

Don't you see I'm tortured, Miriam? I know you only wish to spare me, but—you see, there was a girl, and—and——”

“This makes it different,” said the girl quietly. “Now you can ask her, Tommy.” She went on, while he listened, aghast at his slip. “That's why I wanted to tell you—for the girl's sake.” She felt herself coloring to the eyes, but the shadows were merciful. “I wanted to tell you that you were free—free to go home and face them all. Ah, Tommy, Tommy!” There was a little break in her voice. “You didn't think that we who knew you believed you guilty—did you? Because we didn't. And that is why I was glad, oh, so glad, to find you, and to be the first, the very first to tell you! You see, after you sacrificed everything, Tommy, and ran away, trying to save your chum, to make us believe that you had stolen the money, and not Will Archer——”

“But you mustn't blame him,” Clifford put in quickly. “He didn't really know what he was doing.”

“I know.” She nodded decidedly. “I know that you sacrificed all to save your friend. And when Will discovered what you had done, when it was too late, he told Evelyn. Of course that broke the engagement; and it was only a little later that Will was thrown from his auto somehow—we never really knew what had happened. He left a signed confession; but we didn't know where you had buried yourself, Tommy.”

He was standing now, gripping the rail so that his knuckles stood out white against the bronze of his hands, and staring off wistfully over the waters—toward home.

“Oh, you don't know, you don't know,” he cried brokenly, “what this means to me, Miriam!”

“Ah, but I do,” she told him gently. “I know very well. That's why I came here, Tommy—to find you. I'd heard it was a place where people went when they were in trouble, and I wanted to tell you, because—because——again there sounded that pitiful little quaver in her voice—“because the girl is waiting for you.”

“You think so?”

There was a leaping joy within him that made it hard to speak.

“I'm sure she's waiting, Tommy!”

He turned like a flash and caught both her hands. The girl rose with a little low cry, and for an instant her soul was in her eyes as she faced him. Then the radiance died, and she looked very weary and worn; but Clifford did not notice it.

“Then I'll go!” he cried. “I'll go!

Miriam, Miriam, I don't know how to thank you! I'm off in the morning by that mail steamer. *Home!* You won't mind my hurrying off to pack, will you? She sails at sunrise—and just think, in ten days I'll see Evelyn——”

“No,” she said softly, “I don't mind. Hurry—hurry!” She smiled bravely into his face for an instant, then drew away her hands. “Good-night,” she said.

And when he was gone she stood for a long time, motionless, dry of eye and lip, staring at the corner around which he had disappeared. Finally she stretched forth both arms.

“Oh, my dear, my dear!” she sobbed as if her heart would break—but gently, that none might hear.

Louis Joseph Vance.

The Black Mule Mine.

THOMAS JEFFERSON BAXTER, standing with feet far apart, glared down at William Henry Bisbee; and William Henry Bisbee, seated on a boulder at the intersection of two gulches, scowled up at Thomas Jefferson Baxter. The gray mule flattened her flopping ears and threatened the black mule with two rows of jagged, yellow teeth. The black mule twitched her unshorn tail, and launched an ineffective kick at the gray with a vicious earnestness that rattled the pans, picks, and shovels cinched to her scrawny back. Unquestionably the spirit of strife hovered over the camp.

“You can't bulldoze me for a cent's worth, Bill Bisbee,” growled Thomas Jefferson. “I say we're goin' straight north—right up this gulch.”

“Don't try your bluff on me, Jeff Baxter,” snarled William Henry. “I've stood all I can. Up this side-gulch we go—due west.”

“Anybody that knew pay-ore from alkali dust wouldn't squint twice up that gulch,” Mr. Baxter sneered.

“Nobody but a natural born idiot would keep on prospectin' over ground like this,” rejoined the undaunted Bisbee.

Mr. Baxter bristled pugnaciously.

“North we go—or bust the pardner-ship right here,” he proclaimed.

Mr. Bisbee rose to his feet.

“The firm of Bisbee & Baxter is dissolved by mutual consent,” he announced. “Assets to be equally divided; the liabilities are big enough to take care of themselves.”

