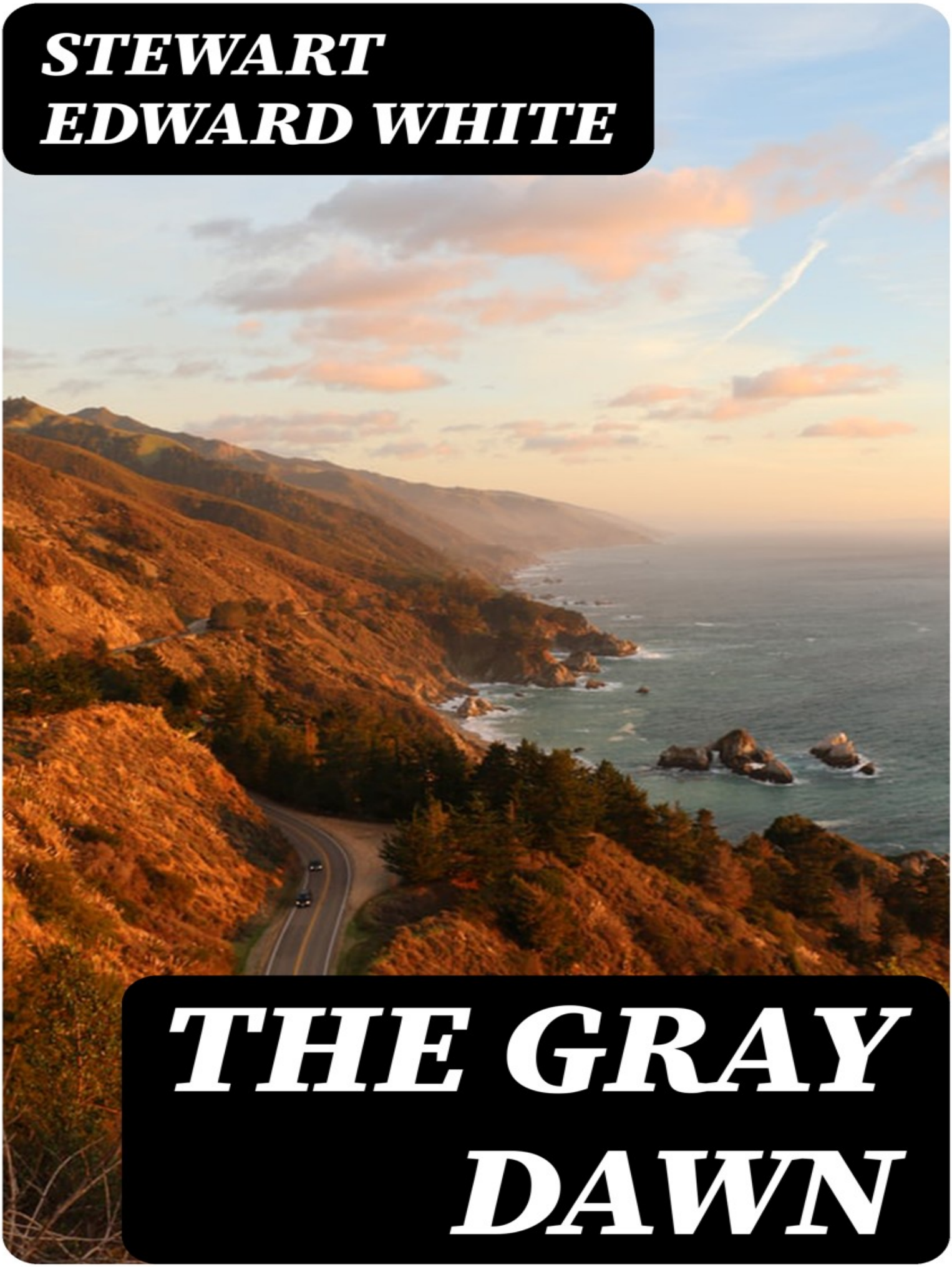
STEWART EDWARD WHITE



THE GRAY DAWN

Stewart Edward White

The Gray Dawn

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I

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On the veranda of the Bella Union Hotel, San Francisco, a man sat enjoying his morning pipe. The Bella Union overlooked the Plaza of that day, a dusty, unkempt, open space, later to be swept and graded and dignified into Portsmouth Square. The man was at the younger fringe of middle life. He was dressed neatly and carefully in the fashionable costume of the time, which was the year of grace 1852. As to countenance, he was square and solid; as to physique, he was the same; as to expression, he inclined toward the quietly humorous; in general he would strike the observer as deliberately, philosophically competent. A large pair of steelbound spectacles sat halfway down his nose. Sometimes he read his paper through their lenses; and sometimes, forgetting, he read over the tops of their bows. The newspaper he held was an extraordinary document. It consisted of four large pages. The outside page was filled solidly with short eight or ten line advertisements; the second page grudgingly vouchsafed a single column of news items; the third page warmed to a column of editorial and another of news; all the rest of the space on these and the entire fourth page was again crowded close with the short advertisements. They told of the arrival of ships, the consignment of goods, the movements of real estate, the

