

HESPER

...BY...

HAMLIN GARLAND

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CHAPTER IX CONTINUED

But the assayers, the men of learning, persisted and in their little mortars brayed the ore and in tiny portable furnaces smelted for many a sturdy miner minute buttons of shining metal. The gold was there, and at last even the most skeptical believed.

Then the inflow began in earnest. The trail was beaten smooth by swarming feet. It became a stage road. A great railroad sent surveyors toiling up each of the deep and winding canyons in the attempt to reach the mighty camp whose fame was beginning to shine throughout the world. The beautiful hills were blotted with the red of red earth. Paths appeared, leading from burrow to burrow like runways in a town of prairie dogs.

The main street of Bozle was 10,000 feet above the sea, but it was at the top of Pine Mountain, at the foot of which ran the river. It was a town of 10,000 feet above sea level, and it was the highest town in all America, and it was called Skytown.

In the end Skytown dominated the whole camp and gave name to it. Bozle, Grass Mountain, Pin Gulch, Hoffman, all were subordinate in fame as they were topographically, and the press affixed to the region as the Skytown mining district.

In those days the barroom of the Mountain House in Bozle was the central stock exchange of the whole camp. It swarmed of an evening with business men from Denver, Kansas City, Chicago, Salt Lake City, San Francisco and New York. Every great newspaper had its representative there, alert and indefatigable, seeking the latest word of strikes and sales.

At the time when Raymond entered it Skytown was the busiest, most vital and in some ways the most picturesque mining district in the world. It was at its height as a poor man's camp. New territory was being opened up each day. Each evening brought stories of strikes—scores of them.

The streets of Bozle were graceless and grassless, but Valley Springs was a bower of trees and growing vines. The houses of the peak were tents, slab shacks and cabins of aspen poles, and remained so, while splendid stone palaces had already appeared in the valley, and every comfort and nearly every luxury of the east was obtainable almost common.

Skytown was the cupola of Sky camp. It surveyed the whole field dominated only by the glittering crest of Mogalyn, which rose nearly 4,000 feet higher into the thin and fleecy air. Bozle and Hoffman and Indian Creek and Eureka and a half dozen other villages lay below.

This was the town, the camp, toward which Raymond had been gazing in longing and irresolution for two years and to which he directed his steps as soon as he was able to walk with something of his old time vigor.

For a week he did nothing but stroll slowly up and down the streets of Bozle, studying his surroundings, listening to all that was said and asking searching questions of every man who seemed to know anything of mining matters. The altitude at first troubled him greatly, but he ate well and slept well, and day by day his strength and native resolution expanded within him, and he began to definitely seek a place whereon to try his hands at labor.

One night as he sat toasting his shins before the big fire in the hotel he became immensely interested in the grand physical proportions and easy, unstudied grace of a middle aged miner who stood with his back to the fire replying to the rapid questions of a young reporter whose head was bent absently above his notebook and pencil. The prospector satisfied every requisite of a mountaineer. His massive head, covered with grizzled hair; his handsome, weather beaten, smiling face; his worn laced boots, spattered with mud; his rusty brown jacket and his broad hat, worn with careless yet unflinching grace, made him easily the most picturesque figure in the room, and when some one clapped him on the back and called out, "Hello, Kelly!" Raymond realized, with a pleasant warming of the heart, that he was looking upon Rocky Mountain Kelly, who knew the ranges of the west as intimately as the lines on the palm of his hand.

Seeking opportunity, he touched the big man on the shoulder. "Are you Matthew Kelly?"

Kelly turned his keen gray eyes on his questioner. "I am, sir. What can I do for ye?"

"I've heard you're a good natured man," began Raymond.

Kelly slid his hand into his pocket. "How much is it?"

Raymond laughed. "Do I look like that?"

"You look like a sick man," replied Kelly, scrutinizing him. "And a hungry man."

"I'm neither," Raymond smilingly replied. "I've just eaten the supper."

"Serve here, and I'm fairly comfortable, but I want to ask your advice about a business matter. If you had a little money and wanted to break into mining, what would you do?"

