

Tracy Louis

The Terms of Surrender



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CHAPTER I

AT “MacGONIGAL’S”

“Hullo, Mac!”

“Hullo, Derry!”

“What’s got the boys today? Is there a round-up somewhere?”

“Looks that-a way,” said Mac, grabbing a soiled cloth with an air of decision, and giving the pine counter a vigorous rub. At best, he was a man of few words, and the few were generally to the point; yet his questioner did not seem to notice the noncommittal nature of the reply, and, after an amused glance at the industrious Mac, quitted the store as swiftly as he had entered it. But he flung an explanatory word over his shoulder:

“Guess I’ll see to that plug myself – he’s fallen lame.”

Then John Darien Power swung out again into the vivid sunshine of Colorado (“vivid” is the correct adjective for sunshine thereabouts in June about the hour of the siesta) and gently encouraged a dispirited mustang to hobble on three legs into the iron-roofed lean-to which served as a stable at “MacGonigal’s.” Meanwhile, the proprietor of the store gazed

after Power's retreating figure until neither man nor horse was visible. Even then, in an absent-minded way, he continued to survey as much of the dusty surface of the Silver State as was revealed through the rectangle of the doorway, a vista slightly diminished by the roof of a veranda. What he saw in the foreground was a whitish brown plain, apparently a desert, but in reality a plateau, or "park," as the local name has it, a tableland usually carpeted not only with grama and buffalo grasses curing on the stem, but also with flowers in prodigal abundance and of bewildering varieties. True, in the picture framed by the open door neither grass-stems nor flowers were visible, unless to the imaginative eye. There was far too much coming and going of men and animals across the strip of common which served the purposes of a main street in Bison to permit the presence of active vegetation save during the miraculous fortnight after the spring rains, when, by local repute, green whiskers will grow on a bronze dog. Scattered about the immediate vicinity were the ramshackle houses of men employed in the neighboring gold and silver reduction works. The makeshift for a roadway which pierced this irregular settlement led straight to MacGonigal's, and ended there. As every man, woman, and child in the place came to the store at some time of the day or night, and invariably applied Euclid's definition of the nearest way between two given points, the flora of Colorado was quickly stamped out of recognition in that particular locality, except during the irrepressible period when, as already mentioned, the fierce rains

of April pounded the sleeping earth and even bronze dogs into a frenzied activity. Further, during that year, now nearly quarter of a century old, there had been no rain in April or May, and precious little in March. As the ranchers put it, in the figurative language of their calling, “the hull blame state was burnt to a cinder.”

The middle distance was lost altogether; for the park sloped, after the manner of plateaus, to a deep valley through which trickled a railroad and the remains of a river. Some twenty miles away a belt of woodland showed where Denver was justifying its name by growing into a city, and forty miles beyond Denver rose the blue ring of the Rocky Mountains. These details, be it understood, are given with the meticulous accuracy insisted on by map-makers. In a country where, every year, the percentage of “perfectly clear” days rises well above the total of all other sorts of days, and where a popular and never-failing joke played on the newcomer is to persuade him into taking an afternoon stroll from Denver to Mount Evans, a ramble of over sixty miles as the crow flies, the mind refuses to be governed by theodolites and measuring rods. Indeed, the deceptive clarity of the air leads to exaggeration at the other end of the scale, because no true son or daughter of Colorado will walk a hundred yards if there is a horse or car available for the journey. Obviously, walking is a vain thing when the horizon and the next block look equidistant.

It may, however, be taken for granted that none of these considerations accounted for MacGonigal’s fixed stare at the

sunlit expanse. In fact, it is probable that his bulging eyes took in no special feature of the landscape; for they held an introspective look, and he stopped polishing the counter as abruptly as he had begun that much-needed operation when Power entered the store. He indulged in soliloquy, too, as the habit is of some men in perplexity. Shifting the cigar he was smoking from the left corner of his wide mouth to the right one by a dexterous twisting of lips, with tongue and teeth assisting, he said aloud:

“Well, ef I ain’t dog-goned!”

So, whatever it was, the matter was serious. It was a convention at Bison that all conversation should be suspended among the frequenters of MacGonigal’s when the storekeeper remarked that he was dog-goned. Ears already alert were tuned at once to intensity. When Mac was dog-goned, events of vital importance to the community had either happened or were about to happen. Why, those words, uttered by him, common as they were in the mouths of others, had been known to stop One-thumb Jake from opening a jack-pot on a pat straight! Of course, the pot was opened all right after the social avanlanche heralded by the storekeeper’s epoch-making ejaculation had rolled past, or Jake’s remaining thumb might have been shot off during the subsequent row.

Apparently, MacGonigal was thinking hard, listening, too; for he seemed to be following Power’s movements, and nodded his head in recognition of the rattle of a chain as the horse was tied to a feeding trough, the clatter of a zinc bucket when Power drew

water from a tank, and the stamping of hoofs while Power was persuading the lame mustang to let him bathe and bandage the injured tendons. Then the animal was given a drink – he would be fed later – and the ring of spurred boots on the sun-baked ground announced that Derry was returning to the store.

Power's nickname, in a land where a man's baptismal certificate is generally ignored, was easily accounted for by his second name, Darien, conferred by a proud mother in memory of a journey across the Isthmus when, as a girl, she was taken from New York to San Francisco by the oldtime sea route. The other day, when he stood for a minute or so in the foyer of the Savoy Hotel in London, waiting while his automobile was summoned from the courtyard, he seemed to have lost little of the erect, sinewy figure and lithe carriage which were his most striking physical characteristics twenty-five years ago; but the smooth, dark-brown hair had become gray, and was slightly frizzled about the temples, and the clean-cut oval of his face bore records of other tempests than those noted by the Weather Bureau. In walking, too, he moved with a decided limp. At fifty, John Darien Power looked the last man breathing whom a storekeeper in a disheveled mining village would hail as "Derry"; yet it may be safely assumed that his somewhat hard and care-lined lips would have softened into a pleasant smile had someone greeted him in the familiar Colorado way. And, when that happened, the friend of bygone years would be sure that no mistake had been made as to his identity; for, in those early days, Power

always won approval when he smiled. His habitual expression was one of concentrated purpose, and his features were cast in a mold that suggested repose and strength. Indeed, their classic regularity of outline almost bespoke a harsh nature were it not for the lurking humor in his large brown eyes, which were shaded by lashes so long, and black, and curved that most women who met him envied him their possession. Children and dogs adopted him as a friend promptly and without reservation; but strangers of adult age were apt to regard him as a rather morose and aloof-mannered person, distinctly frigid and self-possessed, until some chance turn in the talk brought laughter to eyes and lips. Then a carefully veiled kindness of heart seemed to bubble to the surface and irradiate his face. All the severity of firm mouth and determined chin disappeared as though by magic; and one understood the force of the simile used by a western schoolma'am, who contributed verse to the *Rocky Mountain News*, when she said that Derry's smile reminded her of a sudden burst of sunshine which had converted into a sparkling mirror the somber gloom of a lake sunk in the depths of some secluded valley. Even in Colorado, people of the poetic temperament write in that strain.

Now, perhaps, you have some notion of the sort of young man it was who came back to the dog-goned MacGonigal on that June day in the half-forgotten '80's. Add to the foregoing description certain intimate labels – that he was a mining engineer, that he had been educated in the best schools of the Far West, that he

was slender, and well knit, and slightly above the middle height, and that he moved with the gait of a horseman and an athlete – and the portrait is fairly complete.

The storekeeper was Power's physical antithesis. He was short and fat, and never either walked or rode; but his North of Ireland ancestors had bequeathed him a shrewd brain and a Scottish slowness of speech that gave him time to review his thoughts before they were uttered. No sooner did he hear his visitor's approaching footsteps than he began again to polish the pine boards which barricaded him from the small world of Bison.

Such misplaced industry won a smile from the younger man.

"Gee whizz, Mac, it makes me hot to see you work!" he cried. "Anyhow, if you've been whirling that duster ever since I blew in you must be tired, so you can quit now, and fix me a bimetallic."

With a curious alacrity, the stout MacGonigal threw the duster aside, and reached for a bottle of whisky, an egg, a siphon of soda, and some powdered sugar. Colorado is full of local color, even to the naming of its drinks. In a bimetallic the whole egg is used, and variants of the concoction are a gold fizz and a silver fizz, wherein the yoke and the white figure respectively.

"Whar you been, Derry?" inquired the storekeeper, whose massive energy was now concentrated on the proper whisking of the egg.

"Haven't you heard? Marten sent me to erect the pump on a placer mine he bought near Sacramento. It's a mighty good proposition, too, and I've done pretty well to get through in four

months.”

“Guess I was told about the mine; but I plumb forgot. Marten was here a bit sence, an’ he said nothin’.” Power laughed cheerfully. “He’ll be surprised to see me, and that’s a fact. He counted on the job using up the best part of the summer, right into the fall; but I made those Chicago mechanics open up the throttle, and here I am, having left everything in full swing.”

“Didn’t you write?”

“Yes, to Denver. I don’t mind telling you, Mac, that I would have been better pleased if the boss was there now. I came slick through, meaning to make Denver tomorrow. Where is he – at the mill?”

“He was thar this mornin’.”

Power was frankly puzzled by MacGonigal’s excess of reticence. He knew the man so well that he wondered what sinister revelation lay behind this twice-repeated refusal to give a direct reply to his questions. By this time the appetizing drink was ready, and he swallowed it with the gusto of one who had found the sun hot and the trail dusty, though he had ridden only three miles from the railroad station in the valley, where he was supplied with a lame horse by the blunder of a negro attendant at the hotel.

It was his way to solve a difficulty by taking the shortest possible cut; but, being quite in the dark as to the cause of his friend’s perceptible shirking of some unknown trouble, he decided to adopt what logicians term a process of exhaustion.

“All well at Dolores?” he asked, looking straight into the storekeeper’s prominent eyes.

“Bully!” came the unblinking answer.

Ah! The worry, whatsoever it might be, evidently did not concern John Darien Power in any overwhelming degree.

“Then what have you got on your chest, Mac?” he said, while voice and manner softened from an unmistakably stiffening.

MacGonigal seemed to regard this personal inquiry anent his well-being as affording a safe means of escape from a dilemma. “I’m scairt about you, Derry,” he said at once, and there was no doubting the sincerity of the words.

“About me?”

“Yep. Guess you’d better hike back to Sacramento.”

“But why?”

“Marten ’ud like it.”

“Man, I’ve written to tell him I was on the way to Denver!”

“Then git a move on, an’ go thar.”

Power smiled, though not with his wonted geniality, for he was minded to be sarcastic. “Sorry if I should offend the boss by turning up in Bison,” he drawled; “but if I can’t hold this job down I’ll monkey around till I find another. If you should happen to see Marten this afternoon, tell him I’m at the ranch, and will show up in Main Street tomorrow P.M.”

He was actually turning on his heel when MacGonigal cried:

“Say, Derry, air you heeled?”

Power swung round again, astonishment writ large on his face.

“Why, no,” he said. “I’m not likely to be carrying a gold brick to Dolores. Who’s going to hold me up?”

“Bar jokin’, I wish you’d vamoose. Dang me, come back tomorrer, ef you must!”

There! MacGonigal had said it! In a land where swearing is a science this Scoto-Hibernico-American had earned an enviable repute for the mildness of his expletives, and his “dang me!” was as noteworthy in Bison as its European equivalent in the mouth of a British archbishop. Power was immensely surprised by his bulky friend’s emphatic earnestness, and cudgeled his brains to suggest a reasonable explanation. Suddenly it occurred to him a second time that Bison was singularly empty of inhabitants that day. MacGonigal’s query with regard to a weapon was also significant, and he remembered that when he left the district there was pending a grave dispute between ranchers and squatters as to the inclosing of certain grazing lands on the way to the East and its markets.

“Are the boys wire-cutting today?” he asked, in the accents of real concern; for any such expedition would probably bring about a struggle which might not end till one or both of the opposing parties ran short of ammunition.

“Nit,” growled the other. “Why argy? You jest take my say-so, Derry, an’ skate.”

“Is the boss mixed up in this?”

“Yep.”

“Well, he can take care of himself as well as anyone I know.

So long, Mac. See you later.”

“Ah, come off, Derry. You’ve got to have it; but don’t say I didn’t try to help. The crowd are up at Dolores. Marten’s gittin’ married, an’ that’s all there is to it. Now I guess you’ll feel mad with me for not tellin’ you sooner.”

Power’s face blanched under its healthy tan of sun and air; but his voice was markedly clear and controlled when he spoke, which, however, he did not do until some seconds after MacGonigal had made what was, for him, quite an oration.

“Why should Marten go to Dolores to get married?” he said at last.

The storekeeper humped his heavy shoulders, and conjured the cigar across his mouth again. He did not flinch under the sudden fire which blazed in Power’s eyes; nevertheless, he remained silent.

“Mac,” went on the younger man, still uttering each word deliberately, “do you mean that Marten is marrying Nancy Willard?”

“Yep.”

“And you’ve kept me here all this time! God in Heaven, Man, find me a horse!”

“It’s too late, Derry. They was wed three hours sence.”

“Too late for what? Get me a horse!”

“There’s not a nag left in Bison. An’ it’ll do you no sort of good ter shoot Marten.”

“Mac, you’re no fool. He sent me to Sacramento to have me

out of the way, and you've seen through it right along.”

“Maybe. But old man Willard was dead broke. This dry spell put him slick under the harrow. Nancy married Marten ter save her father.”

“That’s a lie! They made her believe it, perhaps; but Willard could have won through as others have done. That scheming devil Marten got me side-tracked on purpose. He planned it, just as David put Uriah in the forefront of the battle. But, by God, he’s not a king, any more than I’m a Hittite! Nancy Willard is not for him, nor ever will be. Give me – but I know you won’t, and it doesn’t matter, anyway, because I’d rather tear him with my hands.”

An overpowering sense of wrong and outrage had Power in its grip now, and his naturally sallow skin had assumed an ivory whiteness that was dreadful to see. So rigid was his self-control that he gave no other sign of the passion that was convulsing him. Turning toward the door, he thrust his right hand to the side of the leather belt he wore; but withdrew it instantly, for he was a law-abiding citizen, and had obeyed in letter and spirit the recently enacted ordinance against the carrying of weapons. He would have gone without another word had not MacGonigal slipped from behind the counter with the deft and catlike ease of movement which some corpulent folk of both sexes seem to possess. Running lightly and stealthily on his toes, he caught Power’s arm before the latter was clear of the veranda which shaded the front of the store.

