Whitaker Herman

Over the Border: A Novel

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I: THE THREE BAD MEN OF LAS BOCAS

The Three had chosen their lair wisely.

In the picturesque Spanish phrase, it "situated itself" midway of the desert, the great Mexican desert that is more varied in its heated monotony than a land of woods and fields and streams. Here it runs to sparse grass land under upland *piñon*; there spreads over wide, clean sands that reflect like burnished brass the intolerable glare of the sun. Now it marches for leagues with the yuccas that fling crazed arms and shrunken limbs like posturing dwarfs; again it is dotted with lonely*mesas*, monolithic masses that raise orange and vermilion facades out of a violet mirage. A magic land it is, made out of shattered rainbows, girded with crimson-and-gold mountains that wear around their high foreheads cooling bandages of snow; a land of deathless calms, cyclonic storms, torrential rains, peopled only by the vultures that wheel against the sky and the little golden dust-whorls which dance together over its heated face. A country where dwells the very spirit of romance; of which anything might

be predicted and come to pass; therefore, as before said, the very place for a lair.

Secondly, the Three had shown a nice discrimination in the selection of a site. Its capacities in the way of offense and defense would have earned the instant commendation of a medieval baron, Mexican bandit, revolutionist, or "movie" director in search of an ideal robber's roost. Years ago a Yankee "prospector" with more faith than sense and money enough to have left prospecting severely alone, had kept a raft of *peones* busy for the better part of two years ripping the heart out of a mountain-top in a feverish search for fabulous gold. Rumors that still linger in Sonora *jacales* tell that the *gringo* worked under the direction of the spirits – or a spiritualist, which may or may not be quite the same. The results – to wit, a huge gap in the mountain and an abandoned adobe powder house, now serving as a residence for the Three Bad Men – seem to favor the rumor. Spirits were never good miners. But that is neither here nor there, the Three concerning themselves only with the natural fortifications they thus inherited.

The adobe stood well back in a semicircular gap, protected on three sides by the curving walls of the excavation. Behind them, the mountain dropped almost a thousand feet sheer, and the level bench in front of the house could only be gained by a narrow path that fell like a yellow snake down the steep slopes into thick chaparral. From its edge one overlooked the vast reaches of the central Sonora desert, an ashen sea of sage and mimosa shored

in by far mountains that loomed dusky purple or stood out stark yellow as they happened to lie to the sun. Since the Yankee went back on his "controls," or they on him, a *sahuaro* cactus had raised its fluted barrel within the excavation, captaining a squad of dwarf yuccas that poked grotesque arms in pathetic entreaty out of the rubble. To these natural improvements the Three had added a*ramada*, broad porch of poles and cornstalks, in the shade of which they took their ease one hot nooning, two playing *pedro* at a rough wooden table while the third dozed and nodded with stool tilted back against the adobe wall.

It did not require more than a cursory glance to know the Three for members of that sad colony which is doomed by its past to remain on the wrong side of the Mexican border. Beginning with Sliver Smith, the sleeper; his drowsy lids hid blue eyes that were hard as chips of agate and exactly fitted his reckless face. Just now sleep had softened its lines and brought a certain underlying good-nature. But for the mouth and deep creases down each side of the nose, which bespoke passions violent and unrestrained, one would have put him down now for that which he had been – a cowman from the New Mexican ranges.

The other two, however, really looked the "bad man." "Bull" Perrin, the biggest and eldest, might have been especially cast by nature for the part. Big, burly, black-visaged, and heavy-jowled, excessive drinking had dyed his face out of all relation to the creamy skin the gods had given him. The hot brown eyes under straight bushy brows bespoke a cyclonic temper. But though Bull

conveyed the impression of an "ugly customer" at first sight, a physiognomist would have picked Jake Evers, his partner, as a far more dangerous man. The cold, bleak sparks of eyes in his lean, lantern-jawed face scintillated with cunning. But for a certain humor that lurked about the corners of his mouth, his face would have been utterly repulsive.

Yet after granting their "badness," there was about them no taint of the mean, rat-like wickedness of the city criminal. Their composite was of strong impulses, misdirected forces gone to waste, of men cast by birth in a wrong age. In the councils of a nation in the olden time, their strength, ferocity, would have gained them power and place; here, out in the desert, they exactly fitted their environment. As much as the horned toad in the sand at Bull's feet, as much as the lizard that coursed swiftly along the adobe wall above the sleeper's head; as much as the*sahuaro* and the tormented yucca, they belonged to the land. Its gold glowed in their bronze. It were a safe bet that – horses and cattle not being in question – they would, at a given emergency, live in the letter of its best traditions.

Looking at Bull and Jake as they sat at play, the former might be likened to a grizzly; the latter to a tiger, alert, stealthy, cunning, ferocious; qualities which sprang into evidence with startling suddenness when a shrill burst of woman's scolding presently disrupted the heated silence.

Apparently the noise issued from a white cloud that hid the doorway; but as this settled and cleared away, a buxom slattern

of a Mexican girl stood revealed. While flicking out the last dust of flour from an empty sack she bitterly reviled the Three. Though delivered in Spanish, the substance of her complaint was international and goes easily into English.

"Flojos! Lazy ones! how shall one cook without flour? The coffee, too, is gone – and the sugar. Of lard or grease there is not a smear for the pan. You must go forth, to-day."

This was merely the text. While she enlarged thereon with copious illustrations to prove their worthlessness as providers, the two men at the table proceeded quietly with their play. It was the third that finally interrupted the harangue with the irascibility of one aroused from pleasant sleep.

"Shut up, Dove!"

In its literal sense the word stands for the most innocent of birds. But she chose to take the opposite meaning of the sarcastic Spanish.

"Si, señor! I am that or I should not be here now, cooking for three beasts." After a comparison between them and the lower animals that greatly favored the latter, she ran on with increasing heat:

"'Dove,' indeed? Then where is my price? Where are they, the fine clothes, the silks and satins and linen, the jewelry and laces you were to gain for me? Was it by this I was bought?" She held out her dirty black skirt. "I, that might be now sitting in the cantina of Ignacio Flores at Las Bocas, selling aguardiente and anisette to his custom? Si, señores, *where are they*, the velvets,

ribands, and neck chains? I – ”

It was at this point that Jake displayed his quality. Swinging swiftly around, he threw his knife, so hard and quickly that it stuck quivering in the door lintel close to the girl’s throat before she had time to close her mouth.

“Here! don’t be so careless.” Bull’s bushy brows drew down over his burning eyes in quick reproof. But his next remark proved that the interference was not based on altruism. “If you croak her, who’s to do the cooking? Any corn left, Rosa?”

Whereas Sliver’s rude interruption had merely stimulated her tongue; whereas, also, she had stuck out that member at Jake the instant she made sure the knife had missed, she now caught her breath with a little, frightened gulp. “Si, señor.”

“Then make some tortillas and serve them along with the jerky,” he called after her. “And bring us out a drink.”

At this Sliver, who had resumed his doze, sat up again. His lugubrious exclamation, “Oh, *hell*!” caused the others to look up a moment later. With an empty demijohn held upside down Rosa stood in the doorway. She did not speak. But her tragic pose, vindictive nod, said quite plainly, “Now will you go?”

Neither did they speak. The situation was beyond revilings. Slowly Jake picked up and pocketed the cards. Sliver rose to his feet. In single file they marched down the path to find their horses. Indeed, they had caught the animals, saddled up at the stable on the flat below and were riding away through the chaparral before they recovered sufficiently to attempt to fix the

blame for the shortage.

Sliver – who, by the way, had gained his nickname under the law of opposites because he was short and stout – remembered that he had warned them several times "notter hit it so hard." But his testimony lost force by reason of certain "lone drinks" in the absorption of which he had, by the others, been caught. Jake, on the other hand, had pleaded for more liquor and less flour the last time they stocked up at Las Bocas. By frank confession, moreover, he reduced the force of Sliver's charge that he would never be satisfied with less liquor than "he ked swim in."

"That's right. I never really seen at one time more whisky than I felt I c'd drink."

From this he went on with invectives against the wave of reform which, by its sudden flooding of the "Territ'ries" – as he still called the States of Arizona and New Mexico – might be held indirectly responsible for his present thirst. "For a cowman, like Sliver here, it don't matter so much, him being used to dry spells out on the range. But for a man that's dealt faro in a s'loon for a spell of years with two fingers of bourbon allus under his nose, it comes some bitter. Them was the golden days. What a man made in beef cattle or gold was his'n to plank down on a bar or place on a card. Till them pinch-faces from the Middle West descended like locusts upon the lan', drought was unknown save by a few fool prospectors that got themselves lost in the desert. Locusts? I wrong 'em! A locust does live up to its natural instincts. Locusts is a blessing compared to pinch-faces. Why –

” But certain lengthy reflections that established the place of the “Middle-Wester” beneath even the lowly bedbug in the scale of creation, must give place to his conclusion. “Si, señores! ’twas them druv’ me to rustling. But for them I’d still be living honest, dealing straight faro to all comers with on’y an occasional turn from the bottom of the box for the good of the house.”

“Pity for you!”

Bull’s pithy comment was enlarged upon by Sliver.

“An’ you-all needn’t to be howling so loud, either, about them dry spells on the ranges. We allus had it in the bunk-houses an’ ’twas a poor cook that couldn’t hide a keg in the chuck-wagon. As for your faro – ’twas to play the odd card you wolves dealt from the bottom that I med my first rustle. But for you I’d be taking my copa right now out of the cook’s keg instead of dying of thirst in this lousy desert.”

There was real heat in the accusation, but the ex-gambler’s lean, leathery face merely split in a dry grin.

“If your mother bred you a fool, don’t blame me. The flea bit the dog, the dog bit me; I kicked the dog an’ killed the flea. Take a drink of water, Sliver; it all works out in the end. You next, Bull. Which was it – water, wine, or weemen?”

“None of ’em.” The big rustler shook his head. “Early piety did for me. Prayers morning, noon, an’ night; grace before meals; two long sermons on Sundays, an’ two hours, Sabbath-school, and what would you expect? I was so well brought up I jest had to go wrong. But if we don’t jog along we won’t make Las Bocas

to-night."

As Bull spurred on ahead, Sliver looked at Jake. "Say, he ain't exactly what you-all 'd call frank in his conversings. If there's a thing he don't know about us – well, 'tain't our fault. But him? When you come to think of it did you ever hear him say how he kem to take up rustling?"

The gambler shook his head. "In a gen'ral way – so gen'ral that I couldn't tell jest how I got it – I've sorter gathered that he once croaked a man. But whether 'twas before or after he took up the profesh I couldn't say. In the natural order of things, a rustler's bound, sooner or later, to down some prying fool. There's so many that try to mix in his business. But if it was before, Bull done it – I'll bet you the gent had it coming."

II: OVER THE BORDER

That night the Three put up at the *cantina* in the little adobe town of Las Bocas, where, by reason of occasional largesses to the leader of the revolutionary faction that happened to be on top, a welcome was always certain. Just now it was more particularly so because the present *jefe-politico*, a Carranzista, varied his political activities by acting as "fence" in the disposal of their plunder.

In accordance with his advice, the following afternoon found them approaching the American border at a point far west of their usual sphere of operations. While they journeyed the sun slid down its western slant till it hung like a smoky lamp in the far dust of the desert. Behind them the sea of sage still ran off to distant mountains, but the sunset glow washed its dust away, draping the land in a royal robe. Ahead the grade was rising imperceptibly but steadily to a sparse grass country where the sage, *palo verde*, and yucca gave place to huge *sahuaros* that strewed the plain with their fluted barrels like the jade columns of some vast ruin. Among them roamed the flocks and herds of a pink-walled *hacienda* that nestled in a grove of lordly cottonwoods. As they rode past, the Three noted with appraising glances the sleek hides of a fine bunch of steers.

"Dress a thousand pounds of beef apiece," Jake opined.

"Worth eighty pesos, gold, on the hoof, in El Paso," Sliver

yearningly added.

But their interest went no further – for reasons that appeared when, at sundown, they rode past the concrete pillar that marked the international boundary. Rustler that he was, drunkard and gambler, utterly worthless if the reports current on the New Mexican ranges were to be believed, Sliver's eye nevertheless lit up at the sight of it; the glow on his hard face was not all sunset reflection.

"The good old U.S.," he commented. "*Some* country!"

"He wasn't talking that way las' time we crossed." Jake winked at Bull.

"Guess not. He was cussing Cristobel Columbo for ever having discovered it."

"That's right," Sliver admitted. "But I was what you-all might call in a bit of a hurry with a squad of rangers streaking at my heels. Other things being ekal – "

"Which they ain't," Jake interrupted. "Mexico's good enough for me. Mexico an' revolution! For I tell you right now that if Porfirio Diaz was still boss, his rurales would have taken right holt where the rangers left off. Instead of dangling from a pine on the American side, we'd hev' finished with a fusillado on this. But with the government switching every five minutes between Orozco, Villa, Huerta, Carranza, an' the jefe-politicos an' governors slaughtering each other between-whiles, it's nobody's business to look after us. We make our little sneaks across the border an' return in peace an' quiet. So 'Viva la revolucion!' That

reminds me – where're you heading, Bull?"

"Livingstone *rancho* on the Little Stoney."

"Say, but that's horses! Don't they run 'em into the corrals at night?"

The big rustler nodded. "All the easier to find, an' after you once get them moving it don't take three days to run 'em over the line. Besides, Don Manuel tol' me at Las Bocas yesterday that the Carranzistas are needing heavy horses for their artillery over on the Coast. He'll pay fifty pesos apiece an' take his chance on a five-thousand-per-cent profit after the old gentleman grabs the presidential chair." He emphatically concluded, "*Horses*, you bet!"

"Some risky, cutting 'em out?" Sliver, too, looked dubious.

"Not as much as you think. Did you never have some flea-bitten son of a gun rub down the bars while you slept plumb up against the corral an' wake next morning to find nary a head in sight? A horse don't like a corral any more'n a man loves prison. The bars once down, you kin trust 'em to soft-foot it out to the open. Why" – his grin at the remembrance set a flash of good-nature in his hard face – "why, I've seen an old nag look back at a colt that kicked the bars passing out just like he was saying, 'You damn young fool! now you've upset the soup!' Leave it to me. I'll work 'em out on foot while you sit tight an' hold my horse. Moon's going to be jest about right, too. She'll be taking her first peep about the time we get 'em out in the clear. It'll be a pipe, then, to saddle up fresh beasts an' shoot 'em over the border."

The *rancho* for which they were heading lay still two hours away, and while they rode the *sahuaro* pillars gave place in turn to *piñon* and juniper thinly strewn over rolling grassland. Before night settled down, the wandering cattle-trails they had followed drew into the twin ruts of a wagon-road. Their going was timed by the moon. But it stole out from behind a low hill a trifle ahead of schedule. By its first dim radiance they made out the dark mass of the *rancho* buildings, house, corrals, stables, in a swale between two hills. It was, however, dark enough for their purpose, and, leaving his horse with the others, Bull went forward on foot.

It was nervous work, sitting there watching the buildings take form under the waxing moon. Their strained senses took every sound, smell, and sight; a dog's bark, click of horns as a steer scratched his forehead on the top rail of a corral, the impatient pawing of a horse, the warm cattle odor that floated on the night breeze. Dim, uncertain shapes seemed to form and fade in the nearer gloom. They were nervous as cats by the time a gun suddenly flashed under the dark porch of the house.

The croupy cough of a child plus the nervous fears of its mother did it. Not that the woman saw Bull when she drew the curtain and peeped out. But these days, with a new revolution breaking, as Jake put it, "every five minutes" over the border, the American ranchers along the international line slept always with an eye open for possible raids. So far as Bull was concerned, her whisper was just as fatal as though she had seen him.

“Pa! get up! I’m sure there’s some one out there!”

Perhaps the rancher did see. Educated in objects moving through dusk, his plainsman’s eye may have noticed movement. Or perhaps he shot on chance. In either case he was quickly informed by the roar and clatter of hoofs that followed, for though Bull did not expect, now, to get away with a single head, pursuit would be blinded and divided by stampeding the beasts. Dropping the bars while the gun continued to flash its staccato warnings, he started the animals out, leaped on the back of one; as soon as it cleared the huddle, went shooting down the trail, guiding the animal with the swing of his body.

