

White Stewart Edward

Gold



Stewart White

Gold

«Public Domain»

White S.

Gold / S. White — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PART I	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	7
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	20
CHAPTER VI	22
CHAPTER VII	27
CHAPTER VIII	29
CHAPTER IX	35
PART II	39
CHAPTER X	39
CHAPTER XI	45
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	48

White Stewart Edward Gold

PART I PANAMA

CHAPTER I OH, SUSANNAH!

Somewhere in this book I must write a paragraph exclusively about myself. The fact that in the outcome of all these stirring events I have ended as a mere bookkeeper is perhaps a good reason why one paragraph will be enough. In my youth I had dreams a-plenty; but the event and the peculiar twist of my own temperament prevented their fulfilment. Perhaps in a more squeamish age—and yet that is not fair, either, to the men whose destinies I am trying to record. Suffice it then that of these men I have been the friend and companion, of these occasions I have been a part, and that the very lacks and reservations of my own character that have kept me to a subordinate position and a little garden have probably made me the better spectator. Which is a longer paragraph about myself than I had purposed writing.

Therefore I will pass over briefly the various reasons, romantic and practical, why I decided to join the gold rush to California in the year 1849. It was in the air; and I was then of a romantic and adventurous disposition.

The first news of the gold discovery filtered to us in a roundabout way through vessels to the Sandwich Islands, and then appeared again in the columns of some Baltimore paper. Everybody laughed at the rumour; but everybody remembered it. The land was infinitely remote; and then, as now, romance increases as the square of the distance. There might well be gold there; but more authentic were the reports of fleas, rawhides, and a dried-up coast. Minstrel shows made a good deal of fun of it all, I remember. Then, when we were of a broad grin, came the publication of the letter written by Governor Mason to the War Department. That was a sober official document, and had to be believed, but it read like a fairy tale.

“I have no hesitation in saying,” wrote the governor, “that there is more gold in the country drained by the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers than would pay the costs of the late war with Mexico a hundred times over.” And he then went on to report in detail big nuggets and big washings, mentioning men, places, dates, in a circumstantial manner that carried conviction.

Our broad grins faded. The minstrels’ jokes changed colour. As I look back, it seems to me that I can almost see with the physical eye the broad restless upheaval beneath the surface of all society. The Mexican war was just over, and the veterans—young veterans all—filled with the spirit of adventure turned eagerly toward this glittering new emprise. Out in the small villages, on the small farms, the news was talked over seriously, almost without excitement, as offering a possible means of lifting the burden war had laid. Families strained their resources, mortgaged their possessions, to equip and send their single strongest members to make the common fortune.

Then came the song that caught the popular ear; and the rush was on. Most great movements are done to song, generally commonplace. It was so in this instance. *Oh, Susannah!* or rather a modification of the original made to fit the occasion, first sung in some minstrel show, ran like fire in the tinder of men’s excited hopes. From every stage, on every street corner, in every restaurant

and hotel it was sung, played, and whistled. At the sound of its first notes the audience always sprang to its feet and cheered like mad.

The desire to go to El Dorado was universal, and almost irresistible. The ability to go was much more circumscribed. For one thing, it cost a good deal of money; and that was where *I* bogged down at the first pull. Then I suppose a majority did have ties of family, business or other responsibilities impossible to shake off. However, we all joined one or more of the various clubs formed for the purpose of getting at least some of their members to California; and discussed heatedly the merits of the different routes; and went into minute and fascinating details as to processes of which we knew less than nothing; and sang *Oh, Susannah!* and talked ourselves into a glorified fever of excitement; and went home with our heads in the clouds. Once in a great while some of these clubs came to something—as a body I mean; for individual members were constantly working themselves up the summit of resolution to rush headlong and regardless down the other side and out of our sight. When a man had reached a certain pitch of excitement he ran amuck. He sold anything, deserted anything, broke through anything in the way of family, responsibility, or financial lacks in order to go. But, as I say, occasionally one of these clubs pooled its individual resources and bought some old tub of a whaler, or outfitted a wagon train, and started off. But generally we got only as far as *Oh, Susannah!* I remember once, in coming out from one of our meetings, finding myself next a solemn and earnest youth originally from my own rural village. He walked by my side for several squares lost in a brown study. Then suddenly he looked up.

“Frank,” said he with conviction, “I believe I’ll go. I know most of this talk is wildly exaggerated, but I’m sensible enough to discount all that sort of thing and to disbelieve absurd stories. I shan’t go with the slightest notion of finding the thing true, but will be satisfied if I do reasonably well. In fact, if I don’t pick up more than a hatful of gold a day, I shall be perfectly satisfied.”

Which remark sufficiently indicates about where we all were!

CHAPTER II

THE HAMMERLOCK

We had many sorts of men in our club, but nearly all young. One, in especial, early attracted my attention, and held it through all the changing vicissitudes of our many meetings. I say attracted me, though fascinated would be perhaps the better word, for after the first evening of his attendance I used deliberately so to place myself that I could watch him.

He came always in a rather worn military cape, which on entering the door he promptly threw back in such a manner as to display the red lining. This seemed an appropriate envelopment of his flaming, buoyant personality. He walked with his chin up and his back straight, and trod directly on and over the ends of his toes so that he seemed fairly to spring with vigour. His body was very erect and tall and pliant, bending easily to every change of balance. If I were never to have seen his face at all I should have placed him as one of the laughing spirits of the world. His head was rather small, round, well poised, with soft close-set ringlets all over it like a cap, in the fashion of some marble gods I have seen. He had very regular, handsome features, with a clear, biscuit-brown complexion, and a close-clipped, stubby, light moustache. All these things were interesting and attractive, though no more so than are the vigour and beauty of any perfect animal. But the quality of his eyes placed him, at least to me, in a class apart. They were sober, clear eyes, that looked out gray and contemplative on the world about them; so that one got the instant impression of a soul behind them that weighed and judged. Indeed they were not laughing eyes at all, and rather negated the impression made by the man's general bearing. But somewhere down in them something flickered like a strong burning candle in a brisk wind. Occasionally it was almost out; then again it blazed up clear, so that one thought to see it plainly through the steady brooding look. It always fascinated the beholder, for it was mysterious. Whether it came and went, grew and shrank, following delicately the moods or reflections of the spirit within, or whether it was a purely fortuitous effect of light and refraction, no man was ever able to say. And some men later made some very bad guesses. I myself think it was the devil of genius—a devil behind the steady control of a clear brain. His name, I soon discovered, was Talbot Ward.

At this period I was starting in as an assistant bookkeeper to a large exporting firm. They were enterprising people, and already they were laying plans to capture some of the California trade. The office talk I heard concerning the purchase of ships, the consignment of arms, the engagement of captains and of crews further inflamed my imagination. I received the vast sum of nine dollars per week. As I was quite alone in the world, and possessed no other resources, the saving of the five hundred dollars agreed upon as the least sum with which it was possible to get to California was fairly out of all question.

One evening, after the meeting, to my great surprise, Ward fell into step with me. We had up to that moment never exchanged a word.

“In New York long?” he demanded.

“About six months,” I told him.

“Farm bred, of course?” he remarked. “Where?”

“Ashbury in Vermont,” I replied, without the slightest feeling that he was intrusive.

He stopped short in the street and looked me up and down reflectively, but without comment.

“I've been watching you at these fool meetings,” said he, falling into step again.

In spite of myself I experienced a glow of gratification at having been the object of his interest.

“Fool meetings?” I echoed inquiringly.

“Suppose, by a miracle, all that lot could agree, and could start for California to-morrow, in a body—that's what they are organized for, I believe,” he countered—“would you go with them?”

“Why not?”

“Martin is why not; and Fowler is why not; and that little Smith runt, and six or eight others. They are weak sisters. If you are going into a thing, go into it with the strong men. I wouldn’t go with that crowd to a snake fight if it was twelve miles away. Where do you live?”

“West Ninth Street.”

“That’s not far. Have you a good big room?”

“I have a very small hall bedroom,” I replied wonderingly; “a number of us have the whole of the top floor.”

Somehow, I must repeat, this unexplained intrusion of a total stranger into my private affairs did not offend.

“Then you must have a big sitting-room. How many of you?”

“Four.”

“Can you lick all the others?”

I stopped to laugh. By some shrewd guess he had hit on our chief difficulty as a community. We were all four country boys with a good deal of residuary energy and high spirits; and we were not popular with the tenants underneath.

“You see I’m pretty big—” I reminded him.

“Yes, I see you are. That’s why I’m with you. Do you think you can lick me?”

I stopped short again, in surprise.

“What in blazes—” I began.

He laughed, and the devils in his eyes danced right out to the surface of them.

“I asked you a plain question,” he said, “and I’d like the favour of a plain answer. Do you think you can lick me as well as your rural friends?”

“I can,” said I shortly.

He ran his arm through mine eagerly.

“Come on!” he cried, “on to West Ninth!”

We found two of my roommates smoking and talking before the tiny open fire. Talbot Ward, full of the business in hand, rushed directly at the matter once the introductions were over.

Our arrangements were very simple; the chairs were few and pushed back easily, and we had an old set of gloves.

“Which is it to be?” I asked my guest, “boxing or wrestling?”

“I said you couldn’t *lick* me,” he replied. “Boxing is a game with rules; it isn’t fighting at all.”

“You want to bite and gouge and scratch, then?” said I, greatly amused.

“I do not; they would not be fair; a fight’s a fight; but a man can be decent with it all. We’ll put on the gloves, and we’ll hit and wrestle both—in fact, we’ll fight.”

He began rapidly to strip.

“Would you expect to get off your clothes in a real fight?” I asked him a little sardonically.

“If I *expected* to fight, yes!” said he. “Why not? Didn’t the Greek and Roman and Hebrew and Hun and every other good old fighter ‘strip for the fray’ when he got a chance? Of course! Take off your shirt, man!”

I began also to strip for this strange contest whose rules seemed to be made up from a judicious selection of general principles by Talbot Ward.

My opponent’s body was as beautiful as his head. The smooth white skin covered long muscles that rippled beneath it with every slightest motion. The chest was deep, the waist and hips narrow, the shoulders well rounded. In contrast my own big prominent muscles, trained by heavy farm work of my early youth, seemed to move slowly, to knot sluggishly though powerfully. Nevertheless I judged at a glance that my strength could not but prove greater than his. In a boxing match his lithe quickness might win—provided he had the skill to direct it. But in a genuine fight, within the circumscribed and hampering dimensions of our little room, I thought my own rather unusual power must crush him. The only unknown quantity was the spirit or gameness of us two. I had no great doubt of my own

determination in that respect—I had been on too many log-drives to fear personal encounter. And certainly Talbot Ward seemed to show nothing but eager interest.

“You don’t show up for what you are in your clothes,” said he. “This is going to be more fun than I had thought.”

My roommates perched on the table and the mantelpiece out of the way. I asked the length of the rounds.

“Rounds!” echoed Talbot Ward with a flash of teeth beneath his little moustache. “Did you ever hear of rounds in a real fight?”

With the words he sprang forward and hit me twice. The blows started at the very toe of his foot; and they shook me as no blows, even with the bare fist, have ever shaken me before or since. Completely dazed, I struck back, but encountered only the empty air. Four or five times, from somewhere, these pile-driver fists descended upon me. Being now prepared, to some extent, I raised my elbows and managed to defend my neck and jaws. The attack was immediately transferred to my body, but I stiffened my muscles thankfully and took the punishment. My river and farm work had so hardened me there that I believe I could have taken the kick of a mule without damage were I expecting it.

The respite enabled my brain to clear. I recovered slowly from the effect of those first two vicious blows. I saw Ward, his eyes narrowed calculatingly, his body swinging forward like a whalebone spring, delivering his attack with nice accuracy. A slow anger glowed through me. He had begun without the least warning: had caught me absolutely unaware. I hit back.

He was so intent on his own assault, so certain of the blinding effect of his first attack, that I hit him. I saw his head snap back, and the blood come from his lips. The blows were weak, for I was still dazed; but they served, together with the slow burn of my anger, greatly to steady me. We were once more on equal terms.

For perhaps two minutes I tried to exchange with him. He was in and out like lightning; he landed on me hard almost every time; he escaped nine out of ten of my return counters. Decidedly I was getting the worst of this; though my heavier body took punishment better than his lighter and more nervous frame. Then suddenly it occurred to me that I was playing his game for him. As long as he could keep away from me, he was at an advantage. My best chance was to close.

From that moment I took the aggressive, and was in consequence the more punished. My rushes to close in were skilfully eluded; and they generally laid me wide open. My head was singing, and my sight uncertain; though I was in no real distress. Ward danced away and slipped around tense as a panther.

Then, by a very simple ruse, I got hold of him. I feinted at rushing him, stopped and hit instead, and then, following closely the blow, managed to seize his arm. For ten seconds he jerked and twisted and struggled to release himself. Then suddenly he gave that up, dove forward, and caught me in a grapevine.

He was a fairly skilful wrestler, and very strong. It was as though he were made of whalebone springs. But never yet have I met a man of my weight who possessed the same solid strength; and Ward would tip the scales at considerably less. I broke his hold, and went after him.

He was as lively as an exceedingly slippery fish. Time after time he all but wriggled from my grasp; and time after time he broke my hold by sheer agility. His exertions must have been to him something terrible, for they required every ounce of his strength at the greatest speed. I could, of course, take it much easier, and every instant I expected to feel him weaken beneath my hands; but apparently he was as vigorous as ever. He was in excellent training. At last, however, I managed to jerk him whirling past me, to throw his feet from under him, and to drop him beneath me. As he fell he twisted, and by a sheer fluke I caught his wrist.

Thus through no great skill of my own the fortunes of war had given me a hammerlock on him. Most people know what that is. Any one else can find out by placing his forearm across the small of

his back and then getting somebody else to press upward on the forearm. The Greek statue of “The Wrestlers” illustrates it. As the pressure increases, so does the pain. When the pain becomes intense enough, the wrestler rolls over and the contest is won. Some people can stand it longer than others; but all sooner or later must give up. In fact, skilled wrestlers, knowing that otherwise the inevitable end is a broken arm, save themselves much tribulation by immediately conceding the bout once this deadly hold is gained.

I began to force Talbot Ward’s hand slowly up his back.

Very gently, an inch at a time, I pressed. He said nothing. Once he attempted to slip sidewise; but finding me of course fully prepared for that, he instantly ceased struggling. After I had pushed the hand to the hurting point, I stopped.

“Well?” said I.

He said nothing.

Now I was young, and none too well disciplined, heated by contest, and very angry at having been so unexpectedly attacked at the beginning. I was quite willing to hurt him a little. Slowly and steadily, and, I am ashamed to say, with considerable satisfaction, I pressed the arm upward. The pain must have been intense. I could feel the man’s body quiver between my knees, and saw the sweat break out afresh. Still he made no sign, but dug his forehead into the floor. “I can stand this as long as you can,” said I to myself grimly.