“Whar ’r you goin’, Derry?” he asked, with a note of keen solicitude in his gruff voice that came oddly in a man accustomed to the social amenities of a mining camp.

“Leave me alone, Mac. I must be alone!” Then Power bent a flaming glance on him. “You’ve told me the truth?” he added in a hoarse whisper.

“Sure thing. You must ha passed the minister between here an’ the depot.”

“He had been there – to marry them?”

“Yep.”

“And everyone is up at the ranch, drinking the health of Marten and his bride?”

“Guess that’s so.”

Power tried to shake off the detaining hand. “It’s a pity that I should be an uninvited guest, but it can’t be helped,” he said savagely. “You see, I was carrying out the millionaire’s orders – earning him more millions – and I ought to have taken longer over the job. And, Nancy too! What lie did they tell her about me? I hadn’t asked her to be my wife, because it wouldn’t have been fair; yet – but she knew! She knew! Let me go, Mac!”

MacGonigal clutched him more tightly. “Ah, say, Derry,” he cried thickly, “hev’ you forgot you’ve left me yer mother’s address in San Francisco? In case of accidents, you said. Well, am I ter write an’ tell her you killed a man on his weddin’ day, and was hanged for it?”

“For the Lord’s sake, don’t hold me, Mac!”

The storekeeper, with a wisdom born of much experience, took his hand off Power's arm at once, but contrived to edge forward until he was almost facing his distraught friend.

"Now, look-a here!" he said slowly. "This air a mighty bad business; but you cahn't mend it, an' ef you go cavortin' round in a red-eyed temper you'll sure make it wuss. You've lost the gal – never mind how – an' gittin' a strangle hold on Marten won't bring her back. Yer mother's a heap more to you ner that gal – now."

One wonders what hidden treasury of insight into the deeps of human nature MacGonigal was drawing on by thus bringing before the mind's eye of an unhappy son the mother he loved. But there was no gainsaying the soundness and efficiency of his judgment. Only half comprehending his friendly counselor's purpose, Power quivered like a high-spirited horse under the prick of a spur. He put his hands to his face, as if the gesture would close out forever the horrific vision which the memory of that gray-haired woman in San Francisco was beginning to dispel. For the first time in his young life he had felt the lust of slaying, and the instinct of the jungle thrilled through every nerve, till his nails clenched and his teeth bit in a spasm of sheer delirium.

MacGonigal, despite his present load of flesh, must have passed through the fiery furnace himself in other days; for he recognized the varying phases of the obsession against which Power was fighting.

Hence, he knew when to remain silent, and, again, he knew when to exorcise the demon, once and for all, by the spoken word. It was so still there on that sun-scorched plateau that the mellow whistle of an engine came full-throated from the distant railroad. The lame horse, bothered by the tight bandage which Power had contrived out of a girth, pawed uneasily in his stall. From the reduction works, half a mile away, came the grinding clatter of a mill chewing ore in its steel jaws. These familiar sounds served only to emphasize the brooding solitude of the place. Some imp of mischief seemed to whisper that every man who could be spared from his work, and every woman and child able to walk, was away making merry at the wedding of Hugh Marten and Nancy Willard.

The storekeeper must have heard that malicious prompting, and he combated it most valiantly.

“Guess you’d better come inside, Derry,” he said, with quiet sympathy. “You’re feelin’ mighty bad, an’ I allow you hain’t touched a squar’ meal sence the Lord knows when.”

He said the right thing by intuition. The mere fantasy of the implied belief that a quantity of cold meat and pickles, washed down by a pint of Milwaukee lager, would serve as an emollient for raw emotion, restored Power to his right mind. He placed a hand on MacGonigal’s shoulder, and the brown eyes which met his friend’s no longer glowered with frenzy.

“I’m all right now,” he said, in a dull, even voice; for this youngster of twenty-five owned an extra share of that faculty of

self-restraint which is the birthright of every man and woman born and bred on the back-bone of North America. "I took it pretty hard at first, Mac; but I'm not one to cry over spilt milk. You know that, eh? No, I can't eat or drink yet awhile. I took a lunch below here at the depot. Tell me this, will you? They – they'll be leaving by train?"

"Yep. Special saloon kyar on the four-ten east. I reckon you saw it on a sidin', but never suspicioned why it was thar."

"East? New York and Europe, I suppose?"

"Guess that's about the line."

"Then I'll show up here about half-past four. Till then I'll fool round by myself. Don't worry, Mac. I mean that, and no more."

He walked a few yards; but was arrested by a cry:

"Not that-a way, Derry! Any other old trail but that!"

Then Power laughed; but his laughter was the wail of a soul in pain, for he had gone in the direction of the Dolores ranch. He waved a hand, and the gesture was one of much grace and distinction, because Power insensibly carried himself as a born leader of men.

"Just quit worrying, I tell you," he said calmly. "I understand. The boys will escort them to that millionaire saloon. They'll be a lively crowd, of course; but they won't see me, never fear."

Then he strode off, his spurs jingling in rhythm with each long, athletic pace. He headed straight for a narrow cleft in the hill at the back of the store, a cleft locally known as the Gulch, and beyond it, on another plateau sloping to the southeast, lay the

Willard homestead.

MacGonigal watched the tall figure until it vanished in the upward curving of the path. Then he rolled the cigar between his heavy lips again until it was securely lodged in the opposite corner of his mouth; but the maneuver was wasted, – the cigar was out, – and such a thing had not happened in twenty years! To mark an unprecedented incident, he threw away an unconsumed half.

“He’s crazy ter have a last peep at Nancy,” he communed. “An’ they’d have made a bully fine pair, too, ef it hadn’t been fer that skunk Marten. Poor Derry! Mighty good job I stopped home, or he’d ha gone plumb to hell.”

Of course, the storekeeper was talking to himself; so he may not have said it, really. But he thought it, and, theologically, that is as bad. Moreover, he might have electrified Bison by his language that night were he gifted with second sight; for he had seen the last of the proud, self-contained yet light-hearted and generous-souled cavalier whom he had known and liked as “Derry” Power. They were fated to meet again many times, under conditions as varying as was ever recorded in a romance of real life; but MacGonigal had to find a place in his heart for a new man, because “Derry” Power was dead – had died there in the open doorway of the store – and a stranger named John Darien Power reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER II

THE TERMS

The Gulch was naked but unashamed, and lay in a drowsy stupor. An easterly breeze, bringing coolness elsewhere, here gathered radiated heat from gaunt walls on which the sun had poured all day, and desiccating gusts beat on Power's face like superheated air gushing from a furnace. Not that the place was an inferno – far from it. On a June day just a year ago two young people had ridden up the rough trail on their way to the Dolores ranch, and the girl had called the man's attention to the exquisite coloring of the rocks and the profusion of flowers which decked every niche and crevice. It may be that they looked then through eyes which would have tinted with rose the dreariest of scenes; but even today, in another couple of hours, when the sun was sinking over the mountain range to the west, the Gulch would assuredly don a marvelous livery of orange, and red, and violet. Each stray clump of stunted herbage which had survived the drought would make a brave show, and rock-mosses which should be moist and green would not spoil the picture because they were withered and brown or black.

But Power, despite a full share of the artist's temperament, was blind to the fierce blending of color which the cliffs offered in the blaze of sunlight. His eyes were peering into his own

soul, and he saw naught there but dun despair and icy self-condemnation. For he blamed himself for wrecking two lives. If Nancy Willard could possibly find happiness as Hugh Marten's wife, he might indeed have cursed the folly of hesitation that lost her; but there would be the salving consciousness that she, at least, would drink of the nectar which wealth can buy in such Homeric drafts. But he was denied the bitter-sweet recompense of altruism. He knew Nancy, and he knew Marten, and he was sure that the fairest wild flower which the Dolores ranch had ever seen would wilt and pine in the exotic atmosphere into which her millionaire husband would plunge her.

Hugh Marten was a man of cold and crafty nature. Success, and a close study of its essentials, had taught him to be studiously polite, bland, even benignant, when lavish display of these qualities suited his purposes. But he could spring with the calculating ferocity of a panther if thereby the object in view might be attained more swiftly and with equal certainty. His upward progress among the mining communities of Colorado, New Mexico, and, more recently, California had been meteoric – once it began. None suspected the means until they saw the end; then angry and disappointed rivals would compare notes, recognizing too late how he had encouraged this group to fight that, only to gorge both when his financial digestion was ready for the meal. He had the faculty, common to most of his type, of surrounding himself with able lieutenants. Thus, John Darien Power came to him with no stronger backing than a college

degree in metallurgy and a certificate of proficiency as a mining engineer, credentials which an army of young Americans can produce; but he discerned in this one young man the master sense of the miner's craft, and promoted him rapidly.

He paid well, too, gave excellent bonuses over and above a high salary – was, in fact, a pioneer among those merchant princes who discovered that a helper is worth what he earns, not what he costs – and Power was actually entitled, through his handling of the Sacramento placer mine, to a sum large enough to warrant marriage with the woman he loved. Not for one instant had the assistant dreamed that his chief was casting a covetous eye on Nancy Willard. She was a girl of twenty, he a man looking ten years older than the thirty-eight years he claimed. Apparently, she was wholly unsuited to become the wife of a financial magnate. She knew nothing of the outer maze of society and politics; while it was whispered that Marten would soon run for state governor, to be followed by a senatorship, and, possibly, by an embassy. To help such ambitious emprise he needed a skilled partner, a woman of the world, a mate born and reared in the purple, and none imagined, Power least of any, that the vulture would swoop on the pretty little song-bird which had emerged from the broken-down cage of the Dolores ranch. For the place had been well named. Misfortune had dogged its owner's footsteps ever since the death of his wife ten years earlier, and Francis Willard was buffeted by Fate with a kind of persistent malevolence. Neighboring farms had been rich in

metals; his was bare. When other ranchers won wealth by raising stock, he hardly held his own against disease, dishonest agents, and unfortunate choice of markets. This present arid season had even taken from him three-fourths of his store cattle.

Power did not know yet how the marriage had been brought to an issue so speedily. In time, no doubt, he would fit together the pieces of the puzzle; but that day his wearied brain refused to act. He might hazard a vague guess that he had been misrepresented, that his absence in California was construed falsely, that the letters he wrote had never reached the girl's hands; but he was conscious now only of a numb feeling of gratitude that he had been saved from killing his usurper, and of an overmastering desire to look once more on Nancy's face before she passed out of his life forever.

He climbed the Gulch to the divide. From that point he could see the long, low buildings of the ranch, lying forlornly in the midst of empty stockyards and scorched grazing land; though the Dolores homestead itself looked neither forlorn nor grief-stricken. A hundred horses, or more, were tethered in the branding yard near the house. Two huge tents had been brought from Denver; the smoke of a field oven showed that some professional caterer was busy; and a great company of men, women, and children was gathered at that very moment near the porch, close to which a traveling carriage was drawn up. A spluttering *feu de joie*, sounding in the still air like the sharp cracking of a whip, announced that the departure of bride and

bridegroom was imminent; but the pair of horses attached to the carriage reared and bucked owing to the shouting, and Power had a momentary glimpse of a trim, neat figure, attired in biscuit-colored cloth, and wearing a hat gay with red poppies, standing in the veranda. Close at hand was a tall man dressed in gray tweed.

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Marten were about to start on their honeymoon trip to New York and Europe!

For an instant Power's eyes were blinded with tears; but he brushed away the weakness with a savage gesture, and examined the stark rocks on each side in search of a nook whence he might see without being seen. It was the careless glance of a man maddened with well-nigh intolerable loss; yet, had he known how much depended on his choice of a refuge, even in the very crux of his grief and torment he would have given more heed to it. As it was, he retreated a few paces, until hidden from any chance eye which might rove that way from the ranch, chose a break in the cliff where an expert cragsman could mount forty feet without difficulty, and finally threw himself at full length on a ledge which sloped inward, and was overhung by a mass of red granite, all cracked and blistered by centuries of elemental war. Some stunted tufts of alfalfa grass were growing on the outer lip of the ledge. By taking off his sombrero, and peeping between the dried stems, he could overlook the cavalcade as it passed without anyone being the wiser.

The surface of the rock was so hot as to be almost unbearable; but he was completely oblivious of any sense of personal

discomfort. That side of the Gulch was in shadow now, and concealment was all he cared for. He was sufficiently remote from the narrow track to which the horses would necessarily be confined that he ran no risk of yielding to some berserker fit of rage if he encountered Marten's surprised scrutiny, when, perchance, he might have flung an oath at the man who had despoiled him, and thereby caused distress to the woman he loved. To avoid that calamity, he would have endured worse evils than the blistering rock.

He remembered afterward that while he waited, crouched there like some creature of the wild, his mind was nearly a blank. He was conscious only of a dull torpor of wrath and suffering. He had neither plan nor hope for the future. His profession, which he loved, had suddenly grown irksome. In curiously detached mood, he saw the long procession of days in the mines, in the mart, in the laboratory. And the nights – ah, dear Heaven, the nights! What horror of dreariness would come to him then! He seemed to hear an inner voice bidding him abandon it all, and hide in some remote corner of the world where none knew him, and where every familiar sight and sound would not remind him of Nancy Willard. Nancy Willard – she was Nancy Marten now! He awoke to a dim perception of his surroundings by hearing his teeth grating. And even that trivial thing brought an exquisite pain of memory; for Nancy, reading a book one day, came across a passage in which some disappointed rascal had “ground his teeth in baffled rage,” and he had joined in her shout of glee at the

notion that anyone should express emotion so crudely. So, then, a man might really vent his agony in that way! Truly, one lived and learned, and this was certainly an afternoon during which he had acquired an intensive knowledge of life and its vicissitudes.

