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**HESPER**  
 ...BY...  
**HAMLIN GARLAND**  
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CHAPTER XVIII.  
**T**HE blowing up of the Red Star mill and shaft house shook the entire district with its possibilities of further violence and concealed beneath its dust and smoke the rich discovery in the Kelly mine. The partners had time to calculate chances and plan for the buying in of the property.  
 The din of controversy was deafening. The labor leaders disclaimed all knowledge of the outrage and roundly condemned it for the foolishly destructive act it really was. Kelly marched in among them like a grizzly bear and stamped thunderously. "You are responsible," he growled. "You sit here and send out appeals to the world while these hounds work their will. Where was Munro and his regulators?" "They can't be everywhere," explained Carter. "No one supposed such a thing could happen in the daylight."  
 "Ye're all a set o' chicken heads. Ye've created a power ye can't control. I give ye notice that if ye don't go after the thieves that did this work I'll organize a vigilance committee and take charge of the whole gang of yez." And he strode out of the room, leaving the officers of the union disgraced and angry. He confessed to Raymond on his return that it was a foolish action.  
 "It was, Matt. You couldn't have done a worse thing. A large number of these dago miners already consider us their enemies, and this will confirm them. We might as well take steps tonight to get our party of the third part in some sort of organization."  
 All this excitement and worry aided Raymond in tiding over the day, but when midnight came and the committee had slipped away into the night his sense of loss and a feeling of loneliness took possession of him. Ann had announced her intention to return to the Springs at the end of the week, and though she had vaguely promised to visit the peak again, Raymond was a sly smile on his face. "What did you

"She's quite right," he admitted to his better judgment. "A mining camp is no place for her or for Nora. Since the destruction of that mill it is even less desirable than before as a place of residence."  
 While on his way to the bungalow the following afternoon he met Munro accompanying a stranger, a big, blond, handsome fellow in a gray traveling suit and soft hat. His face was plump and his brown beard close clipped, and though he realized that he was more or less in durance, his eyes were smiling.  
 Munro called out, "Rob, do you know this chap?"  
 "I do not."  
 Munro turned to his prisoner. "I thought you were lying."  
 The stranger remained untroubled. "I didn't say I knew Mr. Raymond. I merely said that I wanted you to take me to him. Mr. Raymond, I am Wayne Peabody, an old time friend of Miss Rupert. Will you please explain to this knight of the bills that I am in nowise interested in his strike?"  
 Raymond looked at him keenly. So this was the eastern lover—this fair man. "I think I have heard of you," he began slowly.  
 Louis's arrival relieved the awkwardness of the moment. "Hello, Mr. Peabody, how did you get here?"  
 Peabody caught at the boy's hand. "Well, well, Louis, I'm glad to see you. You saved my life. How is Ann?"  
 "Fine! You ought to see her work. She's brown as oak. Come on, I'll take you to her. Gee, she'll be glad to see you."  
 As Peabody excused himself and made off, Munro, with a world of meaning in his voice, softly swore. "Well, if I'd known that, I would have killed him and laid him away under a little rock. She turned me down flat the other day, and it hurt. It hurts worse now that I've seen the other man. I really hoped you were the winner."  
 "She's out of our world, Jack," replied Raymond, and a large part of his resentment of Munro's impertinence vanished with the knowledge that he was a fellow sufferer in despair.  
 Munro went on gravely. "She had me going, sure thing. Why, I stopped drinking—just as I told you I would—and I cut off Claire— Say, boy, that was a severe job! She raised dust for a day or two, but when the queen of heaven gave me my job I said, 'What the good?' and slipped into my old ways. Think of us strutting around the parade ground in front of the seats of the visitors' with intent to beat out old Grant, and here we are! I'm polling a mining camp, and you're pawing dirt like a woodchuck. 'What a fall is there, my brother!'"  
 Raymond did not enjoy Munro's tone and changed the subject. "What are you going to do now?"  
 Munro ceased to laugh. "I am going to cinch this whole camp a little tighter from this on. I'm going to turn back every nonunion miner. All you fellows who are frigidly can go on working just the same, but your men must put themselves on record."  
 Raymond's face settled into stern lines. "Jack, I don't want to be mixed up in another man's fight. We are on good terms with our hands—they're a lot of cantankerous American citizens anyway and can't be coerced. I warn you not to monkey with our plant."  
 Munro laughed. "I'll fight shy, old man, so far as I'm concerned, but these dagoes and Poles are getting wretched, and if they stampede they'll run over somebody. You don't believe in me and my cowboys, but the time may

