



***LOUIS
TRACY***

***THE TERMS
OF SURRENDER***



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The Terms of Surrender

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I

AT “MACGONIGAL’S”

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“Hullo, Mac!”

“Hullo, Derry!”

“What’s got the boys today? Is there a round-up somewhere?”

“Looks that-a way,” said Mac, grabbing a soiled cloth with an air of decision, and giving the pine counter a vigorous rub. At best, he was a man of few words, and the few were generally to the point; yet his questioner did not seem to notice the noncommittal nature of the reply, and, after an amused glance at the industrious Mac, quitted the store as swiftly as he had entered it. But he flung an explanatory word over his shoulder:

“Guess I’ll see to that plug myself—he’s fallen lame.”

Then John Darien Power swung out again into the vivid sunshine of Colorado (“vivid” is the correct adjective for sunshine thereabouts in June about the hour of the siesta) and gently encouraged a dispirited mustang to hobble on three legs into the iron-roofed lean-to which served as a stable at “MacGonigal’s.” Meanwhile, the proprietor of the store gazed after Power’s retreating figure until neither man nor horse was visible. Even then, in an absent-minded way, he continued to survey as much of the dusty surface of the Silver State as was revealed through the rectangle of the doorway, a vista slightly diminished by the roof of a veranda. What he saw in the foreground was a whitish brown plain, apparently a desert, but in reality a plateau, or

“park,” as the local name has it, a tableland usually carpeted not only with grama and buffalo grasses curing on the stem, but also with flowers in prodigal abundance and of bewildering varieties. True, in the picture framed by the open door neither grass-stems nor flowers were visible, unless to the imaginative eye. There was far too much coming and going of men and animals across the strip of common which served the purposes of a main street in Bison to permit the presence of active vegetation save during the miraculous fortnight after the spring rains, when, by local repute, green whiskers will grow on a bronze dog. Scattered about the immediate vicinity were the ramshackle houses of men employed in the neighboring gold and silver reduction works. The makeshift for a roadway which pierced this irregular settlement led straight to MacGonigal’s, and ended there. As every man, woman, and child in the place came to the store at some time of the day or night, and invariably applied Euclid’s definition of the nearest way between two given points, the flora of Colorado was quickly stamped out of recognition in that particular locality, except during the irrepressible period when, as already mentioned, the fierce rains of April pounded the sleeping earth and even bronze dogs into a frenzied activity. Further, during that year, now nearly quarter of a century old, there had been no rain in April or May, and precious little in March. As the ranchers put it, in the figurative language of their calling, “the hull blame state was burnt to a cinder.”

The middle distance was lost altogether; for the park sloped, after the manner of plateaus, to a deep valley through which trickled a railroad and the remains of a river.

Some twenty miles away a belt of woodland showed where Denver was justifying its name by growing into a city, and forty miles beyond Denver rose the blue ring of the Rocky Mountains. These details, be it understood, are given with the meticulous accuracy insisted on by map-makers. In a country where, every year, the percentage of “perfectly clear” days rises well above the total of all other sorts of days, and where a popular and never-failing joke played on the newcomer is to persuade him into taking an afternoon stroll from Denver to Mount Evans, a ramble of over sixty miles as the crow flies, the mind refuses to be governed by theodolites and measuring rods. Indeed, the deceptive clarity of the air leads to exaggeration at the other end of the scale, because no true son or daughter of Colorado will walk a hundred yards if there is a horse or car available for the journey. Obviously, walking is a vain thing when the horizon and the next block look equidistant.

It may, however, be taken for granted that none of these considerations accounted for MacGonigal’s fixed stare at the sunlit expanse. In fact, it is probable that his bulging eyes took in no special feature of the landscape; for they held an introspective look, and he stopped polishing the counter as abruptly as he had begun that much-needed operation when Power entered the store. He indulged in soliloquy, too, as the habit is of some men in perplexity. Shifting the cigar he was smoking from the left corner of his wide mouth to the right one by a dexterous twisting of lips, with tongue and teeth assisting, he said aloud:

“Well, ef I ain’t dog-goned!”

