

THE HERMIT OF LAKE TAHOE.

OUR party had exhausted the wonders of Yosemite, or, rather, the time we had to spend there, and were enroute for Lake Tahoe. By rail we traveled to Truckee and there took the stage for the lake. There were seven of us, our number having been augmented at Oakland by a gentleman and bride named Daymer, who, like ourselves, were out for health and pleasure. Daymer himself, however, had been a resident of California since boyhood until the past three years, and seemed very familiar with all its wondrous scenery; but his wife—a slip of a blonde—was from Illinois, and spending her first season in the far west. We kept the gentleman answering questions until one less obliging would have become wearied. The stage moved slowly along the winding road, following the transparent river's course, giving us time to look and wonder. Perhaps half of the fourteen miles between Truckee and Tahoe had been passed when Madge gaily inquired if there were no legends or romances connected with the enchanted spot.

There was a moment's silence, broken by cousin Reginald's laugh, as he banteringly replied that a woman would not give a straw for the beauties of nature unless heightened by a halo of romance.

"But there really ought to be something. Have you never heard anything, Mr. Daymer?" Madge insisted.

"Look, oh, look at yon height! How grand, and to my imagination it resembles a dog's head," cried Swift, our genuine nature-idolater, at the moment.

All eyes turned in the direction indicated save my own. All unbidden they rested on Daymer's face, which had suddenly grown ashy white, and his lips twitched and quivered. What could it mean, and had Madge's thoughtless question caused it? were the questions I asked myself. I think he felt, rather than saw, my scrutiny, for he began to talk in a hurried, almost incoherent, manner, about the "height," launching almost immediately into a long story regarding the game found upon its slopes.

Madge did not return to her question, and, when once the conversation had changed to something remote, Daymer became strangely silent. I noted all this in surprise, then forgot it entirely for the time when set down at the shore of the incomparable lake.

We had come prepared for camping; accordingly our first day was chiefly spent in setting up the two tents and getting things running. But in the evening we had a treat in the glorious sunset.

"I have heard Europeans say that Tahoe's sunsets surpass in beauty Como's or Maggiore's," said Swift, with an awed expression, "and I am sure I want to see nothing more sublime on earth."

Mentally we agreed with him.

The day following we patronized the little steamer, taking dinner with us and eating it on one of the green slopes above Emerald bay. The next morning the gentlemen of our party received an invitation from those of a party camping half a mile farther up to "go shooting." The ladies urged us to accept, saying that they needed rest and quiet, stipulating, however, that we be home by two o'clock. We went.

Suddenly, when we had been out some two hours, one of our new friends startled us by firing three successive shots. This was the signal agreed upon to call us together, or "in case of alarm," Reginald had laughingly added. Guided by the reports we were soon assembled about a deserted old house.

"Here's a find," said Swift, ecstatically. "Who would have thought of finding ruins here?"

I said we were assembled, but not all—Daymer was missing.

"Such an old, deserted place," remarked the finder, "I thought you'd all want to explore it with me."

"You weren't afraid to do it alone, were you, Ted?" asked his brother, humorously. "You see, Ted has always had a weakness for ghosts and the supernatural," he added, turning to us.

"By the way, where is Daymer?" Reg asked.

Three more shots were fired, and then we began "hunting the ghost," as the elder Huntley called it.

Swift tried the front door, but it was unyielding. Together we tramped around through the weed-grown yard to the rear door. Reg raised his hand to raise the latch when Ted Huntley's voice arrested him—

"Wait, for heaven's sake!"

The house was built of hewn logs. The main part was square in shape, with heavy shutters tightly closed at the four windows. In the rear was an "addition," built of boards and without shutters; but there hung at the window nearest us a rain-streaked curtain of some blue material. Huntley had passed on to an end window, and his exclamation was the result of his first glance through its torn drapery.

His voice and the sight of his pale face the next moment made us all stare in amazement.

"Guess Ted's found it," Reed Huntley managed to say, though his startled countenance belied his careless words.

"Here's Daymer," put in Swift at this juncture.

Sure enough, there was Daymer, but so colorless and wild looking as to be almost unrecognizable.

"What's up?" he asked, breathlessly; then, without waiting for an answer, went on hurriedly—

"Let's be moving; it looks like a storm."

"Not till we see what's scared Ted," Reed said, passing around to where his brother had stood.

"Great Scott! Gentlemen, come here!"