“Suits me!” declared Thomas Jefferson. “It won't take long to divide the assets. I reckon I git the gray mule.”

"You reckon wrong," snapped William Henry. "You can't shove that black demon off onto me that way; we'll toss a dollar for the gray."

"We'll find the dollar first," observed Mr. Baxter sagely and gloomily. "If there's a dollar in this outfit, you can take both mules."

Mr. Bisbee drew from his hip pocket a section of plug tobacco.

"Tag side is heads," he announced laconically. "Say which."

"Tails is mine," said Mr. Baxter, and the plug spun upward, descended, and raised a tiny cloud of alkali dust as it smote the earth.

"Tails it is," admitted Mr. Bisbee sullenly.

With silent celerity various articles were shifted from mule to mule, and Thomas Jefferson, preceded by the coveted gray, turned his bronzed face northward, while William Henry led the despaired black into the lateral gulch and smote her with a ponderous foot.

"I never thought you'd treat me like this, Jeff Baxter," he protested. "Guess you've forgot them fifty dollars I loaned you two years ago."

Mr. Baxter, striding northward, turned to emit a hoarse cackle intended for a scornful laugh.

"I figger that I squared that by nursin' you through that spell of smallpox when nobody else would come within a mile of you," he shouted back.

The retort that quivered on Mr. Bisbee's tongue was never spoken, for at that moment the black mule, carelessly permitted to wander beyond the reach of corporal reproof, seized the opportunity to add another jewel to her crown. With a joyous squeal and a flourish of spavined legs, she bounded high in air, and when she struck the earth she was galloping westward up the gulch with an energy that threatened demolition of Mr. Bisbee's clattering chattels.

After her lumbered the alarmed Bisbee, between whose apostrophic comments upon mules generally and the black mule individually were sandwiched emphatic observations about Mr. Baxter not conducive to the ultimate restoration of the *entente cordiale*.

Having merrily ambled a half mile up the gulch, the black mule whirled squarely to the right and charged straight up its steep and rugged side. A shower of stones and little lumps of soil rolled downward from beneath her clawing hoofs. When she finally gained the summit she halted, gazed down upon the per-

spiring Bisbee, and voiced her victory in a rasping, shrieking paean that elicited a sympathetic and congratulatory response from the distant gray. Then she whisked her unshorn tail contemptuously, and disappeared from her owner's vision.

"I wouldn't have thought she could do it," panted the enraged William Henry, as he laboriously followed the fugitive's trail up the steep incline. "I'll bet she can climb a tree. Just wait till I catch——"

He stopped short to stare with dilated eyes at a mass of crumbling rock shattered and denuded of its thin soil by the struggling hoofs of the black mule. With a gurgle of delight he fell upon the exposed ledge; tore at it with knife and finger-nails; dug and gouged for many minutes; and when at length he clambered to the summit his face was radiant.

"And I'd have walked right past it if it hadn't been for that mule!" he soliloquized, as he cast himself upon the ground and laughed hysterically.

After a while he sat up, hugged his knees, and meditated.

"Wonder what Jeff 'll say when he hears about it," he muttered. "Guess he'll wish he hadn't been so brash. Pity he's so bull-headed, for he did stick to me like a man when I was sick. But it's his own fault!"

Presently he drew a dog-eared book from his pocket, scribbled therein long and laboriously with the stub of a pencil, and rose slowly to his feet. Carefully and securely he impaled the page upon a splinter of a blasted pine, backed away to scrutinize the inscription, grinned broadly, and once more took up the trail of the fleeing mule.

Northeastward it led, straight to where Mr. Baxter, pausing occasionally to contemplate with grim pleasure a black mule and a gray grazing side by side, was encouraging a sputtering fire over which sizzled two meager slices of bacon.

"Lookin' for somethin'?" inquired Mr. Baxter impassively as his former partner approached.

"Not now," replied William Henry; "I've found it."

Mr. Baxter grunted, and a silence broken only by the sputter of the fire and the sizzle of the bacon fell upon the assemblage.

"Jeff," ventured Mr. Bisbee, "do you think that's enough bacon for two?"