So, whatever it was, the matter was serious. It was a convention at Bison that all conversation should be suspended among the frequenters of MacGonigal's when the storekeeper remarked that he was dog-goned. Ears already alert were tuned at once to intensity. When Mac was dog-goned, events of vital importance to the community had either happened or were about to happen. Why, those words, uttered by him, common as they were in the mouths of others, had been known to stop One-thumb Jake from opening a jack-pot on a pat straight! Of course, the pot was opened all right after the social avanlanche heralded by the storekeeper's epoch-making ejaculation had rolled past, or Jake's remaining thumb might have been shot off during the subsequent row.

Apparently, MacGonigal was thinking hard, listening, too; for he seemed to be following Power's movements, and nodded his head in recognition of the rattle of a chain as the horse was tied to a feeding trough, the clatter of a zinc bucket when Power drew water from a tank, and the stamping of hoofs while Power was persuading the lame mustang to let him bathe and bandage the injured tendons. Then the animal was given a drink—he would be fed later—and the ring of spurred boots on the sun-baked ground announced that Derry was returning to the store.

Power's nickname, in a land where a man's baptismal certificate is generally ignored, was easily accounted for by his second name, Darien, conferred by a proud mother in memory of a journey across the Isthmus when, as a girl, she was taken from New York to San Francisco by the oldtime sea route. The other day, when he stood for a minute or so

in the foyer of the Savoy Hotel in London, waiting while his automobile was summoned from the courtyard, he seemed to have lost little of the erect, sinewy figure and lithe carriage which were his most striking physical characteristics twenty-five years ago; but the smooth, dark-brown hair had become gray, and was slightly frizzled about the temples, and the clean-cut oval of his face bore records of other tempests than those noted by the Weather Bureau. In walking, too, he moved with a decided limp. At fifty, John Darien Power looked the last man breathing whom a storekeeper in a disheveled mining village would hail as "Derry"; yet it may be safely assumed that his somewhat hard and care-lined lips would have softened into a pleasant smile had someone greeted him in the familiar Colorado way. And, when that happened, the friend of bygone years would be sure that no mistake had been made as to his identity; for, in those early days, Power always won approval when he smiled. His habitual expression was one of concentrated purpose, and his features were cast in a mold that suggested repose and strength. Indeed, their classic regularity of outline almost bespoke a harsh nature were it not for the lurking humor in his large brown eyes, which were shaded by lashes so long, and black, and curved that most women who met him envied him their possession. Children and dogs adopted him as a friend promptly and without reservation; but strangers of adult age were apt to regard him as a rather morose and aloof-mannered person, distinctly frigid and self-possessed, until some chance turn in the talk brought laughter to eyes and lips. Then a carefully veiled kindness of heart seemed to bubble to the

surface and irradiate his face. All the severity of firm mouth and determined chin disappeared as though by magic; and one understood the force of the simile used by a western schoolma'am, who contributed verse to the *Rocky Mountain News*, when she said that Derry's smile reminded her of a sudden burst of sunshine which had converted into a sparkling mirror the somber gloom of a lake sunk in the depths of some secluded valley. Even in Colorado, people of the poetic temperament write in that strain.

Now, perhaps, you have some notion of the sort of young man it was who came back to the dog-goned MacGonigal on that June day in the half-forgotten '80's. Add to the foregoing description certain intimate labels—that he was a mining engineer, that he had been educated in the best schools of the Far West, that he was slender, and well knit, and slightly above the middle height, and that he moved with the gait of a horseman and an athlete—and the portrait is fairly complete.

The storekeeper was Power's physical antithesis. He was short and fat, and never either walked or rode; but his North of Ireland ancestors had bequeathed him a shrewd brain and a Scottish slowness of speech that gave him time to review his thoughts before they were uttered. No sooner did he hear his visitor's approaching footsteps than he began again to polish the pine boards which barricaded him from the small world of Bison.

Such misplaced industry won a smile from the younger man.

"Gee whizz, Mac, it makes me hot to see you work!" he cried. "Anyhow, if you've been whirling that duster ever

since I blew in you must be tired, so you can quit now, and fix me a bimetallic.”

With a curious alacrity, the stout MacGonigal threw the duster aside, and reached for a bottle of whisky, an egg, a siphon of soda, and some powdered sugar. Colorado is full of local color, even to the naming of its drinks. In a bimetallic the whole egg is used, and variants of the concoction are a gold fizz and a silver fizz, wherein the yoke and the white figure respectively.

“Whar you been, Derry?” inquired the storekeeper, whose massive energy was now concentrated on the proper whisking of the egg.

