the screens. And furthermore – "

Bennie interrupted eagerly.

"They've just hung up the stamps and raked out the rich stuff that's settled between the dies!"

"Naturally, gold being heavier than quartz. Julius Benjamin, you're fit for the second reader."

Bennie laughed softly.

"It's Luna or Morrison been robbing the mill. Won't Frenchy pull the long face when he hears of your find?"

Zephyr made no farther reply than to blow *There'll Be a Hot Time* from pursed lips as he rolled a cigarette.

"So there will be," Bennie answered.

"Not to-night, Bennie." Zephyr was puffing meditative whiffs in the air. "Great things move slowly. Richard Firmstone is great, Benjamin; leave it to him."

Bennie was already dressed, and Zephyr, throwing the stub of his cigarette through the open window, followed him to the kitchen. He ate his specially prepared breakfast with an excellent appetite.

"I think I'll raise my bet. I mentioned a sack of flour and a side of bacon. I'll take a can of coffee and a dab of sugar. St. Peter'll appreciate that. 'Tis well to keep on the right side of the old man. Some of us may have occasion to knock at his gate before the summer is over. You've heard of my new claim, Bennie?"

Bennie made no reply. Between packing up Zephyr's supplies, attending to breakfast for the men, and thinking of the sacks of stolen ore, he was somewhat preoccupied.

Zephyr stowed the supplies in his pack and raised it to his shoulder. Bennie looked up in surprise.

"You're not going now, are you?"

Zephyr was carefully adjusting the straps of his pack.

"It looks pretty much that way, Benjamin. When a man's got all he wants, it's time for him to lope. If he stays, he might get more and possibly – less."

"What will I do with these sacks?" Bennie asked hurriedly, as Zephyr passed through the door.

Zephyr made no reply, further than softly to whistle *Break the News to Mother* as he swung into the trail. He clumped sturdily along, apparently unmindful of the rarefied air that would ordinarily make an unburdened man gasp for breath. His lips were still pursed, though they had ceased to give forth sound. He came to the nearly level terrace whereon, among scattered boulders, were clustered the squat shanties of the town of Pandora.

He merely glanced at the Blue Goose, whose polished windows were just beginning to glow with the light of the rising sun. He saw a door open at the far end of the house and Madame La Martine emerge, a broom in her hands and a dust-cloth thrown over one shoulder.

Pierre's labours ended late. Madame's began very early. Both had an unvarying procession. Pierre had much hilarious company; it was his business to keep it so. He likewise had many comforting thoughts; these cost him no effort. The latter came as a logical sequence to the former. Madame had no company, hilarious or otherwise. Instead of complacent thoughts, she had anxiety. And so it came to pass that, while Pierre grew sleek and smooth with the passing of years, Madame developed many wrinkles and grey hairs and a frightened look, from the proffering of wares that were usually thrust aside with threatening snarls and many harsh words. Pierre was not alone in the unstinted pouring forth of the wine of pleasure for the good of his companions and in uncorking his vials of wrath for the benefit of his wife.

Zephyr read the whole dreary life at a glance. A fleeting thought came to Zephyr. How would it have been with Madame had she years ago chosen him instead of Pierre? A smile, half pitying, half contemptuous, was suggested by an undecided quiver of the muscles of his face, more pronounced by the light in his expressive eyes. He left the waggon trail that zig-zagged up the steep grade beyond the outskirts of the town, cutting across their sharp angles in a straight line. Near the foot of an almost perpendicular cliff he again picked up the trail. Through a notch in the brow of the cliff a solid bar of water shot forth. The solid bar, in its fall broken to a misty spray, fell into a mossy basin at the cliff's foot, regathered, and then, sliding and twisting in its rock-strewn bed, gurgled among nodding flowers and slender, waving willows that were fanned into motion by the breath of the falling spray. Where the brook crossed the trail Zephyr stood still. Not all at once. There was an indescribable suggestion of momentum overcome by the application of perfectly balanced power.

Zephyr did not whistle, even softly. Instead, there was a low hum —

> But the maiden in the garden
> Was the fairest flower of all.

Zephyr deliberately swung his pack from his shoulders, deposited it on the ground, and as deliberately seated himself on the pack. There was an unwonted commotion among the cluster of thrifty plants at which Zephyr was looking expectantly. A laughing face with large eyes sparkling with mischievous delight looked straight into his own. As the girl rose to her feet she tossed a long, heavy braid of black hair over her shoulder.

"You thought you would scare me; now, didn't you?" She came forth from the tangled plants and stood before him.

Zephyr's eyes were resting on the girl's face with a smile of quiet approbation. Tall and slender, she was dressed in a dark gown, whose sailor blouse was knotted at the throat with a red scarf; at her belt a holster showed a silver-mounted revolver. An oval face rested on a shapely neck, as delicately

poised as the nodding flowers she held in her hand. A rich glow, born of perfect health and stimulating air, burned beneath the translucent olive skin.

Zephyr made no direct reply to her challenge.

"Why aren't you helping Madame at the Blue Goose?"

"Because I've struck, that's why." There was a defiant toss of the head, a compressed frown on the arching brows. Like a cloud wind-driven from across the sun the frown disappeared; a light laugh rippled from between parted lips. "Daddy was mad, awfully mad. You ought to have seen him." The flowers fell from her hands as she threw herself into Pierre's attitude. "'Meenx,'" she mimicked, "'you mek to defy me in my own house? Me? Do I not have plenty ze troub', but you mus' mek ze more? *Hein?* Ansaire!' And so I did. So!" She threw her head forward, puckered her lips, thrusting out the tip of her tongue at the appreciative Zephyr. "Oh, it's lots of fun to get daddy mad. 'Vaire is my whip, my dog whip? I beat you. I chastise you, meenx!'" The girl stooped to pick up her scattered flowers. "Only it frightens poor mammy so. Mammy never talks back only when daddy goes for me. I'd just like to see him when he comes down this morning and finds me gone. It would be lots of fun. Only, if I was there, I couldn't be here, and it's just glorious here, isn't it? What's the trouble, Zephyr? You haven't said a word to me all this time."

"When your blessed little tongue gets tired perhaps I'll start in. There's no more telling when that will be than what I'll say, supposing I get the chance."

"Oh, I knew there was something I wanted especially to see you about." The face grew cloudy. "What do you think? You know I was sixteen my last birthday, just a week ago?" She paused and looked at Zephyr interrogatively. "I want to know where you are all the time now. It's awfully important. I may want to elope with you at a moment's notice!" She looked impressively at Zephyr.

Zephyr's jaw dropped.

"What the mischief – "

Élise interrupted:

"No, wait; I'm not through. Daddy got very playful that day, chucked my chin, and called me *ma chère enfant*. That always means mischief. 'Élise bin seexten to-day, heh? Bimeby she tink to liv' her hol' daddy and her hol' mammy and bin gone hoff wiz anodder feller, *hein*?' Then he made another dab at my chin. I knew what he meant." She again assumed Pierre's position. "'What you say, *ma chérie*? I pick you hout one nice man! One ver' nice man! *Hein?* M'sieu Mo-reeson. A ver' nice man. He ben took good care *ma chérie*!'"

