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The UNION JACK

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No. 448

Suddenly there appeared at the window a dusky face, daubed with red and yellow paint, and a pair of fierce eyes glared into the hut. A smile of triumph stole over the features of the chief.

A FATHER'S TESTIMONIAL.—Mr. G. F. Hannah, of Katherine Road, East Ham, writes: "I was passing through the kitchen the other evening when I saw my son reading what I thought to be a 'peany' horrible. I took it away from him, but what was my surprise to find that it was a UNION JACK. I read it through, and found that it was a healthy, exciting yarn, suitable for my son to read."

PARTNERS IN PERIL!

OR THE PRISONER
OF ROCK GULCH.

Suddenly there appeared at the window a dusky face daubed with red and yellow paint, and a pair of fierce eyes glared into the hut.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER 1.

Two British Boys—Well Met—The Missing Partner—
Tom Suspects Foul Play.

THEY met at the fork of the trail, just outside Shasta Town—two British boys, both under seventeen, but both sturdy, well-knit, and athletic.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Medway Norman lives?" Tom Neville asked, as they rode into the town side by side.

"Sure and I can. Stranger here!" asked the other, with a friendly nod. He had a good-natured Irish face, and merry blue eyes. Tom Neville took a liking to him at once.

"Yes. I landed in San Francisco a month ago."

"Thought I knew a tenderfoot! But I say, will you take a word of advice from a fellow-countryman?"

"Gladly."

"Then keep clear of Medway Norman."

"Why, what sort of fellow is he?"

"Moneylender, Shylock, claim-speculator, and bloodsucker generally! Don't get into his clutches!"

Tom Neville looked perplexed.

"But I don't understand. He's my father's partner."

"Then I'm sorry for your father," said the Irish lad grimly. "Norman'll simply skin him! But I reckon there's a mistake somewhere. I've been about Shasta Town a year or more, and I never heard of Medway Norman having a partner. Got any other friends in the town?"

Tom shook his head.

"Then I'll tell you what. There's old Norman's house. You can go and see him. If he shows the cloven foot, come on to the Hencoop Hotel and put up with me."

"Thanks," said Tom gratefully. "It's awfully good of you to—"

"Rats! Britishers should stick together in a foreign land. I'm Ned Clancy. Shake!"

"My name is Tom Neville."

They shook hands; and Clancy, with a cheery "Ta-ta!" passed on, Tom stopping in front of Medway Norman's dwelling.

It was a log cabin, like most of the residences in Shasta Town. A sort of shed with a zinc roof was built out in front, and the door bore the word "office" in sprawling letters. As gleams of light came from the office window, Tom concluded that he would find Mr. Norman there. He hitched his reins to a post, and stepped up to the door.

Evening was closing in upon Shasta Town, and the miners were coming in from the gulches. A crowd of rough, bearded men, in red or blue shirts, with pick and spade over shoulder, passed Tom as he stood at the door of the office.

Some of them glanced curiously at the lad, and he heard the words more than once uttered—"tenderfoot!" "greenhorn!" "Johnny Bull!"

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UNION JACK.—Vol. xviii.—No. 448.

"Come in!" rasped a very unpleasant voice in response to Tom's knock.

Tom pushed open the rickety door and entered. A man with a party face and meagre features sat at a desk, on which lay an open ledger. He had a pen in his hand.

"Shut the door. What do you want?"

Tom's spirits sank a good deal at this far from courteous greeting.

"Are you Mr. Norman?"

"Yes; and I'm busy. State your business!"

"I am Tom Neville."

"Oh!"

"I've come to join my father."

Mr. Norman shifted the evil-smelling oil-lamp, so that the light fell upon the boyish English face. His skinny fingers twitched, and a nervous look crept into his hawkish eyes.

"To join your father?" There was a strange shiver in the rasping voice. "So you want to join your father, do you?"

"Yes, sir!" The speculator's manner awoke all sorts of strange suspicions and misgivings in Tom's mind. "Isn't he here?"

"Well, no—not exactly! Certainly not here!" jerked out Medway Norman. "But how is it that a boy of your age comes to make such a long journey alone? It is a great way from London to California—a very great way!"

"It is easily explained, Mr. Norman. My father left England soon after my mother's death, leaving me at a school kept by Dr. Hurst, an old friend of his. He sent regular remittances through a firm of bankers in San Francisco. Two years ago, these suddenly stopped."

"Two years ago? Yes, that was about the date!" murmured Mr. Norman, drumming upon the desk with his bony knuckles.

"The date of what?"

"Never mind. Go on with your story. I'll tell you what presently."

"Dr. Hurst wrote to the bankers, who answered that they were merely employed to send the remittances, and knew nothing personally of Mr. Neville. We waited anxiously for news, but none came."

"Sad—very sad!" murmured Mr. Norman.

"Six months ago, Dr. Hurst died. Left alone, I resolved to come out here and join my father. I had a little money—more than enough for my fare and outfit—so I came over."

"But what brought you to Shasta Town?"

"My father had mentioned in his last letter that he had gone into partnership with a Mr. Medway Norman, and that his business would be at a mining-camp called Shasta Town, but that he could give me no address to write to, as the place was in the wilds, far from the limits of the postal service. After I landed from the steamer, I inquired about Shasta Town, and found out where it was. I took the train to Sacramento, then to Yreka. I bought a horse there, and here I am!"

The speculator listened attentively.

"You are a plucky lad. Few boys of your age could have done all this."

"I was determined to find my father, sir. His long silence was so strange that I could not help fearing that something had happened to him." Tom looked anxiously at Mr. Norman.

"Tell me where he is, sir."

"Ah, I am sorry I cannot. Your fears, my dear boy, were only too well grounded."

Tom Neville's face went very white.

"What has happened to him? He is not dead?"

"No, not exactly dead," said Mr. Norman in his provokingly slow way.

"Will you tell me where he is?" burst out Tom passionately.

"Why are you torturing me like this?"

"My dear, dear lad, I should be the last in the world to torture anyone!" replied Mr. Norman. "But I cannot tell you where he is, for the simple reason that I do not know."

"How can that be?"

"Mr. Neville has disappeared!"

"Disappeared? How? When? Where?"

"Dear me, how impetuous the boy is!" rasped Medway Norman. "How should I know? Mr. Neville was my partner until he conceived the insane idea of going off to the wilds in search of the Mexican Mine. He left Shasta Town, and since then nothing has been heard or seen of him."

"What is the Mexican Mine?"

"A mine supposed to exist somewhere to the north of Mount Shasta. In my opinion, it is only some drunken miner's fable. But poor Neville was always so impetuous—so very impetuous! He would not listen to my remonstrances!"

"Two years ago! Disappeared!" said Tom, like one in a maze. "I suppose you mean that he is dead?"

A lump came into his throat as he spoke.

"Well, yes. I don't see what can detain him in the wilds, yet if he is still alive," admitted Mr. Norman.

There was silence for a few minutes. Tom looked steadily at Medway Norman.

"And his property?" he asked suddenly.

"Property?" rasped the speculator. "What property?"

"As your partner—"

"He nearly ruined me with his improvidence. He left me the idea of getting anything out of me—"

Tom flushed with anger.

"That will do, Mr. Norman. I want nothing that is not my own. But it strikes me that there's something very peculiar about my father disappearing like this, and leaving nothing behind. I mean to find out the truth of the matter."

Mr. Norman grew a shade paler.

"What do you mean?"

"I am going to find my father!"

Anger and alarm were blotted in the eyes of the speculator.

"And how do you propose to set about it?" he asked, in a sneering tone.

"I don't know yet, but I shall do it. If there has been foul play, I shall see that punishment falls upon the guilty person!" exclaimed Tom, with flashing eyes.

"Quite heroic! I wish you every success. As Robert Neville went away owing me money, I, of course, have an interest in the discovery of his fate. But now, my dear lad," continued Mr. Norman, with a sudden change of tone, "you have only just arrived in Shasta Town, and you must be hungry and tired. I cannot allow my poor partner's son to put up at any house but my own. You will at least stay the night?"

Tom would have preferred to join Ned Clancy at the Hen-coop Hotel, but he did not know exactly how to refuse Mr. Norman's invitation. He thoroughly distrusted the speculator. But, without something to go upon, he could not very well show that.

Besides, it occurred to him that, by staying a night in Mr. Norman's house, he might learn something more about this very unprepossessing partner of his father's. He therefore accepted.

"Where is your horse?" the speculator asked.

"I left him outside."

Medway Norman grinned.

"You have a good deal yet to learn about the Wild West," he said. "If you find your horse still there I shall be greatly surprised."

Tom hastily opened the door. Night had closed in, but it was light enough for him to see that the spotted mustang he had bought at Yreka was no longer where it had been left. He drew his revolver from his belt as he ran out. He could see no sign of a horse in the street.

"Lookin' for anyone, younker?" asked a big, brawny miner, who was passing.

"Someone has taken my horse. Perhaps you've seen it—a spotted mustang?"

"Red Burke passed me on a spotted mustang not five minutes ago, and, if he had such a hanimile this mornin', my name ain't Dandy Dan."

"Which way did he go?"

"Don't you think of goin' arter him. He'd shoot ye as soon as look at ye!" cautioned Dandy Dan.

"I shall not submit to be robbed. Tell me which way he went."

"Oh, if ye mean biz, O.K." The miner shrugged his broad shoulders. "He went t'ords the fork of the trail."

"Thanks!"

Tom hurried as far as the branch trails outside Shasta Town; but, if there was a horseman near, the darkness hid him. He returned unsuccessful.

Medway Norman met him at the door with a grin.

"Found your horse?"

"No. Some thief has stolen it. But, if I ever meet him, I'll have it back, or know the reason why!"

When he spoke, Tom Neville little dreamed how soon he was to set eyes upon Red Burke.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom's Suspicions Verified—The Peril of the Night—A Friend in Need—Catalina.

"CERTAINLY shall not sleep to-night."

That was Tom Neville's mental exclamation as he stood in the room assigned him for the night. It was barely furnished. The bed was merely a wide plank on trestles, covered with buffalo robes. Tom did not object to that. He did not look for luxury in Shasta Town. He intended to keep awake because he did not think it safe to slumber in the house of Medway Norman.

