

Fortunes of the Green Cloth



Chick seemed to be with Charley Heinze that day. There was a satisfied look in his face as he stole furtive glances at the yellow heap of double eagles across the table. For though he often boasted that he could fleece the last cent from any opponent, no matter how timid, it was seldom that he had a chance like this. It brought back to his mind the good old days of the prospectors, when gold, fresh from the earth, poured night and day into his den of vice. Those days were passed now and only a few reckless cow-boys were bold enough to stake their money against his skill and trickery.

But today, a peculiar turn had favored the infamous resort in the shape of a seedy, unsophisticated farmer. Chick was behind the bar and served him his portion of "wheskee straight." In paying, he opened his huge leather wallet, and rather awkwardly displayed its contents. There was something there which opened, for a moment, the narrow slit of Charley's eyes, and a peculiar gleam lit his face. Concealing it with a slight cough, he gave me an impressive look and then handed the farmer his change.

"Rather risky carrying so much money isn't it?" he ventured.

"Yass, but the bank wan't open yit, an' I jes' sold ma farm," drawled the old man.

The conversation continued and I joined in. He had over a thousand dollars and I almost pitied him as I perceived how readily he was duped by our feigned interest. At last I suggested another drink and then a game of cards. He rather shrank from this, saying that he "couldn't play fer money, ca's he'd promised his wife to buy a home a spel nearer teown."

He consented to play for fun, however, and we sat down with a bottle of "Old Crow" between us. Charley and I, all the while made side bets to attract his interest and it soon had the desired effect. He entered thoroughly into the spirit of the game, though he made frequent mistakes and was pitifully blind to all our duplicity.