But now the elfin screeching of excited cowboys, and a continuous fusillade of revolvers fired in the air as their owners raced alongside the lumbering coach, announced that the wedded pair had begun their long journey. The racket of yells and shooting, heightened by weird sounds extracted from tin trumpets, bugles, and horns, drew rapidly nearer, and, at any other time, Power would have been amused and interested by the sudden eruption of life in the canyon brought about by this unwonted intrusion on its peace. A horse or so, or a drove of steers, these were normal features of existence, and no respectable denizen of the Gulch would allow such trifles to trouble his or her alert wits for a moment. But this tornado of pistol-shots and bellowing was a very different matter, and coyotes, jack-rabbits, a magnificent mountain sheep, a couple of great lizards – in fact, all manner of furred and scaly creatures – deserted lairs where they might have remained in perfect security, scampered frantically to other retreats, and doubtless cowered there till dusk.

A coyote raced up the cleft at the top of which Power was hidden; but, ere ever he had seen his enemy, man, he was aware of the hidden danger, and fled to an untainted sanctuary elsewhere. He had hardly vanished before the leading horsemen

galloped into sight, and soon a motley but highly picturesque regiment of Westerners filled the trail to its utmost capacity. Both men and horses were at home in this rugged land, and raced over its inequalities at a pace which would have brought down many a rider who thinks he is a devil of a fellow when a mounted policeman gallops after him in the park and cautions him sharply to moderate his own and his steed's exuberance. Even in the joyous abandonment of this typical western crowd there was a species of order; for they took care not to incommode the coach, a cumbersome vehicle, but the only practicable conveyance of its kind on four wheels which could be trusted to traverse that rock-strewn path. Its heavy body was slung on stout leather bands, and the wheels were low, set well apart, and moving on axles calculated to withstand every sort of jolt and strain. The driver was performing some excellent balancing feats on his perch while he egged on a willing team or exchanged yells with some other choice spirit who tore ahead when the road permitted. Among the throng were not a few women and girls from Bison. They rode astride like their men folk, and their shrill voices mingled cheerfully in the din.

Power was deaf and blind to the pandemonium and its sprites: he had eyes only for the two people seated in the coach. The ancient equipage owned low seats and lofty windows, having been built during a period when ladies' headgear soared well above normal standards; so its occupants were in full view, even at the elevation from which the unseen observer looked down.

Marten, a powerfully built man, of commanding height and good physique, clean-shaven, though the habit was far from general in the West at that date, was evidently exerting himself to soothe and interest his pallid companion. His swarthy face was flushed, and its constant smile was effortless; for he had schooled himself to adapt the mood to the hour. As the personnel of the cavalcade changed with each headlong gallop or sudden halt, he nodded affably to the men, or bowed with some distinction to the women; for Marten knew, or pretended that he knew, every inhabitant of Bison.

His wife knew them too, without any pretense; but she kept her eyes studiously lowered, and, if she spoke, used monosyllables, and those scarcely audible, for Marten had obviously to ask twice what she had said even during the fleeting seconds when the pair were visible to Power. Her features were composed almost to apathy; but the watcher from the cliff, who could read the slightest change of expression in a face as mobile to the passing mood as a mountain tarn to the breeze, felt that she was fulfilling a compact and holding her emotions in tense subjection.

He hoped, he prayed, with frenzied craving of the most high gods, that she might be moved to lift her eyes to his aery; but the petition was denied, and the last memory vouchsafed of her was the sight of her gloved hands clasped on her lap and holding a few sprigs of white heather. Now, it was a refined malignity of Fate which revealed that fact just then, because heather does not grow

in Colorado, and the girl had culled her simple little bouquet from a plant which Power had given her. Once, in Denver, he had rendered some slight service to an expatriated Scot, and, when a sister from Perth joined her brother, bringing with her a pot of Highland soil in which bloomed the shrub dear to every Scottish heart, Power was offered a cutting "for luck." Great was Nancy Willard's delight at the gift; for, like the majority of her sex, she yielded to pleasant superstition, and the fame of white heather as a mascot has spread far beyond the bounds of Great Britain.

Power might well have cried aloud in his pain when he discovered that his lost love had thought of him at the moment she was leaving her old home. Perhaps he did utter some tortured plaint: he never knew, because of what happened the instant after Nancy and her spray of heather were reft from his straining vision.

One-thumb Jake, who had loitered at the ranch for a farewell drink, rode up at a terrific pace, pulled his bronco on to its haunches alongside the coach, and by way of salute, fired three shots from a revolver as quickly as finger could press trigger.

The first bullet sang through the air not more than an inch above Power's forehead. He recalled afterward a slight stirring of his hair caused by the passing of the missile, which spat viciously against the wall of rock some ten feet above the ledge. The next two bullets struck higher, and their impact evidently disturbed the equipoise of a mass of stone already disintegrated by frost, because more than a ton of débris crashed down, pinning Power

to the ledge and nearly pounding the life out of him. The resultant cloud of dust probably helped to render him unconscious. At any rate, he lay there without word or movement, and, if he were dead, his bones might have rested many a year in that strange tomb unless the curiosity of some passerby was aroused by a flock of quarreling vultures – a spectacle so common in cattle-land that the wayfarer does not deviate a hand's breadth from his path because of it.

Nancy heard the thunder of the falling rocks, and looked out. The dust pall told her exactly what had occurred, though the jubilant congratulation of the shooter by the driver would have explained matters in any event.

“Good fer you, Jake!” he shouted. “Gosh! when you're fed up on cowpunchin' you kin go minin' wid a gun!”

She saw, too, what many others saw: A rattlesnake, rudely dislodged from some deep crevice, emerged from the heap of rubbish, stopped suddenly, swelled and puffed in anger, rattled its tail-plates, and was obviously primed for combat. It seemed to change its mind, however, when a fourth bullet from the cowboy's revolver grazed a big brown rhomboid which offered a fair target just below the curved neck. There was another shower of dust and granite chips, and, when this subsided, the reptile had vanished.

Nancy sat back in the coach. Amid a chorus of laughter and jeers at what his critics were pleased to regard as bad marksmanship, Jake spurred his horse into a gallop again.

“What was it?” inquired Marten. Being on the other side of the vehicle, he was unaware of the cause of this slight commotion.

“Nothing, really,” she said dully.

“Oh, come now, little woman – the crowd would not yelp at Jake for no reason.”

“Well, his shots brought down some loose stones, and a rattler appeared in the middle of the heap. It showed fight, too; but made off when Jake fired again.”

“Oh, is that all? There wouldn’t be a snake on the ranch if your father had kept a few pigs.”

“Poor old dad couldn’t keep anything – not even me!”

Her listless tone might have annoyed a weaker man; but Marten only laughed pleasantly.

“I should be very unhappy if he had insisted on keeping you,” he said. “Of course, you hate having to part from him, and from a place where you have lived during a few careless years; but you will soon learn to love the big world to which I am taking you. Colorado in June is all very well; but it can’t begin to compare with London in July, the Engadine in August, and Paris in September. Don’t forget that the proper study of mankind is man – and woman.”

And so, the line was dangled skilfully before her eyes, and the spell whispered gently into her ears, while she, mute and distraught, wondered whether the dear memories of Colorado would ever weaken and grow dim. Then she thought of Derry Power, and a film came over her blue eyes; but she bit her under-

lip in brave endeavor, and forced a smile at some passing friend.

Power did not remain unconscious many minutes. The last straggler among the mounted contingent was clattering through the canyon when the man who had been near death three times in the same number of seconds awoke to a burden of physical pain which, for the time, effectually banished all other considerations.

At first he hardly realized where he was or what had happened. He was half choked with dust, and the effort of his lungs to secure pure air undoubtedly helped to restore his senses. It was humanly impossible to curb the impulse toward self-preservation, and he tried at once to free his limbs of an intolerable weight. He was able to move slightly; but the agony which racked his left leg warned him that the limb was either broken or badly sprained. His profession had often brought similar accidents within his ken, and indications of a further probable subsidence among the fallen stones – though the warning was so slight as to be negligible to the ordinary ear – told him that he must be wary, or a second avalanche might kill him outright.

By now the air was breathable, and he could see into the deserted Gulch. He was well aware that no one might be expected to pass that way during the next hour. Before returning to the feast in preparation at the ranch, the escort would await the departure of the train; while those who had not taken part in the procession would certainly remain there until darkness ended the festivities. So he had the choice of two evils. He could either possess his soul in patience until the mounted contingent began

to straggle back, or risk another rock-fall.

Naturally, he understood the cause and extent of the mishap, and his present mood did not brook the delay entailed by the safer course. Raising head and shoulders by lifting himself on both hands, he contrived to twist round on his left side, and surveyed the position. It was bad enough, in all conscience, but might have been worse. By far the largest piece of granite had been the last to drop, and he saw that it was poised precariously on some smaller lumps. Any attempt to withdraw either of his legs (the left one was broken, beyond a doubt) would disturb its balance, and, if it toppled on his body, he would be imprisoned without hope of relief by his own effort. Rising still higher, though each inch gained cost a twinge of agony that brought sweat from every pore, he achieved a half-sitting, half-lolling posture. Then, applying his miner's aptitude to the dynamics of the problem, he packed the threatening boulder with others until it was wedged into partial security.

He had barely finished this task, which only a splendid vitality enabled him to carry through, when his eye was caught by something in the new face of the rock which seemed to fascinate him for a second or two. Then his mouth twisted in a rictus of dreadful mirth, so wrung was he with pain, yet so overcome by what he had seen.

“So that is the price!” he almost shouted, accompanying the words with others which seldom fell from his lips. “Those are the terms of surrender, eh? Well, it is a compact made in hell;

but I'll keep it!"

After that, his actions savored of a maniac's cunning rather than the desire of a sane man to save his own life. Slowly, with never a groan, he extracted both legs from beneath the pile of stones. The spurs were his chief difficulty. One was held so tightly that he had to tear his foot out by main force; but luckily it was the right foot, or he could not have done it. Something had to give way under the strain, and ultimately the spur was released by the yielding of a strap at a buckle. The torture he suffered must have been intense; but he uttered no sound save an occasional sob of effort, when all the strength of hands and wrists were needed to move one or other of the chunks of granite without dislodging the grim monster he had chained.

At last he was free. He felt the injured limb, which was almost benumbed, and ascertained beyond doubt that it was fractured below the knee. But he was safe enough, even though the precarious structure of stones collapsed, and any other victim of like circumstances would have been content with that tremendous achievement. Not so John Darien Power.

The mere fact that he need now only lie still until assistance reached him seemed to lash him into a fresh panic of energy. After a hasty glance into the canyon, obviously to find out whether or not anyone was approaching, he began to throw pieces of débris into the fissure left bare by the fall. When he had exhausted the store within reach he crawled to a new supply, and piled stone upon stone until the rock wall was covered to a height

of more than two feet. Even then he was not satisfied; but moved a second time, his apparent object, if any, being to give the scene of his accident the semblance of a stone slide.

Finally, he did the maddest thing of all, lowering himself down the cleft with a rapidity that was almost inconceivable in a man with a broken leg. On reaching the level of the trail he slipped and fell. That drew a queer sort of subdued shriek from his parched throat; but, after a moment of white agony, he began to crawl in the direction of the ranch. He chose that way deliberately, because the slope was downhill, and not so rough as in the upper part of the gorge. With care, for he meant to avoid another slip, but never halting, he dragged his crippled body fully a hundred yards from the foot of the ledge. Then he crept into the shade, at a spot where the side of the Gulch rose sheer for twenty feet, turned over on his back, and lay quietly.

He had almost reached the end of his tether. His face was drawn, and disfigured with dirt and perspiration. His eyelids dropped involuntarily, as though to shut out a world which had suddenly become savagely hostile; but his lips moved in a wan grimace, a wry parody of the generous, warm-hearted smile that people had learned to associate with Derry Power.

“My poor Nancy!” he murmured brokenly. “My dear lost sweetheart! If the Fates have bought you from me, I was no party to the deal, and I’ll exact the last cent on it – I swear that by your own sprig of white heather! Someone will pay, in blood and tears, or I’ll know the reason why! Yes, someone will pay! Power

versus Marten, with the devil as arbitrator! Marten has won the first round; but I'll take it to a higher court. I'll choke the life out of him yet – choke – the beast!”

Of course, Power was light-headed.

CHAPTER III

SHOWING HOW POWER ACQUIRED A LIMP

If any sentient thought loomed vaguely through the haze of pain and exhaustion which enwrapped Power like a pall, it was that he would probably lie there a long time before help came; yet he had hardly uttered that half-delirious vow before he was aware of an animal snuffing cautiously around him, and the knowledge galvanized him into a species of activity. He turned on his right side, and raised himself on one hand, the fingers of which closed instinctively on a heavy stone as supplying a weapon of defense.

But his eyes rested only on a dog, a dapper fox-terrier, whose furtive curiosity changed instantly to alarm, as it retreated some distance, and barked excitedly. Then Power saw the animal's master, a stranger, or, at any rate, a newcomer, in the district, a man of about his own age, who rode a compactly-built pony with the careless ease of good horsemanship, and was dressed *de rigueur*, except for the broad-brimmed hat demanded by the Colorado sun.

Evidently the horseman was not surprised at finding someone lying in the Gulch.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Had a spill?"

Power tried to speak; but the dust and grit in his throat

rendered his words almost inaudible. Then the other understood that if, as he imagined, copious drafts of champagne had caused some unaccustomed head to reel, the outcome was rather more serious than a mere tumble. He urged the pony rapidly nearer, and dismounted, and a glance at Power's face dispelled his earlier notion.

"What's up?" he inquired in a sympathetic tone. "Are you hurt?"

Power's second effort at ordered speech was more successful. "Yes," he said. "My leg is broken."

"Ah, that's too bad. Which leg?"

"The left."

"Were you thrown?"

"No."

The stranger noted the soiled condition of the injured man's clothing. He saw that a spur had been torn off, and among the drying dirt on Power's face and hands were some more ominous streaks; since a man may not squirm in agony beneath a shower of jagged granite and escape some nasty abrasions of the skin.

"I see," he said gently. "You fell from up there somewhere," and he looked at the cliff, "tripped over that missing spur, I suppose. Well, what's to be done? Were you at the ranch? I didn't happen to come across you. Shall I take you there?"

"No, please – to Bison – to MacGonigal's store."

"Ah, yes. But it's an awkward business. You can't possibly hold yourself in the saddle. Can you stand on one leg, even for

a few seconds?”

“I fear not. I’m about done.”

“But if I carry you to the face of the rock there, and prop you against it?”

