

## THE MISSING HUSBAND;

—OR—  
Christmas at Mud Flat.

SHE HAD been in camp four days. Where she came from, why she came, or who she was, no one could tell. But she was in camp, and had come to stay there was no doubt. She was quiet, modest and simply clad—three qualities which commended her to the residents of Mud Flat as a change in the kind of women who from time to time invaded the precincts of that classic settlement.

Nor were these the only points which had been noted by the boys. As Andy McCorkle had gallantly handed her from the lower step of his mud-bespattered conveyance to the portico of the hotel everybody saw that she clung convulsively to the little child whose arms were twined about her neck. They observed, also, that her features were pale and bloodless to an extent that was almost pitiful. By that delicate intuition which sometimes exists under the roughest exteriors, the sturdy miners of Mud Flat understood that the strange lady was suffering from mental as well as physical illness. Their sympathy was aroused in her behalf from that instant, and every man in the place immediately constituted himself her champion and friend.

A day later, when she had rented a cabin near the outskirts of town without disclosing to any one her intentions for the future or the story of the past, their interest was increased, and they began to show their friendship in substantial ways. A great heap of firewood was mysteriously deposited within easy reach the first night. Bags of flour, quantities of coffee and sugar a whole ham, and a quarter of fresh venison likewise made their appearance from some unexplained source the third morning.

Little was seen of the recipient of these treasures, however. She had only been on the street once, and then only to purchase a few necessary articles. Upon that occasion she met the reverential gaze of a score of loungers, and turned her head away, pretending not to see, when the joyful Bill Carter smuggled a huge package of candy into the child's capacious pocket. But aside from that she had remained hidden from view, and the miners knew as little about her on the fourth day as they had on the first.

The 23d of December was unusually cold, even for that locality. As the frozen moon came up over a distant crag, cutting with chilly hands the dusky gloom, one might have fancied that he had suddenly been transplanted into the Arctic region. The ground was covered with a thin layer of snow, which glistened like burnished silver in the pale night. Here and there along the sides of the gulch, giant pines, standing like ghostly sentinels, threw spectral shadows across the white expanse. The roar of Potata creek, wrapped in the icy arms of winter, was subdued to a tiny, muffled trickling. And the wind, gently sighing through the passes, played Aeolian melodies among the needles of pine and tassels of hemlock.

In the main apartment of the Magnolia saloon, a party of the boys were sitting around a table, upon which steamed a large bowl, emitting a fragrant and aromatic odor.

"Whoever she might be," observed a tall and rather angular personage known to his companions as Long Tom Rollins—"whoever she might be, she's alone, barrin' the kid, and unexpected besides. She's sickly, too, and order hev a doctor. This ain't no sort of a place for a—ah, in verid," he concluded, hesitatingly, removing his heavy boot from the table, and helping himself to a liberal allowance of the punch. Then, after a pause, he continued, "I wonder what ails the critter, anyhow?"

"A man's at the bottom of it, gentlemen, you hear me," observed Judge Gashwilder from the other side of the table, nodding conviction at each of his hearers in turn. "Take my word for it there's a man in it, as there allers is in any deviltry as robs some poor woman's cheek of its bloom and her eye of its light."

The Judge was eloquent at all times. But when his round pate glistened from the effects of good punch and his theme was woman, he was thought by the men of Mud Flat to have few equals. Therefore the little party seated around the table was considerably startled when, just as their favorite orator had thrust his right hand into his breast as a preparatory gesture leading to a more extended tribute to the sex, Long Tom Rollins leaned forward and exclaimed:

"See here, old man. How do you know all this?"

For a moment everybody was aghast. Whether they were astonished at the suddenness of the interruption, or at the half-savage tone of the speaker, or whether it occurred to them that the Judge might possibly have so far over-

stepped the bounds of prudence as to have attempted "pumping" the interesting stranger, may never be known. But it is certain that they were astounded into silence. Even Judge Gashwilder was observed to lose his usual presence of mind. For instance his naturally serene countenance wore an expression which in another would have been mistaken for guilt. If the confidence which the others had always placed in him was a trifle shaken at that instant, it was quickly restored when, after a moment's hesitation, the old gentleman explained his peculiar position.

"You see, gentlemen," he said, gradually resuming the attitude from which he had been surprised by the abrupt speech above quoted, "I was prowlin' round her cabin last night, when all of a sudden I heered voices inside. The door was open a leedle bit, and by staudin' where I was I couldn't miss a syllabul. I will here explain," he continued, thrusting his red bandana handkerchief into his breast, as was his wont when speaking publicly, "that I was there for the purpose of findin' out, if possible, whether the gal was in need of anything that I could help her to."

"Which accounts," observed a bystander "for that chicking which was hung up alongside the door when I came by this mornin'?"

"I heered her talkin' with the kid," continued Judge Gashwilder, not noticing the interruption, "and I couldn't help lissenen. As near as I could make out, the talk was like this:

"When shall we see papa?"

"Heaven knows, my baby. We have sought him long, and when God is ready He will restore him to us."

"Is Christmas comin' soon, mamma?"

