

THE STORY OF A MINE.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW IT WAS LOBBIED FOR.



MRS. HOPKINSON.

HE Hon. Pratt C. Gashwiler, M. C., was, of course, unaware of the incident described in the last chapter. His secret, even if it had been discovered by Dobbs, was safe in that gentleman's innocent and honorable hands, and certainly was not of a quality that Mr. Wiles, at present, would have cared to expose. For, in spite of Mr. Wiles' discomfiture, he still had enough experience of character to know that the mate member from Fresno would be satisfied with his own peculiar manner of vindicating his own personal integrity, and would not make a public scandal of it. Again, Wiles was convinced that Dobbs was equally implicated with Gashwiler and would be silent for his own sake. So that poor Dobbs, as is too often the fate of simple but weak natures, had full credit for duplicity by every rascal in the land.

From which it may be inferred that nothing occurred to disturb the serenity of Gashwiler. When the door closed upon Mr. Wiles he indicated a note which, with a costly but exceedingly distasteful bouquet—rearranged by his own fat fingers, and discord and incongruity visible in every combination of color—he sent off by a special messenger. Then he proceeded to make his toilet—an operation rarely graceful or picturesque in our sex, and an insect to the spectator when obesity is superadded. When he had put on a clean shirt, of which there was scarcely too much, and added a white waistcoat, that seemed to accent his rotundity, he completed his attire with a black frock coat of the latest style, and surveyed himself complacently before a mirror. It is to be recalled that, however satisfactory the result might have been to Mr. Gashwiler, there were some men on whom that deformed "thing" avenged himself by making their clothes appear perennially new. The gloss of the tailor's iron never disappears; the creases of the shirt perpetually rise in judgment against the wearer. Novelty was the general suggestion of Mr. Gashwiler's full dress—it was never his habit—and "Our Own Make," "Nobby," and the "Latest Style, only \$15," was as patent on the legislator's broad back as if it still retained the shopman's ticket.

Thus arrayed, within an hour he complacently followed the note and his floral offering. The house he sought had been once the residence of a foreign ambassador, who had legally represented his government in a single important treaty, now forgotten, and in various receptions and dinners, still actively remembered by occasional visits to its salon, and the average dreary American parlour. "Dear me," the fascinating Mr. X. would say, "but do you know, love, in this very room I remember meeting the distinguished Marquis of Monte Pio?" or perhaps the fashionable Jones, of the state department, instantly crushed the decayed friend he was perfunctorily visiting by saying: "Pon my soul, you here? Why, the last time I was in this room I gossiped for an hour with the Comtesse de Castenet, in that very corner." For, with the recall of the aforesaid ambassador, the mansion had become a boarding-house, kept by the wife of a departmental clerk.

Perhaps there was nothing in the history of the house more quaint and philippic than the story of its present occupants. Mr. Fauquier had been a departmental clerk for forty years. It was at once his practical good luck and his misfortune to have been early appointed to a position which required a thorough and complete knowledge of the formulas and routine of a department that expended millions of the public funds. Fauquier, on a poor salary, diminishing instead of increasing with his service, had seen successive administrations bud and blossom and decay, but had kept his position through the fact that his knowledge was a necessity to the successive chiefs and employes. Once, it was true that he had been summarily removed by a new secretary, to make room for a camp follower, whose exhaustive and intellectual services in a political campaign had made him eminently fit for anything; but the alarming discovery that the new clerk's knowledge of grammar and etymology was even worse than that of the secretary himself, and that, through ignorance of detail, the business of that department was retarded to a damage to the government of over half a million of dollars, led to the reinstatement of Mr. Fauquier—at a lower salary. For it was felt that something was wrong somewhere, and as it had always been the custom of congress and the administration to cut down salaries as the first step to reform, they made old Mr. Fauquier a moral example. A gentleman born, of somewhat expensive tastes, having lived up to his former salary, this change brought another blow—wiping into the ledger Mr. Fauquier, who tried, more or less unsuccessfully, to turn his old southern habits of hospitality to remunerative account. But as poor Fauquier could never be prevailed upon to present a bill to a gentleman, sir, and as some of the sons of the best southern families were still waiting for, or had been recently dismissed from, a position, the experiment was a pecuniary failure. Yet the house was of excellent repute and well patronized; indeed, it was worth something to see old Fauquier sitting at the head of his own table, in something of his ancestral style, relating anecdotes of great men now dead and gone, interrupted only by occasional visits from importunate tradesmen.