The speculator, as he called himself—though in Shasta Town he was more commonly known as "Shylock"—had exerted himself to be pleasant during the evening. But he had not succeeded in tulling Tom's suspicions. Every glance of his shifty eyes, every tone of his rasping voice, confirmed the lad's distrust.

He blew out his candle and sat upon the bed. His six-shooter was in his belt ready to his hand. Tom had not failed to learn the first lesson of the mining-camp—to carry a revolver, and to know how to use it.

It was weary waiting, and Tom had had a long ride that day. Naturally, he began to nod.

But he did not quite go to sleep. When there was the sound of a movement in another part of the cabin, he started into alertness at once.

It was long past midnight. What was Medway Norman moving about for at that hour?

All the rooms were on the ground floor. There were four in all. Tom's room and the kitchen were at the back, connected by a door. Medway Norman slept in one of the front rooms.

Tom heard the speculator walk through the kitchen and stop outside his door.

The boy's heart pulsed wildly. What did the man mean to do? Surely not—Tom, steadying his nerves with a great effort, stretched himself silently upon the bed and began to breathe regularly and heavily, like a sound sleeper, throwing in an occasional snore. It was the old idea—"give him rope enough and he'll hang himself!" Tom wanted to see just what Medway Norman would do.

"Tom!"

The rasping voice was as soft as the speaker could make it. Tom made, of course, no reply. Norman repeated the name twice, each time louder. Then he opened the door.

Tom's heart beat like a hammer; but, by sheer force of will, he kept up his steady breathing.

Medway Norman did not enter, nor did he show a light into the room, for fear of waking the sleeper. He stood in the doorway, listening intently.

The silence, broken only by the rhythmic respiration, reassured him.

He withdrew softly, and closed the door. Tom sat up, straining his ears till they buzzed again. He heard the speculator return with stealthy steps to his own room.

What did it mean? He had come and gone for no apparent object.

Tom was convinced that there was more to follow. He rose, pulled off his boots, and stole to his door, which he opened a few inches.

"Ah!" he muttered under his breath, as he heard Medway Norman unbarring the front door of the cabin. So he was going to have a midnight visitor. But why his elaborate precautions to ascertain that Tom was asleep? The boy drew a quick, deep breath. A strong sense of danger smote him.

Under the unusual circumstances—when, for all he knew, his very life was threatened, Tom felt justified in secretly watching the speculator. He stepped out into the kitchen, from which the door opened into Medway Norman's room. A lamp was burning there. The door was shut, but it was composed only of rough boards nailed to a frame, leaving cracks more than sufficient for Tom's purpose.

With his eye to a wide crack, Tom Neville had an unintercepted view of the front room. Mr. Norman's visitor had entered, and was seated upon a bench at the table, pouring out a glass of whisky.

He was a man of unusual stature, with a coarse, ruddy face, little fleggy eyes, and a huge tangled beard of almost a brick-red hue.

Mr. Norman was seated opposite him, looking at him with unconcealed impatience.

"That's decent fire-water, boss!" said the red-bearded man, sipping down his glass.

"If you've done swilling, let us come to business!" rasped the speculator.

"Go ahead. What's worrying you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost, by thunder!"

"So I have!" snarled Medway Norman. "First of all, any news from Rock Gulch?"

"Nix! That's short and sweet! Durn my boots, pardner, if I latch on to the meaning of this 'ere deal! Why does yo make us come here in the middle of the night, instead—"

"Because I've work for you to do, Burke, which can only be done in the middle of the night," the speculator replied in a low, tense voice.

The ruffian looked at him curiously.

"Something's skeered you mighty bad, I kin see that!"

"Robert Neville's son has turned up!"

"Thunder!"

"He swears he'll find out what's become of his father, and bring the just punishment to the culprit if there has been foul play."

"Does he?" said Burke, with an extremely ugly look.

"How old is the pilgrim?"

"About seventeen, I reckon."

"Rather young to crow so loud! Shall I knock him on the head?"

The speculator shuddered violently.

"Don't be such a brute, Burke! You know that I will never consent to bloodshed. All the same, the boy is cool, brave, and determined—just the kind of fellow to ruin everything if he is allowed to run loose! There's a middle course."

"All serene." The ruffian nodded. "You want him to disappear so that he'll never be heard of again?"

"Exactly. Have you any pards in town?"

"Three. Mustang Jim, Bowie Bill, and Four Jacks."

"Excellent. Place one at his window in case of alarm.

Bring the other two inside. You can seize and gag him before he wakes." The speculator rubbed his bony hands.

"It will be as easy as rolling off a log."

"Sure he's snoozing? If he's the kind of galoot you describe, we'll mebbe find him awake, with a six-shooter in his fist."

"No fear of that! I've been to his room, and he's sleeping like a top."

"That's O.K." Red Burke rose. "I'll fetch the boys. Look for me in ten minutes."

He put his hand on the latch. Tom had seen and heard enough. As Burke left the cabin, the boy stole back to his room, his face white and his pulses throbbing.

He was to be kidnapped, and in ten minutes he would have four desperadoes to deal with. There was not a moment to be lost.

He looked at his window. Glass was an expensive commodity in Shasta Town, and this window was unglazed.

Transverse bars kept out marauders; a thick blind was a partial protection against the weather. The bars would defy Tom's knife for more than ten minutes, he saw that. It was useless to think of escaping that way.

There was only one course to take, and he took it. In a minute or less he had his boots and bat on.

Then, revolver in hand, he walked out of his room, crossed the kitchen, and entered that of Medway Norman.

The speculator's jaw dropped as he saw Tom. The revolver, levelled at his head, brought the ashen hue of terror to his thin, bony face.

"What—what does this mean?" he managed to articulate.

His cowardice was almost pitiable. Tom thought he was about to faint.

"It means that I have overheard your little plot, Mr. Norman. Think yourself lucky that I don't shoot you dead where you sit. Take care! I swear that, if you make a movement to stop me, I'll kill you as I would a mad dog!"

There was little fear of the trembling wretch attempting to detain him. He sat a picture of limp terror, while Tom lifted the latch and opened the door.

"Good-night, Mr. Norman. And remember this. I'm going to find my father; and, if he's suffered treachery at your hands, as I firmly believe, look out for yourself!"

He was gone!

The speculator was still sitting, pale and shivering, as Tom had left him, when Red Burke re-entered the cabin.

"What's the matter? What makes you sit there looking like a sick owl?" ejaculated the red-bearded ruffian.

Medway Norman shook himself together, and stammered out an exclamation. Burke scowled darkly.

"And you let him pass you?" he exclaimed. "You let a mere kid walk over you like that?"

"What could I do?" was the sullen reply. "He had the drop on me!"

Burke gave him a glare of withering contempt.

"I s'pose you don't even know which way he went, does ye?"

"How should I know? But he can't have gone far. He's about. His horse was stolen from outside my office this evening."

A momentary grin crossed the rugged, red-bearded face.

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"So it was his'n, was it? Well, he shall ride it away from Shasta Town with his feet tied together underneath. Say, pard, the bird's flown, and their nest's empty. We've got to find him, though. Spread out and search. He's got to be roped in. Hang yourselves, for it'll be daylight afore long."

The four rangers scattered for the search. Meanwhile, what of Tom Neville? He had seen Rod Burke and his gang as they came down the street, and dodged into the shadow of a but till they had passed him.

When their footsteps grew faint in the distance, he emerged from his retreat.

His intention was to seek the Henocop Hotel. It would, of course, be closed, and he would have to knock up the proprietor. It was the only refuge he had.

But how to find it? The shanties looked all alike in the dim night.

Ah, what luck! He caught a glimmer of light from the shuttered window of a cabin a little retired from the street. Someone was up very late—or perhaps early, for it wanted only an hour to dawn. Without hesitation, Tom stepped up to the window and tapped lightly.

He heard a swift movement within. Then a sweet, clear voice, with a luring Spanish accent, came through the shutter. "Who knocks?"

Tom started. He had not expected to hear a girl's voice. But he replied at once:

"I am a stranger, pursued by assassins. Can you tell me how to get to the Henocop Hotel?"

His frank, boyish voice probably reassured the inmate of the cabin. The shutter was opened. Tom saw into a neat little room. Upon a table stood a bright lamp; close by it a work-basket.

A girl's face was at the window. Tom had been long enough in California to know a native Californian—that is, one of Spanish-Mexican descent. An olive face, with lustrous, dark eyes, looked out at him. The girl was a year at least younger than Tom, but her face had the sad gravity which comes of a life of care.

As Tom looked in surprise and admiration at the beautiful face so suddenly revealed, he heard the sound of footsteps growing more distinct behind him.

The cabin, as we have said, stood some little distance back from the street. Tom, therefore, could not be seen by his pursuers until they were close upon him. But that would not be many minutes.

"Quick!" said the lad, in a low, hurried voice. "Red Burke and his gang are coming. Can you direct me?" The girl gave a swift, searching glance at his face. Apparently her scrutiny satisfied her doubts.

"You will have to cross the street to the Henocop Hotel, senior. Don't risk it. They are certain to see you."

"The bounds! Well, I carry a revolver. They shall not find me easy to deal with!" Tom muttered between his teeth.

The girl's slim hand glided out of the window and touched his arm as he was turning away.

"Stay, senior. If your life is really in peril, I will help you."

Tom looked at her. "Many thanks. But what can you do?"

"I can conceal you. They will never think of looking for you here. Step to the door."

Tom made a slight movement of repugnance. He felt it humiliating to let a girl conceal him from his enemies. But a second's thought convinced him that it was his only chance, and that it would be the height of folly to object.

The shutter closed. Tom passed to the door. It was already open. Darkness reigned within. The girl had prudently extinguished the lamp.

A little hand clasped his arm and drew him inside. Tom felt that she was trembling. Then, for the first time, it struck him what she was risking for his sake.

"No, no!" he said hurriedly. "I won't come in. I have no right. You don't know the risk you run."

"I know all, and I do not hesitate, for your words show me that you are a noble and generous caballero," the girl said in a low voice touched with emotion. "Say no more, senior! The door was closed and barred. 'And besides, 'tis too late. They would see you leave!'"