Unfortunately, the whim that governs a stampede moved the other beasts to follow. So when the rancher and his men – in shirts and trousers, but not one without a gun – pulled their mounts out of the stables, their pursuit was guided by the distant thunder of hoofs. Neither did Bull’s quick change to his own beast divert the stampede. When the Three galloped on, the scared animals still followed like dogs at their heels.

“First time my prey ever chased me!” Jake laughed harshly, looking back at the band. “If old man Livingstone don’t follow too close we’ll get ’em yet!”

Bull shook his head. “Not with the moon sailing up to her full an’ the critters leaving a trail broad as a pike road. Listen to that!”

A sharp report punctuated the thud and clatter of the stampede; the first shot of a fusillade that grew hotter and hotter as the horses trailed off right and left, leaving the rustlers more

exposed. As yet they were running in the shadow of a long hill where the light was poor. But half a mile ahead lay an open plain unbroken by cover.

"They'll shoot the lights outen us there!" Sliver prophesied. "Better make a stan' while we can."

"They *are* getting sassy," Jake agreed, as a bullet whizzed under his chin. "We'll have to teach 'em this ain't no turkey-shoot."

The deciding word came, as usual, from Bull. "They'd surround an' hold us for the posse. You ride on while I check 'em. If they try to round me it'll be up to you to take 'em from the rear. Get behind so's they don't see me turn."

In the faint light his sudden whirl behind a bush went unnoticed. He had already unshipped his rifle from the saddle slings, and through the upper branches he took careful aim. A hundred yards away Livingstone was coming at full gallop, about the same distance ahead of his men. Bull waited till he could see the old fellow's hair, silver in the moonlight, framing his angry red face. Once the sights lined up level between the eyes. But muttering, "I ked sure spoil your beauty, but – I won't," Bull lowered them to the horse's chest and fired.

With the report the beast plunged forward, head and neck doubled under, throwing his rider out in the clear. Though badly shaken, the old man was up the next instant, and as he ran for cover his sudden change of expression from anger to flustered surprise drew from Bull a grin.

“Teach you not to get so fresh.”

At the crack of the rifle the others had also darted for cover, and as their guns began to spit and flash from the chaparral along the hillside, Bull laughed outright. “Not a rifle among ’em. Easy going! Hasta luego, señores! Some other time!”

One or two bolder spirits emerged from the chaparral as Bull rode out in the open. But they scuttled back like rabbits as he swung in the saddle with leveled rifle. Though they followed till the boundary pillar stood out, two hours later, a shining silver shaft under the brilliant moon, they preserved always a safe distance, and Bull denied Sliver’s suggestion to “chuck a volley” into the dim mass.

“Kain’t you leave your Uncle Samuel sleep? He ain’t a-going to be moved off his ‘watchful waiting’ by the loss of no horse, but if we go to killing folks, he’s sure going to take time to catch our goat b’twixt revolutions.”

“To-morrow morning,” Jake commented, grinning, “the morning papers will be running scareheads an inch high about the ‘Latest Border Outrage!’ Meanwhile we’ll be jogging home – ”

“ – without the horses,” Bull dryly finished.

“An’ Rosa, back at the roost,” Sliver added, “howling for coffee an’ flour an’ grease.”

Which reminded Jake of their former argument: “I told you we orter ha’ bought more whisky. Nothing left but to ride back to Las Bocas an’ hit Don Miguel for credit.”

III: EVEN A RUSTLER HAS HIS TROUBLES

Las Bocas was slowly stewing in its native filth when the Three sighted it again at noon next day.

In all the world nothing reflects its environment more faithfully than a Mexican town. Southward, the great cities of Mexico and Guadalajara testify with their stately cathedrals, ornate public buildings, theaters, parks, and plazas, the flowering *patios* of lovely and luxurious homes, first to the richness of the central Mexican plateau, secondly to the fact that in normal times all the wealth of the republic drains to them. Oppositely, the northern towns with their squalid adobe streets, overrun with a plague of dirty children, dogs, vultures, pigs; desiccated by fierce heat, drowned by torrential rains; these in their place and turn are eminently characteristic of the arid desert. Save that it was a little smaller, a little dirtier, perhaps a little richer in the variety of its stenches, Las Bocas might serve as the type of all Mexican frontier towns.

As the wind blew their way, the Three smelled it from afar. But usage breeds indifference even to evil odors. If not actually homesome, the fetor bespoke a possible drink.

A quarter mile before entering the town they crossed the *arroyo* that gave it drink. Its waters also furnished an open-air

laundry for two brown girls who knelt by its edge, pounding their soiled linen on flat boulders. These days of rampant revolution, a good girl had needs be careful, and at sight of the Three, dusty, unkempt, bearded, and gaunt from tire and travel, *gringos* at that, the two leaped up and fled toward the town.

Grinning at their fright, Bull and Sliver would have ridden on, but Jake, who never missed a trick, reined in his beast and began to examine the laundry with the eye of a connoisseur. Though the remainder of her be clad in rags, the humblest *peona* will have her lace petticoat, and the dozen or so pieces that were already spread out to dry on the neighboring bushes were really very fine.

"D'you allow to turn lady's maid?" Sliver spoke, as Jake bent to stuff the lingerie into his saddle-bags.

"Not till Rosa's had the refusal of it. This orter keep her satisfied for at least a month."

Grinning, the pair of rascals spurred their jaded beasts and overtook Bull as he entered a narrow gut of a street that followed the meanderings of the original cow-path to the *jefe's* house, a plastered adobe, limewashed in purple and gold, that faced the inevitable military barracks across a sorry attempt at a plaza.

If the small traders and artisans who constituted the bulk of the population had been addicted to such flights of imagination, they might have pictured the *jefatura's* yawning gates as a huge gullet through which, in normal times, their substance drained in taxes, fines, and imposts to Mexico City, the nation's stomach, there to be consumed by a hungry tribe of official hookworms.

Now, of course, it was being deflected into the private pocket of the dominant revolutionary chief. Lacking the imagination, they cursed beneath their breath and waited patiently till the next revolution should bring a new tyrant to avenge them on the present oppressor.

The latest incumbent was at lunch under the peppertree in the *patio*when the Three dismounted at the gates. Fat and sleek and brown, his generally gross appearance was accentuated by pouched beady eyes, waxed mustache, unhealthy, erupted skin. As he sat there, shoveling in*frijoles* and *chile*, even a *peon's* slack imaginings could have easily established a resemblance – if not between him and a hookworm, at least, to some greedy parasite. The irritability, blind individualism, offensive conceit, treachery, too common to Mexicans, lay hidden under the usual veneer of Spanish courtesy. The embraces, backpattings, effusive greetings with which he welcomed the Three would have graced the reception of a favorite son.

"Enter, amigos!" His welcome buzzed through the *patio*. "Sit down and eat. Afterward we shall look over the horses. You have bestowed them – where?"

But when he learned of their failure, the scorpion showed through the glaze of courtesy like a fly in amber. "*Carambar-r-r-aa*, señores!" His read wagged in a nasty way. "I had counted on the horses – to save your alive. On my desk lies a requisition from your gringo border police, demanding your bodies. Que desgracia!" The spite that scintillated in his beads of eyes gave his

words sinister significance. “One would dislike to do it, if ’twere only through hate of your Government. But one has to account to his chiefs. Already they have inquired for you, and always I made answer, ‘These are good hombres, useful to our cause.’ But deeds count more than words. Horses for their artilleria would have proved your worth. But now – ” a second nasty wag told that their failure left them as other *gringos*, to be despised, hated, persecuted. Having given the impression time to sink in, he suggested, “But there must be others? You will try again?”

“No use.” Bull’s gloom emphasized the denial. “This is the second time in a month that we’ve been chased across the border. They’re looking for us all along the line.”

“Si? Then must you go elsewhere. What of” – pausing, he looked cautiously around – “what of this side? In central Chihuahua there are many horse-ranchos, gringo ranches with fine blooded stock.”

“But – ”

The *jefe’s* shrug anticipated the objection. “Si, si! ’tis Mexico. That is what I have always told my chief – ‘these hombres bother only the gringo pigs.’” With a covert grin at the safe insult, he continued, “But a gringo is a gringo, whether here or in your United States. If they be despoiled, we shall not shed many tears. There will be a complaint, of course, to and from your Government, and much writing between departments. In the mean time we have the horses. So – ”

“But that’s Valles’s country, isn’t it?” Jake put in. “He’s a bad

hombre to fool with!"

The *jefe* turned on him his evil grin. "What if the gringo ranchers had caught you last night? Hanging, amigo, is a dog's death. I would prefer the fusilado of Valles's men."

"What if he kicks to your people? Puts in a claim for our heads? You're working together, ain't you?"

Once again the *jefe* looked around. "Listen, amigos! Between friends one may show the truth. Already there is a cloud, a little cloud, no bigger than a child's hand arisen between us and Valles. If the horses are taken from a gringo *rancho* in Valles's country, my chiefs will be the better pleased. What they have Valles cannot get in the days when the cloud grows big and black and bursts."

Sliver, who understood more Spanish than he could speak, here nudged Bull. "Ask him if he'll grub-stake the deal."

"Ask nothing!" Bull's hot eyes shot brown fire. "You heard him rubbing it into us, didn't you? If it wasn't that we need him I'd wring the little brown adder's neck." He went on, suavely, in Spanish, "My amigo questions me of the price. It will be the same – fifty pesos apiece, señor?"

Nodding, the *jefe* glanced impatiently back at his lunch. He appeared to have forgotten his invitation. Pleading an engagement, he bowed them out through the gates, then returned to his gorging while, hungrier, and even still thirstier, the Three rode down the street.

Usually they were not averse to an exchange of glances, or a

flirtation – if the *hombre* was not in sight – with the brown girls who watched them from their doorways. But now their glances sought only the*cantinas*, whose open bars displayed a tempting array of bottles. While they looked their progress grew constantly slower, finally stopped in front of one whose owner was taking his *siesta* stretched out on the bar.

Jake looked from the sleeper to his companions, then at the bottles of anisette and *tequila* on the rough wooden shelves. "If he was drunk it 'u'd be easy – " As the Mexican disposed of the doubt, just then, by opening one excessively sober eye, Jake desperately concluded, "Say, kain't we raise the price among us?"

Bull tapped his empty pockets.

Sliver mourned, "All I've got is a Confederate five some one slipped me during my last toot in El Paso. I've carried it sence for a lucky piece."

"An' lucky it is!" Jake extended an eager hand. "After this revolutionary currency that's run off by the million on a newspaper press, these greasers are crazy for gringo bills. What if it has got Jeff Davis's picter on it? This fellow don't know him from Abe Lincoln. All gringo bills look alike to him. He'll never know the diff."

Neither did he. The note, when thrown with elaborate carelessness on the bar, brought in exchange at current ratios thirty-two *pesos* and some*centavos*, along with three stiff *copas*. Deceived by the size of the roll, the Three now proceeded to order from the *tienda* behind the bar coffee, sugar, maize, the

grease of Rosa's desire, and other necessaries. With half a dozen bottles of *tequila*, it made a goodly pile on the counter, but the offer of the roll brought a second lesson in finance – to wit, that cheap money buys few goods. After segregating the *tequila* from the groceries, the merchant explained with a bow and shrug that the thirty-two dollars and some *centavos* aforesaid represented the value of either.

From the groceries, the glances of the Three passed to the *tequila*; then, with one accord, their hands went out and each closed on the neck of a bottle. They were already outside when, looking back, Sliver happened to catch the merchant's eye.

He grinned, answering Sliver's wink. "Si, señores, this time you shall drink with me."

That which followed was quite accidental. While the Mexican was setting out three glasses, Jake drew a pack of cards from his pocket and began to throw two kings and an ace in the "three-card trick." So deftly he did it that Sliver, who was really trying to pick the ace, failed half a dozen times in succession. Their backs being turned, only Bull noticed the Mexican's interest in the performance. Fascinated, he watched the flying cards.

"Looks easy, don't it?" Bull suggested. "Here, Sliver, give this hombre a chance."

Of course he succeeded, and, being Mexican, his conceit prodded him on to try again. He could do it! He'd bet his *sombrero*, his horse, his store, that he could do it every time! The Three being possessed of no other stake, he finally wagered

the pile of goods, which still stood on the counter, against their bottles of *tequila*– and lost! In the course of the next half-hour, being judiciously led on by occasional winnings, there were added to the groceries six other bottles, the original thirty-two *pesos* and some *centavos*, a bolt of lace and linen for Rosa; but for a large, greasy, and infuriated brown woman who charged them suddenly from the rear of the store he would undoubtedly have lost his all. Further acquisitions being balked by her unreasonable interference with the course of nature as applied to fools, the Three packed their winnings in the saddle-bags and rode on their way.

As a rule a certain fairness is inherent in the externally masculine. Even a Mexican expects to pay his losings, and, of his own impulse, the*comerciante* would probably have let things go with a shrug. But not so his woman! The eternally feminine is ever a poor loser – perhaps because she has usually no hand in the game – and as the Three rode off she let loose an outcry that brought a gendarme running from around the corner.

"It is that honest Mexicans are robbed by gringo thieves while thou art lost in a siesta!" she assailed him. "After them, lazy one, and recover our goods!"

By her violence she might have lost her case. With an answer that was quite ungentlemanly the gendarme had already turned to go, when the two girls whom Jake had robbed of their lingerie came tearing up the street and added their outcries to the woman's clamor. And now the Three were surely out of luck. It

chanced that for a week past this very gendarme had been making sheep's eyes at the larger of the two girls, and now the saints had sent this chance for him to gain her favor.

"They stole thy – " Delicacy gave him pause; then, his natural indignation increased by the nature of the robbery, he hot-footed it up the street and overtook the Three.

Ordinarily the arrest would have been accomplished with lofty Spanish punctilio, but in his heat the gendarme allowed his zeal to exceed his discretion, and thereby invited disaster. For as he seized Bull's bridle, the rustler reached over, spread his huge hand flat over the man's angry face, and sent him toppling backward into the kennel. He was up, the next second, long gun in hand. But in that second Jake's bleak eyes squinted along his gun, Sliver had him covered, Bull's rifle was aimed from the hip.

To give the Mexican policeman his due, he does not easily give up. If one man cannot bring in a prisoner, ten may. If they fail, perhaps a company can – or a regiment. The man's shrill whistle was really far more dangerous than his absurd long gun. Instantly it was taken up on the next street and the next; went echoing through the town till it finally brought from the *carcel* a squad on the run.

By that time the Three had backed up against a wall and stood with rifles leveled across the backs of their beasts. Every particle of human kindness, humor, that had showed in their dealings with one another was gone. Jake's long teeth were bared in a wolf grin. Sliver's reckless face had frozen in stone. Bull's

head and huge shoulders rose above his breast, his face dark, imperturbable, fierce. Grim, silent, ferocious as trapped wolves, they faced the squad which took cover while messengers brought an officer and company from the barracks.

Now it was really dangerous. The tragedy that lurks behind all Mexican comedy might break at any moment. In its uniform, that ragged soldiery set forth the history of three revolutions. The silver and gray of Porfirio Diaz's famed *rurales*, the blue and red stripes or fatigue linen of the Federal Army, even the *charro* suits of Orozco's Colorados, were all represented. But in spite of their motley the men were all fighters, tried by years of guerrilla warfare. Their dark brown faces showed only eager savagery. If it had depended on them, tragedy would have burst forth there and then. But the word had to come from the officer, who found himself looking down the barrels of three leveled rifles. It took him just five seconds to make up his mind on this fundamental truth – whoever else survived, he would die. The game was not worth the candle! Very politely he addressed Bull.

"Did I not see you, señor, at the jefatura just now?"

With Bull's nod tragedy resolved into comedy. Swinging round on the*comerciante* and his woman, the officer pronounced on their complaint. "They that gamble must expect to lose. Off, fool! before I throw thee in carcel."

Having driven in the moral with the flat of his saber across the merchant's back, he next took up the complaint of the girls. "How know ye that these be they that stole your garments? Only

that they passed while you were at the wash? Then back, doves, to your cotes! These be friends of the jefe and no stealers of women's fripperies."

Stiffly saluting the Three, he marched his ragged soldiery away.

Five seconds thereafter the Three were again on their way – to the*cantina* where they usually put up.

"All we've gotter do now," Sliver chuckled as they rode on down the street, "is to rope a stray calf or a pig on the way home, an' Rosa'll be fixed for a month."

