

Harold Bell Wright



*The Mine with
the Iron Door*

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CHAPTER I

THE CAÑON OF GOLD

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And yet—those who look for it still find “color” in the Cañada del Oro. Romance and adventure still live in the Cañon of Gold. The treasures of life are not all hidden in a lost mine behind an iron door.

FROM every street and corner in Tucson we see the mountains. From our places of business, from our railway depots and hotels, from our University campus and halls, and from the windows and porches of our homes we look up to the mighty hills.

But of all the peaks and ranges that keep their sentinel posts around this old pueblo there are none so bold in the outlines of their granite heights and rugged cañons, so exquisitely beautiful in their soft colors of red and blue and purple, or so luring in the call of their remote and hidden fastnesses, as the Santa Catalinas.

Every morning they are there—looking down upon our little city in the desert with a brooding, Godlike tolerance—remote yet very near. All day long they watch with world-old patience our fretful activities, our puny strivings and our foolish pretenses. And when evening is come and the dusk of our desert basin deepens, their castle crags and turret peaks signal, with the red fire of the sunset, “good-night” to us who dwell in the gloom below. Even in the darkness we see their shadowy might against the sky, and feel the still

and solemn mystery of their enduring strength under the desert stars.

This is a story of some people who lived in the Catalinas.

If you would find more exactly the scenes of this romance you must take the new Bankhead Highway that, in its course from Tucson to Florence and Phoenix, runs for miles in the shadow of these mountains. From the old Mexican quarter of the city—picturesque still with the colorful life of the West that is vanishing—you go straight north on Main Street, where the dust of your passing is the dust of the crumbled adobe buildings and fortifications of the ancient pueblo that had its beginning somewhere in the forgotten centuries. Leaving the outskirts of the town your way leads over rolling lands of greasewood and cacti, down the long grade past the cemetery, past the Government hospital in the valley, to the bridge that spans the Rillito. From the little river you climb quickly up to the desert slopes that form the western base of the main range and that lie under their wide skies unmarked by human hands since the beginning of deserts and mountains. Beyond the famous Steam Pump Ranch, some sixteen miles from Tucson, the road to Oracle branches off from the Bankhead Highway and climbs higher and higher until from a wide mesa you can see the place of my story—the mighty Cañada del Oro—the Cañon of Gold.

But if you know the way you may turn aside from the main road before you come to this new Oracle branch and take instead the old road that winds closer to the mountains and for several miles follows the bed of the lower cañon. It was along this ancient trail that the eventful and romantic

life of this southern Arizona country, through its many ages, moved.

This way, centuries ago, came the Spaniards—lured by tales of a strange people who used silver and gold as we use tin and iron, and who set turquoise in the gates of their houses. This way came the Franciscan Fathers to find in the Cañada del Oro gold for their mission at San Xavier. This way, from the San Pedro and the Aravaipa, came savage Apache to raid the peaceful farming Papagos and later to war against the pale-face settlers in the valley of the Santa Cruz. Prehistoric races, explorers, Indians, priests, pioneers, prospectors, cattlemen, soldiers and adventurers of every sort from every land—all, all have come this way—along this old road through the Cañon of Gold.

And because there was water here, and because there was gold here, this wild and adventurous life, through the passing centuries, made this place a camping ground and a battle field—a place of labor and crime, of victory and defeat; of splendid heroism, noble sacrifice, and dreadful fear. Set amid the grandeur and the beauty of these vast deserts, lonely skies and wild and rugged mountains, the Cañada del Oro has been, most of all, as indeed it is to-day, a place of dreams that never came true; of hopes that were never fulfilled; of labor that was vain.

Of all the stirring tales of this picturesque region of the Santa Catalinas, of all the romantic legends and traditions that have come down to us from its shadowy past, none is more filled with the essence of human life and love and hopes and dreams than is the tale of the Mine with the Iron Door.

But this is not a story of those old Spaniards and padres and Indians and pioneers. It is a story of to-day.

The old, old tale of the Mine with the Iron Door is as true for us as it ever was for those who lived and loved so many years ago. We too, in these days, have our dreams that must remain always, merely dreams and nothing more. We too, in these modern times, are called upon to bury in the secret places of our modern hearts hopes that are dead. In every life there are the ashes of fires that have burned out or, by some cold fate, have been extinguished. For every living one of us, I believe, there is a Cañada del Oro—a Cañon of Gold—there is a lost mine that will never be found—there are iron doors that may never be opened.