“Haven’t you heard? Marten sent me to erect the pump on a placer mine he bought near Sacramento. It’s a mighty good proposition, too, and I’ve done pretty well to get through in four months.”

“Guess I was told about the mine; but I plumb forgot. Marten was here a bit sence, an’ he said nothin’.” Power laughed cheerfully. “He’ll be surprised to see me, and that’s a fact. He counted on the job using up the best part of the summer, right into the fall; but I made those Chicago mechanics open up the throttle, and here I am, having left everything in full swing.”

“Didn’t you write?”

“Yes, to Denver. I don’t mind telling you, Mac, that I would have been better pleased if the boss was there now. I came slick through, meaning to make Denver tomorrow. Where is he—at the mill?”

“He was thar this mornin’.”

Power was frankly puzzled by MacGonigal's excess of reticence. He knew the man so well that he wondered what sinister revelation lay behind this twice-repeated refusal to give a direct reply to his questions. By this time the appetizing drink was ready, and he swallowed it with the gusto of one who had found the sun hot and the trail dusty, though he had ridden only three miles from the railroad station in the valley, where he was supplied with a lame horse by the blunder of a negro attendant at the hotel.

It was his way to solve a difficulty by taking the shortest possible cut; but, being quite in the dark as to the cause of his friend's perceptible shirking of some unknown trouble, he decided to adopt what logicians term a process of exhaustion.

"All well at Dolores?" he asked, looking straight into the storekeeper's prominent eyes.

"Bully!" came the unblinking answer.

Ah! The worry, whatsoever it might be, evidently did not concern John Darien Power in any overwhelming degree.

"Then what have you got on your chest, Mac?" he said, while voice and manner softened from an unmistakably stiffening.

MacGonigal seemed to regard this personal inquiry anent his well-being as affording a safe means of escape from a dilemma. "I'm scairt about you, Derry," he said at once, and there was no doubting the sincerity of the words.

"About me?"

"Yep. Guess you'd better hike back to Sacramento."

"But why?"

"Marten 'ud like it."

“Man, I’ve written to tell him I was on the way to Denver!”

“Then git a move on, an’ go thar.”

Power smiled, though not with his wonted geniality, for he was minded to be sarcastic. “Sorry if I should offend the boss by turning up in Bison,” he drawled; “but if I can’t hold this job down I’ll monkey around till I find another. If you should happen to see Marten this afternoon, tell him I’m at the ranch, and will show up in Main Street tomorrow P.M.”

He was actually turning on his heel when MacGonigal cried:

“Say, Derry, air you heeled?”

Power swung round again, astonishment writ large on his face. “Why, no,” he said. “I’m not likely to be carrying a gold brick to Dolores. Who’s going to hold me up?”

“Bar jokin’, I wish you’d vamoose. Dang me, come back tomorrer, ef you must!”

There! MacGonigal had said it! In a land where swearing is a science this Scoto-Hibernico-American had earned an enviable repute for the mildness of his expletives, and his “dang me!” was as noteworthy in Bison as its European equivalent in the mouth of a British archbishop. Power was immensely surprised by his bulky friend’s emphatic earnestness, and cudgeled his brains to suggest a reasonable explanation. Suddenly it occurred to him a second time that Bison was singularly empty of inhabitants that day. MacGonigal’s query with regard to a weapon was also significant, and he remembered that when he left the district there was pending a grave dispute between

ranchers and squatters as to the inclosing of certain grazing lands on the way to the East and its markets.

"Are the boys wire-cutting today?" he asked, in the accents of real concern; for any such expedition would probably bring about a struggle which might not end till one or both of the opposing parties ran short of ammunition.

"Nit," growled the other. "Why argy? You jest take my say-so, Derry, an' skate."

"Is the boss mixed up in this?"

"Yep."

"Well, he can take care of himself as well as anyone I know. So long, Mac. See you later."

"Ah, come off, Derry. You've got to have it; but don't say I didn't try to help. The crowd are up at Dolores. Marten's gittin' married, an' that's all there is to it. Now I guess you'll feel mad with me for not tellin' you sooner."

Power's face blanched under its healthy tan of sun and air; but his voice was markedly clear and controlled when he spoke, which, however, he did not do until some seconds after MacGonigal had made what was, for him, quite an oration.

