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GOLD

by STEWART EDWARD WHITE

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"All the surface diggings are taken up," our friend told us, "so now you have to dig deep. It's about four feet down where I'm working. It'll probably be deeper up here. You'd better move back where you were." Yank stretched himself upright. "Look here," he said decidedly. "Let's get a little sense into ourselves. Here's our pore old hoses standing with their packs on and no place to stay and no dinner, and we're scratchin' away at this bar like a lot of fool hens. There's other days comin'." Johnny and I agreed with the common sense of the thing, but reluctant-



We Actually Panned Our First Gold by. Now that we knew how, our enthusiasm surged up again. We wanted to get at it. The stranger's eyes twinkled sympathetically. "Here, boys," said he, "I know just how you feel. Come with me." He snatched up our bucket and strode back to his own claim, where he filled the receptacle with some of the earth he had thrown out. "Go pan that," he advised us kindly. We raced to the water and once more stirred about the heavy contents of the pan which had floated off with the water. In the bottom lay a fine black residue, and in that residue glittered the tiny yellow particles. We had actually panned our first gold! Our friend examined it critically. "That's about a twelve cent pan," he adjudged it.

Somehow in a vague way we had unreasonably expected millions at a twist of the wrist, and the words "12 cents" had a rankly penurious sound to us. However, the miner patiently explained that a twelve cent pan was a very good one, and industriously it was real gold.

Yank, being older and less excitable had not accompanied us to the water side. "Well, boys," he drawled, "that 12 cents is highly satisfactory, of course, but in the meantime we've lost about \$500 worth of loss and grub."

Surely enough, our animals had tired of waiting for us and had moved out packs and all. We hastily shouldered our implements. "Don't you want to keep this claim next me?" inquired our acquaintance. We stopped. "Surely!" I replied. "But how do we do it?" "Just leave your pick and shovel in the hole." "Won't some one steal them?" "No."

"What's to prevent?" I asked a little skeptically. "Miner's law," he replied. We almost immediately got trace of our strayed animals, as a number of men had seen them going upstream. In fact, we had no difficulty whatever in finding them, for they had simply followed up the rough stream bed between the canyon walls until it had opened up to a gentler slope and a hanging garden of grass and flowers. Here they had turned aside and were feeding. We caught them and were just heading them back when Yank stopped short.

"What's the matter with this here?" he inquired. "Here's feed and water near, and it ain't so very far back to the diggings." We looked about us for the first time with seeing eyes. The little up sloping meadow was blue and dull red with flowers, below us the stream brawled foam flecked among black rocks, the high hills rose up to meet the sky, and at our backs across the way the pines stood thick serried. Far up in the blue heavens some birds were circling slowly. Somehow the leisurely swing of these unassuming birds struck from us the feverish hurry that had lately filled our souls. We drew deep breaths, and for the first time the great peace and majesty of these California mountains cooled our spirits. "I think it's a bully place, Yank," said Johnny soberly, "and that little bench up above us looks flat."

We clambered across the slant of the flower spangled meadow to the bench, just within the fringe of the pines. It proved to be flat, and from the edge of it down the hill seeped a little spring marked by the feathery bracken. We

entered a cool green place, peopled with shadow and the rare, considered notes of soft voiced birds. Just over our threshold, as it were, was the sunlit, chirpy, buzzing, bright colored busy world. Overhead a wind of many voices hummed through the pine tops. The golden sunlight flooded the mountains opposite, flashed from the stream, lay languorous on the meadow. Long bars of it slanted through an unguessed gap in the hills behind us to touch with magic the very tops of the trees over our heads. The sheen of the precious metal was over the land.

CHAPTER XIII. The First Gold.

WE arose before daylight, picked our horses, left our dishes unwashed and hurried down to the diggings. Just at sunup, carrying our gold pans or "washbowls," and our extra tools. The bar was as yet deserted. We set to work with a will, taking turns with the pickaxe and the two shovels. I must confess that our speed slowed down considerably after the first wild burst, but we kept at it steadily. It was hard work, and there is no denying it, just the sort of plain hard work the day laborer does when he digs sewer trenches in the city streets, only worse, perhaps, owing to the nature of the soil. It had struck me since that those few years of hard labor in the diggings, from '49 to '53 or '54, saw more actual manual toil accomplished than was ever before performed in the same time by the same number of men. The discouragement of those wearying we now understood. They had expected to take the gold without toll and were dismayed at the labor it had required. At any rate, we thought we were doing our share that morning, especially after the sun came up. We wielded our implements manfully, piled our debris to one side and gradually achieved a sort of crumbling uncertain excavation reluctant to stay empty.

About an hour after our arrival the other miners began to appear, smoking their pipes. They stretched themselves lazily, spat upon their hands and set to. Our friend of the day before nodded at us cheerfully and hopped down into his hole.

We removed what seemed to us tons of rock. About noon, just as we were thinking rather dispiritedly of knocking off work for a lunch, which in our early morning eagerness we had forgotten to bring, Johnny turned up a shovelful whose lower third consisted of the pulverized bluish clay. We promptly forgot both lunch and our own weariness. "Hey!" shouted our friend, scrambling from his own claim. "Easy with the rocks! What are you conducting here, a volcano?" He peered down at us. "Pay dirt, hey? Well, take it easy. It won't run away."

Take it easy! As well ask us to quit entirely! We tore at the rubble, which aggravatingly and obstinately cascaded down upon us from the sides. We scraped eagerly for more of that blue clay. At last we had filled our three pans with a rather mixed lot of the dirt and raced to the river. Johnny fell over a boulder and scattered his awful far and wide. His manner of scuttling back to the hole after more reminded me irresistibly of the way a contestant in a candle race hurries back to the starting point to get his candle relighted.