And yet—those who look for it still find “color” in the Cañada del Oro. Romance and adventure still live in the Cañon of Gold. The treasures of life are not all hidden in a lost mine behind an iron door.

As the old prospector, Thad Grove, said to his pardner one time when their last pinch of dust was gone and their most promising lead had pinched out: “After all, it’s a dead immortal cinch that if we *had* a-happened to strike it rich like we was hopin’, we couldn’t never bin as rich as we was hopin’ to be. There jest naterally *ain’t* that much gold, nohow.”

“Sure,” returned Bob Hill, the other old-timer, “and ain’t you never took notice how much richer a feller with one poor, little, old nugget in his pan is than the hombre what only thinks he’s got a bonanza somewheres on the insides of a mountain? An’ look at this, will you: If everybody was to certain sure *find* the mine he’s huntin’ there’d be so blame

much gold in the world that it'd take a hundred-mule train to pack enough to buy a mess of frijoles. It's a good thing, I say, that somebody, er something has fixed it somehow so's *all* our fool dreams *can't* come true."

"Speakin' of love," said Thad on another occasion, when the two were discussing the happiness that had so strangely come to them with their partnership daughter, "love ain't no big deposit that a feller is allus hopin' to find but mostly never does. Love is jest a medium high-grade ore that you got to dig for."

"Yep," agreed Bob, "an' when you've got your ore you've sure got to run it through the mill an' treat it scientific if you expect to recover much of the values."

The affairs of the old Pardners and their daughter Marta were matters of great and never-failing interest to the loungers who gathered in front of the general store and post-office in Oracle.

Bill Janson, known as the Lizard, invariably opened and led the discussions. The Janson family, it should be said, had drifted into the Cañada del Oro from Arkansas. They were, in the picturesque vernacular of the cattlemen, "nesters." The Lizard, an only son, was one of those rat-faced, shifty-eyed, loose-mouthed, male creatures who know everything about everybody and spend the major part of their days telling it.

It was on one of those social occasions when the Lizard was entertaining a group of idlers on the platform in front of the store that I first heard of the two old prospectors and their partnership girl.

CHAPTER II

AT THE ORACLE STORE

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“My Gawd! Hit’s enough t’ drive a decent man plumb loony, a-tryin’ t’ figger hit out.”

“YES, sir,” said the Lizard, “I’m a-tellin’ ye that them thar Pardners an’ their gal—Marta her name is—are th’ beatenest outfit ye er ary other man ever seed. Ain’t nobody kin figger ’em out, nohow. They’ve been here nigh about five year, too. Me an’ paw an’ maw, we been here eight year ourselves—comin’ this fall. Yes, sir, they’re sure a queer actin’ lot.”

The Lizard had so evidently made his introductory remarks for my benefit that some sort of acknowledgment was unquestionably due.

“What are they, miners?”

“Uh-huh, they’re a-workin’ a claim—makin’ enough t’ live on, I reckon—leastways they’re a-livin’. But that ain’t hit—hit’s that thar gal of theirs.” He shook his head and heaved a troubled sigh. “Law, law!”

And no one could have failed to mark the eager viciousness of the Lizard’s expression as the loose-mouthed creature ruminated on the delectable gossip he was about to offer.

“Ye see hit’s like this: Them two old-timers had this here gal with ’em when they first come into th’ cañon down yonder. She was a kid—’long ’bout fourteen, then. An’ there

ain't nobody kin tell fer sure who she is, ner whar she come from. They say as how old Bob an' Thad found her when they was a-prospectin' onct down on th' border somewhars—tuck her away from some Mexican outfit er other. Mebby hit's so an' mebby hit ain't. But everybody 'lows as how she ain't come from no good sort nohow, 'cause if she had why wouldn't the Pardners tell hit? An' take an' look at this dad-beatin' father arrangement—take their names fer instance: one is Bob Hill, t'other is Thad Grove, an' what's the gal's name but Marta Hillgrove—Hill-Grove—d'ye ketch hit? An' one week old Bob he'll be her pappy, an' th' next week old Thad he's her paw, an' the gal she jist naterally 'lows they both her daddies. My Gawd! Hit's enough t' drive a decent man plumb loony a-tryin' t' figger hit out."

The Lizard's friends laughed.

"Oh, ye kin laugh, but I'm a-tellin' ye thar's somethin' wrong somewhars an' I ain't th' only one what says so neither. Won't nobody over here in Oracle have nothin' t' do with her. Will they?" He turned to the loungers for confirmation.