"Yes, baby, darling. But there won't be no presents for my little one this time. We are away from home and poor. But when we find papa we will go where there are lots of pretty things and then baby shall have plenty."

Here the Judge leaned forward and whispered in a mysterious voice, telling his companions that he had heard the mother repeat to the child the sad story of how her father had gone West four years ago to seek his fortune; how for two years his letters, containing money for her support, had come like rays of sunshine through the clouds; how they had suddenly stopped, and no answers were received to her agonized appeals; how for two more years she had supposed him dead; how, at last, the Postmaster in the little village where she lived had, upon his dying-bed, confessed to having stolen the letters from her husband, so as to get the money they contained, and suppressed her missives to him, for fear of discovery; and how she had started out with her little one to find her lost husband, who had been last heard from in Mud Flat.

All this the Judge told to the few friends he could trust, speaking in a whisper, lest the precious secret should be passed to others in the room.

"And now," he added, resuming his rhetorical attitude and voice, "I axes you as gentlemen and representatives of Mud Flat chivalry, shall this gal and her kid be too poor to have a Christmas of her own—shall they go without it, or not? Remember, gentlemen, that kid is the first one as ever came into this place, and p'raps she's our luck. Let us nurtur her, my friends, and let us show her mother that we ain't so lost in virtoo an' principle as not to appreciate it when we hev a good woman and a innocent kid among us. Let us give 'em a Christmas. I will now proceed to head the subscription."

So saying the gallant old man moved the punch bowl to one side, and emptied the contents of his breeches pocket upon the table. Others followed suit, and when the last man had placed his contribution there the pile contained a goodly sum.

"Now, gentlemen, some one of us has got to take the money, ride to Denver, and spend it for 'em. Who shall it be?"

"Let me be your agent," responded a deep bass voice.

Turning, they saw a tall stranger standing near by, who had just entered in time to hear the judge's call for contributions. One or two in the room recognized him as a miner who had come in from the diggings that afternoon, having found it too cold to work longer in the mountains.

They were inclined to resent the interference of an outsider, and probably would not have heeded his request had he not spoken a second time. Drawing near the table, he said:

"Gentleman, I was once a married man myself, but my wife, God bless her is dead. For the love I bear her memory, for the affection I have toward the remembrance of my little one buried with her, I ask you to let me aid in this matter."

The sadness in his voice and face was so sincere, and the utility of sending a

man who had "been thar, and knowed what wimmen folks would like" presented itself so favorable to the miners that with but little hesitation they allowed him to do as he wished.

In an hour he was gone, and the settlement was lost in speculation as to what he would bring back for the strange lady and her child.

The morning of Dec. 25 dawned crisp and cold. The fresh, biting air of the mountains raced among the trees right merrily, whisking the snow into little wreaths, and frolicking among the branches with real holiday gayety. It was nearly noon when the stranger rode into camp, loaded with bundles. At the Magnolia he met an eager crowd of miners, who, headed by Judge Gashwilder, were soon on the road to the strange lady's cabin. Arrived there, they felt a sudden hesitation about entering. It was like intruding upon some sacred ground, and they were almost tempted to deposit their bundles upon the threshold and fly.

"You take the stuff," said the Judge to the stranger, "and go in first. You've bin familiar with wimmen, and know how to handle 'em. We'll wait outside."

But the stranger felt the same hesitation. Perhaps his long absence from feminine society make him bashful. Perhaps a thought of the memory he revered caused him to hold back.

Finally the Judge consented to take the lead, and, doffing his hat, knocked softly. The door was opened by the child, who bade him enter. Beside the fire sat the mother, who rose to meet them. All passed in but the stranger, who stood outside.

"Marm," said the Judge, who somehow had lost his usual ease of speech and gesture, "we—that is, the citizens of Mud Flat—has come to wish you a merry Christmas, and to offer you these few tokens of our respect an' esteem."

Having thus delivered himself, the old gentleman deposited the bundles on the table, and stood beaming serenely on all his companions. The strange lady, completely overcome by this unexpected kindness, could not find words to reply for a moment. Then, in a broken voice she said:

"This is a glad moment of my sorrowful life. You are good, kind men, and I know God will repay your generosity to the widow and fatherless. I—"

She stopped suddenly and stood with blanched cheeks and distended eyes, staring toward the door. The miners turned and beheld the stranger, who, with a great stride forward, and a cry expressing the wildest joy, caught the woman in his arms.

They stood thus, heart pressed to heart, and lips to lips for an instant.—Then the stranger turned his eyes devoutly toward the ceiling.

"Thank God," he murmured gently, "the wife I had supposed to be dead is restored to me."

The miners stole softly away, and left the stranger standing thus, with his arms tenderly twined about the woman of his love, and the little child clinging fondly to his knees.

The air was balmy outside; the sun shone with ineffable sweetness upon the scene; a bluejay screamed his delight from a neighboring tree, and the wind played a joyful tune among the rocks.

Christmas had come to Mud Flat, and the missing husband was found.