We panned that dirt clumsily and hastily enough and undoubtedly lost much valuable sand overside, but we ended each with a string of color. We crowded together, comparing our pans. Then we went crazy. I suppose we had about a quarter of a dollar's worth of gold between us, but that was not the point. The long journey with all its hardships and adventures, the toll, the uncertainty, the hopes, the disappointments and reactions had at last their visible tangible conclusion. The tiny flecks of gold were a symbol. We yapped aloud, we kicked up our heels, we shook hands, we finally joined hands and danced around and around.

We worked with entire absorption, quite oblivious to all that was going on about us. It was only by accident that Yank looked up at last, so I do not know how long Don Gaspar had been there. "Will you look at that?" cried Yank. Don Gaspar, still in his embroidered boots, his crimson velvet breeches, his white linen and his sombrero, but without the blue and silver jacket, was busily wielding a pickaxe a hundred feet or so away. His companion, or servant, was doing the heavier shovel work.

"Why, oh, why," breathed Johnny at last, "do you suppose, if he must mine, he doesn't buy himself a suit of dunnage or a flannel shirt?" "I'll bet it's the first hard work he ever did in his life," surmised Yank. "And I'll bet he won't do that very long," I guessed.

But Don Gaspar seemed to have more sticking power than we gave him credit for. We did not pay him much further attention, for we were busy with our own affairs, but every time we glanced in his direction he appeared to be still at it. Our sack of sand was growing heftier, as, indeed, were our limbs. As a matter of fact we had been at harder work than any of us had been accustomed to for very

long hours, beneath a scorching sun, without food and under strong excitement. We did not know when to quit, but the sun at last decided it for us by dipping below the mountains to the west.

The following days were replicas of the first. We ate hurriedly at odd times; we worked feverishly; we sank into our tumbled blankets at night tired to wobble. But the buckskin sack of gold was swelling and rounding out most satisfactorily. By the end of the week it contained over a pound!

But the long hours, the excitement and the inadequate food told on our nerves. We snapped at each other impatiently at times and once or twice came near to open quarreling. Johnny and I were constantly pecking at each other over the most trivial concerns.

One morning we were halfway to the bar when we remembered that we had neglected to picket out the horses. It was necessary for one of us to go back, and we were all reluctant to do so.

"I'll be — if I'm going to lug 'way up that hill," I growled to myself. "I tied them up yesterday, anyway." Johnny caught this. "Well, it wasn't your turn yesterday," he pointed out, "and it is today. I've got nothing to do with what you chose to do yesterday."

"Or any other day," I muttered. "What's that?" cried Johnny truculently. "I couldn't bear. Speak up!" We were flushed and eying each other malevolently.

"That'll do," said Yank, with an unexpected tone of authority. "Nobody will go back and nobody will go ahead. We'll just sit down on this log here while we smoke one pipe apiece. I've got something to say."

Johnny and I turned on him with a certain belligerency mingled with surprise. Yank had so habitually acted the part of taciturnity that his decided air of authority confused us. His slouch had straightened; his head was up; his mild eyes sparkled. Suddenly I felt like a bad small boy, and I believe Johnny was the same. After a moment's hesitation we sat down on the log.

"Now," said Yank firmly, "it's about time we took stock. We've been here now five days. We ain't had a decent meal of vittles in that time. We ain't fixed up our camp a mite. We ain't been to town to see the sights. We don't even know the looks of the man that's camped down below us. We've been too damned busy to be decent. Now we're goin' to call a halt. I should judge we have a pound of gold or thereabouts. How much is that

worth, Johnny? You can figure in yore head."

"Along about \$250," said Johnny after a moment. "Well, keep on fingerin'. How much does that come to apiece?" "About \$80, of course."

"And dividin' eighty by five?" persisted Yank. "Sixteen."

"Well," drawled Yank, his steely blue eye softening to a twinkle, "\$16 a day is fair wages, to be sure, but nothin' to get wildly excited over." He surveyed the two of us with some humor. "Hain't thought of it that way, had you?" he asked. "Neither had I until last night. I was so dog tired I couldn't sleep, and I got to fingerin' a little on my own hook."

"Why, I can do better than that in San Francisco, with half the work!" I cried. "Maybe for awhile," said Yank, "but here we got a chance to make a big strike most any time and in the meantime to make good wages. But we ain't goin' to do it any quicker by killin' ourselves. Now, today is Sunday. I ain't no religious man, but Sunday is a good day to quit. I propose we go back to camp peaceable, make a decent place to stay, cook ourselves up a square meal, wash out our clothes, visit the next camp, take a look at town and enjoy ourselves."

Thus vanished the first and most wonderful romance of the gold. Reduced to wages it was somehow no longer so marvelous. The element of uncertainty was always there, to be sure, and an inexplicable fascination, but no longer had we any desire to dig up the whole place immediately. I suppose we moved nearly as much earth, but the fibers of our minds were relaxed, and we did it more easily and with less nervous wear and tear.

(Continued Next Saturday)

Another Insurance Deal Reported. London, July 27.—It is reported that the Sun Insurance Co. will absorb the Marine Insurance Company, the Marine Insurance Co. has a subscribed capital of £1,000,000, of which £400,000 has been paid in. The company began business in the United States in 1884. The Sun Insurance office has subscribed capital of £2,400,000, of which £480,000 is paid in.

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