Prominent among what Mr. Fauquier called his "little family," was a black-eyed lady of great powers of fascination, and considerable local reputation as a flirt. Nevertheless these social aberrations were

amply condoned by a facile and complacent husband, who looked with a lenient and even admiring eye upon the little lady's amusement, and, to a certain extent, lent a tacit indorsement to her conduct. Nobody minded Hopkinson; in the blaze of Mrs. Hopkinson's fascinations he was completely lost sight of. A few married women with unduly sensitive husbands, and several single ladies of the best and longest standing, reflected severely on her conduct. The younger men, of course, admired her, but I think she got her chief support from old fogies like ourselves. For it is your quiet, self-conceited, complacent, philippic, broad-shouldered, pater-familias who, after all, is the one to whom the gay and giddy of the proverbially impulsive, unselfish sex owe their place in the social firmament. We are never inclined to be captious; we laugh at as a folly what our wives and daughters condemn as a fault; our wifeliars are unwrung; yet we still confess to the fascinations of a pretty face. We know, bless us, from dear experience, the exact value of one woman's opinion of another; we want our brilliant little friend to shine; it is only the moths who will burn their two-penny immature wings in the flame! And why should they not? Nature has been pleased to supply more naphtha than candles. Go to! Give the pretty creature—the she maid, wife or widow—a show! And so, my dear sir, while mater-familias bends her black brows in disgust, we smile our superior little smile, and extend to Mistress Anonyma our gracious indorsement. And if goodness is grateful, or if folly is friendly—well, of course, we can't help that. Indeed, it rather proves our theory.

I had intended to say something about Hopkinson; but really there is very little to say. He was invariably good humored. A few malice once tried to show him that he really ought to feel worse than he did about the conduct of his wife; and it is recorded that Hopkinson, in an excess of good humor and kindness, promised to do so. Indeed, the poor fellow was so accessible that it is said young Delaney, of the tape department, confided to Hopkinson his jealousy of a rival; and revealed the awful secret that he (Delaney) had reason to expect more loyalty from his (Hopkinson's) wife. The good fellow is reported to have been very sympathetic, and to have promised Delaney to lend whatever influence he had with Mrs. Hopkinson in his favor. "You see," he said explanatorily to Delaney, "she has a good deal to attend to lately, and, I suppose, has got rather careless—that's women's way. But if I can't bring her round I'll speak to Gashwiler—I'll get him to use his influence with Mrs. Hop. So cheer up, my boy; he'll make it all right."

The appearance of a bouquet on the table of Mrs. Hopkinson was no rare event; nevertheless, Mr. Gashwiler's was not there. Its bold contrasts had offended her woman's eye—it is observable that good taste survives the wreck of all the other feminine virtues—and she had distributed it to make bouquets for other gentlemen. Yet, when he appeared, she said to him hastily, putting her little hand over the emerald ring:

"I'm so glad you came. But you gave me such a fright an hour ago."

Mr. Gashwiler was both pleased and astounded. "What have I done, my dear Mrs. Hopkinson?" he began.

"Oh, don't talk," she said, sadly. "What have you done, indeed? Why, you sent me that beautiful bouquet. I could not mistake your taste in the arrangement of the flowers; but my husband was here. You know his jealousy. I was obliged to conceal it from him. Never—promise me now—never do it again."

Mr. Gashwiler gallantly protested.

"No! I am serious! I was so agitated; he must have seen me blush."

