



IN THE COVER.

Across my face a gentle wind is blowing,
Bearing my fancies far—where once
again
In memory I see the wild flowers growing
Beneath the hedgerows of an English lane.

A tiny path, half-hidden in the grasses,
Leads down the hillside to a fairy dell,
Where hyacinths in heaven-tinted masses
Ring with music from each nodding bell.

Forget-me-nots in sweet profusion mingle
Their tender blue with cowslip's yellow gold,
And in each nook and crevice of the dingle,
The early primrose rises from the mold.

A laughing stream, touched by the sun
To splendor,
Runs through the bracken like a jeweled thread;
And from afar comes, clear and sweet and tender,
"Cuck-o'-ooh!" by all the breezes sped.

I long for this—as maiden for her lover—
To stand where oft in childhood's days I stood,
To gather posies in the dear old cover—
Sweet wild-flower posies from an English wood.
—Evelyn Simms, in Youth's Companion.

GAMBLING WITH FATE

By WILLIAM WALLACE COOK

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CHAPTER I.

DARREL RIDES TO SANDY BAR.

When Nate Darrel went to Sandy Bar he knew he took his life in his hand. Murgatroyd was there and Murgatroyd had sworn to shoot him on sight.

The element of chance, however, entered intimately into every act of Darrel's career. It was guide, counselor and friend for him and formed the basis of his rule of conduct.

Never since he could remember had he wavered between the Known and the Unknown. Luck was the single known factor in his equation and he yielded himself blindly into the hands of fate, always expecting good fortune yet always prepared for the worst.

The feud between Murgatroyd and himself was bitter and of long standing; and Darrel, while caring nothing for bridges in front, was careful to burn those behind. An enemy in the rear is a fox in ambush and it was well that this Murgatroyd affair should be settled once for all.

Thus Darrel reasoned. After studying the aspect of his bright particular star he took team and buckboard, one fine morning, and traveled out of Anaconda by the Blackfoot trail.

Anaconda knew little of the astute, gentlemanly and well dressed young man. He had been in town over night and had essayed a game in the "Colonel's Own," causing a ripple of excitement by showing a discard of two aces and drawing a pair of knaves that "filled" his hand and won him the table stakes.

"It's foolish to tempt fate in that way," said a veteran blackleg who stood near watching the play.

"We make our own fate, my friend," replied Darrel in the easy, well bred way that was always his; "it is not fate that makes or mars us. Be translucent and apprehensive and destiny turns and rends you; lay hold of it with your bare hands and you make it your slave. Fortune crawls at the feet of a daring man but hates and spurns a coward."

The habits of the "Colonel's Own" listened wonderingly. Such philosophy was over the heads of most of them, but the veteran blackleg was impressed.

"I have heard of but one man," said he "who invariably discards aces when he gets a pair. That man is Nate Darrel of San Francisco."

The veteran might have added that the play was known as "Darrel's discard;" and that the man who had originated it had quit college to follow the cards and prove his startling theories—a philosopher of the devils picture books, courting ruin over the green cloth that he might work out a hypothesis of doubtful value.

Darrel had no intention of revealing himself. He was tarrying at Anaconda enroute to Sandy Bar and when his eccentric orbit crossed Murgatroyd's he wished it to be sudden and unexpected.

It chanced, nevertheless, that Darrel had overplayed his hand. That night the veteran gambler dispatched a mounted man to Sandy Bar with a notice to his friend Murgatroyd that Nate Darrel was in Anaconda and possibly would continue on to the mining camp.

When Darrel drew in his team of bronchos at the Half Way House, the hour was high noon. The team was given into the hands of the hostler and Darrel went into the house for dinner.

This balting place was midway between Anaconda and Sandy Bar. East and west trails also crossed at this point leading to mining regions farther back in the hills.

There was much travel along the trails and it was common report that the Half Way House was the biggest gold mine in those parts. So it happened that the dining room was comfortably filled when the Chinese waiter ushered Darrel to a vacant chair at a side table.