But, alas for Rosa! After they had stabled their horses and eaten, followed one of those debauches that occur when men with natural "thirsts" turn loose after a period of deprivation. During its course they spent first the thirty-two *pesos* and some *centavos*, drank up their own *tequila*, finally bartered the groceries to buy still more liquor for the rabble of *peones* and brown girls that flocked to the*cantina* like buzzards to carrion.

The "drunk" went through the customary stages from boisterous conviviality, singing, loud boasting, quarreling, fighting. Three times Sliver and Jake locked and rolled on the floor, tearing like tigers at each other's throats, nor let go till pried apart by Bull. Worse, because really terrible, was it to see the giant rustler, after the other two had lapsed into sottish sleep, sitting with his broad shoulders against the adobe wall, huge hands squeezing an imaginary throat, while his drink-crazed brain rehearsed the details of some past tragedy. Shortly

thereafter he also rolled over in drunken sleep.

As they lay there, crumpled, limp, breathing stertorously, there was nothing edifying in the spectacle. It would be unfair to hint at a likeness between them and the swine that snored in the kennel outside; unfair to the swine, which never descend through drink from their natural estate. Drunkards and outlaws, they were probably as low, at that moment, as human beings ever go. Yet when they awoke, *sans*groceries, *sans tequila*, *sans* money, but plus three splitting headaches, they faced the situation with saving humor.

"Tough on Rosa," Jake said, with a rueful grin.

"If she's still there," Sliver doubted. "An' I'll bet a peppercorn to a toothpick she ain't."

"Chihuahua, now, or starve," Bull succinctly summed the situation. He added, grinning, "Anyway, we'll travel light."

IV: THE TRAIL OF THE COLORADOS

Five days later the Three looked down from a mountain shoulder upon the first and greatest of the Chihuahua *haciendas*.

Far beyond the limit of sight its level ranges ran. From the crest of the blue range in the distance, their glances would still have traveled on less than half-way to the eastern limit. The Mexican Central train, then running southward in the trough between two ranges thirty miles away, had been speeding all day across lands whose ownership was vested in one man. The half-score of towns, hundred villages, in its environs were there only by his consent. Until the bursting of the first revolution had sent him flying into El Paso with other northern overlords, their thousands of inhabitants, shopkeepers, muleteers, artisans, *peones*, drew by his grace the very breath of life.

"Seems foolish even to think that one could own all that."

Jake's glance wandered over the desert that laid off its shining distances to the horizon. Here and there flat-topped *mesas* uplifted their chrome and vermilion façades from the dead flat. Very far away, one huge fellow raised phantom battlements from the ghostly waters of a mirage. It was altogether unlike their own Sonora desert. In place of the familiar seas of sage, cactus and spiky yucca were thinly strewn over a land whose unmitigated

drought was accentuated by the parched windings of waterless streams. Gold! gold! its shimmer was everywhere; burned in the sand; in the dust whorls that danced with the little winds; in the air that flowed like wine around the royal purple of distant ranges. Lifeless, without sign of human tenancy, its solitary reaches were infinite as the ocean. Yet man and his works were not so very far away. Certain black specks that hovered or wheeled against the blue of the sky a mile away served as a sign-post.

"Vultures," Sliver pointed. "Must be something dead over there."

"Or dying?" Bull questioned. "Otherwise the birds 'u'd settle. These days it's as likely to be human as horse. We might ride down that way."

And human it proved to be when, half an hour later, they rode out of encircling cactus into an open space around a giant *sahuaro*. Head fallen back so that his face was turned up to the torrid sun; relaxed, limp as a rag, a man hung by his wrists that had been tied at the full stretch of his arms around the *sahuaro's* barrel. During the sixty hours he had hung there without food or water the skin had shrunk till it lay like scorched parchment on the bones of his face. In addition to the vultures that hovered above, others hopped or fluttered over the hot sands, or perched, patient as death itself, on the surrounding cactus. Now and then a bolder scavenger hopped upon his shoulder. But a slow roll of the head, sudden hiss of dry breath, would drive it away. At the approach of the Three the evil creatures rose in a black cloud,

filling the air with the beat and swish of coffin wings.

"He's white! a gringo!" Bull cried it while he hacked at the cords.

"The poor devil!" Sliver spoke softly as he lifted and laid the poor, limp body on his outspread coat.

While he laved the shrunken face and Bull poured water, drop by drop, on the man's swollen tongue, Jake carefully parted the swollen flesh of the wrists and cut away the cords.

If old man Livingstone, or other of the border ranchers who had suffered through their raids, could have seen them at their merciful work, have noted their gentleness, heard their sympathetic comment, they would probably have refused the evidence of their own eyes. Though still too weak to even raise his head, they brought the man in an hour to the point where he was able, in whispers, to give an account of himself.

He was a miner and his claim lay on a natural bench that jutted out from the sheer wall of a great gulch in the mountains about a mile away. His house, a hut of corrugated iron, stood with a few rough work buildings up there. If he could only get to it, he'd be all right.

And he soon did. Lifted by the others to the saddle in front of Bull and cradled like a child in the rustler's great arms, he scarcely felt the journey. Viewed as he hung on the *sahuaro*, dirty, bruised, shrunken by fever and thirst, he might have been any age. But when laid on his bed, washed, fed with a quick soup compounded by Sliver out of pounded jerky and some pea meal

he found on a shelf, he proved to be a typical American miner of middle age – short gray beard, hawk profile, high cheek-bones, eyes blue and hard as agate. By the time they had cooked for themselves – for even if his condition had permitted, it was now too late to go on – he had recovered his voice and told them all.

"It was the 'Colorados' that tied me up. I knew them by the 'red hearts' on the breasts of their charro jackets."

Even up into their far corner of Sonora had penetrated something of the terror associated with the name. Originally the "Colorados" had been Orozco's soldiers. But when dispersed by the collapse of his revolution against Madero they had split up into bands and overrun the northern Mexican states. Because of their frightful cruelties they were shot by the Carranzistas whenever caught. But though the spread of the latter power was driving them farther south, they still made occasional raids.

"But I was lucky to get off with that," he said, after describing the beating that had preceded the tying-up. "They cut the soles off the feet of two of my *peones*, then drove them, stark-naked, through spiky chollas. When the poor devils fell, exhausted, they beat them to death where they lay on the ground. Surely I was lucky, for if it hadn't been that they thought I had money, and tied me up to make me confess, I'd have got the same. They left me to raid some *rancho*, but swore they'd come back."

Riding in, they had passed the dead *peones*, and, bad man that he was, Jake shuddered at the memory. "But why do you stay here, with that kind of people running loose?"

“Why do I stay?” The miner repeated the question, with heat. “The American consul in Chihuahua is always asking that. Why does any man stay anywhere? Because his living is there. We came here under treaties that guaranteed our rights in the time of Diaz when this country had been at peace for thirty years. Every cent I had was put into this mine, and I’d worked it along to the point where it would pay big capital to come in when that fanatic, Madero, turned hell loose.

“At first we naturally expected that Uncle Sam would look after our rights. But did he? Yes, by ordering us to get out – we that had invested a thousand million dollars in opening up markets for a hundred million dollars’ worth a year of his manufactured products. Get out and have it all go up in smoke the minute our backs were turned!

“Luckily for me, I had no women folk to complicate the situation. But most of the others had. We’d thought, of course, that the mistreatment of one American woman would bring intervention, and so did the Mexicans till the thing had been done again and again. Since then – know what that Colorado leader replied when I threatened him with the vengeance of our Government?”

“‘Your Government!’ he sneered. ‘We have killed your men, we have ravished your women, we have exterminated your brats; will you tell me what else we can do to make your Government fight?’”

He concluded, with bitter sadness, “I was brought up to love

and revere the flag; to believe that an American citizen was safe wherever it floated. But, men! I've seen it trampled in the mire, spat upon, defiled by filthy *peones*, then spread in mockery over the dead bodies of Americans who believed in its power to save."

In Sonora and on the west coast, so far, foreigners had suffered principally in their goods. But rumors and reports of excesses in the central states had found their way westward; enough of them for the Three to find all the miner had said quite easy of belief.

"It sure puts Uncle Sam in rather a poor light," Jake agreed. "He don't seem a bit like the old fellow that sent General Scott right through to Mexico City."

Bull's big head moved in an emphatic nod through a thick cloud of tobacco smoke. "Looks like the old gent had lost his pep sence he put the Apaches outer the scalping business an' got through spanking Johnny Reb."

Only Sliver, the optimist, stood by the accused. "Jest wait! D'you-all know what's going to happen one o' these days? That same Uncle Sam, he's mighty patient an' he's been handed a heap o' bad counsel; but one of these days he's a-going to get mad. When he does – listen! he's a-going to walk down to the Mexican line an' take a look at it with his nose all crinkled up like he smelled something bad. 'Things ain't quite right here!' he'll say, ca'm an' deliberate, that-a-way. Then he'll stoop an' pick up that line, an' when he sots it down again – it 'ull be south of Panama. Jest you-all wait an' see!"

"'Wait? Wait?'" the miner sarcastically repeated. "Seems as

though I'd heard that before. Wait all you want. As for me – one thing I know. Unless your Uncle Samuel crinkles his nose pretty soon, there'll be darned few of us gringos left to see."

"Why not watch from the other side?"

"Watch hell!" The sudden firing of the hard agate eyes showed that, despite his wounds and torture, his just grievance, sorrow, and indignation over his fellows' wrongs, that despite all the indomitable American spirit, the spirit that dared Indian massacres in the conquest of the plains, the spirit of the Alamo which added Texas and California to the Union, the spirit that preserved the Union itself from disintegration, the fine old spirit of '76, still burned under all. "Watch hell! As I told you, we came here under treaties that guaranteed protection. We have a right to stay, and by God! we're going to stay! To-morrow I'll get together my *peones* and go right to it again; only" – he observed a significant pause – "the next time the Colorados come there'll be a machine-gun trained on 'em from up here on the bench. All I ask is that the Lord sends me the same bunch again."

In this stout frame of mind and recovered sufficiently to move about, the Three left him next morning. Looking back from the mouth of the gorge, they got a last glimpse of him between the towering walls, a solitary figure on the edge of the bench. A wave of the hand and he passed out of their lives – in person, but not in other ways. His was one of the stray figures that stroll casually across the course of a life and, in passing, deflect its course into alien channels. Not for nothing had he suffered torture. That and

his talk last night had sown in Bull, at least, a certain leaven; the first fruits whereof showed in the sudden, vicious thump with which he brought his big fist down on the pommel as they rode along.

"I was thinking of what that fellow said las' night," he replied to Jake's questioning look. "To think, after that, we're out to rob our own countrymen for the benefit of a rotten little greaser."

"That's so." Sliver accepted the new point of view with his accustomed alacrity. "Damned if I seen it that way afore."

But Jake, always practical, sterilized this absurd sentimentality with a sudden injection of rustler's sense. "Aw, come off! You fellows may be out for Mexicans, but I'm for myself. We robbed our countrymen on the other side of the line, an' what's wrong with robbing them on this? I kain't see the diff. Business is business; we've gotter eat."

"That's right, too." Sliver caught the sense of it. "We've sure gotter eat."

But Bull's face grew blacker. The Colorado's boast, "We've raped your women, exterminated your brats," had aroused in him instincts older than the race; the instinct that set the gorilla-like caveman with bristling hair, grinning teeth, in the mouth of his cave; that sent the Saxon hind at the throat of the Norse rover; the instinct that has animated the entire line of men through eons of time to rise in defense of the tribal women.

He felt their soul agony, these tribeswomen of his, condemned to become a prey of *peon* bandits; and while the feeling swelled

within him, his black brow drew down over narrowed hot eyes. His huge frame quivered with indignation as righteous as ever animated the best of the race in the defense of a common cause. And yet —

Business was business, they had to eat! The feeling left untouched their evil habit of life; compelled no immediate change of plan.

About midway of the afternoon the Three sighted the poles of the Mexican Central Railway, a gray line of sticks running off in the distance. As they drew nearer, a certain dark blur on the embankment resolved into the rusted ironwork of a burned train. The line here ran almost due east to round a mountain spur, and as they followed along it the rack and ruin of three revolutions passed under their eyes.

Linking burned trains, that occurred every few miles, long lines of twisted rails writhed and squirmed in the ditch. The desiccated carcasses of dead horses, small twig crosses that marked the graves of their wild riders, ran continuously with the telegraph poles. Far beyond their view they ran, those twisted rails, wrecks, carcasses, and crosses, for ten thousand miles throughout the ramifications of the*Nacional* railroads, to the uttermost corners of Mexico; and typical of the vast destruction was the burned station they came on at sundown. Topping a black hill that rose abruptly from the plain behind it, a huge wooden cross stood blackly out against the smoldering reds of the evening sky, futile emblem of the simple faith that had relied upon it to

save the station.

While the Three sat their horses and gazed at the ruin, a whistle sounded, and out from the north steamed a troop-train, first of a dozen, whose glaring headlights spaced off the dusk which was now falling like a dusty brown blanket over the desert.

As the first rolled past Jake swore softly and Sliver exclaimed in surprise, for never before was seen such a sight. On it were packed some thousand *peon* soldiers, part of Valles's army on its way south to pursue the merry trade that had wrought the prevailing destruction. Unlike any other army, its guns, horses, munitions, and supplies were loaded inside, while the soldiers rode with their women on top of box-cars.

In their motley uniforms, regulation khaki or linen alternating with tight *charro* suits and *peon* cottons, they were exceedingly picturesque, and not a man of them but was belted or bandoliered with at least fifteen pounds of shining brass cartridges.

Under shelters of cottonwood boughs or serapes stretched on poles, their brown women crouched by clay cooking-pots, set over fires built on earthen hearths within a ring of stones; so while the *frijoles* and*chile* simmered and sent forth grateful odors, their lords gambled, smoked, or slept.

Nor did they lack music. On every car careless fellows sat with legs dangling precariously over the edge, while they chanted in a high nasal drone to the tinkling of a guitar. Ablaze with vivid color, scarlets, violets, blues, yellows of the women's dresses and serapes, wreathed in the faint blue smoke of cooking-fires, the

trains flashed out of and passed on into the brown dusk, while the guitar tinkled a subdued minor to their roar and rattle.

As the last rolled by a tall Texan rose alongside a machine-gun that was set up on the car roof and yelled to the Three: "Come on, fellows! We're going to belt hell out of the Federals at Torreon!"

It was the trumpet call of adventure; Adventure, the mistress of men, she who was largely responsible for their "rustlings," investing it, as she did, with the fireglows of romance. Subtract the long rides through hot dusks, sudden swoop on drowsy herds, the thunder of the stampede, the fight, pursuit, take away all this and reduce the business to its essence, plain thievery, and not one of the Three but would have turned from it in disgust.

If the train had stopped – perhaps their lives would have been deflected into those roaring, revolutionary channels that led on to death in the trenches outside Torreon. But it rolled on into the dusk, and as it vanished their eyes went to a light that burst like a golden flower in the window of a hut built of railroad ties. Five minutes thereafter they were in full enjoyment of that hospitality which, such as it is, may be had all over Mexico for "a cigarette and a smile."

While eating they extracted from their host, a simple *peon*, all the information necessary for the horse raid. To avoid "requisitions" payable in revolutionary currency wet from the nearest newspaper press, the *gringos hacendados* had driven their animals into the mountain pastures three-quarters of a day's ride east of the tracks. But omitting the details of the long ride next

day over plains where the scant grass ran in sunlit waves ahead of the wind to the horizon, the history of the raid may proceed from the moment the Three sighted the first horses in the hollow of a shallow valley late the following afternoon.

Even at the distance, almost a quarter-mile, they could see the difference in size and condition between them and the common Mexican scrubs. After long study through powerful binoculars that played about the same part in their operations as a "jimmy" in those of a burglar, Bull exclaimed his admiration, "*Some horses!*"

"But – " Jake indicated five Mexicans who were herding the animals at a fast trot down the valley, "we're out of luck."

"Oh, I don't know." Bull handed him the glasses. "See what you make of 'em."

"*Colorados!*" Jake spied at once the dreaded ensign, the red heart on the blue *charro* jacket. "It's the same outfit that tied up the miner, too. Remember how he described the leader? 'About twice as tall as a common Mexican'? That fellow's six-foot-two if he's an inch."

"The gall of him," Sliver snorted. "What do you think o' that? After*our* horses! Well, they 'ain't got 'em yet. We'll jest ride along behind the hill here an' – "

But Jake, who was still gazing through the glasses, dryly interrupted. "No, you bet he hain't. I've a hunch that the gent coming over the hill, there, is the man that owns 'em."