"Take out a lease," answered Kelly promptly.

"Do you know of a promising property to lease?"

"I do."

"Will you show it to me?"

"I will."

Raymond was amused by the crisp succinctness of these replies. It was plain that the prospector was sizing him up, and favorably.

Kelly indicated a chair. "Sit down, man; ye look like a citizen with a lung faded. Where are ye from?"

"I'm a rancher from the plains."

"And ye want to mine?"

"Yes."

"It's ninety-nine chances to one ye lose if ye do."

"I know it."

"Have ye a wife?"

"I have not."

"Any one dependin' on ye?"

"None."

Kelly relaxed, and his eyes began to gleam friendly. "Very well, then, I consent to show ye. I'm the owner of one mine into which I've put me last dollar, but I know a dandy proposition which I'd like to display. I'll take ye with me over the hills when ye're a little better acquainted with me, and when ye've seen the mine we'll talk the terms of partnership. The bankers all know me, and the farm dealers likewise, the more shame to me." A smile of singular charm curved his handsome lips.

"But never mind that. Matt Kelly never took advantage of any man, and that, I think, ye'll find me neighbors agreed upon. I'll not say I like the looks of ye—that would sound like blarney—the truth bein' I'm seekin' a partner, but in a day or two I'll lay me scheme before ye."

Putting aside business, they talked of their personal affairs. Raymond guardedly, Kelly with entire freedom and some humor. Kelly was married and had two little boys, for whom he was now living. "Since Nora came," he said, with tenderness, "I drink no more, but gambling is in me blood. I



Raymond's blood leaped with the joy of it.

play no more with cards or dice, but with lodes and shafts. I'm always taking on new chances. I found myself up with 'good things' till me back is broke and me hands fall empty."

There was something winning in the humorous glance of his big gray eyes, and Raymond sat with him long. His vast experience, his indomitable good nature, his physical pride, all appealed to the rancher with such power that he left him with a distinct exaltation. "Here is the man to help me make my fortune, and I can be guide to him," he added, and he went to sleep that night with greater confidence in his future than at any time since taking Barnett's ranch. He set his teeth hard in the determination to win, and though he had put Ann quite out of his plans for the future, she remained an inspiration and a lure.

His feeling of confidence in Kelly was deepened by his ride with him next day.

Turning from the gulch road, Kelly led the way up the side of Pine mountain, along a trail which braided itself upon a grassy slope like a purple brown ribbon. The air was keen, the sky a fleecy blue hemisphere. Raymond's blood leaped with the joy of it and with a sense that his feet were set at last on the road to fortune.

All about him the miners were climbing, each his special way, swinging a tin bucket which sparkled like glass in the morning sun. Great wains loaded with ore rolled creaking on their downy wheels, while others of their kind, piled high with lumber and machinery, crawled slowly up the curving roads.

On every side men were tunneling into the hillsides, tracing in gorges and tolling at windmills whose heavy wheels revolved as the heavy wheels of a business machine. If you had a little money and wanted to break into mining, what would you do?

man had either struck ore or boy to do so at any moment.

Here and there on the slope a tall and shapeless shaft house rose, with heaps of orange and blue gray refuse rock close beside it. The whole camp was as yet disorganized, formless and debatable. Not one in a hundred of the mines was a paying property; all the others were mere prospects.

As they left Kelly and turned to climb Pine Mountain the dwellings thickened. They were nearly all built of the smooth, straight trunks of the aspen, but nearer the summit were of fir, and a few of them stood in picturesque nooks among the rocks. Toward one of these, more homelike than the others, Kelly directed his horse, and as he neared the door a couple of lanky, yellow haired boys of six or seven years of age came bounding out to meet him.

Mrs. Kelly was unexpectedly lady-like, small and very pretty, with a skin that no wind could tan, and her great, wistful, pathetic eyes appealed to Raymond with instant power. She greeted him cordially, and while Kelly took the horses to the corral, he entered at her invitation. Her voice was as charming as her pale face and hair of burnished gold, and the young fellow looked upon her in surprise.