“Yes, I’ll do that.”

This friend in need pulled the reins over the pony’s head, passed them through his arm, lifted Power, not without some difficulty, and brought him to a spot where the precipice rose like a wall.

“There you are!” he gasped; for he was of slender proportions, and Power’s weight was deceptive, owing to his perfect physical fitness. “Now I’ll mount, and hold you as comfortably as I can; but I don’t know how this fat geegee will behave under a double load, so I must have my hands free at first. Will you grip me tight? It may hurt like sin – ”

“Go right ahead!” said Power.

Sure enough, when the pony found what was expected of him, he snorted, raised head and tail, and trotted a few indignant paces.

The rider soon quieted him to a walk; but they were abreast of the scene of Power’s accident before he was aware that the man clasping his body had uttered neither word nor groan, though the prancing of the horse must have caused him intense agony.

“By Jove!” came the involuntary cry, “you’ve got some sand! I’d have squealed like a stuck pig if I was asked to endure that. Who are you? I’m Robert H. Benson, Mr. Marten’s private

secretary.”

“My name is Power,” was the answer, in a thick murmur.

“Bower?”

“No – Power.”

“Not John Darien Power, who was at Sacramento!”

“Yes.”

“Gee whizz! I’ve written you several letters. You remember my initials, R. H. B.?”

“Yes.”

“Can you talk? Say if you’d rather not.”

“No, no. It’s all right. Anyhow – I’d – sooner – try.”

“Does the boss know you’re here?”

“I guess not. I wrote him – to Denver; but he’s been engaged – otherwise.”

“Ra-ther! Getting wed. You’ve heard? I’m sure you’re as much surprised as any of us. You could have knocked me down with a feather when he told me why I was wired to come West by next train from New York. ‘I want you to take hold,’ he said. ‘I’m off to Europe for six months on my wedding trip.’ That was the day before yesterday, and here he’s gone already! I had a sort of notion, too, that our beloved employer would never take unto himself a wife, or, if he did, that the U. S. A. would hear about it.”

A hard smile illuminated the pallor of Power’s face. “Marten doesn’t hire a brass band when he has any startling proposition in mind,” he said.

Benson laughed. He was a cheerful, outspoken youngster –

exactly the kind of private secretary the secretive millionaire might have been expected to avoid like the plague, if Marten had not chosen him deliberately because of those very qualities.

“No,” he chuckled. “You and I know that, don’t we? But signing on for a wife is a different matter to securing an option on a placer mine. I should have thought there would be things doing when H. M. joined the noble army of benedicts, especially after he had sorted out such a daisy... Sorry, Power! The peak of this saddle must be dashed uncomfortable. And, perhaps, I’m not carrying you to rights. One ought to be taught these things. Now, a cavalry soldier would be trained in the art of picking up a wounded mate, and in carrying him, too.”

“It’s not far. I can last out.”

“You don’t mind having a pow-wow? Guess you prefer it? You knew Miss Willard, I suppose? By the way, were you coming to the wedding?”

“No. I am here by chance.”

“Well, of course, I rather fancied that. If I had been asked offhand how much time that Sacramento job would use up, I should have said another three months, at least. Is all the machinery there?”

“Yes.”

“Pumps, and all?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry if I appear inquisitive, but – ”

“The pumps are working. I got a hustle on the contractors.”

“Great Scott! I should think so, indeed. They’ll make a song about it in Chicago. Have you sent in the consulting engineer’s certificate?”

“Yes. It’s in Denver.”

“Then I’ll tell you something that is good for broken legs. The boss was talking of you only yesterday. He said you were to collect five thousand dollars when that placer mine was in shape. He forgets nothing, does he?”

“Nothing.”

Power’s stricken state was sufficient excuse for any seeming lack of gratitude, and his rescuer’s mind reverted to the more immediate topic of the marriage.

“I asked if you were acquainted with Miss Willard,” he went on. “Naturally, you must have seen her often. She was born and bred on this ranch, I believe.”

“Bred here, yes; but born near Pueblo, I’ve been told.”

“Say, isn’t she a peach?”

“A pretty girl, very.”

“Rather quiet, though. Kind of subdued, to my taste. Life on the Dolores ranch must have been a mighty tough proposition, I imagine. But she’ll brighten up as Mrs. Marten. They all do.”

“Is Marten a sultan, then?”

The private secretary chortled over the joke. “I’m jiggered if I could have pulled off a wheeze like that if I had been chucked off a cliff and my leg was out of gear!” he cried. “No, my boy, Marten has a clean record in that respect. I’ve never known him

look twice at any woman; though he's had chances in plenty. What I mean is that these sweet young things who have never seen a real store, and don't know sable from dyed rabbit, wake up amazingly when they're Mrs. Somebody of Somewhere. Look at Mrs. Van Pieter! A year ago she was keeping tab on people who hired her father's canoes at Portland, Maine, and it's hardly a week since I met her in Tiffany's, matching pearls at a thousand dollars a pick."

"What were you doing in Tiffany's?"

The question seemed to take Benson by surprise; but, though he might be talkative as a parrot, he did not discuss his employer's personal behests.

"Having a look around," he said.

"I thought you might be buying Mrs. Marten's wedding gift," went on Power.

"Well, as a guesser, you'd come out first in a prize competition."

"It was – just – curiosity. I wondered – what – Marten gave her."

"That's no secret. She wore it today. A collarette of diamonds."

"Ah, a collar! Has it a golden padlock? Is there a leash?"

"Say, now! Aren't you feeling pretty bad? We're going downhill, and it jolts. But we're near that store. What's the name?"

"MacGonigal's."

“To be sure. I had forgotten. Queer fellow, the proprietor. Looks like a character out of one of Bret Harte’s novels. Is there a doctor in Bison?”

“Yes – of a sort. He’s sober, some days.”

“Let’s hope this is one of the days.”

“Drunk or sober, he can pull a leg straight and tie it in splints.”

“But it ought to be fixed in plaster of Paris. That’s the latest dodge. Then you’ll be able to hobble about in less than a month. Why, here’s the storekeeper himself. He must have been looking this way.”

“He was expecting me. I promised to meet him about four o’clock.”

“Well, you’re on time.”

“Thanks to you.”

“Ah, come off! A lot I’ve done; though I do believe it was better to keep up a steady flow of chatter than to be asking you every ten yards how you were feeling... Hi, there! I’ve brought your friend Power; but he’s in rather bad shape. Had a fall up in the Gulch, and one leg is crocked.”

The pony needed no urging to halt, and Power, whose head was sunk between his shoulders, looked as if he would become insensible again at the mere thought of renewed exertion.

“A fall!” repeated MacGonigal, moving ponderously to the near side, and peering up into Power’s face. “Well, ef I ain’t dog-goned! What sort of a fall?”

“Just the common variety – downward,” said Benson. “His left

leg is broken below the knee. Can you hold him until I hitch this fiery steed to a post? Then I'll help carry him to a bedroom. After that, if I can be of any use, tell me what to do, or where to go – for the doctor, I mean.”

By this time MacGonigal had assured himself that Power's clothing was not full of bullet-holes, and he began to believe that Benson, whom he recognized, was telling the truth.

“Give him to me,” he said, with an air of quiet self-confidence. “Back of some sugar casks in the warehouse thar you'll find a stretcher. Bring that along, an' we'll lay him in the veranda till the doc shows up.”

Soon the hardly conscious sufferer was reposing with some degree of comfort in a shaded nook with his back to the light. MacGonigal, whose actions were strangely deft-handed and gentle for so stout a man, was persuading him to drink some brandy.

“He has collapsed all at once,” said Benson commiseratingly. “He perked up and chatted in great shape while I was bringing him through the Gulch.”

“Did he now?.. Yes, Derry, it's me, Mac. Just another mouthful... An' what did he talk about, Mr. Benson?”

“Oh, mostly about the wedding, I guess.”

“Nat'rally. He'd be kind of interested in hearin' how Marten had scooped up Nancy Willard.”

Some acrid quality in the storekeeper's tone must have pierced the fog which had settled on Power's brain. He raised a hand to

push away the glass held to his lips.

“Say, I’ve only secured a broken leg, Mac,” he murmured, smiling into the anxious face bent over him. “I don’t want to be doped as well. Perhaps Mr. Benson will mount that nag of his, and bring Peters.”

“Look-a here, Derry, hadn’t we better send to Denver?”

“No. Peters has set dozens of legs and arms.”

“I guess he’s back at the ranch. He went thar, an’ I hain’t seen him among the crowd.”

“Is he a tall, red-whiskered chap, with a nose that needs keeping out of the sun?” broke in Benson.

“Yep. That’s him.”

“Well, he’s there now – and – not so bad. Does he really understand bone-setting?”

“Sure. He’s all to rights when not too much in likker.”

“I’ll have him here in half an hour.”

Benson whistled to the dog, and they heard the clattering hoofbeats of the cob’s hurried departure. MacGonigal brought a chair, and sat by his friend’s side.

“Was it a reel tumble, Derry?” he asked softly.

“Seems like it, Mac. Don’t worry your kind old fat head. No one saw me. Let me lie quiet now, there’s a good soul. I’ve done enough thinking for today.”

“Say, Boy, kin yer smoke?”

“No – not till the doc is through.”

MacGonigal bit the end off a cigar, bit it viciously, as if he

were annoyed at it. Then he struck a match by drawing it sharply along the side of his leg, and lit the cigar; but not another word did he utter until a thunder of hoofs disturbed the hot silence of the afternoon.

“Guess that’s some of the boys comin’ from the depot,” whispered Mac. “They’ll not suspicion you’re here, Derry, an’ I’ll soon have a stampede by tellin’ ’em the doc is loose among the bottles.”

True to his promise, he got rid of the thirsty ones quickly; for this smaller batch had not even awaited the departure of the train.

“Air you awake, Derry?” he inquired, when he had crept back softly to his chair.

“Yes.”

“What’s this yarn about One-thumb Jake shootin’ a rattler?”

“I – don’t know. He didn’t shoot me, Mac. I got slammed on a rock, good and hard.”

“I on’y axed because I’m nearly fed up with Jake an’ his gun-play.”

“Ah, quit it, you sleuth. Jake wouldn’t pull his gun on me, not even at Marten’s bidding.”

“He kin be the biggest damn fool in Bison when he’s loaded. Anyhow, I’ll take your say-so.”

There was another period of quietude, when brooding thought sat heavy on MacGonigal, and pain gnawed Power with its sharpest tooth. Then came the sound of galloping horses again, and Benson appeared, guiding a big man who rolled in his walk;

for the fast canter had stirred many varieties of alcohol in an overburdened system. The private secretary's voice was raised in order that the others might hear.

"I would advise you to bandage the limb sufficiently to give Mr. Power some sort of ease until Dr. Stearn comes from Denver," he was urging. "I am sure that Mr. Marten would wish this case to be attended by his own doctor, and I know that Dr. Stearn attends him."

"Stearn! What does that old mutt know about surgery?" shouted Peters. "I could set a compound fracture while he was searching around for his eyeglasses... Hullo, Mac! You're always the right man in the right place. Bring me a highball, to clear the dust out of the pipes."

"You jest fix Derry first, Peters, an' you kin hev two highballs."

The red-whiskered man, whose medical degree was a blend of sheer impudence and a good deal of rough-and-ready experience, knew MacGonigal so well that he did not attempt to argue.

"Very well," he said sulkily. "Break up an egg box, and saw it into eighteen-inch lengths, four inches wide. You have a roll of lint and scissors? I'll rip up his trousers, and have a look at the place."

His actions were decided, but somewhat awkward. When Power winced because of a careless handling of the injured limb, he only guffawed.

"Nips you a bit!" he grunted. "Of course it does. I'd like to

know what you expected. Did you fancy you could flop over the Gulch like a crow?... Oh, here we are! Just an ordinary smash. Hurry up with those splints, Mac. Now, just set your teeth and grin hard while I pull... There! Did you hear it? I'll not hurt you more than I can help while I do the dressing. Got any bromide in that den of yours, Mac? Well, give him a ten-grain dose every three hours till he sleeps. Get the rest of his clothes off, keep him in bed for three weeks, and the rest may be left safely to Nature. Gee whizz! I'm chewing mud. Where in hell do you keep your whisky?"

"Doctor" Peters had a professional manner which did not inspire confidence; but he seemed to understand what he was about, and Benson, when he could be of no further service, went to the reduction mill, where he had business which detained him until a late hour. Next morning, on his way to Denver, he called at the store, and visited Power, who was feeling a great deal better, and was confident that the damaged limb would soon be as sound as ever.

"I hope you won't think it necessary to trouble Mr. Marten with any report of my accident," went on the invalid. "You see, in a sort of a way, it happened in connection with his marriage, as I was watching the festivities when it happened – had my eyes anywhere but where they ought to be, I suppose – and if his wife came to hear of it she might take it to heart. Sometimes a woman has odd notions about such things occurring on her wedding day."

"Right you are," agreed Benson cheerfully.

A remark dropped by the manager of the mill had supplied a reason for the young engineer's interest in the marriage, and he had come to the conclusion that the sooner the whole affair was forgotten the better it would be for all parties.

"I'll be in Denver till September or thereabouts; but I'll be seeing you long before then," he continued. "What about squaring your account? I think I have all the details in the office."

"Pay what is coming to me by check to Smith & Moffat's bank," said Power. "They'll let me know when they get the money, and you can mail a receipt here for my signature. By the way, I wish to resign my position on Marten's staff as from yesterday."

"Sorry to hear that. Do you really mean it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll put that through, also. Goodby, old chap, and good luck. You'll be well looked after, I suppose?"

"I couldn't be in better hands than Mac's. If he didn't own a hard head, his big heart would have ruined him long ago."

"An unusual combination," laughed Benson, and his eyes met Power's quizzically. "Well, so long! Let me know if I can do anything."

Beyond the purely business formalities connected with the payment of Power's salary and the acceptance of his resignation, Benson heard little of him until ten days later, when a telegram reached him in the early morning. It was from MacGonigal, and read:

“Don’t like the look of Power’s leg. Send doctor.”

That afternoon Benson brought Dr. Stearn to the store, and MacGonigal explained that from some remark grunted by Peters when quite sober, and from personal observation, he was not satisfied with the appearance of Power’s injured limb. The doctor, a fully qualified medical man, was very wroth with Peters when he had made a brief examination of the patient.

