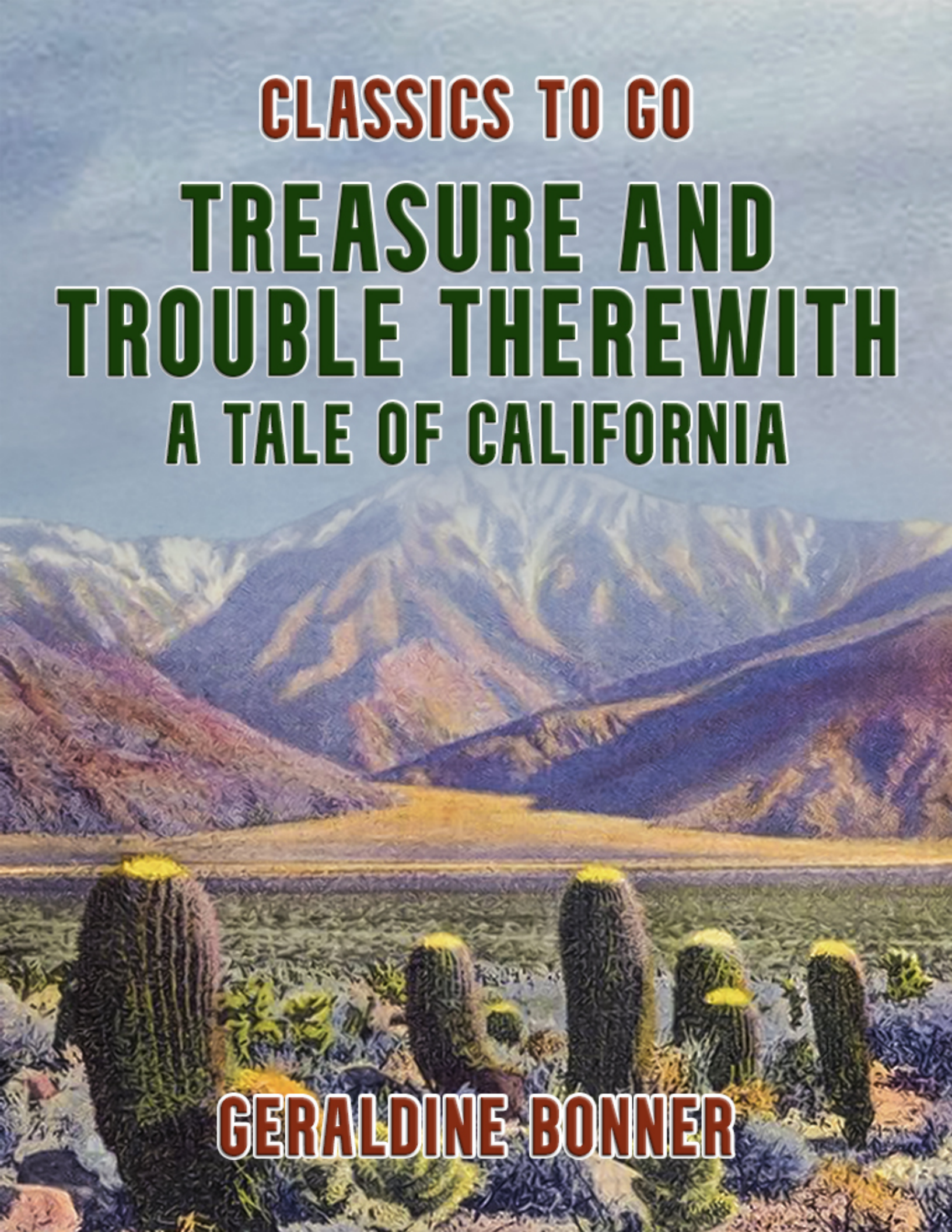
CLASSICS TO GO

TREASURE AND TROUBLE THEREWITH

A TALE OF CALIFORNIA



GERALDINE BONNER

Treasure and Trouble

Therewith A Tale of California

Geraldine Bonner

CHAPTER I

HANDS UP

The time was late August some eleven years ago. The place that part of central California where, on one side, the plain unrolls in golden levels, and on the other swells upward toward the rounded undulations of the foothills.