But at last I reached the point where I knew that another inch, another pound, would break the bone.

“Do you give up?” I demanded.

“No!” he gasped explosively.

“I’ll break your arm!” I snarled at him.

He made no reply.

The blood was running into my eyes from a small scrape on my forehead. It was nothing, but it annoyed me. I was bruised and heated and mad. Every bit of antagonism in me was aroused. As far as I was concerned, it was a very real fight.

“All right,” I growled, “I’ll keep you there then, damn you!”

Holding the arm in the same position, I settled myself. The pain to the poor chap must have been something fearful, for every muscle and tendon was stretched to the cracking point. His breath came and went in sharp hisses; but he gave no other sign. My heat cooled, though, as I look back on it, far too slowly. Suddenly I arose and flung him from me. He rolled over on his back, and lay, his eyes half closed, breathing deeply. We must have been a sweet sight, we two young barbarians—myself marked and swollen and bloody, he with one eye puffed, and pale as death. My roommates, absolutely fascinated, did not stir.

The tableau lasted only the fraction of a minute, after all. Then abruptly Talbot Ward sat up. He grinned up at me with his characteristic momentary flash of teeth.

“I told you you couldn’t lick me,” said he.

I stared at him in astonishment.

“Licked? Why, I had you cold!”

“You had not.”

“I’d have broken your arm, if I had gone any farther.”

“Well, why didn’t you?”

I stared into his eyes blankly.

“Would you have done it?” I asked, in a sudden flash of illumination.

“Why, of course,” said he, with a faint contempt, as he arose.

“Why did you hit me at first, as you did? You gave me no warning whatever.”

“Do you get any warning in a real fight?”

I could not controvert this; and yet uneasily, vaguely, I felt there must be a fallacy somewhere. I had been told and not told, what should, or should not, be done, in an affair that apparently could have no rules, and yet had distinctions as to fair and unfair, some of which were explained and some left as obvious. I felt somewhat confused. But often in my later experience with Talbot Ward I felt just that way, so in retrospect it does not strike me so forcibly as it did at that time.

“But you’re a wonder! a perfect wonder!” Ward was saying.

Then we all became aware of a knocking and a rattling at the door. It must have been going on for some time.

“If you don’t open, I’ll get the police! I promise you, I’ll get the police!” the voice of our landlady was saying.

We looked at each other aghast.

“I suppose we must have been making a little noise,” conceded Talbot Ward. Noise! It must have sounded as though the house were coming down. Our ordinary little boxing matches were nothing to it.

Ward threw his military cape around his shoulders, and sank back into a seat beneath the window. I put on an overcoat. One of the boys let her in.

She was thoroughly angry, and she gave us all notice to go. She had done that same every Saturday night for a year; but we had always wheedled her out of it. This time, however, she seemed to mean business. I suppose we *had* made a good deal of a riot. When the fact became evident, I, of course, shouldered the whole responsibility. Thereupon she turned on me. Unexpectedly Talbot Ward spoke up from the obscurity of his corner. His clear voice was incisive, but so courteous with the cold finality of the high-bred aristocrat, that Mrs. Simpkins was cut short in the middle of a sentence.

“I beg you, calm yourself, madam,” said he; “it is not worth heating yourself over: for the annoyance, such as it is, will soon be removed. Mr. Munroe and myself are shortly departing together for California.”

CHAPTER III THE VOYAGE

If I had any scruples—and I do not remember many—they were overcome within the next day or two. It was agreed that I was to go in Ward's employ, he to pay my passage money and all expenses, I to give him half the gold I might pick up. This seemed to me, at least, an eminently satisfactory and businesslike arrangement. Ward bought the outfits for both of us. It turned out that he was a Mexican war veteran—hence the military cape—and in consequence an old campaigner. His experience and my rural upbringing saved us from most of the ridiculous purchases men made at that time. We had stout clothes and boots, a waterproof apiece, picks and shovel, blankets and long strips of canvas, three axes, knives, one rifle, a double shotgun, and a Colt's revolver apiece. The latter seemed to me a wonderful weapon, with its six charges in the turning cylinder; but I had no opportunity to try it.

Ward decided instantly for the Panama route.

"It's the most expensive, but also the quickest," said he; "a sailing ship around the Horn takes forever; and across the plains is ditto. Every day we wait, some other fellow is landing in the diggings."

Nearly every evening he popped into our boarding house, where, owing to the imminence of my departure, I had been restored to favour. I never did find out where he lived. We took our passage at the steamship office; we went to the variety shows and sang *Oh, Susannah!* with the rest; we strutted a bit, and were only restrained from donning our flannel shirts and Colt's revolving pistols in the streets of New York by a little remnant, a very little remnant, of common sense. When the time at last came, we boarded our steamship, and hung over the rail, and cheered like crazy things. I personally felt as though a lid had been lifted from my spirit, and that a rolling cloud of enthusiasm was at last allowed to puff out to fill my heaven.

In two days we were both over being seasick, and had a chance to look around us. Our ship was a sidewheel steamer of about a thousand tons, and she carried two hundred and eighty passengers, which was about two hundred more than her regular complement. They were as miscellaneous a lot as mortal eye ever fell upon: from the lank Maine Yankee to the tall, sallow, black-haired man from Louisiana. I suppose, too, all grades of the social order must have been represented; but in our youth and high spirits we did not go into details of that sort. Every man, with the exception of a dozen or so, wore a red shirt, a slouch hat, a revolver and a bowie knife; and most of us had started to grow beards. Unless one scrutinized closely such unimportant details as features, ways of speech or manners, one could not place his man's former status, whether as lawyer, physician or roustabout. And we were too busy for that. I never saw such a busy place as that splattering old ship slowly wallowing her way south toward the tropical seas. We had fifty-eight thousand things to discuss, beginning with Marshall's first discovery, skipping through the clouds of rumours of all sorts, down to intimate details of climate, outfit, prospects, plans, and the best methods of getting at the gold. And to all these subjects we brought a dozen points of view, each of which was strange to all the others. We had with us men from every stratum of society, and from every point of the compass. Each was a product of his own training and mental upbringing, and was incapable, without great effort, of understanding his neighbour's point of view. Communication and travel were in those days very limited, it must be remembered, and different communities and sections of the country produced strong types. With us discussion became an adventurous exploration into a new country; the man from Maine could not but be interested in finding out what that strange, straight-haired, dark creature from Carolina might think of even the most commonplace subject. Only our subjects were not commonplace.

So my chief impression of that voyage down was of knots of men talking hurriedly and excitedly, as though there were not a moment to waste; and the hum of voices rising and falling far into the night.

Only two things were capable of breaking in on this tense absorption of the men in each other and in their subject—one was dolphins, and the other the meal gong. When dolphins appeared each rushed promptly to the side of the ship and discharged his revolver at the beasts. I never saw any harm come from these fusillades, but they made a wonderful row. Meal times always caught the majority unaware. They tumbled and jostled down the companionways only to find the wise and forethoughtful had preëmpted every chair. Whereupon, with most ludicrous expressions of chagrin or of assumed nonchalance, they trooped back to meet the laughter of the wise, if not forethoughtful, who had realized the uselessness of the rush. After a moment's grumbling, however, the discussions were resumed.

There was some quarrelling, but not much. A holiday spirit pervaded the lot; for they were men cut off from all experience, all accustomed surroundings, all the restraints of training, and they were embarked on the great adventure. I do not now remember many of them individually. They were of a piece with the thousands we were destined to encounter. But I do retain a most vivid mental picture of them collectively, with their red shirts, their slouch hats, their belts full of weapons, their eyes of eagerness, their souls of dreams; brimming with pent energy; theorizing, arguing, disputing; ready at an instant's notice for any sort of a joke or excitement that would relieve the tension; boisterous, noisy, laughing loudly, smothering by sheer weight of ridicule individual resentments—altogether a wonderful picture of the youth and hope and energy and high spirits of the time.

Never before nor since have I looked upon such a variety of equipment as strewed the decks and cabins of that ship. A great majority of the passengers knew nothing whatever about out-of-door life, and less than nothing as to the conditions in California and on the way. Consequently they had bought liberally of all sorts of idiotic patent contraptions. India rubber played a prominent part. And the deck was cumbered with at least forty sorts of machines for separating gold from the soil: some of them to use water, some muscular labour, and one tremendous affair with wings was supposed to fan away everything but the gold. Differing in everything else, they were alike in one thing: they had all been devised by men who had never seen any but manufactured gold. I may add that I never saw a machine of the kind actually at work in the diggings.

Just now, however, I looked on the owners of these contraptions with envy, and thought ourselves at a disadvantage with only our picks, shovels, and axes.

But we had with us a wonderful book that went far toward cheering up the poorly equipped. Several copies had been brought aboard, so we all had a chance to read it. The work was entitled "Three Weeks in the Gold Mines," and was written by a veracious individual who signed himself H. I. Simpson. I now doubt if he had ever left his New York hall bedroom, though at the time we took his statements for plain truth. Simpson could spare only ten days of this three weeks for actual mining. In that period, with no other implement than a pocket knife, he picked out fifty thousand dollars. The rest of the time he preferred to travel about and see the country, picking up only what incidental nuggets he came across while walking. We believed this.

As we drew southward the days became insufferably warm, but the nights were glorious. Talbot and I liked to sleep on the deck; and generally camped down up near the bitts. The old ship rolled frightfully, for she was light in freight in order to accommodate so many passengers; and the dark blue sea appeared to swoop up and down beneath the placid tropic moon.

We had many long, quiet talks up there; but in them all I learned nothing, absolutely nothing, of my companion.

"If you had broken my arm that time, I should not have taken you," he remarked suddenly one evening.

"Shouldn't blame you," said I.

"No! I wouldn't have wanted that kind of a man," he continued, "for I should doubt my control of him. But you gave up."

This nettled me.

“Would you have had me, or any man, brute enough to go through with it?” I demanded.

“Well”—he hesitated—“it was agreed that it was to be *fight*, you remember. And after all, if you had broken my arm, it would have been my fault and not yours.”

Two young fellows used occasionally to join us in our swooping, plunging perch. They were as unlike as two men could be, and yet already they had become firm friends. One was a slow, lank, ague-stricken individual from somewhere in the wilds of the Great Lakes, his face lined and brown as though carved from hardwood, his speed slow, his eyes steady with a veiled sardonic humour. His companion was scarcely more than a boy, and he came, I believe, from Virginia. He was a dark, eager youth, with a mop of black shiny hair that he was always tossing back, bright glowing eyes, a great enthusiasm of manner, and an imagination alert to catch fire. The backwoodsman seemed attracted to the boy by this very quick and unsophisticated bubbling of candid youth; while the boy most evidently worshipped his older companion as a symbol of the mysterious frontier. The Northerner was named Rogers, but was invariably known as Yank. The Southerner had some such name as Fairfax, but was called Johnny, and later in California, for reasons that will appear, Diamond Jack. Yank’s distinguishing feature was a long-barrelled “pea shooter” rifle. He never moved ten feet without it.

Johnny usually did most of the talking when we were all gathered together. Yank and I did the listening and Talbot the interpellating. Johnny swarmed all over himself like a pickpocket, and showed us everything he had in the way of history, manners, training, family, pride, naïveté, expectations and hopes. He prided himself on being a calm, phlegmatic individual, unemotional and not easily excited, and he constantly took this attitude. It was a lovely joke.

“Of course,” said he, “it won’t be necessary to stay out more than a year. They tell me I can easily make eleven hundred dollars a day; but you know I am not easily moved by such reports”—he was at the time moving under a high pressure, at least ten knots an hour—“I shall be satisfied with three hundred a day. Allowing three hundred working days to the year, that gives me about ninety thousand dollars—plenty!”

“You’ll have a few expenses,” suggested Talbot.

“Oh—yes—well, make it a year and a half, just to be on the safe side.”

Johnny was eagerly anxious to know everybody on the ship, with the exception of about a dozen from his own South. As far as I could see they did not in the slightest degree differ except in dress from any of the other thirty or forty from that section, but Johnny distinguished. He stiffened as though Yank’s gunbarrel had taken the place of his spine whenever one of these men was near; and he was so coldly and pointedly courteous that I would have slapped his confounded face if he had acted so to me.

“Look here, Johnny,” I said to him one day, “what’s the matter with those fellows? They look all right to me. What do you know against them?”

“I never laid eyes on them before in my life, sir,” he replied, stiffening perceptibly.

“Take that kink out of your back,” I warned him. “That won’t work worth a cent with me!”

He laughed.

“I beg pardon. They are not gentlemen.”

“I don’t know what you mean by gentlemen,” said I; “it’s a wide term. But lots of us here aren’t gentlemen—far, far from it. But you seem to like us.”

He knit his brows.

“I can’t explain. They are the class of cheap politician that brings into disrepute the chivalry of the South, sir.”

Talbot and I burst into a shout of laughter, and even Yank, leaning attentively on the long barrel of his pea rifle, grinned faintly. We caught Johnny up on that word—and he was game enough to take it well. Whenever something particularly bad happened to be also Southern, we called it the Chivalry. The word caught hold; so that later it came to be applied as a generic term to the Southern wing of venal politicians that early tried to control the new state of California.

I must confess that if I had been Johnny I should have stepped more carefully with these men. They were a dark, suave lot, and dressed well. In fact, they and a half dozen obviously professional men alone in all that ship wore what we would call civilized clothes. I do not know which was more incongruous—our own red shirts, or the top hats, flowing skirts, and light pantaloons of these quietly courteous gentlemen. They were quite as well armed as ourselves, however, wearing their revolvers beneath their armpits, or carrying short double pistols. They treated Johnny with an ironically exaggerated courtesy, and paid little attention to his high airs. It was obvious, however, that he was making enemies.

Talbot Ward knew everybody aboard, from the captain down. His laughing, half-alooof manner was very taking; and his ironical comments on the various points of discussion, somehow, conveyed no sting. He was continually accepting gifts of newspapers—of which there were a half a thousand or so brought aboard—with every appearance of receiving a favour. These papers he carried down to our tiny box of a room and added to his bundle. I supposed at the time he was doing all this on Molière's principle, that one gains more popularity by accepting a favour than by bestowing one.

CHAPTER IV

THE VILLAGE BY THE LAGOON

In the early morning one day we came in sight of a round high bluff with a castle atop, and a low shore running away. The ship's man told us this was Chagres.

This news caused a curious disintegration in the ship's company. We had heretofore lived together a good-humoured community. Now we immediately drew apart into small suspicious groups. For we had shortly to land ourselves and our goods, and to obtain transportation across the Isthmus; and each wanted to be ahead of his neighbour.

Here the owners of much freight found themselves at a disadvantage. I began to envy less the proprietors of those enormous or heavy machines for the separation of gold. Each man ran about on the deck collecting busily all his belongings into one pile. When he had done that, he spent the rest of his time trying to extract definite promises from the harassed ship's officers that he should go ashore in the first boat.