“This is the work of an incompetent quack,” he said angrily. “Whoever the man may be, he is the worst sort of idiot – the sort that knows a little of what he is doing. The splints and bandaging have served their purpose only too well, because callous is forming already. Unless you wish to have one leg half an inch shorter than the other during the rest of your life, Mr. Power, you must let me put you under ether.”

“Why?” came the calm-voiced question.

“To put it plainly, your leg should be broken again, and properly set.”

“What is wrong with it?”

“You know you have two bones in that part of the leg which is below the knee, the tibia and the fibula? Well, they were broken – by a blow, was it? No, a fall – well, they practically amount to the same thing, though there are indications that this injury was caused by a blow – ”

“He fell off one rock onto another, doctor,” put in Benson.

“Ah, yes! That accounts for it. As I was saying, they were broken slantwise, and now, instead of being in correct apposition,

the upper parts override the lower ones. Do you follow?"

"Suppose they are not interfered with, will they heal all right?" said Power.

"Y-yes," came the grudging admission; "but you'll walk with a limp."

"Bar that, the left leg will be as strong as the right one?"

"Stronger, in that particular place. Nature does some first-rate grafting, when the stock is young and exceptionally healthy."

Power smiled, almost with the compelling good-humor of other days. "Then I'll limp along, Doctor," he said. "I have things to do, and this enforced waste of time is the worst feature of the whole business. It is very good of you to come out here, and more than kind of Mr. Benson to accompany you; but I won't, if I can avoid it, endure another ten days like the sample I have just passed through."

"You'll regret your decision later. There's no means of adding that half inch afterward, you know."

"I quite understand, Doctor. It's a limp for life."

Dr. Stearn felt the calf muscles and tendons again, and pressed the region of the fracture with skilled gentleness.

"It's a pity," he growled. "You've made a wonderful recovery. If, when you are able to hobble about, you meet this rascal, Peters, and shoot him, call me as a witness in your behalf. It would be a clear case of justifiable homicide!"

So that is how John Darien Power acquired the somewhat jerky movement which characterizes his walk today; though the

cause of it is blurred by the mists of a quarter of a century. The red-whiskered Peters was shot long ago, not by Power, but by an infuriated miner from whose jaw he had wrenched two sound teeth before discovering the decayed stump which led to this display of misplaced energy. It was well that such impostors should be swept out of the townlets of Colorado, even if the means adopted for their suppression were drastic. They wrought untold mischief by their pretensions, and brought hundreds of men and women to needless death. They did some little good, perhaps, in communities where physicians and surgeons were few and far between; but their rough and partly successful carpentry of the human frame did not atone for the misery they inflicted in cases which demanded a delicately exact and scientific diagnosis. At any rate, they have gone, never to be seen again in Colorado, and the precise manner of their departure, whether by rum, or lead, or wise and far-reaching laws, does not concern this narrative.

What does concern it most intimately is the first use Power made of his limping steps; for upon their direction and daily increasing number depended the whole of his subsequent history. Life still held for him certain rare and noteworthy phases – developments which, when viewed through the vista of many years, seemed as inevitable and preordained as the ordered sequence of a Greek tragedy. Yet, on the day he hobbled out into the sunshine again, it was just the spin of a coin whether he rode to the Dolores ranch or took train for Denver, and it is safe to

say that had he done the one thing instead of the other his future career must have been drawn into an entirely different channel.

At least, that is the way men reason when they review the past, and single out some trivial act which apparently governed their destinies; whereat, in all probability, the gods smile pityingly, for the lives of some men cannot be the outcome of idle chance, and John Darien Power's life was assuredly no commonplace one.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUDDEN RISE OF PETER MacGONIGAL

A four-wheeled buggy, with springs, the only vehicle of its kind in Bison, had been hired for Power's first outing. During a whole week toward the close of July he had stumped about on a crutch, and, when the great day arrived that he was able to crawl slowly to and fro in the veranda with the aid of a stick, he announced to the watchful MacGonigal that henceforth he was "on the job again."

On that memorable occasion, while Derry was showing off the new-found accomplishment of walking, an elderly man, white-haired and wiry, but of small stature, rode by on a mettlesome mustang. Power's face grew hard when he met the rider's stare of astonishment; but the expression fled instantly, and he waved a friendly greeting, which, however, received the curtest of responses, while the horse unexpectedly found his head free for a canter.

MacGonigal, whose big eyes lost nothing within range, noted the bare nod which acknowledged Power's salute.

"Old man Willard held out the marble mitt that-a time, Derry," said he.

Power did not reply for a moment. When he answered, he

quoted Dryden's couplet:

“Forgiveness to the injured doth belong;
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong.”

“Good fer you, Derry!” exclaimed the storekeeper appreciatively. “I’ve often wondered what you was connin’ to yerself up thar,” and he jerked his head in the direction of Power’s bedroom; “but I never allowed it was po’try.”

“You were not mistaken, Mac. I was hard at work on dry prose. Those lines are not mine. They were written before Colorado was christened, and they will be true until men attain the millennium.”

“Huh!”

MacGonigal took refuge in a noncommittal grunt, because he fancied that the millennium was the name of a Chicago vaudeville house, and, somehow, the notion did not seem to fit into its right place in the conversation.

“For all that,” mused Power aloud, “I’ll call on Mr. Francis Willard, tomorrow.”

So this resolution explained the light conveyance standing outside the store next morning. Power was in the act of settling himself as comfortably as might be beside the driven, when One-thumb Jake galloped down the slope leading from the Gulch. The cowboy pulled up in the approved style of his tribe, swung out of the saddle, and banged into the veranda a decrepit portmanteau,

which he had been carrying in the thumbless hand.

“Room an’ drink fer a single gent!” he shouted. “I’m an orfin, I am, a pore weak critter slung out inter a crool world!”

“You’re never leaving the Willard outfit, Jake?” said Power, who might well be surprised, since the man had been connected with the Dolores ranch since the first lot of cattle was turned loose on its pastures.

“That’s about the size of it,” said the other.

“But why?”

“The old man says, ‘Git!’ an’ I got.”

“No reason?”

“Wall, if you squeeze it outer me, I’ll be squoze. In a sort of a way, it had ter do with you.”

“With me?”

“Yes, sir. The boss says ter me yestiddy, ‘Why is Derry Power hangin’ roun’ Mac’s?’ Says I, ‘He bruk his leg.’ ‘Pity he didn’t break his neck,’ says the boss, an’, seein’ as you’s a friend of mine, I didn’t agree with any sich sentiments, an’ tole him the same. He kind o’ curled up then; but this mornin’ he gev me the perlite push, – said as he was quittin’ Bison fer a spell, an’ the ranch would be shut down. Anyways, Derry, I’m mighty glad ter see you hoppin’ aroun’. Git down outer that rig, an’ hev a sociable drink.”

Power consulted his watch, and seemed to arrive at some decision on the spur of the moment.

“Can’t wait now,” he said. “You’ll be here this evening?”

“Sure.”

“Then I’ll be around, and I may table a proposition that will please you. Jim,” this to the driver, “beat it to the depot. I want to make the ten o’clock to Denver, and we have only twenty minutes.”

MacGonigal, as usual a silent auditor, gazed after the cloud of dust raised by horse and buggy, and was minded, perhaps, to say something. Whatever may have been his first intent, he repressed it.

“What’s yer pizen, Jake?” he inquired, and the cowboy named it.

Late that night Power returned. He was so tired that he had practically to be carried to bed; but he contrived to tell the storekeeper that Jake should remain in Bison at his (Power’s) expense until certain business conditions had developed. Next day he was too exhausted to take any exercise; but sat in the veranda after breakfast, smoking and chatting with the habitués, whose varied surmises he shared, when a stranger whizzed through the township in the buggy, vanished in the direction of the Gulch, and returned with equal celerity of movement a couple of hours subsequently.

“Looks like a lawyer,” said some wiseacre. “Them fellers air allus on a hair-trigger when a mortgage falls in.”

“Is Willard’s time up?” inquired another man.

“Thar was talk about it afore this dry spell kem an’ cleared him out. Of course – ”

The speaker stopped suddenly. He was on the point of alluding to Nancy's marriage, when he remembered that Power was present, and, in such circumstances, it is safe to assume that a gathering of rough western miners will display more real courtesy and consideration for the feelings of others than may be forthcoming in far more pretentious circles.

"No need to trip your tongue on my account," laughed Power, reaching lazily for a glass of milk and seltzer. "You were going to say, I suppose, that when Mr. Willard's daughter married a rich man the mortgage difficulty would disappear."

"Somethin' like that, Derry," was the answer.

"Did you ever hear the amount of the mortgage?"

"Five thousand, I was told."

Power laughed again. "Five thousand!" he cried. "Surely Nancy Willard cost more than that! Why, Marten gave me that amount as a rake-off on one job I put through for him this spring."

The words were bitter as gall, though uttered in a tone of quiet banter. None spoke in reply. Each man there had seen Power and the girl scampering together through Bison on their ponies so often that the two were marked down by good-natured gossip as "made for each other." Sympathy now would be useless and misplaced; so there was silence for awhile, until a safer and collectively interesting topic was broached by MacGonigal.

"Kin anybody here tell me what's going on at the mill?" he asked suddenly.

The “mill,” as the agency through which many thousands of tons of low-grade telluride ore were transmuted weekly into a certain number of ounces of gold and silver, was the breath of life to Bison. If it stopped, the greater part of the little town’s inhabitants was aware instantly of bare cupboards and empty pockets. Work might cease at the mines for varying periods without causing vital harm to the community; but the metal pulses of the mill must beat with regularity, or Bison suffered from a severe form of heart disease. Consequently, there was no rush to volunteer information; though some of those present had had their suspicions that all was not as it should be with the giant whose clamant voice rang ever in their ears.

“Some books and things was carted from the office to Denver a-Wednesday,” said the know-all who had spoken about the mortgage.

“Why?”

The storekeeper’s tone was ominous, and the other man grinned uneasily.

“Guess it’s what they call an audit,” he said.

“Thar’s been two audits a year fer ten years at Bison, an’ the books hev never gone ter Denver afore.”

“Page has been nosin’ around, too, like as if he was takin’ stock,” put in a feeder, whose task it was to guide and shovel ore into the rolls.

“Page oughter know what’s in the mill by this time,” said MacGonigal, and indeed, the personage under discussion being

the manager, the statement was almost excessively accurate.

“Thar was talk in the papers awhile sence about some new process fer treatin’ low-grade ores,” commented the feeder, apropos of nothing in particular. Then he seemed to wake into cheerful activity. “But what’s the use o’ meetin’ trouble halfways?” he cried. “Goldarn it! people said the mines was peterin’ out more’n a year ago, an’ we’re workin’ full spell this yer week... Who’s fer a fizz? I go on at six, an’ I hev to eat a line fust.”

That evening, before the store filled with the day men, and Power alone was listening, MacGonigal was more outspoken.

“I’ve a notion that the mill is goin’ ter close down, Derry,” he said glumly.

“Probably, for a time,” said Power.

Such prompt agreement was unexpected; but MacGonigal passed it without comment.

“Nit – fer good. They lost the main vein a year last Christmas, an’ the treatin’ of ounce ore has been a bluff whiles they s’arched high an’ low beyond the fault. No, Derry, Bison is busted. Me for Denver tomorrow, an’ any fellar kin hev this store at a vallyation, wid a good rake-off, too – dang it!”

Power was smoking placidly, and the gloomy prophecy of his friend did not appear to disturb him. He even affected to ignore the sigh with which MacGonigal turned away after gazing at him with an expression akin to dismay; for the stout man had the constitutional dislike of his kind to change, and the store had

yielded a steady income since the inception of Bison.

“Say, Mac,” said Power after a long pause, “if you were to dig deep down into your pants, how much could you ante up?”

“Eight thousand dollars, ef I kep’ a grubstake,” came the instant response.

“And what is the mill worth?”

“It cost the best part of a hundred an’ fifty thousand.”

“I asked you what it is worth.”

“What it’ll fetch.”

“Can you figure it out?”

“There’s on’y the movable plant. A lot of money is sunk in cyanide vats, an’ rails, an’ buildin’s. Guess, when you come ter whittle it down ter rolls an’ engines, less the cost of takin’ ’em ter pieces an’ fixin’ ’em anywhar, you’d git ’em fer twenty thousand.”

“And plenty, too, for a mill erected ten years ago to deal with high-grade ore. You see, Mac, the scientific treatment of rich ores has developed so rapidly of late that the Bison mill is practically a back number; while we know that it cannot compete with the low-grade extractions now practised in Cripple Creek and at Leadville. No, you must cut down your estimate. When you buy that mill, Mac, you shouldn’t spring a cent beyond fifteen thousand, and begin by offering ten. At best, it would only form a nucleus for real work.”

“Me – buy – the – mill!” MacGonigal permitted himself to be astounded to the point of stupefaction.

“Yes, that is what will happen. But not a word of this to

anyone. Start in and sell the store, by all means; provided you fix its value on the basis of live business, likely to improve.”

“Derry, air you wool-gatherin’, or what?”

“Unless I am greatly mistaken, Mac, you and I will gather as much wool during the next twelve months as we are likely to need for the remainder of our lives. I may be wrong, of course, but you will be perfectly safe. You will grab the mill at its breaking-up price, and you should sell the store in any event. All I ask is that you act strictly according to my instructions. It is hardly necessary to repeat that you must keep the proposition to yourself.”

These two knew each other thoroughly; though MacGonigal was well aware that certain unfathomable characteristics had developed of late in the once carefree and even-minded youngster for whom he felt an almost parental tenderness. He made no reply. He asked no question. He knew that when the time came Power would speak, but not until the scheme he had in mind, whatever it might be, was ripe for action. Indeed, ever since the accident, Power had displayed some of the attributes which caused men to hate and fear Marten. He, whose laugh had been the merriest and human sympathies the most marked among all the men who had passed in review before the storekeeper’s bulbous eyes, was now apt to lapse into a cold cynicism, an aloofness of interest, a smiling contempt for the opinions and wishes of his fellows, which had puzzled and saddened his one stanch friend. But MacGonigal’s confidence in

him had not diminished. Rather was he aware of a broadening and strengthening of qualities already remarkable, and he hugged the belief that, as the image of Nancy Willard faded into impenetrable mists, Power would come back to his erstwhile sane and wholesome outlook on life.

