

offer. It was arranged that he should leave her at the "Red Chief" Hotel, while he continued on to Blazing Star, returning at noon to bring her with him when he could do it without exposing her to recognition. The gray dawn came soon enough, and the coach drew up at "Red Chief" while the lights in the bar-room and dining-room of the hotel were still struggling with the far flushing east. Cass alighted, placed Miss Mortimer in the hands of the landlady, and returned to the vehicle. It was still musty, close, and frowzy, with half awakened passengers. There was a vacated seat on the top, which Cass climbed up to, and abstractedly threw himself beside a figure muffled in shawls and rugs. There was a slight movement among the multitudinous enwrappings, and then the figure turned to him and said dryly, "Good morning!" It was Miss Porter!

"Have you been long here?" he stammered.

"All night."

He would have given worlds to leave her at that moment. He would have jumped from the starting coach to save himself any explanation of the embarrassment he was furiously conscious of showing, without, as he believed, any adequate cause. And yet, like all inexperienced, sensitive men, he dashed blindly into that explanation; worse, he even told his secret at once, then and there, and then sat abashed and conscience-stricken, with an added sense of its utter futility.

"And this," summed up the young girl, with a slight shrug of her pretty shoulders, "is *your May*?"

Cass would have recommenced his story.

"No, don't, pray! It is n't interesting, nor original. Do *you* believe it?"

"I do," said Cass, indignantly.

"How lucky! Then let me go to sleep."

Cass, still furious, but uneasy, did not again address

her. When the coach stopped at Blazing Star she asked him, indifferently: "When does this sentimental pilgrimage begin?"

"I return for her at one o'clock," replied Cass, stiffly.

He kept his word. He appeased his eager companions with a promise of future fortune, and exhibited the present and tangible reward. By a circuitous route known only to himself, he led Miss Mortimer to the road before the cabin. There was a pink flush of excitement on her somewhat faded cheek.

"And it was here?" she asked, eagerly.

"I found it here."

"And the body?"

"That was afterward. Over in that direction, beyond the clump of buckeyes, on the Red Chief turnpike."

"And any one coming from the road we left just now and going to — to — that place, would have to cross just here? Tell me," she said, with a strange laugh, laying her cold nervous hand on his, "would n't they?"

"They would."

"Let us go to that place."

Cass stepped out briskly to avoid observation and gain the woods beyond the highway. "You have crossed here before," she said. "There seems to be a trail."

"I may have made it: it's a short cut to the buckeyes."

"You never found anything else on the trail?"

"You remember, I told you before, the ring was all I found."

"Ah, true!" she smiled sweetly; "it was *that* which made it seem so odd to you. I forgot."

In half an hour they reached the buckeyes. During the walk she had taken rapid recognizance of everything in her path. When they crossed the road and Cass had pointed out the scene of the murder, she looked anxiously around. "You are sure we are not seen?"



"Quite."

"You will not think me foolish if I ask you to wait here while I go in there" — she pointed to the ominous thicket near them — "alone?" She was quite white.

Cass's heart, which had grown somewhat cold since his interview with Miss Porter, melted at once.

"Go ; I will stay here."

He waited five minutes. She did not return. What if the poor creature had determined upon suicide on the spot where her faithless lover had fallen? He was reassured in another moment by the rustle of skirts in the undergrowth.

"I was becoming quite alarmed," he said, aloud.

"You have reason to be," returned a hurried voice. He started. It was Miss Porter, who stepped swiftly out of the cover. "Look," she said, "look at that man down the road. He has been tracking you two ever since you left the cabin. Do you know who he is?"

"No!"

"Then listen. It is three-fingered Dick, one of the escaped road agents. I know him!"

"Let us go and warn her," said Cass, eagerly.

Miss Porter laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"I don't think she'll thank you," she said, dryly. "Perhaps you'd better see what she's doing, first."

Utterly bewildered, yet with a strong sense of the masterfulness of his companion, he followed her. She crept like a cat through the thicket. Suddenly she paused. "Look!" she whispered, viciously, "look at the tender vigils of your heart-broken May!"