And, indeed, footsteps and muttered voices could be heard coming nearer to the spot.

The Californian girl laid her finger upon Tom's lips. They stood in breathless silence. The footsteps were passing the cabin now.

"Don't seem ter be nuther hide ner hair of him nohow. Dues ye think he's scooted from camp, Burke?"

"Looks like it, Bill. But we must have him."

The voices died away.

For several minutes neither Tom nor his saviour spoke. At length he said huskily:

"You have saved my life, for they should never have taken me alive, and I could not have held my own against four of them."

"If I have done so, senior, it is a great joy to me. But you tell me your name! When I saw your face a few minutes ago, it seemed familiar to me. I am Catalina Royal."

"My name is Tom Neville. Do you know it? I do not remember bearing yours before."

"Neville! It is a name that is dear to me, for my last friend—my second father—bore it."

Tom started. Had the girl known his father?

"My father lived in this camp two years ago, Miss Royal. He was Madway Norman's partner. Perhaps you know him?"

She gave a little cry.

"Then you are his son? That is how I knew your name!"

Tom was about to speak again, when Catalina resumed hurriedly: "I leave you now. Wait till all is safe, then go your way. The hotel is opposite—a little to the left. But do not see you again to-morrow. I have many things to say to you. Good-night, senior!"

"Good-night, Miss Royal."

Catalina was gone. Tom heard a door open and shut; a murmur of voices in an adjoining room; then silence.

He did not remain long. The Californian girl had raised scandal by befriending him. If he were seen leaving her cabin, it might set tongues wagging.

In the dark and silent street he saw no signs of his enemies. Perhaps they were searching the recesses of the camp, but more probably they had given up the quest and gone to their lodgings.

In a few minutes, Tom stood before the rough-saddled abanty which a daubed sign announced to be the Henocop Hotel.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Hears the Story of the Mexican Mine—British Boy against Border Ruffians.

RED CLANCY put his head out of his window. "Is that you, tenderfoot? All serene. I'll be durt in a jiffy!"

"Buck up, then. If Red Burke hears my knocking, I shall have a tussle on my hands."

In a minute or less the bars rattled down, and the door was opened.

The two British boys clasped hands. Clancy was half-dressed, and a bit sleepy about the eyes, but as good-natured and cheerful as ever.

"So Shylock cut up rusty, did he? But what has Red Burke, the spalpeen, to do with it?" Clancy rebuffed the door.

"But never mind talking now. I can see you haven't slept. Step up to my room with me, pard. Snore is the word now, entirely!"

In fact, now that the excitement was over, Tom was almost nodding.

He accepted the hospitable Irish lad's invitation, and in five minutes was sleeping soundly.

It was rather late in the morning when Clancy awoke him. Over a substantial Californian breakfast, Tom related to Clancy all the occurrences of the night, with the exception of his meeting with Catalina. He merely said upon that point that "someone" had sheltered him.

Although the two lads had met for the first time the previous evening, Clancy's openhearted cordiality had won Tom's friendship at once, and they talked as if they had known each other for years.

"By jabsers," Clancy exclaimed, "that partner of your dad's is a holy scoundrel, and no mistake! I haven't the least doubt that he was at the bottom of your father's disappearance."

"But what can I do? I haven't a shadow of proof; and even if I had, there's no law in this hole of a camp to force him to tell me where my father is."

"You'll have to find him yourself, alanna, and it's Ned Clancy that'll help ye!"

"Will you? I don't know how to thank—"

"Rats!" Clancy cheerfully interrupted. "Look here. Old Shylock says that Mr. Neville disappeared while looking for the Mexican Mine. Suppose we have a shot at it? I've often thought of doing so. And the same trail may lead us to Mr. Neville, who, I'm pretty sure, is kept a prisoner somewhere by Shylock's order."

"But Norman's object. What can that be?"

"Why, after seeing you yesterday, I asked the landlord of this shebang some questions about Shylock and his partner. He remembers Mr. Neville well, and says that he is of opinion that Neville put most of the capital into the business. When Norman started the money-lending branch, there used to be quarrels. Neville was a decent chap, and used to give back money to the gamblers after Norman had skinned them."

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Naturally, a business conducted on those lines couldn't last for ever, and no one was surprised when Neville vanished, and Norman gave out that the partnership was dissolved. Indeed, says folks reckoned that Shylock had feathered his nest all."

"Norman says my father owed him money when he left."

"Ned Clancy laughed heartily."

"That's rich, and Shylock all over!"

"But, I say, what is this Mexican Mine?"

"I can only tell you the story as it's known about the camp. A party of Mexicans and native Californians—the greasers always go in gangs—went prospecting north of Shasta, where the Klamath Indians most do congregate. The redskins dropped upon them, and only one fellow came back to town—a native Californian named Marco Royal."

Tom started at the mention of this name. "He had four Klamath arrows in his body, and he died in the hotel two hours after reaching the camp. He died delicious, raving about gold and Indians and scalping. Those that heard him figured it out that the Mexicans had found a rich mine, and were working it when the reds swooped down and wiped 'em out. Royal had a dozen or so nuggets in his pockets, and these were handed to his wife—or, rather, widow."

"Ah, he had a wife!"

"Yes; and a daughter, too. She was a little girl then, but she still lives in the camp, and does sewing for the respectable families. She supports her mother, who was knocked over by her husband's death, and has never got over it. Awfully nice colleen," Clancy went on in a reflective way.

"She could marry almost any man in camp, and there are some wealthy pilgrims here, too. But she sticks to her mother and her sewing. If there wasn't a little black-eyed girl waiting for me in Galway, I should fall in love with her myself!"

"I suppose a good many chaps have been looking for the Mexican Mine?"

"Yes. Since the soldiers came and wiped out the redskins, the country's pretty safe. But nobody has located it yet."

"But, if it were located, it would belong to Miss Royal, wouldn't it?"

Clancy shrugged his shoulders.

"Findings are keepings in this Wild West, Tommy. If we find it, though, we give Miss Royal half. That's digger's law."

"Fair enough. But—Great Scott!"

"What's stung ye, ye goosoon!"

"There's that ruffian with my horse, and I'm going to have it back!"

"Arrah, good for ye! I'll stick by ye, pard!"

Red Burke had slouched into the bar-room of the Hencoop Hotel, hunching his reins at the door. At a glance, Tom recognised his spotted mustang. The horse-thief had not even changed the trappings.

Burke, believing that the boy had fled from Shasta Town, considered his possession of the stolen horse extremely unlikely to be disputed.

"What's yer game?" he growled, as Tom stood before him. A quick suspicion leaped into his eyes. He had never seen Tom before, but it occurred to him instantly that this was the boy he had failed to find last night in the streets of Shasta Town. Madway Norman's description had been pretty accurate.

There was rather a crowd in the bar-room, which was to Tom's advantage, for a horse-thief is the most detested of criminals in the Wild West, and Tom had no doubt about being able to prove his case.

"I want to know how you came by that horse," said Tom seriously, but in the least daunted by the ruffian's fierce scowl.

"What's that to you?"

"A good deal. It is my horse, and you have stolen it. I demand its return at once!"

There was a circle about the two in a moment. Wonder was depicted upon many a face. Red Burke was so well-known in Shasta Town as a desperate ruffian, that few men cared to stand against him. Tom's defiance of the giant the miners looked upon as sheer foolhardiness, and everyone expected to see Burke draw a "gun" and lay him dead in the sawdust.

Perhaps Burke would have attempted that, but Ned Clancy had his six-shooter out, and his eyes were fixed upon Burke, watching for foul play.

"You call me a horse-thief, you limb?" said Burke slowly, black with passion.

Tom turned to the silent, tensely interested crowd.

"Gentlemen, I claim that horse. If I can prove my claim, is there no law in Shasta Town to give it to me?"

A brawny miner made a step forward. Tom had seen him before.

"I'm Dandy Dan, and I says, prove that the critter's yours, and the camp'll stand by you to see fair play, and hyer's my six-shooter to back up my words!"



Before Red Burke had recovered from his surprise, Tom was galloping away at full speed. Turning in his saddle, he waved his arm and yelled defiantly at his enemies.

A leader once found, the crowd wasn't long in making its sentiments known.

"Good for you, Dan Doyle. We'll see the fair thing, you bet!" was the general shout.

Red Burke had plenty of bulldog courage, but he knew that when a Western crowd gets on the track of a horse-thief, a cry for "Judge Lynch" usually follows, and he already felt a sensation of choking in his throat.

He did not know what proofs Tom might be able to bring forward in support of his claim, and the course he took showed that he had a full share of the wisdom of the serpent.

"Pards," said he, with an air of great frankness, "the boss ain't mine, and I says so. I found it loose in the street last evenin', and, as it looks mighty like one that belongs to a pard evenin', and, as it looks mighty like one that belongs to a pard evenin', I took charge of it till I could see about it! That's of mine, I reckon, and I reckon thar ain't a man hyer who'll call Bill Burke a liar!"

"Wal," said Dandy Dan, with a look of deep reflection, "if that's the 'how' of it, and you hand over the critter to it's right owner, I don't see as the camp is called upon to interfere."

"I can prove my ownership," Tom said quietly. "My name—Tom Neville—is stamped on the trappings in a dozen

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place, and see, Beauty knows me!" He stepped to the mustang, which rubbed its soft muzzle into his hand, and whinnied as he caressed it. "Is that clear enough?"

"Clear enough!" said Red Burke, with an oath. "If the writer's yours, take it! But you called me a horse-thief, and you've got to eat your words. You take it back, or I'll make it warm fur ye!"

The ruffian, by relinquishing all claim to the horse, had cunningly changed the matter from a public to a personal one. It lay between him and Tom now.

Tom understood it all, but he was not in the slightest degree daunted.

"I take nothing back!" he answered fearlessly. "When I left my mustang, I secured it, and it could not possibly have got loose. I still believe that you stole the horse, and that your excuse is a lie pure and simple!"

The veins stood out like knotted cords upon the forehead of Red Burke. He made a motion as though to spring at the bold speaker.

But Ned Clancy's revolver popped up, and looked him squarely in the face.

