

THE GREAT DEADWOOD MYSTERY.

BY BRET HARTE.

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ALICE.

PART II.
HE spring of 1874 was retarded in the California Sierras; so much so that certain eastern tourists who had early ventured into the Yosemite valley found themselves, one May morning, snowbound against the tempestuous shoulders of El Capitan. So furious was the onset of the wind at the Upper Merced canyon, that even so respectable a lady as Mrs. Rightbody was fain to cling to the neck of her guide to keep her seat in the saddle; while Miss Alice, scorning all masculine assistance, was hurled, a lovely chaos, against the snowy wall of the chasm. Mrs. Rightbody screamed; Miss Alice raged under her breath, but scrambled to her feet again in silence.
"I told you so!" said Mrs. Rightbody, in an indignant whisper, as her daughter again ranged beside her. "I warned you especially, Alice, that—that—"
"What?" interrupted Miss Alice, curtly.
"That you would need your chemise and high boots," said Mrs. Rightbody, in a regretful undertone, slightly increasing her distance from the guides.
Miss Alice shrugged her pretty shoulders scornfully, but ignored her mother's implication.
"You were particularly warned against going into the valley at this season," she only replied, grimly.
Mrs. Rightbody raised her eyes impatiently.
"You know how anxious I was to discover your poor father's strange correspondent, Alice. You have no consideration."
"But when you have discovered him—what then?" queried Miss Alice.
"What then?"
"Yes. My belief is that you will find the telegram only a mere business cipher, and all this quest mere nonsense."
"Alice! Why, you yourself thought your father's conduct that night very strange. Have you forgotten?"
The young lady had not, but, for some far-reaching feminine reason, chose to ignore it at that moment, when her late tumble in the snow was still fresh in her mind.
"And this woman, whoever she may be," continued Mrs. Rightbody.
"How do you know there's a woman in the case?" interrupted Miss Alice, wickedly, I fear.
"How do I know—there's a woman?" slowly ejaculated Mrs. Rightbody, floundering in the snow at the unexpected possibility of such a ridiculous question. But here her guide flew to her assistance, and stopped further speech. And, indeed, a grave problem was before them.
The road that led to their single place of refuge—a cabin, half hotel, half trading post, scarce a mile away—skirted the base of the rocky dome, and passed perilously near the precipitous wall of the valley. There was a rapid descent of a hundred yards or more to this terrace-like passage; and the guides paused for a moment of consultation, coolly oblivious, alike to the terrified questioning of Mrs. Rightbody, or the half insolent independence of the daughter. The elder guide was rufous bearded, stout and humorous; the younger was dark bearded, slight and serious.
"Ef you kin git young Bunker Hill to let you tote her on your shoulders, I'll get the madman to hang on to me," came to Mrs. Rightbody's horrified ears as the expression of her particular companion.
"Freeze to the old gal, and don't reckon on me if the daughter starts in to play it alone," was the enigmatical response of the younger guide.
Miss Alice overheard both propositions; and, before the two men returned to their side, that high-spirited young lady had urged her horse down the declivity.
Alas! at this moment a gust of whirling snow swept down upon her. There was a flounder, a mis-step, a fatal strain on the wrong rein, a fall, a few plucky but unavailing struggles, and both horse and rider slid ignominiously down toward the rocky shelf. Mrs. Rightbody screamed. Miss Alice, from a confused debris of snow and ice, uplifted a vexed and coloring face to the younger guide, a little the more angrily, perhaps, that she saw a shade of impatience on his face.
"Don't move, but the one end of the 'lass' under your arms, and throw me the other," he said, quietly.
"What do you mean by 'lass'—the 'lasso'?" asked Miss Alice, disgustedly.
"Yes, ma'am."
"Then why don't you say so?"
"Oh, Alice!" reproachfully interpolated Mrs. Rightbody, encircled by the elder guide's stalwart arm.
