

came back from the town. The house was empty, and the door shut. As he went to the corral for his horse and wagon he remembered that earlier in the day he had seen his wife going to the house of a poor woman whose husband had been "done up" the night before. The eff-ruff of humanity which the now somnolent railroad had brought to Tuniper were still hanging on in hopes of work. In the meantime they turned their talents to other things, in which the remuneration was possibly quicker.

"I reckon she's packed off Ettamary, tu," he mused, "Mebbe she allowed the ride would be tu much. Well—Sue knows."

And so it happened that a little later, when Sue returned and found the horse and wagon gone, she quickly concluded that Etta Mary was with Jim, on the road to Dellabar, and Jim, enveloped in a pillar of dust, patiently jogging along towards the mountain mining camp, thought the child safe at home in Tuniper, either of which things, as the day drew on, it became very evident that little Etta Mary Pearson was not.

Her solitary meal finished, and what there was of her household goods put in order, Sue Pearson repaired to the Christensen's for a neighbourly call. Smiling Minna Christensen received her with evident joy. Tuniper was filling up with people from the outlying ranches, for a dance that night, and Oliver Lee had asked her to go with him.

In the intervals between Minna's naive disclosures her mother could be heard cleaning her kitchen utensils and chinking over the family supplies with audible satisfaction, a subtle hint to those whose extravagance led them to feed and house the casual stranger. Presently she appeared, her thin brown hair drawn into a repellantly hard tuft behind, her sallow face bright with a not unkindly curiosity.

"Ettamary ben come back?" she asked, as she rucked to and fro.

Sue shook her head. "No, Jim won't be back before night," she answered. The other woman looked surprised.

"Before the night," she repeated. "Vy, Ah tank she not ben wit Yim."

It was Sue's turn to stare.

"Why, Jim took her to Dellabar, I thought," she fattered. A feeling of uneasiness stole over her.

"Ah tank not," said Minna's mother; "Ah tank she ben wit dot ole foolish." Then, with merciful rapidity, as a look of awful fright came over Sue Pearson's face, "Ah see her and the ole man goin' kway in the brush, early in the mornin'—nine o'clock, Ah tank."

"Tut! Minna!" gasped Mrs Christensen, "catch to her, quick! Here! run git yatter! She ben faintin'!"

But Sue Pearson staggered to her feet unaided.

"Oh! what shall I do?" she moaned. "Minna! Minna! what shall I do?"

Minna Christensen did not delay. Action at this moment appealed to her more than advice. As she flew out of the door, and down the street into Tuniper, the occupants of the scattered dwellings caught up the news as if by magic, from her fragmentary sentences.

From every rickety house and tattered tent a woman shot forth. Throwing their aprons over their heads they hurried up the road towards the Pearson's house, and there crowded the room, a moaning, plying, suffocating mob, until Mrs Christensen drove them out.

The men came out of the saloons in twos and threes, furtively wiping their mouths on the backs of their hands. They eyed one another sternly, as some one induced them to apply the case to their own offspring. Instinctively they separated, and scattered themselves through the brush lying between Tuniper and the desert.

But Minna did not stop until she reached the "Little Gem."

"Aie! come awit!" she shrieked frantically from the door, and Oliver Lee held the little ball suspended in mid-air, to see the panting, excited girl who dared the sacred silence of the "Little Gem."

The crowd around the wheel twisted their necks to dislocation.

"Old John of the Desert's runned away with little Ettamary Pearson!" screamed Minna, looking straight at Oliver Lee. She knew he would not fail her.

"Gents!" said Oliver Lee quietly, but with an eye that sent the chairs shooting backwards over the floor, "this game stops right yer! Please tu cash in, before yu saddle up!" he shouted above the din of explosive threats, and the stamping rush of heavy boots towards the doors.

"We open again when little Ettamary gets found."

A few minutes later the streets of Tuniper were filled with horsemen, and when the news came in that the trail had been picked up a hundred yards out in the Devil's playground, a man shot up the road to Dellabar on a long, ranging lope to meet the father and bring him back by the shorter trail, which crossed an arm of the desert.

The horsemen gathered at the Pearson's house, some with canteens of water swinging from their pommels, and all were armed.

Tony Le France's headgear was affording him much trouble. Somehow it had got into his hand, and he was fumbling it over, awkwardly, until, with a shamed side glance, he saw that "Swiss Bob's" yellow crop was bare, and also the sleek black head of Mr William Overton, the Wicked One, who was prepared as if for a stern chase, down to the sawed-off Winchester slung under his leg.

Sue Pearson, her face white with suspense, stood at the horses' heads. "I don't know why he has taken her," said the quivering lips, amid a silence that only the fretting horses disturbed. "I don't know why he has chosen that awful place. I—I—thought he was just a poor, harmless old man. I thought he wouldn't hurt any—anybody." She had to stop for an instant.

