

IN THE OPEN.

How George Verner Found Health and a Wife in Southern California.

W. R. ROSE, in Cleveland Plain Dealer.

The girl lightly swung herself down from her pony and ran forward. The man was lying close to the trail, his white face turned upward, his arms stretched out. As the girl knelt beside him a strand of her black hair fell from beneath her soft, gray hat and touched his face. He twitched his eyes open.

For a moment he was bewildered. Then he slowly smiled.

"Howdy, lady?" he hoarsely said.

The girl drew back.

"Ain't you got any sense?" she brusquely asked.

"Very little," he lazily answered.

"What's the new proof?"

"Lynin' out here in th' sun," she said.

"Come, lift yourself. Here, hook onto this." And she gave him her hand.

He was weak and limp, and for a moment he tottered, but she held to him firmly.

"Wobbly," he said, with a quick smile.

"Get your bearings," she commanded.

"Straighten up. My, but you're a rag!"

"A mere frazzle," he smilingly added.

"The next puff of wind may be expected to flutter me along and hang me on the nearest bush."

"Cut out th' poetry," said the girl, "and brace up. Can you walk now?"

He tested his feet carefully.

"They seem to be dependable," he replied.

"Whither away, fair lady?"

"Drop it," said the girl sharply.

"No foolishness. I'm neither fair nor a lady." She pulled up the straying strand of her hair as she spoke and tucked it under her hat.

His smiling eyes followed her movements.

"I'm a sick man," he said; "an abject example of masculine helplessness. Sick men must be permitted to babble. Even at the risk of incurring your displeasure I shall allude to you as a Diana of the plains."

"Plain enough, heaven knows," said the girl.

"But there, th' sun has got into your think box. You'll be seein' things an' screechin' next. Come."

He leaned on her heavily as they moved toward the pony. And the effort caused him to cough feebly.

"I don't know what's come over me," he faintly said.

"I seemed pretty fit this morning."

"It's th' sleepin' in th' sun at noon-day. I tell you," said the girl sharply.

"Nobody but a tenderfoot would do a fool thing like that. Kin you hold on to th' pony?"

"I think so," he replied.

"I've held on to bigger ones. But where are you taking me, Diana?"

"My name is plain Anna," said the girl brusquely.

"I'm takin' you down to our ranch. Th' cabin is beyond th' clump o' trees yonder on th' creek. I live there with Uncle Jim. Let me help you."

She got him balanced on the saddle and led the pony down the trail and across the lowlands to the creek. Presently they came in sight of the cabin, a half bungalow affair, with wide porches, and flowers and climbing vines all about it, and with the creek—quite a wide and noisy stream—splashing along 100 feet away.

The girl helped the stranger down and led him to the porch and put him in a big, clumsy rocker with many cushions, and ran and fetched him a drink. He sipped the contents of the glass slowly.

"I thought I was going to faint," he said presently.

"That was the reason I didn't have more to say to you. I'm usually pretty gabby. It's fine here."

He looked around with an approving smile.

The girl whistled to the pony and the latter trotted around the bushes and disappeared behind the house.

Then she took a seat on the single step of the porch.

"You from th' East?" she asked.

"Boston."

"Doctor sent you out here, of course?"

"Yes. He gave me up, all right. Said Southern California was my only hope. I came out more to oblige him than anything else."

"Come alone?"

"Yes."

"No folks?"

"Mother. She's abroad."

"Where are you stoppin'?"

"Los Angeles. I'm in a sanitarium here. Don't like it. It's lonesome. Been there a week. Don't sleep well. Made up my mind to run away this morning. Boarded a train. Got off at second station. Wandered up and down and fell asleep. Then you came."

He told this in a series of little gasps and the girl studied his face while she listened.

"How old are you?" she abruptly asked.

"Thirty-four."

"You're young yet."

He knew what she meant.

"Oh, well," he smilingly answered.