Zephyr was betrayed into a startled motion. Élise was watching him with narrowed eyes. There was a gleam of satisfaction.

"That's all right, Zephyr. That's just what I did, only I did more. I told daddy I'd just like M'sieu Mo-reeson to say marry to me! I told daddy that I'd take the smirk out of M'sieu Mo-reeson's face and those pretty curls out of M'sieu Mo-reeson's head if he dared look marry at me. Only," she went on, "I'm a little girl, after all, and I thought the easiest way would be to elope with you. I would like to see M'sieu Mo-reeson try to take me away from a big, strong man like you." There was an expression of intense scorn on her face that bared the even teeth.

Zephyr was not conscious of Élise. There was a hard, set look on his face. Élise noted it. She tossed her head airily.

"Oh, you needn't look so terribly distressed. You needn't, if you don't want to. I dare say that the superintendent at the mill would jump at the chance. I think I shall ask him, anyway." Her manner changed. "Why do they always call him the old man? He is not such a very old man."

"They'd call a baby 'the old man' if he was superintendent. Do they say much about him?" Zephyr asked, meditatively.

"Oh yes, lots. M'sier Mo-reeson" – she made a wry face at the name – "is always talking about that minion of capitalistic oppression that's sucking the life-blood of the serfs of toil. Daddy hates the old man. He's afraid of him. Daddy always hates anyone he's afraid of, except me."

Zephyr grunted absently.

"That's so." Élise spoke emphatically. "That's why I'm here to-day. I told daddy that if I was old enough to get married I was old enough to do as I liked."

In spite of his languid appearance Zephyr was very acute. He was getting a great deal that needed careful consideration. He was intensely interested, and he wanted to hear more. He half hesitated, then decided that the end justified the means.

"What makes you think that Pierre hates the old man?" he ventured, without changing countenance.

"Oh, lots of things. He tells Luna and M'sieu Mo-reeson" – another wry face – "to 'look hout.' He talks to the men, tells them that the 'hol' man ees sleek, ver' sleek, look hout, da's hall, an' go slow,' and a lot of things. I'm awfully hungry, Zephyr, and I don't want to go down for breakfast. Haven't you got something good in your pack? It looks awfully good." She prodded the pack with inquisitive fingers.

Zephyr rose to his feet.

"It will be better when I've cooked it. You'll eat a breakfast after my cooking?"

Élise clapped her hands.

"That will be fine. I'll just sit here and boss you. If you're good, and you are, you know, I'll tell you some more about M'sieu. Suppose we just call him M'sieu, just you and me. That'll be our secret."

Zephyr gathered dry sticks and started a fire. He opened his pack, cut off some slices of bacon, and, impaling them on green twigs, hung them before the fire. A pinch of salt and baking powder in a handful of flour was mixed into a stiff paste, stirred into the frying-pan, which was propped up in front of the fire. He took some cups from his pack, and, filling them with water, put them on the glowing coals.

Élise kept up a rattling chatter through it all.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Daddy says M'sieu is going to be a great man, a great labour leader. That's what M'sieu says himself – that he will lead benighted labour from the galling chains of slavery into the glorious light of freedom's day." Élise waved her arms and rolled her eyes. Then she stopped, laughing. "It's awfully funny. I hear it all when I sit at the desk. You know there's only thin boards between my desk and daddy's private room, and I can't help but hear. That coffee and bacon smell good, and what a lovely bannock! Aren't you almost ready? It's as nice as when we were on the ranch, and you used to carry me round on your back. That was an awful long time ago, though, wasn't it?"

Zephyr only grunted in reply. He pursed his lips for a meditative whistle, thought better of it, took the frying-pan from its prop, and sounded the browning bannock with his fingers.

For the babbling streams of youth
Grow to silent pools of truth
When they find a thirsty hollow
On their way.

He spoke dreamily.

"What are you talking about?" Élise broke in.

"Oh, nothing in particular. I was just thinking – might have been thinking out loud."

"That's you, every time, Zephyr. You think without talking, and I talk without thinking. It's lots more fun. Do you think I will ever grow into a dear, sober old thing like you? Just tell me that." She stooped down, taking Zephyr's face in both her hands and turned it up to her own.

Zephyr looked musingly up into the laughing eyes, and took her hands into his.

"Not for the same reasons, I guess, not if I can help it," he added, half to himself. "Now, if you'll be seated, I'll serve breakfast." He dropped the hands and pointed to a boulder.

Élise ate the plain fare with the eager appetite of youth and health. From far down the gulch the muffled roar of the stamps rose and fell on the light airs that drifted up and down. Through it all was the soft swish of the falling spray, the sharp *blip! blip!* as points of light, gathered from dripping boughs, grew to sparkling gems, then, losing their hold, fell into little pools at the foot of the cliff. High above the straggling town the great cables of the tram floated in the air like dusty webs, and up and down these webs, like black spiders, darted the buckets that carried the ore from mine to mill, then disappeared in the roaring mill, and dumping their loads of ore shot up again into sight, and, growing in size, swept on toward the cliff and passed out of sight over the falls above.

Across the narrow gulch a precipice sheered up eight hundred feet, a hard green crown of stunted spruces on its retreating brow, above the crown a stretch of soft green meadow steeply barred with greener willows, above the meadow jagged spires of blackened lava, thrust up from drifts of shining snow: a triple tiara crowning this silent priest of the mountains.

To the east the long brown slide was marked with clifflets mottled as was Joseph's coat of many colours, with every shade of red and yellow that rusting flecks of iron minerals could give, brightened here and there with clustered flowers which marked a seeping spring, up and up, broken at last by a jagged line of purple that lay softly against the clear blue of the arching sky.

To the west the mountains parted and the vision dropped to miles of browning mesa, flecked with ranchers' squares of irrigated green. Still farther a misty haze of distant mountains rose, with the great soft bell of the curving sky hovering over all.

Zephyr ate in a silence which Élise did not care to break. Her restless eyes glanced from Zephyr to the mountains, fell with an eager caress on the flowers that almost hid the brook, looked out to the distant mesa, and last of all shot defiance at the blazing windows of the Blue Goose that were hurtling back the fiery darts of the attacking sun.

She sprang to her feet, brushing the crumbs from her clothes.

"Much obliged, Mr. Zephyr, for your entertainment." She swept him a low courtesy. "I told you I was out for a lark to-day. Now you can wash the dishes."

Zephyr had also risen. He gave no heed to her playful attitude.

"I want you to pay especial attention, Élise."

"Oh, gracious!" she exclaimed. "Now I'm in for it." She straightened her face, but she could not control the mischievous sparkle of her eyes.

There was little of meditation but much decision in Zephyr's words.

"Don't let Pierre tease you, persuade you, frighten you, or bulldoze you into marrying that Morrison. Do you hear? Get away. Run away."

"Or elope," interrupted Élise. "Don't skip that."

"Go to Bennie, the old man, or to anyone, if you can't find me."

"What a speech, Zephyr! Did any of it get away?"

Zephyr was too much in earnest even to smile.

"Remember what I say."