"You don't look very well, sir," Mrs. Kelly said to Raymond.

"I'm not very well, but I'm going to tear up the soil just the same. Your husband is to show me how."

"Matt can find gold easy enough, but he can't keep it."

"I've confessed as much, Nora, me girl, and if Raymond can help me on that score I'll put him in the way of makin' his pile. Can ye walk a few rods? If so, I'll show ye the mine and the chance."

"Certainly, I'm far from being a 'one-legged' yet."

The two men walked round the little grove of firs to the west and came upon some men busy with a very small upright engine hoisting ore from a shaft.

"Here," said Kelly, "is where we tap the river of life. This is my own mine, but the way I advise ye to take is that just beyond. I have an offer for me own prospect, but I shall not take it. If ye are agreeable, we'll lease the Last Dollar together and work it to the limit, for I'm satisfied its vein is the same as me own, which will keep; but if I strike ore, Curran, who owns the Last Dollar, will jump his price to the moon. Our lay is to bond and lease his mine, move my machinery over to his old shaft and work like mad to open up ore to buy in the property. Ye see, no one has touched pay ore in this quarter, and Curran is anxious to sell. He offers it at \$15,000. I believe we can open a vein that'll pay for it in less than six months. Will ye go in with me?"

"I will."

As their hands met their hearts warmed to each other. Kelly removed his hat and was almost solemn as he said slowly: "This makes us both. Now let's go out."

The Kelly home was as suited to its surroundings as a Swiss chalet. It had the dirt roof, the widely projecting eaves and the southern porch of a mountain cabin, and its lathe-turned and battered door were in keeping; only the windows, with their machine-made frames, were out of key. There were two small bedrooms, a living room, which served also for dining room, and a tiny kitchen, and yet it produced on Raymond's mind the most charming effect of unhesitating hospitality and homeliness. This was due as much to the charm of Mrs. Kelly's manner as to the deep velvet, cordial invitation of the host himself. There was no lock on their door and no bar to their warm hearts.

But Raymond saw what Matt's loving eyes could not discern—Nora was overworked and looking hard. In spite of her ready smile and cordial seconding of her husband's invitation, "Ye must make your home with us," she was not strong enough to take on this extra care, and he resolved to stay in Bozle till he could build a cabin for himself.

CHAPTER X.

LATE in the afternoon, after they had talked long at the mouth of the mine, Kelly and Raymond left the house and walked out along the ridge toward Skytown, which was built where the ground rose from a pine clad plateau to a rocky point overlooking the valley to the north. It had but one business street, which repeated in unpainted lumber all the shoddy architecture of a prairie town, whose flaming battlements pretended to a dignity which they do not fulfill.

The chief business of the street was gambling. Next in order stood rum-selling, with assaying a close third. The street was swarming, as usual, but the talk was directed for the moment to one topic. A convention of miners had been called to meet in the Golden Horn saloon, and several who knew Kelly called out, "Hello, Matt; we're going to make you president of the union."

Kelly smiled as if all this were a joke and introduced his friend and partner, Raymond, shook hands with each man heartily, well knowing that if he were to remain in the camp it would be well to be on friendly terms with all. Following the lead of others, they were soon wedged into a throng which filled the largest saloon of the street, a huge gambling establishment called the Golden Horn, of which Marvin Hanley, a celebrated gambler, was proprietor.

For the first time since the opening of the Golden Horn's door gambling was suspended and the machines of chance set aside. The excitement, the close clipped yellow

hair, a man who looked like a Catholic priest, mounted a box at one end of the room and called the house to order. "You know the purposes of this meeting," he said. "Now, who will you have for chairman?"

"Kelly!" Kelly cried a dozen men.

"Munro!" shouted those farther up the hall.

"Moved and seconded that Munro be chairman," said the smooth faced man.

"All who favor say 'Aye!'" A shout of many mingled voices answered. "Opposed, 'No.'" Only an obvious minority voted "No." "Munro is elected. Jack, get up here!"

