

arms around him. They all gathered about the couch, with the doctor and Shock standing nearest.

"Poor child!" said the doctor softly. "This is a sad night for her."

"Yes," said Shock, in a voice quiet and steady. "For her the night is sad, but for him the day has dawned and there shall be night no more."

There, in that wide valley where the yellow pine needles lie deep and where morning and evening the mingling lights fall softly through the over-arching boughs, they laid the Old Prospector to rest under the pines and the stars that had been his companions for so long.

EJECTED AND REJECTED

IN the main room of the Old Prospector's house some ten or twelve stern-faced men had gathered. The easy, careless manner that was characteristic of the ranchers and cowboys of the district had given place to an air of stern and serious determination. It was evident that they had gathered for some purpose of more than ordinary moment. By common consent Sinclair, a shrewd and fair-minded Scotch rancher who possessed the complete confidence of every man in the company, both for his integrity and his intelligence, was in the chair.

"Where is Mr. Macgregor?" he enquired.

"Gone to the Fort," answered The Kid. "He is on duty there to-morrow. He wished me to say, however, that he has no desire to push this matter, as far as he is personally concerned, but that if the committee thinks the public good demands his presence and his testimony he will appear on Monday."

"He ought to be here," said Sinclair, and his tone almost conveyed a reproof.

"He'll come if he's wanted, I guess," drawled out Ike, quick to take his friend's part.

"Well, then let us proceed. Let us get the facts

first," said Sinclair. "Stanton, we would like to hear what you have to say."

"Well," said The Kid, "there is not much that I have to tell, but I shall begin at the beginning and give you all I know." Stanton's air of boyish carelessness had quite disappeared, his voice took a deeper tone than usual, his manner was grave and stern. "It was six days ago that I happened to call at the Old Prospector's house."

"To see the preacher, I guess," interrupted Ike gravely, winking at Macnamara, who responded with a hearty "Ha! ha! Of course!"

"Quit that, Ike," said Sinclair sternly. "We have got business on hand."

"As I was saying," continued the Kid, with heightened colour, "I called at the Old Prospector's house and found Miss Mowbray in a state of great anxiety in regard to Mr. Macgregor. She told me how the doctor had come to see Mr. Macgregor about a week before, in great excitement, and had informed him that Carroll and Crawley had set off for the mountains two days before, and how, upon hearing that, Mr. Macgregor and Perault had hastily followed, having with them about a week's provisions."

"What reason did Miss Mowbray assign for this?" enquired Sinclair.

"Well, I suppose it's no secret, now," said The Kid, with some hesitation. "The Old Prospector, you know, before his death had made a very rich find, but died without staking his claim. The secret of its location he entrusted to Mr. Macgregor and the doctor. The

doctor, in a fit of drunkenness, gave the secret away to Carroll and Crawley, who, leaving him incapable from drink, set off at once to stake the claim."

"Hold on, Mr. Stanton," said Sinclair. "We must be careful. How do you know their purpose in setting off for the mountains?"

"Well, I think——"

"But," interrupted Sinclair, "we must have statements of fact only."

"Dat's so!" cried Perault excitedly. "Dem feller try to get de Ole Boss show dat mine, for sure. Crawley he's try to mak de Ole Boss tell. I hear heem, me. Dem feller want dat mine bad."

"All right, Perault," said Sinclair quietly. "That doesn't prove they went to stake that claim. Go on, Stanton."

"Well," continued The Kid, "I set off at once, and on my second day out I met these two men, Mr. Macgregor and Perault, exhausted with travelling and faint with hunger."

"Guess you'd better tell how you found them, Kid," said Ike, who had heard the story before.

"Well, gentlemen," continued The Kid, his voice shaking, "it was a pretty tough sight, I can tell you. I first saw them a long way down the trail. Mr. Macgregor was carrying Perault on his back and evidently walking with great difficulty. When I came up to them I found Perault was almost, if not quite, insensible, and Mr. Macgregor in the last stages of exhaustion." The Kid paused a few moments to steady his voice. Low, deep oaths were heard on

every side, while Perault, still weak and nervous from his recent terrible experience, was sobbing audibly.