"You put in an awful lot of hard words. But then, I don't need to remember. I may change my mind. Maybe there'd be a whole lot of fun after all in marrying M'sieu. I'd just like to show him that he can't scare me the way daddy does mammy. It would be worth a whole box of chips. On the whole I think I'll take daddy's advice. Bye-bye, Zephyr." She again picked up her scattered flowers and went dancing and skipping down the trail. At the turn she paused for an instant, blew Zephyr a saucy kiss from the tips of her fingers, then passed out of sight.

A voice floated back to the quiet figure by the fire.

"Don't feel too bad, Zephyr. I'll probably change my mind again."

CHAPTER IV
The Watched Pot Begins to Boil

Of all classes of people under the sun, the so-called labouring man has best cause to pray for deliverance from his friends. His friends are, or rather were, of three classes. The first, ardent but wingless angels of mercy, who fail to comprehend the fact that the unlovely lot of their would-be wards is the result of conditions imposed more largely from within than from without; the second, those who care neither for lots nor conditions, regarding the labourer as a senseless tool with which to hew out his own designs; the third, those who adroitly knock together the heads of the labourer and his employer and impartially pick the pockets of each in the general *mêlée* which is bound to follow.

The past *were* is designedly contrasted with the present *are*, for it is a fact that conditions all around are changing for the better; slowly, perhaps, but nevertheless surely.

The philanthropic friend of the labourer is learning to develop balancing tail-feathers of judgment wherewith to direct the flights of wings of mercy. The employer is beginning to realise the beneficial results of mutual understanding and of considerate co-operation, and the industrious fomenter of strife is learning that bones with richer marrow may be more safely cracked by sensible adjustment than with grievous clubs wielded over broken heads.

Even so, the millennium is yet far away, and now, as in the past, the path that leads to it is uphill and dim, and is beset with many obstacles. There are no short cuts to the summit. In spite of pessimistic clamours that the rich are growing richer and the poor poorer, frothy yowls for free and unlimited coinage at sixteen to one, or for fiat paper at infinity to nothing, the fact remains that, whereas kings formerly used signets for the want of knowledge to write their names, licked their greasy fingers for lack of knives and forks, and starved in Ireland with plenty in France, the poorest to-day can, if they will, indite readable words on well-sized paper, do things in higher mathematics, and avoid the thankless task of dividing eight into seven and looking for the remainder.

Potatoes are worth fifty cents a bushel. Any yokel can dig a hole in the ground and plant the seed and in due time gather the ripened tubers. The engineer who drives his engine at sixty miles an hour, flashing by warning semaphores, rolling among coloured lights, clattering over frogs and switches, is no yokel. Therefore, because of this fact, with the compensation of one day he can, if he so elects, buy many potatoes, or employ many yokels.

Had Sir Isaac Newton devoted to the raising of potatoes the energy which he gave to astronomy, he might have raised larger potatoes and more to the hill than his yokel neighbour. But, his conditions having been potatoes, his reward would have been potatoes, instead of the deathless glory of the discovery and enunciation of the law of gravity. The problem is very simple after all. The world has had a useless deal of trouble because no one has ever before taken the trouble to state the problem and to elaborate it. It is just as simple as is the obvious fact that x plus y equals a.

There is a possibility, however, that we have been going too fast, and have consequently overlooked a few items of importance. We forgot for the moment, as often happens, that the factors in the problem are not homogeneous digits with fixed values, but complex personalities with decided opinions of their own as to their individual and relative importance, as well as pugnacious tendencies for compelling an acceptance of their assumptions by equally pugnacious factors which claim a differential valuation in their own favour. This consideration presents a somewhat different and more difficult phase of the problem. It really compels us to defer attempts at final solution, for the time being, at least; to make the best adjustment possible under present conditions, putting off to the future the final application, much on the same principle that communities bond their present public possessions for their own good and complacently bestow upon posterity the obligation of settling the bills. Considered in this light, the end of the struggle between capital and labour is not yet. Each is

striving for the sole possession and control of things which belong to neither alone. Each looks upon the other not as a co-labourer but as a rival, instead of making intelligent and united effort for an object unattainable by either alone. If capital would smoke this in his cigar and labour the same in his pipe, the soothing effects might tend to more amicable and effective use of what is now dissipated energy.

However, universal panaceas are not to be hoped for. The mailed fist puts irritating chips upon swaggering shoulders, and the unresentful turning of smitten cheeks is conducive to a thrifty growth of gelatinous nincompoops.

The preceding *status quo* existed in general at the Rainbow mines and mill, besides having a few individual characteristics peculiarly their own. Miners and millmen, for the most part recent importations from all countries of Europe, had come from the realms of oppression to the land of the free with very exaggerated notions of what freedom really was. The dominant expression of this idea was that everyone could do as he pleased, and that if the other fellow didn't like it, he, the other fellow, could get out. The often enunciating of abstract principles led to their liberal application to concrete facts. In this application they had able counsel in the ambitious Morrison.

"Who opened these mountain wilds?" Morrison was wont to inquire, not for information, but for emphasis. "Who discovered, amidst toils and dangers and deprivations and snowslides, these rich mines of gold and silver? Who made them accessible by waggon trail and railroads and burros? Who but the honest sons of honest toil? Who, when these labours are accomplished, lolls in the luxurious lap of the voluptuous East, reaping the sweat of your brows, gathering in the harvest of hands toiling for three dollars a day or less? Who, but the purse-proud plutocrat who sits on his cushioned chair in Wall Street, sending out his ruthless minions to rob the labourer of his toil and to express his hard-won gold to the stanchless maw of the ghoulish East. Rise, noble sons of toil, rise! Stretch forth your horny hands and gather in your own! Raise high upon these mountain-peaks the banner of freedom's hope before despairing eyes raised from the greed-sodden plains of the effete East!"

Whereat the sons of toil would cheer and then proceed to stretch forth hands to unripened fruits with such indiscriminating activity that both mine and mill ceased to yield expenses to the eastern plutocrat, and even the revenues of the Blue Goose were seriously impaired, to the great distress of Pierre.

These rhodomontades of Morrison had grains of plausible truth as nuclei. The workmen never, or rarely, came in personal contact with their real employers. Their employers were in their minds men who reaped where others had sown, who gathered where they had not strewn. The labourer gave no heed to costly equipment which made mines possible, or at best weighed them but lightly against the daily toil of monotonous lives. They saw tons of hard-won ore slide down the long cables, crash through the pounding stamps, saw the gold gather on the plates, saw it retorted, and the shining bars shipped East. Against this gold of unknown value, and great because unknown, they balanced their daily wage, that looked pitifully small.

The yield of their aggregate labour in foul-aired stopes and roaring mill they could see in one massive lump. They could not see the aggregate of little bites that reduced the imposing mass to a tiny dribble which sometimes, but not always, fell into the treasury of the company. They would not believe, even if they saw.

For these reasons, great is the glory of the leaders of labour who are rising to-day, holding restraining hands on turbulent ignorance and taking wise counsel with equally glorious leaders who are striving to enforce the truth that all gain over just compensation is but a sacred trust for the benefit of mankind. These things are coming to be so to-day. But so long as sons of wealth are unmindful of their obligations, and so long as ignorance breathes forth noxious vapours to poison its victims, so long will there be battles to be fought and victories to be won.