"Much less you, Ma'am," said Oliver Lee, so softly that not many heard him.

"Just bring her back to me!" pleaded the mother. "That's all I want!" She fingered a rein nervously. "She's pretty nearly all we have now," she faltered. "If Jim was here I wouldn't have to ask it from you." She stepped back to let them go. Each man felt as if she were looking straight at him.

"Just bring her back; that's all I want!"

The noonday sun shone down upon a succession of rounded hillocks and miniature bluffs with combing tops, and long sloping swells, that constantly changed their sizes and contents as the wind puffed and they slid upon themselves.

The rest was glaring, unvarying white.

Against this background a gaunt figure with an inky shadow dragged itself along, going always westward.

Behind it, sunk to the hubs of the wheels, came a small red wagon. Often he stopped to rest himself, swallowing in his throat, and stretching his mouth wide open, in an effort to relieve his thirst. His face streamed with perspiration. It wore a look of fear, mingled with exhaustion, but something always drove it away, and his jaws clenched tight with an expression of dogged resolve.

Occasionally a fragment of desert willow, half drifted over, rose above the sand, and a lizard darted with shadow-like flickerings from under his feet. There was no other life.

He dropped the tongue at last, and knelt by the side of the wagon. The child's head and upper body were covered by the blanket, and although her eyes were shut, she still breathed faintly, appearing to be in a stupor. Beside her lay a half-emptied can of corn.

The gray face looked down upon her with an expression that showed a dawning conviction of his hardihood, wrought in his mind by immense physical stress.

As he continued to gaze at her, her breath seemed to come a little slower. A look of fear shot into his face; this time it refused to go away.

He rose painfully to his feet. Shading his weak eyes with his hand, he peered across the swells. The fair, blue mountains he had seen from the shore had long since been lost to his view. He only felt before him unreckoned miles of plogging, of weary ascents of treacherous mounds; only saw a hundred others, whose gaps, when he had forced himself on once more, he seemed never able to find.

Again he looked at the wagon. This time the little bundle seemed quite still. In an agony of apprehension he tore the covering from her face and put his ear close to the tiny, puckered mouth. A look of relief flickered over his face. Covering her carefully again he seized the rope. A moment of vacillation, a look towards the west, a dry sob in his throat, and he had turned his back on the Land of Promise, and was plogging wearily through the heavy sand, going back the way he had come.

The men had strung themselves out in a line, extending for a quarter of a mile. They rode with a hundred yards between them, for the fast-drifting sand often obliterated the trail. When one lost it he shouted to those on either side, who, if they in turn misaid the footprints, called to the others. They rode thus for several miles, sometimes spurring their animals up the hummocks to obtain a wider view, or trotting them rapidly where the trail lay plain before them. Although the heat was scorching, the horses blowing and flecked with foam, they rode with unflinching steadiness, a long line of stalwart figures, grim and silent.

After a time a man shouted. They reined in and looked to where he was pointing. Two black specks were coming rapidly towards them from the long arm where the Dellabar road sometimes crossed. It was Jim Pearson, his face drawn and haggard, forcing his horse to a gallop, the lathered traces still swinging from its sides. They spurred up to him. There was a rapid searching of faces, a low voiced repetition of all that was known, a hard exclamation, and then Jim Pearson, draining a proffered canteen, swept the sweat from his eyes and took his place at their head.

Four o'clock came, and with it no signs beyond the faintly recurring footprints. A half hour more—they had been gone since two o'clock—and still the sea of sand.

At last, far down the line, a cry rose up. Again they reined up, as they had done a hundred times before, and peered from under their broad brims.

They saw nothing. Still the man yelled and gesticulated frantically toward some point above the level of the ground.

Then, one after the other, they saw it. It was a mirage. Half floating in the air far away, half touching the ground, two blurred masses, the smaller following at a measured distance, were seen moving westward. Sometimes they took on sharper forms, and they saw the man they sought, magnified to four times his natural size, a gigantic, misshapen figure, apparently receding from behind him with giant strides, dragging behind him an oblong mass they knew to be the little red wagon.

More than one man sighed with relief. They had their direction now. Barring accidents, some one of their number could come up with him before eight-fall. As they trotted forward, the vision faded away, and they had to keep their course by the sun. Once more, however, the mirage took shape. This time the Desert Man's course seemed to have changed. He was no longer going westward, but was baring back to the north-east. With a common impulse, the line of horses swung around, and took a direction that would intercept him.

Nearer and nearer they came to the bald headlands, until, after an hour's steady trot, they were within a quarter of a mile, where the ragged fin of a hill sank into the sands. Then they saw something—in fact, two things.

The father was first. As he dismounted, however, he pushed the revolver under his vest again in front. There was no need of it now. Drawn up on the rocky hillside, under the scant shade of a bush, stood the little red wagon. A few feet away, stiff and silent, his face bearing witness to the torture through which he had passed, lay the bundle of tatters they had known for a little while as "John of the Desert."