sales of stock, but mainly of auctions. The man paid little attention to the scanty news, and none at all to the editorials. His name was John Sherwood, and he was a powerful and respected public gambler.

The approach across the Plaza of a group of men caused him to lay aside his paper, and with it his spectacles. The doffing of the latter strangely changed his whole expression. The philosophical middle-aged quietude fell from him. He became younger, keener, more alert. It was as though he had removed a disguise.

The group approaching were all young men, and all dressed in the height of fashion. At that rather picturesque time this implied the flat-brimmed beaver hat; the long swallowtail, or skirted coat; the tight "pantaloons"; varicoloured, splendid, low-cut waistcoats of satin, of velvet, or of brocade; high wing collars; varnished boots; many sparkling, studs and cravat pins; rather longish hair; and whiskers cut close to the cheek or curling luxuriantly under the chin. They were prosperous, well-fed, arrogant-looking youths, carrying their crests high, the light of questing recklessness in their eyes, ready to laugh, drink, or fight with anybody. At sight of Sherwood they waved friendly hands, and canes, and veered in his direction.

"Yo're just the man we are looking for!" cried a tall, dark, graceful young fellow, "We are all 'specially needful of wisdom. The drinks are on some one, and we cain't decide who."

John Sherwood, his keen eyes twinkling, set his chair down on four legs.

"State your case, Cal," he said.

Cal waved a graceful hand at a stout, burly, red-faced man whose thick blunt fingers, square blue jowl, and tilted cigar gave the flavour of the professional politician. "John Webb, here-excuse *me*, Sheriff John Webb-presumin' on the fact that he has been to the mines, and that he came here in '49, arrogates to himself the exclusive lyin' privileges, of this assemblage."

"Pretty large order," commented Sherwood.

"_Pre_cisely," agreed Cal, "and that's why the drinks are on him!"

But Sheriff Webb, who had been chuckling cavernously inside his bulky frame, spoke up in a harsh and husky voice: "I told them an innocent experience of mine, and they try to hold me up for drinks. I don't object to giving them a reasonable amount of drinks—what *I* call reasonable," he added hastily, "but I object to being held up."

"He says he used to cook," put in a small, alert, nervous, rather flashily dressed individual named Rowlee, editor of the *Bugle*.

"I did!" stoutly asseverated Webb.

"And that he baked a loaf of bread so hard nobody could eat it."

"Sounds perfectly reasonable," said Sherwood.

"And that nobody could *break* it," Rowlee went on.

"I have no difficulty in believing that," said Sherwood judicially.

"Your case is mighty weak yet, Cal."

"But he claims it was so hard that they used it for a grindstone."

"I did not!" disclaimed Webb indignantly.

An accusing groan met this statement.

"I tell you I didn't say anything of the kind," roared Webb, his bull voice overtopping them all.

"Well, what did you say, then?" challenged Calhoun Bennett.

"I said we tried to use her as a grindstone," said Webb, "but it didn't work."

"Weak case, boys; weak case," said Sherwood.

The little group, their eyes wide, their nostrils distended, waited accusingly for Webb to proceed. After an interval, the sheriff, staring critically at the lighted end of his cigar, went on in a drawling voice:

"Yes, we, couldn't get a hole through her to hang her axle on. We blunted all our drills. Every Sunday we'd try a new scheme. Finally we laid her flat under a tree and rigged a lightnin' rod down to the centre of her. No use. She tore that lightning all to pieces."

He looked up at them with a limpid, innocent eye, to catch John
Sherwood gazing at him accusingly.

"John Webb," said he "you forget that I came out here in, '48. On your honour, do you expect *me* to believe that yarn?"

"Well," said Webb, gazing again at his cigar end, "no—really I don't. The fact is," he went on with a perfectly solemn air of confidence, "the fact is, I've lived out here so long and told so many damn lies that now without some help I don't know when to believe myself."

"Do we get that drink?" insisted Calhoun Bennett.

"Oh, Lord, yes, you always get a drink."