It was very hot; the sky a fathomless blue vault, the land dreaming in the afternoon glare, its brightness blurred here and there by shimmering heat veils. Checkered by green and yellow patches, dotted with the black domes of oaks, it brooded sleepily, showing few signs of life. At long intervals ranch houses rose above embowering foliage, a green core in the midst of fields where the brown earth was striped with lines of fruit trees or hidden under carpets of alfalfa. To the west the foothills rose in indolent curves, tan-colored, as if clothed with a leathern hide. Their hollows were filled with the darkness of trees huddled about hidden streams, ribbons of verdure that wound from the mountains to the plain. Farther still, vision faint, remote and immaculate, the white peaks of the Sierra hung, a painting on the drop curtain of the sky.

Across the landscape a parent stem of road wound, branches breaking from it and meandering thread-small to ranch and village. It was white-dusted here, but later would turn red and crawl upward under the resinous dimness of

pine woods to where the mining camps clung on the lower wall of the Sierra. Already it had left behind the region of farms in neighborly proximity and the little towns that were threaded along it like beads upon a string. Watching its eastward course, one would have noticed that after it crested the first rise it ran free of habitation for miles.

Along its empty length a dust cloud moved, a tarnishing spot on the afternoon's hard brightness. This spot was the one point of energy in the universal torpor. From it came the rhythmic beat of flying hoofs and the jingle of harness. It was the Rocky Bar stage, up from Shilo through Plymouth, across the Mother Lode and then in a steep, straining grade on to Antelope and Rocky Bar, camps nestling in the mountain gorges. It was making time now against the slow climb later, the four horses racing, the reins loose on their backs.

There was only one passenger; the others had been dropped at towns along the route. He sat on the front seat beside Jim Bailey the driver, his feet on a pine box and a rifle across his knees. He and Jim Bailey knew each other well, for he had often come that way, always with his box and his rifle. He was Wells Fargo's messenger and his name was Danny Leonard. In the box at his feet were twelve thousand dollars in coin to be delivered that night to the Greenhide Mine at Antelope.

With nothing of interest in sight, talk between them was desultory. Jim Bailey thought they'd take on some men at Plymouth when they stopped there to victual up. The

messenger, squinting at the swimming yellow distance, yawned and said it might be a good thing, nobody knew when Knapp and Garland would get busy again. They'd failed in the holdup of the Rockville stage last spring and it was about time to hear from them—the road after you passed Plymouth was pretty lonesome. Jim Bailey snorted contemptuously and spat over the wheel—he guessed Knapp and Garland weren't liable to bother *him*.

After this the conversation dropped. The stifling heat, the whirling dust clouds broken by whiffs of air, dry as from a kiln and impregnated with the pungent scent of the tarweed, made the men drowsy. Jim Bailey nodded, the reins drawing slack between his fingers. Leonard slipped the rifle from his knees to the floor and relaxed against the back of the seat. Through half-shut lids he watched the whitened crests of the Sierra brushed on the turquoise sky.

The horses clattered down a gulley and galloped across a wooden bridge that spanned a dead watercourse. The ascent was steep and they took it at a rush, backs humped, necks stretched, hoofs clattering among loosened stones.

A sudden breeze carried their dust ahead, and for a moment the prospect was obscured, the trees that filled the gulley, bunched at the summit into a thicket, just discernible in foggy outline. The horses had gained the level, Jim Bailey, who knew the road in his sleep, had cheered them with a familiar chirrup, when the leaders stopped, recoiling in a clatter of slackened harness on the wheelers. The stage came to a halt so violent that Jim Bailey lurched forward

against the splashboard, the reins jerked out of his hands. He did not know what had happened, could see nothing but the horses' backs, jammed together, lines and traces slapping about their flanks.

Afterward, describing it at Mormons Landing, he laid it all to the dust. In that first moment of surprise he hadn't made out the men, and anyway who'd have expected it—on the open road in the full of the afternoon? You couldn't put any blame on him, sprawled on his knees, the whole thing coming so quick. When he picked himself up he looked into the muzzle of a revolver and saw behind it a head, only the eyes showing between the hat brim and a gunny sack tied round the lower part of the face.

After that it all went so swift you couldn't hardly tell. He didn't even then know there were two of them—heard the feller at the wheel say, "Hands up," and thought that was all there was to it—when the one at the horses' heads fired. Leonard had given an oath and reached for his gun, and right with that the report came, and Leonard heaved up with a sort of grunt, and then settled and was still. The other feller came along down through the dust, and Jim Bailey, paralyzed, with his hands up, knew Knapp and Garland had got him at last.

The one at the wheel kept him covered while the other pulled out the box. He could see him plain, all but his face, a big powerful chap, shoulders on him like a prize fighter's, and freckled hands covered with red hair. He got the box out with a jerk and dropped it, and then, snatching up a stick,

struck the near wheeler a blow on the flank and jumped back into the bushes.

