

My Strange Traveling Companion.

"STRANGER!" The voice was not loud, but clear and penetrating. I looked vainly up and down the narrow, darkening trail.

"Oh! stranger!" This time a little impatiently. The California vocative, "Oh," always meant business.

I looked up, and perceived for the first time, on the ledge, thirty feet above me, another trail parallel with my own, and looking down upon me through the buckeye bushes a small man on a black horse.

Five things to be here noted by the circumspect mountaineer: First, the locality—lonely and inaccessible, and away from the regular faring of teamsters and miners. Secondly, the stranger's superior knowledge of the road from the fact that the other trail was unknown to the ordinary traveler.

Thirdly, that he was well armed and equipped. Fourthly, that he was better mounted. Fifthly, that any distrust or timidity arising from the contemplation of these facts had better be kept to oneself.

All this passed rapidly through my mind as I returned his salutation.

"Got any tobacco?" he asked. I had, and signified the fact, holding up the pouch inquiringly.

"All right, I'll come down. Ride on, and I'll jine ye on the slide."

"The slide?" Here was a new geographical discovery as odd as the second trail. I had ridden over the trail a dozen times, and seen no communication between the ledge and trail.

Nevertheless, I went on a hundred yards or so, when there was a sharp cracking in the underbrush, a shower of stones on the trail, and my friend plunged through the bushes to my side down a grade that I should scarcely have dared to lead my horse. There was no doubt he was an accomplished rider—another fact to be noted.

As he ranged beside me I found I was not mistaken as to his size; he was quite under the medium height, and, but for a pair of cold gray eyes, was rather commonplace in feature.

"You've got a good horse there," I suggested.

He was filling his pipe from my pouch but looked up a little surprised, and said, "Of course." He then puffed away with the nervous eagerness of a man long deprived of that sedative. Finally between the puffs, he asked me whence I came.

I replied from "Lagrange."

He looked at me a few moments curiously, but on my adding that I had only halted there for a few hours, he said: "I thought I knew every man between Lagrange and Indian Spring, but somehow I sorter disremembered your face and your name."

Not particularly caring that he should remember either, I replied, half laughing, that as I lived on the other side of Indian Spring, it was quite natural. He took the rebuff—if such it was—so quietly, that, as an act of mere perfunctory politeness, I asked him where he came from.

"Lagrange."

"And you are going to—"

"Well! that depends pretty much on how things pan out, and whether I can make the rifle." He let his hand rest quite unconsciously on the leather holster of his dragoon revolver, yet with a strong suggestion to me of his ability "to make the rifle" if he wanted to, and added: "But just now I was reek'nin on taking a little pasear with you."

There was nothing offensive in his speech save its familiarity and the reflection, that, perhaps, whether I objected or not, he was quite able to do as he said; I only replied that if our pasear was prolonged beyond Heavytree Hill I should have to borrow his beast. To my surprise he replied quietly, "That's so," adding that the horse was at my disposal when he wasn't using it and half of it when he was. "Diek has carried double many a time before this," he continued, "and kin do it again; when your mustang gives out I'll give you a lift, and room to spare."

I could not help smiling at the idea of appearing before the boys at Red Gulch en croupe with a stranger; but neither could I help oddly being affected by the suggestion that his horse had done double duty before. "On what occasion, and why?" was a question I kept to myself. We were ascending the long, rocky flank of the Divide; the narrowness of the trail obliged us to proceed slowly and in file, so that there was little chance for conversation, had he been disposed to satisfy my curiosity.

We toiled on in silence, the buckeye giving way to chimital, the western sun reflecting again from the blank walls beside us, blinding our eyes with its glare. The pines in the canon below were olive gulfs of heat, over which a hawk here and there drifted lazily, or rising to our level, cast a weird and gigantic shadow of moving wings on the

mountain side. The superiority of the stranger's horse led him often far in advance, and made me hope that he might forget me entirely, or push on, grown weary of waiting. But regularly he would halt by a boulder, or reappear from some chimital, where he had patiently halted. I was beginning to hate him mildly, when at one of those reappearances he drew up to my side, and asked me how I liked Dickens!