"Well, come on and *get* it then—you, too, of course, Mr. Sherwood."

The gambler arose, and began leisurely to fold his paper and to put away his spectacles.

"I see you got Mex Ryan off, Cal," he observed. "You either had extraordinary luck, or you're a mighty fine lawyer. Looked like a clear case to me. He just naturally went in and beat Rucker half to death in his own store. How did you do it?"

"I assure yo' it was no sinecure," laughed the tall, dark youth. "I earned my fee."

"Yes," grumbled Webb, "but he got six months—and I got to take care of him. Cluttering up my jail with dirty beasts like Mex Ryan! Could just as easy have turned him loose!"

"That would have been a little too much!" smiled Bennett. "It was takin' some risk to let him off as easy as we did. It isn't so long since the Vigilantes."

"Oh, hell, we can handle that sort of trash now," snorted Webb.

"Who was backing Mex, anyway?" asked Rowlee curiously.

"Better ask who had it in for Rucker," suggested the fourth member of the group, a man who had not heretofore spoken. This was Dick Blatchford, a round-faced, rather corpulent, rather silent though jovial-looking individual, with a calculating and humorous eye. He was magnificently apparelled, but rather untidy.

"Well, I do ask it," said Rowlee.

But to this he got no response.

"Come on, ain't you got that valuable paper folded up yet?" rumbled
Webb to Sherwood.

They all turned down the high-pillared veranda, toward the bar, talking idly and facetiously of last night's wine and this morning's head. A door opened at their very elbow, and in it a woman appeared.

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She was a slender woman, of medium height, with a small, well-poised head, on which the hair lay smooth and glossy. Her age was somewhere between thirty and thirty-five years. A stranger would have been first of all impressed by the imperious carriage of her head and shoulders, the repose of her attitude. Become a friend or a longer acquaintance, he would have noticed more particularly her wide low brow, her steady gray eyes and her grave but humorous lips. But inevitably he would have gone back at last to her more general impression. Ben Sansome, the only man in town who did nothing, made society and dress a profession and the judgment of women a religion, had long since summed her up: "She carries her head charmingly."

This poised, wise serenity of carriage was well set off by the costume of the early fifties—a low collar, above which her neck rose like a flower stem; flowing sleeves; full skirts

with many silken petticoats that whispered and rustled; low sandalled shoes, their ties crossed and recrossed around white slender ankles. A cameo locket, hung on a heavy gold chain, rose and fell with her breast; a cameo brooch pinned together the folds of her bodice; massive and wide bracelets of gold clasped her wrists and vastly set off her rounded, slender forearms.

She stood quite motionless in the doorway, nodding with a little smile in response to the men's sweeping salutes.

"You will excuse me gentlemen, I am sure," said Sherwood formally, and instantly turned aside.

The woman in the doorway thereupon preceded him down a narrow, bare, unlighted hallway, opened another door, and entered a room. Sherwood followed, closing the door after him.

"Want something, Patsy?" he inquired.

The room was obviously one of the best of the Bella Union. That is to say, it was fairly large, the morning sun streamed in through its two windows, and it contained a small iron stove. In all other respects it differed quite from any other hotel room in the San Francisco of that time. A heavy carpet covered the floor, the upholstery was of leather or tapestry, wall paper adorned the walls, a large table supported a bronze lamp and numerous books and papers, a canary, in a brass cage, hung in the sunshine of one of the windows, flitted from perch to perch, occasionally uttering a few liquid notes under its breath.

"Just a little change, Jack, if you have some with you," said the woman. Her speaking voice was rich and low.

Sherwood thrust a forefinger into his waistcoat pocket, and produced one of the hexagonal slugs of gold current at that time.

"Oh, not so much!" she protested.

"All I've got. What are you up to to-day, Patsy?"

"I thought of going down to Yet Lee's—unless there is something better to do."

"Doesn't sound inspiring. Did you go to that fair or bazaar thing yesterday?"

She smiled with her lips, but her eyes darkened.

"Yes, I went. It was not altogether enjoyable. I doubt if I'll try that sort of thing again."

Sherwood's eye suddenly became cold and dangerous.

"If they didn't treat you right—"

She smiled, genuinely this time, at his sudden truculence.

"They didn't mob me," she rejoined equably, "and, anyway, I suppose it is to be expected."

"It's that cat of Morrell's," he surmised.

"Oh, she—and others. I ought not to have spoken of it, Jack. It's really beneath the contempt of sensible people."

"I'll get after Morrell, if he doesn't make that woman behave," said
Sherwood, without attention to her last speech.

She smiled at him again, entirely calm and reasonable.