Thus was the way made ready for the feet of one of the labourer's mistaken friends. Morrison was wily, if not wise. He distinguished between oratory and logic. He kindled the flames of

indignation and resentment with the one and fed them with the other. But in the performance of each duty he never lost sight of himself.

Under the slack management of previous administrations, the conditions of the Rainbow mine and mill had rapidly deteriorated. In the mine a hundred sticks of powder were used or wasted where one would have sufficed. Hundreds of feet of fuse, hundreds of detonators, and pounds of candles were thrown away. Men would climb high in the mine to their work only to return later for some tool needed, or because their supplies had not lasted through their shift. If near the close of hours, they would sit and gossip with their fellow-workmen. Drills and hammers would be buried in the stope, or thrown over the dump. Rock would be broken down with the ore, and the mixed mass, half ore and half rock, would be divided impartially and sent, one-half to the dump and one-half to the mill.

At the mill was the same shiftless state of affairs. Tools once used were left to be hunted for the next time they were wanted. On the night shift the men slept at their posts or deserted them for the hilarious attractions of the Blue Goose. The result was that the stamps, unfed, having no rock to crush, pounded steel on steel, so that stamps were broken, bossheads split, or a clogged screen would burst, leaving the half-broken ore to flow over the plates and into the wash-sluices with none of its value extracted.

Among the evils that followed in the train of slack and ignorant management not the least was the effect upon the men. If a rich pocket of ore was struck the men stole it all. They argued that it was theirs, because they found it. The company would never miss it; the company was making enough, anyway, and, besides, the superintendent never knew when a pocket was opened, and never told them that it was not theirs. These pilfered pockets were always emptied at the Blue Goose. On these occasions the underground furnace glowed ruddily, and Pierre would stow the pilfered gold among other pilfered ingots, and would in due time emerge from his subterranean retreat in such cheerful temper that he had no heart to browbeat the scared-looking Madame. Whereupon Madame would be divided in her honest soul between horror at Pierre's wrong-doing and thankfulness for a temporary reprieve from his biting tongue.

The miners stole supplies of all kinds and sold them or gave them to their friends. Enterprising prospectors, short of funds, as is usually the case, "got a job at the mine," then, having stocked up, would call for their time and go forth to hunt a mine of their own.

The men could hardly be blamed for these pilferings. A slack land-owner who makes no protest against the use of his premises as a public highway, in time not only loses his property but his right to protest as well.

So it happened at the Rainbow mine and mill that, as no locks were placed on magazines, as the supply-rooms were open to all, and as no protest was made against the men helping themselves, the men came to feel that they were taking only what belonged to them, whatever use was made of the appropriated supplies.

These were some of the more obvious evils which Firmstone set about remedying. Magazines and supply-rooms were locked and supplies were issued on order. Workmen ceased wandering aimlessly about while on shift. Rock and ore were broken separately, and if an undue proportion of rock was delivered at the mill it was immediately known at the mine and in unmistakable terms.

The effect of these changes on the men was various. Some took an honest pride in working under a man who knew his business. More chafed and fumed under unwonted restrictions. These were artfully nursed by the wily Morrison, with the result that a dangerous friction was developing between the better disposed men and the restless growlers. This feeling was also diligently stimulated by Morrison.

"Go easy," was his caution; "but warm it up for them."

"Warm it up for them!" indignantly protested one disciple. "Them fellers is the old man's pets."

Morrison snorted.

"Pets, is it? Pets be damned! It's only a matter of time when the old man will be dancing on a hot stove, if you've got any sand in your crops. The foreman's more than half with you now. Get the union organised, and we'll run out the pets and the old man too. You'll never get your rights till you're organised."

At the mill, Firmstone's nocturnal visits at any unexpected hour made napping a precarious business and visits to the Blue Goose not to be thought of.

The results of Firmstone's vigilance showed heavily in reduced expenses and in increased efficiency of labour; but these items were only negative. The fact remained that the yield of the mill in bullion was but slightly increased and still subject to extreme variations. The conclusion was inevitable that the mill was being systematically plundered. Firmstone knew that there must be collusion, not only among the workmen, but among outsiders as well. This was an obvious fact, but the means to circumvent it were not so obvious. He knew that there were workmen in the mill who would not steal a penny, but he also knew that these same men would preserve a sullen silence with regard to the peculations of their less scrupulous fellows. It was but the grown-up sense of honour, that will cause a manly schoolboy to be larruped to the bone before he will tell about his errant and cowardly fellow.

Firmstone was well aware of the simmering discontent which his rigid discipline was arousing. He regretted it, but he was hopeful that the better element among the men would yet gain the ascendant.

"He's square," remarked one of his defenders. "There was a mistake in my time, last payroll, and he looked over the time himself." "That's so," in answer to one objector. "I was in the office and saw him."

"You bet he's square," broke in another. "Didn't I get a bad pair of boots out of the commissary, and didn't he give me another pair in their place? That's what."

If Morrison and Pierre had not been in active evidence Firmstone would have won the day without a fight.

CHAPTER V
Bennie Opens the Pot and Firmstone Comes in

Firmstone was late to breakfast the day of Zephyr's departure, and Bennie was doing his best to restrain his impatience. When at last the late breakfaster appeared, Bennie's manner was noticeably different from the ordinary. He was a stanch defender of the rights of the American citizen, an uncompromising opponent of companies and trusts, a fearless and aggressive exponent of his own views; but withal a sincere admirer and loyal friend of Firmstone. Bennie knew that in his hands were very strong cards, and he was casting about in his mind for the most effective mode of playing them.

"Good morning, Bennie," Firmstone called out, on entering the dining-room.

Bennie returned the greeting with a silent nod. Firmstone glanced at the clock.

"It is pretty late for good morning and breakfast, that's a fact."

Bennie disappeared in the kitchen. He returned and placed Firmstone's breakfast before him.

"What's the matter, Bennie?" Firmstone thought he knew, but events were soon to show him his mistake.

"Matter enough, Mr. Firmstone, as you'll soon find." Bennie was getting alarming.

Firmstone ate in silence. Bennie watched with impassive dignity.

"Is your breakfast all right?" he finally asked, unbendingly.

"All right, Bennie. Better than I deserve, pouncing on you at this hour." He again looked up at the clock.

"Come when you like, late or early, you'll get the best I can give you." Bennie was still rigid.

Firmstone was growing more puzzled. Bennie judged it time to support his opening.

"I'm an outspoken man, Mr. Firmstone, as becomes an American citizen. If I take an honest dollar, I'll give an honest return."

"No one doubts that, Bennie." Firmstone leaned back in his chair. He was going to see it out.

Bennie's support was rapidly advancing.

"You know, Mr. Firmstone, that I have my opinions and speak my mind about the oppression of the poor by the rich. I left my home in the East to come out here where it was less crowded and where there was more freedom. It's only change about, I find. In the East the rich were mostly Americans who oppressed the dagoes, being for their own good; but here it's the other way. Here's Mike the Finn, and Jansen the Swede, and Hansen the Dane, and Giuseppe the dago, and Pat the Irishman the boss of the whole dirty gang. Before God I take shame to myself for being an honest man and American born, and having this thieving gang to tell me how long I can work, and where I can buy, with a swat in the jaw and a knife in my back for daring to say my soul is my own and sticking to it against orders from the union."