Miss Alice deigned no reply, but drew the loop of the lasso over her shoulders, and let it drop to her round waist. Then she essayed to throw the other end to her guide. Dismal failure! The first fling nearly knocked her off the ledge; the second went all wild against the rocky wall; the third caught in a thorn bush, twenty feet below her companion's feet. Miss Alice's arm sank helplessly to her side, at which signal of unqualified surrender, the younger guide threw himself half way down the slope, worked his way to the thorn bush, hung for a moment perilously over the parapet, secured the lasso, and then began to pull away at his lovely burden. Miss Alice was so dead weight, however, but steadily half-scrambled on her hands and knees to within a foot or two of her rescuer. At this too familiar proximity, she stood up, and scanned

a little stiffly against the line, causing the guide to give an extra pull, which had the lamentable effect of landing her almost in his arms. As it was, her intelligent forehead struck his nose sharply, and I regret to add, treating of a romantic situation, caused that somewhat prominent sign and token of a hero to bleed freely. Miss Alice instantly clasped a handful of snow over his nostrils.
"Now elevate your right arm," she said commandingly.
He did as he was bidden, but sulkily.
"That compresses the artery."
No man, with a pretty woman's hand and a handful of snow over his mouth and nose, could effectively utter a heroic sentence, nor, with his arm elevated stiffly over his head, assume a heroic attitude. But, when his mouth was free again, he said half-sulkily, half-apologetically:
"I might have known a girl couldn't throw worth a cent."
"Why?" demanded Miss Alice sharply.
"Because—why—because—you see—you haven't got the experience," he stammered feebly.
"Nonsense! they haven't the clavicle—that's all! It's because I'm a woman, and smaller in the collar bone, that I haven't the play of the forearm which you have. See?" She squared her shoulders slightly, and turned the blaze of her dark eyes full on his. "Experience, indeed! A girl can learn anything a boy can."
Apprehension took the place of ill-humor in her hearer. He turned his eyes hastily away, and glanced above him. The elder guide had gone forward to catch Miss Alice's horse, which, relieved of his rider, was floundering toward the trail. Mrs. Rightbody was nowhere to be seen. And these two were still twenty feet below the trail!
There was an awkward pause.
"Shall I pull you up the same way?" he queried. Miss Alice looked at his nose, and hesitated. "Or will you take my hand?" he added, in surly impatience. To his surprise, Miss Alice took his hand, and they began the ascent together.
But the way was difficult and dangerous. Once or twice her feet slipped on the smoothly worn rock beneath; and she confessed to an inward thankfulness when her uncertain feminine handgrip was exchanged for his strong arm around her waist. Not that he was ungentle; but Miss Alice angrily felt that he had once or twice exercised his superior masculine functions in a rough way; and yet the next moment she would have probably rejected the idea that she had even noticed it. There was no doubt, however, that he was a little surly.
A fierce scramble finally brought them back in safety to the trail; but in the action Miss Alice's shoulder, striking a projecting boulder, wrung from her a feminine cry of pain, her first sign of womanly weakness. The guide stopped instantly.
"I'm afraid I hurt you."
She raised her brown lashes, a trifle moist from suffering, looked in his eyes, and dropped her own. Why, she could not tell. And yet he had certainly a kind face, despite its seriousness; and a fine face, albeit unshorn and weather beaten. Her own eyes had never been so near to any man's before, save her lover's; and yet she had never seen so much in even his. She slipped her hand away, not with any reference to him, but rather to ponder over this singular experience, and, somehow, felt uncomfortable thereat.
Nor was he less so. It was but a few days ago that he had accepted the charge of this young woman from the elder guide, who was the recognized escort of the Rightbody party, having been a former correspondent of her father's. He had been hired like any other guide, but had undertaken the task with that chivalrous enthusiasm which the average Californian always extends to the sex so rare to him. But the illusion had passed; and he had dropped into a sulky, practical sense of his situation, perhaps fraught with less danger to himself. Only, when appealed to his manhood or her weakness, he had forgotten his wounded vanity.