Talbot and I sat on our few packages and enjoyed the scene. The ship came to anchor and the sailors swung the boat down from the davits. The passengers crowded around in a dense, clamouring mob. We arose, shouldered our effects, and quietly slipped around to the corresponding boat on the other side the ship. Sure enough, that also was being lowered. So that we and a dozen who had made the same good guess, were, after all, the first to land.

The town proved to be built on low ground in a bay the other side the castle and the hill. It must be remembered that I had never travelled. The cane houses or huts, with their high peaked roofs thatched with palm leaves, the straight palms in the background against the sky, the morasses all about, the squawk and flop of strange, long-legged marsh birds, the glare of light, the queer looking craft beached on the mud, and the dark-skinned, white-clad figures awaiting us—all these struck strongly at my imagination.

We beached in the mud, and were at once surrounded by a host of little, brown, clamorous men. Talbot took charge, and began to shoot back Spanish at a great rate. Some of the little men had a few words of English. Our goods were seized, and promptly disappeared in a dozen directions. I tried to prevent this, but could only collar one man at a time. All the Americans were swearing and threatening at a great rate. I saw Johnny, tearing up the beach after a fleet native, fall flat and full length in the mud, to the vast delight of all who beheld.

Finally Talbot ploughed his way to me.

"It's all settled," said he. "I've made a bargain with my friend here to take us up in his boat to Cruces for fifteen dollars apiece for four of us."

"Well, if you need two more, for heaven's sake rescue Johnny," I advised. "He'll have apoplexy."

We hailed Johnny and explained matters. Johnny was somewhat put to it to attain his desired air of imperturbable calm.

"They've got every blistered thing I own, and made off with it!" he cried. "Confound it, sir, I'm going to shoot every saddle-coloured hound in the place if I don't get back my belongings!"

"They've got our stuff, too," I added.

"Well, keep calm," advised Talbot. "I don't know the game down here, but it strikes me they can't get very far through these swamps, if they *do* try to steal, and I don't believe they're stealing anyway; the whole performance to me bears a strong family resemblance to hotel runners. Here, *compadre!*"

He talked a few moments with his boatman.

"That's right," he told us, then. "Come on!"

We walked along the little crescent of beach, looking into each of the boats in the long row drawn up on the shore. They were queer craft, dug out from the trunks of trees, with small decks in

bow and stern, and with a low roof of palmetto leaves amidships. By the time we had reached the end of the row we had collected all our effects. Our own boatman stowed them in his craft.

Thereupon, our minds at rest, we returned to the landing to enjoy the scene. The second ship's boat had beached, and the row was going on, worse than before. In the seething, cursing, shouting mass we caught sight of Yank's tall figure leaning imperturbably on his rifle muzzle. We made our way to him.

"Got your boat yet?" Talbot shouted at him.

"Got nothin' yet but a headache in the ears," said Yank.

"Come with us then. Where's your plunder?"

Yank stooped and swung to his shoulder a small bundle tied with ropes.

"She's all thar," said he.

These matters settled, we turned with considerable curiosity to the little village itself. It was all exotic, strange. Everything was different, and we saw it through the eyes of youth and romance as epitomizing the storied tropics.

There were perhaps a couple of hundred of the cane huts arranged roughly along streets in which survived the remains of crude paving. All else was a morass. Single palm trees shot up straight, to burst like rockets in a falling star of fronds. Men and women, clad in a single cotton shift reaching to the knees, lounged in the doorways or against the frail walls, smoking cigars. Pot-bellied children, stark naked, played everywhere, but principally in the mudholes and on the offal dumps. Innumerable small, hairless dogs were everywhere about, a great curiosity to us, who had never even heard of such things. We looked into some of the interiors, but saw nothing in the way of decent furniture. The cooking appeared to be done between two stones. A grand tropical smell hung low in the air. On the thresholds of the doors, inside the houses, in the middle of the streets, anywhere, everywhere, were old fish, the heads of cattle, drying hides, all sorts of carrion, most of it well decomposed. Back of the town was a low, rank jungle of green, and a stagnant lake. The latter had a delicate border of greasy blue mud.

Johnny and I wandered about completely fascinated. Talbot and Yank did not seem so impressed. Finally Talbot called a halt.

"This is all very well; if you kids like to look at yellow fever, blackjack, and corruption, all right," said he. "But we've got to start pretty soon after noon, and in the meantime where do we eat?"

We returned through the town. It was now filled to overflowing with our compatriots. They surged everywhere, full of comment and curiosity. The half-naked men and women with the cigars, and the wholly naked children and dogs, seemed not in the least disturbed nor enlivened.

Talbot's earnest inquiries finally got us to the Crescent Hotel. It was a hut exactly like all the rest, save that it had a floor. From its name I suppose it must have been kept by a white man, but we never got near enough through the crowd to find out. Without Talbot we should have gone hungry, with many others, but he inquired around until we found a native willing to feed us. So we ate on an upturned hencoop outside a native hut. The meal consisted of pork, bread, and water.

We strolled to the beach at the hour appointed with our boatman. He was not there; nor any other boatman.

"Never mind," said Ward; "I'll know him if I see him. I'll go look him up. You fellows find the boat with our things in it."

He and I reëntered the village, but a fifteen minutes' search failed to disclose our man. Therefore we returned to the beach. A crowd was gathered close about some common centre in the unmistakable restless manner of men about a dog fight or some other kind of a row. We pushed our way in.

Johnny and Yank were backed up against the palmetto awning of one of the boats in an attitude of deadly and quiet menace. Not two yards away stood four of our well-dressed friends. Nobody as yet displayed a weapon, except that Yank's long rifle lay across the hollow of his left arm instead of

butt to earth; but it was evident that lightnings were playing. The boatman, who had appeared, alone was saying anything, but he seemed to be supplying language for the lot.

Johnny's tense, alert attitude relaxed a little when he saw us.

"Well?" inquired Ward easily. "What's the trouble?"

"Yank and I found our goods dumped out on the beach, and others in their place," said Johnny.

"So you proceeded to reverse matters? How about it?" he inquired pleasantly of the four men.

"I know nothing about it," replied one of them shortly. "We hired this boat, and we intend to have it; and no whipper-snapper is going to keep us from it."

"I see," said Talbot pleasantly. "Well, excuse me a moment while I talk to our friend." He addressed the man in Spanish, and received short, sullen replies. "He says," Talbot explained to us, "that he never saw us before in his life, and never agreed to take us up the river."

"Well, that settles it," stated the other man.

"How much did you offer to pay him?" asked Talbot.

The man stared. "None of your business," he replied.

"They're askin' twenty dollars a head," volunteered one of the interested spectators.

"Exactly. You see," said Talbot to us, "we got here a little too early. Our bargain was for only fifteen dollars; and now this worthy citizen has made a better rate for himself."

"You should have had the bargain immediately registered before the *alcalde*, señor," spoke up a white-dressed Spaniard of the better class, probably from the castle.

"I thank you, señor," said Talbot courteously. "That neglect is due to my ignorance of your charming country."

"And now if you'll move, young turkey cock, we'll just take our boat," said another of the claimants.

"One moment!" said Talbot Ward, with a new edge to his voice. "This is my boat, not yours; my baggage is in it, my boatman is on the ground. That he is forgetful has nothing to do with the merits of the case. You know this as well as I do. Now you can acknowledge this peacefully and get out, or you can fight. I don't care a continental red copper which. Only I warn you, the first man who makes a move with anything but his two feet will be shot dead."

He stood, his hands hanging idly by his sides, and he spoke very quietly. The four men were not cowards, that I'll swear; but one and all they stared into Ward's eyes, and came individually to the same conclusion. I do not doubt that dancing flicker of refraction—or of devilment—was very near the surface.

"Of course, if you are very positive, I should not dream of doubting your word or of interfering," said the tallest and quietest, who had remained in the background. "We desire to do injustice to no man—"

Johnny, behind us, snorted loudly and derisively.

"If my knowledge of Spanish is of any value in assisting you to a boat, pray command me," broke in Ward.

The crowd moved off, the boatman with it. I reached out and collared him.

Talbot had turned on Johnny.

"Fairfax," said he icily, "one of the first things you must learn is not to stir things up again once a victory is gained. Those men were sore; and you took the best method possible of bringing on a real fight."

Poor Johnny flushed to the roots of his hair.

"You're right," said he in a stifled voice.

Talbot Ward thawed completely, and a most winning smile illumined his face.

"Why, that's what I call handsome, Johnny!" he cried. "It's pretty hard to admit the wrong. You and Yank certainly looked bold and warlike when he came along. Where's that confounded *mozo*?"

Oh, you have him, Frank. Good boy! Come here, my amiable citizen. I guess you understand English after all, or you couldn't have bargained so shrewdly with our blackleg friends."

The flush slowly faded from Johnny's face. Yank's sole contribution to the changed conditions was to spit with great care, and to shift the butt of his rifle to the ground.

"Now," Talbot was admonishing the boatman, "that was very bad. When you make a bargain, stick to it. But I'll tell you what I will do. I will ask all people, *sabe*, everywhere, your people, my people, and if everybody pay twenty dollars, then we pay twenty dollars. *Sabe?* But we no pay twenty dollars unless you get us to Cruces *poco pronto*, *sabe?* Now we start."

The boatman broke into a torrent of talk.

"Says he's got to find his assistant," Talbot explained to us. "Come on, my son, I'll just go with you after that precious assistant."

We sat on the edge of our boat for half an hour, watching the most comical scenes. Everybody was afflicted with the same complaint—absence of boatmen. Some took possession, and settled themselves patiently beneath their little roofs. Others made forays and returned dragging protesting natives by the arm. These generally turned out to be the wrong natives; but that was a mere detail. Once in a lucky while the full boat's complement would be gathered; and then the craft would pull away up the river to the tune of pistol shots and vociferous yells.

At the end of the period mentioned Talbot and the two men appeared. They were quite amicable; indeed, friendly, and laughed together as they came. The "assistant" proved to be a tremendous negro, nearly naked, with fine big muscles, and a good-natured, grinning face. He wore large brass ear circlets and bracelets of copper. We all pushed the canoe to the very edge of the water and clambered aboard. The negro bent his mighty shoulders. We were afloat.

CHAPTER V

A TROPICAL RIVER

Our *padrone*, as Talbot told us we should call him, stood in front clad in a coloured muslin shirt. The broad sluggish river was alive with boats, all making their way against the current. By the time the lagoon had narrowed, however, they had pretty well scattered.

We entered a tropical forest, and never shall I forget the wonder of it. The banks were lined to the water's edge with vegetation, so that one could see nothing but the jungle. There were great palm trees, which we recognized; and teak trees, which we did not, but which Talbot identified for us. It was a very bald sort of tree, as I remember it. Then there were tremendous sycamores in which were ants' nests as big as beehives; and banana trees with torn leaves, probably the most exotic touch of all; and beautiful noble mangoes like domes of a green cathedral; and various sorts of canes and shrubs and lilies growing among them. And everywhere leaped and swung the vines—thick ropy vines; knotted vines, like knotted cables; slender filament vines; spraying gossamer vines, with gorgeous crimson, purple, and yellow blooms; and long streamers that dipped to trail in the waters. Below them were broad pads of lotus and water lilies; with alligators like barnacled logs, and cormorants swimming about, and bright-eyed waterfowl. The shadows in the forest were light clear green, and the shadows under the hanging jungle near the water were dull green; and the very upper air itself, in that hot steaming glade, seemed delicately green, too. Butterflies were among the vine blossoms, so brilliant of colour that it seemed to me that the flowers were fluttering from their stems. Across the translucent green shadows flashed birds. I recognized little green paroquets. I had never before seen them outside of cages. No man can realize the wonder of finding himself actually part of romantic scenes so long familiar in the pages of books that they have become almost mythical. We sat there absolutely silent, save when calling attention to some new marvel, drinking it in.

Our men paddled steadily ahead. The negro hummed strange minor songs to himself. Suddenly he flashed his teeth at us and broke into full voice:

“Oh, Susannah! don't cry for me!
I'm off to California wid my banjo on my knee.”

The accent was queer, but the words and tune were right. Talbot questioned him in Spanish.

“He says all Americans sing it. He has taken many up the river.”

“Too many,” muttered Johnny. “I wish we'd started three months sooner.”

It was growing dusk when we came in sight of a village of bamboo huts on the right bank. To this we headed. Hardly had the boat struck the beach when both of our men leaped ashore and raced madly toward the huts. Pausing only long enough to slide the boat beyond the grip of the river, we followed, considerably mystified. Quick as we were, we found both the *padrone* and his man, together with a dozen others, already seated at a *monte* table. The *padrone* was acting as banker!

We discovered the name of this place to be Gatun. Talbot found us a native hut in which were hammocks we could rent for the night. The hut was a two-storied affair, with a notched pole by which to clamber aloft. I took one look and decided to stay below. My weight seemed sufficient to bring the whole thing down about our ears.

I do not know which had the better of it. My hammock was slung across one corner of the single room. A cooking fire blazed merrily five or six feet away. Some ten or a dozen natives were drinking and talking until nearly morning; and to my personal knowledge some ten or a dozen thousand fleas were doing the same. Six dogs were that hut's allowance. They discovered that my weight sagged my hammock down to a height just suitable for the rubbing of their backs. In vain I smote with boot or pistol barrel. They kiyied and departed; but only for a moment. I had not even time to fall into a

doze before one of the others was back at it. This amused the drinking natives. I suppose the poor beasts very passionately wanted to scratch their backs. I could sympathize with them; none of them could have had as many fleas as I had, for their superficial area was not as great; but perhaps they had as many per square inch.

In the course of the night it began to rain. I mean really rain, “without going into details as to drops,” as somebody has said. Then I ceased envying my friends upstairs; for from all sounds I judged the roof was leaking.

Next morning it was still drizzling. The town was full of sad-eyed, wearied men. I think every one had had about the same experience. The *padrone* was at first a little inclined to delay; but he quickly recognized that our mood was bad, so shortly we were under way.

That day was not an unmitigated joy. It rained, picking the surface of the river up in little spots and rings. The forest dripped steadily. All the butterflies and bright birds had disappeared; and sullen, shifting clouds fairly touched the treetops. It was cold. Wrap ourselves as we would, we became thoroughly chilled. We should have liked to go ashore for a little fire, or at least a tramp about; but there seemed to be no banks, and the vegetation would not let us approach whatever earth there might be. The *padrone* and the big negro thrust their heads through holes cut in the middle of their blankets, and seemed happy. Talbot Ward and Yank took it with the philosophy of old campaigners; but Johnny and I had not had experience enough to realize that things have a habit of coming to an end. We were too wet even to smoke.