Nothing but the gross flattery of this speech could have clouded its manifest absurdity to the Gashwiler consciousness. But Mr. Gashwiler had already succumbed to the girlish half timidity with which it was uttered. Nevertheless, he could not help saying:

"But why should he be so jealous now? Only day before yesterday I saw Simpson, of Duluth, hand you a nosegay right before him!"

"Ah," returned the lady, "he was outwardly calm then, but you know nothing of the scene that occurred between us after you left."

"But," gasped the practical Gashwiler, "Simpson had given your husband that contract—a cool fifty thousand in his pocket?"

Mrs. Hopkinson looked as dignifiedly at Gashwiler as was consistent with five feet three (the extra three inches being a pyramidal structure of straw-colored hair, a frond of faint curls, a pair of laughing blue eyes and a small belted waist. Then she said, with a casting down of her lids:

"You forget that my husband loves me," and for once the mix appeared to look penitent. It was becoming; but as it had been originally practiced in a simple white dress, relieved only with pale-blue ribbons, it was not entirely in keeping with bedonned lavender and rose-colored trimmings. Yet the woman who hesitates between her moral expression and the harmony of her dress is lost. And Mrs. Hopkinson was victim by her very candor.

Mr. Gashwiler was flattered. The most disreputable man likes the appearance of virtue. "But, dear Mrs. Hopkinson," he said obsequiously, "belong to the whole country." Which, with something between a courtesy and a La-stunt, he endeavored to represent. "And I shall want to avail myself of all," he added, "in the matter of the Castro claim. A little support at Webster's, a glass or two of champagne, and a single flash of those bright eyes, and the thing is done."

"But," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "I have promised Josiah that I would give up all those frivolities, and, although my conscience is clear, you know how people talk! Josiah leaves it. Why, only last night, at a reception at the Patagonian minister's, every woman in the room gossiped about the

cause I led the German with him. As if a married woman, whose husband was interested in the government, could not be civil to the representative of a friendly power?"

Mr. Gashwiler did not see how Mr. Hopkinson's late contract for supplying salt pork and canned provisions to the army of the United States should make his wife susceptible to the advances of foreign princes; but he prudently kept that to himself. Still, not being himself a diplomat, he could not help saying:

"But I understood that Mr. Hopkinson did not object to your interesting yourself in this claim, and you know some of the stock." The lady started, and said:

"Stock! Dear Mr. Gashwiler, for heaven's sake don't mention that hideous name to me. Stock, I am sick of it! Have you gentlemen no other topic for a lady?"

She punctuated her sentence with a mischievous look at her interlocutor. For a second time, I regret to say, that Mr. Gashwiler succumbed. The Roman constituency at Remus, it is to be hoped, were happily ignorant of this last defection of their great legislator. Mr. Gashwiler instantly forgot his theme—began to ply the lady with a certain boylike gallantry, which it is to be said he carried with a playful, terrier-like tenacity, when the servant suddenly announced, "Mr. Wiles."

Gashwiler started. Not so Mrs. Hopkinson, who, however, prudently and quietly removed her own chair several inches from Gashwiler's.

"Do you know Mr. Wiles?" she asked pleasantly.

"No! That is, I—ah—yes, I may say I have had some business relations with him," responded Gashwiler rising.

"Won't you stay?" she added pleadingly. "No."

Mr. Gashwiler's prudence always got the better of his gallantry. "Not now," he responded in some nervousness. "Perhaps I had better go now, in view of what you have just said about Josiah. You need not mention my name to this—this—Mr. Wiles?"

And with one eye on the door, and an awkward dash of his lips at the lady's fingers, he withdrew.

There was no introductory formula to Mr. Wiles' interview. He dashed at once in medias res. "Gashwiler! knows a woman that, he says, can help us against the Spanish girl who is coming here with spoils, prettiness, fascination, and what not! You must find her out."

"Why?" asked the lady laughing.