As yet the new-comer was unseen by the Colorados, and as,

without pause, he raced after them down the slope, Bull growled his admiration. “He’s sure got his nerve.”

“Mebbe he don’t know they’re Colorados.”

Perhaps Sliver was right. As the raiders’ backs were turned, the daring rider could not see the dreaded ensign. Or he may have thought that the marauders would fly at the sight of him; intended to afford them opportunity when he pulled his gun and fired.

“Here comes his army!” Jake croaked.

“Only a lad.”

Bull, who now held the glasses, made out both the youthful face, white with anxiety, and the lithe swing of the young body in rhythm with the galloping horse. The anxiety was justified, for as he also raced on down the slope the Colorados swung in their saddles, let go a volley from their short carbines, and dropped the first rider and horse in his tracks. At the same moment the lad’s hat, a soft slouch, blew off, loosing a cloud of fair hair on the breeze. If it had not, a shrill scream would still have proclaimed the rider’s sex.

“Hell!” Bull’s astonishment vented itself in a sudden oath. “It’s a woman! a white girl – dressed in man’s riding-togs!”

V: THE "HACIENDA OF THE TREES"

Strange is fate! From two points, perhaps the width of the world apart, two lives begin their flow, and though their mutual currents be deflected hither and thither by the winds of fortune, tides of chance, yet will they eventually meet, coalesce, and roll on together like two drops that join running in down a window-pane.

Now between John Carleton, owner of some hundred thousand broad acres, and the three rapscallions of Las Bocas the only possible relation would appear to be that which could be established by a well-oiled gun. Between them and Lee Carleton, his pretty daughter, any relation whatever would appear still more foreign. Yet – but let it suffice, for the present, that just about the time the Three had gained almost to the*hacienda* Carleton and his daughter had reined in their horses on the crest of a grassy knoll that overlooked the buildings.

A long pause, during which neither spoke, gives time for her portrait. Rather tall for a girl and slender without thinness, her fine, erect shoulders and the lines of her lithe body lost nothing by her costume; riding-breeches of military cord, yellow knee-boots, man's cambric shirt with a negligée collar turned down at the neck. Her features were small and delicately cut; the nose

piquant, slightly *retroussé*. Her eyes, large and brown and widely placed under a low broad brow, vividly contrasted with her fair skin and tawny hair. The face, as a whole, was wonderfully mobile and expressive, almost molten in its swift response to lively emotion. Just now, while she sat on gaze, it expressed that curious yearning, half pathetic, that is born of deep feeling.

"Oh, dad, isn't it beautiful!"

The sweep of her small hand took in the range rolling in long sunlit billows; but her eyes were on the *hacienda—Hacienda de los Arboles*, named in the sonorous Spanish after the huge cottonwoods that lent it pleasant shade.

Built in a great square, its massive walls, a yard thick and twice the height of a man, formed the back wall of the stables, adobe cottages, storehouses, and granaries on the inner side. It also lent one corner to the house which rose above it to a second story. Pierced for musketry, with a watch-tower rising above its iron-studded gates, it was, in the old days, a real fort. Besides the long row that followed the meanderings of a dry water-course across the landscape, a cluster of giant cottonwoods raised their glossy heads within the compound, shading with checkered leafage the watering wells and house. Set amidst growing fields of corn and wheat at the foot of a range that loomed in violet, crimson, or gold, according to the hour, it was as pleasant a place as ever a man looked upon and called his home.

Carleton smiled as she added, "I'd hate to have been brought up in El Paso or any other prosy American city."

He might have replied that there were American cities she might find less prosy than El Paso. But he was well content to have her think as she did.

His own gaze, overlooking the prospect, expressed the pride of accomplishment with which men survey their completed work; nor was his satisfaction less because the buildings themselves were not of his creation. Coming here, sixteen years ago, with a nest-egg of two or three thousand dollars, he had leased and let, bought and sold with Yankee shrewdness; added acre to acre, flock to flock, until, at last, he was in position to buy Los Arboles from a "land-poor" Spanish owner.

To a man without imagination the fact that its foundations had been laid almost four centuries ago by one of Cortés's *conquistadores* might have meant little. With Carleton it counted more than its broad acreage. From a trove of old papers left by the former owner he had gathered many a story of siege and battle, scandal and intrigue, consummated within its massive walls. Instead of fairy-tales, he had told these to Lee during her childhood, so that medieval atmosphere had penetrated her very being.

They seldom overlooked the *hacienda*, as now, without making some observations anent its past. As in some vivid pageant, they saw the old Dons, their *señoras*, *señoritas*, savage brown retainers, in the midst of their fighting, working, loving, praying. By self-adoption, as it were, Carleton, at least, had allied himself with them, had come to think of himself as belonging

to the family.

"Great old fellows they were!" Though he spoke musingly, now, without connection, she instantly caught his meaning, knew he was harking back. "Great old chaps! I was looking into one of our land titles the other day, and the records read in princely fashion. 'Between the rivers such and such, of a width that a man may ride in one day,' that was a favorite method of establishing boundaries. No paring of land like cheese rinds; everything done by wholesale; no haggling over a few square leagues."

"And here comes one of them." Lee pointed her quirt at a horseman who had just topped the opposite rise. "Doesn't he look it?"

Surely he did. The *charro* suit of soft tanned deerskin with its*bolero* jacket and tight pantaloons braided or laced with silver; the lithe figure under the suit; dark, handsome face, great Spanish eyes that burned in the dusk of a gold-laced *sombrero*; the fine horse and Mexican saddle heavily chased in solid silver; the gold-hilted *machete*in its saddle sheath under the rider's leg, even the rope *riata* coiled around the solid silver pommel, horse, rider, and trappings belonged in that pageant of the past.

"It is Ramon Icarza," Carleton nodded. "He hasn't been here for a long time." This he repeated in Spanish when the young man rode up.

"Attending to the herds and the horses, señor. As with you, the most of our *peones* have run away to the wars. We have left only a few *ancianos*too feeble and stiff to be of much service. Still, with

the aid of the women we manage. That last requisition for the" – his shrug was eloquent in its disdain – "*cause*. You paid it?"

"Had to – or be confiscated." With a grin comical in its mixture of amusement and anger, Carleton went on, "I raked up five thousand pesos of Valles's money and took it to him myself. And what do you think he said? 'I don't want that stuff. I can print off a million in a minute. You must pay me in gold.'"

Perhaps because humor has no place in the primitive psychology of his race, Ramon received the news with a black frown. "The devil take him! Yet you Americans are better treated than we, his countrymen. With us, he takes all. Those poor Chihuahua comerciantes!" His hands and eyebrows testified to Valles's scandalous treatment of the merchants. "First he demands a contribution to the *cause*. Those who refuse are foolish, for first he shoots them as traitors, then confiscates their goods. But the poor devils who contribute, see you, fare little better; for with the money he runs off a newspaper press he buys up the goods they have left. In the old days we used to curse the locusts, señor; but they, at least, left us our beasts and lands. Who would have thought, four years ago, that you and the señorita here and my venerable father would be reduced to become herders of cattle?"

"Oh, but it's lots of fun!" Lee's happy laugh bespoke sincerity. "I love it out here. They will never be able to get me back in the house. And that reminds me that we're almost due there for lunch."

“You’ll stay, of course, Ramon?” Pointing to a couple of mares with foals they had brought in from a distant part of the range, Carleton added, “There’s still another over in the next valley. If you will take these along, I’ll get her.”

Left to themselves, the young man and girl headed the mares toward the*hacienda*, riding sufficiently in rear to check the sudden, aimless boltings of the foals. The helplessness of the little creatures touched the girl’s maternal instinct, and though their stilts of legs, wabbly knees, long necks, and big heads were badly out of drawing, she exclaimed like a true mother over their beauty.

“Oh, aren’t they pretty!”

Ramon agreed – as he would had she called upon him to admire a Gila monster. Not that he had always followed her lead. Close neighbors – that is, as neighboring goes in range countries where distance is reckoned by the hundred miles – their childhood had compassed more than the usual number of squabbles. Until the dawn of masculine instinct had bound him slave to her budding beauty, they had upset the peace and dignity of many a ceremonial visit by fighting like cat and dog. Lee knew, of course, his mother and sister, and not until she had extracted the last iota of family gossip did she bestow a sisterly inspection on himself and clothes. Having passed favorably on the material, fit, and trimmings, she reached for his *sombrero*.

“You are quite the hacendado, now, Ramon, in that magnificent hat. Let me look at it. What a beauty!”

While she turned and twisted it, fingered the rich gold braid, examined it with head slightly askew like a pretty bird, the natural glow intensified in Ramon's big dark eyes; a wave of color flowed through the gold of his skin. His mouth – too red and womanish for Anglo-Saxon standards – drew into a tender smile.

According to the cañons of fiction, this was wrong. A man with a black or brown skin must reserve his admiration for women of his race. Yet, with singular disregard, for writer's law, Nature continued to weave for Ramon her potent spells. The sunshine snared in Lee's hair, rose blush of her skin, her womanly contours, the fine molding of her limbs, the sweetness of youth, all the witcheries of form and color with which Nature lures her creatures to their matings, affected the lad just as powerfully as if he had been born north of the Rio Grande.

On her part Lee ought to have resented his admiration. But here, again, Nature utterly ignored "best seller" conventions. Brought up among Mexicans, counting Ramon's sister her best friend, Lee felt no racial prejudice. Wherefore, like any other young girl possessed of normal health and spirits, she made the most of the situation. After sufficiently admiring the hat, she tried it on.

"How does it look?"

As she faced him, saucily smiling from under the enormous brim, there was no mistaking the "dare." Whether or no the custom obtains in Mexico, Ramon caught the implication.

"Pretty enough to – kiss!"

With the word he reached swiftly for her neck, but caught only empty air. Ducking with a touch of the spur, she shot from under his hand.

The next second he was after her. Along the shallow valley for a half-mile she led, then, whirling just as he rode alongside, she shot back along the ridge. At the end he overtook her, and, anticipating her whirl, caught her bridle rein. Leaning back, however, flat on her beast's back, laughing and panting, she was still out of his reach; and when he began to travel, hand over hand, along the bridle, she leaped down on the opposite side and dodged behind a lone *sahuaro*.

Sure of her now, he followed. But, dodging like a hare around the*sahuaro*, she came racing back for the horses; might possibly have gained them and made good her escape, if, glancing back over her shoulder, she had not seen Ramon stumble, stop, then clasp his right ankle.

"Oh, is it sprained?" she cried, running back. Then, as, reaching suddenly, he caught her, she burst out, "Cheat! oh, you miserable cheat!"

That all is fair in love and war, however, goes in all languages, and while she punctuated the struggle with customary objections whereby young maids enhance the value of a kiss, there was no anger in her protests. Wrestling her back and down, he got, at last, the laughing face upturned in the hollow of his arm; had almost reached her lips, when, with force that sent Lee to the ground, he was seized and thrown violently against the horse.

In the excitement of the chase they had completely forgotten Carleton, who had viewed its beginnings from the opposite ridge. By self-adoption he had almost, as before said, identified himself with the Spanish strain that had flowed for centuries through the *patios* and compound of Los Arboles. He had even come to think in Spanish; in custom and manner was almost Mexican. But in moments of anger habit gives place to instinct. The instinct that first formed and later preserved the tribe, pride of race, overpowered friendship. In one second the young Mexican, whom he had regarded for years almost as a son, was transmuted into the despised "greaser" of the border.

"You – you – " Choking with anger, eyes bits of blue flame, he strode at Ramon, fist bunched to strike.

But the blow did not fall, for, scrambling up again, Lee seized his arm from behind. "Oh, dad! dad!" Despite his struggles, she clung like a cat, defeating his efforts to shake her off. "Oh, dad! It was only a bit of fun! all my fault! I put on his hat! Please don't!"

If the young fellow had flinched, perhaps Carleton would have struck. But, head erect, he quietly waited, and presently Carleton ceased struggling.

"All right! I'll let him go – this time. But, remember" – bringing his clenched fist in a heat of passion into the palm of the other hand, he glared at the young man – "remember! when this girl is kissed – it will be by a man of her own breed. Get off my land!" After helping Lee to mount, he vaulted into his own saddle and rode away, driving the mares and foals before them.

In accordance with before-mentioned precedents, Ramon ought to have folded his arms and hissed a threat through gritted teeth. Instead, he stood very quietly, his face less angry than sad, watching them go. His little nod, in its firmness, would have become any young American; went very well with his thought.

"We shall see."

Mounting, he rode away to the northward, and not till he had covered many miles did he rein in his beast, so suddenly that it fell back on its haunches. His dark face expressed vexation mixed with alarm. "Maldito! I forgot to warn them that Colorados had been seen east of the railroad. I must go back."

On their part, Lee and her father rode on toward the *hacienda*. Though he glanced at her from time to time, it was always furtively, for with a man's dislike of scenes he made no reference to that which had just passed. Nevertheless, it filled his mind. Man-like, he had watched her develop into womanhood with scarcely a thought for her future. If he had given the subject any consideration he would probably have concluded that, sooner or later, she would choose a suitable mate from the hundreds of American miners, railroad men, ranchers, and engineers that had swarmed in the state of Chihuahua before the revolution.

But with the clear vision of after sight he now saw that he had unconsciously depended on the race pride which had just manifested itself in himself to prevent her from contracting a mésalliance. Now, with consternation, he faced the truth that racial pride is masculine; contrary to both the feminine instinct

and nature's scheme of things.

"I was a fool!" he berated himself. "A damned fool! She will have to go north – live in the States for a while."

These and similar thoughts were whirling through his mind when they came on a band of his horses at pasture under charge of an *anciano*, a withered old *peon*, whose age and infirmities had estopped him from joining the exodus to the wars. After cautioning the old fellow not to allow the animals to stray too far, Carleton plunged again into deep meditation.

Had he not been thus preoccupied he would probably have long ago discovered the five horsemen who were following at a distance, using the natural cover afforded by the rolling land; for he always rode with a powerful binocular in his holster, and often swept with it the prospect. Several times the glass would have shown him a row of heads behind the next ridge in rear. As it was, he had ridden to the crest of the rise from which they had looked down on the *hacienda* before habit asserted itself. He had no sooner leveled the glasses than an exclamation burst from his lips. "My God!"

"What is it, dad?" Lee swung in her saddle, looking back at him.

"Raiders! They are attacking Francisco! He has nothing but his staff! He's fighting them like an old lion! My God, they're chopping him with their machetes." It came out of him in staccato phrases. "Race in and send out Juan, Lerdo, and Prudencia with rifles! Stay there! Don't dare to follow!"

Digging in his spurs, he galloped away. For a moment the girl hesitated. Her eyes went to the *hacienda*, still half a mile away, then back to her father racing madly down the slope. There was no time to go for help! Loosening the pistol in her holster, she drove in her spurs and galloped after.

From Carleton's first appearance till the girl screamed all had passed so quickly that the Three could only sit and gape. From their original intent to rob Carleton it was a far cry to the reconstructed impulse to succor and save him, and it speaks well for them that they accomplished the revolution as soon as they did.

The scream had not passed unnoticed by the Colorados. The leader, who had turned to ride on, swung his beast, looked, then, as the girl dropped from the saddle to her knees beside the wounded man, drove in his spurs and galloped toward her. Heedless of her own danger, Lee was trying to stanch with her handkerchief the bloodflow from Carleton's chest, so lost in her agonized grief that she did not look up till the Colorado leaped down and seized her.

In this world there are savages who would have respected, for the time at least, her white grief. But this was the man who had tortured the miner and his *peones*; driven the latter naked through spiky cactus after he had cut the soles off their feet. She sprang up when he seized her, and as she fought bitterly, beating away his black, evil face with her little fists, his strident laughter mingled with her wild sobbing and carried to Bull behind the ridge.

For three days this man's boast had rung in his brain: "We've killed your men, outraged your women!" But though anger blazed within him, his tone was icy cold. "Look after the others. I'll 'tend to him!"

He had already pulled his rifle from the sling under his leg. Raising it now, he lined the sights, the same sights that had directed a ball through the brain of Livingstone's horse. While Lee writhed and twisted in the Colorado's arms, he dared not shoot. He waited until, at the double crack of his companions' rifles, two of the other Colorados pitched headlong from their saddles. Then, as their leader paused to look and, with a swift wrench, Lee tore loose and let daylight between them, the rifle spoke, sent its bullet whistling through his brain.