The horses started, mad, like they were locoed; it was a wonder the stage wasn't upset, racing this way and that, up the bank and down on the other side. Jim Bailey crawled out on the axle, picked up the dragging reins and got back just in time to keep Leonard from bouncing out. He heaved him up and held him round the body, and when he got the horses going straight, took a look at him. That first time he thought he was dead, white as chalk and with his eyes turned up. But after a spell of going he decided there was life in him yet, and holding him with one arm, stretched the other over the splashboard, shaking the reins on the wheelers' backs, and the way those horses buckled to their work was worth gettin' held up to see.

Half an hour later the Rocky Bar stage came like a cyclone into Mormons Landing, Jim Bailey hopping like a grasshopper on the front seat, and on his arm Danny Leonard, shot through the lung. They drew up in front of the Damfino Saloon, and Mormons Landing, dead among its deserted ditches, knew again a crowded hour of glorious life. Everybody came running and lined up along the sidewalk, later to line up along the Damfino Bar. The widow woman who ran the eating house put Danny Leonard in her own bed and sent one of her sons, aged six, to San Marco for a doctor, and the other, aged eight, to Jackson for the sheriff.

Before night fell the news had flashed through the countryside. On ranch piazza and in cabin doorway, in the camps along the Mother Lode and the villages of the plain, men were telling one another how Knapp and Garland had held up the Rocky Bar stage and got away with twelve thousand dollars in gold.

CHAPTER II

THE TULES

The place of the holdup was on the first upward roll of the hills. Farther back, along more distant slopes, the chaparral spread like a dark cloth but here there was little verdure. The rainless California summer had scorched the country; mounded summit swelled beyond mounded summit all dried to a uniform ochre. But if you had stood on the rise where the stage stopped and faced toward the west, you would have seen, stretching to the horizon, a green expanse that told of water.

This was the tules, a vast spread of marsh covered with bulrushes, flat as a floor, and extending from a distant arm of the bay back into the land. It was like a wedge of green thrust through the yellow, splitting it apart, at one end meeting the sky in a level line, at the other narrowing to a point which penetrated the bases of the hills. From these streams wound down ravine and rift till their currents slipped into the brackish waters of the marsh. Such a stream, dried now to a few stagnant pools, had worn a way along the gulley where the holdup had occurred.

Down this gulley, the box between them, the bandits ran. Alders and bay grew thick, sun spots glancing through their leaves, boughs slapping and slashing back from the passage of the rushing bodies, stones rolling under the flying feet.

The heat was suffocating, the narrow cleft holding it, the matted foliage keeping out all air. The men's faces were empurpled, the gunny sacks about their necks were soaked with sweat. They spoke little—a grunt, a muttered oath as a stone turned. Doubled under the branches, crashing through a covert with closed eyes and warding arm, they fled, now and then pausing for a quick change of hands on the box or the sweep of a sleeve across a dripping brow. Nearly a half hour from the time they had started they emerged into brighter light, the trees growing sparse, the earth moist, a soft coolness rising—the creek's conjunction with the tules.

The sun was sloping westward, the sky infinitely blue and clear, golden light slanting across the plain's distant edges. Before them, silent, not a breath stirring the close-packed growth, stretched the marshes. They were miles in extent; miles upon miles of these level bulrush spears threaded with languid streams, streams that curved and looped, turned back upon themselves, narrowed into gleaming veins, widened to miniature lakes on whose bosom the clouds, the birds and the stars were mirrored. They were like a crystal inlay covering the face of the tules with an intricate, shining pattern. No place was ever more deserted, alien, uninhabitable, making no compromise with the friendly, fruitful land.

Against the muddy edge a rotten punt holding a pole swung deliberate from a stake. The men put the box in, then followed, and the elder, standing in the stern, took the pole and, pushing against the bank, drove the boat into deep water. It floated out, two ripples folding back oily sleek from

its bow. After the Indian fashion, the man propelled it with the pole, prodding against the bottom. He did it skillfully, the unwieldly hulk making a slow, even progress. He also did it with a singular absence of sound, the pole never grating on the gunnel, feeling quietly along the soft mud of the shores, rising from the water, held suspended, then slipping in again as noiseless as the dip of the dragon flies.

No words passed between them. Sliding silent over the silent stream, they were like a picture done in a few strong colors, violent green of the rushes, violent blue of the sky. Their reflection moved with them, two boats joining at the water line, in each boat two figures, every fold of their garments, every shade and high light, minutely and dazzlingly reproduced.