So the stout man did not even trouble to put into words the assurance that he might be trusted to hold his tongue as to possible occurrences at Bison. After a prolonged stare at a glorious sunset which silhouetted the Rocky Mountains in a rich tint of ultramarine against a sky of crimson and gold, he executed that unaided transit of a cigar across his mouth for which he was noted, and when he spoke it was only to assure the section of Colorado visible through the door that he was dog-goned.

Thereafter events moved with the swiftness which at times seems to possess the most out-of-the-way places in America like a fever.

The stranger whose guise suggested a lawyer to the quidnuncs of Bison was not seen again in the township during the ensuing fortnight; but affrighting rumor, which soon became deadly fact, told of the mill closing down for lack of paying ore. Mr. Page, Marten's representative, promised the sorrowing people that work would be found for everyone elsewhere. Though this guarantee alleviated the crushing effect of the blow, there was much grieving over the loss of more or less comfortable homes which had been won from the wilderness by years of patient effort. Men and women, even in strenuous America, twine

their heartstrings around stocks and stones, and the threatened upheaval was grievous to them. It meant the breaking up of families and friendships, a transference to new districts and a strange environment, a scattering of the household gods which might never reassemble in the old and familiar order. Amid the general unrest none gave much heed to the news that the Dolores ranch had found a new owner – who, by the way, according to the joyous version of the foreman, One-thumb Jake, meant to raise horses instead of cattle – but all Bison felt its hair lifting in amazement when the *Rocky Mountain News* announced that Mr. Hugh Marten had sold the mill to Mr. Peter MacGonigal for a sum unnamed, but variously estimated between the ridiculous (though actual) price of twelve thousand dollars (toward which one-half was contributed by a mortgage on mill and ranch) and five times the amount as representing its cheap acquisition as a going concern.

Every practical miner knew that the ore bodies in the mines were exhausted, and many and quaint were the opinions privately uttered as to Mac's sanity. Even the astute Page – once the deeds were signed and the money paid – expressed the hope that the storekeeper would not rue his bargain.

“Of course,” he said diplomatically, “you may find purchasers for some of the plant; but milling machinery is a special thing, and you will be lucky if you sell the stuff soon. I suppose you have a purpose in view for the buildings?”

“Guess there's some stuff ter be found in the tailin's, an' a few

pockets of ore in the mines,” said MacGonigal.

The manager shook his head. “You can take it from me that when Marten sucks an orange there isn’t much juice left for the next fellow,” he said. “You bought the place with your eyes open, and I still think you may get your money back, with a small profit, but I advise you strongly not to lose a day in advertising the rolls and accessories, while the man who has taken over the Dolores ranch may buy the buildings. They will come in useful as barns.”

“I’ll chew on that proposition,” said MacGonigal.

Page thought him slightly cracked; but shook hands affably, and caught the next train for Denver. He was completely flabbergasted when an assistant whom he had deputed to superintend the removal of Bison’s citizens to new spheres of labor informed him that Messrs. Power and MacGonigal were signing on the whole of the miners and mill-hands at established rates of pay, and that operations were to be started forthwith on a new strike in the Gulch. When he had recovered somewhat from the shock of this announcement he strolled into the government record offices, and examined the registry of recent mining claims. There he found that a location certificate had been obtained by John Darien Power for 1,500 feet by 300 feet on a well defined crevice, at least 10 feet deep, situated in the Gulch, Dolores Ranch, Bison, in the county of Bison and state of Colorado. Other certificates had been issued to cover more than a mile of the main contact, and, to clench the mining right, John Darien Power figured as the legal owner of the land. In a word,

he was “a valid discoverer” on his own property.

Page was a shrewd man, and he did not commit the error of underestimating the ability of the rival who had engineered this subtle stroke.

“I’m buncoed this time, and no mistake,” he muttered, and hurried back to his office, pallid with wrath and foreboding.

There he met Benson, and told him what had happened. The private secretary, rather staggered at first, regained his complacency when he had glanced through some letters and cablegrams received from their common chief.

“The boss has approved of every move in the game,” he said, with a half-hearted laugh. “You see, here he authorizes us to take even less than MacGonigal paid for the mill, and, when Willard repaid the loan, he refused to accept it, but cabled that the money was a gift from Mrs. Marten. So I don’t think he can hold us responsible.”

“It’s not the responsibility I’m kicking at, but the smooth way in which I was bested,” growled Page. “Now, who’d have thought Power had it in him?”

“Well, I would, for one,” said Benson.

“Why, you hardly knew him.”

“I met him under exceptional conditions.”

“But how the deuce did he manage to locate that lost vein – I suppose that is what he has found?”

“Perhaps it was a gift from the gods.”

“I do wish you’d talk sense,” said the irritated manager.

“What *you* would call sense might not pass for wisdom on Olympus,” smiled Benson.

“Will you kindly tell me what you are driving at?”

“I can’t. But look here, Page – which of us is going to write this story to the boss?”

“You are, and don’t forget to put in those remarks of yours. They’ll help some.”

“Shouldn’t I cable? Marten may want to know of this new move.”

“Yes, I suppose that is the right thing to do. When you have coded the message, I’ll go through it with you. There must be no mistake this time.”

Thus, within a few hours, Hugh Marten, established at the Meurice in Paris, received news which certainly took him aback; for he was a man who seldom brooked a successful interloper. At first he was annoyed, and had it in mind to discharge Page by cablegram. There would be no difficulty in giving “Messrs. Power and MacGonigal” a good deal of legal trouble. To begin with, the lawyers would allege collusion against Page, and an investigation into the purchase of the ranch might reveal loopholes for legal stiletos. Indeed, his alert brain was canvassing all manner of chicanery possible through statutes made and enacted when his wife came in, flushed and breathless.

“Hugh,” she cried, “I’ve had heaps of fun this afternoon! Madame de Neuville brought me to the Duchesse de Brasnes’ place in that quaint old Faubourg St. Germain, and the Duchesse

took such a fancy to me that we are invited for a week-end shoot at her castle, one of the real châteaux on the Loire. You'll come, of course?"

"Why, yes, Nancy."

"You say yes as though I had asked you to go to the dentist."

"I'm a trifle worried, and that's the fact."

"What is it? Can I help?"

Marten hesitated; though only for an instant. His wife was more adorable than ever since she had discovered what wonders an illimitable purse could achieve in the *boutiques* of the Rue de la Paix; but there was ever at the back of his mind a suspicion that she looked on her past life as a thing that was dead, and was schooling herself to an artificial gaiety in these glittering surroundings of rank and fashion.

"The truth is that I am vexed at something which has happened in Colorado – at Bison," he said.

"You have had no ill news of Dad?" she cried, in quick alarm.

"No, he's all right. I told you he had sold the ranch. Well, the purchaser is that young engineer, Derry Power."

He watched her closely; but trust any woman to mislead a man when she knows that her slightest change of expression will be marked and understood. Mrs. Marten's eyes opened wide, and she had no difficulty in feigning honest surprise.

"Derry Power!" she almost gasped. "What in the world does he want with the ranch?"

"It seems that he contrived to find the main vein which we lost

in the Esperanza mine.”

“Oh, is that it?” She was indifferent, almost bored. Her mind was in the valley of the Loire.

“Yes. That idiot Page was kept in the dark very neatly; so he sold the mill at a scrap price – by my instructions, I admit – and now Power and MacGonigal have everything in their own hands.”

Nancy’s eyebrows arched, and she laughed gleefully. “Just fancy Mac blossoming into a mining magnate!” she cried. “But why should this affair worry you, Hugh?”

His hard features softened into a smile – in this instance, a real smile – for he was intensely proud of his pretty wife.

“I hate to feel that I have got the worst of a deal,” he admitted. “But that’s all right, Nancy. We won’t quarrel with old friends at Bison. Run away and write to your duchess while I concoct a cable.”

And so it came to pass that Page, instead of receiving a curt dismissal, was told to place no obstacles in the way of the new venture, but rather to facilitate it by fixing a reasonable price on land and houses not covered by the sale of the mill, should they be needed by Marten’s successors at Bison. In fact, by an unexampled display of good will on the part of his employer, he was bade to offer these properties to Power at a valuation. That somewhat simple though generous proposal had a highly important sequel when Francis Willard, rendered furious by learning how he had been ousted from the ranch, sought legal aid to begin a suit against Power. Even his own lawyer counseled

abandonment of the law when the facts were inquired into. Power's title was indisputable, and Marten's action in selling the mill, no less than his readiness to make over other portions of the real estate if desired, showed that the whole undertaking had been carried through in an open and businesslike way.

Willard was convinced against his will; but, being a narrow-minded and selfish man, who had not scrupled to imperil his daughter's happiness when a wealthy suitor promised to extricate him from financial troubles, the passive dislike he harbored against Power now became an active and vindictive hatred. He believed, perhaps he had honestly convinced himself of this, that the young engineer had secured the estate by a trick. It was not true, of course, because he had jumped at the chance of a sale when approached by the Denver lawyer acting for Power. But a soured and rancorous nature could not wholly stifle the prickings of remorse. He knew that he had forced his daughter into a loveless marriage; he could not forget the girl's wan despair when no answer came from Sacramento to her letters; he had experienced all the misery of a craven-hearted thief when he stole the letters Power sent to Bison until Marten assured him that equally effective measures at the other end had suppressed Nancy's correspondence also. Because these things were unforgivable he could not forgive the man against whom they were planned. Penury and failing health had driven him to adopt the only sure means by which he could break off the tacit engagement which opposed a barrier to his scheming; but the

knowledge that he had sinned was an ever-present torture. A certain order of mind, crabbed, ungenerous, self-seeking, may still be plagued by a lively conscience, and Willard's enmity against Power could be measured only by his own fiercely repressed sufferings.

"Curse the fellow!" he said bitterly, when the lawyer told him that a suit for recovery of the ranch must be dismissed ignominiously. "Curse him! Why did he cross my path? I am an old man, and I do not wish to distress my daughter, or I would go now to Bison and shoot him at sight!"

So John Darien Power had made at least one determined enemy, and it may be taken for granted that, had he visited the Dolores ranch instead of Denver on that first day in the open air after his accident, no money he could command would have made him undisputed lord of the land and all it contained.

But evil thinking is a weed that thrives in the most unlikely soil. To all appearance, with Nancy wed and the foundations of a fortune securely laid, Willard's animosity could achieve small harm to Power. Yet it remained vigorous throughout the years, and its roots spread far, so that when the opportunity came they entangled Power's feet, and he fell, and was nearly choked to death by them.

CHAPTER V

WHEREIN POWER TRAVELS EAST

One summer's day at high noon a man rode into Bison from the direction of the railway, and, judging by the critical yet interested glances he cast right and left while his drowsy mustang plodded through the dust, he seemed to be appraising recent developments keenly. As the horseman was Francis Willard, and as this was the first time he had visited Bison since leaving the ranch, there were many novelties to repay his scrutiny. The number of houses had been nearly doubled, the store had swollen proportionately, not to mention the Bison Hotel, which had sprung into being on the site of the ramshackle lean-to where once MacGonigal's patrons had stabled their "plugs," and a roomy omnibus rumbled to and fro in the main street before and after the departure of every train from the depot.

These unerring signs of prosperity spoke volumes; but it was only when the rider drew rein near the mouth of the Gulch that he was able to note the full measure of Bison's progress. Deep in a hollow to the left were two mills instead of one, and the noise of ore-crunching rolls was quadrupled in volume. Two long rows of recently erected cyanide vats betokened the increased output of the mine, and, even while Willard sat there,

gazing moodily at a scene almost strange to his vision, an engine snorted by, seemingly hauling a dozen loaded trucks, but in reality exerting its panting energy to restrain the heavily freighted cars from taking headlong charge of the downward passage. Another engine, heading a similar string of empty wagons, was evidently on the point of making the ascent; so Willard jogged an unwilling pony into movement again, and entered the Gulch.

Beyond the two sets of rails, nothing new caught his eye here until he had rounded the curve leading to the watershed. Then he came in sight of the original entrance to the mine – a shaft was being sunk nearly three-quarters of a mile away, but he was not aware of that at the moment – and noticed that a stout man, jauntily arrayed in a white canvas suit and brown boots, who had a cigar tucked into a corner of his mouth, had strolled out of a pretentious-looking office building, and was obviously surprised by the appearance of a mounted man in that place at that moment.

MacGonigal had, in fact, recognized Willard the instant he swung into view, because none of the ranchers rode that way nowadays, a more circuitous but safer trail having been cut to avoid the rails.

Mac had certainly remarked that he was dog-goned when he set eyes on Willard, and a similar sentiment was expressed more emphatically by the visitor; for there was no love lost between those two, and, in consequence, their greetings were unusually gracious.

“Wall, Mr. Willard, ef this don’t beat cock-fightin’!” cried MacGonigal, when the other halted at the foot of an inclined way leading to the level space from which rock had been blasted to provide room for the various structures that cluster near the outlet of a busy mine. “Now, who’d ha thought of seein’ you hereabouts terday?”

“Or any other day, Mr. MacGonigal,” said Willard, forcing an agreeable smile. The prefix to MacGonigal’s name was a concession to all that had gone before during a short half-hour’s ride. The ex-storekeeper was now the nominal head of a gold-producing industry which ranked high in the state, and the bitterness welling up in Willard’s mind had been quelled momentarily by sheer astonishment.

“That’s as may be,” returned Mac affably, rolling the cigar across his mouth. “But, seein’ as you air on this section of the map, guess you’d better bring that hoss o’ yourn into the plaza. A bunch of cars is due here any minute.”

Willard jogged nearer, and dismounted, and a youth summoned by MacGonigal took charge of the mustang.

“Hev’ yer come ter see Power?” inquired the stout one, with just the right amount of friendly curiosity.

“Well, no, not exactly. I shall be glad to meet him, of course. Is he somewhere around?”

“No. He went East two days sence.”

Now, the movements of local financial magnates are duly chronicled in the Colorado press, and MacGonigal was sure

that Willard had not only read the announcement of Power's departure, but had timed this visit accordingly. Still, that was no affair of his. Willard was here, and might stay a month if he liked, because he would have to pay for bed and board in the Bison Hotel, which MacGonigal owned.