Had he asked my opinion on Huxley or Darwin, I could not have been more astonished. Thinking it were possible he referred to some local celebrity of Lagrange, I said hesitatingly: "You mean—?"

"Charles Dickens. Of course you've read him? Which of his books do you like best?"

I replied with considerable embarrassment that I liked them all—as I certainly did.

He grasped my hand for a moment with a fervor quite unlike his usual phlegm, and said, "That's me, old man, Dickens ain't no slouch. You can count on him pretty much all the time."

With this rough preface, he launched into a criticism of the novelist, which for intelligent sympathy and hearty appreciation, I had rarely heard equalled. Not only did he dwell upon the exuberance of his humor, but upon the power of his pathos and the all-pervading element of his poetry. I looked at the man in astonishment. I had considered myself a rather diligent student of the great master of fiction, but the stranger's felicity of quotation and illustration staggered me. It is true that his thought was not always clothed in the best language, and often appeared in the slouching, shaggy undress of the place and period, yet it never was rustic nor homespun, and struck me with its precision and fitness. Considerably softened toward him, I tried him with other literature. But vainly. Beyond a few of the lyrical and emotional poets, he knew nothing. Under the influence and enthusiasm of his own speech, he himself had softened considerably; offered to change horses with me, re-adjusted my saddle with professional skill, transferred my pack to his own horse, insisted upon my sharing the contents of his whiskey flask, and, noticing that I was unarmed, pressed upon me a silver-mounted derringer, which he assured me he could "warrant."

These various offices of good will and the diversion of his talk beguiled me from noticing the fact that the trail was beginning to become obscure and unrecognizable. We were evidently pursuing a route unknown before to me. I pointed out the fact to my companion a little impatiently. He instantly resumed his old manner and dialect.

"Well, I reckon one trail's as good as another, and what hev ye got to say about it?"

I pointed out, with some dignity that I preferred the old trail.

"Mebbee you did. But you're jiss now takin' a pasear with me. This yer trail will bring you right into Indian Spring, and ommotlood, and no questions asked. Don't you mind now, I'll see you through."

It was necessary here to make some stand against my strange companion. I said firmly, yet as politely as I could, that I had proposed stopping over night with a friend.

"Whar?"

I hesitated. The friend was an eccentric Eastern man, well known in the locality for his fastidiousness and his habits as a recluse. A misanthrope of simple means, he had chosen a secluded but picturesque valley in the Sierras, where he could rail against the world without opposition. "Lone Valley" or "Boston Ranch," as it was more familiarly called was the one spot that the average miner both respected and feared. Mr. Sylvester, its proprietor, had never affiliated with "the boys," nor had he ever lost their respect by any active opposition to their ideas. If seclusion had been his object, he certainly was gratified. Nevertheless, in the darkening shadows of the night, and on a lonely and unknown trail, I hesitated a little at repeating his name to a stranger of whom I knew so little. But my mysterious companion took the matter out of my hands.

"Look yar," he said suddenly, "thar ain't but one place twixt yer and Indian Spring yar we can stop, and that's Sylvester's."

I assented, a little sullenly.

"Well," said the stranger quietly, and with a slight suggestion of conferring a favor on me. "Ef you're pointed for Sylvester's—why—I don't mind stopping thar with ye. It's a little off the road—I'll lose some time—but taking it by and large I don't much mind."

I stated as rapidly and as strongly as I could, that my acquaintance with Mr. Sylvester did not justify the introduction of a stranger to his hospitality—that he was unlike most of the people here—in short that he was a queer man, &c., &c.

To my surprise my companion answered quietly: "O, that's all right. I've heard of him. If you don't feel

like checking me through, or if you'd rather put 'C. O. D.' on my back, why it's all the same to me. I'll play it alone. Only you just count me in. Say 'Sylvester' all the time. That's me!"