The newcomer was eyed with sus-

picion. In the eyes of the rough and ready crowd already there he was too well dressed, too "pretty" and defied the laws of convenience by making a distinction in his use of knife and fork.

Then, too, his voice was too soft and his language too precise. These evidences of superiority rankled under the greasy blue shirts affected by the miners and freighters.

Before Darrel's entrance another had been looked at askance. This other was a white-faced man in corduroys with "easterner" and "tenderfoot" written large in person and manner.

His reserve was stretched to the point of timidity and before he had used plate, knife and fork he had surreptitiously wiped them on the edge of the table cloth.

That of itself was an insult which might have resulted in gun-play had the proprietor been witness. The stranger was slender, like Darrel, had the same dark eyes and closely cropped hair and was near the same height.

His face was smooth, however, while Darrel had a neatly trimmed full beard. There was something about the stranger that held Darrel's eye.

A man in Darrel's peculiar line is perform a reader of character. After a little study over the bacon, beans, coffee and sour dough bread, Darrel concluded that the gentleman in corduroys had been driven west under the spur of conscience.

Possibly his absence had left an unprofitable void in some eastern bank, or other financial institution.

The coming of Darrel caused general attention to withdraw itself from the tenderfoot and focus upon him. Yet, although his superiority was manifest, every man in the room knew that the second stranger was not a raw recruit in the ranks of the frontier.

Finishing his meal under a running fire of half veiled sneers and covert jests, Darrel calmly rose and went out.

"Goin' south?" asked the proprietor, withdrawing his attention from a Mexican hag who, for four bits, was reading an old deck of cards for a prospector and telling him where he would best go to strike a paying lead.

Darrel nodded as he settled his bill.

"Meby you'd like to help out a fellow human who's down on his luck?" proceeded the proprietor tentatively.



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tively, for he was likewise impressed with Darrel's superiority and feared he might refuse the favor.

"I shall be happy to do what I can," replied the young man and immediately went up a notch in the other's estimation.

"Then come this way," said the proprietor, turning and making for a rear room. "It ain't much you'll be asked to do an' yer kindness'll be appreciated."

Darrel presently found himself in a little back room where a red-whiskered man lay groaning on a cot, his right arm in splints and bandages.

"Got a man for ye, Hasbrook," said the proprietor cheerily; then added, facing Darrel: "Hasbrook's hose played out yer an' I give him another, the best I had. The bronk threw him—"

"Where will I find Murgatroyd?" he asked of the man who took charge of his team at the camp corral.

"That's tellin'," was the answer, as a pair of speculative eyes traveled over the newcomer. "By ten an' after you can generally find Murg at Hawkbill's. Sometimes durin' the day he's at his minin' office."

"Where is the office?"

"Up stairs over Kaliper's place. See that buildin' with the lamps in front?"

The man pointed down the street as he put the question.

"Yes," replied Darrel. "Is that Kaliper's?"

"Naw, that's Hawkbill's. Kaliper's is the next buildin' north."

"Thank you."

Darrel started immediately, his slight, graceful figure watched curiously by the man at the corral. "A tin-horn, if I know the brand," the man muttered, shaking his head forebodingly as he began unbatching the team; he looks it all right, and besides he asked for Murgatroyd."

At that hour of the day Sandy Bar was quiet and orderly. Night brought the miners out of the hills and the gambling gentry from their lurking places, the games and the excitement beginning simultaneously.

While passing the cluster of lamps that arched above the sidewalk, Darrel took note of the temple of chance behind them. Such establishments always interested him professionally, and this one, with its elaborately painted front, its fulsome display of red globes and its air of prosperity, was plainly a favorite rendezvous.

Kaliper's place was a restaurant, at least a sign indicated that "meals" were to be had at all hours. A narrow stairway led to the second floor and at the top of the flight Darrel was confronted by a door bearing the words: "L. Murgatroyd, Mines and Mining Stocks."

Without a moment's hesitation, Darrel opened the door and stepped within.

A sallow-faced young man sat at the table, writing.

"Very well," said he.

She shuffled and shuffled and he cut the pack into three piles. Then she ran over the cards with great care and elaborate show of knowledge.