"Keep after them!" Bull called back as he rode on over the ridge.

But already Jake and Sliver's rifles were barking like hungry dogs. Trained to a hair in guerrilla warfare, the remaining Colorados had spurred their beasts behind the horse herd. At the first shot the band had stampeded, and now, urged on by the yells of the fugitives, who rode crouched on their horses' necks, the scared animals coursed swiftly down the valley.

"The gall of them! *Our* horses!" Repeating his former observation, Sliver would have ridden after.

But Jake caught his bridle. His bleak eyes were scintillating like sunlit icicles. His lean, avid face quivered with subdued ferocity. "Don't be a damn fool! They're only using 'em for cover!

We'll shoot along this side of the ridge an' catch 'em at the end of the valley!"

Meanwhile Bull rode on down the slope. After a surprised stare that showed her rescuers to be Americans, Lee had knelt again beside her father. As before said, Bull was no beauty. His black beard, bushy brows, hot red eyes, drink-blotched face, were of themselves sufficient to frighten a woman. Yet when she looked up sympathy illumined his countenance till it shone in her distressed sight as a clear lamp radiating human feeling. Without fear or doubt she turned to him for help.

"It's my father! I'm afraid – Can't you do something?"

So far Carleton had lain with his eyes closed. Now he opened them and spoke in detached whispers as Bull knelt by his side. "You're – American. I told her not to follow. Don't bother – with me. I'm shot – through lungs and stomach – bleeding inside. Get Lee – back to the house."

"Plenty of time," Bull soothed him. As a crackle of rifle-fire turned loose in the distance, followed by sudden silence, he added, "That 'ull be the last o' the Colorados. I'll fix you a bit, an' when my fellows come back we'll jest pack you home."

With a plainsman's skill in crude surgery, he tore up Carleton's shirt to make a pad and bandage which he twisted with a stick till the blood-flow stopped. This was no more accomplished before Jake and Sliver rode up, driving the horses ahead.

"They won't cut no more soles offen people's feet," Jake answered Bull's questioning look.

“Fine and dandy.” Bull nodded. “You, Jake, rope a fresh horse outer the band an’ ride like hell to the railroad an’ wire El Paso for a doctor.”

“No!” Lee eagerly suggested. “Wire the American Club at Chihuahua. These dreadful days all gringos help one another.”

Freshly horsed, five minutes thereafter, Jake galloped away – but not before, cold, crafty, laconic, dissolute gambler as he was, he had left a comforting word in the girl’s ear. “Don’t you be skeered, Miss. I’ll bring out a doctor, if I have to ride inter El Paso an’ raid a hospital.”

As he went out of sight over the next roll Sliver, with the girl’s aid, lifted the wounded man up to Bull in the saddle. So for the second time within three days did the giant rustler bear like a child in his arms a *gringo* victim of the Mexican revolution. To the leaven that had been working within him was now added the most powerful influence that can be brought to bear on a man – a woman’s heartbroken sobbing.

VI: BULL TURNS NURSE

Passing over into the next valley, they came on the body of old Francisco, hacked almost to bits. So far Lee had kept a strong grip on herself. But now she burst out crying.

"The poor fellow! He was faithful as a dog. We saw them cut him down, and that caused dad to lose his head. Otherwise he would never have tried to pursue them alone."

"He was old – an' died a man's death," Bull offered her rough comfort. "You couldn't wish him a better ending."

It was man's reasoning, therefore contrary to her woman's feelings, yet it helped to control her grief. She acquiesced at once when Bull suggested that she ride ahead and prepare a room.

By her departure Sliver was afforded an opportunity to get something off his mind. After a glance at Carleton, who had relapsed again into unconsciousness, he nodded at the horses. "Don't you allow I'd better leave 'em here? After we get through with him we kin come back an' – " He stopped, shuffled uneasily, under Bull's stare.

"You're dead right! Don't trouble to say it. I'd steal the horses offen a hearse."

Bull's glance dropped again to the unconscious man. Then, very slowly, he voiced his opinion, formed on frontier code: "Wait till he's well enough to fight for his own. Till then – we leave him alone."

Stepping at a lively gait, they passed in half an hour under the *patio*gateway. Within, arched *portales* ran around three sides, supporting the gallery of an upper story. From the red-tiled roof above a wonderful creeper poured a cataract of green lace, so dense, prolific, that only vigorous pruning kept it from burying the *portales* beneath. In the center rose a great *arbol de fuego*, "tree of fire," contrasting its flaming blossoms with the rich greens of palms and bananas.

They were met at the entrance by a flock of frightened brown women, house servants, and *peonas*; for of the scores of men who had worked for Carleton before the wars there were left only three withered*ancianos* to bear his body up the wide stone stairway to a room that caught the fresh breeze from the mountains.

Here Bull redressed the wounds. His skill, however, was only of the surface. As it would require at least four days to bring a doctor even from Chihuahua, he felt that unless Jake materialized one out of the dry desert air Carleton would surely die. Nevertheless, he stoutly denied the possibility to Lee during the two days that he shared her watch.

Sliver, on his part, also did his best to cheer and comfort, relating marvelous tales of accidents and illnesses that, by contrast, made shooting through the lungs and stomach look smaller than a toothache.

"You she'd have seen Rusty Mikel, Miss, the time his Bill-hoss turned a flip-flop onto him. Druv' the pommel clean through his

chest, it did. Yet he was up an' around, lively as a bedbug by candle-light, in less 'n five weeks."

Surely without them the girl would not only have broken down, but her father could never have survived to see the doctor, whose arrival was announced by a rapid beat of hoofs the following evening. For Jake had achieved the impossible, grabbed him, if not from midair, at least from a revolutionary-hospital train that had stopped at the burned station to bury its dead.

The doctor was American. But even as he dismounted at the gate Bull picked him for a "colonist." Just how, he himself could not have said. His premature grizzle, unhealthy pallor, might have been due to overwork. But a certain brooding quiet, seen only in those who have been cut off for long periods from communication with their fellows, impressed even Sliver. He remarked on it while they sat with Jake under the *portales* while he ate.

"Say! but he's whitish. Looks like he'd done time."

"He has," Jake nodded. "I had it from a Yankee machine-gunner in Valles's army that had got himself shot through both arms an' was being taken back to the base hospital with about a hun'red others. When I landed at the burned station he was a-setting with his legs dangling out of a box-car door, watching 'em bury his *compañeros* that had died on the way.

"'Gotter do it quick,' he says. 'They don't keep worth a darn in this clime.'

"He'd met Carleton once in Chihuahua, an' 'twas him that sent

the doctor an' tol' me about him while he was packing his grip. Seems that he'd belonged to a gang that worked insurance frauds on American companies. They'd insure some *peon* that was about ready to croak, paying the premiums themselves an' c'llecting the insurance after he cashed in. If he lingered 'twas said that they hurried him. That was never quite proved, most of 'em being too far gone to testify when they was resurrected. But the doc had furnished the death certificate, an' as the Mexicans ain't so particular about technicalities as our courts, he was sentenced to be shot along with his pals. If he'd been Mexican they'd have done it, too. But Diaz, who liked a bad gringo better than a good greaser, commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. He'd actually served twelve years – think of it, hombres! twelve years in a Mexican jail before the revolutionists let him out to serve on their hospital-trains."

"Twelve years!" Sliver echoed it. "An' just for croaking a few Mex? He orter ha' practised in New Mexico. They'd have give him a medal up there."

After Jake had eaten, the Three sat and smoked till the doctor came down. While eating he made his report. "If I could do any good I'd stay. But he will surely die to-night. It's going to be mighty hard on that poor girl. Like most of us" – his glance took in all Three – "Carleton didn't come down here for his health. It's bad form in Mexico to inquire about a man's past. Nevertheless, it's pretty well known that he killed the seducer of his wife and came here with the child when she was four years old. She's never

been away since, and has no kin that she knows of. To run a hacienda, these days, is too big a job for a girl."

His deep concern showed an underlying goodness. Genuine sadness weighted his words when he gave his last orders from the saddle. "I've left an opiate in case he suffers. He may regain consciousness, but don't be deceived. It will be the last flare before the dark."

It happened at midnight. An hour before, Bull had put Lee out of the room with gentle force to take needed rest. He had then moved his chair to the door, which opened out on the *corredor*, to secure the free air his rustler's lungs demanded. Across the compound he could see the moon's pale lantern hanging in the branches of a yucca that upraised its maimed and twisted shape on a distant knoll. Northward the mountains loomed, dim and mysterious, in tender light that reduced the vivid chromes and blues of lime-washed adobes in the compound to pale violet and clear gold.

Gringo as he was, his people had lived under Carleton's hand fuller, freer lives than their forebears had ever known under the Mexican overlords, and, day or night, the *patio* had never lacked a dozen brown*peonas* on their knees at their prayers to the saints. Under the*arbol de fuego* in the center of the *patio* below three old crones had erected a small altar, and its guttering candles now threw splashes of gold up through the crimson dusk of the tree. Adding the human note which, by contrast, accentuated the infinite mystery of that still night, their mutterings rose up to

Bull; bits of gossip sandwiched between prayers.

"Three crows perched here at sundown, Luisa. Thou knowest what that means?"

"Si; they were devils come for a soul."

"'Tis a pity that all gringos are doomed to the flame. The señor was a good master to us that had felt the iron fist of the Spaniard."

"The señorita? She that is so sweet and good. Thinkest thou, Luisa, that she also will be cast into hell?"

"Not if my prayers can save, Pancha. Three great candles, at twenty centavos the candle, have I burned on the altar of Guadalupe for her soul's sake. There is yet time for her. But the poor señor – " her pause doomed him. Nevertheless, with greater vigor they returned to their prayers for his saving.

The dim beauty of the night with its spread of moonlit plain, loom of distant mountains, querulous supplication rising under cold stars, combined to produce that awful sense of infinity that shrouds the riddle of life. If Bull was incapable of philosophizing upon it, to translate the feeling in thought, he still came under its sway. While it weighed heavily upon him, there came a gasp and feverish mutter from the bed.

In a second he was there. As he removed the shade from the candle he saw Carleton's face lit by the last flare. Recognition and intelligence both were there.

"Where is – Lee? Sleeping? Don't wake her. Listen! She – must not – stay here. Tell William Benson – he's rough and a bully – but honest and good. Tell him to get a permit – from

the revolutionists – to drive my cattle and horses – across to the States. They will bring enough – to keep Lee for many – a year. Be sure – ”

The halting voice suddenly failed. Even while Bull was reaching for a stimulant the soul of the man passed out into the mystery beyond the moonlit plains.

For a while Bull stood looking down upon him. Then, very slowly, he made toward the door that led to the girl’s room. But as her tired face rose before him he stopped and shook his head. “Let her finish her sleep.” Tiptoeing, instead, out to the gallery rail, he leaned down and softly called the old women.

VII: THE RUSTLERS ARE ADOPTED

"Well, I reckon this about lets us out."

The Three sat under the *portales*, heavily smoking. Bull puffed meditatively at a strong old pipe. Between lungfuls Sliver toyed absently with a cigarette. The necessities of dealing faro-bank had trained Jake in the labial manipulations of his fat native cigar. As all necessary readjustment could be made with the tongue or lips, his hands were thrust deep in his pockets, a proof of profound mental concentration. It was he who had spoken, and the "this" alluded to Carleton's funeral, which had taken place the preceding day.

It had been a quiet affair. William Benson, the nearest white neighbor, happened to be in El Paso. Of a round dozen Mexicans of the better class, eleven were wearily waiting on the other side of the border till still another revolution should restore their territorial rights. The Icarzas, Ramon and his father, a bewhiskered *hacendado*, attended, with Isabel, the dusky beauty of the house. The Lovells, a small American rancher and his two pretty daughters, represented the hundreds of*gringos*, miners, ranchers, engineers, smelter men, who would have come in normal times. So these, with Lee, Carleton's *peones*, and the Three, had followed the rude ox-cart that bore him to the

graveyard of a little adobe church in the hills. Their duty in the premises being thus consummated, the Three had resolved themselves into a committee on ways and means.

"Yes, I s'pose we'll have to move on." If not actually dismal, Sliver's indorsement both expressed regret and invited contradiction.

Bull did not speak. He was watching Lee and the Lovell girls, who had just then stepped out of her room across the *patio*. Phyllis, the younger, was to stay for a week, while Phœbe, the elder, returned home with her father, who had just brought the horses to the gateway. As Lee walked with her guests the length of the *patio* she took with her the sympathetic glances of the Three.

Nature mercifully provides her own anesthesia, stunning the victims of her catastrophes till the dangerous period of shock be passed. Later, the sight of Carleton's riding-whip, spurs, or gloves, carelessly thrown in a corner, would bring a violent recurrence of grief, set her agonizing once more before the great blank wall of death. But just now complete emotional exhaustion left her quiet and calm. Neither had she made any attempt to bury her youth under the frowsy trappings of grief. Even the black velvet riband she wore at her throat was purely accidental, a natural trimming of her dress.

Indeed, the other girls showed more outward sorrow. Though American born, they were almost Spanish in their coloring, and their dusky eyes, dark hair, rich cream skins provided a vivid

foil for Lee's fairness. If their eyes were swollen and nose tips chafed, the fact merely accentuated their feminine charm. To the Three, deprived for years of association with any but the lowest Mexican women, they swam in sweetness and light. The graceful turn of a rounded neck, lift of a smooth chin, flexure of a lithe waist aroused powerful memories. Like a cleansing stream, the sweetness of their first young, cool loves swept through their beings, purging them, for the moment, of shame and dross and passion.

"Adios, you fellows!" Lovell's friendly voice came floating back from the gate. "Come and see us at San Miguel."

It was the climax; the climax of a week during which, in place of suspicion and distrust bred of the knowledge that every man's hand was against them and theirs against every man, they had met only faith and trust and friendship. The invitation instigated Sliver's muttered exclamation: "Lordy! I'd like to! but – "

" – it's no place for us." Bull nodded toward Lee. "It 'u'd be easier if she was provided for. Think of her, alone here, an' a new revolution breaking every other day!"

"Pretty fierce," Jake coincided. "But if 'twas left to that young Mex at the funeral yesterday – Ramòn Icarza, wasn't that what they called him? If 'twas left to him she'd soon be – "

" – damned an' done for!" Sliver exploded. Hard eyes flashing, he added: "Come to think of it, the son of a gun did behave sorter soft. No Mex that was ever pupped is fit to even herd sheep for the little lady-girl. Hell! if I thought she'd look twice his way, I'd

croak him afore we left."

"It wouldn't be unnatural, she being raised here an' not knowing much else." Bull's gloom was here pierced by a flash of thought. "I'll bet you that's what her father dreaded when he said for Benson to try an' get her up to the States. I wish the man was here so's I could tell him afore we left."

"Tol' her yet?" Sliver asked.

Bull nodded. "Las' night. Said she hadn't given any thought, yet, to the future."

The two girls were now coming back from the gate. At first they made to go down the opposite *portales*. Then Lee paused, gently disengaging her arm from the other girl's waist, and came walking on alone.

They rose and though she was, as before said, tall for a girl and well formed, she appeared childlike by comparison with their crude bulk. They felt it, and it drove in more keenly the sense of her loneliness.

"Oh, shore!" with his customary impulsiveness, Sliver cut off her attempts to thank them for their kindness. "We hain't done nothing worth while."

"Sliver's right." Jake's bleak eyes had grown almost soft. "You don't owe us anything. All that's bothering us is – "

" – that we kain't jest see how you're going to manage," Bull finished. "Your father's idea – " He stopped.

Her smooth white brow had drawn up into a thoughtful little frown. "It isn't practicable. Valles would never permit us to drive

horses across the border. We have asked him once before. And if he would – " Her sweeping hand took in the sunlit *patio*, the brown *criadas*soft-footing it along the *corredor*; the compound ablaze with barbaric color; the *peonas* gossiping in the shade at the well; all of that medieval life that wraps Mexico in the sunshine of the past. "And if he would – I could never be happy in the United States. I was brought up to this. I'm part of it, and it of me," she concluded, with a firm little nod. "I shall carry on my father's work."

The Three looked at one another. Bull's troubled look, Jake's dubious brows, Sliver's cough, all expressed their common doubt. "Can you do it, Miss, alone?"

