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HUGH PENDEXTER
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(Continued)
CHAPTER III

The Town of High Promise.
They halted their horses at the top of a steep descent early in the afternoon and gazed down into the lower end of Deadwood Gulch. The gulch seemed to end abruptly against a ridge in the middle distance, but San Juan explained that its course was very winding and that it was fully ten miles long. Both sides of the road were lined with log cabins, shanties of rough boards, and tents.
"It ain't very pretty to look at," dubiously commented Lottie Carl, gazing disapprovingly at the scattered dead pines, the survivors of fires and windfalls.
"I agree with Lottie. It isn't much to look at," said Dinsdale.
"Forget the scenery, man. Remember that Deadwood City wasn't laid out till last May, and that all supplies and the machinery for the sawmills had to be freighted in for two hundred and fifty miles with much of the road being in hostile country. Deadwood is a great town. No other like it in the world."
And in saying this the gambler spoke with but little, if any, exaggeration; for the mining camp at the junction of the two creeks was a miracle of American enthusiasm and enterprise. Up to the middle of May it had been a tangled wilderness, with the growth so thick and impenetrable that the government exploring expedition of the previous year, sent out to confirm the Custer expedition of 'seventy-four, had not entered the gulch at all.
Since the middle of May, when Craven Lee and Isaac Brown built the first pine log cabin and helped to lay out the streets with a larval in lieu of a surveyor's chain, it had grown into a business center of feverish activity.
San Juan Joe dismounted before Parkhurst's "Lager Beer Saloon" on the left of the road and announced:
"This is the beginning of Deadwood City. Let's have a glass of beer."
"I'll stay here with Lottie," replied Dinsdale.
San Juan was soon back. As he swung into the saddle he told Dinsdale it was true that Wild Bill's slayer had been acquitted and allowed to leave the town.
On that August day seven-eighths of the Black hills population, or some seven thousand people, were in the town. And it was estimated that seven out of every ten lacked employment and were living from hand to mouth. While justly called the "poor man's diggings" there was scant opportunity for late arrivals to go prospecting so long as the fear of the Sioux held the people close to the town.
The talk of the milling crowds was not of gold but of Indians. Even the Chinese laundrymen abandoned their work in the Centennial wash house and loitered outdoors to pick up scraps of information concerning the writings of Crazy Horse.
San Juan Joe was one of the best-known men in the gulch. Decent men, as well as the refuse of the world's quarters, passed through his big gambling tent. When he was recognized there was a general crowding forward to greet him and learn the latest news from the south. The gambler did not attempt to speak at first, for he was battered with fierce queries from a score of men at once.
"Where's Crook?"
"Lord! Is the government going to let them devils wipe us out?"
"Have the Crows and Shoshoni joined Crook yet?"
"Where's Terry? Where's Gibson?"
"Why don't the soldiers come?"
The gambler raised a hand for silence and briefly recited what little outside news he had picked up while at Bowman's ranch on the Cheyenne. With more detail he told of the massacre in the canyon and was compelled to wait until the chorus of oaths and yells for vengeance had spent itself.
The wild outburst changed to wilder cheers and a tremendous exultation as he spoke of the five Indians slain by him and Dinsdale.
"One word more," cried San Juan. "This little lady is Lottie Carl, the only survivor of the Belman outfit."
"Buy her a pair of shoes," howled a citizen.
Deftening cheeks greeted the suggestion. A blacksmith, still wearing his leather apron and carrying his sledge, shouted:
"Hooray for five dead skunks! I've start it with this!" And snatching a hat from the nearest head, he dropped into it a tiny bag of dust.
There were many in the gathering who did not know where the next meal was coming from; but there were