That night we spent at a place called Pena Blanca, which differed in no essential from Gatun. We slept there in small sheds, along with twenty or thirty of our ship's companions wedged tightly together. A dozen other similar sheds adjoined. We were all quarrelsome and disinclined to take much nonsense either from the natives or from each other. Also we needed and wanted food; and we had difficulty in getting it. A dozen incipient quarrels were extinguished because the majority of the crowd would not stand for being bothered by the row. Finally the whole hutful became involved, and it really looked for a moment like a riot. A good deal of bad language flew about, and men seized their weapons. Yank rose to the occasion by appealing to them not “to kick up a muss,” because there was “a lady of our own colour in the next room.” The lady was mythical, but the riot was averted.

The next day was clearing, with occasional heavy dashing showers, just to keep us interested. The country began more to open up. We passed many grass savannahs dotted with palms and a tree something like our locust. Herds of cattle fed there. The river narrowed and became swifter. Often our men had to lay aside their paddles in favour of the pole or tracking line. Once or twice we landed and walked for a short distance along the banks. At one place we saw several wild turkeys. At another something horrifying, rustling, and reptilian made a dash fairly from between my feet, and rushed *flop* into the water. The boys claimed I jumped straight upward four feet; but I think it was nearer ten. Talbot said the thing was an iguana. I should like very much to be able to describe it accurately, but my observation was somewhat confused. Beyond the evident fact that it snorted actual fire, I am not prepared to go.

Along in the early afternoon we reached bolder shores in which the trap rock descended sheer beneath the surface of the water. Directly ahead of us rose a mountain like a cone of verdure. We glided around the base of it, and so came to Gorgona, situated on a high bluff beyond. This we had decided upon as the end of our river journey. To be sure we had bargained for Cruces, six miles beyond; but as the majority of our ship's companions had decided on that route, we thought the Gorgona trail might be less crowded. So we beached our boat, and unloaded our effects; and set forth to find accommodations for the present, and mules for the immediate future.

CHAPTER VI

THE VILLAGE IN THE JUNGLE

At first there seemed slight chance of getting either. The place was crowded beyond its capacity. The Hotel Française—a shed-and-tent sort of combination with a muddy natural floor—was jammed. The few native huts were crowded. Many we saw making themselves as comfortable as possible amid their effects out in the open. Some we talked with said they had been there for over a week, unable to move because of lack of transportation. They reported much fever; and in fact we saw one poor shaking wretch, wistful-eyed as a sick dog, braced against a tree all alone. The spirit was drained out of him; and all he wanted was to get back.

While we were discussing what to do next, our muslin-clad *ex-padrone*, who had been paid and shaken by the hand some time since, approached smoking a longer cigar than ever. This he waved at us in a most debonair and friendly manner.

“Bread on the water,” commented Talbot after a short conversation. “He says we have treated him like a brother and a true comrade in arms; which means that *I* did; you fellows, confound your spiteful souls, wanted to throw him overboard a dozen times. And now he says to follow him, and he’ll get us a place to stay.”

“Some native pig-sty with fleas,” I remarked skeptically, aside, to Johnny.

“You com’,” begged the *padrone*, with a flash of teeth.

We came bearing our household goods, because we could nowhere see any one to bear them for us. At that we had to leave the heaviest pieces on the beach. Talbot insisted on lugging his huge bundle of newspapers.

“They may come in handy,” he answered us vaguely. “Well, they’re mine, and this is my back,” he countered to Johnny’s and my impatience with such foolishness.

The *padrone* led us through town to the outskirts. There we came to a substantial low house of several rooms, with a veranda and veritable chimneys. The earth in front had been beaten so hard that even the downpour of yesterday had not appreciably softened it. To our summons appeared a very suave and courteous figure—that, it appeared, of the *alcalde* of the place.

“My fren’,” explained the *padrone* in English, for our benefit, “they good peepele. They wan’ estay. Got no place estay.”

The *alcalde*, a portly gentleman with side whiskers and a great deal of dignity, bowed.

“My house is all yours,” said he.

Thus, although arriving late, we stopped at the best quarters in the town. The sense of obligation to any one but our boatman was considerably relieved when next day we paid what we owed for our lodging. Also, had it not been for Talbot and Johnny, I am sure Yank and I would have taken to the jungle. There seemed to be required so much bowing, smiling, punctiliousness and elaborate complimenting that in a short time I felt myself in the precise mental attitude of a very small monkey shaking the bars of his cage with all four hands and gibbering in the face of some benign and infinitely superior professor. I fairly ached behind the ears trying to look sufficiently alert and bland and intelligent. Yank sat stolid, chewed tobacco and spat out of the window, which also went far toward stampeding me. Talbot and Johnny, however, seemed right at home. They capped the old gentleman’s most elaborate and involved speeches, they talked at length and pompously about nothing at all; their smiles were rare and sad and lingering—not a bit like my imbecile though well-meant grinning—and they seemed to be able to stick it out until judgment day. Not until I heard their private language after it was all over did I realize they were not enjoying the occasion thoroughly.

Toward sunset occurred a welcome break. A mob of natives suddenly burst into view, from the direction of town. They were running madly, led by a very little man and a very big man. The two

latter rushed up to the edge of the veranda, on which we were all sitting, and began to talk excitedly, both at once.

“What’s the row?” we asked Talbot in a breath.

“Can’t make out yet; something about a fight.”

The *alcalde* commanded order. Then the matter became clear. The very large man and the very little man had had a fight, and they had come for justice. This much Talbot made plain. Then he chuckled explosively.

“The little man is making his accusation against himself!” he told us. “He is charging *himself* with having assaulted and beaten the other fellow. And the big one is charging *himself* with having licked the little one. Neither wants to acknowledge he got licked; and each would rather pay a fine and have it entered on the records that he won the fight. So much for sheer vanity!”

Each had his desire. The *alcalde*, with beautiful impartiality, fined them both; and nonchalantly pocketed the proceeds.

At dusk millions of fireflies came out, the earth grew velvet black, and the soft, tepid air breathed up from the river. Lights of the town flickered like larger yellower fireflies through the thin screen of palms and jungle; and the various noises, subdued by distance, mingled with the voices of thousands of insects, and a strange booming from the river. I thought it very pleasant; and wanted to stay out; but for some reason we were haled within. There the lamps made the low broad room very hot. We sat on real chairs and the stilted exchange resumed. I have often wondered whether our host enjoyed it, or whether he did it merely from duty, and was as heartily bored as the rest of us.

A half-naked servant glided in to tell us that we were wanted in the next room. We found there our good *padrone* and another, a fine tall man, dressed very elaborately in short jacket and slit loose trousers, all sewn with many silver buttons and ornaments.

“He my fren’,” explained the *padrone*. “He have dose *mulas*.”

With the gorgeous individual Talbot concluded a bargain. He was to furnish us riding animals at ten dollars each per day; and agreed to transport our baggage at six dollars a hundredweight. The *padrone* stood aside, smiling cheerfully.

“I ver’ good fren’? Eh?” he demanded.

“My son,” said Talbot with feeling, “you’re a gentleman and a scholar; indeed, I would go farther and designate you as a genuine lallapaloozer!”

The *padrone* seemed much gratified; but immediately demanded five dollars. This Talbot gave him. Johnny thought the demand went far toward destroying the value of the *padrone*’s kindness; but the rest of us differed. I believe this people, lazy and dishonest as they are, are nevertheless peculiarly susceptible to kindness. The man had started by trying to cheat us of our bargain; he ended by going out of his way to help us along.

At supper, which was served very shortly, we had our first glimpse of the ladies of the establishment. The older was a very dignified, placid, rather fat individual, whose chief feature was her shining dark hair. She bowed to us gravely, said a few words in Spanish, and thereafter applied herself with childlike and unfeigned zest to the edibles. The younger, Mercedes by name, was a very sprightly damsel indeed. She too had shining black hair, over which she had flung the most coquettish sort of lace shawl they call a *rebosa*. Her eyes were large, dark, and expressive; and she constantly used them most provocatively, though with every appearance of shyness and modesty. Her figure, too, was lithe and rounded; and so swathed, rather than clothed, that every curve was emphasized. I suppose this effect was the result of the Spanish mode rather than of individual sophistication; just as the succession of lazy poses and bendings were the result of a racial feminine instinct rather than of conscious personal coquetry. Certainly we four red-shirted tramps were poor enough game. Nevertheless, whatever the motive, the effect was certainly real enough. She was alluring rather than charming, with her fan and her *rebosa*, her veiled glances, her languorous, bold poses, and the single red flower in her hair. And a great deal of this allurements resided in the very fact that no one could

tell how much was simple, innocent, and unconscious instinct, and how much was intended. An unpleasing note in both women was furnished by the powder. This so liberally covered their faces as to conceal the skin beneath a dead mat white.

Yank and I were kept out of it, or thought we were, by our ignorance of the language. This did not seem to hinder Johnny in the least. In five minutes he was oblivious to everything but his attempts to make himself agreeable by signs and laughing gestures, and to his trials—with help—at the unknown language. The girl played up to him well. Talbot was gravely and courteously polite. At the close of the meal the women rose suddenly, bowed, and swept from the room. Johnny turned back to us a good deal flushed and excited, a little bewildered, and considerably disappointed. The *alcalde* looked as though nothing unusual were under way. The rest of us were considerably amused.

“You’ll see her later,” soothed Talbot mockingly.

Johnny gulped down his coffee without reply.

After the meal we went outside. Fires had been built on opposite sides of the hard beaten earth in front of the house. Four men with guitars sat chair tilted, backed against the veranda. Thirty or forty people wandered to and fro. They were of the usual native class; our host’s family, and one other, consisting of parents and three grown children, seemed to represent all the aristocracy. These better-class guests came to join us on the veranda. The older people did not greatly differ from our host and his wife, except in cut of masculine whisker, or amount of feminine fat. The younger members consisted of a young lady, tall and graceful, a young girl in white, and a man of twenty or thereabout. He was most gaudily gotten up, for a male creature, in a soft white shirt, a short braided jacket of blue, a wide, red-tasselled sash, and trousers slit from the knees down. The entire costume was sewn at all places, likely and unlikely, with silver buttons. As he was a darkly handsome chap, with a small moustache, red lips and a little flash of teeth, the effect was quite good, but I couldn’t care for his style. The bulk of the villagers were dressed in white. The women all carried the *rebosa*, and were thickly powdered. We could see a number of the Americans in the background.

The musicians struck up a strummy, decided sort of marchlike tune; and the dancers paired off. They performed a kind of lancer figure, very stately and solemn, seemingly interminable, with scant variation, small progressions, and mighty little interest to me. We sat in a stiff row and shed the compliment of our presence on the scene. It was about as inspiring as a visit to a hospital ward. What determined the duration of the affair, I cannot tell you; whether the musicians’ fingers gave out, or the dancers’ legs, or the official audience’s patience. But at last they ceased.

At the beginning of another tune, of much the same solemn character, our young visitor bowed ceremoniously to our host’s daughter, and led her down the steps.

“Come on, Johnny, be a sport. Dance this one,” said Talbot rising.

“Don’t know how,” replied Johnny gloomily, his eyes on the receding figure of Mercedes.

“The lady’ll show you. Come along!”

Talbot bowed gravely to the young girl, who arose enchanted. Johnny, with his natural grace and courtesy, offered his arm to the other. She took it with a faintly aloof and indifferent smile, and descended the step with him. She did not look toward him, nor did she vouchsafe him a word. Plainly, she was not interested, but stood idly flirting with her fan, her eyes fixed upon the distance. The dance began.

It was another of the same general character as the first. The couples advanced and retreated, swung slowly about each other, ducked and passed beneath each other’s arms, all to the stately strumming of the guitars. They kept on doing these things. Johnny and Talbot soon got hold of the sequence of events, and did them too.

At first Johnny was gloomy and distraught. Then, after he had, in the changes of the dance, passed Mercedes a few times, he began to wake up. I could make out in the firelight only the shapes of their figures and the whiteness of their faces; but I could see that she lingered a moment in Johnny’s formal embrace, that she flirted against him in passing, and I could guess that her eyes were on duty. When

they returned to the veranda, Johnny was chipper, the visitor darkly frowning, Mercedes animated, and the other girl still faintly and aloofly smiling.

The fandango went on for an hour; and the rivalry between Johnny and the young Spaniard grew in intensity. Certainly Mercedes did nothing to modify it. The scene became more animated and more interesting. A slow, gliding waltz was danced, and several posturing, stamping dances in which the partners advanced and receded toward and from each other, bending and swaying and holding aloft their arms. It was very pretty and graceful and captivating; and to my unsophisticated mind a trifle suggestive; though that thought was probably the result of my training and the novelty of the sight. It must be remembered that many people see harm in our round dances simply because they have not become sufficiently accustomed to them to realize that the position of the performers is meaninglessly conventional. Similarly the various rather daring postures of some of these Spanish dances probably have become so conventionalized by numberless repetitions along the formal requirements of the dance that their possible significance has been long since forgotten. The apparently deliberate luring of the man by the woman exists solely in the mind of some such alien spectator as myself. I was philosophical enough to say these things to myself; but Johnny was not. He saw Mercedes languishing into the eyes of his rival; half fleeing provocatively, her glances sparkling; bending and swaying her body in allurements; finally in the finale of the dance, melting into her partner's arms as though in surrender. He could not realize that these were formal and established measures for a dance. He was too blind to see that the partners separated quite calmly and sauntered nonchalantly toward the veranda, the man rolling a paper cigarro, the woman flirting idly her fan. His eyes glowing dully, he stared straight before him; a spot of colour mounted on his cheekbones.

With an exclamation Talbot Ward arose swiftly but quietly and moved down the veranda, motioning me to follow. He bent over Johnny's chair.

"I want to speak to you a moment," he said in a low voice.

Johnny looked up at him a moment defiantly. Talbot stood above him, inflexibly waiting. With a muttered exclamation Johnny finally arose from his chair. Ward grasped his arm and drew him through the wandering natives, past the fringe of American spectators, and down the hard moonlit path to the village.

Johnny jerked his arm loose and stopped short.

"Well, sir!" he demanded, his head high.

"You are on your way to California," said Ward, "and you are stopping here over one night. The girl is pretty and graceful and with much charm, but uneducated, and quite empty headed."

"I will thank you to leave all young ladies out of this discussion," broke in Johnny hotly.

"This young lady is the whole of this discussion and cannot be left out."

"Then we will abandon the discussion."

"Also," said Talbot Ward irrelevantly, "did you notice how fat all their mothers are?"

We were wandering forward slowly. Again Johnny stopped.

"I must tell you, sir, that I consider my affairs none of your business, sir; and that I resent any interference with them," said he with heat.

"All right, Johnny," replied Talbot sadly; "I am not going to try to advise you. Only I wanted to call your attention to all the elements of the situation, which you probably had forgotten. I will repeat—and then I am done—she is nothing to you, she is beneath you, you are stopping here but one day, she is charming but ignorant—and her mother is very fat. Now go have your fool fight—for that is what you are headed straight for—if you think it at all worth while."

Johnny's generous heart must have been smiting him sorely, now that his heat and excitement had had time to cool a little. He followed us a few steps irresolutely. We came to the large tree by the wayside. The man with the fever still sat there miserably indifferent to his surroundings.