"Thunder and Mars, Bennie! What's the matter?"

Bennie's reserves came up with a rush. He thrust open the door of his room and jerked a blanket from the sacks which Zephyr had left there.

Firmstone gave a low whistle of surprise.

"There's matter for you, Mr. Firmstone."

"Where under the sun did you get these?" Firmstone had opened one of the sacks and was looking at the ore.

"I didn't get them. Zephyr got them and asked me to see that you had them. There's a man for you! 'Twas little white paint the Lord had when he came West, but he put two good coats of it on Zephyr's back."

Firmstone made no reply to Bennie's eulogy of Zephyr. He closed and retied the opened sacks.

"There's mighty interesting reading in these sacks, Bennie."

"Those were Zephyr's words, sir."

"That ore was taken from the mill last night. Luna was on shift, Long was sick, and Luna put Morrison in his place." Firmstone looked at Bennie inquisitively. He was trying his facts on the cook.

"That's so, sir," remarked Bennie. "But you'll never make a hen out of a rooster by pulling out his tail-feathers."

Firmstone laughed.

"Well, Bennie, that's about the way I sized it up myself. Keep quiet about this. I want to get these sacks down to the office some time to-day." He left the room and went to the office.

Luna reported to the office that night as usual before going on shift. Firmstone gave a few directions, and then turned to his work.

Shortly after twelve Luna was surprised at seeing the superintendent enter the mill.

"Cut off the feed in the batteries."

The order was curt, and Luna, much bewildered, hastened to obey.

Firmstone followed him around back of the batteries, where automatic machines dropped the ore under the stamps. Firmstone waited until there began to come the sound of dropping stamps pounding on the naked dies, then he gave orders to hang up the stamps and shut down the mill. This was done. The rhythmic cadence of the falling stamps was broken into irregular blows as one by one the stamps were propped up above the revolving cams, till finally only the hum of pulleys and the click of belts were heard. These sounds also ceased as the engine slowed and finally stopped.

"Shall I lay off the men?" asked the foreman.

"No. Have them take out the screens."

This also was done, and then Firmstone, accompanied by Luna, went from battery to battery. They first scraped out the loose rock, and afterward, with a long steel spoon, took samples of the crushed ore from between the dies. The operation was a long one; but at length the last battery was sampled. Firmstone put the last sample in a sack with the others.

"Shall I carry the sack for you?" asked Luna.

"No. Start up the mill, and then come to the office." Firmstone turned, and, with the heavy sack on his shoulder, left the mill.

There were a hundred stamps in the mill. The stamps were divided into batteries of ten each. Each battery was driven separately by a belt from the main shaft. There was a man in attendance on every twenty stamps. Firmstone had taken samples from each battery, and each sample bore the number of the battery. He had taken especial care to call this to Luna's attention.

The foreman saw to replacing the screens, and, when the mill was again started, he went to the superintendent's office. He knew very well that an unpleasant time awaited him; but, like the superintendent, he had his course of action mapped out. The foreman was a very wise man within a restricted circle. He knew that the battle was his, if he fought within its circumference. Outside of the circle he did not propose to be tempted. Firmstone could not force him out. Those who could, would not attempt it for very obvious and personal reasons. Luna was aware that Firmstone knew that there was thieving, and was morally certain as to who were the thieves, but lacked convincing proof. This was his protecting circle. Firmstone could not force him out of it. Morrison and Pierre knew not only of the thieving, but the thieves. They could force him out, but they would not. Luna was tranquil.

Luna saw Firmstone in the laboratory as he entered the railed enclosure. He opened the railing gate, passed through the office, and entered the laboratory. Firmstone glanced at the foreman, but he met only a stolid face with no sign of confusion.

"Pan these samples down."

Without a word Luna emptied the sacks into little pans and carefully washed off the crushed rock, leaving the grains of gold in the pans. Eight of the pans showed rich in gold, the last two hardly a trace.

Firmstone placed the pans in order.

"What do you make of that?" he asked, sharply.

Luna shook his head.

"That's too much for me."

"What batteries did these two come from?" Firmstone pointed to the two plates.

"Nine and Ten," the foreman answered, promptly.

"Who works on Nine and Ten?"

"Clancy day and Long night," was the ready answer.

"Did Long work last night?"

"No. He was sick. I told you that, and I asked you if I should put on Morrison. You didn't say nothing against it."

"Did Nine and Ten run all night?"

"Except for an hour or two, maybe. Nine worked a shoe loose and Ten burst a screen. That's likely to happen any time. We had to hang up for that."

"You say you can give no explanation of this?" Firmstone pointed to the empty pans.

"No, sir."

"Look this over." Firmstone went to his desk in the office and Luna followed him. He picked up a paper covered with figures marked "Mine Assays, May," and handed it to the foreman.

Luna glanced over the sheet, then looked inquiringly at Firmstone.

"Well?" he finally ventured.

"What do you make of it?" Firmstone asked.

Luna turned to the assay sheet.

"The average of two hundred assays taken twice a week, twenty-five assays each time, gives twenty-five dollars a ton for the month of May." Luna read the summary.

Firmstone wrote the number on a slip of paper, then took the sheet from the foreman.

"You understand, then, that the ore taken from the mine and sent to the mill in May averaged twenty-five dollars a ton?"

"Yes, that's right." Luna was getting puzzled.

"Very good. You're doing well. Now look at this sheet." Firmstone handed him another paper. "Now read the summary."

Luna read aloud:

"Average loss in tailings, daily samples, May, two dollars and seventy-five cents a ton."

"You understand from this, do you not, that the gold recovered from the plates should then be twenty-two dollars and twenty-five cents a ton?"

"Yes, sir." Luna's face was reddening; beads of perspiration were oozing from his forehead.

"Well, then," pursued Firmstone, "just look over this statement. Read it out loud."

Luna took the paper offered him, and began to read.

"What do you make out of that?" Firmstone was looking straight into the foreman's eyes.

Luna tried his best to return the look, but his eyes dropped.

"I don't know," he stammered.

"Then I'll tell you. Not that I need to, but I want you to understand that I know. It means that out of every ton of ore that was delivered to this mill in May thirteen dollars and forty-five cents have been stolen."

Luna fairly gasped. He was startled by the statement to a cent of the amount stolen. He and his confederates had been compelled to take Pierre's unvouched statements. Therefore he could not controvert the figures, had he chosen. He did not know the amount.

"There must have been a mistake, sir."

"Mistake!" Firmstone blazed out. "What do you say to this?"

He pulled a canvas from the sacks of ore that had been brought to the office. He expected to see Luna collapse entirely. Instead, a look of astonishment spread over the foreman's face.

"I'll give up!" he exclaimed. He looked Firmstone squarely in the face. He saw his way clearly now. "You're right," he said. "There has been stealing. It's up to me. I'll fire anyone you say, or I'll quit myself, or you can fire me. But, before God, I never stole a dollar from the Rainbow mill." He spoke the literal truth. The spirit of it did not trouble him.

Firmstone was astonished at the man's affirmations, but they did not deceive him, nor divert him from his purpose.