"I've seen almost everything worth seeing and I'm pretty tired o' it all."

She shook her head. She was considering.

"What you want is to live out in the open," she said.

"Some do get well, you know. There was a girl come down here from Sacramento. Pretty far gone, too. She was th' daughter of an old friend of Uncle Jim's. We put up a tent for her out there yonder by th' old redwood—an' there she stayed. That was five year ago—I was just fo'teen—an' she's livin' yet—married an' a mother. She sends me a present every Christmas, an' some day she's comin' here for a visit an' she's goin' to bring th' kids."

The man in the big chair leaned back with an air of profound satisfaction.

"This is fine," he said, with a little sigh.

"There's a healing tonic in this breeze and there's soothing music in your voice. Life seems a rather pleasant condition just at this moment."

And then a little paroxysm of coughing seized him and he struggled for breath.

The girl's face was full of pity.

"You say you're all alone."

"Yes," he gasped.

"Mother far away?"

"Yes."

"That's pretty bad. You may be thirty-four, but you seem like a boy. How would that idea of the tent out there suit you?"

"It's a great idea," he eagerly said.

"It fascinates me. I can pay for everything, you understand. By Jove, this is awfully good of you! But can you arrange it?"

She nodded.

"There is only Uncle Jim," she answered, "an' he does whatever I ask him. He is getting a little old an' th' rheumatism is botherin' him, an' he can't get around much, an' so I know he'll be glad to have you near by."

"I'll pay well for all the bother I make," said the stranger in the same eager tone.

"We'll see about that later," said

For a time the invalid seemed to improve a little. He was happy in his new way of living, for the benefit and pleasure of life in the open strongly appealed to him.

But nothing pleased him better than to get out some favorite book and read it aloud to the girl. He had to read carefully to avoid hoarseness, but his voice grew stronger in time. Anna was a rapt listener, and what seemed very strange to him, she loved the authors he loved—and Robert Louis Stevenson more especially.

"He was a 'lunger,' too," George explained, "and always frail and delicate—yet full of hopefulness and helpfulness. But the darkness fell on him at last; fell on him at a time when he could have still done much for the world he loved so dearly. Why, what's the matter?"

For the girl had suddenly risen and gone away sobbing.

George Verner stared after her.

"I must be more careful," he said.

"But it was strange for her to take it that way."

So the girl and the invalid became very good friends. She was so willing, so gentle, so thoughtful.

"I don't see how I can ever pay you for all this care," he told her one day.

"As long as you can read those stories to me," the girl responded, "I won't worry you for any balance on account. Trouble is they ain't going to last much longer."

George Verner laughed. He could laugh now without coughing.

"There are lots of other books," he answered. "I have but to wave my magic pen and lo! they will appear! Next week we will roll up our sleeves and tackle Dickens. You will like Dickens, gentle Anna."

She suddenly frowned.

"I don't like the name you just called me," she said. "I'm not gentle. I'm just Anna."

And she went away in the abrupt fashion with which he was beginning to be familiar.

George Verner had been living in the open for four months and he was none the worse for his experience. In fact he seemed a little improved.

Then one day he was much worse. The change couldn't be explained. Jose was hurried to Los Angeles with directions to rush back with a doctor. The doctor came and looked at George and slowly shook his head.

"Speak up," whispered George, "but not too loud. I have faced this thing so long that it has lost the power to scare me."

"Then," said the doctor, "this looks like the last call. Of course we can't tell. You may rally. I'll do whatever science can suggest. But it

me. Nobody ever was quite so kind and thoughtful. And you see it's just a mere form—but a necessary one."

"No, no," murmured the girl.

"I'm going to leave the arrangements to you, Uncle Jim—only they must be hurried. And now, Anna, girl, you won't oppose me, I'm sure. You've humored me all through—you must humor me in this. Make it as soon as possible—just as soon as possible. And now let me rest."