Highwayman is a word of picturesque suggestion, but there was nothing picturesque about them. They looked like laborers weather-worn from wind and sun; the kind of men that crowd the streets of new camps and stand round the cattle pens at country fairs. Knapp, sitting in the bow, was younger than the other—under thirty probably. He was a big-boned, powerful animal, his thick, reddish hair growing low on his forehead, his face, with its wide nose and prominent jaw, like the study of a face left in the rough. In his stolid look there was something childlike, his eyes following the flight of a bird in the air, then dropping to see its reflection in the water.

Garland was older, fully fifty, burly, thickset, strong as an ox. His hat lay in the bottom of the boat and his head,

covered with curly, grizzled hair, was broad and well-shaped. A corresponding grizzle of beard clothed his chin and fringed a straight line of lip. The rest of his face showed the skin sun-dried and lined less from age than a life in the open. Wrinkles radiated from the corners of his eyes, and one, like a fold in the flesh, crossed his forehead in a deep-cut crease. His clothes were of the roughest, a dirty collarless shirt with a rag of red bandanna round the neck, a coat shapeless and dusty, and overalls grease and mud-smeared with the rubbing of his hands. His boots were the iron-hard clouts of the rancher, his hat a broken black felt, sweat-stained and torn. Passing him on the road, you would have set him down as a farm hand out of a job.

The boat had passed beyond the shelter of the hills to where the tules widened. Pausing, he glanced about. Far to the right he could see a small white square—the lodge of a sportsman's club which in the duck shooting season would disgorge men and dogs into the marsh. It was closed now, but on the plain beyond there were ranches. He dropped to his knees, shipped the pole, and drew from the bottom of the boat a piece of wood roughly shaped into a paddle. Here in the heart of the tules, where a head moving over the bulrush floor might be discerned, sound would not carry far. He dipped in the paddle, the long spray of drops hitting the water with a dry, running patter.

The man in front moved and looked ahead.

"We'd ought to be near there."

"A few yards over to the right," came the answer, and with it the boat took a sharp turn to the left, nosing along the bank, then stole down a waterway, a crystal channel between ramparts of green. This looped at a right angle, shone with a sudden glaze of sun, slipped into shadow and, rounding a point, an island with a bare, oozy edge came into view.

A deep stroke of the paddle sent the boat forward, its bow burrowing into the mud, and Knapp jumped out and beached it. The place was a small islet, one side clear, a wall of rushes, thick as grass, clothing the other. Over the water line the earth was hard, its surface cracked and flaked by the sun. On this open space lay two battered kerosene oil cans, their tops torn away, and a pile of stones. The hiding place was not a new one and the properties were already prepared.

With a knife and chisel they broke open the box. The money was in small canvas sacks, clean as if never used before and marked with a stenciled "W. F. & Co." They took it out and looked at it; hefted its weight in their hands. It represented the first success after several failures, one brought to trial, others frustrated in the making or abandoned after warnings from the ranchers and obscure townsfolk who stood in with them. Knapp had been discouraged. Now he took a handful and spread it on his palm, golden eagles, heavy, shining, solid. Swaying his wrist, he let the sun play on them, strike glints from their edges, burnish their surface.

"Twelve thousand," he murmured. "We ain't but once before got that much."

The elder, pulling the gunny sack from his neck, dropped it into one of the oil cans, pressing it against the sides like a lining.

"I can get the ranch now; six thousand'll cover everything."

"Are you honestly calculatin' to do that?" Knapp had reached for the other can. With arm outstretched, he looked at Garland, gravely curious.

"I am. I told you so before. I had a look at it again last week. They'll sell for four thousand, and it'll take five hundred to put it into shape. I'll bank the rest."

"And you'll quit?"

"Certain. I've had enough of the road."

The younger man pondered, watching the hands of his partner fitting the money bags into the can. "Mebbe you got the right idea," he muttered.

"It's the right idea for me. I'm not what I once was, I'm old. It's time for me to lay off and rest. I can't keep this up forever and now I got the chance to get out and I'm goin' to."

He had filled his can and rose, taking off his coat and throwing it on the ground. Picking up the knife and chisel he

went back to where the bulrushes began and crushed in among them. Knapp, packing the other can, could hear the sound of his heavy movements, the hacking of the knife at the bulrush stalks and then the thud of falling earth. When he had filled his can he saw that there were two sacks left over. He took them up and, looking about, caught sight of a newspaper protruding from the pocket of Garland's coat. He pulled it out, calling as he did so:

"There's two sacks I can't get in. I'm goin' to put 'em in this here paper you got."

