

you, I'd have been mighty apt to have starved. I tell you I don't feel as though any of that claim belonged to me. If it wasn't too unutterably lonely to leave a man by himself, I'd pick up my duds and clear off until you had the claim worked out. There's only one consolation—it's not altogether a safe neighborhood, and maybe I'm going to do some good just by staying."

The other gave vent to a short laugh, and knocked the ashes out of his own pipe.

"Don't be nonsensical; Tom Thorne is a good enough name to go by. I knew you as soon as I saw you, and took you right into my camp. I'm glad I did, for you're a dozen times better fellow than I expected to find you. Don't you suppose I remember you, Brace Martin?"

"And who in thunder are you?" exclaimed Martin, leaping to his feet, and peering into the face of his companion.

"I'm Edward Hunter, at your service. You used to be Bob's friend, at Dr. Inman's, but from some little hints you've given, I fancy you've dropped to him as thoroughly as I did before I ran away."

"And you've kept this to yourself all these weeks? Well, I'll be hanged!"

"Don't mention such a contingency. It's so likely to happen to any one out here. But now that the murder is out, sit down and give me the news. I'm just dying to talk of old times and all that."

After a few more expressions of surprise, Bracebridge Martin did as he was bidden, and each told more or less of his story.

"A hard time? Well, yes, you might consider it such. I bolted because I couldn't stand the way I was treated; and, for a time, I thought I'd jumped from the frying pan into the fire. But I got out here and went to work. I've been rich two or three times already; and then, when Fate knocked me down, I jumped up and went at it again. I've got so used to my new name I have almost forgotten my old one. Now tell us about yourself. I know you must have got into a snarl somehow, and maybe I can show you the way through."

Martin, being taken somewhat off his guard, told the whole story of his wasted life, down to the time of his leaving; and the reason for the abrupt departure was that Robert Hunter had threatened him with ruin for uttering a check that he claimed was forged.

"How it could be I can't imagine, for I got the check from Hunter himself."

"Just like him. The boy that would try to break his cousin's neck because of envy would ruin a friend to serve his ends. He must have some reason for wishing to have you in his power."

"He did. I had used up everything I was worth, but Vida had a little fortune of her own, and he was after that. He couldn't do anything with her himself, and he wanted to reach her through me. To block that game I bolted."

It was just as well that the two had this conversation, for it made a still more thorough understanding between them. In addition, it prepared Edward Hunter for what happened the following day.

As they were taking their frugal supper, just as the dusky evening fell, both were startled by hearing the sound of some one approaching. More startling yet; when the new-comers came into sight Hunter saw that there were two ladies and a gentleman in the party. When one of these ladies exclaimed:

"Oh, Bracebridge!" and hastily threw herself from the saddle, he knew that, in all probability, this was the Vida Martin of whom his companion had been speaking the evening before.

He watched the meeting with real pleasure, and yet,

before long, his smile was turned into a frown, as he heard Vida saying:

"But oh, Bracebridge, you must fly once more. Even though you decide to go back to New York and brave the arrest, it would never do for him to drag you there. He is on your trail, and we only reached Poverty Gulch before him by a liberal use of money in procuring a private conveyance. The stage was only a few hours behind us; an accident cost me nearly three days. It is not safe to remain here even another night."

"If I do it will be for your sake, not mine," he answered.

And as they stood there arguing their cause a sudden interruption, in the shape of three men, who, having crawled up unheard, dashed into the circle. At their head came Robert Hunter, exclaiming:

"Bracebridge Martin, surrender! I arrest you in the name of the law."

In an instant Martin seized Howard's arm and dashed away down the secret trail that led to their claim in the gulch below. Robert Hunter glanced quickly around him and caught a glimpse of the retreating figures. As he dashed away in pursuit Edward Hunter uttered a cry of warning, but it was unheeded.

There was a path to be seen, narrow and dangerous, but Robert Hunter knew nothing of it. He had marked the spot where the men had disappeared, and leaping forwards, as he supposed, into the shadow, he bounded straight over the edge of the canyon, whose sheer wall went down and down for a straight two hundred feet.

Strangest of all, the man was not immediately killed. Several projecting trees broke his fall, and they found him living and not altogether speechless.

When they gathered round him, lying prone under the full moonlight, he knew his cousin at once. He muttered, brokenly:

"This is your revenge. You remember?"

"Heaven knows, my poor fellow, that it was no act or fault of mine. I forgave you long ago."

"Revenge all the same. You will get all of mine and yours that I held you out of so long. Martin is right. I forged the endorsement and gave him. The true note is in my safe. Good-bye. I am going. It—is—right."

He said no more, but slowly drifted out into that other world, where such as he fare badly.

Sick to her very heart, Vida stood leaning upon her brother's shoulder, who fled no farther. The two guides his foe had brought with him washed their hands of the affair—they had dropped into something better since they knew the secret of Discovery Gulch.

Before a week was over there were a dozen cabins in sight from Martin's cabin, and every foot of pay dirt was claimed.

Yet this made but little difference now to the two friends, as they desired to sell out anyhow. They had no wish to linger there, nor did they. Their bonanzas had already turned out well, and they sold for much more, and then five persons wended their way eastward.

Not to impose a long story upon the reader, Bracebridge Martin's innocence was now susceptible of abundant proof, as was Edward Hunter's kinship to the deceased. He was the nearest of all, and to him came the inheritance, though much of it was really that fortune of his own of which, through so many years, he had been defrauded.

And do you ask, what of Vida? Ah, well. The true friend of her brother became her friend also—and after a time something nearer. She is still happy as the wife of him who ran away to win revenge, who failed, and yet was revenged after all.

W. R. B.