What could I oppose to this man's assurance! I felt myself growing red with anger and nervous with embarrassment. What would the correct Sylvester say to me? What would the girls—I was a young man then, and had won an entree to their domestic circle by my reserve—known by a less complimentary adjective among the "boys"—what would they say to my new acquaintance? Yet I certainly could not object to his assuming all risk on his own personal recognition, nor could I resist a certain feeling of shame at my embarrassment.

We were beginning to descend. In the distance below us already twinkled the light in the solitary rancho of Lone Valley. I turned to my companion. "But you have forgotten that I don't even know your name. What am I to call you?"

"That's so," he said, musingly. "Now let's see. 'Kearney' would be a good name. It's short and easy like. Thar's a street in 'Frisco the same title. Kearney it is."

"But—" I began impatiently. "No you leave all that to me," he interrupted, with a superb self-confidence that I could not but admire. "The name ain't no account. It's the man that's responsible. If I was to lay for a man that I reckoned was named Jones, and after I fetched him I found out on the inquest that his real name was Smith—that wouldn't make no matter, as long as I got the man."

The illustration, forcible as it was, did not strike me as offering a prepossessing introduction, but we were already at the rancho. The barking of dogs brought Sylvester to the door of the pretty little cottage which his taste had adorned.

I briefly introduced Mr. Kearney. "Kearney will do—Kearney's good enough for me," commented the *soldisant* Kearney half aloud, to my own horror, and Sylvester's evident mystification, and then he blandly excused himself for a moment that he might personally supervise the care of his own beast. When he was out of ear shot, I drew the puzzled Sylvester aside.

"I have picked up—I mean I have been picked up on the road by a gentle maniac, whose name is not Kearney. He is well armed and quotes Dickens. With care, acquiescence in his views on all subjects, and general submission to his commands, he may be placated. Doubtless the spectacle of your helpless family, the contemplation of your daughter's beauty and innocence, may touch his fine sense of humor and pathos. Meanwhile, heaven help you, and forgive me."

I ran up stairs to the little den that my hospitable host had kept always reserved for me in my wanderings. I lingered some time over my ablutions, hearing the languid, gentlemanly drawl of Sylvester below mingled with the equally cool, easy slang of my mysterious acquaintance. When I came down to the sitting-room I was surprised, however, to find the self-styled Kearney quietly seated on the sofa, the gentle May Sylvester, the "Lily of Lone Valley," sitting with maidenly awe and unaffected interest on one side of him, while on the other that arrant flirt, her cousin Kate, was practicing the pitiless archery of her eyes, with an excitement that seemed almost real.

"Who is your deliciously cool friend?" she managed to whisper to me at supper as I sat utterly dazed and bewildered between the enrapt May Sylvester, who seemed to hang upon his words, and this giddy girl of the period who was emptying the battery of her charms in active rivalry upon him. "Of course we know his name jan't Kearney. But how romantic! And isn't he perfectly lovely? And who is he?"

I replied with severe irony that I was not aware that foreign potentate was then traveling *incognito* in the Sierras of California, but that when his Royal Highness was pleased to inform me, I should be glad to introduce him properly. "Until then," I added, I fear the acquaintance must be Morganatic."

"You're only jealous of him," she said, pertly. "Look at May—she is completely fascinated. And her father, too." And actually, the languid, world-sick, cynical Sylvester was regarding him with a boyish interest and enthusiasm almost incompatible with his nature. Yet I submit honestly to the clear-headed reason of my own sex, that I could see nothing more in the man than I have already delivered to the reader.

In the middle of an exciting story of adventure, of which, to the already prejudiced mind of his fair auditors, he was evidently the hero, he stopped suddenly.

"It's only some pack train passing the bridge on the lower trail," explained Sylvester. "Go on."