"Here, this won't do!" cried Talbot. "He mustn't be allowed to sit there all night; he'll catch a chill sure. My friend, give us your arm. We'll find you some sort of a bunk."

The man was dead.

We carried him to the village and raised a number of our compatriots. Not one knew who the man might be, nor even where his belongings had been stored. He had no mark of identification on his person. After a diligent search, we were forced to give it up. The body we buried with all reverence at the edge of the jungle. I wanted to place the matter on an official footing by notifying the *alcalde*, but Talbot negatived this.

“I know this people,” said he. “Once let the news of a man’s death get abroad, and it’s good-bye to any chance of finding his effects to-morrow. And that’s our only show to identify him. Best say nothing.”

We returned slowly to the *alcalde*’s house. The fandango was still in progress. Mercedes flashed her bright eyes at Johnny as we mounted the steps; the Spaniard scowled and muttered an imprecation. Johnny bowed gravely and passed into the house.

We told Yank the circumstances.

“Poor devil,” said I. “Like the rest of us, he was so full of hope so short time ago.”

Ward nodded.

“And his death was so unnecessary, so utterly and completely useless.”

“I don’t know,” spoke up Talbot musingly. “It seems to us unnecessary, but who can tell? And useless? I don’t know. If we hadn’t happened to stumble on that poor chap just then, Johnny Fairfax might be in his fix right this minute, and Johnny Fairfax seems to me likely to prove a very valuable citizen.”

“And what did the blame critter mean by that?” Yank asked me later.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAIL

We made desperate efforts next morning to find somebody who knew the man, or at least could point out to us his effects; but in vain. All was confusion, and everybody was too busy getting away to pay us very much attention. This, I am convinced, was not hardheartedness on the part of most; but merely that all men's minds were filled with a great desire. Our own transport men were impatient to be off; and we had finally to abandon the matter. Whether or not the man had a family or friends who would never know what had become of him, we shall never find out. Later in the gold rush there were many scores of such cases.

Having paid the *alcalde* we set forth. Mercedes did not appear. Our good *padrone* was on hand to say farewell to us at the edge of town. He gave us a sort of cup made from coconut husk to which long cords had been attached. With these, he explained, we could dip up water without dismounting. We found them most convenient.

Shortly after we had left town, and before we had really begun our journey in earnest, we passed a most astonishing caravan going the other way. This consisted of sixteen mules and donkeys under sole charge of three men armed with antiquated and somewhat rusty muskets. On either side of each mule, slung in a rope and plain to see, hung a heavy ingot of gold! Fascinated, we approached and stroked the satiny beautiful metal; and wondered that, on a road so crowded with travellers of all grades, so precious a train should be freely entrusted to the three ragged lazy natives. So curious did this seem that Talbot inquired of the leader why it was allowed.

"Whither would a thief run to? How could he carry away these heavy ingots?" the man propounded.

Often around subsequent campfires we have in idle curiosity attempted to answer these two questions successfully, but have always failed. The gold was safe.

Talbot insisted, with a good deal of heavy argument, that our effects should precede us on the trail. The wisdom of this was apparent before we had been out an hour. We came upon dozens of porters resting sprawled out by the side of their loads. I could hardly blame them; for these men carried by means of a bamboo screen and straps across the shoulders and forehead the most enormous loads. But farther on we passed also several mule trains, for whose stopping there could be no reason or excuse except that their natives were lazy. Our own train we were continually overtaking and prodding on, to its intense disgust. Thus Talbot's forethought, or experience with people of this type, assured us our goods. Some of our shipmates were still waiting for their baggage when we sailed to the north.

We now entered a dense forest country. The lofty trees, thick foliage, swinging vines, and strange big leaves undoubtedly would have impressed us under other conditions. But just now we were too busy. The rains had softened the trail, until it was of the consistency of very stiff mud. In this mud the first mule had left his tracks. The next mule trod carefully in the first mule's footsteps; and all subsequent mules did likewise. The consequence was a succession of narrow, deep holes in the clay, into which an animal's leg sank halfway to the shoulder. No power on earth, I firmly believe, could have induced those mules to step anywhere else. Each hole was full of muddy water. When the mule inserted his hoof the water spurted out violently, as though from a squirt gun. As a result we were, I believe, the most muddied and bedraggled crew on earth. We tried walking, but could not get on at all. Occasionally we came to a steep little ravine down and up the slippery banks of which we slid and scrambled. Yank and his mule once landed in a heap, plump in the middle of a stream.

In the course of these tribulations we became somewhat separated. Johnny and I found ourselves riding along in company, and much too busy to talk. As we neared a small group of natives under a tree, three of them started toward us on a run, shouting something. We stopped, and drew together.

One of the assailants seized Johnny's animal by the bit, and another's gesture commanded him to dismount.

"Get out of that!" shouted Johnny threateningly; and as the men did not obey his emphatic tone, he snatched out his Colt's pistol. I closed in next him and did the same.

Our threatening attitude caused the men to draw back a trifle; but they redoubled their vociferations. Johnny attempted to spur his mule forward; but all three threw themselves in his way. The rest of the natives, four in number, joined the group. They pointed at Johnny's animal, motioned peremptorily for him to descend; and one of them ventured again to seize his bridle.

"I don't believe it's robbery, anyhow," said I. "They seem to recognize your mule. Probably you're riding a stolen animal."

"I don't know anything about that," said Johnny, a trifle angrily, "but I do know I hired it to go to Panama with: and to Panama I'm going. They can settle their mule question afterward."

But when he gathered his reins again, he was prevented from going on. Johnny reached suddenly forward and struck with his pistol barrel at the head of the man holding his rein. He missed by the fraction of an inch; and the man leaped back with a cry of rage. Everybody yelled and drew near as though for a rush. Johnny and I cocked our weapons.

At this moment we heard Talbot Ward's voice from beyond. "Take 'em from that side!" yelled Johnny excitedly. "Give it to 'em, Tal!"

Talbot shouted again, in Spanish. Every brigand in the lot immediately turned in his direction, shouting perfect fountains of words. After a moment Talbot, afoot, emerged from the jungle and calmly picked his way through the mud toward us.

"Put up your shooting irons," he grinned at us. "These men tell me your saddle pad is on crooked and they want to straighten it for you."

Johnny, and I am sure myself, turned red; then everybody howled with glee. Johnny dismounted, and a dozen eager hands adjusted the harness. We shook hands all around, laughed some more, and resumed our very sloppy journey.

This to me was one of the most terrible days I ever spent. We passed dozens of dead mules, and vultures that sat in trees; and exhausted men lying flat as though dead; and sick men shaken with fever; and one poor wretch, whom we picked up and took with us, who had actually lain down to die. He was half raving with fever, and as near as we could make out had had companions. We twisted him aboard a mule, and took turns walking alongside and holding him on. Beyond the fact that he was a very small individual with light hair and an English accent, we could tell nothing about him. He was suffering from cholera, although we did not know that at the time. That night we spent at a wayside hut, where we left our patient.

Early the next morning we began to ascend a little; and so came to a rocky tableland with palms, and beyond it another ridge of hills. We climbed that ridge and descended the other side. Another elevation lay before us. This we surmounted, only to find a third. After we had put a dozen such ranges behind us, we made the mistake of thinking the next was sure to be the last. We got up our hopes a number of times in this fashion, then fell dully into a despair of ever getting anywhere. The day was fearfully hot. The Indian who had stolidly preceded us as guide at last stopped, washed his feet carefully in a wayside mud hole and put on his pantaloons.

"That looks to me like an encouraging symptom," I remarked.

Shortly after we entered the city of Panama.

CHAPTER VIII

PANAMA

We arrived early in the afternoon, and we were all eyes; for here was a city taken directly from the pages of the Boy's Own Pirate. Without the least effort of the imagination we could see Morgan or Kidd or some other old swashbuckler, cutlass in teeth, pistols in hand, broad sashed, fierce and ruthless rushing over the walls or through the streets, while the cathedral bells clanged wildly and women screamed. Everything about it was of the past; for somehow the modern signs of American invasion seemed temporary and to be blown away. The two-story wooden houses with corridor and veranda across the face of the second story, painted in bright colours, leaned crazily out across the streets toward each other. Narrow and mysterious alleys led up between them. Ancient cathedrals and churches stood gray with age before grass-grown plazas. And in the outskirts of town were massive masonry ruins of great buildings, convent and colleges, some of which had never been finished. The immense blocks lay about the ground in a confusion, covered softly by thousands of little plants; or soared against the sky in broken arches and corridors. Vegetation and vines grew in every crevice; and I saw many full-sized trees rooted in midair. The place was strongly fanciful; and I loved to linger there. To me the jungle seemed like an insidiously beautiful creature enveloping thus, little by little, its unsuspecting prey. The old gray tumbled ruins seemed to be lost in dreams of their ancient days. And through the arches and the empty corridors open to the sky breathed a melancholy air from a past so dead and gone and buried and forgotten that of it remained no echo, no recollection, no knowledge, nothing but squared and tumbled stones.

To tell the truth I generally had these reflections quite to myself. The body of the town was much more exciting. The old dilapidated and picturesque houses had taken on a new and temporary smartness of modernity—consisting mainly of canvas signs. The main street was of hotels, eating houses, and assorted hells. It was crowded day and night, for we found something over a thousand men here awaiting the chance of transportation. Some had been here a long time, and were broke and desperate. A number of American gambling joints did a good business. Native drinking houses abounded. The natives were in general a showy lot, but too lazy even to do a good job at fleecing the stranger within their gates. That was therefore undertaken—and most competently—by the enterprising foreigners of all nations. Foreigners kept two of the three hotels, as is indicated by their names—Hotel Française, Fonda Americano, and the Washington House. Americans ran the gambling joints. French and Germans, mainly, kept the restaurants.

We stopped over one day at the Fonda Americano; and then realizing that we were probably in for a long wait, found two rooms in a house off the main street. These we rented from a native at a fairly reasonable rate. They were in the second story of a massive stone ruin whose walls had been patched up with whitewash. The rooms were bare and geometrically cat-a-cornered and extraordinarily chilly, like vaults; but they gave out on a charmingly unkempt walled garden with a stone fountain in the middle whose features were all rounded by time and blurred with moss, with tall ragged bananas and taller wind-swept palms, and a creeping lush tangle of old plants, and the damp soft greenness of moss and the elfin tinkling of little waters. On our balcony the sun shone strong; so that we could warm our chilled bones gratefully like lizards against a wall.

We tried all the restaurants, one after the other, and found them about equally bad. We also went in—once—for a real Spanish dinner. It consisted of a succession of dishes highly seasoned with the hottest sort of pepper, generally drowned in rich gravy, and composed of such things as cheese, chunks of meat, corn meal, and the like. Any one of these dishes would have been a fine strength test for the average unsophisticated stomach; but your true Spanish dinner consists of a dozen of them. We had horrible indigestion.

In one place, kept by a German, we were treated very disagreeably, and overcharged so badly that Yank vowed he intended to get even. As to just how he was going to do it, he maintained a deep silence; but he advised us he would eat there the following evening. Also he asked four or five other men, with whom we had become friendly, to meet us at the restaurant. We met, ate our meal leisurely, and had a very good time.

“Now,” said Yank to us, “when we get up, you fellows all go right out the front door and keep going until you get to the Fonda bar, and there you wait for me. No lingering, now. Do as you are told.”

We did as we were told. After about fifteen or twenty minutes Yank sauntered in.

“Now,” said Johnny, “I hope you’ll explain. We’re much obliged for your dinner party, but we want to know what it is all about.”

“Well,” chuckled Yank, “I just dealt the Dutchman what you might call idle persiflage until you fellows had been gone a few minutes, and then I held him out my dollar. ‘What’s that?’ says he. ‘That’s a dollar,’ says I, ‘to pay for my dinner.’ ‘How about all those other fellows?’ says he. ‘I got nothing to do with them,’ says I. ‘They can pay for their own dinners,’ and after a while I come away. He was having some sort of Dutch fit, and I got tired of watching him.”

Outside the walls of the city was a large encampment of tents in which dwelt the more impecunious or more economical of the miners. Here too had been located a large hospital tent. There was a great deal of sickness, due to the hardships of the journey, the bad climate, irregular living, the overeating of fruit, drinking, the total lack of sanitation. In fact only the situation of the city—out on an isthmus in the sea breezes—I am convinced, saved us from pestilence. Every American seemed to possess a patent medicine of some sort with which he dosed himself religiously in and out of season. A good many, I should think, must have fallen victims to these nostrums.

Each morning regularly we went down to harass the steamship employees. Roughly speaking some three hundred of us had bought through passage before leaving New York: and it was announced that only fifty-two additional to those already aboard could be squeezed into the first steamer. The other two hundred and forty-eight would have to await the next. Naturally every man was determined that he would not be left; for such a delay, in such a place, at the time of a gold rush was unthinkable. The officials at that steamship office had no easy time. Each man wanted first of all to know just when the ship was to be expected; a thing no one could guess. Then he demanded his accommodations; and had a dozen reasons why his claim should be preferred over that of the others. I never saw a more quarrelsome noisy dog-kennel than that steamship office. Why no one was ever shot there I could not tell you.

After bedevilling the officials for a time, our business for the day was over. We had the privilege of sauntering through the streets, of walking down the peninsula or of seating ourselves in any of the numerous bars or gambling halls. All were interesting; though neither the streets nor the gambling places were in full action until late afternoon.

About four o’clock, or half after, when the invariable siesta was over, the main street began to fill with idlers. The natives wore white, with wide soft straw hats, and lounged along with considerable grace. They were a weak, unenergetic, inoffensive race, always ready to get off the sidewalk for other nations provided the other nations swaggered sufficiently. The women, I remember, had wonderful piles of glossy black hair, arranged in bands and puffs, in which they stuck cigars. The streets were very narrow. When a vehicle came along, we all had to make way for it; as also for the gangs of prisoners connected with heavy iron chains around their necks. These were very numerous; and I can hear yet as the leading notes of the place, the clinking of their chains, and the cracked jangling of some of the many cathedral bells.

There was a never-failing joy to us also in poking around the odd places of the town. The dim interiors of cathedrals, the splashed stones of courtyards, the shadows of doorways, the privacies of gardens all lured us; and we saw many phases of native life. Generally we were looked on at first with distrust. There were a number of roughs among the gold seekers; men whose brutal instincts or whose

merely ignorant love of horseplay had now for the first time no check. They found that the native could be pushed off the sidewalk, so they pushed him off. I once saw a number of these men light their cigars at altar candles. But Talbot's Spanish and our own demeanour soon gained us admission.

Thus we ran across a most delightful institution. We were rambling in a very obscure portion of town when we came to quite a long wall unbroken save by a little wicket gate. A bell pull seemed to invite investigation; so we gave it a heave. Almost immediately the gate swung open and we entered.