As the new chairman's head rose above the throng Raymond experienced a shock. "I know that man," he said under his breath. Munro was a clean shaven, boyish fellow, with black hair pushed back from his face. He was young and handsome and began speaking in a clear, mellow and most persuasive voice. It was plain he was on good terms with his audience and quite certain of himself.

"I don't know why I should be made chairman of this meeting," he said after some local allusions, "unless it be to open the way for the real speaker and man of the hour—the man who has a message for you—Tom Larned of Dead Pine."

While the crowd applauded Larned climbed to his place and began to speak. He was a short man, with a forward thrust of the chin. His high forehead was smooth and pale, his calm eyes in vivid contrast with his burning blue eyes. He ignored all of Munro's joking and thrust his way in to the middle of his contention.

"I hear some men say we don't need a union here, but I tell you ye do. Ye're going the way of all mining camps. As soon as the claims are all taken consolidations begin and wages will be cut. A big mining camp must be run by union labor. The work has got to be done by men bred to the mine, and they must be organized. If they're not, they'll work for nothing. This camp is about to decline!"

"No! No!" shouted a dozen men.

The speaker held up a hand. "Wait a moment! I mean to say that this swarm of easy going tramps scratching the surface looking for a mine will begin to melt away. It is already melting away. These men on horseback, these grub stakers, these burro punchers, will not dig gold for other men." "Ye bet they won't!" shouted a big lugged fellow. "The real miners have got to get underground and stay there! Ye understand? Stay there! And they will want somebody on top to look after their interests. They'll want a union if ye don't; but, I tell you, ye short term miners will want a union before February is out."

In such wise he argued, and even Kelly admitted the truth of what he said. Others spoke, grizzled old fellows from other districts, men who had given up all hope of digging a head for themselves; men with families to feed and educate, who had fallen to contentment with a good wage and a steady job. But in some of the speeches a note of bitterness toward Valley Springs made itself heard. Skytown had begun to hate the valley as the home of those who lived on the labor of others, and some of those in the valley, as Raymond well knew, expressed their contempt of those who dwell in the Sky by calling them "red necks," in allusion to their tanned or drink inflamed faces. Politically the two towns were already as wide apart as the poles, and references to this division were numerous during the evening. The county was divided against itself and hopelessly tabilitated, and Bozle was eager to be free from the valley.

Kelly, weary of the wrangle, touched Raymond on the arm and turned toward the door. A big miner, detecting this movement, shouted out, "Here's Kelly taking a sneak!" Instantly Kelly was seized, a couple of heavy fellows lifted him to the bar, and so, towering over them all, the big prospector took of his hat and, with smiling contempt, said: "Boys, I wish ye well. I make no objection to the plans, but why should I, an old burro puncher, bother me head about a union? No one is cuttin' my wages. No one is shortenin' my hours of labor. Besides—and here he broke into a broad smile—"I'm an employer of labor myself."

"Down wid 'im!" shouted Munro. "To what extent?" asked another. "To the whole of fire men—not countin' myself," answered Kelly with a roguish grin. "And I'm a hard-rod master."

A roar of laughter responded to his jest.

"Down with the oppressor of labor!" shouted Munro. "Off with his head!"

Kelly playfully struck at him with his hat and then became serious. "Now, boys, let me tell you. I honestly don't think ye need a union. The landscape is wide up here; there's a chance for every man in the hills. I believe in the big, free land. When any man tries to corner me, I take me mule and strike out into the wild country. I have no fear of the Red Star Mining company nor any other, and ye needn't. I do not oppose the union. Mind what I'm sayin'. It's well enough for those who believe in it and made it, but have me out of it. The Kellys will take care of themselves."

Larned was on the box before Kelly had time to get down and, leveling his finger at him, cried out sharply: "That's all well and good for you, Matt Kelly, a skilled prospector, a man with a paying mine already, but how about those men who have no skill in finding gold, who are working for money to start themselves a home? How about those who are hoping to bring their families here and settle and educate them? They are not a band of all outdoors, they haven't

even the mule and the grub stake. They are holed up five hundred or a thousand feet underground, working for a company, and this company, I tell you, has no regard for its hands. Their interests are not those of the miner. You may blarney all ye like, but the miners must look out for their own interests, just as the employer hires lawyers and agents to look after his."