"I sha'n't be altogether alone. Mr. Lovell and Mr. Benson will be here to advise, and I shall hire an American foreman. If you – " she paused, looking them over with sudden interest, then shook her head. "Of course, that's absurd! You have your own business. But perhaps you might know some one?"

The Three looked at one another again, the same thought in the mind of each. Well they knew how close they were to the end of their rope. As in a cinematograph they saw Don Manuel, insolent and threatening; the American border tightly closed; the *fusilado* against a 'dobe wall that would surely end their Mexican operations. Black as a thundercloud that dark prospect stood out against the sunlit peace of the past week. Yet, to do them justice, the girl's helpless situation affected them most. If they paused, it was with the natural hesitation of men surveying a new path.

Jake spoke first. “To tell the truth, Miss, we ain’t exactly what you’d call rushed with business.”

“Like all of us – upset by the revolutions.” She jumped to the natural conclusion, “Were you – mining?”

A picture of the lair on the bench of the abandoned mine flashed before all Three. Not without truth was Bull’s statement, “We ain’t worked it much, of late.”

“Peones all gone to the wars, I suppose?”

A sudden memory of Rosa’s desertion permitted Sliver to say, “The las’ we had left jest t’other day.”

Her pretty face brightened. “Then you mean to say that you are free for the present?”

That was exactly what they had!

She went on, slowly: “I’ll have to be frank. We own about a hundred and sixty or seventy thousand acres of land. But we haven’t been permitted to sell any stock for two years, so have no ready cash. I don’t know, even, whether I could pay a regular wage. But if you would take what I can scrape up and wait for the remainder till things quieten – ”

“Don’t you be bothering about that, Miss,” Bull broke in. “We’ll stay, an’ when it comes that you don’t need us any longer – ”

“ – we ain’t a-going to bust you with no claims for high wages,” Sliver concluded. “To tell you the truth, Miss, I’d be willing to work for my board jest to feel at loose on a range ag’in.”

His enthusiasm brought her smile, and though it was but a

wintry effort, it still added warmth to her words. “Then – now you are *my* men.”

The accent on the “my” unconsciously expressed the deepest lack of her bereavement, the sudden check to the natural feminine instinct to own and care for a man. The isolation of herself and her father amid an alien brown people had undoubtedly tended to develop it in her to the fullest. Though Carleton had grumbled, man-like, at her pretty tyrannies in manners and modes, shirts and socks, he had, surreptitiously, hugely enjoyed it. Now, the stronger for her sorrow, that dominant trait broke loose on the devoted heads of the Three.

“*My* men!” It sealed their adoption.

“Phyllis, come here!” She was eying them with that microscopic feminine scrutiny that detects the minutest personal defect. Her gesture of despair when the other girl came up was so lovingly insulting it could not have been outdone by the best of mothers. “They are going to work for me, so we’ll have to care for them. Do you suppose we can *ever* get them to rights?”

Phyllis wasn’t quite sure, but as her interest while real was more casual, she held out hope. “They’ll look better, dear, after they’re washed and mended.”

That was too mild for Lee. Nothing but revolution, drastic and complete, would satiate that hungry instinct. “No, they’ll have to have new things. The store is run down badly, but it will supply their present needs.”

With something of the air of convicts arraigned before a stern

judge the Three listened to certain other frank comments upon their appearance. As laid down, their reconstruction included shaves for Sliver and Jake, a beard-trim for Bull, hair-cuts for all three. To this they meekly agreed; took their new things with sheepish thanks when they were brought from the store; endured all with resignation, if not cheerfulness, up to the moment that she tried to quarter them in the house. Then the last shreds of masculine independence asserted themselves. They made a stand.

"If it's all the same, Miss," Jake pleaded, "we'd sooner bunk down in one of those empty adobes."

Sliver supported the rebellion. "You see, Miss, we're that rough an' not used to ladies' society – "

"An' we smoke something dreadful," Bull added his bit. "You really couldn't stan' – "

"Oh, I wouldn't mind it a bit. I love tobacco smoke. It's half of Mexico."

Deprived of their last weapon, the Three could only stand and fidget till Phyllis came to the rescue. Her interest, as aforesaid, being founded merely on the general principles of loyalty to her sex, she could afford to be generous.

"They'll want to play cards and generally carry on," she whispered. "Men always do. Let them sleep in the adobe and take their meals with you at the house."

A compromise thus effected, Lee marched the Three to their new abode. But this was not the end. Just as they were about to

settle therein she turned loose upon them a veritable hornets' nest of brown *criadas*. All afternoon they found themselves encircled, as it were, by clouds of flying skirts, and when the flutter subsided the adobe stood scrubbed and dusted and furnished with *catres*, bed-clothing, wash-stands, chairs, and a table for the "cards and general carrying on." When the invasion, brown and white, finally withdrew, and the suggested changes in apparel and personal appearance were duly consummated, they were left gazing with something of awe and a great deal of wonder at their reconstructed selves.

"You look almost human," Jake gave his opinion of Bull. "A touch with a powder-puff an' I allow you might mash one o' them criadas."

Catching himself up short, Sliver walked to the door to expectorate. "It's dreadfully clean in here," he remarked, coming back. "But I reckon we'll sorter get used to it. Now if we on'y had a bottle o' aguardiente to hold a bit of a house-warming, it 'u'd – "

Bull looked at him with sudden sternness. "Look here! We've got the care of a young girl on our han's. There's going to be no boozing – at least on the premises. When you feel you kain't stan' it any longer, light out somewheres an' get it over."

"That's right," Jake lent support to the moralities. "Though it sorter looks to me like she'd adopted us."

As a matter of fact, the girls' talk, walking back to the house, quite favored the latter theory. While overseeing the housecleaning Lee had obtained temporary surcease from her

grief. She laughed softly at Phyllis's remark, "Aren't they big and crude and funny?"

"Helpless and clumsy as children. But just wait till I've had them a month."

"Won't it be a little difficult? They're grown up; can't be treated like babies."

"Not a bit." Lee laughed softly again. "If one of them misbehaves, I shall quietly draw the attention of another to it. Mr. Jake will correct Mr. Bull; and Mr. Sliver, Mr. Jake. If they were girls they'd see through it at once. Being men, they'll feel quite perked up."

Why they should have thought it so funny is hard to say. Perhaps their merriment proceeded from that obscure source whence issues the disappointment of a woman after she has molded masculine clay in her own likeness, and wishes it back in all of its crudity again. In any case, as they looked forward to that most delightful of feminine visions, a crude man-animal, tamed and parlor broke, they laughed again.

VIII: “THE LEOPARD’S SPOTS”

It was not done with malice aforethought, for Sliver had not quite reached the point where “he couldn’t stan’ it any longer.” It just happened. Heavy drinkers may be divided into three classes – to wit, the sporadic, who break out in occasional wild debauches; the “steadies,” who sop, sop, sop all the time; and a third class which combines the traits of the other two. Of the Three, Bull represented the first, Jake the second, Sliver the last and worst.

If Sliver had not ridden his horse along the crest of a certain hog’s back on the chance that the cattle he was hunting might be in the ravine below, it might never have come to pass. If Napoleon Bonaparte, for matter of that, hadn’t developed indigestion at Waterloo; if Christopher Columbus had followed the Church instead of the sea; if Julius Cæsar had been born a girl; if all the cats on all the famous fences of history had happened to jump the other way – this world would be quite different. So let it suffice that Sliver rode along the hog’s back.

At its end the ridge ran out on a wide bench from which Sliver looked over the foot-hills, rolling tumultuously under a black blanket of chaparral out to the tawny valleys of the *hacienda* pastures. Below, he could see a path that ran with a silver stream at the bottom of the ravine. Its deep rut, no wider than the swing of a mule, marked it for one of those ancient highways

whose place had been usurped by the Diaz railways. In its heyday the cañon had rung with the tinklings of the mule-trains that transported *aguardiente*, maize, tobacco, serapes, and cloths between Mexico City and Santa Fé. But of that great traffic there now remained barely enough to support the little *fonda* that lay with its mule *patio* almost at Sliver's feet.

Though no one was in sight, he set down certain moving black dots as chickens, goats, or pigs. Thus assured of tenancy, and thinking that he might pick up some news of his strays, he rode on down a trail that zigzagged through the chaparral.

Looking down from above, Sliver had noted the resemblance of the place to the lair back on the miner's bench in Sonora. The *ramada* of grass and cornstalks might have been the same. Only that she was younger and prettier, the Mexican girl who knelt before a *metate* grinding*tortilla* paste could have passed for Rosa herself. Though Mexican Indian, some vagrant Spanish strain had pushed up her brow, reduced her cheek-bones, shortened her waist, and lengthened her limbs. Masses of black hair framed her oval face. Her eyes were velvet pools; the nose small and well shaped. Her bare arms tapered from fine shoulders to small wrists, and if she followed Juno rather than Psyche in her luxurious molding she was pliant as a willow, carried her shapely poundage with an effect of slimness.

If Sliver noted these desirable personal assets, his interest therein disappeared after he had spied the sign, "Fonda," over the door. True, the month which had now elapsed since they entered

Lee's service had not, however, been entirely "dry." At the close of each day's work the Three took their *copa* with the *ancianos* at the *hacienda* store in the Mexican fashion. But the application of liquor in such medicinal doses to a thirst like Sliver's was equivalent to the squirting of gasolene upon a fire. Now, as he gazed at the sign, spirituous desires flamed within him. It was with difficulty that his dry lips formed his question to the girl.

Was there a *copita* of *aguardiente* to be had?

Nodding, she rose, and as she let down a small wooden door in the wall Sliver's glance licked the rows of bottles within.

Tequila, anisette, *aguardiente*, *mescal*, every variety of liquid fire with which the Mexican *peon* burns out his stomach, stood there in deadly array. Beginning at one end, Sliver worked his way, during the next two hours, along the row, and had just started back again when, with some surprise, he noted a most curious phenomenon – to wit, the gray hair and deep wrinkles the girl had suddenly acquired. Quite unaware that she had resigned his thirst to her father, and was even then vigorously rubbing *tortilla* paste behind his back, he solemnly studied this startling metamorphosis. Drunk as he was, his cowman's instinct had kept him warned of the sun's declension. Sure, now, that he had had enough, he paid his score, gravely addressing his host, meanwhile, concerning his changed appearance.

"You she'dn't do it. It's – hard on the nerves. Keep it up an' – you'll drive your custom away."

Having climbed into the saddle, he remained there because of

that merciful provision of nature by which a man may ride long after he has lost the power to walk. Realizing his condition, he left the business of going home to his horse. While it carried him down the cañon and out across the plains he concentrated his remaining energies on "The Cowboy's Lament," howling its one hundred and one verses at the top of his voice, sending warning of his coming a full mile ahead.

In the mean time Bull with Lee, Jake "on his lonely," had pursued the search for the strays in other directions. It chanced that luck rode with the former. Returning home at sundown, Jake saw them driving the cattle along a shallow valley.

During the month which had elapsed since her father's death Lee had taken the only real panacea for grief – hard work. In addition to the management of the house *criadas*, she exercised a feudal overlordship over the *hacienda peones*. Besides hiring and letting, leasing of lands on charges, she acted as judge in their squabbles, adviser in their small affairs, comforter in trouble. In addition, her womanhood brought extra duties. She had to godmother the babes, attend christenings, doctor the sick, lend her patronage to the *bailes* and *fiestas*.

Most of these duties she discharged in the mornings. Afternoons she donned her man's riding-togs and rode out with the Three, rounding up strays, new-born calves, and foals. At nights her fair head might be seen under a golden aureole lent by the lamp, while she mended or made for them and herself. If it lacked the stimulation and color of city life, it was, at least, a

healthy and honest existence. Already it had restored her shocked nerves, given back her roses. She had never been prettier than when, reining in, she looked back at Jake as he came up!

"We found them! *we* found them!" Her pride in the fact provoked Jake's smile. "They were up in the Cañon del Norte. Whatever in the world is that?"

It might have been anything from the last puff of a worn-out calliope to the yelp of a sick coyote, for at its best Sliver's voice rarely came within a quarter of a mile of a specified tune, and an hour's steady tearing into "The Cowboy's Lament" had not improved its tone. As the raucous strains came floating down the wind Lee burst into a bubbling little laugh.

"Mr. Sliver isn't hardly what you could call a singer. Is he – often taken like that?"

They could have answered quite easily, Sliver's vocal efforts being ever timed by his potations. Instead, they looked at each other in blank disgust. Nor was answer necessary, for just then Lee dug in her spurs and shot after a wild steer that had taken a sudden notion to go back to the Cañon del Norte.

"Piously drunk!" Jake swore loudly, as soon as she passed beyond earshot. "Wonder where he got it!"

"Search me," Bull shrugged. "The question is how to stop him. You know what to expect if he's loose an' drunk among all them *peonas*. You ride on an' head him off. Don't stan' any nonsense. Bat him over the can if nec'ssary."

The admonition was not required, for Jake was always

thorough. Neither was it his habit to waste time on argument or persuasion. Having roped Sliver, ten minutes thereafter, from behind a convenient bush, he gagged and cinched him in his saddle, hustled him in by the back gate of the compound, had him lashed to his *catre* in their adobe before Lee and Bull arrived.

So far, all was well. Their real troubles began when at supper Bull replied to Lee's inquiry concerning Sliver's absence that he "wasn't feeling well."

She jumped up at once. "Oh, the poor fellow! I must go and see what he can eat!"

A vivid mental picture of the "poor fellow," gagged and lashed to his*catre*, filled them with consternation. Bull inwardly cursed himself for not having reported Sliver absent. But while he floundered, beating his brains for a second excuse, the crafty Jake supplied it.

"I wouldn't – really, Miss."

She stopped, half-way along the *portales*. He had spoken so earnestly. "Why not? Is it – catching?"

Bull would have replied in the affirmative, regardless of further complications. Jake shook his head. "No, it's just chills an' fever, a sorter constitutional ague he's taken with at this time o' the year. But – well, Miss, it's this way, Sliver's that bashful, though you mightn't think it to look at him, he'd die of shame if a young lady was to see him in his bunk."

She hesitated, then came back. "But – he ought to be looked after."

"He has been." Jake clinched the victory. "A copa's the finest thing in the world for chills. He's had a couple an' was sleeping like a babe when we came in."

She gave in with a sigh. "Then we won't wake him. But you must take him a tray when you go out."

But if her dominant instinct was thus, for the time, frustrated, it broke out more violently the following morning. When Sliver would fain have carried his aching head and sick stomach out to some secluded portion of the range, to be wretched at his ease, Lee "shooed" him like a sick chicken into a corner of the *patio*, there to be coddled and doctored with slops and brews compounded by her brown maids, every mother's daughter of whom had her own infallible "*remedio*." His real contrition was made none the lighter by the veiled jestings of his companions at meals.

"Invalid looks a bit better," Jake would opine.

"A week's careful nursing orter bring him around," Bull would add. Then while prodding him with secret gibes, they ate with a zest that turned his poor, burned-out stomach.

That night, moreover, he furnished the text for a rude sermon after they got him alone in the adobe. "I s'pose neither of you saints would ha' stopped even to smell of it," he sarcastically inquired, after confessing how and where he obtained the liquor.

"'Tain't that," Bull admonished him. "I'm pretty near due for a bust myself. But when it hits, you bet I'll go somewheres so's the sight of my hoggishness ain't a-going to offend our girl. No,

’tain’t that you acquired a bun we’re kicking at, but that you toted it back here.”

“You bet y’u,” Jake added. “Next time you’re took that-a-way, have ’em hide your horse, then lie down with your nose in it an’ don’t budge till you’re through. Have you done, now, or is there anything out there you forgot to drink?”

“Through? Oh, Lordy! Lordy!” Sliver groaned. “My liver’s burned right out!”

“Bueno!” Jake nodded his satisfaction. “Then if you’ve finished I’m free to begin. My fingers has been itching to get into a game for a week. That’s where you fellows have me at a disadvantage. All you’ve gotter do is to find a bottle, but mine’s simply gotter have cards in it. I don’t get off short of El Paso. I reckon some of that important mining business of our’n calls for my presence there day after to-morrow.”

“All right, get it over,” Bull agreed, after a moment’s rumination. “Tell her at breakfast. She’ll fix you up with the fare.”