We found ourselves in a wide space paved with smooth great slabs of rocks, wet as though from a recent rain. The space was thickly built up by small round huts of reeds, but without roofs. In the centre was a well, probably ten or twelve feet wide, over which slanted a cross arm and wheel for the drawing of water. No human being was in sight; the gate had been unlatched by an overhead cord.

We shouted. In a minute or so a very irascible old woman hobbled to us from some mysterious lurking place among the reed huts. She spoke impatiently. Talbot questioned her; she replied briefly, then turned and hobbled off as fast as she could go.

"What did she say?" some one asked Talbot curiously.

"She said," replied Ward, "literally this: 'Why don't you take any of them without bothering me? They are all ready.' I imagine she must mean these bird cages; though what they are for I couldn't tell you."

We investigated the nearest. It was divided into two tiny rooms each just big enough to hold a man. In one was a three legged stool; in the other stood two tall graceful jars of red clay, their sides bedewed with evaporation. A dipper made from a coconut lay across the top of one of them.

"Bath house!" shouted Johnny, enchanted.

The water in the porous earthen jars was cold. We took each a hut and poured the icy stuff over us to our heart's content. All except Yank. He looked on the proceedings we thought with some scorn; and departed carrying his long rifle.

"Hey!" shouted Johnny finally, "where's the towels?"

To this inquiry we could find no substantial answer. There were no towels. The old woman declined to come to our yells. She was on hand, however, when we were ready to depart, and took one American dime as payment for the three of us. This was the only cheap thing we found in Panama. We came every day, after the hour of siesta—with towels. Yank refused steadfastly to indulge.

"I'm having hard enough dodging to keep clear of fever'n ager now," he told us. "You don't seem to recollect what neck of the woods I come from. It's a fever'n ager country out there for keeps. They can't keep chickens there at all."

"Why not?" asked Johnny innocently.

"The chills they get shakes all the feathers off'n 'em," replied Yank, "and then they freeze to death."

In the evening the main street was a blaze of light, and the byways were cast in darkness. The crowd was all afoot, and moved restlessly to and fro from one bar or gambling hell to another. Of the thousand or so of strangers we came in time to recognize by sight a great many. The journey home through the dark was perilous. We never attempted it except in company; and as Johnny seemed fascinated with a certain game called Mexican *monte*, we often had to endure long waits before all our party was assembled.

One morning our daily trip to the steamship office bore fruit. We found the plaza filled with excited men; all talking and gesticulating. The much tired officials had evolved a scheme, beautiful in its simplicity, for deciding which fifty-two of the three hundred should go by the first ship. They announced that at eleven o'clock they would draw lots.

This was all very well, but how did the general public know that the lots would be drawn fairly?

The officials would permit a committee of citizens to be present.

Not by the eternal! Where would you get any one to serve? No member of that committee would dare accept his own ticket, provided he drew one. No one would believe it had been done honestly.

Very well. Then let fifty-two out of three hundred slips of paper be marked. Each prospective passenger could then draw one slip out of a box.

“It’s all right, boys,” the observers yelled back at those clamouring in the rear.

One of the officials stood on a barrel holding the box, while a clerk with a list of names sat below.

“As I call the names, will each gentleman step forward and draw his slip?” announced the official.

We were all watching with our mouths open intensely interested.

“Did you ever hear of such a damfool way of doing the thing?” said Talbot. “Here, give me a boost up!”

Johnny and I raised him on our shoulders.

“Gentlemen! gentlemen!” he cried a number of times before he could be heard above the row. Finally they gave him attention.

“I’m a ticket holder in this thing; and I want to see it done right. I want to ask that gentleman there what is to prevent the wrong man from answering to a name, from drawing a slip without having any right to?”

“The right man will prevent him,” answered a voice. The crowd laughed.

“Well, who’s to decide, in case of dispute, which is the right man and which the wrong man? And what’s to prevent any man, after the drawing, from marking a blank slip—or making a new slip entirely?”

“That’s right!” “Correct!” shouted several voices.

The officials consulted hurriedly. Then one of them announced that the drawing would be postponed until the following morning. Each was to bring his steamship ticket with him. The winners in the drawing must be prepared to have their tickets countersigned on the spot. With this understanding we dispersed.

This was Talbot Ward’s first public appearance; the first occasion in which he called himself to the attention of his fellows assembled in public meeting. The occasion was trivial, and it is only for this reason that I mention it. His personality at once became known, and remembered; and I recollect that many total strangers spoke to him that evening.

By next morning the transportation officials had worked it out. We could not all get into the office, so the drawing took place on the Plaza outside. As each man’s name was called, he stepped forward, showed his ticket, and was allowed to draw a slip from the box. If it proved to be a blank, he went away; if he was lucky, he had his ticket *viséd* on the spot. Such a proceeding took the greater part of the day; but the excitement remained intense. No one thought of leaving even for the noon meal.

Yank drew passage on the first steamer. Talbot, Johnny, and I drew blanks.

We walked down to the shore to talk over the situation.

“We ought to have bought tickets good on this particular ship, not merely good on this line,” said Johnny.

“Doesn’t matter what we *ought* to have done,” rejoined Talbot a little impatiently. “What are we *going* to do? Are we going to wait here until the next steamer comes along?”

“That’s likely to be two or three months—nobody knows,” said Johnny.

“No; it’s in six weeks, I believe. They tell me they’ve started regular trips on a new mail contract.”

“Well, six weeks. If we stay in this hole we’ll all be sick; we’ll be broke; and in the meantime every ounce of gold in the country will have been picked up.”

“What’s the alternative?” I asked.

“Sailing vessel,” said Talbot briefly.

“That’s mighty uncertain,” I objected. “Nobody knows when one will get in; and when it does show up it’ll be a mad scramble to get to her. There’s a mob waiting to go.”

“Well, it’s one or the other. We can’t walk; and I don’t see that the situation is going to be much better when the next steamer does get here. There are a couple of hundred to crowd in on her—just counting those who are here and have tickets. And then there will be a lot more.”

“I’m for the sailing vessel,” said Johnny. “They come in every week or two now; and if we can’t make the first one, we’ll have a good chance at the second or the third.”

Talbot looked at me inquiringly.

“Sounds reasonable,” I admitted.

“Then we’ve no time to lose,” said Talbot decisively, and turned away toward the town.

Yank, who had listened silently to our brief discussion, shifted his rifle to his shoulder and followed. Shortly he fell behind; and we lost him.

We accompanied Talbot in some bewilderment, for there was no ship in sight nor in prospect, and we could not understand any reason for this haste. Talbot led the way directly to the steamship office.

“I want to see Brown,” he asserted, naming the chief agent for the company.

The clerk hesitated: Brown was an important man and not to be disturbed for trivial matters. But Talbot’s eye could be very assured.

“What is your business with Mr. Brown?” asked the clerk.

“It is with Mr. Brown,” said Talbot firmly, “and I may add that it is to Mr. Brown’s own interest to see me. Tell him just that, and that Mr. Talbot Ward of New York City desires an immediate interview.”

The clerk was gone for some moments, to the manifest annoyance of a dozen miners who wanted his attention. When he returned he motioned us to a screened-off private office in the rear.

“Mr. Brown will see you,” said he.

We found Brown to be a florid, solidly built man of fifty, with a keen eye and a brown beard. He nodded to us briefly and looked expectant.

“We three men,” said Talbot directly, “hold three tickets on your line. We were not fortunate enough to get passage on the next steamer, and our business will not permit us to wait until the one after. We want our money back.”

Brown’s face darkened.

“That is a matter for my clerks, not for me,” he said curtly. “I was told your business was to my advantage. I have nothing to do with tickets.”

“One minute,” said Talbot. “There are between two and three hundred men in this town each one of whom bought a ticket from your company in New York in the expectation, if not under the understanding, that they were to get through passage immediately.”

“No such thing was expected or guaranteed,” interposed Brown abruptly.

“Not guaranteed, nor expected by you—by us, yes.”

“I cannot argue that matter. I have no further time for you. Good-day.” And Brown once more reached his hand toward his bell.

“Suppose,” said Talbot softly, leaning forward. “I should put it into the heads of those three hundred men that they ought to get their passage money back?”

Brown’s hand stopped in midair.

“They are large, violent, armed men; and they are far from pure home influences,” went on Talbot mockingly. “Here’s a sample of them,” said he indicating my huge frame. “And there are a thousand or so more, not directly interested but dying for excitement.”

“Are you trying to intimidate me, sir?” demanded Brown.

“I am just stating conditions.”

“You are threatening me.”

“Ah, that is different,” said Talbot Ward.

Brown sat lost in thought for some moments. Then he reached forward and at last struck the bell.

“Let me have your tickets,” he commanded us shortly.

He endorsed them and handed them to the clerk, together with a written order. We all sat in absolute silence for perhaps five minutes. Then the clerk returned with a handful of gold. This Brown counted over and shoved across to Talbot. The latter also counted it, and thrust it in his pocket.

“Now,” said Brown, with something approaching geniality, “I am counting on your honour to say nothing of this outside. I am gambling on your evident class in life at home.”

“You have our promise, and it will be kept,” said Talbot rising. “But undoubtedly within two days you will think I am the biggest liar unhung. There will be many more who will think of this same simple plan of getting a refund on their tickets and who will blab it out to every one on the street. You would do well to make your plans now as to how you intend to deal with them. But remember, I, nor my friends, will have had nothing to do with it.”

“I understand that there will be plenty making your same demand,” said Brown, “but I doubt any of them will think of urging that demand.”

We left. As a matter of interest, Talbot’s prediction was correct; as, indeed, Brown had immediately recognized it would be. Talbot had only the advantage of thinking a little quicker than the next man, of acting immediately, and of allowing no time for reflection to the other. The steamship office had a strenuous time. Talbot’s threat had this much of real significance: that there was, lacking him, no organized demonstration. Each man went for himself and demanded his money back. In a few rare cases he got it; but was generally bluffed out, or blandly referred back to the New York offices, or reasoned out. The situation came near to riot, but in some difficult manner it was tided over. A few settled down to wait for the next steamer. The majority decided for sailing ships, and pocketed their steamer tickets in hopes of future reimbursement. One score of fanatics and ignoramuses, in dense ignorance as to the nature of the journey, actually started out to row to San Francisco in an open boat! They were never heard of again. One or two parties modified this plan by proceeding in fishing boats to the extremity of the peninsula of Lower California, and thence marched overland to San Diego. Their sufferings in that arid region were great, but they managed to arrive many months later.

We returned to our lodgings, congratulating Talbot on the promptitude of his action, for already we saw determined looking men hurrying across the plaza toward the offices.

At our place we found that Yank had not returned. At first we thought nothing of this; but about dusk we found that all his belongings had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX NORTHWARD HO!

We could not understand this sudden departure, except on the possible ground that Yank, realizing that now the party must split forces, had decided to seek new companions among those lucky enough to sail on the first steamer.

“Even then he needn’t have been in such a hurry,” complained Johnny a trifle bitterly. “And he needn’t have thought we’d be in his way.”

“Has he paid his share of the lodgings?” it occurred to me to ask.

We felt quite bitter against Yank, and we carefully avoided his usual haunts, for we did not want to meet him. Then we began to think it strange we had not run across him somewhere on the streets. Then we began to look for him. We found that Yank had disappeared!

At that, a little alarmed, we set ourselves to a serious search and inquiry. A few remembered to have seen him, but were vague as to when and where. The authorities moved sluggishly, and with little enthusiasm. Men were dying every day; and disappearing underground, leaving no trace of themselves behind. One more or less seemed unimportant.

In the meanwhile we spent much of our time by the shore, together with a comfortable majority of our fellow argonauts, awaiting the sighting of a vessel. We had engaged, and paid daily, a boatman to be in readiness to take us off; and we settled our lodgings account a week ahead.

“There’s going to be a scramble for that blessed ship,” said Talbot; “and we’ll just be prepared.”

To that end we also kept our effects packed and ready for instant removal.

The beach was not a bad place. It ran out the peninsula in a long gentle curve; and the surges broke snow white on yellow sands. Across deep blue water was an island; and back of us palm trees whipped in the trade winds. We sat under them, and yarned and played cards and smoked. In bad weather—and it rained pretty often—we huddled in smoky little huts; those of us who could get in. The rest tried to stick it out; or returned with rather a relieved air to the town.

The expected ship came, of course, on one of these dull gray days; and those who had thought themselves unlucky in being crowded out of the huts were the first to sight her. They sneaked down very quietly and tried to launch two of the boats. Of course the native boatmen were all inside; trust them! As a high surf was running, and as none of the men were in any sense good boatmen, they promptly broached to and filled. The noise brought us to the door.

Then there was a fine row. One of the two boats commandeered by the early birds happened to be ours! All our forethought seemed to have been in vain. The bedraggled and crestfallen men were just wading ashore when we descended upon them. Talbot was like a raving lunatic.

“You hounds!” he roared. “Don’t you dare try to sneak off! You catch hold here and help empty these boats! You would, would you?” He caught one escaping worthy by the collar and jerked him so rapidly backward that his heels fairly cracked together. Johnny flew to combat with a chuckle of joy. I contented myself by knocking two of them together until they promised to be good. The four we had collared were very meek. We all waded into the wash where the boat lay sluggishly rolling. It is no easy matter to empty a boat in that condition. Water weighs a great deal; is fearfully inert, or at least feels so; and has a bad habit of promptly slopping in again. We tugged and heaved, and rolled and hauled until our joints cracked; but at last we got her free.

In the meantime forty other boats had been launched and were flying over the waves halfway between the shore and the ship.

Talbot was swearing steadily and with accuracy; Johnny was working like a crazy man; I was heaving away at the stern and keeping an eye on our involuntary helpers. The boatman, beside himself with frantic excitement, jabbered and ran about and screamed directions that no one understood.

About all we were accomplishing now was the keeping of that boat's head straight against the heavy wash.

It seemed as though we tugged thus at cross purposes for an hour. In reality it was probably not over two or three minutes. Then Talbot regained sufficient control to listen to the boatman. At once he calmed down.

"Here, boys," said he, "ease her backward. You, Johnny, stand by at the bow and hold her head on. Frank and I will give her a shove at the stern. When the time comes, I'll yell and you pile right in, Johnny. *Vamos, Manuel!*"

We took our places; the boatman at the oars, his eyes over his shoulder watching keenly the in-racing seas.

The four dripping culprits looked at each other uncertainly, and one of them started to climb in the boat.

"Well, for *God's* sake!" screeched Talbot, and made a headlong bull rush for the man.

The latter tumbled right out of the boat on his back in the shallow water. His three companions fled incontinently up the beach, where he followed them as soon as he could scramble to his feet.

Manuel said something sharply, without looking around.

"Shove!" screeched Talbot. "Pile in, Johnny!"

We bent our backs, The boat resisted, yielded, gathered headway. It seemed to be slipping away from me down a steep hill.

"Jump in!" yelled Talbot.