A grunt of acquiescence came from the bulrushes, the hacking of the knife, the thuds going on. Knapp unfolded the paper, set the sacks in it, and, gathering it about them, placed it on the top of his can. He heaved the whole up and crashed through the rushes to where Garland had already cleared a space and was digging a hole in the mud. When it was finished, the cans—the newspaper bundle on top—were lowered into it, and earth and roots replaced. No particular attempt was made at concealment; the cache was as secure against intrusion as if it were on the crest of the Sierra, and within the week they would be back to empty it. The box was filled with stones and sunk in the stream.

Then they rested, prone on the ground, at first talking a little. There was a question about the messenger; Knapp had shot and was casually confident he had only winged him. The matter seemed to give him no anxiety, and presently, his head burrowed into his arm, he fell asleep, a

great, sprawled figure with the sun making his red hair shine like a copper helmet.

Garland lay on his back, his coat for a pillow, smoking a blackened pipe and thinking. He saw the sky lose its blue, and fade to a thin, whitish transparency, then flush to rose, bird specks skimming across it. He saw the tules grow dark, black walls flanking paths incredibly glossy, catching here and there a barring of golden cloud. He felt the breath of the marshes chill and salt-tainted, and watched the first star, white as a diamond, prick through the vault.

Then he rose and shook his partner, waking him with voluble profanity. The night had come, the dark that was to hide their stealthy exit. They went different ways; Knapp by a series of trails and planks to the south bank and thence across country, footing it through the night to his lair near Stockton. Garland would move north to friends of his up toward the mining camps along the Feather. They made a rendezvous for a night six days distant. Then they would carry away the money to places of safety which they went to prepare.

The sky was star-strewn as Garland's punt slipped away from the island. It was intensely still, a whisper of water round the moving prow, the sibilant dip of the paddle the only sounds. He could see the water as a pale, winding shimmer ahead, dotted with star reflections like small, scattered flowers. Once, rising to make sure of his course, he saw the tiny yellow light in a ranch house far away. He stood for a moment looking at it, and when he crouched

again the light had kindled his imagination. Its spark glowed wide till it showed the ranch kitchen, windows open to the blue night, earth smells floating in, the table with its kerosene lamp, the rancher reading the paper, his dog sleeping at his feet, peaceful, unguarded, secure.

Conscious of distance to be traversed before he became a creature of wary instincts and watchful eyes, he let his thoughts have way. They slipped about and touched the future with a sense of ease, then veered to the past. Here they steadied, memories rising photographically distinct like a series of pictures, detached yet revealing an underlying thread of connection:

First it was his youth in the Southwest when he had been Tom Michaels, a miner, well paid, saving his wages. Then his marriage with Juana Ramirez, the half-breed girl at Deming, and the bit of land he had bought—with a mortgage to pay—in the glaring, green river valley. Glimpses of their life there, children and work—stupefying, tremendous work—to keep them going and to meet the interest; he had been a giant in those days.

And even so he hadn't been able to do it. Six years after they took possession they moved out, ruined. He remembered it as if it had been yesterday—the adobe house with its flat roof and strings of red peppers hanging on the walls, the cart piled high with furniture, Juana on the front seat and Pancha astride of the mule. Juana had grown old in those six years, fat and shapeless, but she had been dog-loyal, dog-loving, his woman. Never a word of complaint

out of her—even when the two children died she had just covered her head with the blanket and sat by the hearth, stoical, dry-eyed, silent.

He could see now that it was his dream of making money—big money—that had been wrong. If he'd been content with a wage and a master he'd have done better by her, but from the start he'd wanted his freedom, balked at being roped and branded with the herd. That was why he drifted back to mining, not a steady job, though he could have got it, but as a prospector, leaving Arizona and moving to California. There were years of it; he knew the mineral belt from the Panamint mountains to the Kootenai country. Juana and Pancha plodded from town to town, seeing him at intervals, always expecting to hear he'd struck "the ledge," and be hardly able to scrape a living for them from the bottom of his pan.

One picture stood out clearer than the rest, ineffaceable, to be carried to his grave—the day he came back and heard that Juana was dead. He had left them at a place in Inyo, a scattering of houses on the edge of the desert. Pancha saw him coming, and her figure, racing to meet him in a blown flutter of cotton skirt, was as plain before his eyes as if she were running toward him now along the shining water path. She was twelve, brown as a nut, and scarecrow-thin, with a tangle of black hair, and narrow, dark eyes. He could recall the feel of her little hard hand inside his as she told him, excited at imparting such news, pushing the hair off her dirty face to see how he took it.