"I had plenty of grub," continued The Kid. "I did my best for them and helped them home. That is all I have to say."

A deep silence fell upon the group of men.

"Now, Perault," said Sinclair, "tell us your story."

Perault tried to steady his voice, but, failing utterly, broke into passionate weeping, Sinclair waiting in grave silence for him to recover. Macnamara, the soft-hearted big Irish rancher, was quietly wiping his eyes, while the other men were swearing terrible oaths.

"Give him a drink," drawled Ike. "Too much water aint good for no man."

Half a dozen flasks were immediately offered. Perault drank, and, after a few moments, began his tale.

"I can' spik much, me," he said, "when I tink how dat beeg feller pack me on hees back twenty mile, I fin' bad pain here," striking his breast, "and den I can' spik at all." And again the little Frenchman's voice broke down in sobs.

"Take time, Perault," said Sinclair gravely. "We want to know all about it. Begin at the beginning and tell it in your own way." The grave tone, even more than the whisky he had drunk, steadied Perault, and he began again.

"Dat's twelve or tirteen day, now. De Preachere, dat Prospector, I call heem, he's jus' lak de Ole Boss, for sure—de Prospector he's sen' dat ole fool doctor

for me queek. I come and fin' de Prospector he's ver' mad; mos' awful mad; never see heem lak dat before. 'Perault,' he say, 'get ponee and grub' queek. We go for de Los' Reevee.'

"By gar! He's mak me scare. I get ponee an' grub and get off queek, *toute suite*, right away. Well, we go two day hard and come to de camp where de Ole Boss he's die, den we climb over de montin. De Prospector he's got map and show me trail. Oui, I know him bon, fus rate. 'Perault,' he say, 'you min' las' year de Ole Boss he's fin' good mine way up in de valley?' 'Oui, for sure.' 'You know de trail?' 'Oui, certainment.' 'Den,' he say, 'we go dere.' Nex' day we strike dat trail and go four or five mile. We come to dat valley—Mon Dieu! dere's no valley dere. We come back and try once more—dat blank valley, she's no dere. De Prospector he look much on dat map. 'Where dose tree peak?' he say. 'Dere sure 'nuff, one, two tree. Dat valley she's right on line of dose peak.' 'Sure,' I say. 'I see heem myself she's gone now for sure! Ah! Voila! I see! Beeg slide feel dat valley up! By gar! Dat's so, dat montin she's half gone, dat valley he's full up. Mon Dieu! De Prospector he's lak wil' man. 'Perault,' he say, 'I promise de ole man I go for fin' dat mine.' 'All right, boss,' I say, 'me too.' We make cache for grub, we hobble de ponee and go for fin' dat mine. Dat's one blank hard day. Over rock and tree and hole and stomp he's go lak one deerhoun.' Next day he's jus' same. For me, I'm tire' out. Well, we come home to camp, slow, slow, hungree, sorefoot—by gar!

Sacre bleu! Dat cache she broke up, de grub he's gone! Mon Dieu! dat's bad—four or five day walk from home and no grub at all."

"What did you think, Perault?" asked Sinclair. "Did you see signs of any beast, bear or mountain lion?"

"Sure, dat's what I tink fus' ting, but de Prospector he's walk aroun' quiet and look everyting. 'Perault, dat's fonee ting,' he say. 'Where dose can' meat, eh?' By gar! dat's so, de bear he can' eat dose can' meat, not moche!"

"Not likely, not bein' a goat," put in Ike drily.

"Well, we look aroun' ver' close, no scratch, no track. By gar! dat's no bear, for sure—dat's one bear on two leg."

"I think," said Sinclair gravely, "that there is no doubt of that. The question is, who did it? Gentlemen, it has been proved that these two men, Carroll and Crawley, were away during the week when this crime took place. We do not know where they were, but we must be fair to them. We may have our opinions about this, but in fixing the responsibility of this crime we must be exceedingly careful to deal justly with every man. I suggest we call Carroll."

Carroll came to the meeting without hesitation, and with him, Crawley.