"Because I don't trust that Gashwiler. A woman with a pretty face and an ounce of brains could sell him out; eye, and us with him."

"Oh, say two ounces of brains. Mr. Wiles, Mr. Gashwiler is no fool."

"Possibly, except when your sex is concerned, and it is very likely that the woman is his superior."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Hopkinson with a mischievous look.

"Ah, you know her, then?"

"Not so well as I know him," said Mrs. H. quite seriously. "I wish I did."

"Well, you'll find out if she's to be trusted. You are laughing—this is a serious matter! This woman—"

Mrs. Hopkinson dropped him a charming courtesy and said,

"C'est moi!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A RACE FOR IT.



ROYAL THATCHER worked hard. That the boyish little painter who shared his hospitality at the "Blue Mass" mine should afterward have little part in his active life seemed not inconsistent with his habits. At present the mine was his only mistress, claiming his entire time, exasperating him with fickleness, but still requiring that supreme devotion of which his nature was capable. It is possible that Miss Carmen saw this too, and so set about with feminine tact, if not to supplement, at least to make her rival less pertinacious and absorbing. Apart from this object, she zealously labored in her profession, yet with small pecuniary result. Local art was at a discount in California. The scenery of the country had not yet become famous; rather it was reserved for a certain eastern artist, already famous, to make it so; and people cared little for the reproduction, under their very noses, of that which they saw continually with their own eyes and valued not. So that little Mistress Carmen was fain to divert her artist soul to support her plump little material body; and made divers excursions into the regions of ceramic art, painting on velvet, illuminating missals, decorating china, and the like. I have in my possession some wax flowers—a

delicate and a law-drawing delight—both for a rare present by the little lady, whose pictures lately took the prize at a foreign exhibition, shortly after she had been half starved by a California public, and claimed by a California press as its fostered child of genius.

Of these struggles and triumphs Thatcher had no knowledge; yet he was perhaps more startled than he would own to himself when one December day, he received this dispatch: "Come to Washington at once.—Carmen De Haro."

"Carmen De Haro!" I grieve to state that such was the preoccupation of this man, elected by fate to be the hero of the solitary anatomical episode of this story, that for a moment he could not recall her. When the honest little figure that had so manfully stood up against him, and had proved her sex by afterwards running away from him, came back at last to his memory, he was at first mystified and then self-reproachful. He had been remiss to the self-confessed daughter of his enemy. Yet why should she telegraph to him, and what was she doing in Washing-

ton? To all these speculations it is to be said to his credit that he looked for no sentimental or romantic answer. Royal Thatcher was naturally modest and self-deprecating in his relations to the other sex, as indeed most men who are apt to be successful with women generally are, despite a vast degree of superannuated lish to the contrary. To the half dozen women who are startled by sheer audacity into submission there are scores who are piqued by a self-respectful patience; and where a woman has to do half the wooing, she generally makes a pretty sure thing of it.

In his bewilderment Thatcher had overlooked a letter lying on his table. It was from his Washington lawyer. The concluding paragraph caught his eye—"Perhaps it would be well if you came here yourself. Roscommon is here; and they say there is a niece of Garcia's, lately appeared, who is likely to get up a strong social sympathy for the old Mexican. I don't know that they expect to prove anything by her; but she is attractive and clever, and has enlisted the sympathies of the delegation." Thatcher laid the letter down a little indignantly. Strong men are quite as liable as weak women are to sudden whimsical ideas on any question they may have in common. What right had this poor little had he had cherished—he was quite satisfied now that he had cherished her, and really had suffered from her absence—what right had she to suddenly blossom in the sunshine of power to be, perhaps, plucked and worn by one of his enemies. He did not agree with his lawyer that she was in any way connected with his enemies; he trusted to her masculine loyalty that far. But here was something vaguely dangerous to the feminine mind—position, flattery, power. He was almost as firmly satisfied now that he had been wrong and neglected as he had been positive a few moments before that he had been right in his attention. The irritation, although momentary, was enough to decide this strong man. He telegraphed to San Francisco and, having missed the steamer, secured an overland passage to Washington; then, in haste, and with a gentle dash of his hand on the door, he was purchased; but, manlike, once having made a practical step in a wrong direction, he kept on rather than admit an inconsistency to himself. Yet he was not entirely satisfied that his journey was a business one. The impulsive went into the "Blue Mass" mine had probably scored against the strong man.