"Why should Marten go to Dolores to get married?" he said at last.

The storekeeper humped his heavy shoulders, and conjured the cigar across his mouth again. He did not flinch under the sudden fire which blazed in Power's eyes; nevertheless, he remained silent.

"Mac," went on the younger man, still uttering each word deliberately, "do you mean that Marten is marrying Nancy Willard?"

“Yep.”

“And you’ve kept me here all this time! God in Heaven, Man, find me a horse!”

“It’s too late, Derry. They was wed three hours sence.”

“Too late for what? Get me a horse!”

“There’s not a nag left in Bison. An’ it’ll do you no sort of good ter shoot Marten.”

“Mac, you’re no fool. He sent me to Sacramento to have me out of the way, and you’ve seen through it right along.”

“Maybe. But old man Willard was dead broke. This dry spell put him slick under the harrow. Nancy married Marten ter save her father.”

“That’s a lie! They made her believe it, perhaps; but Willard could have won through as others have done. That scheming devil Marten got me side-tracked on purpose. He planned it, just as David put Uriah in the forefront of the battle. But, by God, he’s not a king, any more than I’m a Hittite! Nancy Willard is not for him, nor ever will be. Give me—but I know you won’t, and it doesn’t matter, anyway, because I’d rather tear him with my hands.”

An overpowering sense of wrong and outrage had Power in its grip now, and his naturally sallow skin had assumed an ivory whiteness that was dreadful to see. So rigid was his self-control that he gave no other sign of the passion that was convulsing him. Turning toward the door, he thrust his right hand to the side of the leather belt he wore; but withdrew it instantly, for he was a law-abiding citizen, and had obeyed in letter and spirit the recently enacted ordinance against the carrying of weapons. He would have gone without another word had not MacGonigal slipped from

behind the counter with the deft and catlike ease of movement which some corpulent folk of both sexes seem to possess. Running lightly and stealthily on his toes, he caught Power's arm before the latter was clear of the veranda which shaded the front of the store.

"Whar 'r you goin', Derry?" he asked, with a note of keen solicitude in his gruff voice that came oddly in a man accustomed to the social amenities of a mining camp.

"Leave me alone, Mac. I must be alone!" Then Power bent a flaming glance on him. "You've told me the truth?" he added in a hoarse whisper.

"Sure thing. You must ha passed the minister between here an' the depot."

"He had been there—to marry them?"

"Yep."

"And everyone is up at the ranch, drinking the health of Marten and his bride?"

"Guess that's so."

Power tried to shake off the detaining hand. "It's a pity that I should be an uninvited guest, but it can't be helped," he said savagely. "You see, I was carrying out the millionaire's orders—earning him more millions—and I ought to have taken longer over the job. And, Nancy too! What lie did they tell her about me? I hadn't asked her to be my wife, because it wouldn't have been fair; yet—but she knew! She knew! Let me go, Mac!"

MacGonigal clutched him more tightly. "Ah, say, Derry," he cried thickly, "hev' you forgot you've left me yer mother's address in San Francisco? In case of accidents, you

said. Well, am I ter write an' tell her you killed a man on his weddin' day, and was hanged for it?"

"For the Lord's sake, don't hold me, Mac!"

The storekeeper, with a wisdom born of much experience, took his hand off Power's arm at once, but contrived to edge forward until he was almost facing his distraught friend.

"Now, look-a here!" he said slowly. "This air a mighty bad business; but you cahn't mend it, an' ef you go cavortin' round in a red-eyed temper you'll sure make it wuss. You've lost the gal—never mind how—an' gittin' a strangle hold on Marten won't bring her back. Yer mother's a heap more to you ner that gal—now."

One wonders what hidden treasury of insight into the deeps of human nature MacGonigal was drawing on by thus bringing before the mind's eye of an unhappy son the mother he loved. But there was no gainsaying the soundness and efficiency of his judgment. Only half comprehending his friendly counselor's purpose, Power quivered like a high-spirited horse under the prick of a spur. He put his hands to his face, as if the gesture would close out forever the horrific vision which the memory of that gray-haired woman in San Francisco was beginning to dispel. For the first time in his young life he had felt the lust of slaying, and the instinct of the jungle thrilled through every nerve, till his nails clenched and his teeth bit in a spasm of sheer delirium.