"We will take you in a few minutes," said Sinclair to Crawley.

"Now," he continued to Carroll, when Crawley had been removed, "we would like to know where you were last week."

"That's nobody's blank business," said Carroll.

An angry murmur arose from the crowd.

"Carroll, this thing is too serious for any bluffing, and we are going to see it through. It is fair that you should know why we ask. Let me give you the facts we have found out." Sinclair gave a brief *résumé* of the story as gathered from Stanton and Perault. As Carroll listened his face grew white with fury.

"Does any blank, blank son of a horse thief," he cried, when Sinclair had done, "say I am the man that broke open that cache? Let him stand up for'ninst me and say so." He gnashed his teeth in his rage. "Whin Tim Carroll goes to git even wid a man he doesn't go behind his back fur it, and yez all know that! No," he cried, planting his huge fist with a crash upon the table, "I didn't put a finger on the cache nor his ponies ayther, begob!"

"All right, Carroll, we are glad to hear it," said Sinclair, in a cold, stern voice. "You needn't get so wild over it. You cannot frighten us, you know. Every man here can give an account of his doings last week—can you?"

"I can that same," said Carroll, somewhat subdued by Sinclair's tone and manner. "I am not afraid to say that we went up to see a mine we heard of."

"You and Crawley, you mean?" said Sinclair quietly.

"Yes," continued Carroll, "and that's fair enough, too; and we hunted around a week fur it, an' came back."

"Did you find your mine?" asked Sinclair.

"We did not, and it's a blank, blank fool I was to listen to the yarn of the drunken old fool of a doctor."

"Thank you, Carroll. Now, I do not think myself that you touched that cache."

"If he did, he will swing for it," said a voice, cool and relentless, in the crowd.

Carroll started a little as he heard that voice.

"You shut up!" said Ike.

"Now, Carroll, we want you to answer a few questions," continued Sinclair. "Mr. Crawley brought you to the camp where the Old Prospector died—is that right?"

"He did."

"And then you went east from that point over the mountain?"

"We did, and I am telling you we was looking for that mine we heard of."

"All right," said Sinclair. "How long did you stay in that neighbourhood?"

"A week or so."

"Did you see Mr. Macgregor or Perault while you were there?"

"That's none of your business."

"You'd better answer, Carroll."

"It'll be your business pretty blank soon!" drawled the voice again.

"Shut up!" said Ike. "Give him a chance."

"I think you'd better answer," said Sinclair quietly. "You've nothing to hide, I suppose?"

"I haven't," said Carroll defiantly. "We did see them two walking around, and we soon knew, too, that they didn't know any more than ourselves about that mine. Thin we came away."

"Did you see their camp?"

"We did. We passed it by."

"Did you stop and speak to them?"

"No, we did not; for the good reason they weren't there."

"Did you examine the camp or touch anything?"

"Nivir a touch, so help me God!" said Carroll, with great earnestness.

"Then did you and Crawley come away together?"

"We did."

"Where did you camp that night?"

"Over the mountain beyant, forninst the Old Prospector's grave."

"And you came straight home next day?"

"We did, except for a luk at a couple of prospects we knew of."

"Oh! How long did that take you?"

"It tuk me about a day, and Crawley a little less, I'm thinkin'."

"How was that, Carroll?" enquired Sinclair.

"Well, he tuk one gulch and I tuk the other, and he got through before me, and the next day we came home; and that's the truth of it, so help me."

"Then you were never separated from each other except for that one day?"

"That's true." There was no mistaking the sincerity and honesty of Carroll's manner.

"Any further questions to ask, gentlemen?"

"How long did you stop at Mr. Macgregor's camp when you was passing by?" asked Ike.

"Don't be so blanked smart, Ike!" said Carroll, in savage scorn. "I'm telling you that I didn't stop a fut. We saw their camp and their ponies and we went sthraight past."

"Didn't stop to light your pipe or nothing?" enquired Ike.

"Blank your blank ugly mug!" roared Carroll, "do you mean to say——"

"Oh, nothing," said Ike quietly. "Just wanted to know how long you stopped?"