"And what good would it do to get after Morrell?" she asked. "Mrs. Morrell only stands for what most of them feel. I don't care, anyway. I get along splendidly without them." She sauntered over to the window, where she began idly to poke one finger at the canary.

"For the life of me, Patsy," confessed Sherwood, "I can't see that they're an inspiring lot, anyway. From what little I've seen of them, they haven't more than an idea apiece. They'd bore me to death in a week."

"I know that. They'd bore me, too. Don't talk about them. When do they expect the *Panama*—do you know?"

But with masculine persistence he refused to abandon the topic.

"I must confess I don't see the point," he insisted. "You've got more brains than the whole lot of them together, you've got more sense, you're a lot better looking"—he surveyed her, standing in the full light by the canary's cage, her little glossy head thrown back, her pink lips pouted teasingly at the charmed and agitated bird, her fine clear features profiled in the gold of the sunshine—"and you're a thoroughbred, egad, which most of them are not."

"Oh, thank you, kind sir." She threw him a humourous glance. "But of course that is not the point."

"Oh, isn't it? Well, perhaps you'll tell me the point."

She left the canary and came to face him.

"I'm not respectable," she said.

At the word he exploded.

"Respectable? What are you talking about? You talk as though—as though we weren't married, egad!"

"Well, Jack," she replied, a faint mocking smile curving the corners of her mouth, "when it comes to that, we *did* elope, you'll have to acknowledge. And we weren't married for quite a long time afterward."

"We got married as soon as we could, didn't we?" he cried indignantly. "Was it our fault that we didn't get married

sooner? And what difference did it make, anyway?"

"Now don't get all worked up," she chided. "I'm just telling you why, in the eyes of some of these people, I'm not 'respectable.' You asked me, you know."

"Go on," he conceded to this last.

"Well, we ran away and weren't married. That's item one. Then perhaps you've forgotten that I sat on lookout for some of your games in the early days in the mining camps?"

"Forgotten?" said Sherwood, the light of reminiscence springing to his eyes.

The same light had come into hers.

"Will you *ever* forget," she murmured, "the camps by the summer streams, the log towns, the lights, the smoke, the freedom—the comradeship—"

"Homesick for the old rough days?" he teased.

"Kind of," she confessed. "But it wasn't 'respectable'—a—well, a *fairly* good-looking woman in a miner's saloon."

He flared again.

"Do you mean to tell me they dare say—"

"They dare say anything—behind our backs," she said, with cool contempt. "It's all drivelling nonsense. I care nothing about it. But you asked me. Don't bother your head about it. Have you anything to suggest doing this morning, instead of Yet Lee's?" She turned away from him toward the door leading into another room. "I'll get my hat," she said over her shoulder.

"Look here, Patsy," said Sherwood, rather grimly, "if you want to get in with that lot, you shall."

She stopped at this, and turned square around.

"If I do—when I do—I will," she replied. "But, John Sherwood, you mustn't interfere—never in the world! Promise!" She stood there, almost menacing in her insistence, evidently resolved to nip this particularly masculine resolution in the bud.

"Egad, Patsy," cried Sherwood, "you are certainly a raving beauty!"

He covered the ground between them in two strides, and crushed her in his arms. She threw her head back for his kiss.

A knock sounded, and almost immediately a very black, very bullet-headed young negro thrust his head in at the door.

"Sam," said Sherwood deliberately, "some day I'm going to kill you!"

"Yes, sah! yes, sah!" agreed Sam heartily.

"Well, what the devil do you want?"

"Th' *Panama* done been, signalled; yes, sah!" said the negro, but without following his head through the door.

"Well, what the devil do you suppose I care, you black limb?" roared
Sherwood, "and what do you mean coming in here before you're told?"

"Yes, sah! yes, sah, dat's right," ducked Sam, "Shell I awdah the team, sah?"

"I suppose we might as well go see her docked. Would you like it?" he asked his wife.

"I'd love it."

"Then get the team. And some day I'm going to kill you."

III

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Mrs. Sherwood prepared herself first of all by powdering her nose. This simple operation, could it have been seen by the "respectable" members of the community, would in itself have branded her as "fast," In those days cosmetics of any sort were by most considered inventions of the devil. It took extraordinary firmness of character even to protect one's self against sunburn by anything more artificial than the shadow of a hat or a parasol. Then she assumed a fascinating little round hat that fitted well down over her small head. This, innocent of pins, was held on by an elastic at the back. A ribbon, hanging down directly in front, could be utilized to steady it in a breeze.