He strode moodily ahead, dutifully breaking the path for her in the direction of the distant canyon, where Mrs. Rightbody and her friend awaited them. Miss Alice was first to speak. In this trackless, uncharted terra incognita of the passions, it is always the woman who steps out to lead the way.
"You know this place very well. I suppose you have lived here long?"
"Yes."
"You were not born here—no?"
A long pause.
"I observe they call you 'Stanislaus Joe.' Of course that is not your real name?" (Clem.—Miss Alice had never called him anything, usually prefacing any request with a languid, "O-er-er, please, mister-er-a") explicit enough for his station.)
"No."
Miss Alice (trotting after him, and bawling in his ear)—What name did you say?
The man (doggedly)—I don't know.
Nevertheless, when they reached the cabin, after a half-hour's buffeting with the storm, Miss Alice applied herself to her mother's escort, Mr. Ryder.
"What's the name of the man who takes care of my horse?"
"Stanislaus Joe," responded Mr. Ryder.
"Is that all?"
"No. Sometimes he's called Joe Stanislaus."
Miss Alice (satirically)—I suppose it's the custom here to send young ladies out with gentlemen who hide their names under an alias?
Mr. Ryder (greatly perplexed)—Why, dear me, Stanislaus, you allers' peared to me as a gal as was able to take keer—
Miss Alice (interrupting with a wounded, dove-like timidity)—Oh, never mind, please! The cabin offered but scanty accommodation to the tourists; which fact, when indignantly presented to Mrs. Rightbody, was explained by the good-humored Ryder from the circumstance that the usual hotel was only a slight affair of boards, cloth and paper, put up during the season, and partly dis-

wanted in the rail. "You couldn't be kept warm enough there," he added. Nevertheless Miss Alice noticed that both Mr. Ryder and Stanislaus Joe retired there with their pipes, after having prepared the ladies' supper, with the assistance of an Indian woman, who apparently emerged from the earth at the coming of the party, and disappeared as mysteriously.
The stars came out brightly before they slept; and the next morning a clear, unwinking sun beamed with almost summer power through the shutterless windows of their cabin, and ironically disclosed the details of its rude interior. Two or three mangy, half-eaten buffalo robes, a bearskin, some suspicious looking blankets, rifles and saddles, deal tables and barrels made up its scant inventory. A strip of faded calico hung before a recess near the chimney, but so blackened by smoke and age that even feminine curiosity respected its secret. Mrs. Rightbody was in high spirits, and informed her daughter that she was at last on the track of her husband's unknown correspondent. "Seventy-four and Seventy-five represent two members of the vigilance committee, my dear, and Mr. Ryder will assist me to find them."
"Mr. Ryder!" ejaculated Miss Alice, in scornful astonishment.
"Alice," said Mrs. Rightbody, with a suspicious assumption of sudden defence, "you injure yourself, you injure me, by this exclusive attitude. Mr. Ryder is a friend of your father's, an exceedingly well informed gentleman. I have not, of course, imparted to him the extent of my suspicions. But he can help me to what I must and will know. You might treat him a little more civilly—or, at least, a little better than you do his servant, your guide. Mr. Ryder is a gentleman, and not a paid courier."
Miss Alice was suddenly at entive. When she spoke again, she asked, "Why do you not find something about this Silsbie—who did—or was hung—or something of that kind?"
"Child!" said Mrs. Rightbody, "don't you see there was no Silsbie, or, if there was, he was simply the confidant of that—woman!"
A knock at the door, announcing the presence of Mr. Ryder and Stanislaus Joe with the horses, checked Mrs. Rightbody's speech. As the animals were being packed, Mrs. Rightbody for a moment withdrew in confidential conversation with Mr. Ryder, and, to the young lady's still greater annoyance, left her alone with Stanislaus Joe. Miss Alice was not in good temper, but she felt it necessary to say something.
"I hope the hotel offers better quarters for travelers than this in summer," she began.
"It does."
"Then this does not belong to it?"
"No, ma'am."
"Who lives here, then?"