"I'm not going to tell you whom to let out or take in," he replied. "I'm holding you responsible. I've told you a good deal, but not all, by a good long measure. This stealing has got to stop, and you can stop it. You would better stop it. Now go back to your work."

That very night Firmstone wrote a full account of the recovery of the stolen ore, the evils which he found on taking charge of the property, the steps which he proposed for their elimination. He closed with these words:

"It must be remembered that these conditions have had a long time in which to develop. At the very least, an equal time must be allowed for their elimination; but I believe that I shall be successful."

CHAPTER VI
The Family Circle

On the morning of Élise's strike for freedom, Pierre came to breakfast with his usual atmosphere of compressed wrath. He glanced at his breakfast which Madame had placed on the table at the first sound which heralded his approach. There was nothing there to break the tension and to set free the pent-up storm within. Much meditation, with fear and trembling, had taught Madame the proper amount of butter to apply to the hot toast, the proportion of sugar and cream to add to the coffee, and the exact shade of crisp and brown to put on his fried eggs. But a man bent on trouble can invariably find a cause for turning it loose.

"Where is Élise?" he demanded.

"Élise," Madame answered, evasively, "she is around somewhere."

"Somewhere is nowhere. I demand to know." Pierre looked threatening.

"Shall I call her?" Madame vouchsafed.

"If you know not where she is, how shall you call her? Heh? If you know, mek ansaire!"

"I don't know where she is."

"*Bien!*" Pierre reseated himself and began to munch his toast savagely.

Madame was having a struggle with herself. It showed plainly on the thin, anxious face. The lips compressed with determination, the eyes set, then wavered, and again the indeterminate lines of acquiescent subjection gained their accustomed ascendency. Back and forth assertion and complaisance fled and followed; only assertion was holding its own.

The eggs had disappeared, also the greater part of the toast. Pierre swallowed the last of his coffee, and, without a look at his silent wife, began to push his chair from the table. Madame's voice startled him.

"Élise is sixteen," she ventured.

Pierre fell back in his chair, astonished. The words were simple and uncompromising, but the intonation suggested that they were not final.

"Well?" he asked, explosively.

"When are you going to send Élise away to school?"

"To school?" Pierre was struggling with his astonishment.

"Yes." Madame was holding herself to her determination with an effort.

"To school? *Baste!* She read, she write, she mek ze figure, is it not suffice? Heh?"

"That makes no difference. You promised her father that you would send her away to school."

Pierre looked around apprehensively.

"Shut up! Kip quiet!"

"I won't shut up, and I won't keep quiet." Madame's blood was warming. The sensation was as pleasant as it was unusual. "I will keep quiet for myself. I won't for Élise."

"Élise! Élise! Ain't I do all right by Élise?" Pierre asked, aggressively. "She have plenty to eat, plenty to wear, you tek good care of her. Don't I tek good care, also? Me? Pierre? She mek no complain, heh?"

"That isn't what her father wanted, and it isn't what you promised him."

Pierre looked thoughtful; his face softened slightly.

"We have no children, you and me. We have honly Élise, one li'l girl, *la bonne* Élise. You wan' mek me give up *la bonne* Élise? *P'quoi?*" His face blazed again as he looked up wrathfully. "You wan' mek her go to school! *P'quoi?* So she learn mek *teedle, teedle* on ze piano? So she learn speak gran'? So she tink of me, Pierre, one li'l Frenchmens, not good enough for her, for mek her shame wiz her gran' friends? Heh? Who mek ze care for ze li'l babby? Who mek her grow up strong? Heh? You mek

her go school. You mek ze gran' dam-zelle. You mek her go back to her pip'l. You mek me, Pierre, you, grow hol' wiz noddings? Hall ze res' ze time wiz no li'l Élise? How you like li'l Élise go away and mek ze marry, and w'en she have li'l children, she say to her li'l children, '*Mes enfants, voila!* Pierre and Madame, *très bon* Pierre and Madame,' and *les petits enfants* mek big eyes at Pierre and Madame and li'l Élise? She say, '*Pauvres enfants*, Pierre and Madame will not hurt you. *Bon* Pierre! *Bonne* Madame!'" Pierre made a gesture of deprecating pity.

Madame was touched to the quick. Starting tears dimmed the heavy eyes. Had she not thought of all this a thousand times? If Pierre cared so much for li'l Élise how much more reason had she to care? Li'l Élise had been the only bright spot in her dreary life, yet she was firm. Élise had been very dear to her in the past, but her duty was plain. Her voice was gentler.

"Élise is not ours, Pierre. It is harder to do now what we ought to have done long ago."

Pierre rose and walked excitedly back and forth. He was speaking half to himself, half to Madame.

"Sixtin year 'go li'l Élise mammy die. Sixtin year! She no say, 'Madame Marie, tek my li'l babby back Eas' to my friend, *hein*? No. She say, 'Madame Marie, my poor li'l babby ain' got no mammy no mo'. Tek good care my poor li'l babby.' Then she go die. We mek good care of ze li'l Élise, me and you, heh? We sen' away Élise? *Sacré non!* Nevaire!" Pierre stopped, and looked fiercely at Madame.

"Yes," answered Madame. "Her mammy asked me to care for her little baby, but it was for her father. When her father died he made you promise to give her to her friends. Don't I know how hard it is?" Her tears were flowing freely now. "Every year we said, 'She is yet too young to go. Next year we will keep our promise,' and next year she was dearer to us. And now she is sixteen. She must go."

Pierre broke in fiercely:

"She shall not! Sixtin year? Sixtin year she know honly me, Pierre, her daddy, and you, her mammy. What you tink, heh? Élise go school in one beeg city, heh? She mek herself choke wiz ze brick house and ze stone street. She get sick and lonesome for ze mountain, for her hol' daddy and her hol' mammy, for ze grass and ze flower."

"That is for her to say. Send her away as you promised. Then" – Madame's heavy eyes grew deep, almost beautiful – "then, if she comes back to us!"

Pierre turned sullenly.

"She is mine. Mine and yours. She shall stay."

Madame's tears ceased flowing.

"She shall go." Her temerity frightened her. "I will tell her all if you don't send her away."

Pierre did not explode, as she expected. Instead, there was the calm of invincible purpose. He held up one finger impressively.

"I settle hall zis. *Écoutez!* She shall marry. Right away. Queek. Da's hall." He left the room before Madame had time to reply.

Madame was too terrified to think. The possibility conveyed in her husband's declaration had never suggested itself to her. Élise was still the little baby nestling in her arms, the little girl prattling and playing indoors and out, on the wide ranch, and later, Madame shuddered, when Pierre had abandoned the ranch for the Blue Goose, waiting at the bar, keeping Pierre's books, redeeming checks at the desk, moving out and in among the throng of coarse, uncouth men, but through it all the same beautiful, wilful, loving little girl, so dear to Madame's heart, so much of her life. What did it matter that profanity died on the lips of the men in her presence, that at her bidding they ceased to drink to intoxication, that hopeless wives came to her for counsel, that their dull faces lighted at her words, that in sickness or death she was to them a comfort and a refuge?