"All ready," she announced, picking up a tiny parasol, about big enough for a modern doll. "You may carry my mantle."

Near the foot of the veranda steps waited Sam at the heads of a pair of beautiful, slim, satiny horses. Their bay coats had been groomed until they rippled and sparkled with every movement of the muscles beneath. Wide red-lined nostrils softly expanded and contracted with a restrained eagerness; and soft eyes rolled in the direction of the Sherwoods—keen, lithe, nervous, high-strung creatures, gently stamping little hoofs, impatiently tossing dainty heads, but nevertheless making no movement that would stir the vehicle that stood "cramped" at the steps. Their harness carried no blinders; their tails, undocked, swept the ground; but their heads were pulled into the air by the old

stupid overhead check reins until their noses pointed almost straight ahead. It gave them rather a haughty air.

Sherwood stepped in first, took the reins in one hand, and offered his other hand to his wife. Sam instantly left the horses' heads to hold a wicker contrivance against the arc of the wheels. This was to protect skirts from dusty tires. Mrs. Sherwood settled as gracefully to her place as a butterfly on its flower. Sam snatched away the wicker guards. Sherwood spoke to the horses. With a purring little snort they moved smoothly away. The gossamerlike wheels threw the light from their swift spokes. Sam, half choked by the swirl of dust, gazed after them. Sherwood, leaning slightly forward against the first eagerness of the animals, showed a strong, competent, arresting figure, with his beaver hat, his keen grim face, his snow-white linen, and the blue of his brass-buttoned-coat. The beautiful horses were stepping as one, a delight to the eye, making nothing whatever of the frail vehicle at their heels. But Sam's eye lingered longest on the small stately figure of his mistress. She sat very straight, her head high, the little parasol poised against the sun, the other hand clasping the hat ribbon.

"Dem's quality foh sure!" said Sam with conviction.

Sherwood drove rapidly around the edge of the Plaza and, so into Kearney Street. From here to the water front were by now many fireproof brick and stone structures, with double doors and iron shatters, like fortresses. So much had San Francisco learned from her five disastrous fires. The stone had come from China, the brick also from overseas. Down side streets one caught glimpses of huge warehouses —already in this year of 1852 men talked of the open-air

auctions of three years before as of something in history inconceivably remote. The streets, where formerly mule teams had literally been drowned in mud, now were covered with planking. This made a fine resounding pavement. Horses' hoofs went merrily *klop, klop, klop*, and the wheels rumbled a dull undertone. San Francisco had been very proud of this pavement when it was new. She was very grateful for it even now, for in the upper part of town the mud and dust were still something awful. Unfortunately the planks were beginning to wear out in places; and a city government, trying to give the least possible for its taxes, had made no repairs.

There were many holes, large or small: jagged, splintered, ugly holes going down to indeterminate blackness either of depth or mud. Private philanthropists had fenced or covered these. Private facetiousness had labelled most of them with signboards. These were rough pictures of disaster painted from the marking pot, and various screeds—"Head of Navigation," "No Bottom," "Horse and Dray Lost Here," "Take Soundings," "Storage, Inquire Below," "Good Fishing for Teal," and the like.

Among these obstructions Sherwood guided his team skilfully, dodging not only them, but other vehicles darting or crawling in the same direction. There were no rules of the road. Omnibuses careered along, every window rattling loudly; drays creaked and strained, their horses' hoofs slipping against wet planks; horsemen threaded their way; nondescript delivery wagons tried to outrattle the omnibuses. The din was something extraordinary—hoofs drumming, wheels rumbling, oaths and shouts, and from the

sidewalks the blare and bray of brass bands in front of the various auction shops. Newsboys and bootblacks darted in all directions, shouting raucously as they do to-day. Cigar boys, an institution of the time, added to the hubbub. Everybody was going in the same direction, some sauntering with an air of leisure, some hurrying as though their fortunes were at stake.

A wild shriek arose, and everybody made room for the steam sand shovel on its way to dump the sand hills into the bay. It was called the "steam paddy" to distinguish it from the "hand paddy"—out of Cork or Dublin. It rumbled by on its track, very much like juggernaut in its calm indifference as to how many it ran over. Sherwood's horses looked at it nervously askance; but he spoke to them, and though they trembled they stood.

Now they debouched on the Central Wharf, and the sound of the hoofs and the wheels changed its tone. Central Wharf extended a full mile into the bay. It was lined on either side its narrow roadway by small shacks, in which were offered fowls, fish, vegetables, candy, refreshments. Some of them were tiny saloons or gambling houses. But by far the majority were the cubicles where the Jewish slop sellers displayed their wares. Men returning from the mines here landed, and here replenished their wardrobes. Everything was exposed to view outside, like clothes hung out after a rain.

