

They dashed down the mountain trail at a break-neck speed, and fast as they would go, Hepworth still shouted "faster!" When they had crossed the valley and were climbing the ascent on the other side, the dome of Shasta rose to its stupendous height just in front of them, and at its base glimmered the lone star. With a wild, guttural yell, that awoke slumbering echoes, the celestial renegade now leaped from the mule's back and disappeared in the depths of the forest, followed by a volley of oaths and the contents of Hepworth's six-shooter. Whether he was hit or not will never be revealed till the judgment day, for he never saw the face again. He understood enough of mining parlance to grasp the meaning of Hepworth's threat, and made a dash for his life.

Leaving the coolie in charge of the mules, Hepworth walked swiftly to the door of the rude cabin, and rapping gently, said—

"Keith; don't be frightened; it's Ben."

She flew to the door and let him in—his Keith, left alone in the wilderness of solitude—then crept to the safe shelter of his faithful breast and lay there like a tired child, spent with long play. All a father's protecting love, a mother's infinite tenderness, a lover's mighty passion were concentrated in the gaze that rested on the thin, colorless face and sunken eyes, that read, with unerring intuition, the terrible abuses, the long heart-break. At length, very gently, he laid his hand, in the old way, on her head, and his voice vibrated with passionate pain, as he said—

"My pure, mountain rose! For five years at the mercy of fiends, and I've searched for you night and day."

She looked up at him now with a quick, deprecating glance: "You know?"

"All!" he said, and forestalled further questions by telling, in a few words,

of his meeting with Wong Kee, his forcing the truth from him, and his final escape.

"And you didn't believe I deserted you of my own free will?" By the tone of her voice, he knew how she feared answer and entreated his forbearance. He looked at her with eyes full of reproach—

"Never, Keith! I knew there was vile treachery somewhere."

She glanced up at him, gravely sweet, gravely glad, in the old way he remembered so well. "Dear old Ben!" she said, with tremulous lips, then broke down and sobbed out her heart-break.

"He made me believe that he was a friend, whom you had sent to take charge of me, as you were detained by business; that his mother lived in the town, and that he would take me there, and the next morning we would go down to the city. He ordered a close carriage, and after we had entered it, he gave me something which partly took away both consciousness and will power. I have a dim remembrance of going into an office, of hearing the marriage service read and my own name connected with it, but I had no power to resist. Then I knew nothing more till I awoke in this place."

Hepworth shuddered as this second verification of his dream came home to him. She looked at him wonderingly. "The night air is chilly at this altitude," he said, evasively. Then, with vehement passion, cried: "By the holy Mary! That villain shall die like a dog, by this right hand."

Keith started up with a cry and caught his hand: "Ben! Dear Ben! Promise me that you will shed no blood for my sake. It is a last request—a dying request," she said, solemnly, pressing her hand to her heart. "I feel that I have not long to live. I wanted to see the old home again, to tell you the truth