What if Pierre had fiercely protected her from the knowledge of the more loathsome vices of a mining camp? It was no more than right. Pierre loved her. She knew that. Pierre was hoarding every shining dollar that came to his hand. Was he lavish in his garnishment of the Blue Goose? It was only for the more effective luring of other gold from the pockets of the careless, unthinking men

who worked in mines or mills, or roamed among the mountains or washed the sands of every stream, spending all they found, hoping for and talking of the wealth which, if it came, would only smite them with more rapid destruction. And all these little rivulets, small each one alone, united at the Blue Goose into a growing stream that went no farther. For what end? Madame knew. For Pierre, life began and ended in Élise. Madame knew, and sympathized with this; but her purpose was not changed. She knew little of life beyond the monotonous desolation of a western ranch, the revolting glamour of a gambling resort, where men revelled in the fierce excitement of shuffling cards and clicking chips, returning to squalid homes and to spiritless women, weighed down and broken with the bearing of many children, and the merciless, unbroken torture of thankless, thoughtless demands upon their lives. Madame saw all this. She saw and felt the dreary hopelessness of it all. Much as she loved Élise, if it parted her from all that made life endurable she would not shrink from the sacrifice. She knew nothing of life beyond her restricted circle, but anything outside this circle was a change, and any change must be for the better.

"She shall marry. Right away." Pierre's words came to her again with overwhelming terror. Overwhelming, because she saw no way of averting the threatened blow.

From behind, Madame felt two soft hands close on her straining eyes, and a sympathetic voice:

"Has daddy been scolding you again? What was it about this time? Was it because I ran away this morning? I did run away, you know."

For reply Madame only bowed her head from between the clasping hands that for the first time had distress instead of comfort for her groping soul. She did not pray for guidance. She never thought of praying. Why should she? The prisoned seed, buried in the dank and quickening soil, struggles instinctively toward the source of light and strength. But what instinct is there to guide the human soul that, quickened by unselfish love, is yet walled in by the Stygian darkness of an ignorant life?

Madame's hands were clinched. Her hot eyes were dry and hard. No light! No help! Only a fierce spirit of resistance. At length she was conscious of Élise standing before her, half terrified, but wholly determined. Her eyes moistened, then grew soft. Her outstretched arms sought the girl and drew her within their convulsive grasp.

"My poor Élise! My poor little girl, with no one to help her but me!"

"What is it, mammy? What is it?"

Madame only moaned.

"My poor little Élise! My poor little girl!"

Élise freed herself from the resisting arms.

"Tell me at once!" She stamped her foot impatiently.

Madame sprang to her feet.

"You shall not marry that man. You shall not!" Her voice rose. "I will tell you all – everything. I will, if he kills me. I will! I will!"

The door from the saloon was violently opened, and Pierre strode in. He pushed Élise aside, and, with narrowed eyes and uplifted hand, approached his wife.

"You will? You will, heh?"

The threatening blow fell heavily, but upon Élise. She thrust forth her hands. Pierre stumbled backward before the unexpected assault. His eyes, blazing with ungoverned fury, swept around the room. They rested upon a stick. He grasped it, and turned once more toward Madame.

"You will! You will! I teach you bettaire. I teach you say 'I will' to me! I teach you!" Then he stopped. He was looking squarely into the muzzle of a silver-mounted revolver held in a steady hand and levelled by a steady eye.

Pierre was like a statue. Another look came into his eyes. Youth toyed with death, and was not afraid. Pierre knew that. At threatening weapons in the hands of drink-crazed men Pierre smiled with scorn. The bad man stood in terror of the law as well as of Pierre. But when determined youth laid hold on death and shook it in his face Pierre knew enough to stand aside.

Élise broke the tense silence.

"Don't you ever dare to strike mammy again. Don't you dare!"

Without a word Pierre left the room. He had loved Élise before with as unselfish a love as he could know. But hitherto he had not admired her. Now he rubbed his hands and chuckled softly, baring his teeth with unsmiling lips.

"A-a-ah!" he breathed forth. "*Magnifique! Superb! La petite diable!* She mek ze shoot in her eye! In ze fingaire! She bin shoot her hol' man, her hol' daddy, *moi!* Pierre." Pierre thoughtfully rubbed his smooth chin. "*La petite diable!*"

Poor Madame! Poor Pierre! The dog chases his tail with undiminished zest, and is blissfully rewarded if a straggling hair but occasionally brushes his nose. He licks his accessible paws, impelled alone by a sense of duty.

CHAPTER VII
Mr. Morrison Tackles a Man with a Mind of His Own and a Man without One

Mr. Morrison was a slick bird – in fact, a very slick bird. It was his soul's delight to preen his unctuous feathers and to shiver them into the most effective and comfortable position, to settle his head between his shoulders, and, with moistened lips, to view his little world from dreamy, half-closed eyes. This, however, only happened in restful moments of complacent self-contemplation. He never allowed these moods to interfere with business. He had broached the subject of marriage to Pierre, and Pierre had of course fallen in with his views. The fact that Élise evidently loathed him disturbed no whit his placid mind. He was in no hurry. He assumed Élise as his own whenever he chose to say the word. He regarded her in much the same way as a half-hungered epicure a toothsome dinner, holding himself aloof until his craving stomach should give the utmost zest to his viands without curtailing the pleasure of his palate by ravenous haste. He served Pierre with diligence and fidelity. The Blue Goose would sooner or later come to him with Élise.

He had ambitions, political especially, not acquired, but instinctive. Not that he felt inspired with a mission to do good unto others, but that others should do good unto him, and also that the particular kind of good should be of his own choosing. He knew very well the temperaments of his chosen constituency, and he adapted himself to their impressionable peculiarities. To this end he dispensed heavily padded gratuities with much ostentation on selected occasions, but gathered his tolls in merciless silence. He did this without fear, for he knew that the blare of the multitude would drown the cries of the stricken few.

Mr. Morrison had long meditated upon the proper course to take in order best to compass his ends. The unrest among the employees of the Rainbow Company came to him unsought, and he at once grasped the opportunity. The organisation of a miners' and millmen's union would be an obvious benefit to the rank and file; their manifestation of gratitude would naturally take the very form he most desired. To this end before the many he displayed the pyrotechnics of meaningless oratory, in much the same manner as a strutting peacock his brilliant tail; but individuals he hunted with nickel bullets and high-power guns. On various occasions he had displayed the peacock tail; this particular afternoon he took down his flat-trajectoried weapon and went forth to gun for Bennie.

Bennie had washed the dinner dishes, reset his table, prepared for the coming meal, and now, as was his custom, was lying in his bunk, with an open book in his hands, prepared to read or doze, as the spirit moved him.

Mr. Morrison appeared before him.

"Howdy, Bennie! Taking a nap?"

"I'm taking nothing but what's my own." Bennie looked meaningly at Morrison.

Morrison slipped into what he mistook for Bennie's mood.

"You're wise, if you get it all. Many's the ignorant devil that takes only what's given him and asks no questions, worse luck to him!"

"You'll do well to go on," remarked Bennie, placidly. "There's many that gets more, and then damns the gift and the giver."

"And just what might that mean, Bennie?" Morrison looked a little puzzled.

"It means that, if more got what they deserved, 'twould be better for honest men." Bennie was very decided.

Morrison's face cleared. He held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said.