"Go slow, ye rapparee!" chuckled the Irish lad. "Sure, it's a poor hand ye play in this game, intirely!"

"You Irish madman, turn that thing away!" Tom Neville—if that's your name—do you mean to screen yourself behind that bog-trotter? Haven't you pluck enough to stand up for yourself? Do you carry a revolver without daring to use it?"

"I'll fight you if you like!" Tom replied coolly. "But will Medway Norman pay you as much for shooting me as for kidnapping me?" he added caustically.

"Come out inter the street!" said the ruffian hoarsely. "Either you or me'll die this hour!"

The crowd poured out of the Hencoop Hotel into the wide, sunny street.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fight—Tom's Luck—Preparing for the Trail.

RED CLANCY was looking serious and concerned as he accompanied Tom to the street.

"I say, pard, you've taken a big job in hand. Red Burke has killed as many men as he has fingers on his hands, so the folks say."

"Are you setting up as a Job's comforter, Ned?"

"No." The young Irishman laughed. "But I'd like you to let me take your place in this affair. I'm more used to the 'wild and woolly West' and its ways than you are."

"I am a good shot, Clancy, though it's true I've never fired at a human being before. But I didn't act in this matter without reflection. Red Burke is paid by Medway Norman to go for me; and, as soon as I leave Shasta Town, he's pretty sure to follow and attack me. Now, as I've got to tackle him some time, whether I choose or not, I'd rather do it in Shasta Town, where I'm sure of fair play, than in the woods, where he would have a gang to help him."

Ned Clancy nodded.

"I see. In this case, it's certainly good policy to take the bull by the horns," he admitted.

"I shall not take his life if I can possibly help it. Heaven knows I shrink from bloodshed. But I must defend myself, and I will not allow even his life to interfere with my search for my poor father."

The voice of Dan Doyle broke in.

"Britisher, stick yerself in the middle of the street, and face Red Burke. That's ko-rect! Gentlemen, are ye ready for the cirks to kermence?"

"Yaas!" growled Burke savagely.

"I am ready!" Tom replied, without a quiver in his voice. He knew that the next minute held the chances of life and death, and he was perfectly self-possessed.

Word had been passed that a "shooting-bee" was in progress, and nearly fifty men had gathered to see it, lining the street upon either side, well out of the track of the bullets.

The British boy and the border ruffian faced each other, pistol in hand, between the rows of eager faces—Tom calm, thoughtful; Burke half furious, half swaggering.

Dan Doyle, who had appointed himself master of the ceremonies—nobody raising objection—called out the word to fire:

"One, two, three! Let her go, Gallagher!"

Crack-ack!

The two reports were blended into one. Tom gave a sharp start, and the blood running down his face told him that he was wounded.

Red Burke stood perfectly still for a moment, only the wave of ghastly whiteness which spread over his face indicating that he had been hit. Then he lurched forward, and the whole length of him crashed upon the ground.

Clancy was at Tom's side in a flash.

"You are hit, pard. Let me see."

"It's painful, Ned, but I don't think it's serious. I feel all right."

"You're in luck," Ned Clancy heard a great sigh of relief. "There's a bit of skin clipped off your temple, but you've lost a lock of your hair. It was a close shave, but recent business."

Dan Doyle was bending over Red Burke. The legs of the camp bully lay very still.

"He is not dead!" Tom spoke in a hoarse voice. "I know he is not dead!"

The miner looked up with a kindly grin.

"Not by a jugful! He's wish a bull graveyard full of men yet!"

"You think he'll recover? Thank Heaven!" said Tom, feeling a great weight lifted from his mind.

"Sasy, yunker, you're too good for Shasta Town. Send go back to John Bull's island an' start a young ladies' school," ejaculated the miner.

Tom smiled.

"You're sure he'll recover?"

"You bet! The lead's in his shoulder. It'll take him a month to git over it, I calc'late."

The insensible rough was carried into the Hencoop Hotel.

Tom went to Ned Clancy's room to wash away the blood from his face, and his new partner bandaged the cut with a torn handkerchief. When Tom put his hat on, wound and bandage alike were almost hidden, and he felt little the worse for his adventure.

The "pards" having decided to leave Shasta Town in quest of the Mexican Mine, they made a common stock of their cash, and Ned went about the camp to purchase the necessary supplies, he being more experienced in this line than the "tenderfoot," fresh from the old country.

Tom, after seeing his spotted mustang safely bestowed in the hotel stables, set out to pay his promised visit to Catalina, while Clancy was making his purchases.

The door of Catalina's cabin was open, and the girl sat in the sunshine there, with needle and thread in hand. It struck Tom at once that she must have seen the duel.

"You are safe, then?"

The words broke from her involuntarily.

"Quite!" Tom smiled. "You saw it, then?"

She nodded.

"Don't think me a brawler, Miss Royal," Tom said earnestly. "The man is my enemy for no fault of mine, and I had no choice but to meet him."

"I understand, senor. I think you are very brave!" the Californian girl said softly.

Tom's glance, passing the girl, fell upon the form of a woman, reclining in a large croking-chair. The likeness showed that she was Catalina's mother. The old lady gave Tom a friendly nod and smile, but did not rise.

"My mother is an invalid," said Catalina, as she handed Tom a chair, "and she speaks no language but her own. You do not speak Spanish?"

"Not a word, I'm sorry to say."

Senora Royal was perforce left out of the talk. Tom, however, was not displeased by that, for he liked to listen to the musical tones of Catalina.

"You knew my father, Miss Royal? I have come from England to find him. Can you tell me anything that will help me in the search?"

"Alas, I cannot. I only knew that two years ago, he left the town in quest of my father's mine. Since then he has not been heard of," the girl said sadly. "I should ask you forgiveness, senor, for it was chiefly upon my account that he left Shasta Town."

"Ah, I have heard the story of the Mexican Mine. But do not reproach yourself, Miss Royal. I am convinced that he fell a victim to the treachery of his partner—not to the dangers of the Indian trail."

"I suspected that also," Catalina confessed. "I never trusted Medway Norman. Ah, senor, it almost broke my heart when the months passed and Senor Neville died by the turn." Her voice faltered. "After my father became of age, Klamath arrows, I know not what would have become of me—my mother and me—but for Robert Neville. He was my friend, and the most generous and delicate of friends. I came to love him almost as I had loved my own father. Often he spoke of his little son in England. It is a great happiness to me to make your acquaintance, senor."

The artless simplicity of the Californian girl was very charming to Tom, and also he felt a son's natural delight in learning these particulars concerning his father, whose long absence had only deepened his filial affection.

The talk ran on, and he was soon in possession of Catalina's simple life-story.

By her skill with the needle, she kept the wolf from the door, but often she found it necessary to be up and down hours before daylight. Tom could not fail to see the weariness imprinted upon the young brow. Even now, as they talked, her fingers were not idle for a moment. But the girl never thought of complaint. She accepted a hard life cheerfully.

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When Tom told her that he was going to seek the Mexican Mine, her alarm was visible, but she did not attempt to dissuade him.

"And if I find it, Miss Royal, you will be rich!" continued Tom.

"But it will not belong to me, señor, if you find it, for the claim has not been registered."

"No; but we should share, of course. You will take one half; my part and I the other."

"You are very good, señor. I wish you every success. But useful as the gold would be to me, I would rather you found Señor Neville than the mine."

"By good fortune, I hope to discover both."

CHAPTER 5.

The Wounded Klamath—Good Samaritans—News of Red Burke—Tom Missing—Taking the Trail.

"ARRAH, now, listen, will ye? Sure and I heard somebody in the thicket."

"You're dreaming, Ned."

"Dreaming be hanged! Och, there it is again! Am I dreaming now, ye spalpeen?" exclaimed Clancy triumphantly.

"No, by Jove! It's somebody wounded!"

A month had passed since the events occurred in Shasta Town which we have recorded.

Tom Neville and Ned Clancy were far from the lively little mining-camp.

In quest of the Mexican Mine, they had plunged into the rocky wilderness north of Mount Shasta.

Hitherto, their search had not been successful.

Neither the Mexican Mine nor the missing partner of Medway Norman had been discovered.

But the two British boys were far from giving up hope.

With good horses, plenty of supplies, excellent health, and unlimited pluck, they had no idea of returning unsuccessful to Shasta Town.

It was upon a fine morning, when the partners were making their way through an open forest of redwoods, that Ned Clancy halted, with the declaration that someone was lurking in a thicket they were about to penetrate.

A deep groan from the depths of the bushes convinced Tom that his partner's ears had not deceived him.

They dismounted at once; and, tearing the bushes aside, discovered whence the sound of pain proceeded.

An Indian—a chief by his dress—lay extended upon the ground in an almost insensible state. Blood was clotted upon his face and hair and disordered head-dress.

Tom uttered an exclamation of pity. Ned Clancy looked critically at the redskin.

"I know him, be jabers! It's Cloudy Face, the chief of the Klamaths."

The Indian stirred at the sound of voices.

"Whoever he is, he's a man, and in need of help, and we are going to help him, Ned."

"Right you are. We'll be Good Samaritans, though the boulder would have scalped us if we had been in his place!" laughed Ned.

The two lads, gently enough, lifted the Klamath chief from the thicket and laid him upon the soft turf at the foot of a big redwood. Clancy supported his head, while Tom bared and bathed his hurt.

He had been shot at close quarters with a revolver, and the bullet had grazed along the skull. Half an inch lower, it would have killed him. As it was, he was stupefied by the shock, and had lost a great deal of blood.

"He'll be as good as new in an hour or two!" Ned Clancy remarked.

"But, I say, Tommy, that wound wasn't given more than an hour ago. The fellow who shot him is very likely still among the redwoods. Suppose the redskin has been at the scalping game? I know there's peace with the reds now, but you know how long an Indian peace lasts when a good chance at scalping comes along."

"Well, even so, we're bound to help a wounded man!" Tom declared stoutly.

"Will the white men listen to the words of Cloudy Face?"

It was the voice of the red chief, who had been restored to consciousness by the cold water applied to his head.

"Fire away!" said Clancy.