come when you'll see that I'm about the only commander in this camp."  
 "I see that now, Jack. That's why I'm talking to you. But you've started on a line of action that means war with organized society. You had no call to join those Jackasses who ran Mackay out of camp. It was none of your funeral—had nothing to do with the question of wages."  
 Munro grinned. "He was such an ape."  
 "Yes, but it started you wrong. Now, I don't know who blew up the shaft house, but if you do your best plan is to cut those outlaws out and turn them back to the authorities."  
 "I don't know a thing. Of course the union. And nothing to do with it. It was done by a few hotheads full of peaches. These mine owners have got to give up their nine hour scheme. We've got 'em dead to rights, for I can drive every nonunion man out of camp if necessary, and my advice to you is, have your men march up and sign our rolls double quick."  
 "They can do as they please about that, but I'd like to ask you as a friend not to make it any harder than you can help for Kelly & Raymond. We've got all we can stagger under now, and the worst thing that can happen to us is delay. We've opened our vein, and we're going to buy in our mine inside of six weeks if nothing prevents."  
 Raymond walked on to his cabin with a heavier heart than he had carried since he left Barnett's home. Part of this was due to Munro's warning, but the larger part of it sprang from his meeting with Peabody, who was not at all the sort of citizen he had expected Ann's eastern lover to be. He was a man of power, dignity and decision, not an erratic idler like Barnett, and his air of quiet authority sprang from a strong personality securely placed in the world.  
 Louis came back to the cabin with a sly smile on his face. "What did you



The two men shook hands.

to my hunting lodge in the Maine woods." He was in the midst of a story when a knock at the door announced a visitor.  
 "Come in!" shouted Raymond, and Munro entered, entirely at his ease, graceful, jocular, making no account of the looks of surprise on the faces of Raymond and his guests.  
 "Remain where you are!" he called. "The house is entirely surrounded and no nonunion laborer will be allowed to escape."  
 Raymond mechanically gave him a chair, while Kelly nodded curtly. Ann bowed and said, "Good evening, Captain Munro."  
 Peabody alone smiled. "Ah, you were my guide up the hill! My guard as well as guide, I take it."  
 "I'd rather have been your executioner."  
 "For what reason?"  
 "I had I known you were coming to get the queen of the peak your blood had stained the hearth."  
 "Good heavens, what an escape! Am I quite safe now?" he asked of Kelly.  
 This fooling over, they took seats, and the conversation ran to the prospects of the camp, and Peabody, with a feeling that Kelly was the man of richest experience, persuaded him to tell something of his wonderful career as a trailer of golden pathways.  
 Raymond sat in silence, while Ann awoke to a delicious excitement in the situation. Before her sat three very direct and forceful lovers regarding each other like tigers, instinct with hate, yet masking it, pretending to honor and good will while bitter jealousy raged beneath. She provoked Munro to the most audacious sayings merely to see Peabody stare, and she flung an appealing word at Raymond now and again as if valuing his opinion above all others, though he made but curt answers, returning to his fire, mystified by her gaiety and by her subtlety of reply. Munro, so far from being depressed by Peabody's presence, was carried quite beyond his usual self, and his reckless compliments had a keen edge. In the end Ann regretted her encouragement of his audacity.  
 Raymond's guests rose at last, and Ann and Peabody went away together. This cut deeper than all else, and Louis, who took a very pessimistic view of the whole affair, did not comfort him. "She'll go back with him. I can see that," he said. "And she'll want me to go, too, but I won't."  
 Munro went away outwardly jocular, but inwardly sadder than he had ever been in his life, for his love for Ann was mingled with respect for her mind, her character. Her calm and kindly attitude toward him that night had been a revelation to him.  
 Peabody on his return found Raymond sitting alone by his fire. Louis was deep in slumber.  
 "That man Munro is an interesting fellow. What do you know about him?" asked the lawyer.  
 "Not very much. He's rather secretive. He came here from Sylvanite, I believe."  
 "His jokes about getting under my ribs were a little greswome. He struck me as just about mediaeval enough to do it—under proper conditions. Tell me about yourself. Ann has only praise for you. I want to thank you most cordially for your kindness to her and to the boy. He's much improved—less nervous and more manly."  
 "I doubt if he can be persuaded to leave. He told me tonight that he wouldn't go."  
 "Well, I'm glad I met you, Mr. Raymond. I shall feel easier about the boy in case we do go east without him."  
 These cordial, frank and manly words struck an icy chill to Raymond's heart. It was all over then. She had consented to go, and his life was laid waste. He rose unsteadily.  
 "You must be tired. Shall I show you your bunk?" he asked.  
 "I believe I will turn in," responded Peabody.  
 When the young miner returned to his seat beside the fire a big lump of pain filled his throat, and he owned a boyish desire to fling himself down on the floor and sob. He lost all shame of his weakness at length and went out into the night—to be alone with the deepest grief of his life.  
 (To be Continued.)

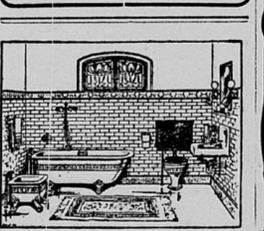
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