"I do."
"I beg your pardon," stammered Miss Alice. "I thought you lived where we hired—where we met you—in— You must excuse me."
"I'm not a regular guide; but as times were hard, and I was out of grub, I took the job."
"Out of grub?" "Job?" And she was the "job." What would Henry Marvia say? It would nearly kill him. She began herself to feel a little frightened, and walked toward the door.
"One moment, miss!"
The young girl hesitated. The man's tone was surly, and yet indicated a certain kind of half-pathetic grievance. Her curiosity got the better of her prudence, and she turned back.
"This morning," he began hastily, "when we were coming down the valley, you picked me up twice."
"I picked you up?" repeated the astonished Alice.
"Yes, contradicted me; that's what I mean; once when you said those rocks were volcanic, once when you said the flower you picked was a poppy. I didn't let on at the time, for it wasn't my say; but all the while you were talking I might have laid for you."
"I don't understand you," said Alice laughingly.
"I might have entrapped you before folks. But I only want you to know that I'm right, and here are the books to show it."
He drew aside the dingy calico curtain, revealed a small shelf of bulky books, took down two large volumes—one of botany, one of geology—nervously sought his text, and put them in Alice's outstretched hands.
"I had no intention," she began, half proudly, half embarrassedly.
"Am I right, miss?" he interrupted.
"I presume you are, if you say so."
"That's all, ma'am. Thank you!"
Before the girl had time to reply he was gone. When he again returned it was with her horse, and Mrs. Rightbody and Ryder were awaiting her. But Miss Alice noticed that his own horse was missing.
"Are you not going with us?" she asked.
"No, ma'am."
"Oh, indeed!"
Miss Alice felt her speech was a feeble conventionalism, but it was all she could say. She, however, did something. Hitherto it had been her habit to systematically reject his assistance in mounting to her seat. Now she awaited him. As he approached she smiled and put out her little foot. He instantly stooped, she placed it in his hand, rose with a spring and for one supreme moment Stanislaus Joe held her resistingly in his arms. The next moment she was in the saddle, but in that brief interval of sixty seconds she had uttered a volume in a single sentence:
"I hope you will forgive me!"
He muttered a reply, and turned his face aside quickly as if to hide it.
Miss Alice centered forward with a smile, but pulled her hat down over her eyes as she found her mother. She was blushing.

PART III.
Mrs. Rightbody was as good as his word. A day or two later he entered Mrs. Rightbody's parlor at the Chrysolopolis hotel, in Stockton, with the information that he had seen the mysterious senders of the dispatch, and that they were now in the office of the hotel, waiting her pleasure. Mr. Ryder further informed her that these gentlemen had only stipulated that they should not reveal their real names, and that they should be introduced to her simply as the respective "Seventy-four" and "Seventy-five" who had signed the dispatch sent to the late Mr. Rightbody.
Mrs. Rightbody at first demurred to this; but, on the assurance from Mr. Ryder that this was the only condition on which an interview would be granted, finally consented.
"You will find them square men, even if they are a little rough, ma'am. But, if you'd like me to be present, I'll stop; though I reckon, if ye'd kalkulated on that, you'd have had me take care o' your business by proxy, and not come yourself three thousand miles to do it."
Mrs. Rightbody believed it better to see them alone.
"All right, ma'am. I'll hang round out here; and of ye should happen to hev a tickle in your throat, and a bad spell o' coughin', I'll drop in, careless like, to see if you don't want them drops. Sale!"
And with an exceedingly arch wink, and a slight familiar tap on Mrs. Rightbody's shoulder, which might have caused the late Mr. Rightbody to burst his spleen, he withdrew.
A very timid, hesitating tap on the door was followed by the entrance of two men, both of whom, in general size, strength, and unceremoniousness, were ludicrously inconsistent with their diffident announcement. They proceeded in Indian file to the center of the room, faced Mrs. Rightbody, acknowledged her deep courtesy by a strong shake of the hand, and drawing two chairs opposite to her, sat down side by side.