"Cloudy Face keep peace. Hunt deer with four braves. Bad whites shoot redskins from behind trees, and steal horses, rifles, blankets. Cloudy Face wounded; his braves killed. Cloudy Face fly; fall down; hide in bush; bad whites not find him."

The terse explanation of the Indian was given with an air of gloom that banished all doubt.

"I'm sorry for you, chief, and I'm very glad we came along and found you," said Tom. "Have you any idea who the reds were?"

"Cloudy Face know. Bad whites from smoky wigwams on face."

Tom and Ned exchanged glances. The Indian chief's description brought to their minds the great stature and red-bearded face of the bulky Tom had fought outside the Henocop Hotel in Shasta Town.

"Red Burke!" ejaculated Tom. "Is he here after us, Ned? What do you think?"

"Shouldn't wonder. A pity you didn't make it his last sickness for him that day, Tommy!"

The partners looked very serious. It was no joke to have Red Burke and his gang seeking for them amongst the redwoods. The keen black eyes of the Klamath chief read their faces.

"Bad whites enemies of my brothers?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, chief. They're on our trail, I believe."

A look of satisfaction came over the darkly-bronzed face.

"Cloudy Face grateful. Bring more warriors from wigwams. Help young braves wipe out bad whites!"

"That isn't a bad idea, Tommy!" observed Clancy, looking at his pard.

Tom nodded thoughtfully.

"If they attack us, chief, we shall be very glad of your help, but I don't know whether we should be justified in striking the first blow," Tom said slowly.

The expression of the dusky face showed that the Klamath did not comprehend the scruples of the English lad. However, he said nothing.

He remained silent, while Tom bandaged the wound.

"It won't be safe for you to move for some hours, chief. You require rest. But I've no doubt you'll be able to get about by sundown."

The forced inactivity was not welcome to the Klamath. He was eager to go upon the trail of vengeance. But his head was still dizzy, and he was weak with loss of blood. He did not gainsay Tom's decision.

The lads camped under the redwood. They had plenty of time at their disposal, and besides, Tom wanted to ascertain something of Red Burke's whereabouts before pushing on.

"We don't want to ride blindly into a hornet's nest, as Cloudy Face and his men appear to have done," the English lad remarked.

"I rather think you had better stay by our red friend, Ned, while I go and do a little scouting."

Clancy nodded.

"That's only prudent; but you'd better stay, while I do the scouting, alama."

Tom smiled. He took a coin from his pocket, spun it, and caught it.

"Let the dollar decide, Neddy."

"Head!" exclaimed Clancy.

"Wrong!" chuckled Tom. "So I go scouting!"

"Keep your eyes peeled, pard."

"You bet!"

And Tom left the camp afoot, with his rifle in the hollow of his arm.

Ned Clancy remained watchful by the sleeping Indian. He did not feel uneasy about Tom. A month in the woods had made the "tenderfoot" a very passable trailer.

But an hour passed, then another, and another, and Tom did not return.

Ned began to feel a sense of disquietude growing upon him.

"Tom surely ought to be back by now. Has anything happened to him?" he asked himself again and again.

The sun was getting lower in the west; the shadows of the redwoods were lengthening.

All at once Clancy became aware that the Klamath was awake. Two large, earnest eyes were watching keenly his anxious face.

"What troubles my white brother?" asked Cloudy Face.

"My partner has gone on a scout, and I begin to fear that something's wrong!" answered Clancy.

With deep concern in his dusky face, the redskin rose. His weakness, apparently, was gone.

"If the young brave is in danger, we must save him," he said.

"Cloudy Face follow trail. Klamath chief track wind through forest! Let us go."

"But suppose Tom returns after we've gone?" Clancy hesitated.

"He may only have lost his way amongst the redwoods."

"Talk on tree!" was the laconic reply.

Clancy understood. From his girdle, where he carried his war-paints in the Indian fashion, the Klamath produced a stick of chalk.

Ned scratched upon the bark of the big redwood in huge capitals a single sentence:

"We have followed your trail.—Nap."

Five minutes later, the camp under the branches of the redwood was deserted.

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CHAPTER 6.

Red Burke Holds the Drop—in the Enemy's Hands—
The Prisoner of Rock Gulch.

"HANDS up, you young hound, or I'll scatter your brains over the redwoods! I've got the drop on you!" Tom Neville started back, and, brave as he was, he turned pale when he saw a levelled revolver only a few feet from his face, and, behind the threatening barrel, the evil, exultant eyes of Red Burke.

The Shasta Town bully had indeed got the "drop" on him. It required only a slight pressure upon the trigger to hurl him headlong into eternity.

He had therefore obeyed, though reluctantly, the order of the ruffian, elevating his hands above his head in token of surrender.

"Hyer, mates, I've got hold of one of the roosters!" chuckled Red Burke. "Four Jacks, look spry with that there mate."

The rough who bore this peculiar name—doubtless derived from some "hand" he had held in a "poker" game—slouched forward.

"Tie his furs, and stick him on a hoss, and then rope his hooks together underneath!" directed the leader. "Britisher, if you so much as crook your finger, it'll be kingdom-come for yer, so I warn ye!"

"You've got me at a disadvantage," replied Tom, and his voice was fearless. "I'm your prisoner!"

There was no help for it. It was of no use to argue with a levelled six-shooter. Besides, the whole gang were round him now—four in all—about the wickedest-looking quartette to be found in northern California.

Tom's hands were fastened behind him, and then he was swung upon an Indian pony and secured there. Red Burke was full of glee.

"I s'pose you don't know what I've tuck you prizner fur, 'stead of layin' you out, you limb?" he remarked.

"I suppose Medway Norman will only pay for kidnapping and not for murder!"

"You've missed it. I meant to shut you up in Rock Gulch fust, but arter you put a bullet through my shoulder and spoiled my shootin' for ever, I'd see old Shyluck and his dollars sky-high afore I'd let you live—prisoner or free!" scowled the rough.

Tom was puzzled. "Then why—" he began.

"Afore ye go over the range, sonny, ye've got to tell me whar ter look fur the Mexikin Mine," Red Burke said, watching the lad's face intently.

Tom looked astonished, as he felt.

"What do you think I know about the Mexican Mine?" he queried.

Red Burke chuckled knowingly.

"Oh, ye're going to play ther innocent, aye ye? Does ye think ye kin pull the wool over my eyes, sonny? Don't try it! I've got my eye-teeth!"

"If you think I know anything about the Mexican Mine, you're on the wrong track! I've heard the story, that's all. I know no more than all Shasta Town knows."

"Too thin!" Burke shook his head decidedly. "Mustang Jim, hyer, saw you a-jawin' with old Royal's daughter afore you started. I allers kinder 'spicioned that mebbe the gal knew more about it than she let on. You know whar to look for the mine—or, at least, you've got a clue—and you're goin' ter tell me all about it, or I'll know the reason why!"

And the ruffian's tone was full of deadly menace. Tom did not reply. The knowledge Red Burke attributed to him he did not possess. But he saw in the mistake of his captor an escape from immediate death, and that was an advantage at least. His silence was misconstrued by Burke.

"Ah, ye sees it's no use, does ye? Better make up yer mind to it, fur as soon as I've got time to 'tend to yer, I mean

to larn all ye knows, or else put you through some Indian games, and make ye speak! Four Jacks, jest you take along to Rock Gulch, while we look for his pard."

Tom felt a chill at his heart. Ned Clancy was threatened by a terrible danger, and he was unable to give warning to his pard. Burke noted an anxious look, and laughed loudly.

"We'll hev him soon, pard!" he remarked. "It 'pears that he ain't fur off!"

But, upon reflection, Tom was a little consoled. He was at least two miles from Clancy, and his trail was too light to be followed by any but the most experienced trackers, and Burke and his gang were not likely to possess much skill in woodcraft.

Four Jacks took his rein and led him southward. The rough also led three other ponies, and Tom had no difficulty in recognising that this was the plunder taken from the murdered Indians. The gang had left Shasta Town on the hunt for Tom and Ned, but all was grist which came to their mill.

Red Burke and his companions disappeared amongst the trees. Four Jacks and Tom proceeded in silence under the branches of the redwoods, Tom's only attempt at talk being met by a gruff growl.

The pace was slow, for the led horses were none too tame, and it was not till sunset that the pair reached their destination.

They had advanced some distance up the lower slopes of Mount Shasta. The trees were left behind. Wild canyons and gorges, foaming torrents, and masses of red rock surrounded them. Tom wondered how his guide found his way through such a wilderness of jumbled rock and lava. But Four Jacks never halted. In the red sunset, they entered a narrow gorge, and, sharply rounding a bend, came upon a couple of log cabins, which—so narrow was the gorge—filled it from side to side. Beyond the cabins lay a gulch, shut in on every side by towering cliffs, bare of vegetation, and perfectly inaccessible.



Among the glittering mica, the shining gold,
lay the bones of the original discoverers.

A better prison could not have been devised. From the cliff-locked gulch there was but one exit—through the gorge—and this was completely barred by the log cabins.

Three men came out of the cabins as Four Jacks drew rein. They were Indians of the Modoc tribe. It did not require more than a single glance to tell Tom that they were "bad reds."

Their brutal, ferocious faces were very dissimilar to the dusky but manly countenance he had admired in Cloudy Face, the chief of the Klamaths.

"Shove these 'ere critters inter the corral, reds," said Four Jacks.

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"The boulder would have scalped us if we had been in his place," laughed Ned, as the two lads gently lifted the Klamath chief from the thicket, and laid him upon the soft turf at the foot of a big redwood.

And he cut loose the rope which held Tom to the pony, and jerked him roughly to the ground.

The Modocs, without taking the slightest notice of Tom, led the stolen horses through a cabin into the gulch, where, doubtless, the corral was placed.

"Get along, kid. That's your berth!"

Tom entered the other cabin, which contained but a single apartment, with a small barred window looking into the gulch. "I am getting the camp. You can't be afraid of my getting out of this."

"You'll stay as you are till Burke comes back. I ain't taking no peaky risks, you bet! You've given us more'n enough trouble already!"

And the ruffian closed the door, and fastened it upon the outside.

"You brute! If I do get away, I'll make you smart for all this!" Tom muttered.