“‘Tell her at breakfast’?” Jake looked his scorn. “An’ have her running an’ fixing me out with socks an’ shirts an’ things like I was going off on honest business. Not on your life! When she looks at me, so amiable and trustful, like she felt I was straight grain through an’ through, I simply kain’t fix up my mouth for a good lie. No, you fellows can jest give me all you’ve got. With any kind of luck it’ll turn you big interest. You can tell her that I left in the night so’s to catch an early train.”

So real was his feeling, he did rise and leave before daylight.

But thereby his moment of shame was merely postponed.

When Jake arrived in El Paso – But the less said about his sojourn there the better. His operations, which included the fleecing of some cattlemen, would not make edifying reading. He may be picked up again at the moment he was, as aforesaid, overtaken by shame, when Lee spied him, a week later, coming through the *patio* gateway.

"Oh, you poor man!" she exclaimed at the sight of his haggard face. "They must have worked you all night."

"Which they did work me overtime," he confessed to Bull, in the adobe that evening. "Five days an' most of the nights I sat inter one game. Look at this!"

The roll he held up contained two thousand and some odd hundreds of American dollars. "When I seen how the luck was heading my way I pulled a side partner into the game, for I saw what a chance it was to fatten Miss Lee's hand. He was a —

"What are you crinkling your nose at?" he hotly demanded of Bull. "This ain't no tainted money. I took it from some sports that had been buying horses from Mexican raiders. Mebbe some of 'em came from this very ranch. Anyway, in default of finding the real owners, who has a better right to their money than the little girl?"

"'Tain't that." Bull shook his head. "I was on'y thinking that I'd liefer you tried to give it her than me. She don't look like she'd take easily to charity."

"*That so?*" Jake regarded him cynically. "Now kain't you jest

hear me a-saying, 'Please, Miss, will you please take this, you need it so bad?' But is there any reason why she should object to us investing a couple of thousand in horses?"

"No; but she will."

And Bull was right. When, next morning, Jake, speaking for the Three, made his proposition, Lee shook her head. "It's only a question of time before the revolutionists run off all the stock. Then where would be your two thousand dollars?"

"In the same box with yours – stowed safely away where we can't spend or lose it, till Uncle Sam makes Mexico pay our claims," Jake argued. "The risk we're willing to take, because we expect to buy cheap on that account."

At that she wavered; with a little more pressing, acceded. And thus by devious ways did the blind god of chance atone for many a former error, turning evil to good, if only for once.

IX: A PARTY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

"Lady-girl's a-going to have a birthday."

The remark issued from the blue tobacco reek that filled the bunk-house. So thick it was the lamp on the table sent forth a feeble golden glimmer that barely revealed the sketchy outlines of the Three stretched at ease on their *catres*. But the title "Lady-girl," Sliver's especial name for Lee, stamped the remark as coming from him.

"That so?" Bull and Jake spoke in chorus. "How'd you know?"

"She asked me to write a piece, t'other day, in her birthday-album, an' looking through it I kem on her day."

"She asked me, too," Jake admitted. "What did you write?"

"'Roses is red, violets is blue; sugar is sweet, an' so air you.'"

"A real nice piece, too," Jake commented upon this classic. "I like it better 'n mine." Nevertheless, with the secret pride of your true poet, he gave his own:

Under pressure, Bull also admitted a descent into poetry. "I ked on'y think of a verse that a girl once wrote in my sister's album when I was a kid. 'Tain't near as good as yourn.

> "My pen is dull, my ink is pale;
> My love for you will never fail."

"I think it's pretty fine," the others commended the effort.

After a thoughtful pause, consecrated by heavy smoking, Bull asked, "How old is she, Sliver?"

"Rising twenty, be the date."

"Seems to me we orter raise a little hell in honor of the 'casion – if it's on'y to keep her from feeling lonesome."

"Little bit close on the funeral," Jake tentatively suggested. "Jest about three months, ain't it?"

"Yes, for a regular party. My idea was just to tip off the Lovells an' have 'em drop in that day."

"We might shoot things up a bit, too," Sliver began, but Jake cut him off with utter scorn.

"This ain't no cowman's jamboree. Girls don't like any shooting except what they do with their own pretty mouths. A cake with candles 'u'd be my idee."

"'Cake'?" Sliver now returned the scorn. "Kain't you see these Mexican dames baking a real, sure-enough birthday cake made out of raisins an' curran's an' cit-tron peel, an' with spice fixin's to it? An enchilada stuffed with store prunes 'u'd be the best they ked do."

"Oh, I don't know." Bull poured the oil of quiet counsel on the troubled waters. "What about Mrs. Mills?"

He referred to the widow of an American rancher who, with the aid of her young daughter and a few *peones*, had kept their *rancho* going since her husband's death. "If one of us was to ride over to-morrow I'll bet you she'd fix up a cake, if 'twas only a

three-layer chocolate. As for candles, candles an' beer-factories are the main products of Mexico."

Thus was the ball set rolling, not only for the party, but also toward consequences unforeseen; and it received a second fillip when Bull delivered his invitation to the Lovells at San Miguel midway of the following afternoon. It chanced that Phoebe's *fiancé*, a young mining engineer, had arrived the preceding evening, bringing with him a friend, a smelter man from El Paso. With the enthusiasm of youth they proceeded to enlarge upon the plan after Bull rode on.

"It would be a shame to leave out Isabel Icarza," Phyllis warmly declared. "She and Lee have always been such good friends."

Accordingly, a *mozo* delivered an invitation at the *Hacienda del Sol*about the same time that Bull dismounted at the widow's *rancho*.

The widow, a woman of thirty-five or six, whose comeliness indicated former real beauty, fell at once for the plan. While Bull was eating supper she began on the cake. Having met her but once before, he developed a certain shyness. But if his communications with her bordered on the formal, he yielded himself captive without reserve to Betty, her small daughter.

Though nearly thirteen, with the promise of being as pretty in her flaxen whiteness as Lee herself, isolation had conserved, if anything, the girl's childishness. Sitting on a chair opposite Bull, she prattled happily while they both seeded raisins,

questioning him with an artless directness that sometimes proved embarrassing.

Had he a father, mother, sister? Where did they live? What was his business? Married? Why not? And when he returned the usual answer that no one would have him she brought him to sudden and utter confusion.

"Oh, I'm so glad! Mother would take you, I'm sure. I'd just love to have you for my father. Will you please marry her, then she will never be anxious or fearful again?"

Her mother's merry laugh helped to cool Bull's blushes. "Don't be specially insulted. She says that to every one." Then, brave little soul though she was, she lifted a corner of the curtain that veiled an ever-present fear. "It's true that I get sometimes terribly anxious. Mexicans are lovely people when they're kept in their place. But since Diaz was overthrown they're like a school of naughty children, let loose without morality, discipline, or guidance to protect them from themselves. Sometimes I think we ought to leave, but if we did the place would be sacked and burned before we reached the railroad. So I'd rather take the risk than be a pauper in the United States. But there, I'm ungrateful talking this way instead of thanking Providence we've got along so well."

"That's the way to look at it, ma'am," Bull encouraged her. While a wicked flash shot from under his black brows he added, "If any one bothers you jest send for us."

"Oo-oh, but you looked fierce then!" the child gave a delighted

shudder. “Do it again.” Though a humorous twinkle sterilized the rehearsal, she consoled herself with the reflection: “’Tisn’t the same. But I’ll bet you’re muy malo when you fight.”

“It’s a good thing if he is.” From the sink, where she was washing currants, her mother surveyed with approval Bull’s imposing bulk. “It was a great relief when we heard that you and your friends were staying with Lee.”

Later, when Bull’s shyness had somewhat abated, she spoke more intimately. From Ramon himself she had learned of his expulsion from Los Arboles. “Ramon is a nice boy, yet no one could blame Mr. Carleton,” she said. “Yet what is Lee to do? Before the revolution she could have taken her pick from scores of young Americans, but now they’re all gone.” Laughing, she finished with a remark which was destined, later, to produce unexpected results. “I guess we’ll have to import her a husband.”

Bull’s heavy rumble echoed her laugh. It broke out again when Betty cried out: “While you’re at it get one for me. I simply won’t marry a greaser.”

Because of the unusual proceedings she was allowed to sit up. Caught yawning while the cake was baking, she fled to Bull’s knee, from which strategic position she defeated her mother’s best efforts to coax her to bed. Whereafter she promptly celebrated her victory by falling asleep. Curled against him in trustful comfort, she slept with her fair head pillowed on his mighty chest till, the cake finished, he carried her to bed. A *catre* had been moved out for him under the *portales*. But after

silence and sleep descended on the house he sat for a long time on its edge, softly musing, the warmth of the child's body enwrapping his heart. Even Jake, whose sharp eyes had detected many an alien expression on that scarred visage of late, would have wondered at its tenderness.

Betty was still asleep when he mounted to leave next morning, but at the beat of hoofs she came running, bare feet and legs flying under her nightdress. Stooping, he swung her to the saddle before him. The pressure of her warm arms around his neck, soft lips on his cheek, put a thrill of earnestness into his farewell.

"Remember, ma'am, we'll come whenever you call."

A quarter-mile away he drew rein and looked back. Though smaller than Los Arboles, the *rancho* buildings grouped picturesquely in a pocket of the foot-hills. The rich purple and crimson blossoms of a bougainvillea vine that almost buried the house made a fine splash of color against the golden adobe walls and tawny pastures. Drenched in sunlight, roofed in by fleecy clouds sailing across the deep blue vault above, it seemed the abode of peace. But not so did Bull see it. It loomed through a dread mirage that squirmed with ugly fighting shapes.

Shaking his big head, he spoke aloud. "'Tain't safe for them here, 'tain't safe!"

So vivid was that dread feeling, presage of evil, the sweat broke on his brow. Into his mind shot a vivid picture of the miner hanging limply from the *sahuaro*, face turned up to the torrid sun. Around it, as in a whirling nightmare, revolved all of the

horrors, outrages, and murders of three awful years. Turning, he shook his big fist at the northern horizon in fierce rebuke of the political lethargy and executive indifference on the other side of the border that had not only made the long list of outrages possible, but almost set the seal of approval upon it. Anger choked him. With the growl of a furious dog he turned again and rode on.

It may be laid down as a general principle that a woman never forgets and a man seldom remembers anniversaries. These tendencies are due to the fact that a woman lives principally in the past and present, a man in the future; while she observes past occasions, he creates new ones. Whether she be looking forward with youthful joy, or looking back with increasing regret, a woman specializes upon her birthdays. But, accustomed to her father's bad memory, Lee had not expected any one to remember; was accordingly astonished and pleased when, coming to breakfast that morning, she found the table decorated with trailing vines and a bouquet of wild flowers at her plate that had been picked by Sliver.

"Why – " she gave a little gasp. Then her shining glance accused the Three, whose sheepish grins loudly proclaimed their guilt. "How *did*you know? What's this?"

While she was unwrapping the tissue-paper in which Mrs. Mills had wrapped the cake the Three looked on with eager expectance, and were treated to a second bath of sunshine. "A *real* cake! Where *did* you get it?"

In a country where cakes, if not actually hanging on every tree, may be either home-grown or plucked from the counter of any pastry cook, her joy might have seemed exaggerated. But in that alien desert, stripped of its substance to the bare hot bones by repeated revolutions, the conjunction of a sure-enough cake with a girl's birthday verged on the miraculous. Nor was Lee's pleasure lessened after she heard at what pains it had been produced.

It was, of course, merely the first of the day's surprises, some of which were purely accidental, as when William Benson rode in at noon. As a matter of fact, his visit pertained to a defensive alliance against raiders, but, being warned in time, he straightway credited his visit to the birthday. A bluff Englishman, almost as big as Bull, hot-tempered and overbearing in manner, he fell with great joviality into the spirit of the occasion; kissed and congratulated Lee with the license of old friendship. His big, hearty laugh was resounding in the *patio* when the second irruption of the Lovells and their *fiancés*– for Phyllis had conquered the smelter man in record time – occurred midway of the afternoon. And they were no more than settled under the *portales*before, like some rich, dusky bird, Isabel Icarza came floating under the arched gateway into Lee's arms.

"But you surely did not come alone?" Though that was exactly what she might have done herself, Lee looked at her in horror.

"Ah no, querida! Ramon escorted me, and will return tomorrow!"

"You don't mean to say that he has – " Lee stopped, for she

had caught, just then, a glimpse of him riding away.

"Your father – you remember – he thought – "

Isabel stopped in her embarrassed explanations for, like a scared white bird, Lee was flying through the gateway. Grabbing Isabel's horse from the *anciano* who was just about to lead it around to the compound, she leaped into the saddle and went flying down the trail.

Turning at the sound of hoofs, Ramon waited for her. It was the first time they had met since the funeral, and though embarrassment would have been quite natural, Lee's frank greeting put him at once at his ease.

"You were going away – on my saint's day?"

"It was out of respect for – "

She cut off his apology. "Yes, yes, but father was angry and unjust that day. He would have acknowledged it himself, had he lived. You must come back, at once, with me."

Not knowing the cause of her sudden flight, Bull had followed to the gateway. As he stood there watching the two returning, Benson's voice broke at his shoulder.

"That's the hell of raising a girl in this country. I spoke often to Carleton about it, but he was a lonely man and couldn't bear to have her away. I suppose that he felt she was perfectly safe with him."

Knowing him for Lee's sincere friend, Bull did not scruple to hand on the information he had gained from Mrs. Mills. Benson received it with a low, shocked whistle.

"And the poor man had to meet death with that on his mind? She hasn't seen Ramon since the funeral, you say? That speaks well for him. He tried to go, just now, too. He's not half bad. But when it's a question of marrying Lee, no Mexican need apply. But come on back in. She'll pick out in a second that we're talking about them."

During the lively chatter that whiled away the afternoon; at supper when the cake appeared in a glory of radiant candles; while the young folks laughed and chatted thereafter under the lighted *portales*, the two stealthily watched Lee and Ramon. Sliver and Jake having retired early, Bull and Benson engaged in an interminable game of poker which left them free to discuss the proposed defensive alliance without neglecting their watch.

Before night fell the girls had distributed candles here and there among the foliage which now transmuted their waxen gleam into a greenish incandescence. Behind the creeper that fell in a cascade from the roof, the lamplit *portales* gleamed in half-circles of gold. The massed cluster of a bougainvillea dripped clotted blood down the façade of the gate arch. As the girls moved under the golden arches opposite, their white dresses might easily have been the fluttering wings of giant tropical moths, and, noting it, Benson paused in filling his hand.

"It's like a beautiful stage setting."

Bull's nod took in the bright faces, soft laughter, happy chatter. With a slow, indulgent smile he musingly watched the secret glances between the two pairs of lovers; artless subterfuges by

which the girls achieved small personal contacts.

"Don't take much to make 'em happy, does it? A little laughter an' a little song; plenty of chatter an' some pretty clothes; a baby to love and a man to boss; 'tain't much, but Lordy, how many of 'em don't get it. If men 'u'd on'y keep on admiring in their wives the things they liked in their sweethearts, the divorce courts 'u'd go out of business. If I had a daughter, I'd marry her to a boot-black that understood the nature of women ahead of a merchant prince; for a man that says to his wife at breakfast, 'Why, how pretty you look this morning!' is a-going to get a reward that can't be bought with a million."

Just then Phœbe Lovell's clear voice floated across the *patio*. "What a lovely night! Let's go for a walk."

"All right. Wait till I get a shawl."

As the others moved off, Lee ran back into her room. They had passed through the gateway when she came out again, except Ramon, who took the shawl and threw it over her shoulders. For a few moments they stood talking under the lamplit *portal*, and, though the conversation was quite ordinary, the glow in his big dark eyes was sufficiently revealing. As Lee's back was turned toward them, her face told nothing. But just before they moved off she reached up and straightened the lapel of Ramon's coat.

Bull frowned. "D'you really think she's in love?"

Benson shrugged. "When a girl fusses with a young man's clothes she doesn't hate him."

Bull broke a second frowning pause. "You've knowed her

almost all her life. Kedn't you put in a word?"

The Englishman made a wry face. "I did, about six months ago, when I first noticed this thing starting. But never again!" He laughed, a little self-consciously. "I never had any one sauce me so in all my life. Told me that it was none of my damn business; to go home and boss my poor wife. Said that she preferred Mexicans to English, anyway. Phe-e-ew! I never think of it, even now, without aching to spank her. No, counsel wouldn't help her."

"But she simply kain't be allowed to go ahead an' marry him." Bull's coal eyes flashed with the old wicked gleam. "Before that I'd – lay for him an' shoot him."