On a small part of the present great trans-continental railway at this time had been built, and was lat piers at either end of its date and with expensive yet unneeded. From the overland traveler left the rail at Fresno, he left it, as it were, civilization with it; and, until he reached the Webster frontier, the rest of his road was only the old common rail traveled by engines of the Overland company. Excepting a part of "Devil's Canyon," the way was unpicturesque and flat; and the passage of the Rocky mountains, far from suggesting the alleged poetry of that region, was only a reminder of those sterile plains of a level New England landscape. The journey was a dreary monotony that was scarcely enlivened by its discomforts, never amounting to actual accident or incident, but utterly destructive to all nervous tension. Usually even supervened. "On the third day out," said Frank Monk, driver, speaking casually but characteristically of a "fare"—on the third day out, after asking no end of questions and getting no answers, he took to chewing straws that he picked out of the cushion, and kussin' to himself. From that very day I knew it was all over with him, and I handed him over to his friends at "Shy Ann," strapped to the back seat, and ravin' and cussin' at Ben Holiday, the gentlemanly proprietor. It is presumed that the unfortunate tourist's indignation was excited at the late Mr. Benjamin Holiday, then the proprietor of the lue—an evidence of his insanity that no one who knew that large-hearted, fastidious and elegantly-cultured Californian, since allied to foreign nobility, will for a moment doubt.

Mr. Royal Thatcher was too old and experienced a mountaineer to do aught but accept patiently and cynically his brother Californian's method of increasing his profits. As it was generally understood that any one who came from California by that route had some dark design, the victim received little sympathy. Thatcher's equable temperament and indomitable will stood him in good stead, and helped him cheerfully in this emergency. He ate his scant meals, and otherwise took care of the functions of his weak human nature, when and where he could, without grumbling, and at times earned even the praise of his driver by his ability to "rough it." Which "roughing it," by the way, meant the ability of the passengers to accept the incompetency of the company. It is true there were times when he regretted that he had not taken the steamer; but then he reflected that he was one of a vigilance committee sworn to hang that admirable man, the late Commodore Cornelius Vanderbit, for certain practices and cruelties done upon the bodies of certain storage passengers by his line, and for divers irregularities in their transportation. I mention this fact merely to show how so practical and stout a voyager as Thatcher might have contemplated the perplexities attending the administration of a great steamship company with selfish greed and brutality; and that he, with other Californians, may not have known the fact, since recorded by the commodore's family clergyman, that the great millionaire was always true to the hymns of his childhood.

Nevertheless, Thatcher found time to be cheerful and helpful to his fellow passengers, and even to be so far interesting to "Yuba Bill" the overland traveler on some places at his disposal. "But," said Thatcher in some concern, "the box seat was purchased by that other gentleman in Sacramento. He paid extra for it, and his name's on your way bill!"

"That," said Yuba Bill, scornfully, "don't fret me, even if he chartered the whole shebang. Look you, do you reckon I'm going to spile my temper by sitting next to a man with a game eye? And such an eye! Gosh! Well, darn my skin, the other day when we were watering at Webster, he