Uncle Jim arose slowly, but the girl suddenly slipped to her knees beside the cot and put the wasted fingers to her lips, then drew away with a sudden sob.

This time it was a clergyman that Jose brought, and in the little tent he married the weeping girl to the sorely stricken stranger.

"Just a sick man's whim, reverend sir," George murmured with a brave smile, "and yet one of the worthiest acts he has ever done. Your hand and my thanks, good sir. And your hand, Uncle Jim. And now yours, Anna."

He looked up in her face with a bright smile and then the heavy eyelids drooped and he fell asleep—his hand held fast in the girl's.

He was sleeping quietly the next morning and did not awaken until afternoon.

"What!" he murmured. "Still here?"

And he lay there a long time with his eyes half closed.

"I believe I'm much better," he suddenly said.

And from that moment he began to mend.

The doctor, being duly sent for, was amazed, but did what he could to conceal the fact.

"Science doesn't recognize miracles," he said, after he had examined George very carefully, "but I'll admit this is a pretty close imitation of the old fashioned brand. I'm ready to predict now that you are good for a bunch of years. You'll never be strong, but with reasonable care you should outlive many stronger men."

So George Verner continued to mend, but not a word said he of that strange marriage. But one day he showed Uncle Jim a carefully prepared paper.

"That's a settlement for Anna," he said. "It's half I've got."

The old man shook his head.

"She won't touch it," he said.

So the weeks passed away, and George slowly improved, and Anna was still the helpful Anna of old, but no word was uttered by either concerning that strange rite within the tent.

And then one bright afternoon a surprising thing happened. A lady came down the trail from the highway on the ridge, the sound of a motor preceding her coming.

She was quite a grand lady, and carried herself with a stately air.

George Verner looked up and recognized her and hurried forward.

"My son!" she cried and held him fast.

"Why, you look almost yourself again, dear. Just think—I've come all the way across the continent to find you. I left your stepfather in New York—he's not at all well. Can you go back with me at once, George?"

George drew back.

"Wait, mother." He turned and looked toward the cabin. "Anna," he cried. Her voice answered him.

"Yes, George."

She came to him quickly, but stopped short at sight of the lady.

"My mother, Anna. Mother, my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Listen, mother. Wait, Anna. Mother, there was a time, not very long ago, when I believed my moments were numbered. And then the desire to do a good act influenced me to ask Anna here to marry me—to marry your son, mother, who was no better than a dead man. Anna had been good to me in a way that nothing could repay—and she could not resist my last request. So we were married and I fell asleep with her hand in mine, and when my feet splashed in the dark waters she drew me back—and held me to the shore and defied the black shadow—and that is why I am here to-day, mother." He paused a moment. "Anna married me through a misapprehension, mother. I took what now seems an unwarranted advantage of her goodness. I am willing to make the best amends I can. But just now, mother, I cannot go with you without Anna's consent. If she wants me, if she will bid me stay, I will know that all is well for me."

He paused again. The mother looked from the girl to her son.

"This can be easily arranged, dear son," she said. "Come. I am your mother."

And then Anna looked up—her eyes blazing.

"And I am your wife," she cried and flung her loving arms about George and held him fast and would not let him go.

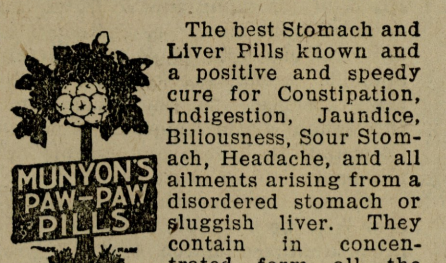
George looked at his mother with a sudden smile.

"Anna wins," he said.

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Young Men of Today.