Benson regarded him dryly. "Your plan has the advantage of finality, but – it would lead to reprisals. Old Icarza stands well with Valles. If anything happened to his beloved son we'd be wiped out so completely there'd be no one left to mourn us. But why worry? We don't know for sure whether she even loves him. Give me two cards. I raise you three blues."

For two hours thereafter the two played and talked, arranging a code of smoke signals by day, beacons by night, to warn the *haciendas*. But under it Bull's thought still revolved around Lee and her problem. The party had returned from the walk, and Lee was shooing all her guests off to bed before his brow cleared and he uttered a low chuckle.

"What's the matter?" Benson looked up in surprise.

"Oh, jest something I was thinking of. I raise you two reds."

Not until Jake woke up when Bull entered the bunkhouse did his secret thought find expression. “Sure I noticed it,” he answered Jake’s remark concerning Lee’s “likin’ for that Mexican.” “But leave it to me.”

“What d’you allow to do?”

This time Bull laughed outright. “Mrs. Mills was saying, t’other day, that we’d have to import a rival. ’Tain’t sech a bad idea.”

“What d’you reckon to do – put an ad in the paper ‘Wanted, a husband’?”

“Never you mind,” Bull quietly replied to the cynical comment. “I’m going, to-morrow, up to El Paso.”

X: WANTED – A HUSBAND

Departures are usually cheerless affairs, but the morning sun loosed a flood of gold into the *patio* where the party was in process of dissolution. William Benson had left with Jake and Sliver, when they went out on the range, so Bull sat and smoked alone.

It was very pleasant there. His after-breakfast pipe was always the sweetest of the day, and while puffing contentedly Bull observed with an indulgent grin two small brown *criadas*, darting with needle and thread and pins from room to room with first-aid-to-injured habits; the transparent flirtations, stealthy glances after the girls came out; the beauty of innocent sex, of youth in love – set his big rough heart aglow. The girls, with keen instinct for honest feeling, felt it. The young men, with natural respect for quiet power, admired his kindliness and strength. Their farewells and invitations were hearty and sincere.

"You've promised and promised and never come yet – that is, for a real visit," Phœbe and Phyllis rebuked him.

The young men earnestly charged him, "We look to you to take care of our girls till we're in shape to look after them ourselves."

Not till the Icarzas bid him good-by did that kindly glow fade. Even when Isabel slid a small soft hand into his huge paw and turned on him the full power of her big Spanish eyes

while uttering lovely felicities, he remained non-committal. He frowned hearing Lee accept an invitation for a visit in the near future. But when she came in, after they left, the hostile look had faded.

"Oh, didn't we have a lovely time?" She patted his arm. "And it was all due to you."

"And now I'll take my pay. I want to go up to El Paso."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Darting into her room, she came running back with a fat roll of bills. "I felt dreadfully, yesterday, because you and Mr. Sliver and Mr. Jake had to wear your working-clothes. While you are in El Paso I want you to buy a nice suit apiece."

Now fine raiment, even of the vogue of the Western cow towns, was the last thing in the world that Bull's heart desired. But she looked so pretty in her earnestness, he found it hard to refuse. His laugh rumbled through the *patio*.

"Now that's real nice of you. But back up at the mine we've all got store clothes to burn. One o' these days, when the work ain't so pressing, Sliver kin ride over an' get 'em. Fifty'll be all I'll need."

"Oh *dear*!" she gave in, with a little disappointed sigh. "I did want to do something; you've all been so kind."

But she made up for the disappointment by busy preparations for his comfort. She packed her own suit-case with socks and clean shirts, then bossed the job while her *criadas* brushed and curried and sponged him. After tying one of her father's cravats

around his neck she turned him round and round like a mother inspecting a school-boy, finally dismissed him with a gentle pat.

On the Mexican Central, trains were running, as Bull put it, "be how an' when," but fortune favored him. Catching a mixed freight and passenger at the burned station that midnight, he camped down on the rear platform to avoid the fetor of unwashed bodies and tobacco smoke exhaled by the mixture of *peones*, revolutionary soldiers, and fat Mexican*comerciantes* that jammed the only first-class car. When he fell asleep he could make out the dim outlines of another form that evolved under the light of the following morning into an American war correspondent.

"'Morning, friend," he greeted Bull, cordially. "My name is Naylor. Yours? Glad to meet you, Mr. Perrin. Now if you'll tip this water-bottle for me, I'll do the same by you, and we can take off at least one layer of dust and cinders."

The operations placed them at once on terms that would have taken years to establish in civilization's cultured circles. Before it was over, Bull had learned that his companion was "on a little *pasear* between revolutionary battles," and had given, in return, some inkling of his own affairs. The young fellow's lithe, spare figure, clean face, fearless gray eyes, impressed him strongly, and while the train ambled along through the scrubby desert of sand and cactus toward Juarez, he eyed and estimated and measured him with a care that attracted, at last, the other's attention.

"Hey!" he demanded. "Is my nose out of plumb, or what?"

Bull warded off offense with the truth. “I happened to be looking for a man about your size. Any chance of your changing your job?”

“That depends.” The correspondent answered, breezily, but with caution. “Without being what you could call wedded to this sandy, thirsty, cutthroat business of Mexican revolutions, I like it better than anything else in sight. But what’s your lay? Ranching?” He repeated it after Bull. “In central Chihuahua? Forget it, friend.”

Bull eyed him wistfully. He fitted so closely to specifications. Finally, in desperation, he opened his simple heart; was explaining his quest when the young fellow burst out laughing.

“I beg your pardon.” He raised a protesting hand against Bull’s black glower, then went on with sympathetic seriousness: “But you’ll have to admit that one doesn’t see a man of your build every day in this matrimonial business. So there’s a damsel in distress, hey? That alters the case. If it wasn’t for a little girl up in San Francisco that I expect to marry some day when I become very rich and famous, I’d try and help you out, for I know just how you feel. It would be a damned shame to have her throw herself away on a Mexican. But you’ve laid yourself out some job. Not that you won’t be able to find men, good-looking chaps at that. But to get the right one calls for some picking and choosing. But I tell you what I will do – I shall be up for a week and I’d love to give you a hand.”

“Sure you kedn’t tackle it yourself?”

The young fellow denied the wistful appeal. “Hombre! a million wouldn’t release my girl’s mortgage.”

With a regretful sigh Bull struck hands on the compact. While they were talking the train had ambled through the brown adobe skirts of Juarez, the squalid Mexican town across the Rio Grande, whence they were presently shot by automobile over the international bridge into the spacious bosom of El Paso’s largest hotel. Bull had calculated to go out, at once, on his search, but while they sat at breakfast there descended upon them a host of reporters and correspondents, ravenous for news and aching to dispense hospitality.

“Might as well put it off till to-morrow, Diogenes.” His friend had already named Bull after the person who had such a deuce of a time hunting an honest man among the grafters and ward heelers of ancient Greece. “We’ll devote to-day to the irrigation of our desiccated systems, then go to it mañana like hungry dogs. But safety first! Take a ten out of your wad and give the rest to the clerk.”

Instead of one day, however, three passed during which Bull’s huge bulk upreared alongside a hundred bars. In all that time he never went to bed, for, intensified by long abstinence, the outbreak proved unusually virulent. Generally the conclusion of his debauches found him broke. But, thanks to the correspondent’s prevision, he awoke on the fourth morning, in bed at the hotel, with the bulk of his money still in the office safe. While he was draining the water-jug according to time-honored

precedents, his friend appeared in the doorway of the adjoining room. His own head was swathed in a wet towel that almost hid his rueful grin.

"One never knows what one is starting. You certainly went the limit, Diogenes. Are you quite sure you're through?"

Bull nodded and put down the jug with a satisfied sigh. "It's a bit of a strain, this fathering an' mothering a lone girl, a feller's gotter keep so straight." He added, apologetically, "I was jest plumb ripe for a bust, but I reckon this orter hold me for another three months."

"Very well, then, let's get down to work. At intervals, while I could still see, I kept one eye open for possibles. But it's like looking for gold or diamonds; the supply doesn't touch the demand. The few prospects all proved to have attachments in the shape of sweetheart or wife. Good ones, I suppose, are so rare that the girls grab them at sight like marked-down waists on a bargain-counter."

After two days of vain search through the plazas and parks, hotel lobbies, streets, and bars of El Paso, Bull was almost driven to the same conclusion. Short men, tall men, thin men, broad men; some that were ugly, others handsome; well and ill clad from all walks of life – passed under his observation. The few he trailed were either engulfed within the sacred precincts of some bank or met at the doors of suburban bungalows and there warmly kissed by young and pretty wives. Without fulfilling the specifications called for in the potential husband, it would have

been difficult enough to have enlisted an ordinary ranch hand for service across the line. At the close of the second day Bull reported as much to the correspondent when they met in the hotel lobby.

"Guess I'll have to give it up."

"Now if *that* was only free." The other bowed, just then, to a young man who had just walked in from the street. "Look at him! Five-eleven in his socks, hazel eyes, brown hair, good strong jaw, flat shoulders and flanks, deep chest; walks the earth like he owned it. Some dresser, too. That mixed plaid cost a hundred at his New York tailor's."

"Some banker's son, I'll bet you," Bull grumbled.

"That or better. I had a little chat with him this morning. A 'varsity man by his accent and manner. Seemed to know the Mexican situation down to the ground from the Wall Street end, so papa's probably a broker. Holy snakes! Look at that! Neat work! Neat work!"

Walking up to the counter, the young man had held out his hand – evidently for the key of his room – while his indifferent gaze traveled around the lobby. The clerk, who departed in no wise from the casual specifications of his supercilious breed, glanced at the hand contemptuously. Turning, the young man spoke. Then as, without glancing up, the clerk answered, he snatched, hauled that superior person across the counter, and slammed him down hard on the floor. Next, as they came on, he felled one large door porter and three oversized bell-boys who

had answered the clerk's yell. This done, he waited, expectantly, quietly surveying the wreck, the hazel eye admired by Naylor transmuted into hard steel flecked with dots of brown light.

Jaw, eyes, pose, all said, "Next!" But the "wreck" was complete. The oversized bell-boys ran off to answer imaginary calls. An automobile party at the door called for the porter's attention. Deserted, the clerk swiftly retreated behind his counter, behind which, from a safe distance, he issued defiant mutterings. With a slight nod that expressed comprehension and satisfaction, Hazel-Eyes sauntered across the lobby out into the street.

All had passed in the time required for the correspondent to reach the desk. He was back again in five seconds. "He's broke – owes two weeks' room rent. Clerk told him to get out; hence the scrap. Diogenes, we're in luck! Venus and Cupid are in the ascendant. He's our meat."

Grabbing Bull's arm, he hustled him outside, where they spied the quarry turning up a cross-street that led to the plaza. When he finally settled down on an empty bench, the correspondent nudged Bull in the ribs.

"Look at them!" He indicated the hundreds of men idling on the benches or sprawled out on the turf. "Last refuge of the broke, home of the out-of-works. That settles it. Bet you he hasn't the price of a meal. But, say! he's plucky. The beggar is actually smiling."

From the way in which the young fellow's glance wandered

around the assembled out-of-works, it was easy to see that he rather enjoyed the novel situation. When Bull had noted and commented on the fact, the correspondent went on:

"Now, Diogenes, we must proceed with due regard for the traditions. When grand dukes, princes, and caliphs in disguise befriend some worthy person, they invariably begin by testing his honesty – see *Arabian Nights* and other authorities. Split a couple of tens off your wad and drop them as you stroll past him. I'll stay here and watch lest he be found wanting."

Bull managed it, too, quite cleverly, scraping the bills out of his pocket along with his tobacco-pouch. Watching closely, the correspondent saw the young fellow look, pick them up, then run and tap Bull's shoulder. Leaning back, he shook with silent laughter.

"And they say romance is dead," his thought ran. "*Dead!* while this big, black giant stalks around like a knight of old seeking a perfect husband for a girl he's known only a few weeks. Diogenes, my friend, Don Quixote had nothing on you. Of all the lovely, fine pieces of idiocy that ever helped to raise us out of the muck of commercialism, this is the very finest. And wouldn't it be queer if it worked? It's almost too good to be true, and yet – a girl that can move a man to do things like that must be remarkably worth while. Quien sabe? Perhaps it will end like all true romances, with a happy marriage."

Till the two settled down side by side on a bench, the correspondent watched. Then with a satisfied nod he rose and

walked out of Bull's life in the same casual way he had entered it; to return once more, however, at a critical juncture, many months later.

Thus left to his own devices, Bull carried on the campaign with diplomacy quite foreign to his Goliath makeup. From thanks and casual observations anent the weather, he led by gradual stages to labor conditions as exemplified by the surrounding out-of-works. His simulated astonishment when the young fellow claimed community with them was remarkably well done.

"*No-o-o!*" he protested.

"Sure!" the other nodded. "I was turned out of my hotel only half an hour ago."

Quite in the fashion of grand dukes and caliphs, Bull still pretended doubt. "Broke, mebbe, but you don't belong with these. What was it? Wine, weemen, or cyards?"

The young fellow grinned a little ruefully. "A woman, yes, but not in the usual way. What would you think if I told you – But, pshaw! what's the use? It would sound to you just like any other out-of-work fairy-tale. Well, it may amuse you. If you really want to know, I'm here, busted and broke, because I refused a hundred thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edged securities and real estate."

"A hundred thousand!" Bull's financial acquaintance having rarely risen above the sixty-a-month class, he could not repress his surprise.

"There, I told you. Nevertheless, it is true. I am here because I refused a hundred thousand – with a girl attached."

Bull's face fell. "I see. Folks wanted you to marry her an' you refused beca'se you'd already picked one for yourself."

The young man nodded. "Correct except in one or two particulars. I disliked the girl so much that her money couldn't tempt me. As for the one I'll marry, I haven't picked her yet. But I mean to when I'm taken that way."

Bull's face lit up with hope again as, with naïve frankness, the young fellow went into details; told how his father had set his heart on a marriage that would unite the wealth of two families. The girl, an only daughter, was desirable; pretty, accomplished, played, sang, and all that! They had been brought up almost like brother and sister, and there was the hitch!

"For a fellow doesn't want to marry his sister," he explained. "I know her so well she hasn't a surprise in her hand. When I hook up, it will be with a girl that can bowl me over at first sight and keep me guessing forever after. But the Relieving Officer" – he broke off, laughing at Bull's puzzled look – "that's my name for my father. He was always coming through when I got in debt at college, hence the title. He's a good old scout, but obstinate as – as – "

" – yourself?" Bull suggested.

"Right-o! Well, you know what happens when the irresistible force hits the immovable obstacle – something busts. That was me. Without even the last check the stern parent presents to the undutiful son in melodrama, I got. Of course the dear old gentleman wouldn't have me suffer. He supposed I'd presently

come home to partake of the fatted calf; and just for fear that I might, I took my last money and bought a ticket West. So here I am, without money and without friends. Add it up and subtract the result – pick and shovel. I see them looming in the future."

"Oh, shore!" The caliph – that is, Bull – was proceeding very cautiously. "You'll get a job in some bank."

"Don't believe it. You see, I'd just come home from Princeton and had no commercial training. Anyway, I'd rather work in the open, ranching, or something like that. If I had a little capital, I'd buy in. As I haven't, I'm open for any kind of a job. But there, again, I've got no experience further than the fact that I can ride a horse. I'm afraid it's pick and shovel."

The abused and hackneyed psychological moment had arrived! The net was spread, the twigs limed, the cage door open! With great artfulness Bull proceeded to shoo the bird inside. He knew of a job – in fact, it was on the same *hacienda* where he worked himself! Of course it had the disadvantage of being located in Mexico, across the line where nothing was certain but death and "requisitions"! And there was always the chance of a scrap! He, Bull, wouldn't advise any one to try it that had too strong a grip on this life, for there was no saying just when one might be launched into "Kingdom Come." But for a man who liked action and would take a fighting chance – so forth and so on.

A disinterested listener would have thought these and kindred inducements were eminently fitted to scare the bird away. If so – Bull did not want him. But, sizing him for a lad of spirit with

the romantic outlook of his years, he counted on their appeal. Nor was he mistaken. He had finished telling of Carleton's death at the hands of the Colorados, and was relating the accidental manner in which he and his*compañeros* had assumed the guardianship of Lee, when the young fellow thrust out his hand.

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