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Then McNally had an inspiration. "Will you go, Sam, if we pay you for going?" he asked.
"Sure," replied the trapper at once. "I'm a laborin' man. I'll go anywhere I'm paid to go."
It came out that Bagby's ideas of proper compensation were his supplies, \$15 a week in gold and a drink of whisky twice a day! In all this gold country he was the only man I met who genuinely despised money. I really think we were hurried to our decision by this unexpected reasonableness on his part. At any rate, we decided definitely to go.
There were nine of us—Bagby, Yank, Johnny Fairfax, myself, Don Gaspar, Vasquez, McNally, Buck Barry and Missouri Jones.
Bagby got us up long before daylight. The air was chilly. In contrast to the terrific heat to be expected later in the day, so we hastened to finish our packing and at dawn were off.

Until about 3 o'clock we journeyed through a complete solitude; then we came upon some men digging in a dry wash. They had piled up a great heap of dirt from a hole. We stopped and talked to them and discovered that they were working what they called "dry diggings." The pay dirt they excavated from wherever they found it, piled it in a convenient place and there left it until the rains should permit its washing. They claimed their dirt would prove to be very rich, but I thought myself that they were laboring in great faith. Also we learned what Bagby had known right along, but which he had not bothered to tell us—that we were now about to cross the main overland trail.

We stopped that night near the road and at a wayside inn or roadhouse of logs kept by a most interesting man. He served us an excellent meal, including raw eggs, and afterward joined us around the fire. He was an Italian, short, strongly built, with close curly hair, a rolling, good natured face, and with tiny gold rings in his ears. Johnny and he did most of the talking, while we listened. No part of the civilized world seemed to have been visited by this pair. Johnny mentioned Paris. Our host added an intimate detail as to some little street. London appeared to be known to them from end to end; the other, Berlin, Edinburgh, St. Petersburg, even, and a host of other little fellows, whose names I never knew before and cannot remember now. They wrapped reminiscences of the streets, the restaurants and the waiters and proprietors thereof; the alleys, and byways, the parks and little places—I knew in a general way that Johnny had done the grand tour, but the Italian with his gold earrings and his strong, brown, good humored peasant face puzzled me completely. How came he to be so traveled, so intimately traveled? He was no sailor. That I soon determined.

The two of them became thoroughly interested, but after a time the native courtesy of the Italian asserted itself. He evidently thought we might feel left out of it, though I think the others were, like myself, quite fascinated. "You like music?" he smiled at us engagingly. "I getta my Italian fiddle? No?"
He arose at our eager assent, pushed aside a blanket that screened off one end of the log cabin and produced his "Italian fiddle"—a hand organ.
At once the solution of the wide wandering among the many cities, the intimate knowledge of streets and of public places burst upon my comprehension. I could see our host looking upward, his strong white teeth flashing in an ingratiating, fascinating smile, his right arm revolving with the crank of his organ, his little brown monkey with the red coat and the anxious face clambering—
Next morning we crossed the overland trail and plunged into a country of pines, of high hills, of deep canyons and bold, rocky ridges. The open spaces we had left behind and the great heats. Water flowed in almost every ravine, and along its courses grew green grass and wild flowers.

CHAPTER XV.
The Strike.
We awoke the fourth morning to a bright day. The helmeted quail were calling. The bees were just beginning a sun warmed hum among the bushes. A languorous warmth hung in the air and a Sunday stillness. It was as though we awakened to a new world, untrodden by men, which was, indeed, a good deal the case.
While we ate breakfast we discussed our plans. The first necessity, of course, was to find out about gold. To that end we agreed to separate for the day, prospecting far and wide. Bagby kept camp and an eye on the horses. He displayed little interest in the gold proposition, but insisted strongly that we carry both our rifles and revolvers. It would be difficult to describe the thrill of anticipation with which I set off up the valley. The place was so new, so untouched, so absolutely unknown. The high ridges on either side frowned down austerely on the little meadows that smiled back quite unabashed. As I crossed the brown, dry

meadow toward the river a covey of quail whirred away before me, lit and paced off at a great rate. Two big grouse roared from a thicket. The river was a beautiful, clear stream, with green water; water whirling darkly in pools or breaking white among the stones. As my shadow fell upon it I caught a glimpse of a big trout scurrying into the darkness beneath a boulder. Picking my way among the loose stones, I selected a likely place on the bar and struck home my pick.

I have since repeated the sensations of that day on a smaller scale, of course—in whipping untried trout waters, same early excitement and enthusiasm, same eager sustained persistence in face of failure, same incredulous slowing down, same ultimate discouragement, disbelief and disgust. All that day I shoveled and panned.



All That Day I Shoveled and Panned.

The early morning freshness soon dissipated. Between the high mountain walls the heat reflected. All the quail struts beneath the shade of bushes, their heads held open, as though panting. The birds that had sung so sweetly in the early morning had somewhere sought repose. I could occasionally catch glimpses of our horses dozing under trees. Even the chirping insects were still. As far as I could make out it was the only living thing foolish enough to stay abroad and awake in that suffocating heat. The sweat dripped from me in streams. My eyes ached from the glare of the sun on the rocks and the bleached grasses. Toward the close of the afternoon I confessed sneakingly to myself that I was just a little glad I had found no gold and that I hoped the others had been equally unfortunate. The thought of working day after day in that furnace heat was too much for me.

My hopes were fulfilled. All came in that night, tired, hot, dirty and discouraged. Not one of the eight of us had raised a sign of color.
"Well," said Bagby philosophically, "that's all right. We've just got to go higher. Tomorrow we'll move upstream."