MacGonigal, despite his present load of flesh, must have passed through the fiery furnace himself in other days; for

he recognized the varying phases of the obsession against which Power was fighting.

Hence, he knew when to remain silent, and, again, he knew when to exorcise the demon, once and for all, by the spoken word. It was so still there on that sun-scorched plateau that the mellow whistle of an engine came full-throated from the distant railroad. The lame horse, bothered by the tight bandage which Power had contrived out of a girth, pawed uneasily in his stall. From the reduction works, half a mile away, came the grinding clatter of a mill chewing ore in its steel jaws. These familiar sounds served only to emphasize the brooding solitude of the place. Some imp of mischief seemed to whisper that every man who could be spared from his work, and every woman and child able to walk, was away making merry at the wedding of Hugh Marten and Nancy Willard.

The storekeeper must have heard that malicious prompting, and he combated it most valiantly.

"Guess you'd better come inside, Derry," he said, with quiet sympathy. "You're feelin' mighty bad, an' I allow you hain't touched a squar' meal sence the Lord knows when."

He said the right thing by intuition. The mere fantasy of the implied belief that a quantity of cold meat and pickles, washed down by a pint of Milwaukee lager, would serve as an emollient for raw emotion, restored Power to his right mind. He placed a hand on MacGonigal's shoulder, and the brown eyes which met his friend's no longer glowered with frenzy.

"I'm all right now," he said, in a dull, even voice; for this youngster of twenty-five owned an extra share of that

faculty of self-restraint which is the birthright of every man and woman born and bred on the back-bone of North America. "I took it pretty hard at first, Mac; but I'm not one to cry over spilt milk. You know that, eh? No, I can't eat or drink yet awhile. I took a lunch below here at the depot. Tell me this, will you? They—they'll be leaving by train?"

"Yep. Special saloon kyar on the four-ten east. I reckon you saw it on a sidin', but never suspicioned why it was thar."

"East? New York and Europe, I suppose?"

"Guess that's about the line."

"Then I'll show up here about half-past four. Till then I'll fool round by myself. Don't worry, Mac. I mean that, and no more."

He walked a few yards; but was arrested by a cry:

"Not that-a way, Derry! Any other old trail but that!"

Then Power laughed; but his laughter was the wail of a soul in pain, for he had gone in the direction of the Dolores ranch. He waved a hand, and the gesture was one of much grace and distinction, because Power insensibly carried himself as a born leader of men.

"Just quit worrying, I tell you," he said calmly. "I understand. The boys will escort them to that millionaire saloon. They'll be a lively crowd, of course; but they won't see me, never fear."

Then he strode off, his spurs jingling in rhythm with each long, athletic pace. He headed straight for a narrow cleft in the hill at the back of the store, a cleft locally known as the Gulch, and beyond it, on another plateau sloping to the southeast, lay the Willard homestead.

MacGonigal watched the tall figure until it vanished in the upward curving of the path. Then he rolled the cigar between his heavy lips again until it was securely lodged in the opposite corner of his mouth; but the maneuver was wasted,—the cigar was out,—and such a thing had not happened in twenty years! To mark an unprecedented incident, he threw away an unconsumed half.

“He’s crazy ter have a last peep at Nancy,” he communed. “An’ they’d have made a bully fine pair, too, ef it hadn’t been fer that skunk Marten. Poor Derry! Mighty good job I stopped home, or he’d ha gone plumb to hell.”

Of course, the storekeeper was talking to himself; so he may not have said it, really. But he thought it, and, theologically, that is as bad. Moreover, he might have electrified Bison by his language that night were he gifted with second sight; for he had seen the last of the proud, self-contained yet light-hearted and generous-souled cavalier whom he had known and liked as “Derry” Power. They were fated to meet again many times, under conditions as varying as was ever recorded in a romance of real life; but MacGonigal had to find a place in his heart for a new man, because “Derry” Power was dead—had died there in the open doorway of the store—and a stranger named John Darien Power reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER II THE TERMS

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The Gulch was naked but unashamed, and lay in a drowsy stupor. An easterly breeze, bringing coolness elsewhere, here gathered radiated heat from gaunt walls on which the sun had poured all day, and desiccating gusts beat on Power's face like superheated air gushing from a furnace. Not that the place was an inferno—far from it. On a June day just a year ago two young people had ridden up the rough trail on their way to the Dolores ranch, and the girl had called the man's attention to the exquisite coloring of the rocks and the profusion of flowers which decked every niche and crevice. It may be that they looked then through eyes which would have tinted with rose the dreariest of scenes; but even today, in another couple of hours, when the sun was sinking over the mountain range to the west, the Gulch would assuredly don a marvelous livery of orange, and red, and violet. Each stray clump of stunted herbage which had survived the drought would make a brave show, and rock-mosses which should be moist and green would not spoil the picture because they were withered and brown or black.