"I presume I have the pleasure of addressing—" began Mrs. Rightbody.
The man directly opposite Mrs. Rightbody turned to the other inquiringly.
The other man nodded his head, and replied:
"Seventy-four."
"Seventy-five," promptly followed the other.
Mrs. Rightbody paused, a little confused.
"I have sent for you," she began again, "to learn something more of the circumstances under which your gentlemen sent a dispatch to my late husband."
"The circumstances," replied Seventy-four, quietly, with a side glance at his companion, "panned out about in this yer style. We hung a man, named Josh Silsbie, down at Deadwood for hoss stealing. When I say see, I speak for Seventy-five yer as is present, as well as representin', so to speak, seventy-two other gents as is scattered. We hung Josh Silsbie on squar, pretty squar, evidence. Afore he was strung up Seventy-five yer axed him, accordin' to custom, ef ther was enny thing he had to say, or enny request that he allowed to make of us. He turns to Seventy-five yer, and—"
Here he paused suddenly, looking at his companion.
"He sez, sez he," began Seventy-five, taking up the narrative—"he sez, 'Kin I write a letter?' sez he. 'Not much, ole man; ye've got no time.' Sez he, 'Kin I send a dispatch by telegraph?' I sez, 'Heave ahead.' He sez—these is his dential words—'Send Adam Rightbody, Boston. Tell him to remember his sacred compact with me thirty years ago.'"
"His sacred compact with me thirty years ago," echoed Seventy-four—"his dential words."
"What was the compact?" asked Mrs. Rightbody anxiously.
Seventy-four looked at Seventy-five, and then both arose and retired to the corner of the parlor, where they engaged in a slow but whispered deliberation. Presently they returned and sat down again.
"We allow," said Seventy-four, quietly but decidedly, "that you know what that sacred compact was."
Mrs. Rightbody lost her temper and her truthfulness together. "Of course," she said hurriedly, "I know. But do you mean to say that you gave this poor man no further chance to explain before you murdered him?"
Seventy-four and Seventy-five both rose again slowly and retired. When they returned again and sat down, Seventy-five, who by this time, through some subtle magnetism, Mrs. Rightbody began to recognize as the superior power, said gravely:
"We wish to say, regarding this yer murder, that Seventy-four and me is equally responsible; that we reckon also to represent, so to speak, seventy-two other gentlemen as scattered; that we are ready, Seventy-four and me, to take and bolt that responsibility, now and at any time, afore every man or men as kin be fetched agin us. We wish to say that this yer say of ours holds good yer in California, or in any part of these United States."
"Or in Canady," suggested Seventy-four.
"Or in Canady. We wouldn't agree to cross the water, or go to furrin parts, unless absolutely necessary. We leaves the chise of wappings to your principal, ma'am, or being a lady, ma'am, and interested, to any one you may fetch to act for him. An advertisement in any of the Sacramento papers, or a play-card or handbill stuck unto a tree near Deadwood, saying that Seventy-four or Seventy-five will communicate with this yer principal or agent of yours, will fetch us—allers."
Mrs. Rightbody, a little alarmed and desperate, saw her blunder "I mean nothing of the kind," she said hastily. "I only expected

that you might have some further details of this interview with Silsbie; that perhaps you could tell me"—a bold, bright thought crossed Mrs. Rightbody's mind—"something more about her."
The two men looked at each other.
"I suppose your society has no objection to giving me information about her?" said Mrs. Rightbody eagerly.
Another quiet conversation in the corner, and the return of both men.
"We want to say that we've no objection."
Mrs. Rightbody's heart beat high. Her boldness had made her penetration good. Yet she felt she must not alarm the men heedlessly.
"Will you inform me to what extent Mr. Rightbody, my late husband, was interested in her?"
This time it seemed an age to Mrs. Rightbody before the men returned from their solemn consultation in the corner. She could both hear and feel that their discussion was more animated than their previous conference. She was a little mortified, however, when they sat down, to hear Seventy-four say slowly:
"We wish to say that we don't allow to say how much."