## Railways Safer than Home.

In his recently-published "Notes on Railroad Accidents," Mr. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., shows that the percentage of loss of life and of personal injuries on railroads is exceedingly small, when compared with the amount of travel, and that the risks of railroad travel are much less than they are popularly supposed to be. He cites statistics to prove that it is actually safer for a man or his family to travel by rail than to stay at home, thus corroborating the saying attributed to John Bright, that the safest place in which a man could put himself was inside a first-class railroad carriage of a train in full motion. During the eight years from 1870 to 1879 the whole number of lives lost in operating the entire railroad system of Massachusetts was 1,105, or an average of 146 a year, while in Boston the recorded deaths from accidental causes during the ten years from 1868 to 1878 was 2,387 or an annual average of 239. These results show that in the city of Boston alone the yearly number of deaths caused by accident was eighty per cent. greater than the number reported on all the railroads of the state. This comparison is not peculiar to Massachusetts, but may be taken as approximately accurate for other places. Indeed statistics were published years ago in France showing that people were less safe at home than while on railroads.

Another fact which will serve to reassure the timid is, that of the whole number of persons accidentally killed or injured on railroads, but a small proportion are passengers. Many of those who lose their lives or are personally injured, are employes. But, as Adams shows, the greatest and most regular cause of death

and injury in the operation of railroads is the reckless habit of walking on the track, which is common with too many people, and especially with those who are more or less drunk. More than one-third of all the railroad casualties reported in Massachusetts are classified under the general head of accidents to trespassers, that is, accidents to men, women and children, especially the latter, illegally lying, walking or playing on the tracks, or riding on the cars. Mr. Adams says that the best remedy for this dangerous practice is the system of broken stone ballast, covering the entire surface of the roadbed. This has been adopted by the Pennsylvania railroad with the most satisfactory results, though the company had others objects in view than the discomfort of pedestrians. The sharp and uneven edges of the broken stone from a surface which the most inveterate railroad tramp will shun.

## Advice To a Young Man.

My son, don't be in too great a hurry to accept "advanced opinions." It is "the thing" to be "advanced" in this progressive day and generation, but there's a heap of shallowness in it. Did you never notice, my son, that the man who tells you he cannot believe the Bible is usually able to believe almost anything else? You will find men, my son, who turn with horror and utter disbelief of the Bible and joyfully embrace the teachings of Buddha. Is it quite just now, my son, for a civilized, enlightened man, brought up in a Christian country and an age of wisdom, to be a Buddhist? And if you ask six men who profess Buddhism who Buddha was, one of them will tell you he was an Egyptian soothsayer, who lived two hundred years before Moses. Another will tell you he brought letters from Phoenicia and introduced them into Greece; a third will tell you that she was a beautiful woman of Farther India, bound by her vows to perpetual chastity; a fourth will with a little hesitation, say he was a Brahma of the ninth degree and a holy disciple of Confucius; and of the other two, one will frankly admit that he doesn't know, and the other will say, with some indecision that he was either a dervish of the Nile (whatever that is) or a felo de se, he can't be positive which.

Before you propose to know more than anybody and everybody else, my son, be very certain that you are at least abreast of two thirds of your fellow-men. I don't want to suppress any inclination you may have toward genuine free thought and careful, honest investigation, my son. I only want you to avoid the great fault of atheism in this day and generation; I don't want to see you try to build a six-story house on a one-story foundation.

Before you criticize, condemn and finally revise the work of creation, my son, be pretty confident you know something about it as it is, and don't, let me implore you, don't turn this world upside down and sit down on it, and flatter it entirely out, until you have made or secured another one for the rest of us to live in while you demolish the old one. If ever you should develop into an "advanced" atheist, my son, just do that much for the rest of us.

## The New Teacher's Stories.

The Chicago Inter-Ocean of Saturday has the following: A Sabbath-School teacher at Cincinnati (or a near suburb) having occasion for being absent, engaged one of the leading young ladies of society to take her place and teach her class. She was prompt in the duty, and dressed in faultless style, made a decided and favorable impression upon the class, and fancied she had sown good seed in the minds of her youthful charge. The teacher the next Sunday, upon gathering her class, said:

"Well, girls, you had a new teacher last Sunday; can you tell me any of the lessons she taught you, or have you forgotten?"

"Oh, no," answered the class, "we remember everything. She taught us all about Samson in the lion's den."

"Oh, no—you mean Daniel?"

"No, we don't, it was Samson."

The teacher wisely closed the subject, and hurrying through the lesson, took an early occasion to call upon the substitute. Said —, "What did you teach my class last Sunday?"

"Oh! we had a nice time, and I told them all about Samson in the lion's den, and Moses in the fiery furnace, and—"

The above is not a joke, but a fact.

## Guilty of Wrong.

Some people have a fashion of confusing excellent remedies with the large mass of "patent medicines," and in this way they are guilty of a wrong.—There are some advertised remedies fully worth all that is asked for them, and one at least we know of—Hop Bitters. The writer has had occasion to use the Bitters in just such a climate as we have most of the year in Ray City, and has always found them to be first-class and reliable, doing all that is claimed for them.—Tribune. 2t 2

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