Bennie took the proffered hand.

"Here's hoping you'll come to your own!" he remarked, grimly.

The clasped hands each fell to its own. Morrison's hands went to his pocket as he stretched out his crossed legs with a thankful look on his face.

"I'm not specially troubled about myself. I've had fairly good luck looking out for Patrick Morrison, Esq. It's these poor devils around here that's troubling me. They get nipped and pinched at every turn of the cards."

"It's God's truth you're talking. And you want to help them same poor devils?"

"That's what."

"Then listen to me. Smash your roulette and faro. Burn down the Blue Goose, first taking out your whisky that'll burn only the throats of the fools who drink it. Do that same, and you'll see fat grow on lean bones, and children's pants come out of the shade of the patches."

Morrison lifted his hat, scratching his head meditatively.

"That isn't exactly what I'm at."

"Eagles to snowbirds 'tis not!" put in Bennie, aside.

Morrison gave no heed to the interruption.

"Every man has the right to spend his own money in his own way."

"The poor devils get the money and the Blue Goose furnishes the way," Bennie again interpolated.

Morrison was getting uneasy. He was conscious that he was not making headway.

"You can't do but one thing at a time in good shape."

"You're a damned liar! At the Blue Goose you're doing everyone all the time."

Morrison rose impatiently. The nickel bullets were missing their billet. He began tentatively to unfold the peacock's tail.

"You see," he said, "it's like this. In union is strength. What makes the rich richer? Because they hang together like swarming bees. You pick the honey of one and you get the stings of all. Learn from the rich to use the rich man's weapons. Let us poor workingmen band together like brothers in a common cause. Meet union with union, strength with strength. Then, and only then, can we get our own."

"It took more than one cat to make strings for that fiddle," Bennie remarked, thoughtfully. "Just what might that mean?"

Morrison again looked puzzled. He went back to his bullets.

"To be specific," he spoke impressively, "as things stand now, if one workingman thinks he ought to have more pay he goes to the company and asks for it. The company says no. If he gets troublesome, they fire him. If one man works in a close breast with foul air the company tells him to go back to his work or quit. It costs money to timber bad ground. One poor workman's life doesn't count for much. It's cheaper for the company to take chances than to put in timber." He paused, looking sharply at Bennie.

"You're talking sense now. How do you propose to help it?"

Morrison felt solid ground beneath his feet.

"Do as I said. Learn from the rich. Unite. If the men are not getting fair wages, the union can demand more."

Bennie lifted an inquiring finger.

"One word there. You want to organise a union?"

"That's it. That's the stuff." Morrison was flatteringly acquiescent. "A company can turn down one man, but the union will shove it up to them hard."

"If one man breaks five tons of ore a day, and another man breaks only one, will the union see that both get the same pay?"

"A workingman is a workingman." Morrison spoke less enthusiastically. "A man that puts in his time earns all that he gets."

Bennie looked musingly at the toes of his boots.

"The union will equalise the pay?"

"You bet it will!"

"They'll make the company ventilate the mines and keep bad ground timbered?"

"They'll look after these things sharp, and anything else that comes up."

"The union will run the company, but who'll run the union?"

Morrison waxed enthusiastic.

"We'll take our turn at bossing all right. Every man in the union stands on the same floor, and when any of the boys have a grievance the president will see them through. The president and the executive committee can tie up the whole camp if the company bucks."

"Is the union organised?" asked Bennie.

"Not yet. It's like this." Morrison's voice had a tinge of patronage. "You see, I want to get a few of the level-headed men in the camp worked up to the idea; the rest will come in, hands down."

"Who have you got strung?"

"Well, there's Luna, and – "

"Luna's a crowd by himself. He's got more faces than a town-clock telling time to ten streets. Who else?"

"There's Thompson, the mine foreman – "

"Jim Thompson? Don't I know him now? He'll throw more stunts than a small boy with a bellyful of green apples. Who else?"

Morrison looked a little sulky.

"Well, how about yourself. That's what I'm here to find out."

Bennie glared up wrathfully.

"You'll take away no doubts about me, if my tongue isn't struck by a palsy till it can't bore the wax of your ears. When it comes to bosses, I'll choose my own. I'm American and American born. I'd rather be bossed by a silk tile and kid gloves than by a Tipperary hat and a shillalah, with a damned three-cornered shamrock riding the necks of both. It's a pretty pass we've come to if we've got to go to Irish peat-bogs and Russian snow-banks to find them as will tell us our rights and how to get them, and then import dagoes with rings in their ears and Hungarians with spikes in their shoes to back us up. Let me talk a bit! I get my seventy-five dollars a month for knowing my business and attending to it, because my grub goes down the necks of the men instead of out on the dump; because I give more time to a side of bacon than I do to organising unions. And I'll tell you some more facts. The rich are growing richer for using what they have, and the poor are growing poorer because they don't know enough to handle what they've got. Organise a union for keeping damned fools out of the Blue Goose, and from going home and lamming hell out of their wives and children, and I'll talk with you. As it is, the sooner you light out the more respect I'll have for the sense of you that I haven't seen."

Morrison was blazing with anger.

"You'll sing another tune before long. We propose to run every scab out of the country."

"Run, and be damned to you! I've got a thousand-acre ranch and five hundred head of cattle. I've sucked it from the Rainbow at seventy-five a month, and I've given value received, without any union to help me. Only take note of this. I've laid my eggs in my own nest, and not at the Blue Goose."

Morrison turned and left the room. Over his shoulder he flung back:

"This isn't the last word, you damned scab! You'll hear from me again."

"'Tis not the nature of a pig to keep quiet with a dog at his heels." Bennie stretched his neck out of the door to fire his parting shot.

Morrison went forth with a vigorous flea in each ear, which did much to disturb his complacency. Bennie had not made him thoughtful, only vengeful. There is nothing quite so discomposing as the scornful rejection of proffers of self-seeking philanthropy. Bennie's indignation

was instinctive rather than analytical, the inherent instinct that puts up the back and tail of a new-born kitten at its first sight of a benevolent-appearing dog.

Morrison had not gone far from the boarding-house before he chanced against Luna.

Morrison was the last person Luna would have wished to meet. Since his interview with Firmstone he had scrupulously avoided the Blue Goose, and he had seen neither Morrison nor Pierre. His resolution to mend his ways was the result of fear, rather than of change of heart. Neither Morrison nor Pierre had fear. They were playing safe. Luna felt their superiority; he was doing his best to keep from their influence.

"Howdy!"

"Howdy!" Luna answered.

"Where've you been this long time?" asked Morrison, suavely.

Luna did not look up.

"Down at the mill, of course."

"What's going on?" pursued Morrison. "You haven't been up lately."

"There's been big things going on. Pierre's little game's all off." Luna shrank from a direct revelation.

"Oh, drop this! What's up?"

"I'll tell you what's up." Luna looked defiant. "You know the last lot of ore you pinched? Well, the old man's got it, and, what's more, he's on to your whole business."

Morrison's face set.

"Look here now, Luna. You just drop that little *your* business. It looks mighty suspicious, talking like that. I don't know what you mean. If you've been pulling the mill and got caught you'd better pick out another man to unload on besides me."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.