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pictures, all in heavy gilt frames; and an excellent piano stood against the wall.
Lottie Carl continued speechless. It was apparent she had never seen such combinations of colors and comfort.
The gambler watched her with a smile on his lean face. She would be the one to decide, he had assumed, and already he was sure of her verdict. After a life of hardships she would gladly remain in this, to her, fairy environment.
There came the soft swish of skirts in the hall, a pause while a low musical voice gave an order in Chinese. Then Kitty, the schemer, stood before the door, one of the most picturesque and notorious characters to be found in all the history of mining camps' semi-madness.
She was slight of figure, and her face was youthful and showed no signs of dissipation. Her air was that of innocence, piqued by curiosity. Only those who knew her history could appreciate the dynamic qualities of her spirit. Dinsdale was now recalling how she had, unaided, invaded the Far East and had established two palaces of sin, one in Hongkong, the other in Yokohama.
She took in the three at a glance and extended her slim hand to the gambler. For the first time Dinsdale saw beneath the impassivity of San Juan's face. He clung to her hand and blazed down into the upturned face, spoke volumes.
"Lost your voice, Juan?" Kitty asked, her limpid blue eyes turning in welcome to Dinsdale.
The gambler hastened to present his companions. The woman ignored the girl to study Dinsdale. Her subtle mind quickly formed an estimate, and it was entirely in his favor.
Then she deigned to appraise the girl. The rough boots and the dowdy dress prompted a slight smile. With arched brows she glanced from the coarse dress to her own attire, which typed the faintest lines that civilized shopping would furnish. Beside this paragon of frailty Lottie Carl looked very uncouth.
She extended a welcome to Dinsdale, still ignoring Lottie Carl, and said to the gambler:
"Well, Juan, your eyes tell me you love me. But surely you don't bring Mr. Dinsdale along as a witness. What is it?"
"This girl is the only one left of an outfit trapped in Red Canyon. Dinsdale and I fetched her through. We got five of the Sioux."
"Good boy!" she purred. "Now go and get some road agents."
The gambler completed his explanation by saying: "This girl hasn't any folks. She's all alone in the world. I reckoned you'd take her."
Kitty the schemer frowned a bit impatiently. "With those eyes—that hair—"
As she hesitated San Juan insisted: "Surely she would do."
"Oh, leave her. I'll see what I can do. Not very interesting to Mr. Dinsdale though, all this."
"I'm keenly interested," corrected Dinsdale, advancing in front of Lottie Carl. "And I'm mighty curious. Just what would her position be here? I'm a stranger in town, but from appearances, the big tent and all, I take it you have lots of company."
She eyed him curiously. Then sharply, like the thrust of a stiletto, she said: "You'd better get on with the

girl, anyway?"
"Nothing beyond seeing that she is decently housed—referring more to



"Just What Have You to Do With This Girl?"

her surroundings than to the furniture. Later on more permanent plans can be made for her."
Kitty the schemer tossed back her head and laughed lightly, but there was a wicked glint in her eyes as she bantered:
"I'd say, Juan, that you and Mr. Goodman ought to have had a pow-wow about this child before asking me to take a hand."
San Juan glared at Dinsdale and harshly demanded:
"What the hell is the matter with you? You're acting queer. All the way from Custer we've been planning to bring the girl here."
"You planned, not I," murmured Dinsdale, pleased to have a man to talk to. "I've decided the girl isn't old enough, or experienced enough to choose for herself. So I'll choose for her. She's not to come here. You can like it, or leave it."
"Not to come here?" mocked Kitty, approaching close to Dinsdale and tilting back her head. "You may kiss me."
"No, you may not kiss her!" warned San Juan, his face paling, his half-closed eyes revealing the heart of a "killer."
"Your friend is about to slay me, Miss Kitty," said Dinsdale, moving back and feeling Lottie Carl's fingers clutching his hand as if to hold him clear of temptation. "Not very gallant of me, but after all I have only one life, you know."
"This is no time for nonsense, Kitty," broke in the gambler. "Dinsdale, you shouldn't tell me to 'like' anything, or 'leave' it."
"And some time you'll ask permission to kiss me," softly murmured Kitty the schemer, busily thinking murderous thoughts.
Dinsdale faced the gambler, and his embarrassment vanished. He quietly said:
"I was the first to meet her in the canyon. You rode behind me. I was the one to swing her on to a horse—my horse. You helped get the Indians;