Tearing away the covering, the father clutched his child frantically to his bosom. A faint movement at her heart showed that she still lived. He called for whisky. A dozen flasks flashed before his eyes; Tuniper was always "cheered." He poured some between her lips and rubbed it on her face and wrists.

In a half circle they stood before him, as he crooned over her and strove to bring back the spark of life, a hardened, rough-and-ready group, their thumbs crooked into their revolver belts, their faces as alive with mingled hope and fear as his.

Suddenly a shout went up. "By—I! she's alive! You blamed old son of a gun! You've brought her out!" There was a rush forward.

Poor Jim Pearson thought all the world was there, to shake him by the hand.

Presently, the tears still streaming from his eyes, he stumbled down the hill, his precious burden clutched tightly in his arms. They dropped back and opened a way for him.

"Don't keep the missus waiting!" they said with one accord. Two of them, on

fastest horses, raced off to bring the news to Tuniper, while the rest, who had something yet to do, rolled cigarettes leisurely, and talked it over before beginning their task.

They still stood on the side of the hill, where a ledge of outcropping rocks ran directly up the slope.

By delicate balancing a man managed to turn a piece of the rock over with his toe. While the others smoked and laughed, something in it caught his fancy. He weighed it in his hand with an automatic motion, and brought it nearer his eye. Presently when none was looking, he put it in his pocket.

The strain being over, another cast about for something to while away the time, and being western born, did what the other had done.

They looked over his shoulder in idle curiosity. Some one spoke, with a quick intake of his breath.

"Holy jumpin' Jiminy!" They scattered instantly. They stripped the ledge with their bright, roving eyes. "Looks purty gude!" they said approvingly. "There's where she strikes—look a yere, up past that there dead bush!"

"Say, Tony, shove the old man over k' bit!"

"No, don't do that. Jest scrape out a hole down below, and cover him with sand. Kick that—wagon away! We want to see how wide she is!"

But while they spoke a deft hand laid a piece of paper, duly inscribed, upon a rock, and placed another above it, and yet another, until a full-ledged location monument had risen under their very eyes.

"Gents!" said the dealer from the "Little Gem," significantly, "this yere claim is held for Jim Pearson!"

There was a moment of silence.

"Huuu," said one, and smoothed his chin reflectively. They looked at one another, judiciously weighing the pros and cons. A man enickered.

"Done again!"

Immediately the chorus, sulphurously beneficent:

"Well, by—I I reckon that's about right!"

The crowd moved down to the houses.

Ten minutes later they were lost to view. Tuniper would be gay to-night. But the sands had meanwhile slid and sifted, across the little mound at the foot of the hill, and rounded off its angles, until it was only a soft, white billow among a thousand others, a clean, warm winding-sheet for him who had found at last the Mine of Perpetual Silence—and was happy!

JAPAN! JAPAN! JAPAN!

Handsome coloured mounted Photos and collotype coloured Post Cards on Japanese subjects, including Famous Temples, Scenery Street Scenes, etc. etc. Sent post free on receipt of P.O. Order, at the following prices—

Photos, cabinet size, 2/- per doz., 10/6 per 100
8 x 10 " 9d. ea. 8/ 60/-
Post Cards (coloured) 6d. each, 2/- per doz.,
10/6 per 100.

Russo-Japan War Series Post Cards also to be had at above prices.

The Kasuga Trading Co., Yokohama, Japan.

MR FRASER RELATES FACTS.

MR D. FRASER is interested in the Cycle Trade, Terukin, and writes as follows:—"Last August I was taken ill with rheumatic fever, and consulted a doctor, who sent me to the hospital, where I stayed about three months and lost an eye. Some few weeks after my discharge from the hospital, I was again taken bad—so bad, in fact, that I couldn't move any of my joints. I saw Rhinquo advertised and tried a bottle as an experiment. After taking half a bottle I was able to get up and walk about. I took four or five bottles, and have never felt an ache or pain since. I consider Rhinquo a wonderful medicine." Mr Fraser is right—Rhinquo is wonderful. Sold by Chemists and Stores, at 2/6 and 4/6 per bottle.

KEMPTHORNE, PROSSER, AND CO.,
Wholesale Agents.

WE SEND ON APPROVAL
and guarantee safe delivery
Highest grade Cycles fully warranted.
Lowest prices. Write for Catalogue
£2.10 to £5.50
Dunlop Tyres, Westwood Steel Rims,
Free by Train, Free Goods, Free
**CARRIAGE PAID to any
part in Australia.**
Motor Cars and Motorcycles
Tyres, Accessories, Sporting Goods &
Sewing Machines, Hair Dressing
Machines for Sale and Special Offer
for using sufficient foreign postage.
MEAD OYOLE CO., Dept. 944 B
CHICAGO, U.S.A. and LONDON, ENGLAND