But Power, despite a full share of the artist's temperament, was blind to the fierce blending of color which the cliffs offered in the blaze of sunlight. His eyes were peering into his own soul, and he saw naught there but dun despair and icy self-condemnation. For he blamed himself for wrecking two lives. If Nancy Willard could

possibly find happiness as Hugh Marten's wife, he might indeed have cursed the folly of hesitation that lost her; but there would be the salving consciousness that she, at least, would drink of the nectar which wealth can buy in such Homeric drafts. But he was denied the bitter-sweet recompense of altruism. He knew Nancy, and he knew Marten, and he was sure that the fairest wild flower which the Dolores ranch had ever seen would wilt and pine in the exotic atmosphere into which her millionaire husband would plunge her.

Hugh Marten was a man of cold and crafty nature. Success, and a close study of its essentials, had taught him to be studiously polite, bland, even benignant, when lavish display of these qualities suited his purposes. But he could spring with the calculating ferocity of a panther if thereby the object in view might be attained more swiftly and with equal certainty. His upward progress among the mining communities of Colorado, New Mexico, and, more recently, California had been meteoric—once it began. None suspected the means until they saw the end; then angry and disappointed rivals would compare notes, recognizing too late how he had encouraged this group to fight that, only to gorge both when his financial digestion was ready for the meal. He had the faculty, common to most of his type, of surrounding himself with able lieutenants. Thus, John Darien Power came to him with no stronger backing than a college degree in metallurgy and a certificate of proficiency as a mining engineer, credentials which an army of young Americans can produce; but he discerned in this

one young man the master sense of the miner's craft, and promoted him rapidly.

He paid well, too, gave excellent bonuses over and above a high salary—was, in fact, a pioneer among those merchant princes who discovered that a helper is worth what he earns, not what he costs—and Power was actually entitled, through his handling of the Sacramento placer mine, to a sum large enough to warrant marriage with the woman he loved. Not for one instant had the assistant dreamed that his chief was casting a covetous eye on Nancy Willard. She was a girl of twenty, he a man looking ten years older than the thirty-eight years he claimed. Apparently, she was wholly unsuited to become the wife of a financial magnate. She knew nothing of the outer maze of society and politics; while it was whispered that Marten would soon run for state governor, to be followed by a senatorship, and, possibly, by an embassy. To help such ambitious enterprise he needed a skilled partner, a woman of the world, a mate born and reared in the purple, and none imagined, Power least of any, that the vulture would swoop on the pretty little song-bird which had emerged from the broken-down cage of the Dolores ranch. For the place had been well named. Misfortune had dogged its owner's footsteps ever since the death of his wife ten years earlier, and Francis Willard was buffeted by Fate with a kind of persistent malevolence. Neighboring farms had been rich in metals; his was bare. When other ranchers won wealth by raising stock, he hardly held his own against disease, dishonest agents, and unfortunate choice of markets. This present arid season had even taken from him three-fourths of his store cattle.

Power did not know yet how the marriage had been brought to an issue so speedily. In time, no doubt, he would fit together the pieces of the puzzle; but that day his wearied brain refused to act. He might hazard a vague guess that he had been misrepresented, that his absence in California was construed falsely, that the letters he wrote had never reached the girl's hands; but he was conscious now only of a numb feeling of gratitude that he had been saved from killing his usurper, and of an overmastering desire to look once more on Nancy's face before she passed out of his life forever.