The young men of 1910 are apparently better developed physically than were the youngsters of 1864. That fact is brought out by a table comparing the Yale seniors of 1910 with Yale and Harvard seniors who were examined in 1864. The averages show that the young college man of today is just a little bit taller, is considerably heavier and has better muscular development than did the college man of the Civil war period. The change is naturally attributed to the present love of outdoor sports and exercises. It appears that 88 per cent of the present senior class at Yale are taking regularly some form of systematic exercises, either by playing healthful games or by training in the gymnasium. These figures and statements are all in relation to college students, but could similar comparisons be made it would probably be found that the boys of today are in better physical condition than were the boys of half a century ago.—Portland Press.

Size of Antarctica.

It is a somewhat curious fact, if it is a fact, that the last of the terrestrial continents to be explored is the largest mass of raised land in the world. The concentration of attention upon the South Pole since Commander Peary landed the other end of our axis makes it highly probable that the antarctic antipode will soon be dangling from some explorer's belt. Incidentally, the south polar continent will be opened, if not to the settler, at least to the mapmaker. We already know something of its fringes at a few points, and Lieut. Shackleton pushed into it south of Mounts Erebus and Terror for several hundred miles, but the greater portion of its surface is still terra incognita.—Collier's Weekly.

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the girl. "You won't make much bother—you don't look that kind. An' there'll be plenty of help. There's Uncle Jim an' me, an' Marie, that's our cook, an' Jose an' Felipe an' Marlo—they're th' Mexican boys that work on th' ranch. Tain't as if you'd be altogether lonesome."

"And when can I come?"

"Just as soon as you like."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"By Jove, I feel better and stronger already! I'm absorbing something helpful by just looking at you. I beg your pardon—what am I to call you?"

"My name is Anna."

"And mine is George."

The girl arose.

"I am going to get you something to eat," she said. "An' when you go back to th' city this afternoon Jose shall go with you. He has business there an' is a bright boy. He'll see about your baggage for you an' come back with you when you're ready. You must excuse me now, George."

"Yes, Anna."

He laughed suddenly and the breeze lightly ruffled his hair and the song of the creek was like a lullaby in his ears.

When the girl came out bearing a tray he was fast asleep, the smile still on his white face.

She put the tray down softly on a little table.

"Poor tenderfoot," she murmured.

"All alone an' with his mother away in foreign parts. It makes me plumb sorry."

And she seated herself on the step and waited for him to awake.

Twenty-four hours later George Verner was settled in his canvas habitation. It had a board floor, and sides that would roll up and a place for his books and his clothes, and a comfortable cot.

"She's a very capable girl," he said.

"There ain't any more so," declared the old man.

would be wise for you to set your house in order."

That afternoon George Verner looked up and asked Anna, who was sitting by the cot, to call her uncle.

So Anna brought him in and they sat by George's side, and for a moment there was a little silence.

"Now, friends," said George, "I've got a little deal to propose to you, and, of course, you are going to let me have my way about it—you wouldn't think of opposing me now. That's out of the question." He paused and caught his breath. "Give me my own time about this. I'll get somewhere presently. In the first place, I am George Verner, of Boston—and nothing else to boast of. I am quite alone in the world, save for my mother, who is now somewhere in Italy, I fancy, with my new stepfather. I have some property—property that my mother will never need. She is a wealthy woman and has married a very wealthy man. There is quite a lot of this property, all in good shape. The inventory is with the letters and other documents in the package yonder. You are to take charge of all those papers, Anna, when—when it is necessary. There is a letter there for my lawyer and another for my mother."

"Don't," said Anna very softly, and turned away her head.

George reached out suddenly and caught her hand.

"Stay here," he said, "I'm almost through, and I'll do the rest of my talking to Uncle Jim. Now, see here, Uncle Jim, I want to do a square deed before I say quit. I've led a pretty careless and selfish life, and it does me good to think that I've got this chance, Uncle Jim, I want to marry Anna here. Listen. I want her to have all that's mine. I want to make her comfortable for life, and give her the power to make others about her comfortable. To marry her will simplify everything. She's been good to