It had crushed the heart in him and some upholding principle of hope and resolution broke. He found a place for Pancha with Maria Lopez, the Mexican woman who ran the Buon Gusto restaurant at Bakersfield and agreed to look after the girl for pay. Then he went back to the open, not caring much, the springs of his soul gone dry. He had no energy for the old life and did other things, anything to make his own food and Pancha's keep—herded sheep, helped on the cattle ranges, tended store, hung on the fringes of the wilderness, saw men turn to savages and turned himself.

At long intervals he went down to the settlements and saw Pancha, growing into a gawky girl, headstrong, and with the wildness of her mother's people cropping out. She hated Maria Lopez and the work in the restaurant and wanted him to take her to the mountains. When she was sixteen a spell of illness laid him up and after that he had difficulty in getting work. Two months passed without a payment and when he finally got down to Bakersfield he found that Pancha had gone, run away with a traveling company of actors. Maria Lopez and he had a fight, raged at one another in mutual fury, and then he started out to find his girl, not knowing when he did what he would do with her.

She solved that problem; she insisted on staying with the actors. She liked the life, she could sing, they told her she had a future. She had fixed and settled everything, even to her name; she would retain that of Lopez, which she was already known by in Bakersfield. There was nothing for it but to let her have her way; a man without home, money or

prospects has no authority. But the sense of his own failure, of the hopelessness of his desire to shelter and enrich her, fell on his conscience like a foot on a spark and crushed it out. He returned to the mountains, his hand against all men, already an outlaw, love for his own all that was left of the original man. That governed him, gave him the will to act, stimulated his brain, and lent his mind an unfailing cunning. The meeting with Knapp crystallized into a partnership, but when Garland the bandit rose on the horizon, no one, least of all Pancha, knew he was Michaels the miner.

He stood up in the boat and again reconnoitered; he was near the shore. The country slept under the stars, gray rollings of hills and black blotches of trees, very still in its somber repose. Dropping back to the seat, he plied the paddle with extraordinary softness, wary, listening, alert. Soon, in a week or two, if he could settle the sale, he would be on his way to San Francisco to tell Pancha he had sold his claim at last and had bought the ranch. Under his caution the pleasure of this thought pervaded him with an exquisite satisfaction. He could not forbear its indulgence and, leaning on the paddle, allowed himself a last, delightful vision—the ranch house piazza with Pancha—her make-up off—sitting on the steps at his feet.

That night he slept in the cowshed of an abandoned ranch. A billet of wood under his head, his repose was deep and dreamless, but in the dawn's light he woke, suddenly called out of slumber by a thought. It floated on the surface of his conciousness, vaguely disturbing, then took slow shape and he sat up feeling in the pockets of his coat. The

paper was gone; Knapp saying he had taken it was not a dream. For a space he sat, coming to clearer recollection, his partner's voice calling, vaguely heard, its request unheeded in his preoccupation. He gave a mutter of relief, and dropping back settled himself into comfort. The paper was as safe there as in his own pocket and he'd have it again inside of a week. With the first light in his eyes, he lapsed off again for another hour.

CHAPTER III

MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE

A few miles below where the stage was held up a branch road breaks from the main highway and cuts off at right angles across the plain. This is a ranchers' road. If you follow it southward you come to the region of vast holdings, acres of trees in parallel lines as straight as if laid with a tape measure, great, fawn-colored fields, avenues of palm and oleander leading to white houses where the balconies have striped awnings and people sit in cushioned wicker chairs.

The other end of it runs through lands of decreasing cultivation till—after it passes Tito Murano's cottage—it dips to the tules and that's the end of it. To be sure, a trail—a horse path—breaks away and makes a detour round the head of the marshes, but this is seldom used, a bog in winter and in summer riven with dried water-courses and overgrown with brambles. To get around the tules comfortably you have to strike farther in and that's a long way.

The last house before you get to Tito Murano's, which doesn't count, is the Burrage Ranch. In the white mansions among the fruit trees the Burrage Ranch doesn't count much either. It is old and small, fifty acres, a postage stamp of a ranch. There is no avenue to the house, which is close to the road behind a picket fence, and instead of encircling

balconies and striped awnings, it has one small porch with a sagging top, over which climbs a rose that stretches long festoons to the gable. In its yard grow two majestic live oaks, hoary giants with silvered limbs reaching out in a thick-leaved canopy and casting a great spread of shade.