The narrow way between this long row of shops was crowded almost dangerously. Magnificent dray horses, with long hair on the fetlocks above their big heavy hoofs, bridling in conscious pride of silver-mounted harness and

curled or braided manes, rose above the ruck as their ancestors, the warhorses, must have risen in medieval battle. The crowd parted before them and closed in behind them. Here and there, too, a horseman could be seen—with a little cleared space at his heels. Or a private calash picking its way circumspectly.

From her point of vantage on the elevated seat Mrs. Sherwood could see over the heads of people. She sat very quietly, her body upright, but in the poised repose characteristic of her. Many admiring glances were directed at her. She seemed to be unconscious of them. Nevertheless, nothing escaped her. She saw, and appreciated and enjoyed, every phase of that heterogeneous crowd—miners in their exaggeratedly rough clothes, brocaded or cotton clad Chinese, gorgeous Spaniards or Chileños, drunken men, sober men, excited men, empty cans or cases kicking around underfoot, frantic runners for hotels or steamboats trying to push their way by, newsboys and cigar boys darting about and miraculously worming their way through impenetrable places. Atop a portable pair of steps a pale, well-dressed young man was playing thimble-rig on his knees with a gilt pea. From an upturned keg a preacher was exhorting. And occasionally, through gaps between the shacks, she caught glimpses of blue water; or of ships at anchor; or, more often, of the tall pile drivers whose hammers went steadily up and down.

Sherwood guided his glossy team and light spidery vehicle with the greatest delicacy and skill. He was wholly absorbed in his task. Suddenly up ahead a wild turmoil broke out. People crowded to right and left, clambering,

shouting, screaming. A runaway horse hitched to a light buggy came careering down the way.

A collision seemed inevitable. Sherwood turned his horses' heads directly at an open shop front. They hesitated, their small pointed ears working nervously. Sherwood spoke to them. They moved forward, quivering, picking their way daintily. Sherwood spoke again. They stopped. The runaway hurtled by, missing the tail of the buggy by two feet. A moment later a grand crash marked the end of its career farther down the line. Again Sherwood spoke to his horses, and exerted the slightest pressure on the reins. Daintily, slowly, their ears twitching back and forth, their fine eyes rolling, they backed out of the opening.

Throughout all this exciting little incident the woman had not altered her pose nor the expression of her face. Her head high, her eye ruminative, she had looked on it all as one quite detached from possible consequences. The little parasol did not change its angle. Only, quite deliberately, she had relinquished the ribbon by which she held on her hat, and had placed her slender hand steadyingly on the side of the vehicle.

The bystanders, already leaping down from their places of refuge and again crowding the narrow way, directed admiring eyes toward the beautiful, nervous, docile horses, the calm and dominating man, and the poised, dainty creature at his side. One drunken individual cheered her personally. At this a faint shell pink appeared in her cheeks, though she gave no other sign that she had heard. Sherwood glanced down at her, amused.

But now emerged the Jew slop seller, very voluble. He had darted like a rat to some mysterious inner recess of his burrow; but now he was out again filling the air with lamentations, claims, appeals for justice. Sherwood did not even glance toward him; but in the very act of tooling his horses into the roadway tossed the man some silver. Immediately, with shouts and cheers and laughter, the hoodlums nearby began a scramble.

The end of the long wharf widened to a great square, free of all buildings but a sort of warehouse near one end. Here a rope divided off a landing space. Close to the rope the multitude crowded, ready for its entertainment. Here also stood in stately grandeur the three livery hacks of which San Francisco boasted. They were magnificent affairs, the like of which has never elsewhere been seen plying for public hire, brightly painted, highly varnished, lined with silks, trimmed with solid silver. The harnesses were heavily mounted with the same metal. On their boxes sat fashionable creatures, dressed, not in livery, but throughout in the very latest of the late styles, shod with varnished leather, gloved with softest kid. Sherwood drove skilfully to the very edge of the roped space, pushing aside the crowd on foot. They growled at him savagely. He paid no attention to them, and they gave way. The buggy came to a stop. The horses, tossing their heads, rolling their eyes, stamping their little hoofs, nevertheless stood without need of further attention.