"Marde mia! Senor it is malo, muy malo. Forswear the cards and keep away from Sandy Bar. That is what I read. Trouble awaits you at the mining camp, ah, mucho, mucho. What I see, señor, I cannot understand, but here it is: You are to die and after that you are to live—"

He laughed, but she flashed him the indignant look of a devotee of an exact science and continued.

"The second time you live you prove your innocence of the crime by fastening it upon yourself. Is it not strange? I no sabre your fortune, señor, but there it is, plain to see. And, look! there is a queen of hearts; a fair young señorita whose fate links with yours—"

"That will do."

The silver rang as he threw it down on the table and turned away. He had not taken two steps before the old woman had him by the arm.

"You make your living with the cards, señor," she breathed harshly, "have a care that you do nothing wrong."

He pulled away from her and drew himself up.

"I play an honorable game," said he curtly.

"Ojala!" she mumbled; "you may be honest, but you cannot be honorable and follow the cards. Beware of three aces and two red sevens, señor."

"Why?"

"When you hold that hand you never leave the table alive!"

"Gracias, señora," he said, "a fine scorn lurking in the words; "the future is a riddle and a riddle you have read me. As for the jacks full on red sevens, it is a good hand in any game and I shall be glad to receive it. Adios!"

Thereupon he left the office and ordered the hostler to bring his team.

CHAPTER II.

DARREL "PRESENTS HIS COMPLIMENTS."

As Darrel climbed into his buckboard the man in corduroys rode past on a calico cayuse. To the saddle cantle was strapped a well-worn traveling bag.

Darrel caught the stranger surveying him covertly. The man's gaze was quickly averted, however, when the other parried the scrutiny with a keen look.

"There's certainly a heavy load on that fellow's mind," thought Darrel as he gathered up the lines and flicked the whip lash between the bronchos' ears.

The galloping cayuse was pointed south and Darrel's plunging team swiftly carried him abreast of its rider, and ahead. Quickly the stranger drew rein and was still at a halt when the buckboard and its single passenger topped a rise and vanished on the other side.

In those days all sorts and conditions of men were to be met in that section, so Darrel scarcely gave the man in corduroys a further thought. "You may be honest, but you cannot be honorable," were the words that passed and repassed through his mind.

Rarely, indeed, did this freelance allow anything to weigh upon his spirits. But there was something in the Mexicana's statement that struck cruelly against a desire to be a little different and a little better than he knew himself to be.

"An honorable man must be honest," thought Darrel, "but an honest man is not necessarily honorable." He smiled to himself. "That is what the señora would imply and she is not consistent."

All the way to Sandy Bar he soliloquized, coming to himself abruptly when he sighted the Epony below him and made out the huddled buildings of the camp. With a shrug he dismissed his unpleasant reflections and gave attention to the work that confronted him.

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The clerk was alone, but off to the

right was a door, partly ajar, and marked "Private." The scratching of the clerk's pen ceased suddenly when he saw a stranger in the office—a stranger with one hand behind him, under his coat.

"Well?" queried the clerk.

"I have business with Murgatroyd," answered Darrel.

"He's out of town," said the clerk.

A shadow of disappointment crossed Darrel's face as the hand was withdrawn from under the coat.

"When will he return?"

"In time for the games at Hawkbill's."

"If I left a few lines for him would he see them if he gets back?"

"Reckon he would. He always comes to the office after a trip into the hills."

"Where can I write?"

"Step right into his private room. Stranger in camp?"

"Yes."

"Know Murgatroyd?"

"I've known him for a good many years."

Darrel was ushered into the other apartment and the clerk placed paper, pens and envelopes at Darrel's disposal. As he seated himself, Darrel saw a revolver lying on the desk by the inkwell.

The weapon had an ebony stock, carved with a death's head. It was Murgatroyd's, as Darrel well knew, and by what chance had its owner gone into the hills without it?

The clerk noticed Darrel's curious glance at the firearm.

"That's the old man's," he vouchsafed; "first time I ever knew him to go away and forget it. Make yourself