"Very true," replied Kelly calmly. "I'm not objectin' to that. Organize and take care of labor's interests, but don't ask me, an employer of labor, to throw up me hat when ye vote to raise the wages of me fire men. I'll fight scandalous!"

"Go it, Kelly! Ye have him on three legs and goin'!" shouted a wag, and amid the laughter that followed, Kelly leaped down and made for the door.

When Raymond overtook him again he was in talk with a lean young fellow with large, bright eyes, who had the tone of an old and bitterly disappointed man.

Kelly introduced him. "Rob, shake hands with Mr. Dolan, correspondent of the Valley Springs News. Jim, this is my new partner."

Dolan, as he clasped hands, remarked, "Ye've met up with a good man, a man that won't do ye, and there aren't many like him in this town."

Only long after did it come to Raymond's mind that Kelly had been giving Dolan a note concerning their plans and that his whereabouts would be at once made known to Valley Springs and to Louis.

"Who is this man Munro?" asked Raymond as they left the reporter and started for home.

"He's a devil-may-care chap from Red Cliff. He pretends to be a miner and is a partner with an old fellow on the north side o' the hill, but he's workin' for Hanley—lookout for the roulette wheel. The boys all think a heap of him. They say he always gives 'em a square deal."

"Does he?"

"I think so. I never heard to the contrary."

"Larned was right about the union," said Raymond. "The big owners in the Springs are sending east for their miners. They know that men like ye and me will not do their deep work for them. He's right, too, in saying these cowboys and farm hands from the states won't make miners. They don't intend to work underground. We'll find ourselves left short some morning if we depend on these fellows, who can hit the trail at ten minutes' notice."

"Sure thing," said Kelly. "This gettin' under the crust o' the earth and livin' there is unholly business—not for free men like ourselves. It's all goin' to be done by the Russians and the daggoes."

In silence the two men looked abroad over the valley toward the dim line of peaks faintly lit by the big silver bright moon.

A sentence from Richter came into Raymond's mind. "In the presence of beauty, beneath the stars, men think of love," and his heart ached with a sense of loss.

Unconsciously, in spite of his attempt to put himself away from her presence, Ann had come to dominate his musing hours. At thought of her he grew resolute and hopeful and, reaching forth a powerful hand, grasped the air as if it were the throat of a hitherto invincible opponent and said, "I will win!" He acknowledged that wealth had power to aid him. "So long as I am unknown and poor and in disgrace she can only consider me what I am—a failure. Money is a measure of value, and wealth I must have first; then leisure and the higher life."

CHAPTER XI.

ON the second morning after his meeting with Dolan, Raymond, riding down the trail toward Bozle, discovered a small figure trailing toward him, putting often to rest. "It can't be Louis," he said, "and yet there's something familiar in that walk. It is Louis, and he's on my trail!"

When the boy, lifting his tired head, recognized the rider he uttered a fierce shout of joy, but he fairly staggered with weakness.

Raymond slid from his horse and put his arm about the reeling lad. "When did ye come to camp?"

Louis leaned against his big friend. "Oh, I've been here a week. I know ye were here somewhere, but I couldn't get track of you. Don was over here yesterday, but I dodged him, and he went back. I didn't sign my own name on the register." He grinned slyly. "See my boots. Aren't they right?"

Raymond looked down at the boy's small legs clothed with miner's laced boots. "Ye believe in dressing the part, don't ye? Ye are a kidlet!" He laughed at the boy's chapfallen look, for Louis detected being called a boy, and added: "Well, what now? Does your sister know where ye are?"

"No."

Raymond's whole expression changed. "Climb that horse," he said sternly. "Ye're going back to town, and ye're going to send her a telegram at once."