"She's a plumb beauty, too, an' a mighty cute little piece—reg'lar spitfire, if ye git her started—an' smart—say, she bosses them pore old Pardners till they're scared mighty nigh t' death of her—an' proud—huh—she's too all-fired proud to suit some of us."

The crowd grinned.

"The Lizard, he sure ought to know," said one.

"How about it, Lizard?" came from another. "You been a-tryin' t' make up t' her ever since she moved into your neighborhood, ain't you?"

“Ye all don’t need to mind about me,” retorted the Lizard, with a vicious leer. “My day’ll happen along yet. Ye notice I ain’t drawed what Chuck Billings got.”

“Chuck Billings,” he continued for the benefit of any one who might not be well versed in Cañada del Oro history, “he was one of George Wheeler’s punchers, an’ he tuck up with her one evenin’ when she was a-comin’ home from Saint Jimmy’s, an’ I’ll be dad-burned i’ her old prospectin’ daddies didn’t work on Chuck ’til George jist naterally had t’ send him int’ th’ hospital at Tucson. Chuck he ain’t never showed up in this neighborhood since neither. I heard as how George told him if he did get well an’ dast t’ come back he’d take a try at him hisself.”

“Good for George!”

“Heh? What’s that?”

“Does George Wheeler live in the Cañada del Oro, too?”

“Naw, Wheeler he’s got a big cow ranch jist back here from Oracle a piece. George he rides all th’ cañon country though—him an’ his punchers. An’ us folks down in th’ cañon we go through his hoss pasture when we come up here t’ Oracle fer anythin’. George an’ his wife they’re ’bout th’ only folks what’ll have any truck with that pardnership gal. But shucks, George an’ his wife they’d be good t’ anybody. Take Saint Jimmy an’ his maw now, they have her ’round of course.”

“Saint Jimmy is your minister, I suppose?”

“He’s what?”

“A minister—clergyman, you know—a preacher.”

“Oh, ye mean a parson—Shucks! Naw, Saint Jimmy he’s jist one of these here fellers what’s everybody’s friend. He

lives with his maw up on th' mountain 'bove Juniper Spring, 'bout three mile from Wheeler's ranch, jist off th' cañon trail after ye come up into th' hills. A little white house hit is. You kin see hit easy from most anywheres. His real name's Burton. He's a doctor, er was 'fore he got t' be a lunger. He was a-livin' back East when he tuk sick. Then him an' his maw they come t' this country. He's well enough here, 'pears like; but they do say he dassn't never leave Arizona an' go back t' his doctorin' agin like he was. He's a funny cuss—plays th' flute t' beat anythin'. You kin hear him 'most any time of a pretty evenin'. He'll roost up on some rock on th' side of th' mountain somewhares an' toot away 'til plumb midnight; but he won't never play when ye ask him, ner fer any of th' dances we have over here in Oracle neither. I heard George Wheeler say onct as how Saint Jimmy war right smart of a doctor back t' his home whar he come from. You see, Saint Jimmy he's been a-teachin' this here gal of th' Pardners book larnin'."

The Lizard opened his wide mouth in a laugh which showed every yellow tooth in his head. "I'll say he's a-teachin' her. I've seed 'em together up on th' mountains an' in th' cañon more'n onct—book larnin'—huh! Ye don't need t' take my word fer hit neither—ye kin ask anybody 'bout what decent folks thinks of Marta Hillgrove. She——"

How much more the Lizard would have said on his favorite topic will never be known for at that moment a man appeared in the open doorway of the store.

Not one of the group of loungers spoke, but every eye was turned on the man who stood looking them over with such cool contempt.

He was dressed in the ordinary garb of civilization, but his dark, impassive countenance, with the raven-black hair and eyes, was not to be mistaken. The man was an Indian.

Presently, without a word, the red man stepped past the loungers and walked away up the road.

Silently they watched until the Indian was out of sight.

The Lizard drew a long breath.

“That thar’s Natachee. He’s Injun. Lives all alone somewheres in th’ mountains, away up at th’ head of th’ Cañada del Oro. He’s one of them thar school Injuns. Talks like a reglar book when he wants t’, but mostly he won’t say nothin’ t’ nobody. Wears white clothes all right, like ye see, when he has t’ come t’ town fer anythin’; but out in th’ mountains he goes ’round jist like all th’ Injuns used to. Which goes t’ show, I claim, that an Injun’s an Injun no matter how much ye try t’ larn him.”

“That’s right,” agreed one of the listeners.

“He’s a real sociable cuss, ain’t he?” commented another with a grin.