I gave a mighty heave and fell over the stern into the bottom of the boat. Waters seemed to be crashing by; but by the time I had gathered myself together and risen to my knees, we were outside the line of breakers, and dancing like a gull over the smooth broad surges.

Ships could anchor no nearer than about a mile and a half offshore. By the time we had reached the craft she was surrounded by little boats bobbing and rubbing against her sides. She proved to be one of that very tubby, bluff-bowed type then so commonly in use as whalers and freighters. The decks swarmed black with an excited crowd.

We rowed slowly around her. We were wet, and beginning to chill. No way seemed to offer by which we could reach her decks save by difficult clambering, for the gang ladder was surrounded ten deep by empty boats. A profound discouragement succeeded the excitement under which we had made our effort.

"To hell with her!" snarled Johnny, "There's no sense going aboard her. There's enough on deck now to fill her three times over. Let's get back where it's warm."

"If I run across any of those fellows in town I'll break their necks!" said I.

"What makes me mad—" continued Johnny.

"Oh, for heaven's sake shut up!" cried Talbot.

If he had been a little less cold and miserable we probably would have quarrelled. As it was, we merely humped over, and motioned the astonished Manuel to return to the shore. Our boat's head turned, we dropped down under the bow of the ship. In order to avoid the sweep of the seas Manuel held us as closely as possible under the bowsprit. We heard a hail above us. Looking up we saw Yank bending over the rail.

We stared at him, our mouths open, so astonished that for a moment we did not even think to check the boat. Then we came back in a clumsy circle. Yank yelled at us; and we yelled back at him; but so great was the crash of waters and the whistling of wind that we could make out nothing. Then Yank motioning us to remain where we were, disappeared, to return after a short interval, with a speaking trumpet.

"Have you got your baggage with you?" he roared.

We shook our heads and waved our arms.

"Go get it!" he ordered.

We screamed something back at him.

“Go get it!” he repeated; and withdrew his head entirely.

We rowed back to town; it was no longer necessary to return to the exposed beach where we had waited to sight the ships. Johnny and I indulged in much excited speculation, but Talbot refused to show curiosity.

“He’s there, and he’s evidently engaged us passage; and he wants us aboard to claim it,” said he, “and that’s all we can know now; and that’s enough for me.”

On our way we met a whole fleet of boats racing their belated way from town. We grinned sardonically over the plight of these worthies. A half-hour sufficed us to change our clothes, collect our effects, and return to the water front. On the return journey we crossed the same fleet of boats inward bound. Their occupants looked generally very depressed.

Yank met us at the top of the gangway, and assisted us in getting our baggage aboard. Johnny and I peppered him with questions, to which he vouchsafed no answer. When we had paid off the boatman, he led the way down a hatch into a very dark hole near the bows. A dim lantern swayed to and fro, through the murk we could make out a dozen bunks.

“They call this the fo’cas’le,” said Yank placidly. “Crew sleeps here. This is our happy home. Everything else full up. We four,” said he, with a little flash of triumph, “are just about the only galoots of the whole b’iling at Panama that gets passage. She’s loaded to the muzzle with men that’s come away around the Horn in her; and the only reason she stopped in here at all is to get a new thing-um-a-jig of some sort that she had lost or busted or something.”

“Well, I don’t like my happy home while she wobbles so,” said Johnny. “I’m going to be seasick, as usual. But for heaven’s sake, Yank, tell us where you came from, and all about it. And make it brief, for I’m going to be seasick pretty soon.”

He lay down in one of the bunks and closed his eyes.

“You’d much better come up on deck into the fresh air,” said Talbot.

“Fire ahead, Yank! Please!” begged Johnny.

“Well,” said Yank, “when I drew that steamer ticket, it struck me that somebody might want it a lot more than I did, especially as you fellows drew blank. So I hunted up a man who was in a hurry, and sold it to him for five hundred dollars. Then I hired one of these sail-rigged fishing boats and laid in grub for a week and went cruising out to sea five or six miles.”

Johnny opened one eye.

“Why?” he demanded feebly.

“I was figgerin’ on meeting any old ship that came along a little before the crowd got at her,” said Yank. “And judgin’ by the gang’s remarks that just left, I should think I’d figgered just right.”

“You bet you did,” put in Talbot emphatically.

“It must have been mighty uncomfortable cruising out there in that little boat so long,” said I. “I wonder the men would stick.”

“I paid them and they had to,” said Yank grimly.

“Why didn’t you let us in on it?” I asked.

“What for? It was only a one-man job. So then I struck this ship, and got aboard her after a little trouble persuading her to stop. There wasn’t no way of making that captain believe we’d sleep anywheres we could except cash; so I had to pay him a good deal.”

“How much?” demanded Talbot.

“It came to two hundred apiece. I’m sorry.”

“Glory be!” shouted Talbot, “we’re ahead of the game. Yank, you long-headed old pirate, let me shake you by the hand!”

“I wish you fellows would go away,” begged Johnny.

We went on deck. The dusk was falling, and the wind with it; and to westward an untold wealth of gold was piling up. Our ship rolled at her anchor, awaiting the return of those of her people who had

gone ashore. On the beach tiny spots of lights twinkled where some one had built fires. A warmth was stealing out from the shore over the troubled waters. Talbot leaned on the rail by my side. Suddenly he chuckled explosively.

“I was just thinking,” said he in explanation, “of us damfools roosting on that beach in the rain.”

Thus at last we escaped from the Isthmus. At the end of twenty-four hours we had left the island of Tobago astern, and were reaching to the north.

PART II THE GOLDEN CITY

CHAPTER X THE GOLDEN CITY

We stood in between the hills that guarded the bay of San Francisco about ten o'clock of an early spring day. A fresh cold wind pursued us; and the sky above us was bluer than I had ever seen it before, even on the Isthmus. To our right some great rocks were covered with seals and sea lions, and back of them were hills of yellow sand. A beautiful great mountain rose green to our left, and the water beneath us swirled and eddied in numerous whirlpools made by the tide.

Everybody was on deck and close to the rail. We strained our eyes ahead; and saw two islands, and beyond a shore of green hills. None of us knew where San Francisco was located, nor could we find out. The ship's company were much too busy to pay attention to our questions. The great opening out of the bay beyond the long narrows was therefore a surprise to us; it seemed as vast as an inland sea. We hauled to the wind, turning sharp to the south, glided past the bold point of rocks.

Then we saw the city concealed in a bend of the cove. It was mainly of canvas; hundreds, perhaps thousands of tents and canvas houses scattered about the sides of hills. The flat was covered with them, too, and they extended for some distance along the shore of the cove. A great dust, borne by the wind that had brought us in, swept across the city like a cloud of smoke. Hundreds and hundreds of vessels lay at anchor in the harbour, a vast fleet.

We were immediately surrounded by small boats, and our decks filled with men. We had our first sight of the genuine miners. They proved to be as various as the points of the compass. Big men, little men, clean men, dirty men, shaggy men, shaven men, but all instinct with an eager life and energy I have never seen equalled. Most wore the regulation dress—a red shirt, pantaloons tucked into the tops of boots, broad belts with sometimes silver buckles, silk Chinese sashes of vivid raw colours, a revolver, a bowie knife, a floppy old hat. Occasionally one, more dignified than the rest, sported a shiny top hat; but always with the red shirt. These were merchants, and men permanently established in the town.

They addressed us eagerly, asking a thousand questions concerning the news of the outside world. We could hardly answer them in our desire to question in return. Were the gold stories really true? Were the diggings very far away? Were the diggings holding out? What were the chances for newcomers? And so on without end; and the burden always of gold! gold! gold!

We were answered with the enthusiasm of an old-timer welcoming a newcomer to any country. Gold! Plenty of it! They told us, in breathless snatches, the most marvellous tales—one sailor had dug \$17,000 in a week; another man, a farmer from New England, was taking out \$5,000 to \$6,000 daily. They mentioned names and places. They pointed to the harbour full of shipping. "Four hundred ships," said they, "and hardly a dozen men aboard the lot! All gone to the mines!" And one man snatching a long narrow buckskin bag from his pocket, shook out of its mouth to the palm of his hand a tiny cascade of glittering yellow particles—the Dust! We shoved and pushed, crowding around him to see this marvellous sight. He laughed in a sort of excited triumph, and tossed the stuff into the air. The breeze caught it and scattered it wide. A number of the little glittering particles clung to my rough coat, where they flashed like spangles.

"Plenty more where that came from!" cried the man; and turned away with a reckless laugh.

Filled with the wine of this new excitement we finally succeeded in getting ashore in one of the ship's boats.

We landed on a flat beach of deep black sand. It was strewn from one end to the other by the most extraordinary wreckage. There were levers, cogwheels, cranks, fans, twisted bar, and angle iron, in all stages of rust and disintegration. Some of these machines were half buried in the sand; others were tidily laid up on stones as though just landed. They were of copper, iron, zinc, brass, tin, wood. We recognized the genus at a glance. They were, one and all, patent labour-saving gold washing machines, of which we had seen so many samples aboard ship. At this sight vanished the last remains of the envy I had ever felt for the owners of similar contraptions.

We looked about for some sort of conveyance into which to dump our belongings. Apparently none existed. Therefore we piled most of our effects neatly above high tide, shouldered our bundles, and started off up the single street.

On either side this thoroughfare stood hundreds of open sheds and buildings in the course of construction. Goods of all sorts, and in great quantity, lay beneath them, wholly or partially exposed to the dust and weather. Many unopened bales had been left in the open air. One low brick building of a single story seemed to be the only substantial structure in sight. We saw quantities of calicos, silks, rich furniture, stacks of the pieces of knock-down houses, tierces of tobacco, piles of all sorts of fancy clothing. The most unexpected and incongruous items of luxury seemed to have been dumped down here from the corners of the earth, by the four hundred ships swinging idly at anchor in the bay.

The street was, I think, the worst I have ever seen anywhere. It was a morass of mud, sticky greasy mud, of some consistency, but full of water-holes and rivulets. It looked ten feet deep; and I should certainly have ventured out on it with misgivings. And yet, incongruously enough, the surface ridges of it had dried, and were lifting into the air in the form of dust! This was of course my first experience with that common California phenomenon, and I was greatly astonished.

An attempt had been made to supply footing for pedestrians. Bags of sand had been thrown down, some rocks, a very few boxes and boards. Then our feet struck something soft and yielding, and we found we were walking over hundred pound sacks of flour marked as from Chili. There must have been many hundred of them. A man going in the opposite direction sidled past us.

“Cheaper than lumber,” said he briefly, seeing our astonishment.

“I’d hate to ask the price of lumber,” remarked one of our ship’s companions, with whom—and a number of others—we were penetrating the town. This man carried only a very neat black morocco satchel and a net bag containing a half dozen pineapples, the last of a number he had brought from the Isthmus. The contrast of that morocco bag with the rest of him was quite as amusing as any we saw about us; though, of course, he did not appreciate that.

We walked on flour for a hundred feet or so, and then came to cook stoves. I mean it. A battalion of heavy iron cook stoves had been laid side by side to form a causeway. Their weight combined with the traffic over them had gradually pressed them down into the mud until their tops were nearly level with the surface. Naturally the first merry and drunken joker had shied the lids into space. The pedestrian had now either to step in and out of fire boxes or try his skill on narrow ledges! Next we came to a double row of boxes of tobacco; then to some baled goods, and so off onto solid ground.

We passed many people, all very intent on getting along safely. From the security of the shed stores the proprietors and an assorted lot of loafers watched proceedings with interest. The task of crossing the street from one side to the other, especially, was one not lightly to be undertaken! A man had to balance, to leap, to poise; and at last probably, to teeter back and forth trying to keep his balance like a small boy on a fence rail, until, with an oath of disgust, he stepped off into the slime.

When we had gained the dry ground near the head of the street we threw down our burdens for a rest.

“I’ll give you ten dollars for those pineapples!” offered a passerby, stopping short.

Our companion quickly closed the bargain.

“What do you think of that?” he demanded of us wide-eyed, and in the hearing of the purchaser.

The latter grinned a little, and hailed a man across the street.

“Charley!” he yelled. “Come over here!”

The individual addressed offered some demur, but finally picked his way across to us.

“How do you like these?” demanded the pineapple purchaser, showing his fruit.

“Jerusalem!” cried Charley admiringly, “where did you get them? Want to sell ’em?”

“I want some myself, but I’ll sell you three of them.”

“How much?”

“Fifteen dollars.”

“Give ’em to me.”

The first purchaser grinned openly at our companion.

The latter followed into the nearest store to get his share of the dust weighed out. His face wore a very thoughtful expression.

We came shortly to the Plaza, since called Portsmouth Square. At that time it was a wind-swept, grass-grown, scrubby enough plot of ground. On all sides were permanent buildings. The most important of these were a low picturesque house of the sun-dried bricks known as adobes, in which, as it proved, the customs were levied; a frame two-story structure known as the Parker House, and a similar building labelled “City Hotel.” The spaces between these larger edifices was occupied by a dozen or so of smaller shacks. Next door to the Parker House stood a huge flapping tent. The words *El Dorado* were painted on its side.

The square itself was crowded with people moving to and fro. The solid majority of the crowd consisted of red or blue shirted miners; but a great many nations and frames of minds seemed to be represented. Chinese merchants, with red coral buttons atop their stiff little skullcaps, wandered slowly, their hands tucked in capacious sleeves of the richest brocade. We had seen few of this race; and we looked at them with the greatest interest, examining closely their broad bland faces, the delicate lilacs and purples and blues of their rich costumes, the swaying silk braided queues down their backs. Other Chinese, of the lower castes, clad in blue canvas with broad bowl-shaped hats of straw on their heads, wormed their way through the crowd balancing baskets at the ends of poles. Rivalling the great Chinese merchants in their leisure, strolled the representatives of the native race, the Spanish Californians. They were darkly handsome men, dressed gloriously in short velvet jackets, snowy ruffles, plush trousers flaring at the bottom, and slit up the side of the leg, soft leather boots, and huge spurs ornamented with silver. They sauntered to and fro smoking brown-paper cigarettos. Beside these two, the Chinese and the Californians, but one other class seemed to be moving with any deliberation. These were men seen generally alone, or at most in pairs. They were quiet, waxy pale, dressed always neatly in soft black hat, white shirt, long black coat, and varnished boots. In the face of a general gabble they seemed to remain indifferently silent, self-contained and aloof. To occasional salutations they responded briefly and with gravity.

“Professional gamblers,” said Talbot.

All the rest of the crowd rushed here and there at a great speed. We saw the wildest incongruities of demeanour and costume beside which the silk-hat-red-shirted combination was nothing. They struck us open-mouthed and gasping; but seemed to attract not the slightest attention from anybody else. We encountered a number of men dressed alike in suits of the finest broadcloth, the coats of which were lined with red silk, and the vests of embroidered white. These men walked with a sort of arrogant importance. We later found that they were members of that dreaded organization known as *The Hounds*, whose ostensible purpose was to perform volunteer police duty, but whose real effort was toward the increase of their own power. These people all surged back and forth good-naturedly, and shouted at each other, and disappeared with great importance up the side streets, or darted out with equal busyness from all points of the compass. Every few minutes a cry of warning would go up on one side of the square or another. The crowd would scatter to right and left, and down through the opening would thunder a horseman distributing clouds of dust and showers of earth.