As he led the horse down the hill Raymond comprehended something of the anxiety the runaway had brought to Ann and that he indirectly was the cause of it, but at the door of the office he said more gently: "Now, youngster, hop off. Ye're going to send word to the folks that ye're with me and safe."

"Ye're not going to drive me away?"

Raymond looked at him in silence. "No, I'm going to put you to school."

The boy's face threw off its shadow. "That's just what I want. Now I'm a scholar!"

"Give me a pen," he wrote:

I have found Rob. We're all O. K. Don't worry.

As he handed it over he said slyly, "Will that do?"

"That's satisfactory. Now rush it." As they walked out Raymond sternly asked: "Want to stay with me, do you? Well, everybody works where I live. We don't allow idlers. If you had something to do you'd keep out o' mischief."

Louis twisted his small right arm. "I'm ready for anything."

"Got your outfit—your whole kit?"

"I've got one camera and my drawing materials."

Raymond packed his hand bags on



He led the horse down the hill.

the horse, and together they set out up the trail. At first the lad excited and cried out like a blue jay, but his breathing grew labored as they rose, and at last Raymond turned. "Now, see here, Louis, this air is pretty thin till a fellow gets used to it; you'd better mount. You'll enjoy the scenery better."

With a feeling that he was succumbing to an unmanly weakness, Louis clambered to the horse's back and perched among his possessions, while Raymond, striding ahead, led the way up and up till the whole world seemed coming into view. "Oh, this is fine! Jupiter, this is the place for me!"

He was unfeignedly delighted with everything—with the new shacks, with the slab tables and the plank chairs and with the liberal and smoking dinner which Mrs. Kelly provided—but he drew a hissing breath of admiration over the grand figure of old Matthew Kelly. "Gee, but ye're a wonder! I must do you."

Kelly was puzzled and a little embarrassed by this outspoken admiration and regarded Louis with definite disfavor till he presented him with a pencil drawing of the lads playing on the doorstep, and then he said: "The Lord God has made a power o' people that the Kellys have not seen. This is wan of them. Now, isn't that a wonder? He put the whole thing together in five minutes." The latter he accepted the boy for the cunning that lay in his fingers.

Raymond wrote that night to Ann as formally as the riot in his brain would permit:

I planned to take myself out of your life as completely as if I were dead, but Louis would not have it so. When I met him on the hill today and he told me how long he had been from home, I determined to hustle him back to the Springs, but he asked to stay a day or two, and here he is. Will you trust him with me? He will tire of it here by and by and go back to you of his own accord. Just now he is mad over the life and the scenery. As for myself, I am a new man, with new aspirations. They may not seem very high to you, for I am striving now to acquire gold, but that is only a means to an end. There is something else in the world for me to do. I don't know what it is to be—perhaps my cure of this wonderful boy is a part of it. At any rate, he is here and not to be driven away without great risk to his life and deep pain to me. So, unless you object, I shall keep him. Our life is rough, but not contenting. I will see that no harm comes to him.

There was nothing more personal in the letter than this, but Ann's heart warmed to the writer unaccountably. And yet the thought of Louis in a mining camp troubled her. "I ought to go and fetch him away," she said to Don. "No, no! You remain here, and I will go over and see the little scamp and bring him back if possible."

The next morning Raymond put into action a measure he had formulated during the night. He called Louis to him, and together they ascended the "Lookout," as Kelly called the ledge back of his cabin. "See here, lad, I've brought you up here to ask you a few questions," said he.

Louis braced himself. "Fire away!"

"As I understand it, you and Ann are alone in the world—I mean you are closer to each other than to any one else—she's your best friend. You've given her a great deal of anxiety, my lad, and that isn't right. You must go straight back to her and up-lodge and ask her permission to come back. If she consents, then I'll make a place for you here."

"She won't consent. I'd have to run away again, and I'd do it!" he added defiantly.

Raymond, after a pause, slowly resumed: "Now, I want to make a compact with you. If you'll go down and see her, I will write a letter interceding for you and asking her to let you return."

Continued Next Saturday