He climbed the Gulch to the divide. From that point he could see the long, low buildings of the ranch, lying forlornly in the midst of empty stockyards and scorched grazing land; though the Dolores homestead itself looked neither forlorn nor grief-stricken. A hundred horses, or more, were tethered in the branding yard near the house. Two huge tents had been brought from Denver; the smoke of a field oven showed that some professional caterer was busy; and a great company of men, women, and children was gathered at that very moment near the porch, close to which a traveling carriage was drawn up. A spluttering *feu de joie*, sounding in the still air like the sharp cracking of a whip, announced that the departure of bride and bridegroom was imminent; but the pair of horses attached to the carriage reared and bucked owing to the shouting, and Power had a momentary glimpse of a trim, neat figure, attired in biscuit-colored cloth, and wearing a hat gay with red poppies, standing in the veranda. Close at hand was a tall man dressed in gray tweed.

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Marten were about to start on their honeymoon trip to New York and Europe!

For an instant Power's eyes were blinded with tears; but he brushed away the weakness with a savage gesture, and examined the stark rocks on each side in search of a nook whence he might see without being seen. It was the careless glance of a man maddened with well-nigh intolerable loss; yet, had he known how much depended on his choice of a refuge, even in the very crux of his grief and torment he would have given more heed to it. As it was, he retreated a few paces, until hidden from any chance eye which might rove that way from the ranch, chose a break in the cliff where an expert cragsman could mount forty feet without difficulty, and finally threw himself at full length on a ledge which sloped inward, and was overhung by a mass of red granite, all cracked and blistered by centuries of elemental war. Some stunted tufts of alfalfa grass were growing on the outer lip of the ledge. By taking off his sombrero, and peeping between the dried stems, he could overlook the cavalcade as it passed without anyone being the wiser.

The surface of the rock was so hot as to be almost unbearable; but he was completely oblivious of any sense of personal discomfort. That side of the Gulch was in shadow now, and concealment was all he cared for. He was sufficiently remote from the narrow track to which the horses would necessarily be confined that he ran no risk of yielding to some berserker fit of rage if he encountered Marten's surprised scrutiny, when, perchance, he might have flung an oath at the man who had despoiled him, and

thereby caused distress to the woman he loved. To avoid that calamity, he would have endured worse evils than the blistering rock.

He remembered afterward that while he waited, crouched there like some creature of the wild, his mind was nearly a blank. He was conscious only of a dull torpor of wrath and suffering. He had neither plan nor hope for the future. His profession, which he loved, had suddenly grown irksome. In curiously detached mood, he saw the long procession of days in the mines, in the mart, in the laboratory. And the nights—ah, dear Heaven, the nights! What horror of dreariness would come to him then! He seemed to hear an inner voice bidding him abandon it all, and hide in some remote corner of the world where none knew him, and where every familiar sight and sound would not remind him of Nancy Willard. Nancy Willard—she was Nancy Marten now! He awoke to a dim perception of his surroundings by hearing his teeth grating. And even that trivial thing brought an exquisite pain of memory; for Nancy, reading a book one day, came across a passage in which some disappointed rascal had “ground his teeth in baffled rage,” and he had joined in her shout of glee at the notion that anyone should express emotion so crudely. So, then, a man might really vent his agony in that way! Truly, one lived and learned, and this was certainly an afternoon during which he had acquired an intensive knowledge of life and its vicissitudes.

But now the elfin screeching of excited cowboys, and a continuous fusillade of revolvers fired in the air as their owners raced alongside the lumbering coach, announced

that the wedded pair had begun their long journey. The racket of yells and shooting, heightened by weird sounds extracted from tin trumpets, bugles, and horns, drew rapidly nearer, and, at any other time, Power would have been amused and interested by the sudden eruption of life in the canyon brought about by this unwonted intrusion on its peace. A horse or so, or a drove of steers, these were normal features of existence, and no respectable denizen of the Gulch would allow such trifles to trouble his or her alert wits for a moment. But this tornado of pistol-shots and bellowing was a very different matter, and coyotes, jack-rabbits, a magnificent mountain sheep, a couple of great lizards—in fact, all manner of furred and scaly creatures—deserted lairs where they might have remained in perfect security, scampered frantically to other retreats, and doubtless covered there till dusk.