"Do you not think that the 'sacred compact' between Mr. Rightbody and Mr. Silsbie referred to her?"
"We reckon it do."
Mrs. Rightbody, flushed and animated, would have given worlds had her daughter been present to hear this undoubted confirmation of her theory. Yet she felt a little nervous and uncomfortable even on this threshold of discovery.
"Is she here now?"
"She's in Tuolumne," said Seventy-four.
"A little better looked arter than formerly," added Seventy-five.
"I see. Then Mr. Silsbie enticed her away?"
"Well, ma'am, it was allowed as she runned away. But it wasn't proved, and it generally wasn't her style."
Mrs. Rightbody trifled with her next question. "She was pretty, of course?"
The eyes of both men brightened.
"She was that!" said Seventy-four emphatically.
"It would have done you good to see her?" added Seventy-five.
Mrs. Rightbody inwardly doubted it; but, before she could ask another question, the two men again retired to the corner for consultation. When they came back there was a shade more of kindness and confidence in their manner, and Seventy-four opened his mind more freely.
"We wish to say, ma'am, looking at the thing, by and large, in a far-minded way, that, ez you seem interested, and ez Mr. Rightbody was interested, and was, according to all accounts, deceived and led away by Silsbie, that we don't mind listening to any proposition you might make as a lady—allowin' you was ekally interested."
"I understand," said Mrs. Rightbody quickly. "And you will furnish me with any papers?"
The two men again consulted.
"We wish to say, ma'am, that we think she's got papers, but—"
"I must have them, you understand," interrupted Mrs. Rightbody, "at any price."
"We was about to say ma'am," said Seventy-five slowly, "that, considerin' all things—and you being a lady—you kin have her, papers, pedigree and guaranty, for \$1,200."
It has been alleged that Mrs. Rightbody asked only one question more and then fainted. It is known, however, that by the next day it was understood in Deadwood that Mrs. Rightbody had confessed to the vigilance committee that her husband, a celebrated Boston millionaire, anxious to gain possession of Abner Springer's well known sorrel mare, had incited the unfortunate Josh Silsbie to steal it; and that finally, failing in this, the widow of the deceased Boston millionaire was now in personal negotiation with the owners.
Howbeit, Miss Alice, returning home that afternoon, found her mother with a violent headache.
"We will leave here by the next steamer," said Mrs. Rightbody languidly. "Mr. Ryder has promised to accompany us."
"But, mother—"
"The climate, Alice, is overrated. My nerves are already suffering from it. The associations are unfit for you, and Mr. Marvia is naturally impatient."
Miss Alice colored slightly.
"But your quest, mother?"
"I've abandoned it."
"But I have not," said Alice, quietly. "Do you remember my guide at the Yosemite—Stanislaus Joe? Well, Stanislaus Joe is—who do you think?"
Mrs. Rightbody was languidly indifferent.
"Well, Stanislaus Joe is the son of Joshua Silsbie."
Mrs. Rightbody sat upright in astonishment.
"Yes. But, mother, he knows nothing of what we know. His father treated him shamefully, and set him cruelly adrift years ago; and, when he was hung, the poor fellow, in sheer disgrace, changed his name."
"But, if he knows nothing of his father's compact, of what interest is this?"
"Oh, nothing! Only I thought it might lead to something."
Mrs. Rightbody suspected that "something," and asked sharply, "And pray how did you find it out? You did not speak of it in the valley."
"Oh! I didn't find it out till to-day," said Miss Alice, walking to the window. "He happened to be here, and—told me."
Money Saved Is Money Earned.
Capitalist (just rescued from the water)—Well, mister, I'm much 'bliged to ye for haulin' me out of the water, an' here's \$1.40 for ye—all the change I've got about me now.
"Oh, no; keep your money. I wouldn't think of robbing you."
"Not 'tall! not 'tall! 'Twould have been lost anyhow, if ye hadn't rescued me"—Harper's Bazar.