"And I am tellin' you we didn't sthoph atall, atall, not a fut of us! We didn't go near their camp within fifty yards."

"Not fifty yards, eh? Well, that's strange."

Carroll poured out a volley of oaths.

"You're sure about that fifty yards, Carroll?" asked Ike, in insinuating tones.

"I didn't pace it, you blanked fool! but I'll swear it wasn't more than thirty."

"You're dead sure about that thirty yards, Carroll?" persisted Ike.

"I am that, and if you want to say anything more come outside!" said Carroll, glaring wildly at his interlocutor.

"Oh, thanks, I'm comfortable," said Ike mildly, as he sat back in his chair. "Hope you are the same."

"That will do, Carroll," said Sinclair. "I am sure

we all feel much obliged to you for your straightforward answers. If we want you again we'll send for you."

"And I'll come," said Carroll, with another oath, passing out of the room.

"Now," said Sinclair, "we'll have Crawley."

In a few moments Crawley came in, smiling and self-confident, with plenty of nerve, an abundance of wit, and a most ingenuous manner. He met the chairman's questions with ready assurance and corroborated the story told by Carroll. He would frankly acknowledge that he had heard about the Lost River. Indeed, he had been more or less interested in it for some years and, though he did not take much stock in the doctor's word, still he declared that his own interests and the interests of Miss Mowbray, and indeed of all concerned, demanded that the thing was worth looking into. They visited the locality indicated by the doctor; they spent a week in exploration, but could find no trace of such a valuable mine as the doctor had described; and they had come away not very much disappointed; they had hardly expected any other result. They had seen Mr. Macgregor's camp, but they had not approached it; they passed by at some distance, leaving everything undisturbed.

"You camped that night near the Old Prospector's grave?" asked Sinclair.

"Yes."

"The next day you set off for home?"

"Exactly."

"You and Carroll were always together?"

"Certainly."

"You came home by the same trail and without any other explorations?"

Here Crawley hesitated a moment. "Well, yes, except that we ran up a gulch to look at some rocks."

"Oh! Did you find anything?"

"Well, we think so," said Crawley pleasantly.

"You went both together up the gulch? You were never separated?"

"We went together, yes."

"Any further questions, gentlemen?"

For a time there was no response, then Ike came slowly forward to the table and stood by Crawley's side.

"You did not go near that cache?"

"No," said Crawley firmly.

"Are you mighty sure about that? Better be sure."

"I am positive we did not go within twenty or thirty yards," said Crawley defiantly.

"All right, Crawley," drawled Ike, "better have a pipe now." And as he spoke he threw down a tobacco pouch on the table.

Crawley turned pale, gripped at the table to steady himself, gazed at the pouch lying before him for a few moments and then enquired in a voice that shook in spite of all that he could do: "Who gave you—where did you get that?"

"It's yours, aint it? Got your name on, anyway," said Ike. "Where did you leave it?"

"Don't know," said Crawley, turning green with terror.

"Gentlemen," said Ike, addressing the crowd, "I aint agoin' to make no speech to this jury, but I want to remark that this here blank reptile is a blank liar, and if he aint a murderer 'taint his fault. That there pouch of his," continued Ike, putting a long forefinger down upon the article lying on the table, "that there pouch of his was found by the 'Prospector,' as Perault calls him, beside that there empty cache. That's all I have to say." And Ike turned and walked slowly back to his seat.

In vain the trembling wretch tried first to bluster and then to explain. Carroll was again summoned and affirmed emphatically that he and Crawley had been separated for the greater part of one day, and that while together they had not approached Mr. Macgregor's camp.

"That will do, Carroll," said Sinclair quietly. "We believe you entirely, and I would like to say that for my part I am mighty glad that you are entirely freed from suspicion."

"That's so, you bet!" came from the men on all sides, as one by one they stepped forward to shake Carroll warmly by the hand.

"Now, gentlemen," said Sinclair, "make your decision. This man," pointing to Crawley, "is charged with a serious crime. What is your verdict?"

One by one the men threw into the hat on the table a bit of paper. In silence Sinclair and The Kid read and recorded the ballots. When they had finished