He stood at the window, looking out upon the locked gulch. It was already growing dusky, the tall cliffs shutting out the westerling sun.

Tom was thinking of his father. For many reasons, he had become convinced that the lost partner of Medway Norman was kept a prisoner somewhere in the wilds of Mount Shasta. That was the fate which the treacherous speculator had doomed for him in his horror of bloodshed—a horror born of cowardice, and not of conscience. Why not for his father also?

And, if that really were the case, did not every circumstance

indicate that it was this Rock Gulch which was the prison of Robert Neville?

Tom's heart beat hard at the thought. He was a prisoner, powerless even to attempt a rescue. But he longed for a sight of his lost father.

He stared into the gulch, viewing it from rocky wall to wall. A little stream rippled through it, and along its banks was a belt of pecans and junipers.

Tom suddenly caught sight of a moving form under the trees. A man, with his head bent down and his hands clasped behind him, in an attitude of the deepest dejection, was walking slowly amongst the pecans.

He was too far off to be seen clearly, but a thrill went through Tom. Clearly, the man was a prisoner. Who, then, could he be, if not the lost partner of Medway Norman?

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Father!"

The cry rang far through the still air. It reached the man under the pecans. He started, and looked up.

In a minute more Tom would have known whether his surmise was correct—whether his long-lost father really stood in his sight, or whether his hopes had deceived him.

But he had reckoned without his guard. His cry had reached other ears beside the prisoner's. The door of the cabin was dragged open. Four Jacks rushed in. With a fierce grip upon his shoulder, Tom was torn away from the window.

"Ye cuss, ye can't keep quiet, can't ye!" the ruffian growled. "Wal, we'll see if this'll stop yer tootin' yer bugle!"

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He forced open the helpless lad's mouth and jammed a rugged piece of quartz into it, binding it there with a cord, careless of the pain he inflicted. "Now ye whelp, toot if ye can't ye're welcome!"

Tom could not speak. His eyes spoke volumes, but his impotent rage did not affect Four Jacks. The door was slammed and fastened again.

Once more Tom was alone, and unable to solve the haunting doubt—to answer the continually recurring question: "Was the prisoner of Rock Gulch his father?"

CHAPTER 7.

The Helping Hand—A Bid for Liberty—A Hot Chase—Run Down—Indian Torture—A Terrible Doom.

"WHAT does this mean?" Tom muttered, under his breath.

It was midnight. High in the sky was a half-moon, but in the hill-locked gulch all was dark, shadowy.

Tom, in the densely dark cabin, moved about restlessly. The jagged gag caused him intense pain. His lips were bleeding and his gums swollen. His arms, tightly tied at the wrists, quivering with the cramp. The pain and discomfort were so intense that he would almost have welcomed the return of Red Burke and the certainty of death.

All at once his eyes became riveted upon the barred aperture forming the window. The darkness without was, of course, less opaque than that within. The window was a glimmering square, black-barred.

Abruptly, without a sound, a dim form rose into Tom's sight at the window, and something bright glimmered into view. The next instant the form was gone, but the glimmer remained.

"What does that mean?"

The apparition had made no sound. Tom stood staring at the window, doubting his eyesight. What was it that had come and gone as soundlessly as a spectre? What was it he saw still glimmering in the window-frame?

With a beating heart, he stepped towards it. A knife was stuck in the wood.

Tom understood. It was the prisoner of Rock Gulch who had placed it there. Under cover of the darkness, the man had crept Indian-like, on hands and knees, to the cabin, placed the knife there, and vanished as he came. A sound would have alarmed Four Jacks and the Modocs, drinking in the next cabin. But he had made no sound.

"Heaven bless him, whoever he is!" Tom murmured fervently. "If I get away alive, he shall have his freedom, whether he is my father or not."

The knife was a godsend. His wrists being tied behind him, he had to turn his back to take it. His fingers were free. They closed upon the handle of the knife, and drew it from the window-frame.

With the handle in his fingers, the blade turned upward, he began to saw at the cords which bound his wrists. It was a difficult and painful process. Often the keen blade jabbed into his flesh. But at length the cords fell apart. He was free!

For five minutes he twisted and chafed his cramped arms before he was able to lift his hands and remove the gag from his mouth. The pain that followed was intense. He bore it in Spartan silence.

He moved about the room, swinging his arms to restore the circulation. He could not leave the hut. But, sooner or later, the door would be opened. He had a weapon now. Taking his captors by surprise, he had every chance of successfully running the gauntlet, and escaping to the wild hills.

It was two hours later that he heard the sound of hoofs in the gorge. It was the return of Red Burke. Tom drew a deep breath. He stood just within the door, gripping his knife. Through a chink of the ill-built doorway, he could see into the gorge, where the light from the other cabin fell.

Red Burke, Mustang Jim, and Bowie Bill dismounted. Their sullen faces and scowling brows told Tom that their search for Ned Clancy had not been successful. He felt a great sense of glad relief.

"Got him, pard?" questioned Four Jacks, lounging out of the cabin to meet his chief.

Red Burke uttered a ringing curse.

"No. He seems to have melted into thin air. We've checked it. But young Neville. Where have you put him?"

Four Jacks jerked his thumb towards Tom's prison. Burke stopped up to it.

"Guess I'll take a look at the rooster afore I go to my little bunk!" he remarked.

The bars clattered down; the door was swung open. The next instant Burke reeled back before a fierce knife-slash, and a bounding figure passed him.

Tom had seen the horse standing before the cabin. He had made up his mind what to do.

Two bounds carried him to them; a third, and he was in

the saddle. Before Red Burke had recovered from his surprise, Tom was galloping away at full speed. Turned in his saddle, he waved his arm and yelled defiantly at his enemies.

The other horses, startled and scared, reared and bolted. The Shasta Town roughs stood like men paralyzed.

Burke recovered himself first. Blood was streaming down his beard. Tom's slash had laid open his face from mouth to ear.

He was mad with rage.

"Bring horses from the corral, ye cursed reds!" he yelled.

And, as the Modocs hastened to obey, he drew his revolver and levelled it at Four Jacks. "Wot for did ye nottle him?" he roared.

"Where did he get that knife?"

Four Jacks was gasping with amazement.

"I'll swear I left him tied an' gagged, pard," he stammered.

"and I'll take my oath that he never had no knife."

"Look at my face!" yelled Burke.

And, in his fury, he pulled the trigger.

Four Jacks would have fallen dead at his feet had not Mustang Jim struck up the revolver.

"Taint no mortal use salivating Four Jacks!" deprecatingly said Jim. "That wot bring the kid back. Better send Four Jacks and the Injuns arter him. Guess we're too lagged fur any more ridin' ter-night."

Burke, calming down a little as the solid sense of the reasoning struck him, sullenly thrust the revolver back into his belt.

"That'll do!" he growled. "But ef we don't git him back, I'll have a bone to pick with you, Four Jacks!"

Tom, as a sudden thought struck him, his brow cleared a little.

"His horse was the one I rode. It's about played out, I guess. With fresh critters, we'll easy run him down."

The horses had by this time been brought from the corral and saddled.

Red Burke, staying only to bind a bandanna about his gashed cheek, mounted. Four Jacks and the Modocs followed him.

The other two roughs, fatigued by their long ride, remained to guard the cabins. Burke himself appeared tireless. Upon his huge frame fatigue made no impression.

Tom Neville made the most of his few minutes' start. He left the gorge behind, and rode into a wide, open canyon, where the moonlight fell clearly. He did not know whether he rode. But he knew that the forest of redwoods, where he had parted with Ned Clancy, was somewhere in advance of him. If he could but reach the trees, he had little fear for the rest.

But could he? The clatter of hoofs behind told of close pursuit, and he had already discovered that the animal he rode was almost exhausted. But he did not abandon hope.

A yell behind announced that his enemies had caught sight of him in the moonlight. He set his teeth, and rode on fiercely. From that moment the vengeful eyes of Red Burke never lost sight of him for more than a few moments at a time. And ever the fresh horses drew nearer and nearer to the wearied steed.

Tom rode well. The horse did its best. Mile after mile fled beneath the racing hoofs. And now the rocks became less wild and rugged; bushes rose around him; here and there a tree stood lonely. He was getting near to the forest.

But closer and closer drew the ringing hoof-beats behind. Red Burke, ahead of his companions, was gaining upon him.

And every minute the distance between pursued and pursuer was perceptibly diminished. A savage grin of triumph distorted the bearded, bloodstained face.

The trees were growing more numerous; the bushes thicker. Tom was entering the forest. If his labouring steed could hold out five minutes longer—

Crack! crack!

The whizzing bullets from Burke's revolver spattered upon the ground round the lashing heels. The Shasta Town bully did not fire at Tom. He did not wish to risk killing the lad, and so losing his supposed secret. If he could disable the horse, his purpose would be served. The quick, staccato cracking of his revolver sounded above the beating of the hoofs.

Tom felt a chill. His horse, terribly overtaken, with heaving flanks and blood-flecked nostrils, was sinking under him.

The touch of a bullet would finish the poor brute. If he could hold out only five minutes more—

A convulsive shudder ran through the animal; an almost human scream broke from its throat. Through flesh and bone a bullet was boring its way. Down upon its chest it fell.

Tom had barely time to spring clear before it was reeling over and over, with lashing hoofs, in an agony of death.

Before the boy could collect his scattered wits, Burke had ridden up; and, with a blow from his pistol-barrel, sent him reeling to the earth.

"Rope him up, and see that he's well tied this time, Four Jacks!" snarled Burke.

And poor Tom, half stunned by the cruel blow, was tied up.

Hand and foot, without the chance of offering resistance, was a bitter reverse. Five minutes more, and the thick forest

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would have shattered him. A hundred nocks would have offered concealment. But luck was against him. He was a prisoner again, with cords cutting painfully into his flesh, and the expression of Burke's brutal face showed that there was no hope of even a respite.

Burke growled out orders to his followers. The horses were tethered to a tree. The Indians dispersed amongst the redwoods. Tom wondered what was coming.

He lay upon the ground, under a huge redwood. The moonlight, growing fainter now, glistened through the branches. Red Burke sat on a log near him, refastening the bandage which had become loose in the hot chase—about his head.