Cass saw the woman who had left him a moment before on her knees on the grass, with long thin fingers digging like a ghoul in the earth. He had scarce time to notice her eager face and eyes, cast now and then back toward the spot where she had left him, before

there was a crash in the bushes, and a man, — the stranger of the road, — leaped to her side. "Run," he said ; "run for it now. You're watched!"

"Oh! that man, Beard!" she said, contemptuously.

"No, another in a wagon. Quick. Fool, you know the place now, — you can come later ; run!" And half-dragging, half-lifting her, he bore her through the bushes. Scarcely had they closed behind the pair when Miss Porter ran to the spot vacated by the woman. "Look!" she cried, triumphantly, "look!"

Cass looked, and sank on his knees beside her.

"It *was* worth a thousand dollars, was n't it?" she repeated, maliciously, "was n't it? But you ought to return it! *Really* you ought."

Cass could scarcely articulate. "But how did *you* know it?" he finally gasped.

"Oh, I suspected something ; there was a woman, and you know you're *such* a fool!"

Cass rose, stiffly.

"Don't be a greater fool now, but go and bring my horse and wagon from the hill, and don't say anything to the driver."

"Then you did not come alone?"

"No ; it would have been bold and improper."

"Please!"

"And to think it *was* the ring, after all, that pointed to this," she said.

"The ring that *you* returned to me."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Don't, please, the wagon is coming."

In the next morning's edition of the "Red Chief Chronicle" appeared the following startling intelligence:



## EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY!

FINDING OF THE STOLEN TREASURE OF WELLS, FARGO  
& CO. OVER \$300,000 RECOVERED.

Our readers will remember the notorious robbery of Wells, Fargo & Co.'s treasure from the Sacramento and Red Chief Pioneer Coach on the night of September 1. Although most of the gang were arrested, it is known that two escaped, who, it was presumed, *cached* the treasure, amounting to nearly \$500,000 in gold, drafts, and jewelry, as no trace of the property was found. Yesterday our esteemed fellow citizen, Mr. Cass Beard, long and favorably known in this county, succeeded in exhuming the treasure in a copse of hazel near the Red Chief turnpike, — adjacent to the spot where an unknown body was lately discovered. This body is now strongly suspected to be that of one Henry Cass, a disreputable character, who has since been ascertained to have been one of the road agents who escaped. The matter is now under legal investigation. The successful result of the search is due to a systematic plan evolved from the genius of Mr. Beard, who has devoted over a year to this labor. It was first suggested to him by the finding of a ring, now definitely identified as part of the treasure which was supposed to have been dropped from Wells, Fargo & Co.'s boxes by the robbers in their midnight flight through Blazing Star.

In the same journal appeared the no less important intelligence, which explains, while it completes this veracious chronicle: —

"It is rumored that a marriage is shortly to take place between the hero of the late treasure discovery and a young lady of Red Chief, whose devoted aid and assistance to this important work is well known to this community."

*In the Carquinez Woods.*

## CHAPTER I.

THE sun was going down on the Carquinez Woods. The few shafts of sunlight that had pierced their pillared gloom were lost in unfathomable depths, or splintered their ineffectual lances on the enormous trunks of the red-woods. For a time the dull red of their vast columns, and the dull red of their cast-off bark which matted the echoless aisles, still seemed to hold a faint glow of the dying day. But even this soon passed. Light and color fled upwards. The dark, interlaced tree-tops, that had all day made an impenetrable shade, broke into fire here and there; their lost spires glittered, faded, and went utterly out. A weird twilight that did not come from an outer world, but seemed born of the wood itself, slowly filled and possessed the aisles. The straight, tall, colossal trunks rose dimly like columns of upward smoke. The few fallen trees stretched their huge length into obscurity, and seemed to lie on shadowy trestles. The strange breath that filled these mysterious vaults had neither coldness nor moisture; a dry, fragrant dust arose from the noiseless foot that trod their bark-strewn floor; the aisles might have been tombs, the fallen trees, enormous mummies; the silence, the solitude of the forgotten past.

And yet this silence was presently broken by a recurring sound like breathing, interrupted occasionally by inarticulate and stertorous gasps. It was not the quick, panting, listening breath of some stealthy feline or canine animal, but indicated a larger, slower, and more powerful organi-