“Him an’ Saint Jimmy’s friendly enough,” said the Lizard, “an’ I know th’ old Pardners claim he ain’t no harm. But I ain’t havin’ no truck with him myself. This here’s a white man’s country, I say.”

A chorus of “You bet!” “That’s what!” and “You’re a-shoutin’!” approved the Lizard’s sentiments.

Then another voice said:

“Do you reckon this here Natachee really knows anything about that old lost mine in the cañon, like some folks seem to think?”

The Lizard wagged his head in solemn and portentous silence, signifying that, however ready he might be to talk about the Pardners' girl, the Mine with the Iron Door was not a subject to be lightly discussed in the presence of a stranger.

CHAPTER III

THE PARDNERS' GIRL

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“Marta is bound to know, when she stops to think about it, that she jest can't have two fathers.”

THE house in the Cañon of Gold where the Pardners and their girl lived was little more than a cabin of rough, unpainted boards. But there was a wide porch overrun with vines, and a vegetable garden with flowers. Beyond the garden there was a rude barn or shelter, built as the Indians build, of sahuaro poles and mud, with a small corra made of thorny ocotillo, and the place as a whole was roughly inclosed by an old fence of mesquite posts and barbed wire. On every side the mountains rose—ridge and dome and peak—into the sky, and night and day, through summer droughts and winter rains, the cañon creek murmured or sang or roared on its way from the woodsy heart of the Catalinas to lose itself in the sandy wastes of the desert below. The little mine where the Pardners worked was across the creek a hundred yards or more from the kitchen door.

It was that time of the year when, if the rain gods of the Indians have been kind, the deserts and mountains of Arizona riot in a blaze of color. On the mountain sides, silvery white Apache plumes and graceful wands of brilliant scarlet mallow were nodding amid the lilac of the loco-weed, while, in every glade and damp depression, the gold of the buck-bean shone in settings of brightest green. And on the

cañon floor, the pink white bloom of cañon anemone, with yellow primroses and whispering bells, made points and patches of light in the shadow of the rocky walls.

It is not enough to say that the Pardners' girl fully justified the Lizard's somewhat qualified admiration. There was something more—something that neither the Lizard nor his kind could appreciate. She was rather boyish, perhaps, as girls reared in the healthful out-of-door atmosphere are apt to be, but it was a dainty boyishness—if sturdy—that in no way marred the exquisite feminine qualities of her beauty. Her hair and eyes were dark, and her cheeks richly colored with good health and sunshine; and she looked at one with a disconcerting combination of innocence and frankness which, together with the charm of her sex, was certain to fix the attention of any mere male, whatever his station in life or previous condition of servitude. In short, the strangeness of Marta Hillgrove's relationship to the grizzled old Pardners, with the mystery of her real parentage, was not at all needed to make her the talk of the country side. She was the kind of a girl that both men and women instinctively discuss, though for quite different reasons.

Bob Hill put his empty coffee cup down that Saturday morning with a long breath of satisfaction, and felt for the pipe and the sack of tobacco in his shirt pocket.

"Thar's nothin' to it, daughter," he remarked—his faded blue eyes twinkling and his leathery, wrinkled, old face beaming with pride and love—"if Mother Burton learns you any more cookin', Thad an' me will founder ourselves sure. I'm here to maintain that one whiff of a breakfast like that

would make one of them Egypt mummies claw himself right out of his pyramid.”

Thad Grove grunted a scornful, pessimistic, protesting grunt and rubbed the top of his totally bald head with aggressive vigor.

“She ain’t your daughter, Bob Hill—not this week. It’s my turn to be daddy an’ you know it. You’re allus a-tryin’ to gouge me out of my rights.”

Marta’s laughter was as unaffected as the song of the cardinal that at that moment was waking the cañon echoes. Patting Thad’s arm affectionately, she said:

“Make him play fair, daddy, make him play fair. I’ll back you up every time he tries to cheat.”

“By smoke!” ejaculated Bob. “I clean disremembered what day it was to-day. But to-morrer is another week an’ she’ll be mine all right then.” He glared at Thad triumphantly. “I tell you, Pardner, jest a-thinkin’ of me goin’ to be daddy to a gal like her makes me all set up. I’ve sure got a feelin’ that to-morrer is the day we’ll dig clean through to our bonanza.”

“Huh,” retorted Thad. “I got a feelin’ we ain’t goin’ to dig into no bonanza to-morrer, nor nothin else.”

“Why not?” demanded Bob.