"You cursed young cub," the bully growled, "you think yourself mighty spry. I s'pose, ter give me all this trouble. You reckon you kin kyrate a pilgrim's dial whenever you want to, does yer?" He stretched out his leg, and kicked the boy with his heavy boot. "I'll let ye learn that Bill Burke's the best galoot ter play these hyer tricks on!"

"You coward!" Tom gasped.

The ruffian scowled malignantly.

"Still cheeky, hey? I'll soon take that outter ye. I s'pose ye think I'm going ter tote ye back ter Rock Gulch, an' erlow you another chance to play roots on me? I reckon not, sonny. I'm going to finish the trail right hyer!" He looked up at the Modocs came back with their arms full of dry branches. "Stick it under this yer tree. Four Jacks, chuck yer fists over a branch. Tie the end to the rope round his ankles."

The rough, with a guffaw, obeyed. A glimmering of his enemy's purpose broke upon Tom's mind. An icy chill went to his heart. Burke saw the colour fade from his face, and laughed jeeringly.

"Guess wot's comin', hey? I've seen the Injuns amuse themselves for hours with a prisoner in this fashion. But I'm a tender-hearted chap, I am." He chuckled. "Tell me where you were goin' to look for the Mexikin Mine, and I'll let ye off with a bullet through yer head!"

"You fend!—you inhuman fend!"

"No time for compliments! Will ye tell me whar to look for the lost mine of Marco Royal?"

"I know nothing about it."

Burke scowled savagely. He was possessed with the idea that Tom had a clue to the mine, and this denial did not shake his conviction.

"Light the fire. Bank it up. Haul away, pard!"

Four Jacks tugged at the rope. Tom was dragged into the air, and hung head downwards over the great mass of fuel, to which the Modocs were applying the match. Four Jacks tied the rope-end to a projecting root of the tree.

Tom was almost swooning with horror. The dusky faces of the Indians were blazing with a ferocious delight.

It was not death he feared. He could have faced that with British pluck—with steady heart and eyes. But to burn—to feel the flames licking his face; to die by inches, slowly, slowly, by the most agonizing of deaths—that brought the sweat to his brow, and drove the colour from his trembling lips.

Smoke was rising from the pile. At a word from Burke, one of the Indians gripped Tom and drew him from above the fire. Had the human fend relented? Far from it, as his next words showed.

"Tom Neville, when the redskin lets go, you will swing back into the fire, your head in the flames!"

"You fend! You coward!"

"Your last chance. Where is the Mexican Mine?"

"I do not know."

Burke's eyes searched his face. He read the truth there. A perfect hell of rage surged up into his heart. All his hatred, all his disappointment, all his chagrin blended in a burst of fiendish fury. Could he have condemned this boy to a more terrible torture, he would gladly have done so. For his weight in gold he would not have spared Tom now.

"Let go!" he yelled.

The flames were leaping and dancing. The fire burned freely.

The grinning Indian released Tom.

He swung back—swung right into the heart of the red and roaring flames.

From his lips fell one cry of the wildest, bitterest anguish, and then his senses fled.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Nick of Time—Saved from the Flames—The Ride to Rock Gulch.

FOR a single moment only Tom's swoon lasted. He came to himself without an effort, his faculties at their clearest.

His amazement was unbounded. He was not suspended over the fire. His skin felt scorched and blistered. He could smell the unpleasant odour of burnt hair. But he

was lying on the grass, several yards from the fire. He was still bound. He could move only his head. In spite of the pain he suffered, his curiosity mastered him. In spite of the have happened? He could hear shouts, cries, all the sounds of a conflict. He twisted his head and looked about him.

Dark forms, fierce, dusky faces, shining blades, flitted to and fro in the firelight. It was an attack of reinkins. Even as he moved, the sounds abruptly ceased. He heard a distant horse's footfalls growing fainter; then, close at hand, a red-skin yell of triumph.

"Tom—dear old Tom—how do you feel now?"

Tom gasped. It was Ned Clancy who was bending over him, with tears in his eyes. The Irish lad's knife severed his bonds in a few seconds. He sat up, his head on Ned's knee. Cloudy Face, the Klamath, held to his lips a pannikin of cold water. He drank deeply, greedily.

"Am I dreaming, Ned? Tell me what has happened."

He looked round. The three Modocs lay still and very quiet. He shuddered as he saw their heads. Four Jacks, with a splash of blood across his face, was in the grip of two Indians. Of Red Burke he could see no sign.

"We've wiped 'em out, Tommy," Clancy explained gleefully. "Only Burke's got away, and he had a cut from Cloudy Face's tomahawk. We'll have him yet. After this, I'll never rest till he's paid the penalty of his crimes, the inhuman villain!"

"But I don't understand. How came you here?" asked Tom. "Thunder, how my head burns! I say, Cloudy Face, what the dickens are you up to?"

The Klamath was rubbing over his face and head some sticky, greasy substance, of which the odour was far from sweet.

"Cure burn!" said the Klamath laconically.

"Oh, go ahead, then."

The Klamath went ahead; and, while he rubbed, Ned Clancy concisely related what had taken place since Tom last saw him.

The Irish lad and Cloudy Face had followed Tom's trail until it joined that of Red Burke's gang. The Klamath had recognised the tracks of the horses stolen from him and his murdered braves. He knew, therefore, with whom he had to deal. As there was no sign of blood or a dead body, he concluded, correctly, that Tom had been made a prisoner.

They resolved at once to leave no stone unturned to effect his rescue. But, considering that they had four men—all desperate characters and well armed—to deal with, Cloudy Face, with Indian caution, determined to obtain the aid of his warriors before making the attempt.

Clancy, eager as he was to push on, agreed to this prudent counsel. While, therefore, as Tom could now tell him, Burke was searching among the redwoods for the Irish lad, Clancy and Cloudy Face were riding rapidly to the Klamath lodges. They took the trail again with ten stalwart redskins at their back.

The trail of Four Jacks and the stolen horses, and over it the fresher traces of Red Burke's gang, led the redskins through the forest to where it ended on the rocky slopes of Mount Shasta. There they were baffled. The hard rock retained no trail.

This unlooked-for check drove Clancy almost to despair. Cloudy Face held out a faint hope that in daylight some trace might be discovered. The hope was very faint, but there was no other. They camped on the border of the redwoods, to wait for dawn.

It was then that, far in the distance, they heard the sound of galloping, and the shots fired by Red Burke at Tom's failing horse. With the hope, rather than the belief, that the firing would lead them to those they sought, the redskins saddled up and took the trail again.

"It was Providence, Tom," Clancy said, in a voice full of emotion. "We came in the very nick of time. I suppose the wretches were too engrossed in their fiendish work to think of foes, and the soft turf deadened the sound of our horses. Judge what I felt when I saw the fire blazing, and the savage holding you ready to let you swing back into the flames!" His voice faltered. "I rode then as I had never ridden before."

Tom pressed his hand.

The rest of the story was soon told. The Klamath braves burst upon the torturers like a thunderbolt. Ned Clancy was already springing towards the fire when the Modocs let Tom swing back into the flames. Tom entered the blaze, but Ned's grasp was upon him the same instant, dragging him forth. It was only for a fraction of a second that he felt the flame.

But he felt it long enough to blister his skin and singe his hair, and Clancy's hands were blackened and blistered.

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Clancy had stopped only to slash through the rope by which his partner swung, and to lay him upon the turf. Then, wild for vengeance, he turned to find Red Burke.

"But he's got away, the rapparee!" Clancy concluded. "Still, we have a prisoner who'll guide us to him!"

Four Jacks heard the words, and a savage oath broke from him.

"I'll see ye hanged fast, cuss yer! Not a word will ye get out of me!"

Clancy looked at the Klamath chief.

"Think you can persuade him, Cloudy Face?"

The Indian nodded, with a grim smile. He had finished with the ointment. Tom looked a ludicrous sight. But the pain was almost gone, and that was the great point.

"That's splendid, Cloudy Face," said Tom gratefully. "I feel as fit as a fiddle now; and, by Jove, I'm hungry!"

"Tuck in, then," said Clancy. "Here you are."

"Thanks!" said Tom, with his mouth full. "But, I say, I've heaps of news for you!"

Between bites, he told of his adventures—of the prisoner of Rock Gulch whom he believed to be his father. Cloudy Face and Clancy listened with intense interest. The Irish lad gave a cheer when he had concluded, much to the astonishment of the grave Indians.

"Hurrah! Ye've found your father, Tommy darlint!" Clancy cried. "Hurrah!"

"And the next question," said Tom, "is to rescue him. I cannot help feeling that he is my father. But I shall never be able to rest till I'm sure."

"Cloudy Face is as anxious to get hold of Burke as you are to see your father. He will lend us his aid. Won't you, chief?"

"White boys help Cloudy Face—Cloudy Face help his white brothers!" tersely said the chief. "Cloudy Face swear by Manitou to take scalp of chief-with-red-hair-on-face. Cloudy Face keep word."

"But, although I've been there, I haven't any idea of the route!" confessed Tom. "It will be necessary to compel that ruffian to guide us."

"Cloudy Face do that. Soon make him talk!" said the red-skin, grimly.

The Klamaths carried Four Jacks among the trees, out of sight of the white lads. In a few minutes terrible cries were heard. Tom and Ned turned pale, but Tom set his teeth resolutely.

"I must find my father, Ned," he said. "Nothing shall stand in the way of that."

The cries ceased. Cloudy Face came back.

"Bad white will guide!" he said briefly.

Four Jacks had given way as soon as he felt the torture. Bound to a horse, whose reins were held by Cloudy Face, the ruffian led the cavalcade.

They set out at once. Tom mounted upon his spotted mustang, restored to him by Cloudy Face. Through the dim night they pressed on without a halt, and dawn found them in the narrow gorge which led to Rock Gulch.

CHAPTER 9.

The Last Fight—Wiped out!—Father and Son—The Mine Discovered—Midway Norman's Penalty—A Happy Ending.

"BUNDER, boss! What's happened?"

Red Burke reeled into the cabin, and sank upon a seat. His two comrades in crime stared at him in sleepy amazement.