Now the brass bands blared with a sudden overwhelming blast of sound, the crowd cheered noisily; the runners for the hotels began to bark like a pack of dogs. With a vast

turmoil of paddle wheels, swirling of white and green waters, bellowing of speaking trumpets, throwing of handlines and scurrying of deck hands and dock hands, the *Panama* came to rest. After considerable delay the gangplank was placed. The passengers began to disembark, facing the din much as they would have faced the buffeting of a strong wind. This was the cream of the entertainment for which the crowd had gathered; for which, indeed, the Sherwoods had made their excursion. Each individual received his meed of comment, sometimes audible and by no means always flattering. Certainly in variety both of character and of circumstance they offered plenty of material. From wild, half-civilized denizens of Louisiana's canebrakes, clinging closely to their little bundles and their long rifles, to the most polished exquisites of fashion they offered all grades and intermediates. Some of them looked rather bewildered. Some seemed to know just what to do and where to go. Most dove into the crowd with the apparent idea of losing their identity as soon as possible. The three magnificent hacks were filled, and managed, with much plunging and excitement, to plow a way through the crowd and so depart. Amusing things happened to which the Sherwoods called each other's attention. Thus a man, burdened with a single valise, ducked under the ropes near them. A paper boy happened to be standing near. The passenger offered the boy a fifty-cent piece.

"Here, boy," said he, "just carry this valise for me."

The paper boy gravely contemplated the fifty cents, dove into his pocket, and produced another.

"Here, man," said he, handing them both to the traveller, "take this and carry it yourself."

One by one the omnibuses filled and departed. The stream of passengers down the gangplank had ceased. The crowd began to thin. Sherwood gathered his reins to go. Mrs. Sherwood suddenly laid her hand on his forearm.

"Oh, the poor thing!" she cried, her voice thrilling with compassion.

A young man and a steward were supporting a girl down the gangplank. Evidently she was very weak and ill. Her face was chalky white, with dark rings under the eyes, her lips were pale, and she leaned heavily on the men. Although she could not have heard Mrs. Sherwood's exclamation of pity, she happened to look up at that instant, revealing a pair of large, dark, and appealing eyes. Her figure, too, dressed in a plain travelling dress, strikingly simple but bearing the unmistakable mark of distinction, was appealing; as were her exquisite, smooth baby skin and the downward drooping, almost childlike, curves of her lips. The inequalities of the ribbed gangplank were sufficient to cause her to stumble.

"She is very weak," commented Mrs. Sherwood.

"She is—or would be—remarkably pretty," added Sherwood. "I wonder what ails her."

Arrived at the foot of the gangplank the young man removed his hat with an air of perplexity, and looked about him. He was of the rather florid, always boyish type; and the removal of his hat had revealed a mat of close-curling brown hair, like a cap over his well-shaped head. The normal expression of his face was probably quizzically humorous,

for already the little lines of habitual half laughter were sketched about his eyes.

"A plunger," said John Sherwood to himself, out of his knowledge of men; then as the young man glanced directly toward him, disclosing the colour and expression of his eyes, "a plunger in something," he amended, revising his first impression.

But now the humorous element was quite in abeyance, and a faint dismay had taken its place. One arm supporting the drooping girl, he was looking up and down the wharf. Not a vehicle remained save the heavy drays already backing up to receive their loads of freight. The dock hands had dropped and were coiling the line that had separated the crowd from the landing stage.

With another exclamation the woman in the carriage rose, and before Sherwood could make a move to assist her, had poised on the rim of the wheel and leaped lightly to the dock. Like a thistledown she floated to the little group at the foot of the gangplank. The steward instantly gave way to her evident intention. She passed her arm around the girl's waist. The three moved slowly toward the buggy, Mrs. Sherwood, her head bent charmingly forward, murmuring compassionate, broken, little phrases, supporting the newcomer's reviving footsteps.

Sherwood, a faint, fond amusement lurking in the depths of his eyes, quietly cramped the wheels of the buggy.

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A half hour later the two men, having deposited the women safely in the Sherwoods' rooms at the Bella Union, and having been unceremoniously dismissed by Mrs. Sherwood, strolled together to the veranda. They had not, until now, had a chance to exchange six words.

The newcomer, who announced himself as Milton Keith from Baltimore, proved to have a likable and engaging personality. He was bubbling with interest and enthusiasm; and these qualities, provided they are backed solidly, are always prepossessing. Sherwood, quietly studying him, concluded that such was the case. His jaw and mouth were set in firm lines; his eye, while dancing and mischievous, had depths of capability and reserves of forcefulness. But Sherwood was, by inclination and by the necessities of his profession, a close observer of men. Another, less practised, might have seen here merely an eager, rather talkative, apparently volatile, very friendly, quite unreserved young man of twenty-five. Any one, analytical or otherwise, could not have avoided feeling the attractive force of the youth's personality, the friendly quality that is nine tenths individual magnetism and one tenth the cast of mind that initially takes for granted the other man's friendliness.