got down and passed in front of the off leader—that yer pinto colt that's L'n accustomed to Injuns, grizzlies and buffalo—and I'm bless ef, when her eye tackled his, ef she didn't jist git up and rar round that I reckoned I'd hev to go down and take them blinders off from her eyes and clap on his." "But he paid his money, and is entitled to his seat," persisted Thatcher. "Mebbe he is—in the office of the kempeny," growled Yuba Bill; "but it's time some folks knowed that out in the plains I run this yer team myself." A fact which was self-evident to most of the passengers. "I suppose his authority is as absolute on this dreary waste as a ship captain's in mid ocean," exclaimed Thatcher to the baleful-eyed stranger. Mr. Wiles—whom the reader has recognized—assented with the public side of his face, but looked vengeance at Yuba Bill with the other, while Thatcher, innocent of the presence of one of his worst enemies, placated Bill so far as to restore Wiles to his rights. Wiles thanked him. "Shall I have the pleasure of your company far?" Wiles asked, insinuatingly. "To Washington," replied Thatcher, frankly. "Washington is a gay city during the session," again suggested the stranger. "I'm going on business," said Thatcher, bluntly.

A trifling incident occurred at Pine Tree Crossing which did not heighten Yuba Bill's admiration of the stranger. As Bill opened the double locked box in the "boot" of the coach—sacred to Wells, Fargo & Co.'s express and the Overland company's treasures—Mr. Wiles perceived a small, black monoco portmanteau among the parcels. "Ah, you carry baggage there, too?" he said, sweetly. "Not often," responded Yuba Bill, shortly. "Ah, this then contains valuables?" "It belongs to that man whose seat you've got," said Yuba Bill, who, for insulting purposes of his own, preferred to establish the fiction that Wiles was an interloper, and of he reckons, in a sorter mixed company like this, to look up his portmanteau, I don't know who's business it is. Who?" continued Bill, lashing himself into a simulated rage, who in plain language was saying, "Mebbe you think, sittin' up there on the box seat, you are, Mebbe you think you kin see round corners with that eye and kin pull up for teams round corners on down grades a mile ahead?" But here Thatcher, who, with something of Lane's concern for Method, had a noble pity for all infirmities, interposed so sternly that Yuba Bill stopped.

On the fourth day they struck a blinding snow storm while ascending the dreary plateau that trended toward for 600 miles was to be their roadbed. The horses, after floundering through the drift, gave out completely on reaching the next station and the prospects ahead, to all but the experienced eye, looked doubtful. A few passengers advised taking to sledges, others a postponement of the journey until the weather changed. Yuba Bill alone was for pressing forward as they were. "Two miles more and we're on the high grade, where the wind is strong enough to blow you through the windy and jist pent enough to peck away over them slick, every inch of snow that falls. I'll jist skirmish round in and out of them drifts on these four wheels when ye can't drag one of them flat bottomed dry goods boxes through a drift." Bill had a California whip's contempt for a sledge. But he was warmly seconded by Thatcher, who had the next best thing to experience, the instant that taught him to read character, and take advantage of another man's experience. "Them that wants to stop kin do so," said Bill authoritatively, cutting the Gordian knot; "them as wants to take a sledge can do so, their's one in the barn. Them as wants to go on with me and the relay will come on." Mr. Wiles selected the sledge and a driver, a few remained for the next stage, and Thatcher, with two others, decided to accompany Yuba Bill. These changes took up some valuable time; and the storm continuing, the stage was run under the shed, the passengers gathering around the station fire, and not until after midnight did Yuba Bill put in the relays. "I wish you a good journey," said Wiles, as he drove from the shed as Bill entered. Bill vouchsafed no reply, but, addressing himself to the driver, said curtly, as if giving an order for the delivery of goods, "Shove him out at Rawlings," and passed contemptuously around to the tail board of the sled, and returned to the harnessing of his relay.

The moon came out and shone high as Yuba Bill once more took the reins in his hands. The wind, which instantly attacked them as they reached the level, seemed to make the driver's theory plausible, and for half a mile the road bed was swept clean, and frozen hard. Further on a tongue of snow, extending from a bowlder to the right, reached across their path to the height of two or three feet. But Yuba Bill dashed through a part of it, and by skillful maneuvering circumvented the rest. But even as the obstacle was passed, the coach dropped with an

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[To be continued.]