Red Burke did not reply. He seized a flask, and drank deeply of its fiery contents.

"What's the others?" continued Mustang Jim. "Surely that kid ain't—"

"It was the Injuns!" growled Burke. "They came on to us all of a sudden. That demon Cloudy Face ain't dead arter all." He put his hand to his brow, where the Klamath's tomahawk had left a deep cut. "He came near making it last sickness for me. The Modocs aire plugged, and I saw Four Jacks go down with two of the red devils atop of him. It was a close shave for me."

"But, I say, aire they a-follerin' you?" exclaimed Mustang Jim, in alarm.

"Ef they did, I gave 'em ther slip in the hills. I stopped four or five times to listen, and there warn't a sound behind. They kain't git here. Ther's no trail on ther rocks." The giant threw himself upon a bed of skins. "By thunder, I'll git even for this! I'll lay that Britisher by the heels, and burn him over a slow fire!" He gnashed his teeth like some wild beast. "It'll be my turn sooner or later. And now I want some sleep. I'm about played out."

Between fatigue and the whisky he had drunk, Red Burke was soon sleeping soundly. And his two pals, after dis-

cussing the matter in low tones for a while, followed his example.

Night gave place to day.

Over the rugged, rocky slopes of Mount Shasta stole the pale grey of dawn.

Still slept the three ruffians in their fool's security, when their fate was stealing upon them.

Through the unshuttered window came the early sun-rays, and the scent of the pines, waited by the morning breeze.

Suddenly there appeared at the aperture a dusky face, flushed with red and yellow paint, and a pair of fierce eyes glared into the hut.

A smile of triumph stole over the features of the chief of the Klamaths. He stepped quietly away.

A terrific crash suddenly startled the Shasta Town ruffians from their slumbers. They sprang up, dazed, their eyes still heavy with sleep.

The door had been shattered. The pieces lay inside the cabin, along with the huge, rugged boulder which, held by four stalwart braves, and hurled against the door, had done the work of a battering-ram.

In the doorway, the fierce faces of a crowd of Klamaths glared upon the whites.

"Injuns!" yelled Red Burke, grasping his revolver. "Fight for your lives!"

But the ruffians had no time to use their firearms. Almost before the crash of the falling door had died away, the red-skins were upon them.

Cloudy Face, with the spring of a tiger, seized Burke, and the two closed and fought desperately.

Mustang Jim was cut down by a tomahawk as he cocked his pistol.

Bowie Bill attempted to escape by the door which led through the rear of the cabin into Rock Gulch. But, even as he tore it open, an Indian axe laid him low.

Red Burke fought like a tiger.

But the vengeful Klamath was more than his match. The giant fell at last. The Indian's knife flashed before his eyes, and then was driven mercilessly home.

Cloudy Face stepped from the cabin with grim triumph in his face, and a reeking scalp at his belt.

"It is over!" he said.

Tom and Clancy had not had a chance of sharing in the fight. The Indians, eager for revenge and scalps, had pushed them aside without ceremony. They were not sorry for that. Their aid was not needed, and they had no wish to be spectators of a scene of merciless bloodshed.

"Come, Tommy. Now for the prisoner!" said Clancy.

The two lads, accompanied by Cloudy Face, passed through the cabin into the locked gulch.

Tom's face was flushed and eager. His heart was beating hard.

Ten minutes later the three stood before a small cabin, sheltered by a bulging cliff. Pecan trees, well tended, grew round it. Evidently this was the home of the mysterious captive.

Tom knocked at the door with a tremulous hand. There was silence for a moment; then a clear voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"Tom Neville!"

"What?"

"Tom Neville, who seeks his father."

The door was flung open. A man, half dressed, stood before them.

"Good heavens," he cried wildly, "is it rescue at last, or am I dreaming?"

Eagerly Tom's eyes searched the pinched, pale face, the furrowed cheeks, and sunken eyes.

Changed—terribly changed—but still his father! Unerring instinct told him that.

And his gaze was as eagerly returned by the prisoner of Rock Gulch, who scrutinized the scorched and blistered face of the boy almost hungrily.

"Father!" cried Tom. "Don't you know me?"

"Sure," muttered Clancy, "in that state you couldn't expect your own mother to know ye!"

"Tom!" panted the recluse—"it cannot be Tom!"

"It is Tom, father." The boy was nearly crying in his gladness. "It's Tom, who has come all the way from England to find you!"

"My brave boy!" All doubt was gone. "My noble boy! God be praised!"

Afterwards, father and son had much to tell each other. Tom's surmises concerning his father's disappearance had been correct.

Mr. Neville's kidnapping had been effected by Red Burke.

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his business as a moneylender and bloodsucker without interference.

From the money actually belonging to Neville, Medway Norman paid the cut-throats who were employed to keep watch and ward over the locked gulch. As the escape of the prisoner would mean cessation of their pay, the speculator knew he could depend upon the watchmen. Cowardice—and perhaps some last rag of conscience—kept him from ordering the death of Neville. But for this much mercy the prisoner could not be expected to be grateful. He was grimly determined to have a full and bitter reckoning when he returned to Shasta Town.

Mr. Neville had had no idea that it was his son whose escape he had aided the previous night. Tom's cry of "Father" had reached his ears and attracted his attention. But, as he supposed his son to be at school in England—six thousand miles away—he, of course, never imagined that the word was addressed to himself. Without being able to make that out, he still understood one thing—that a prisoner was in the hands of his guards; and, as soon as he was sure of that, he determined to lend what aid he could.

He had obtained possession of the knife some months before, and had kept it carefully concealed, hoping some day to make use of it in an attempt to escape. He had parted with it cheerfully to aid the unknown prisoner.

"Little did I dream that it was my own brave boy I was helping," Mr. Neville said in a voice full of emotion. "I longed to speak as I stood at the window—to say that a hapless captive in this nook of the wilderness pined for rescue—but even a whisper might have alarmed the scoundrels in the next cabin. I was within reach of their door. Thank God, all has ended well."

Later on, Tom asked his father about the Mexican Mine. "Did you find it, dad? Miss Royal told me about your goodness to her, and how you started out to seek the mine on her account."

Mr. Neville shook his head sadly. "I had no chance, Tom. Red Burke and his gang pounced upon me among the redwoods, and dragged me here before I had been three days out of Shasta Town. But, Tom—he looked curiously at his son—"how do you like little Catalina?"

Tom blushed through his blisters. "Immensely! She saved my life. A fellow can't forget that. I like her awfully!"

Mr. Neville nodded approvingly. "I'm glad to hear you say so, my boy." Just then Ned Clancy came dancing up, his face full of glee. Cloudy Face, the Elamath, followed him with more leisurely steps.

"Arrah, now, I've news for ye!" "What is it, old fellow?" "Illigant news, entirely." "Out with it!" "I've told Cloudy Face what we came to find among the rocks of Mount Shasta."

"Well?" "Well, it occurred to me, ye see, that, as he belonged to the tribe that wiped out Marco Royal's party, he might know something about Marco Royal's lost mine."

"And does he?" Tom was interested at once. "Can you tell us anything about the Mexican Mine, chief?"

The redskin nodded. "Cloudy Face there. Helped to wipe out Mexicans!" he announced. "Cloudy Face show mine to his white brothers if white brothers like!"

Three days later, the gold-seekers stood in a wild ravine in the Shasta River valley, and looked upon the mine which so many had sought in vain. Cloudy Face, true to his word, had led them to the spot where the Indian arrows had struck down the luckless Mexican miners in the midst of their new-found gold. It was with as much sadness as pleasure that the white men looked upon their prize.

The soil teemed with golden grains. The workings, rude as they were, disclosed streaks of the precious metal, which amply confirmed the rumoured richness of the lost mine. But among the glittering mica, the shining gold, lay the bones of the original discoverers. Picked clean by the coyotes, bleached by the weather, the dislocated skeletons and grinning skulls lay at the feet of the explorers.

With grave faces, with reverent hands, the gold-seekers gave decent burial to these poor relics of humanity. Then they examined the mine.

"Be jabers, we'll go back to Shasta Town with our pockets full of gold," Clancy ejaculated.

"What do you reckon it's worth, dad?" Tom asked. "It would not pay us to sell it for a quarter of a million dollars, in my opinion," Mr. Neville declared.

"Phew! That'll be news for Catalina!"

Medway Norman sat in his office, at the desk where Tom Neville had found him upon his first arrival in Shasta Town.

The door abruptly opened, without a knock to announce the new-comer.

The speculator turned his face towards it with a growl. "Well, who are you?" he rasped out.

Then, as his eyes fell upon his visitor's face, he started up with a wild scream of terror.

"I am Robert Neville. I am your partner, Medway Norman!" The ringing voice struck icy fear to the speculator's heart. "I am your victim, returned from a living tomb. What have you to say?"

Medway Norman's face was horribly white, and his eyes strangely contracted.

He pressed both hands to his breast, as though a sudden pain had pierced his heart.

His bloodless lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Robert Neville's wrath expired as he looked upon the death-stricken face of his partner. He remembered that Medway Norman was affected with heart-disease. He saw that the shock of his sudden appearance had brought on a terrible attack of the malady.

He sprang quickly to catch the speculator as he fell forward upon his desk.

But Medway Norman was past all human assistance. "For-give me!" he stammered thickly.

And then his voice was silent for ever.

It was Tom who acquainted Catalina with the successful result of the quest.

"I've found my father, and we've found the lost mine. We shall all be rich now, Catalina," he said gaily.

"Ah, how happy I am!" the Californian girl exclaimed. "I—I feared that perhaps you would never return."

Tom's face grew very tender. "Did you care very much, Catalina?"

And then—neither knew exactly how it came about—but her head was upon his shoulder, his arm circled her waist, and he was whispering the love which had been born in his heart the night she saved his life, and which had grown and strengthened during the long weeks in the wilderness. And, in reply, Catalina confessed how her heart had gone into his keeping, how she had trembled for him when he went into the wilds, how she had prayed for his safe return.

And in this, the brightest hour of our hero's life, we take our leave of him.

THE END.

A GRAND TREAT

FOR ALL OF YOU

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