At the moment Keith was boyishly avid for the sights of the new city. In these modern days of long journeys, a place so remote as San Francisco, in the most commonplace of circumstances, gathers to its reputation something of the fabulous. How much more true then of a city built from sand

dunes in four years; five times swept by fire, yet rising again and better before its ashes were extinct; the resort of all the picturesque, unknown races of the earth—the Chinese, the Chileño, the Mexican, the Spanish, the Islander, the Moor, the Turk—not to speak of ordinary foreigners from Russia, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the out-of-the-way corners of Europe; the haunt of the wild and striking individuals of all these races. "Sydney ducks" from the criminal colonies; "shoulder strikers" direct from the tough wards of New York; long, lean, fever-haunted crackers from the Georgia mountains or the Louisiana canebrakes; Pike County desperadoes; long-haired men from the trapping countries; hard-fisted, sardonic state of Maine men fresh from their rivers; and Indian fighters from the Western Reserve; grasping, shrewd commercial Yankees; fire-eating Southern politicians; lawyers, doctors, merchants, chiefs, and thiefs, the well-educated and the ignorant, the high-minded and the scalawags, all dumped down together on a sand hill to work out their destinies; a city whose precedents, whose morals, whose laws, were made or adapted on the spot; where might in some form or another —revolver, money, influence—made its only right; whose history ranged in three years the gamut of human passion, strife, and development; whose background was the fabled El Dorado whence the gold in unending floods poured through its sluices. To the outside world tales of these things had come. They did not lose in the journey. The vast loom of actual occurrences rose above the horizon like mirages. Names and events borrowed a half-legendary quality from distances, as elsewhere from time. Keith had heard of

Coleman, of Terry, of Broderick, Brannan, Gwin, Geary, as he had heard of the worthies of ancient history; he had visualized the fabled splendours of San Francisco's great gambling houses, of the excitements of her fervid, fevered life, as he might have visualized the magnificences of pagan Rome; he had listened to tales of her street brawls, her vast projects, the buccaneering raids of her big men, her Vigilance Committee of the year before, as he would have listened to the stories of one of Napoleon's veterans. Now, by the simple process of a voyage that had seemed literally interminable but now was past, he had landed in the very midst of fable. It was like dying, he told Sherwood eagerly, like going irretrievably to a new planet. All his old world now seemed as remote, as insubstantial, as phantomlike, as this had seemed.

"Even yet I can't believe it's all so," he cried, walking excitedly back and forth, and waving an extinct cigar. "I've got to see it, touch it! Why, I know it all in advance. That must be where the Jenny Lind Theatre stood—before the fire—just opposite? I thought so! And the bay used to come up to Montgomery Street, only a block down! You see, I know it all! And when we came in, and I saw all those idle ships lying at anchor, just as they have lain since their crews deserted them in '49 to go to the mines—and I know why they haven't been used since, why they will continue to lie there at anchor until they rot or sink—"

"Do you?" said Sherwood, who was vastly amused and greatly taken by this fresh enthusiasm.

"Yes, the clipper ships!" Keith swept on. "The first cargoes in this new market make the money—the fastest clippers—

poor old hulks—but you brought in the argonauts!"

So he ran on, venting his impatience, so plainly divided between his sense of duty in staying near his wife and his great desire to slip the leash, that Sherwood smiled to himself. Once again he mentioned Coleman and the Vigilantes of '51.

"I suppose he's around here? I may see him?"

"Oh, yes," said Sherwood, "you'll see him. But if you would accept a bit of advice, go slow. You must remember that such a movement makes enemies, arouses opposition. A great many excellent people—whom you will know—are a little doubtful about all that."

Keith mentioned other names.

"I know them all. They are among the most influential members of the bar." He glanced at a large watch. "Just at this hour we might find them at the Monumental engine house. What do you say?"

"I should like nothing better!" cried Keith.

"Your wife's illness is not likely to require immediate attendance?" suggested Sherwood inquiringly.

"She's only seasick—horrible voyage—she's always under the weather on shipboard—three weeks of it from Panama—Nan's as strong as a horse," replied Keith, with obvious impatience.

They walked across the Plaza to the Monumental fire engine house, a square brick structure of two stories, with wide folding doors, and a bell cupola apart. Keith paused to admire the engine. It was of the type usual in those days, consisting of a waterbox with inlet and outlet connections, a pump atop, and parallel pump rails on either side, by the