Accordingly next day we turned at right angles to our former route and followed up the bed of the canyon ten or twelve miles toward the distant main ranges.
About 4 o'clock we camped. The flat was green. Little clumps of cedar bushes stood out across it. The oaks had given place to cottonwoods. We had now to make acquaintance with new birds.

The following morning we went prospecting again. My instructions were for the dry washes in the sides of the hills. Accordingly I scrambled up among the boulders in the nearest V shaped ravine. I had hardly to look at all. Behind a large boulder lay a little cuplike depression of stones in which evidently had stood a recently evaporated pool of water and which in consequence was free from the usual dusty rubbish. In the interstices between the stones my eye caught a dull glitter. I fell on my knees, dug about with the point of my bowie knife and so unearthed small nuggets aggregating probably a half ounce in weight.

Although mightily tempted to stay for more, I minded our agreement to report promptly the first discovery and started back to camp. Why I did not come a header in that fearful boulder strewn wash I cannot tell you. Certainly I took no care of my going, but leaped recklessly from rock to rock like a goat. When I reached the flat I ran, whooping like an Indian. From the river I could see Johnny and Buck Barry running, too, and had sense enough to laugh as it occurred to me they must think us attacked by Indians. Far down the stream I could just make out figures I knew to be Yank and McNally. They, too, seemed to be coming to camp, though I could not imagine that my shouts had carried so far.

I burst in on Bagby, who was smoking his pipe and leisurely washing the breakfast dishes, with a whoop, flung him bodily by the shoulders, whirled him around in a clumsy dance. He aimed a swipe at me with the wet dishcloth that caught me across the eyes. "You tarntion young grizzly bair" said he.
I wiped the water from my eyes. Johnny and Buck Barry ran up. Somehow they did not seem to be anticipating an Indian attack after all. Johnny ran up to thump me on the back.
"Isn't it great?" he cried. "Right off the reel! First pot! Bagby, old

sport, you're a wonder!" He started for Bagby, who promptly rushed for his long rifle.
"I'm going to kill the first lunatic I see," he announced.
Johnny laughed excitedly and turned back to thump me again.
"How did you guess what it was?" I asked.
"Didn't. Just blundered on it."
"What?" I yelled. "Have you struck it too?"
"First shovel," said Johnny. "But you don't mean?"
I thrust my three nuggets under his eyes.
"Saw," broke in Buck Barry. "If you fellows know where the whisky is hide it, and hide it quick. If I see it I'll get drunk!"
Yank and McNally at this moment strolled from around the bushes. We all burst out on them.
"See your fool nuggets and 'color' and 'raise you this,'" drawled Yank. And he hauled from his pocket the very largest chunk of virgin gold it has ever been my good fortune to behold. It was irregular in shape, pitted and scored, shaped a good deal like an egg and nearly its size. One point and a tiny fraction that great nugget balanced when we got around to weighing it. And then to crown the glorious day which the gods were brimming for us came Don Gaspar and Vasquez, trailed by that long and saturnine individual, Missouri Jones. The Spaniards were outwardly calm, but their eyes snapped. As soon as they saw us they waved their hats.
"Ah, also you have found 'the gold,'" cried Don Gaspar, sensing immediately the significance of our presence. "We too. It is of good color, there above by the bend." His eyes widened as he saw what Yank held. "Madre de Dios!" he murmured.
McNally, who had said and done nothing, suddenly uttered a resounding whoop and stood on his hands. Missouri Jones, taking aim, spat carefully in the center of the fire, missing the dishpan by a calculated and accurate inch.
"The country is just sowing with gold," he pronounced.
Then we blew up. We hugged each other, we pounded each other's backs, we emulated McNally's wild Irish whoops, finally we joined hands and danced around and around the remains of the fire, kicking up our heels absurdly. Bagby, a leathery grin on his face, stood off one side. He still held his long barreled rifle, which he presented at who ever neared him.
"I tell you, look out!" he kept saying over and over. "I'm shootin' lunatics today, and apparently there's plenty game to choose from."
Although we did not immediately run into the expected thousands, nor did the promise of that first glorious day of discovery quite fulfill itself, nevertheless our new diggings turned out to be very rich. We fell into routine, and the days and weeks slipped by. Bagby and one companion went out every day to hunt or to fish. We took turns at a vacation in camp. Every night we "blew" our day's collection of sand, weighed the gold and packed it away, our accumulations were getting to be very valuable.
For a month we lived this idyllic life quite untroubled and had gradually come to feel that we were so far out of the world that nothing would ever disturb us. The days seemed all alike, clear, sparkling, cloudless. It was my first experience with the California climate, and these things were a perpetual wonder to my New England mind.

Then one day when I was camp keeper at the upper end of our long meadow a number of men emerged from the willows, and hesitated uncertainly. They were too far away to be plainly distinguishable, but I believed in taking no chances, so I fired my revolver to attract the attention of my companions. They looked up from their labor, saw the men and promptly came into camp.
The group still hesitated at the edge of the thicket. Then one of them

"Isn't it great?" he said. "Right off the reel! First pot!"

waved something white. We waved in return, whereupon they advanced slowly in our direction.
As they neared we saw them to be Indians. Their leader held before him a stick to which had been tied a number of white feathers. As they approached us they began to leap and dance to the accompaniment of a weird rising and falling chant. They certainly did not look very formidable with their heterogeneous mixture of clothing, their round, black, stupid faces and their straight hair. Most of them were armed simply with bows and arrows, but three carried specimens of the long Spanish musket.

"Isn't it great?" he said. "Right off the reel! First pot!"



(To be continued.)

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