“Why doesn’t somebody kill a few of those crazy fools!” muttered Talbot impatiently, after a particularly close shave.

“Why, you see, they’s mostly drunk,” stated a bystander with an air of explaining all.

We tacked across to the doors of the Parker House. There after some search was made we found the proprietor. He, too, seemed very busy, but he spared time to trudge ahead of us up two rickety flights of raw wooden stairs to a loft where he indicated four canvas bunks on which lay as many coarse blue blankets.

Perhaps a hundred similar bunks occupied every available inch in the little loft.

“How long you going to stay?” he asked us.

“Don’t know; a few days.”

“Well, six dollars apiece, please.”

“For how long?”

“For to-night.”

“Hold on!” expostulated Talbot. “We can’t stand that especially for these accommodations. At that price we ought to have something better. Haven’t you anything in the second story?”

The proprietor’s busy air fell from him; and he sat down on the edge of one of the canvas bunks.

“I thought you boys were from the mines,” said he. “Your friend, here, fooled me.” He pointed his thumb at Yank. “He looks like an old-timer. But now I look at you, I see you’re greenhorns. Just get here to-day? Have a smoke?”

He produced a handful of cigars, of which he lit one.

“We just arrived,” said Talbot, somewhat amused at this change. “How about that second story?”

“I want to tell you boys a few things,” said the proprietor, “I get sixty thousand dollars a year rent for that second story just as she stands. That tent next door belongs to my brother-in-law. It is just fifteen by twenty-five feet, and he rents it for forty thousand.”

“Gamblers?” inquired Talbot.

“You’ve guessed it. So you see I ain’t got any beds to speak of down there. In fact, here’s the whole layout.”

“But we can’t stand six dollars a night for these things,” expostulated Johnny. “Let’s try over at the other place.”

“Try ahead, boys,” said the proprietor quite good-naturedly. “You’ll find her the same over there; and everywhere else.” He arose. “Best leave your plunder here until you find out. Come down and have a drink?”

We found the City Hotel offered exactly the same conditions as did the Parker House; except that the proprietor was curt and had no time for us at all. From that point, still dissatisfied, we extended our investigations beyond the Plaza. We found ourselves ankle deep in sandhills on which grew coarse grass and a sort of sage. Crazy, ramshackle huts made of all sorts of material were perched in all sorts of places. Hundreds of tents had been pitched, beneath which and in front of which an extremely simple housekeeping was going on. Hunt as we might we could find no place that looked as though it would take lodgers. Most of even the better looking houses were simply tiny skeletons covered with paper, cloth or paint. By painstaking persistence we kept at it until we had enquired of every building of any pretensions. Then, somewhat discouraged, we picked our way back to the shore after our heavier goods.

The proprietor of the Parker House greeted us with unabated good nature.

“I know how you boys feel,” said he. “There’s lots in your fix. You’d better stick here to-night and then get organized to camp out, if you’re going to be here long. I suppose, though, you’re going to the mines? Well, it’ll take you several days to make your plans and get ready. When you get back from the mines you won’t have to think about these things.”

“There’s plenty of gold?” ventured Johnny.

“Bushels.”

“I should think you’d be up there.”

“I don’t want any better gold mine than the old Parker House,” said he comfortably.

We paid him twenty-four dollars.

By now it was late in the afternoon. The wind had dropped, but over the hills to seaward rolled a soft beautiful bank of fog. The sun was blotted out behind it and a chill fell. The crowds about the Plaza thinned.

We economized our best at supper, but had to pay some eight dollars for the four of us. The bill was a la carte and contained such items as grizzly steak, antelope, elk, and wild duck and goose. Grizzly steak, I remember, cost a dollar and a quarter. By the time we had finished, it had grown dark. The lamps were alight, and the crowds were beginning to gather. All the buildings and the big tent next door were a blaze of illumination. The sounds of music and singing came from every side. A holiday spirit was in the air.

Johnny and I were crazy to be up and doing, but Talbot sternly repressed us, and Yank agreed with his decision by an unusually emphatic nod.

“It is all a lot of fun, I’ll admit,” said he; “but this is business. And we’ve got to face it. Sit down here on the edge of this veranda, and let’s talk things over. How much money have you got, Yank?”

“Two hundred and twenty dollars,” replied Yank promptly.

“You’re partners with me, Frank, so I know our assets,” said Talbot with tact. “Johnny?”

“Hanged if I know,” replied that youth. “I’ve got quite a lot. I keep it in my pack.”

“Well, go find out,” advised Talbot.

Johnny was gone for some time. We smoked and listened to the rather blatantly mingled strains of music, and watched the figures of men hurrying by in the spangled darkness.

Johnny returned very much excited.

“I’ve been robbed!” he cried.

“Robbed? Is your money all gone?”

“No, there’s a little left, but—”

Talbot laughed quietly.

“Sit down, Johnny, and cool off,” he advised. “If anybody had robbed you, they’d have taken the whole kit and kaboodle. Did you come out ahead on those *monte* games?”

Johnny blushed, and laughed a little.

“I see what you’re at, but you’re away off there. I just played for small stakes.”

“And lost a lot of them. I sort of look-out your game. But that’s all right. How much did the ‘robbers’ leave you?”

“Twelve dollars, besides what I have in my clothes—twenty-one dollars in all,” said Johnny.

“Well, that’s pretty good. You beat Frank and me to death. There’s our total assets,” said Talbot, and laid a ten-dollar gold piece and a dime on his knee.

“We’ll call that dime a curiosity,” said he, “for I notice a quarter is the smallest coin they use out here. Now you see that we’ve got to talk business. Frank and I haven’t got enough to live on for one more day.”

“There’s enough among us—” began Yank.

“You mean you already have your share of the partnership finances,” corrected Talbot, quickly. “If we’re going to be partners—and that’s desired and understood, I suppose?” We all nodded emphatic agreement. “We must all put in the same amount. I move that said amount be two hundred and twenty dollars apiece. Yank, you can loaf to-morrow; you’ve got your share all made up. You can put in the day finding out all about getting to the mines, and how much it costs, and what we will need.”

“All right; I’ll do it,” said Yank.

“As for the rest of us,” cried Talbot, “we’ve got to rustle up two hundred and twenty dollars each before to-morrow evening!”

“How?” I asked blankly

“How should I know? Out there” he waved his hand abroad at the flickering lights. “There is the Golden City, challenging every man as he enters her gates. She offers opportunity and fortune. All a man has to do is go and take them! Accept the challenge!”

“The only way I could take them would be to lift them off some other fellow at the point of a gun,” said Johnny gloomily.

CHAPTER XI

I MAKE TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS

We talked the situation over thoroughly, and then turned in, having lost our chance to see the sights. Beneath us and in the tent next door went on a tremendous row of talking, laughing, and singing that for a little while prevented me from falling asleep. But the last month had done wonders for me in that way; and shortly I dropped off.

Hours later I awakened, shivering with cold to find the moonlight pouring into the room, and the bunks all occupied. My blanket had disappeared, which accounted for my dreams of icebergs. Looking carefully over the sleeping forms I discerned several with two blankets, and an equal number with none! At first I felt inclined to raise a row; then thought better of it, by careful manipulation I abstracted two good blankets from the most unprotected of of my neighbours, wrapped them tightly about me, and so slept soundly.

We went downstairs and out into the sweetest of mornings. The sun was bright, the sky clear and blue, the wind had not yet risen, balmy warmth showered down through every particle of the air. I had felt some May days like this back on our old farm. Somehow they were associated in my mind with Sunday morning and the drawling, lazy clucking of hens. Only here there were no hens, and if it was Sunday morning—which it might have been—nobody knew it.

The majority of the citizens had not yet appeared, but a handful of the poorer Chinese, and a sprinkling of others, crossed the Plaza. The doors of the gambling places were all wide open to the air. Across the square a number of small boys were throwing dust into the air. Johnny, with his usual sympathy for children, naturally gravitated in their direction. He returned after a few moments, his eyes wide.

“Do you know what they are doing?” he demanded.

We said politely that we did not.

“They are panning for gold.”

“Well, what of it?” I asked, after a moment’s pause; since Johnny seemed to expect some astonishment. “Boys are imitative little monkeys.”

“Yes, but they’re getting it,” insisted Johnny.

“What!” cried Talbot. “You’re crazy. Panning gold—here in the streets. It’s absurd!”

“It’s not absurd; come and see.”

We crossed the Plaza. Two small Americans and a Mexican youth were scooping the surface earth into the palms of their hands and blowing it out again in a slantwise stream. When it was all gone, they examined eagerly their hands. Four others working in partnership had spread a small sheet. They threw their handfuls of earth into the air, all the while fanning vigorously with their hats. The breeze thus engendered puffed away the light dust, leaving only the heavier pieces to fall on the canvas. Among these the urchins searched eagerly and carefully, their heads close together. Every moment or so one of them would wet a forefinger to pick up carefully a speck of something which he would then transfer to an old buckskin sack.

As we approached, they looked up and nodded to Johnny in a friendly fashion. They were eager, alert, precocious gamins, of the street type and how they had come to California I could not tell you. Probably as cabin boys of some of the hundreds of vessels in the harbour.

“What are you getting, boys?” asked Talbot after a moment.

“Gold, of course,” answered one of them.

“Let’s see it.”

The boy with the buckskin sack held it open for our inspection, but did not relax his grip on it. The bottom of the bag was thickly gilded with light glittering yellow particles.

“It looks like gold,” said I, incredulously.

“It *is* gold,” replied the boy with some impatience. “Anyway, it buys things.”

We looked at each other.

“Gold diggings right in the streets of San Francisco,” murmured Yank.

“I should think you’d find it easier later in the day when the wind came up?” suggested Talbot.

“Of course; and let some other kids jump our claim while we were waiting,” grunted one of the busy miners.

“How much do you get out of it?”

“Good days we make as high as three or four dollars.”

“I’m afraid the diggings are hardly rich enough to tempt us,” observed Talbot; “but isn’t that the most extraordinary performance! I’d no notion—”

We returned slowly to the hotel, marvelling. Yesterday we had been laughing at the gullibility of one of our fellow-travellers who had believed the tale of a wily ship’s agent to the effect that it was possible to live aboard the ship and do the mining within reach ashore at odd hours of daylight! Now that tale did not sound so wild; although of course we realized that the gold must occur in very small quantities. Otherwise somebody beside small boys would be at it. As a matter of fact, though we did not find it out until very much later, the soil of San Francisco is not auriferous at all. The boys were engaged in working the morning’s sweepings from the bars and gambling houses which the lavish and reckless handling of gold had liberally impregnated. In some of the mining towns nearer the source of supply I have known of from one hundred to three hundred dollars a month being thus “blown” from the sweepings of a bar.

We ate a frugal breakfast and separated on the agreed business of the day. Yank started for the water front to make inquiries as to ways of getting to the mines; Talbot set off at a businesslike pace for the hotel as though he knew fully what he was about; Johnny wandered rather aimlessly to the east; and I as aimlessly to the west.

It took me just one hour to discover that I could get all of any kind of work that any dozen men could do, and at wages so high that at first I had to ask over and over again to make sure I had heard aright. Only none of them would bring me in two hundred and twenty dollars by evening. The further I looked into that proposition, the more absurd, of course, I saw it to be. I could earn from twenty to fifty dollars by plain day-labour at some jobs; or I could get fabulous salaries by the month or year; but that was different. After determining this to my satisfaction I came to the sensible conclusion that I would make what I could.

The first thing that caught my eye after I had come to this decision was a wagon drawn by four mules coming down the street at a sucking walk. The sight did not impress me particularly; but every storekeeper came out from his shop and every passerby stopped to look with respect as the outfit wallowed along. It was driven by a very large, grave, blond man with a twinkle in his eye.

“That’s John A. McGlynn,” said a man next my elbow.

“Who’s he?” I asked.

The man looked at me in astonishment.

“Don’t know who John McGlynn is?” he demanded. “When did you get here?”

“Last night.”

“Oh! Well, John has the only American wagon in town. Brought it out from New York in pieces, and put it together himself. Broke four wild California mules to drag her. He’s a wonder!”

I could not, then, see quite how this exploit made him such a wonder; but on a sudden inspiration I splashed out through the mud and climbed into the wagon.

McGlynn looked back at me.

“Freightin’,” said he, “is twenty dollars a ton; and at that rate it’ll cost you about thirty dollars, you dirty hippopotamus. These ain’t no safe-movers, these mules!”

Unmoved, I clambered up beside him.

“I want a job,” said I, “for to-day only.”

“Do ye now?”

“Can you give me one?”

“I can, mebbe. And do you understand the inner aspirations of mules, maybe?”

“I was brought up on a farm.”

“And the principles of elementary navigation by dead reckoning?”

I looked at him blankly.

“I mean mudholes,” he explained. “Can you keep out of them?”

“I can try.”

He pulled up the team, handed me the reins, and clambered over the wheel.

“You’re hired. At six o’clock I’ll find you and pay you off. You get twenty-five dollars.”

“What am I to do?”

“You go to the shore and you rustle about whenever you see anything that looks like freight; and you look at it, and when you see anything marked with a diamond and an H inside of it, you pile it on and take it up to Howard Mellin & Company. And if you can’t lift it, then leave it for another trip, and bullyrag those skinflints at H. M. & Co.’s to send a man down to help you. And if you don’t know where they live, find out; and if you bog them mules down I’ll skin you alive, big as you are. And anyway, you’re a fool to be working in this place for twenty-five dollars a day, which is one reason I’m so glad to find you just now.”

“What’s that, John?” inquired a cool, amused voice. McGlynn and I looked around. A tall, perfectly dressed figure stood on the sidewalk surveying us quizzically. This was a smooth-shaven man of perhaps thirty-five years of age, grave faced, clean cut, with an air of rather ponderous slow dignity that nevertheless became his style very well. He was dressed in tall white hat, a white winged collar, a black stock, a long tailed blue coat with gilt buttons, an embroidered white waistcoat, dapper buff trousers, and varnished boots. He carried a polished cane and wore several heavy pieces of gold jewellery—a watch fob, a scarf-pin, and the like. His movements were leisurely, his voice low. It seemed to me, then, that somehow the perfection of his appointments and the calm deliberation of his movement made him more incongruous and remarkable than did the most bizarre whims of the miners.

“Is it yourself, Judge Girvin?” replied McGlynn, “I’m just telling this young man that he can’t have the job of driving my little California canaries for but one day because I’ve hired a fine lawyer from the East at two hundred and seventy-five a month to drive my mules for me.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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

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