Old Man Burrage had had the ranch a long time as they reckon time in California. In his youth he had seen the great epoch in Virginia City, figured in it in a humble capacity, and emerged from its final *débâcle* with twenty thousand dollars. He should have emerged with more and that he didn't made him chary of mining. Peace and security exerted their appeal, and after looking about for a few reflective years, he had married the prettiest waitress in the Golden Nugget Hotel in Placerville and settled down to farming. He had settled and settled hard, settled like a barnacle, so firm and fast that he had never been able to pull himself loose. Peace he had found but also poverty. If the mineral vein was capricious, so were the elements, insect pests and the fruit market. Thirty years after he had bought the ranch he was still there and still poor with his wife Mary Ellen, his daughter Sadie and his son Mark.

Mark's advent had followed the decease of two older boys and his mother had proclaimed his preciousness by christening him Marquis de Lafayette. Her other sons had borne the undistinguished appellations of relatives, but this one, her consolation and her Benjamin, would be decked with the flower of her fancy. Of the original bearer of the name she knew nothing. Waiting on table at the Golden Nugget and later bearing children and helping on the ranch

had not left her time for historical study. When her son, waking to the blight she had so innocently put upon him, asked her where she had found the name, she had answered, "In a book," but beyond that could give no data. When, unable to bear his shame, he had abbreviated it to "Mark D.L." she had been hurt.

Otherwise he had not disappointed her. When she had crowned him with a title she had felt that a high destiny awaited him and the event proved it. After a youth on the ranch, Mark, at sixteen, grew restive, at seventeen announced that he wanted an education and at eighteen packed his grip and went to work his way through Stanford University. Old Man Burrage made himself a bore at the crossroads store and the county fair telling how his boy was waiting on table down to Stanford and doing typewriting nights. Some boy, that!

When Mark came home on his vacations it was like the return of Ulysses after his ten years' wandering—they couldn't look at him enough, or get enough time to listen. His grammar was straightened out, his chin smooth, the freckles gone from his hands, and yet he was just the same—no fancy frills about *him*, Old Man Burrage bragged to his cronies. And then came the coping stone—he told them he was going to be a lawyer. Some of the neighbors laughed but others grew thoughtful and nodded commendingly. Even on the balconies of the white houses in the wicker chairs under the awnings Mark and his aspirations drew forth interested comment. Most of these people had known him since he was a shock-headed, barefoot kid, and when they

saw him in his store clothes and heard his purified grammar, they realized that for youth in California belongs the phrase "the world is my oyster."

Now Mark had graduated and was studying in a large law office in San Francisco. He was paid twenty dollars a week, was twenty-four years old, rather silent, five-feet-ten and accounted good-looking. At the time this story opens he was spending his vacation—pushed on to the summer's end by a pressure of work in the office—on the ranch with his parents.

It was late afternoon, on the day following the holdup, and he was sitting in the barn doorway milking the brown cow. The doorway was shadowed, the blackness of the barn's interior behind it, the scent of clean hay drifting out and mingling with the scents of baked earth and tarweed that came from the heated fields. With his cheek against the cow's side he could see between the lower limbs of the oaks the country beyond, rust-colored and tan, streaked with blue shadows and the mottled blackness below the trees. Turning a little further he could look down the road with the eucalyptus tall on either side, the yellow path barred by their shade. From the house came a good smell of hot bread and a sound of voices—Mother and Sadie were getting ready for supper. At intervals Mother's face, red and round below her sleeked, gray hair, her spectacles up, her dress turned in at the neck, appeared at the window to take a refreshing peep at her boy milking the brown cow.

The milk sizzed and foamed in the pail and the milker, his forehead against the cow's warm pelt, watched it rise on the tin's side. It made a loud drumming which prevented his hearing a hail from the picket fence. The hail came again in a husky, dust-choked voice:

"Hello, can you give me a drink?"

This time Mark heard and wheeled on the stool. A tramp was leaning against the fence looking at him.

Tramps are too familiar in California for curiosity or interest, also they are unpopular. They have done dreadful things—lonely women in outlying farms have guns and dogs, the one loaded, the other cultivated in savagery against the visits of the hobo.

Mark rose unwelcoming, but the fellow did look miserable. He was gaunt and dirty, long ragged locks of hair falling below the brim of his torn straw hat, an unkempt straggle of beard growing up his cheeks. His clothes hung loose on his lean frame, and he looked all the same color, dust-brown, his hair, his shirt, his coat, even his face, the tan lying dark over a skin that was sallow. Only his eyes struck a different note. They were gray, very clear in the sun-burned face, the lids long and heavy. Their expression interested Mark; it was not the stone-hard, evil look of the outcast man, but one of an unashamed, smoldering resentment.

