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HIS INHERITANCE

By Clinton Dangerfield

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The tones of the elder man's voice ceased, and to John Ringwood, standing before him, it seemed that the whole world was suddenly enveloped in a mist of red shame. When Ringwood spoke, his accents were curiously quiet and constrained, for was he not addressing Molly's father?

"And so," he said, wondering vaguely if he were the same John Ringwood who ten minutes ago had asked so hopefully for the girl's hand—"and so, sir, this is your objection to me—because my father was a—a coward?"

The word came out with a gasping sound—"you think I must be one also?"

"Blood tells," returned Henry Morris hoarsely. "But remember, lad, I would never have forced this painful knowledge of mine on you if you had not compelled me to say why I could not trust my girl to you. Your father's shame was known only to you and me, would have slept with him in his grave but—you would know."

"That will do," said Ringwood thickly. "I am my father's son, as you say. There is no chance here, or I might prove to you that God does not always make us mere copies of those who go before. But that is idle. There is one thing—when I am gone tell Molly that I loved her, that I asked for her hand, but that there was a barrier between us. She shall not think I was making summer love to her. She shall not hate me for that."

"Very well," said the elder man grimly. "But if I had known the girl would interest herself in the first good looking stranger thrown at my gates by a broken ankle I would have taken preventive measures long ago."

"I will take the stage tomorrow," pursued Ringwood. "Until then I must trespass on your hospitality."

"And welcome," said Morris heartily. "You're met what I said like a man. Here's my hand."

"Is that necessary," returned the other briefly. "You may as well avoid contamination when you have condemned another into hereditary leprosy."

Morris left the taunt unanswered, and just then the library door swung open, and a curly haired boy of sixteen pushed in with sleepy freedom.

"Everything's gone to sleep on the ranch," he said pettishly. "When's Markham and Molly coming home?"

"Your brother said he would bring your sister home by 8 o'clock," returned Morris.

"Gracious! I hope he will," said the boy. "But she said they might cut across to Denham's. She wanted to see old Aunt Hannah or some such nonsense. I told her she was going after one of Hannah's love charms, and she turned as red as you please."

"Try to talk sense," said his father frantically, and Ringwood crossed to the west window and stood watching the sunset fire die to an ashen gray.

"So rose the fire of my hopes," he thought. "Like this, it died in bitter ashes—died to my father's level! The son, O God, of—a coward!"

Eight o'clock came, but neither the elder son nor Molly Morris had returned. At 9 a negro groom brought a note saying they would sleep that night at the Denham's, some fifteen miles away. A thrill half anguish, half relief, shot through Ringwood. Best, indeed, that they should never meet again. He would take the stage early next morning.

Then on the heels of the negro stumbled in Lee Hung, the cook, who had been granted an afternoon off. Blinded to the palest of yellows, he stammered out a tale in his almost incomprehensible lingo which, translated, ran as follows:

Coming home on foot, he was aware of a tiny fire at the foot of Sevier's canyon. Inspired by ancestral duties, he had crept up to overhear the strangers converse. Developed they had learned of Markham Morris' deposit that day with the express agent at Ravenshoe, that they resolved that this money would circulate better the more and had shot the unfortunate express agent through his window, dead men being proverbially close mouthed; had seized the packet, which waited the midnight express, and now only tarried the rising of the moon.

Young Morris went white with rage and despair. That package stood between his family and financial ruin. His eyes flashed.

"Of course we'll get it back, dad, at once."

"Yes, lad. Lee Hung, how many men were there?"

"Allee samee fingers one hand—no thumb."

"Four. I'm sorry your brother isn't here, Stanley. You are a bit young for such work. The foot of Sevier canyon. Let's see; we can be on them in half an hour."

"Take the short cut through the canyon, dad, and we can be at 'em in twenty-five minutes."

"No," said his father decisively. "To ride through that canyon trail at full speed means almost certain death. Quick, Lee Hung, and you, boy, to the negro, 'saddle Prince and Firebrand. Stanley, help me get the pistols and a rifle for each."

Only two horses! Young Morris flashed an astounded look on their guest. Was that dogged indifference real? Of course nothing was expected from Lee or the negro, but this handsome Saxon with frank, gray eyes—could he fall them in such need?

But Morris understood. This was

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