"Ah, that's too bad," said Willard, feigning an indifference he was far from feeling. "Still, I have no real business on hand. I happened to be at a loose end in Denver, and didn't seem to know anybody in the Brown Palace Hotel; so I came out here, to take a peep at the old shanty, so to speak."

"You'll hev' located an alteration or two already?" chuckled the other.

"Every yard of the way was a surprise."

"Guess that's so; but what you've seen is small pertaters with the circus on the other side of the hill."

"On the ranch! Things can't have changed so greatly there?"

"You come this-a way, an' survey the park."

MacGonigal led the visitor through a check office, and along a corridor. Throwing open a door, he ushered him into a well furnished room, with two French windows opening on to a spacious veranda.

"This yer is Derry's den," he said. "He likes ter look at the grass growin'; but my crib is at the other side, whar I kin keep tab on the stuff that makes most other things grow as well. Not that it ain't dead easy ter know why Derry likes this end of the outfit – an' nobody livin' 'll understand that better'n yerself, Mr.

Willard, when you've looked the proposition over fer ten seconds by the clock."

Willard had never found MacGonigal so loquacious in former days; but he was too preoccupied by the tokens of success that met his furtive gaze in every direction to give much heed to any marked change in his guide's manner. Moreover, he had scarcely set foot in the veranda before he yielded to a feeling which, at first, was one of undiluted amazement. The annual rainfall had been normal since he abandoned ranching; but Colorado in June is not exactly the home of lush meadows during the best of years, and he was staring now at a fertile panorama of green pastures, and thriving orchards, while the ranch itself was set in the midst of smooth lawns embosomed in a wealth of shrubs and ornamental trees. Greatest miracle of all, a tiny stream of pellucid water was flowing down the Gulch.

"I don't quite grasp this," he muttered thickly, while his eyes roved almost wildly from the dancing rivulet to the fair savannah which it had made possible.

"A bit of a wonder, ain't it?" gurgled MacGonigal placidly. "Jest another piece of luck, that's what it air. Derry can't go wrong, I keep tellin' him. I had a notion the hull blamed show was busted when we struck a spring at the end o' the fust dip of two hundred feet; but Derry jest laughed in his quiet way, an' said, 'There oughter be tears round about any place called Grief, an' now we have Dolores weepin'. We've tapped a perennial spring, Mac, an' it's the very thing I wanted ter make the ranch a fair copy

of Paradise.' There you hev' it – Derry's luck – a pipe line laid on by Nature – an' him raisin' apples, Mr. Willard, raisin' pippins as big as your fist, on land whar *you* couldn't raise a bundle of alfalfa!"

Willard had to find something to say, or he would have choked with spleen. "Evidently the inrush of water did not injure the mine?" he blurted out; but, for the life of him, he could not conceal the envy in his voice.

"Did good, really," chortled MacGonigal. "We had to drive a new adit, an' that cleared away enough rock ter give us elbow-room. The fust intake was up thar," and he pointed to that part of the Gulch where Power had once wrought with death on a long-vanished ledge. "Now we go in about a hundred feet west of this yer veranda, an' the haulin' is easier."

"Mr. Power and you have created a marvelous property here," said Willard after a long pause.

"Not me," said MacGonigal quickly. "I helped Derry with my wad; but he did all the thinkin', an' it's like a fresh chapter outer a fairy tale when I wake up every fine mornin' an' remember that my third share is bringin' me in close on five hundred dollars a day."

"So Power's interest is worth three hundred thousand dollars a year?"

"More'n that, I reckon. The output keeps on pilin' up, an' Derry's horses 'll add a tidy bit to his bank balance this year."

"His horses?"

“Yep. Hain’t you heerd? One-thumb Jake is manager of the plug department. Nigh on fifty two-year-olds ’ll be sold this fall at two hundred dollars an’ more a throw. I suspicioned Derry was goin’ crazy when he bought up so many mares; but I allow he has the bulge on me now. An’ Jake! Dang me if he didn’t show up at a dance t’other evenin’ with a silver fringe on his chaps!”

Willard turned reluctantly into the darkened room, and, by some mischance, when his eyes had recovered from the external glare, the first object they dwelt on was a framed pencil sketch of the Dolores homestead as he had last seen it – a dreary, ramshackle place, arid and poverty-stricken. In the corner was written, “Nancy,” and a date.

“The ways of fortune are mysterious,” he said, making shift to utter the words calmly. “I endured ten long years of financial loss in the house which my daughter has shown there. She used to know Mr. Power, and gave the drawing to him, I suppose.”

“Derry thinks a heap of that picter,” commented MacGonigal.

“I wonder why?”

“He never tole me.”

Willard laughed disagreeably. He had not forgotten Mac’s peculiarities, one of which used to be blank ignorance concerning any subject on which he did not wish to be drawn.

“By the way,” he said, “why did you give the new mine such a queer name – El Preço – I guess you know it means, ‘The Price’? Why was it called that?”

“It was jest a notion of Derry’s.”

“Rather odd, wasn’t it?”

“Derry’s mostly odd, size him up anyways you hev’ a mind ter.”

“I could have understood it better had he christened the place, ‘The Bargain.’ He shook me up good and hard when he grabbed Dolores for five thousand dollars.”

“He sure had his wits about him, had Derry,” said MacGonigal admiringly.

“And he has gone now to New York, you tell me,” went on Willard.

“East, I said.”

“Well, East stands for New York all the time. Is he making a long stay there?”

“He never said a word. Jest, ‘So long, Mack,’ an’, ‘So long, Derry.’ That’s all thar was to it. Kin I get you a drink? Thar’s a chunk of ice somewhar in the outfit.”

“No, thanks. Time I got a move on. How about those freight cars of yours? Have I a clear road back through the Gulch?”

“Thar’s a half-hour’s off spell right now,” was the prompt answer, and a minute later the resident manager of El Preço mine was watching Willard descend the canyon in the direction of Bison.

“I’d give a ten-spot ter know jest why that skunk kem nosin’ round here,” he mused, gazing contemplatively after the slow-moving mustang and its rider. Then he called the youth who had held the horse during Willard’s brief visit.

“What sort of an Indian air you, Billy?” he grinned.

“Purty spry, Boss, when the trail’s fresh,” said the boy.

“Well, hike after old man Willard, an’ let me know when he’s safe off this yer section.”

Within a couple of hours Billy reported that Willard had entered a train bound for Denver, and MacGonigal blew a big breath of relief. It was not that he had the slightest misgiving as to the effect of Willard’s ill will against either his partner or himself, but he was intensely anxious that Power should not come in contact with anyone who would remind him of the existence of Mrs. Hugh Marten. Power himself never mentioned her; so his faithful friend and trusted associate in business could only hope that the passing years, with their multiplicity of fresh interests, were gradually dimming the memory of events which had altered the whole course of his life.

MacGonigal did not think it necessary to tell Willard that Power had brought his mother from San Francisco soon after the mine proved its worth. Mother and son occupied the Dolores ranch. The presence of the gentle, white-haired woman was a positive blessing to Bison; for she contrived to divert no mean percentage of her son’s big income into channels of social and philanthropic effort in which she took a close personal interest. A library and reading-room had been established; a technical instruction class offered an excellent supplement to the state school; a swimming bath was built close to the mills; two churches were in course of erection; a wideawake theatrical

manager at Denver had secured a site for a theater and the township already boasted its ten miles of metaled roadway. In the self-satisfied phrase of the inhabitants, Bison was becoming "quite a place," and everyone testified that it was to Mrs. Power rather than her son that all these civic improvements were due. Men had even ceased to consult Power himself on such matters.

"You run and see my mother about that," he would say, with a quiet smile, when someone had endeavored to arouse his sympathy in behalf of a deserving object. "It's my affair to make the money which she spends. Get her to O. K. your scheme, and it goes."

In business he was equally unapproachable.

"Put it before MacGonigal," was his regular formula. "I can't do a thing without his say-so. But I warn you he is a terror. If there's a kink in your proposition, he'll find it, as sure as Jake can run his fingers onto a splint."

For all that, the stout manager of mine and mill realized his limitations.

Once, and once only, did MacGonigal act in the belief that Power had referred a point to him for final settlement. A glib agent for mining machinery persuaded him to purchase a new type of drill, which proved absolutely useless when asked to disintegrate the hard granite of Colorado. Power laughed when he heard of its failure.

"You must have thought it was meant for cutting cheese, Mac," he said lightly. But the barbed shaft struck home, and "the

terror" bought no more drills without first consulting the man who understood them.

Thus, slowly but effectually, Power contrived to isolate himself from Bison. With an almost uncanny prescience he gave occasional directions in the mine, or suggested some modification in the milling process which invariably resulted in a higher percentage of extraction. For the rest, he devoted his days to the improvement of the stud farm, and his evenings to books. His mother tried vainly to dissipate this recluse trend of thought and habit. On one memorable occasion she invited a friend and her two cheerful and good-looking daughters to visit the ranch for a week. Timidly enough, she had sprung a surprise on her son, warning him of the forthcoming invasion only when it was too late to stop travelers already en route from San Francisco. Then she, like MacGonigal, had to learn her lesson. Derry agreed she had acted quite rightly. He merely expressed a suave doubt that the ladies would enjoy the enforced seclusion of a place like Dolores, but they might appreciate the air. Then he strolled out, and a telegram from Denver apologized for a sudden departure to Chicago. He explained in a letter that he was in need of a number of books, and thought it best to look through the bookstores in person rather than trust to catalogues. He returned two days after the guests had left, and there were no more experiments in that direction. Be sure that an anxious mother had long ago formed a remarkably accurate opinion as to the circumstances attending Nancy Willard's wedding; but, being a wise woman, she said no

word to her son concerning it, and was content to pray that the cloud might lift from off his soul, and that he might yet meet a girl who would make him a good and loving wife. For that is the way of women who are mothers – they find real joy only in the well-being of their offspring. Though this gentle-hearted creature knew that she was risking some of her own belated happiness in bringing about her son's marriage, she was ready to dare that, and more, for his sake. She longed to renew her own youth in fondling his children. She was almost feverishly desirous of seeing him thoroughly established in a bright and cheerful home before the gathering mists shut him out forever from her sight. So she waited, and watched, and wondered what the future had in store for her loved one, and often, in her musings, she tried to imagine what manner of girl Nancy Willard was that she should have inspired such an enduring and hopeless passion.

The upheaval, when it came, was due to the simplest of causes. Power had foreseen the tremendous industrial development which lay before Colorado, and indulged his horse-breeding hobby on lines calculated to produce a large income wholly apart from the ever-increasing profits of the mine. The state needed horses, which must be strong of bone, with plenty of lung capacity; yet not too heavy, for mountain tracks and dusty valleys are anathema to the soft Belgian. They must be presentable animals, too, symmetrical, of untarnished lineage, and of a type fitted either for saddle or harness, because Colorado was making money in a hurry. Thus, it chanced that, shortly before Willard's

ill-omened visit to Bison, an Eastern agent wrote advising Power to attend a sale in New York. A noted breeder of hackneys, who had imported some of the best sires from England and Russia, and owned several fine Percherons, was breaking up his stud, and the chance thus presented of securing some magnificent stock might not be repeated during another decade.

Power asked his mother to accompany him; but she was afraid of the long journey in the torrid temperature then obtaining. Yielding to his wishes, she telegraphed a second time to her San Francisco friends, and they accepted an invitation joyously and promptly. Moreover, seeing that she was regarding with some misgivings his prospective absence from the ranch for a period which could not well be less than three weeks, he made a great concession.

“If Mrs. Moore and her girls can arrange to stay so long, keep them here until I return,” he said, and the pleasure in the worn, lined face fully repaid the effort those words cost him. So they kissed, and parted, and the weary years which have passed since that sunlit morning in Colorado have contained no diviner solace for the man than the knowledge that he left his mother well satisfied with her lot, and smiling a farewell without the slightest premonition of evil or sorrow. It is well to part thus from those whom we love; for no man knows what the future may have in store – and horror would have been added to the burden of Power’s suffering if recollections of the last hours of companionship with his mother were clouded by an abiding sense

of unkindness or unfilial treatment.

So Power hied him to New York, which meant that he passed three hot nights and two hotter days in a fast-speeding train. The Rock Island Railroad took him across the rolling prairie to Omaha and Chicago, and, in the city which no steer nor sheep nor hog can visit and live, he entered the palatial Pennsylvania Limited, which, in those unregenerate days, dumped him out early in the morning on the New Jersey shore. Then, for the first time, he saw New York, and saw it from the river, which is the one way to see New York for the first time. Crossing by the ferry to 23d Street, he did not, it is true, secure that wondrous initial glimpse of a city, unequaled, in many respects, by any other, which is vouchsafed to the traveler arriving by sea. But, even twenty-two years ago, the busy Hudson was no mean stream, and when Power's unaccustomed eye turned bewildered from the maze of shipping which thronged that magnificent waterway it found fresh wonders in the far-flung panorama stretching from Grant's Tomb to the Battery. At that time Trinity Church was still a landmark, for New York had hardly begun to climb into the empyrean; so the prospect was pleasing rather than stupefying, as it is today.

A hot wind already hissed with furnace-breath over the fourteen miles of serried streets that lined the opposite shore; for, in the long years which have sped since Power first crossed the Hudson, New York has neither lengthened nor broadened. Even mighty Gotham cannot achieve the impossible; so, in

the interim, several new cities have been superimposed on the older one which spread its beauties before his bewildered vision. The *Paris*— who of the middle generation does not remember the *Paris*, with her invariable list to starboard, after an ocean crossing? — was creeping slowly upstream, and Power was amused by the discovery that the big ship, like himself, moved with a limp. The *City of Rome*, whose yacht-like lines suggested the poetry of motion, but, as is the mode on Parnassus, adhered strictly to suggestion, lay at anchor near the Jersey shore, and when the ferry churned around her graceful stem, the grim walls of the Palisades completed a picture which admits of few peers. Disillusionment came later; but the spell of that thrilling first impression was never wholly lost. Driving through 23d Street, on his way to the Waldorf Hotel, Power could not help comparing this important thoroughfare with Market Street, San Francisco, and State Street, Chicago, and the architectural stock of the metropolis experienced a sudden slump. Nor did it wholly recover lost points when his carriage entered Madison Square, with its newly erected campanile, almost a replica of the stately Giralda tower in Seville, its glimpses of Broadway, south and north, its stolid Fifth Avenue Hotel, and its chastely elegant, though still towerless, white Metropolitan building. Even the Waldorf, then less than a fourth of the Waldorf-Astoria, though notable already among the public palaces of the world, failed to strike his imagination with the appeal of the Palace Hotel, San Francisco; the truth being that New York, first in the field by

a couple of centuries, had not yet begun, like Milton's eagle, to mew her mighty youth.