"I don't," answered Mr. Baxter, without looking up. "There's more in your pack. You're welcome to the fire—when I'm done with it."

"Kind of crabbed with your old pardner, ain't you, Jeff?"

Thomas Jefferson lifted his face to frown across the fire.

"Your blarney don't go this time, Bill," he growled. "I knowed you'd come sneakin' back, but the pardnership's busted—and it's goin' to stay busted."

Something left Mr. Bisbee's hand and caromed from Mr. Baxter's boot. Mr. Baxter eyed the object suspiciously, pounced upon it voraciously, turned it over and about in his calloused hands, and stared at the smiling Bisbee.

"Bill," he stammered, "where—where'd you git it?"

"Picked it up off the ground. Did you think I'd shot it on the wing?"

"But where?" insisted Mr. Baxter excitedly.

"Would you like to see?"

"I would!" shouted Thomas Jefferson, abandoning the bacon to a fiery fate. "You can't show me too quick!"

The expression of incredulity on his hard face fled like a flash when he had followed Mr. Bisbee up the gulch and had cast one searching glance upon the exposed ledge.

"Bill," he ejaculated, "we're millionaires this minute!"

"We?" snorted Mr. Bisbee. "Ain't the pardnership busted—and goin' to stay busted?"

"Billy," pleaded Thomas Jefferson, "you surely wouldn't go back on an old pardner! We've prospected together, and starved together, and fought together, and—"

"You ought to have remembered all that before you busted the pardnership," Mr. Bisbee interrupted. "It's too late now; I've made up my mind. And I've put it down in black and white. Come up and read it."

They climbed to the summit, and Thomas Jefferson, turning his mournful gaze to the paper on the pine stump, threw his arms about the grinning William Henry and emitted a whoop that startled the distant mules; for he read:

"The Black Mewl Mine, Located by William Henry Bisbee and Tomas Jefferson Baxter, Pardners, Haf and Haf."

Frank N. Stratton.

The Test.

"It seems too good to be true, Lizzie," said Mrs. Meadows, as she placed the candle upon the table in the front apartment of the two-room cabin. "It's al-

most a miracle. I knew Mr. Lowry was a powerful exhorter, but I never thought he could move Jim Meadows. Your father has always had a very trying temper, Lizzie."

The girl dropped her hands into her lap, and her black eyes snapped as she frowned into the crackling fireplace.

"It's enough to give any one a trying temper, living away out here away from everybody," she said impatiently. "I don't see why pa didn't stay in Shell County and fight it out!"

"He wouldn't have fought very long," replied Mrs. Meadows wearily. "After that last row with the Hawkinses, there weren't enough of our folks left to stand any show. And then when Bill Hawkins ambushed your father and broke his leg with a bullet, we had to give up. We had to get out of Shell County, Lizzie. Maybe we can go back some time; but I don't want to until we can live in peace. I was sick and tired of the fighting. I wasn't raised that way."

"Seems to me, ma, there's a call for Mr. Lowry up at Hillsdale. If he'd convert Bill Hawkins and his gang, that would be something to brag about. What's the good of converting pa? He wouldn't harm anybody if they'd leave him alone."

"Hush, Lizzie. Don't question the ways of Providence. I only hope your father won't backslide. You can't tell until he's tried and tested. I'm awfully afraid he can't stand a test." Mrs. Meadows walked to the window and peered anxiously out into the darkening forest. "Here he comes at last," she said in a thin, worn voice. "I'm always nervous when he stays out after dusk. We're a long way from Hillsdale, but you can't tell what Hawkins and his people might do."

The cabin door swung open to admit a tallish, shaggy-bearded man, on whose hard features was an expression that caused the woman and the girl to exchange interrogating glances.

"Hope you hain't been worried," the man observed as he limped toward the fireplace. "Comin' up from the woods pasture, I met Dave Stevens on his way home from Hillsdale. There's been terrible doin's up there to-day." He stooped to poke the burning logs vigorously, and his eyes glittered with a fire as fervid as the flames that leaped up the clay-daubed chimney. "Bill Hawkins and the Kelly boys rode into Hillsdale this morning, tanked up, and went to shootin' promiscuous. They wounded