"It may be my horse is a trifle uneasy in the stable," said the alleged Kearney, "he ain't used to boards and covering." Heaven only knows what

wild and delicious revelation lay in the statement of this fact, but the girls looked at each other with cheeks pink with excitement as Kearney arose, and, with quiet absence of ceremony, quitted the table.

"Ain't he just lovely," said Kate, gasping for breath, "and so witty."

"Witty!" said the gentle May, with just the slightest trace of defiance in her sweet voice. "Witty, my dear? why, don't you see that his heart is just breaking with rathos? Witty, indeed; why, when he was speaking of that poor Mexican woman that was hung I saw the tears gather in his eyes. Witty, indeed!"

"Tears," laughed the cynical Sylvester; "tears, idle tears. Why, you silly children, the man is a man of the world—a philosopher—quiet, observant, unassuming."

"Unassuming!" Was Sylvester intoxicated, or had the mysterious stranger mixed the "insane verb" with the family pottage? He returned before I could answer this self-asked inquiry and resumed coolly his broken narrative.—Finding myself forgotten in the man I had so long hesitated to introduce to my friends, I retired to rest early, only to hear, through the thin partitions, two hours later, enthusiastic praises of the new guest from the voluble lips of the girls, as they chatted together in the next room before retiring.

At midnight I was startled by the sound of horses' hoofs and the jingling of spurs below. A conversation between my host and some mysterious personage in the darkness was carried on in such a low tone that I could not learn its import. As the cavalcade rode away I raised the window.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Sylvester, coolly, "only another of those playful homicidal freaks peculiar to the country. A man was shot by Cherokee Jack over at Lagrange this morning, and this was the Sheriff of Calaveras and his posse hunting him. I told him I'd seen nobody but you and your friend. By the way, I hope the cursed noise hasn't disturbed him. The poor fellow looked as if he wanted rest."

I thought so, too. Nevertheless, I went softly to his room. It was empty. My impression was that he had distanced the Sheriff of Calaveras about two hours.

A Reverend Rascal.

The Rev. Charles Steinbach, of Chicago, engaged Margaret Murphy, a maiden of nearly forty, as a housekeeper. He told her that his wife was dead and gone and he wanted a good woman among his children. Soon he beat and abused his children and often locked her up with them to starve. At length she resolved to save one of the children—a twelve-year-old girl—from his abuse. She left the house with the girl, took some of his things and pawned them for needful money, and put the child for safe keeping in the Home of the Friendless. He had her arrested for larceny. The papers spoke of the Steinbach trouble. Another woman saw the case in the newspapers, went to the jail to see Miss Murphy, and announced herself as Steinbach's lawful wife, deserted by him, and the mother of his children. Then the two women became fast friends to work out a scheme of vengeance on Steinbach. But he cannot be found.

Rising glory occasions the greatest envy, as kindling fires the greatest smoke. Envy is the reverse of charity; and is that is the supreme source of pleasure, so this is of pain. Envy has under its banner hatred, calumny, treachery, with the meagreness of famine, the venom of pestilence, and the rage of war.

At Dartmouth Park, England, a boy three years of age was given an old wooden pipe by his father, with which to blow soap bubbles. The father washed out the pipe before letting the child have it. After using it the boy was taken ill, and three days later he died, his death, according to the medical evidence, being undoubtedly caused by the nicotine contained in the old pipe, which he had sucked while blowing the soap bubbles.

Turkish women do all their shopping at the doors of the stores in Pera, and the merchant—generally a Greek or an Armenian who speaks Turkish—must go to the carriage window with the things they wish to purchase. An ordinance of the Minister of Police prohibits a Turkish woman from entering any store in the Frank quarter.

"This little affair places him high upon the roll as a most unmitigated, external, internal, and infernal 'cuss,'" said Deacon Brower, in a church meeting in Trigg county, Ky. The allusion was to the pastor, who had turned his wife out of doors.

The Iowa Methodist Conference resolved to entreat all ministers and members who use tobacco to desist for conscience's sake; and to vote for the admission of no one to the conference who uses tobacco, without a pledge that he will abandon it.

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