It would assuredly be interesting to those who knew and loved the queen city of the Atlantic nearly a quarter of a century ago if Power's revised and corrected opinions might be quoted now. But the chronicle of a man's life ought to be accurate before it is picturesque, and the truth is that the heat-wave which was then withering the whole Eastern seaboard kept this visitor from breezy Colorado pent within the marble halls of the Waldorf Hotel, save when urgent need drove him forth. That particular scourge of high temperature was destined to become historical. The thermometer soared up beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit; hundreds of people were stricken daily by heat apoplexy; the hospitals were crammed to their utmost capacity; the asphalt pavement, where it existed, showed ruts like a muddy road in the country; and it is easy to understand why a man who had cheerfully endured 110 degrees and 115 degrees in the dry heat of the nearer Rockies should gasp for air here like a fish out of water.

Worst of all, the horse sale was postponed. The owner of the stud and his prospective patrons alike had flown to sea and mountain for relief. As inquiry showed that the horse-breeder himself had gone to Newport, Power made haste to secure a stateroom on one of the Fall River line of steamboats, and it was on this quest that the *Puritan Maiden*, a vessel on which folk would travel merely for the sake of describing her to their friends,

brought him to the chief summer resort of fashionable life in America.

He had not the slightest notion that Mrs. Hugh Marten was disporting herself daily on that particular stretch of Rhode Island beach. For all that he knew, she might as well have been at Trouville or Brighton. Indeed, had anyone dared the lightning of his glance by mentioning her, and if he were compelled to hazard a guess as to her possible whereabouts, he would certainly have said that, to the best of his belief, she was in Europe. Such was the fact; but there are facts in every life which assume the guise of sheer incredibility when analyzed, say, in the doubtful atmosphere of a law-court. In the dark days to come, during those silent watches of the night when a man looks back along the tortuous ways of the past, John Darien Power could only lift impotent hands to Heaven and plead in anguish that he might at least have been spared an ordeal which he not only did not seek, but would have fled to the uttermost parts of the earth to have avoided. Such moments of introspection were few and far between, it is true. His was too self-contained a nature that he should rail against the Omnipotent for having tested him beyond endurance. He made a great fight, and he failed, and he paid an indemnity which is not to be measured by any other scale than that alone which records the noblest effort.

To his own thinking, the tragedy of his life began that day in Bison when the sympathetic storekeeper told him of Nancy Willard's marriage. But he was wrong in that belief. A man may

lose the woman he loves, and recover from the blow, but he peers into abysmal depths when he meets her as another man's wife, and finds that love, though sorely wounded, is not dead. It is then that certain major fiends, unknown to the generality, come forth from their lairs – and there must have been a rare awakening of crafty ghouls on the day Power reached Newport.

CHAPTER VI

THE MEETING

When Power arrived at New England's chief summer resort on a glorious July morning twenty-two years ago, man had succeeded in adding only a garish fringe to a quietly beautiful robe devised by Nature. Some few pretentious houses had been built; but local residences in the mass made up an architectural hotch-potch utterly at variance with sylvan solitudes and breezy cliffs. Rhode Island, which lends its name to the entire state, is slightly larger than Manhattan. A long southwesterly spur shields from the mighty rages of the Atlantic the little bay on which the old town of Newport stands; but the climate has the bracing freshness which is almost invariably associated with the northern half of that great ocean. If the bare rudiments of artistry existed among the idle rich who overran the island during the '80's, it should have protected a charming blend of seashore and grassy downs from the Italian palaces, Rhenish castles, Swiss chalets, and don-jon keeps which the freakish conceits of plutocrats placed cheek by jowl along the coast. Nowadays these excrescences are either swallowed in forests of well grown trees or have become so beautified by creepers that they have lost much of their bizarre effect; while magnificent avenues, carefully laid out and well shaded, run through a new city of delightful

villas and resplendent gardens. But Power's first stroll from the portals of the Ocean House revealed a medley in which bad taste ran riot. The Casino, a miserable-looking structure, was saved from dismal mediocrity by its splendid lawns alone; the surf-bathers' friends were protected from the fierce sun by a long, low shanty built of rough planks; the roads were unkempt, and ankle-deep in mud or dust; broken-down shacks alternated with mansions; a white marble replica of some old Florentine house, stuck bleakly on one knob of a promontory, was scowled at by a heavy-jowled fortress cumbering its neighbor.

He found these things irritating. They were less in harmony with their environment than the corrugated iron roofs of Bison. His gorge rose at them. They satisfied no esthetic sense. In a word, he resolved to get through his business with the horse-fancying judge as speedily as might be, and escape to the unspoiled wilderness of Maine.

Were it not for one of those minor accidents which at times can exert such irresistible influence on the course of future events, he would certainly have left Newport without ever being aware of Mrs. Marten's presence there. He ascertained that the judge had gone off early in the morning on a yachting excursion up Narragansett Bay, having arranged to lunch at a friend's house at Pawtucket; so, perforce, he had to wait in Newport another day.

At dinner he was allotted a seat at a large round table reserved for unattached males like himself. The company was

a curiously mixed one, but pleasant withal. A Norwegian from San Francisco, who sold Japanese curios, a globe-trotting Briton, a Southerner from Alabama, a man from Plainville, New Jersey, and a Mexican who spoke no English, made up, with Power himself, a genuinely cosmopolitan board, and Power soon discovered that he was the only person present who could understand the Mexican. Mere politeness insisted that he should lend his aid as interpreter when a negro waiter asked the olive-skinned señor what he would like to eat; but the "Greaser," as he was dubbed instantly, proved to be a jovial soul, who laughed when any of the other men laughed, insisted on having the joke translated, and roared again when it was explained to him, so that each quip earned a double recognition, while he never failed to pay his own score by some joyous anecdote or amusing repartee. Thus, Power was forced into the role of "good fellow" in a way which he would not have believed possible a few hours earlier. In spite of himself, the merry mood of other years came uppermost, and, when the party broke up at midnight, after a long and lively sitting on a moonlit veranda, he retired to his room with a certain feeling of marvel and agreeable surprise at the change which one evening of enforced relaxation had effected in his outlook on life. He decided that these chance companions had done him a world of good, that his misanthropic attitude was a false one, and that a week or two at Newport might send him back to Colorado a better man. Applying to a state of mind a metaphor drawn from material things, he felt as an Englishman feels who leaves his own

dripping and fog-bound island on a January afternoon and wakes next morning amid the roses and sunshine of the Riviera. The glitter on land and sea may bear a close resemblance to spangles and gilt paper on the stage; but it is cheering to eyes which have not seen the sun for weeks, and when, in such conditions, John Bull sits down to luncheon under the awnings of a café facing the blue Mediterranean, he is unquestionably quite a different being from the muffled-up person who hurried on board the steamer at Dover.

Power had contrived to withdraw himself so completely from the more genial side of existence at Bison that he rediscovered it with a fresh zest. Next day he was no longer alone. The man from Birmingham, Alabama, and the Englishman shared his love of horses, and the three visited the judge, who stabled some of his cattle on the island, and had photographs and pedigrees galore wherewith to describe the stock on his New York farm.

So Power stayed two days, and yet a third, and he was laughing with the rest at some quaint bit of Spanish humor which he had translated for the benefit of the company at dinner on the third evening, when he became aware that a lady, entering with a large party, for whose use a table had been specially decorated, was standing stock-still and looking at him. He lifted his eyes, and met the astonished gaze of Mrs. Marten.

“Derry!” she gasped.

“Nancy!” said he, wholly off his guard, and flushing violently in an absurd consciousness of having committed some fault.

She had caught him, as it were, in a boisterous moment utterly at variance with the three years of self-imposed monasticism which followed her marriage. Yet, with the speed of thought, he saw the futility of such reasoning. The girl-wife knew nothing of his sufferings. She was greeting him with all the warmth of undiminished friendship, and could not possibly understand that he had endured tortures for her sake. So he regained his wits almost at once, and was on his feet, bowing.

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Marten,” he went on. “Your presence here took me completely unawares. You are the last person breathing I expected to see in Newport.”

She laughed delightedly, with no hint of flurry or confusion beyond that first natural outburst.

“It would sound much nicer if you said what I am going to say to you,” she cried, “that you are one of the few persons breathing whom I am really delighted to see in Newport. But I can’t stop and talk now. I’ll ask Mrs. Van Ralten to forgive me if I slip away from her party for ten minutes after dinner. Mind, you wait for me on the veranda. I’m simply dying to hear some news of dear old Bison! How is Mac? Oh, my! I really must go. But don’t you dare escape afterward!”

Forgetful of all else, he allowed his startled eyes to follow her as she ran to her place at the neighboring table. She was dressed in some confection of white tulle and silver; a circlet of diamonds sparkled in her thick brown hair; a big ruby formed a clasp in front for an aigrette of osprey plumes; her robes and

bearing were those of a princess. Were it not for the warranty of his senses, he would never have pictured the girl of the Dolores ranch in this fine lady. Even now he stood as one in a trance, half incredulous of the evidence of eyes and ears, and seemingly afraid lest he might awake and come back to the commonplaces of an existence in which the Nancy Willard of his dreams had no part.

The Englishman, Dacre by name, knew something of the world and its denizens, and he had seen the blood rush to his friend's face and ebb away again until the brown skin was sallow.

"Sit down, old chap," he said quietly. "I was just thinking of ordering some wine for the public benefit. Do you drink fizz?"

The calm voice helped to restore Power's bemused senses. Afraid lest his moonstruck attitude might have been observed by some of Mrs. Marten's companions, he tried to cover his confusion by a jest.

"Wine, did you say?" he cried. "Certainly – let's have a magnum. Bottled sunlight should help to dissipate visions."

"Anacreon has something to that effect in one of his odes; though he vowed that he worshiped Wine, Woman, and the Muses in equal measure."

"Who is Anacreon?" asked the man from Plainville.

"He flourished at Athens about 600 B.C.," laughed Dacre.

"Did he? By gosh! The Greeks knew a bit, then, even at that time."

"This one in particular was an authority on those three topics.

Love, to him, was no mischievous boy armed with silver darts, but a giant who struck with a smith's hammer. He died like a gentleman, too, being choked by a grapestone at the age of eighty-five."

"Ah, that explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"He had a small swallow, or rum and romance would have knocked him out in half the time."

Power was rapidly becoming himself again. "I behaved like a stupid boy just now," he said; "but I was never more taken aback in my life. I have not met Mrs. Marten since her marriage, three years ago, and I imagined she was in Europe."

"Oh, is that Mrs. Marten?" chimed in downright Plainville. "Last Sunday's papers whooped her up as the prize beauty of Newport this summer, and I guess they got nearer the truth than usual. She's a sure winner."

"Did I hear her mention Mrs. Van Ralten?" inquired Dacre.

"Yes, her hostess tonight, I believe."

"Van Ralten and Marten hurried off together to the Caspian last week. They are interested in the oil wells at Baku."

Cymbals seemed to clash in Power's brain, and he heard his own voice saying in a subdued and colorless staccato, "I am sorry I did not meet her sooner. I leave tomorrow."

Dacre looked at him curiously; but the wine had arrived, a choice vintage of the middle '70's, and the Mexican was lifting his glass.

“El sabio muda conseja; el necio no,” he quoted.

The phrase was so apt that Power glanced at the speaker with marked doubt; whereupon the blond Norwegian asked what the señor had said.

“He told us that the wise man changes his mind, but the fool does not,” translated Power.

“Gee whizz!” cried Plainville. “It’s a pity he can’t give out the text in good American; for he talks horse sense most all the time. If *I* had a peach like Mrs. Marten callin’ me ‘Derry,’ damn if I’d quit for a month!”

The general laugh at this dry comment evoked a demand by the Mexican for a Spanish version of the joke. Then he made it clear that he had resolved to abjure wine, and was only salving his conscience by a proverb.

This cheerful badinage, which might pass among any gathering of men when one of them happened to be greeted by a pretty woman, did not leave Power unscathed. He had dwelt too long apart from his fellows not to wince at allusions which would glance harmlessly off less sensitive skins. The iron which had entered into his soul was fused to a white heat by sight of the woman he had loved and lost. He resented what he imagined as being the knowledge these boon companions boasted of his parlous state. Unable to join in their banter, not daring to trust his voice in the most obvious of retorts, for the man from Plainville had not been designed by nature to pose as a squire of dames, he gulped down a glass of champagne at a draft, and pretended to

make up for wasted time in an interrupted course.

Dacre seemed to think that he would be interested in the latest gossip in financial circles with reference to a supposed scheme organized by Marten and Van Ralten to fight the Oil Trust. Power listened in silence until he felt sure of himself; then he launched out vigorously.

“It strikes me that America has lost the art of producing great men,” he said. “We whites are degenerating into mere money-grubbers; so, by the law of compensation, our next demigod should be a nigger.”

“Huh!” snorted Alabama, eager for battle.

“That’s my serious opinion,” continued Power dogmatically. “And, what’s more, I think I know the nigger. Have any of you dined in the Auditorium Hotel, Chicago?”

Yes, several; dining-room on top floor; lightning elevator; all right going up empty, but coming down full was rather a trial.

“Well, you will remember that, as you go in, a young colored gentleman takes your hat and overcoat, and cane or umbrella. He supplies no numbered voucher, and cannot possibly tell at which tables some six or seven hundred diners will be seated. At this time of year every man is wearing a straw hat of similar design; yet, as each guest comes forth, he is handed his own hat and other belongings. Now, I hold that that nigger has a brain of supreme mathematical excellence. There is not a financier in Wall Street who could begin to emulate that feat of memory. Given a chance, and such men make their own opportunities. The Auditorium

cloakroom attendant will rise to a dizzy height.”

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