The same quality was in his manner. The request for water was neither fawningly nor piteously made. It was surly, a right churlishly demanded. Mark moved to the pump and

filled the glass standing there. The tramp leaning on the pickets looked at him, his glance traveling morose over the muscular back and fine shoulders, the straight nape, the dark head with its crown of thick, coarse hair. As Mark advanced with the glass he continued his scrutiny, when, suddenly meeting the young man's eyes, his own shifted and he said in that husky voice, hoarse from a parched throat:

"It's the devil walking in the heat on these rotten dusty roads."

The other nodded and handed him the glass. He drained it, tilting his head till the sinews in his haggard throat showed below his beard. Then he handed it back with a muttered thanks.

"Been walking far?" said Mark.

The tramp moved away from the pickets, jerking his head toward the road behind him. For the first time Mark noticed that he had a basket on his arm, containing a folded blanket.

"From the fruit farms down there. I've been working my way up fruit picking. But it's a dog's job; better starve while you're about it. Thank you. So long."

It was evident he wanted no further parley, for he started off down the road. Mark stood looking after him. He noticed that he was tall and walked with a long stride, not the lazy shuffle of the hobo. Also he had caught a quality of

education in the husky voice. Under its coarsened inflections there was an echo of something cultured, not fitting with his present appearance, a voice that might once have known very different conditions. Possibly a dangerous chap, Mark thought; had an ugly look, a secret, forbidding sort of face. When the educated kind dropped they were apt to fall further and come down harder than the others. He threw the glass into the bushes and went in to wash up. Before he was called to supper he had forgotten all about the man.

In the cool of the evening the Burrages sat on the porch, rather crowded for the space was small. Mark, on the bottom step, smoked a pipe and watched the eucalyptus leaves printed in pointed black groupings against the Prussian-blue sky. This was the time when the family, released from its labors, sat back comfortably and listened to the favored one while he told of the city by the sea. Old Man Burrage had a way of suddenly asking questions about people he had known in the brave days of the Comstock, some dead now, others trailing clouds of glory eastward this many years.

Tonight he was minded to hear about the children of George Alston whom Mark had met. Long ago in Virginia City Old Man Burrage had often seen George Alston, talked with him when he was manager of the Silver Queen and one of the big men of that age of giants. Mother piped up there —*she* wasn't going to be beaten. Many's the time she'd waited on George Alston when he and the others would come riding over the Sierras on their long-tailed horses—a

bunch of them together galloping into Placerville like the Pony Express coming into Sacramento.

"And some of 'em," said the old woman, rocking in easeful reminiscence, "would be as fresh with me as if I'd given 'em encouragement. But George Alston, never—he'd treat me as respectful as if I was the first lady in the land. Halting behind to have a neighborly chat and the rest of them throwin' their money on the table and off through the dining room hollerin' for their horses."

Her son, on the lower step, stirred as if uncomfortable. These memories, once prone to rouse a tender amusement, now carried their secret sting.

"He was the real thing," the farmer gravely commented. "There wasn't many like him."

Sadie, who was not interested in a man dead ten years ago, pushed the conversation on to her own generation.

"His daughters are grown up. They must be young ladies now."

Mark answered:

"Yes—Miss Chrystie's just eighteen, came of age this summer. The other one's a few years older."

"Up in Virginia," said the farmer, "George Alston was a bachelor. Every woman was out with her lariat after him but he give 'em all the slip. And afterward, when he went back

East to see his folks, a little girl in his home town got him—a girl a lot younger than him. She died after a few years."

There was regret in his tone, not so much for the untimely demise of the lady as for the fact that George Alston had not found his mate in California.

"What are they like?" said Sadie—"pretty?"

Mark had his back toward her. She could see the shape of it, pale in its light-colored shirt, against the dark filigree of shrubs at the bottom of the steps. His answer sounded indifferent between puffs of his pipe:

"Yes, I guess so. Miss Chrystie's a big, fine sort of girl, with yellow hair and lots of color. She's nearly as tall as I am. The other, Miss Lorry—well, she's small."

"They'd ought to have a heap of money," said the farmer. "But when he died I heard he hadn't cut up as rich as you'd think. Folks said he was too honest."

"They've got enough—four hundred thousand each."

"Well, well, well," said Mother with a lazy laugh, "that'd do *me*."

Her husband wouldn't have it.

"Lord, that's small for him," he mourned. "But I'm not surprised. He wouldn't 'a' stood for what some of the rest of 'em did."