A coyote raced up the cleft at the top of which Power was hidden; but, ere ever he had seen his enemy, man, he was aware of the hidden danger, and fled to an untainted sanctuary elsewhere. He had hardly vanished before the leading horsemen galloped into sight, and soon a motley but highly picturesque regiment of Westerners filled the trail to its utmost capacity. Both men and horses were at home in this rugged land, and raced over its inequalities at a pace which would have brought down many a rider who thinks he is a devil of a fellow when a mounted policeman gallops after him in the park and cautions him sharply to moderate his own and his steed's exuberance. Even in the joyous abandonment of this typical western crowd there was a species of order; for they took care not to incommode the

coach, a cumbersome vehicle, but the only practicable conveyance of its kind on four wheels which could be trusted to traverse that rock-strewn path. Its heavy body was slung on stout leather bands, and the wheels were low, set well apart, and moving on axles calculated to withstand every sort of jolt and strain. The driver was performing some excellent balancing feats on his perch while he egged on a willing team or exchanged yells with some other choice spirit who tore ahead when the road permitted. Among the throng were not a few women and girls from Bison. They rode astride like their men folk, and their shrill voices mingled cheerfully in the din.

Power was deaf and blind to the pandemonium and its sprites: he had eyes only for the two people seated in the coach. The ancient equipage owned low seats and lofty windows, having been built during a period when ladies' headgear soared well above normal standards; so its occupants were in full view, even at the elevation from which the unseen observer looked down.

Marten, a powerfully built man, of commanding height and good physique, clean-shaven, though the habit was far from general in the West at that date, was evidently exerting himself to soothe and interest his pallid companion. His swarthy face was flushed, and its constant smile was effortless; for he had schooled himself to adapt the mood to the hour. As the personnel of the cavalcade changed with each headlong gallop or sudden halt, he nodded affably to the men, or bowed with some distinction to the women; for Marten knew, or pretended that he knew, every inhabitant of Bison.

His wife knew them too, without any pretense; but she kept her eyes studiously lowered, and, if she spoke, used monosyllables, and those scarcely audible, for Marten had obviously to ask twice what she had said even during the fleeting seconds when the pair were visible to Power. Her features were composed almost to apathy; but the watcher from the cliff, who could read the slightest change of expression in a face as mobile to the passing mood as a mountain tarn to the breeze, felt that she was fulfilling a compact and holding her emotions in tense subjection.

He hoped, he prayed, with frenzied craving of the most high gods, that she might be moved to lift her eyes to his aery; but the petition was denied, and the last memory vouchsafed of her was the sight of her gloved hands clasped on her lap and holding a few sprigs of white heather. Now, it was a refined malignity of Fate which revealed that fact just then, because heather does not grow in Colorado, and the girl had culled her simple little bouquet from a plant which Power had given her. Once, in Denver, he had rendered some slight service to an expatriated Scot, and, when a sister from Perth joined her brother, bringing with her a pot of Highland soil in which bloomed the shrub dear to every Scottish heart, Power was offered a cutting "for luck." Great was Nancy Willard's delight at the gift; for, like the majority of her sex, she yielded to pleasant superstition, and the fame of white heather as a mascot has spread far beyond the bounds of Great Britain.

Power might well have cried aloud in his pain when he discovered that his lost love had thought of him at the moment she was leaving her old home. Perhaps he did utter

some tortured plaint: he never knew, because of what happened the instant after Nancy and her spray of heather were reft from his straining vision.

One-thumb Jake, who had loitered at the ranch for a farewell drink, rode up at a terrific pace, pulled his bronco on to its haunches alongside the coach, and by way of salute, fired three shots from a revolver as quickly as finger could press trigger.

The first bullet sang through the air not more than an inch above Power's forehead. He recalled afterward a slight stirring of his hair caused by the passing of the missile, which spat viciously against the wall of rock some ten feet above the ledge. The next two bullets struck higher, and their impact evidently disturbed the equipoise of a mass of stone already disintegrated by frost, because more than a ton of débris crashed down, pinning Power to the ledge and nearly pounding the life out of him. The resultant cloud of dust probably helped to render him unconscious. At any rate, he lay there without word or movement, and, if he were dead, his bones might have rested many a year in that strange tomb unless the curiosity of some passerby was aroused by a flock of quarreling vultures—a spectacle so common in cattle-land that the wayfarer does not deviate a hand's breadth from his path because of it.

Nancy heard the thunder of the falling rocks, and looked out. The dust pall told her exactly what had occurred, though the jubilant congratulation of the shooter by the driver would have explained matters in any event.

“Good fer you, Jake!” he shouted. “Gosh! when you're fed up on cowpunchin' you kin go minin' wid a gun!”