“‘Cause to-morrer is Sunday, ain’t it? Holy Cats! but you’re a-gettin’ loonier and loonier. If you keep on a-dyin’ at the top you won’t be fit to be daddy to nobody. I’ll jest up an’ git myself app’inted guardian for my off weeks—that’s what I’ll do.”

“I may be a-dyin’ at the top,” returned Bob, “but, by smoke, I ain’t coverin’ no alkali flat under my hat like you

be. As for us workin' Sundays—I know we ain't allowed, in general, but it's a plumb sin if we can't—jest for to-morrer—with me all set like I am."

He looked at Marta appealingly.

"Whatever my gal says goes," said Thad.

Bob continued persuasively:

"You see, honey, I've got it all figgered out that when we git in about three feet further than we'll make to-day we're bound to uncover our everlastin' fortunes. You want us all to be rich, don't you?"

"It's no use," said the girl firmly. "You both know well enough that I will not permit you to break the Sabbath. Saint Jimmy's mother says it is no way for Christians to do, and that settles it. Anything that Mother Burton says is wrong *is* wrong. You both consider yourselves Christians, don't you?"

"You're dead right, daughter," said Thad, with an air of gentle complacency. "I hadn't a mite of a notion to work on Sunday myself. I wouldn't go so far as to say I was much of a Christian but"—he glared at his pardner—"it's a cinch I'm no Zulu. As for anybody that intimates we got a chance to uncover a fortune anywhere in that hole out there, between the dump and China—wal, I'd hate to tell you what sort of a Christian I think *he* is."

Bob grinned cheerfully.

"Mebby I ain't so much of a Christian neither," he agreed, "but if I'd a-been that old Pharaoh what built them pyramids ___"

The girl interrupted:

"Now, there you go again. That's the second time. What in the world started you to talking about Egypt and

pyramids and Pharaoh and mummies and things like that?"

"Oh, I jest happened to take a peek into one of them books that Saint Jimmy got us to buy for you, that's all," returned the old-timer, with a sly wink at the smiling girl. "An' anyway, it seems like I ought to know somethin' about mummies by this time, after livin' as long as I have with that there." He pointed a long, gnarled finger at his pardner. "Egypt or Arizona, livin' or dead, it's all the same, I reckon. A mummy's a mummy wherever you find it."

Thad rubbed his bald head with deliberate care.

"Daughter, does Mother Burton's brand of Christianity say anything about what a man should do to his enemies?"

"Indeed it does," returned the girl. "It says we must love our enemies and forgive them."

"All right—all right—an' what does it say about lovin' an' forgivin' your friends, heh?"

"Why—nothing, I guess."

"Course it don't," cried the old prospector in shrill triumph.

"Course it don't. An' do you know why? I'll tell you why. It's because it's so doggone easy to forgive an enemy compared to what it is to forgive a friend, that's why. The Good Book knows 'tain't necessary to say nothin' about friends, 'cause it's jest as nateral and virtuous to hate a friend as 'tis to love an enemy—that's what I'm a-meanin'."

Marta was not in the least disturbed over this exchange of courtesies by her two fathers. Rising from the table, she laughingly remarked that if they were not *too* busy they might saddle her horse, as she must go to Oracle for supplies. Whereupon the Pardners went to the barn, leaving

their girl free to clear away the breakfast things, wash the dishes, and finish her morning housework.

It was an unwritten law of the partnership that the particular father of the week should stand obligated to the parental responsibilities of the position. It was by no means the least of his duties that he must endure the criticisms of the other upon the way he was “bringing up” his daughter. It seems scarcely necessary to add that criticism was never wanting and that it was never without directness and point. To compensate for this burden of responsibility, the parent was permitted to say “my gal” while the critic, by the rules of the game, must invariably say “that gal of yourn.”

While Thad the father was currying his daughter’s horse, Nugget—a bright little pinto—Bob squatted comfortably on his heels, his back against the wall of the barn.

“Pardner,” he said, as one who speaks after mature deliberation, “I ain’t meanin’ to mix none in your family affairs, but as a friend I’m a-feelin’ constrained to remark that you ain’t doin’ right by that gal of yourn nohow.”

Marta’s father was making a careful examination of the pinto’s off forefoot and seemed not to hear.

Bob continued:

“Anybody can see that she comes mighty nigh bein’ grown up. First thing *you* know somebody’ll make her understand all to once that she’s a woman, and then——”

Thad dropped the pinto’s foot and glared at his pardner over the horse’s back.

“Then *what?*”

“Then she’ll be wantin’ to know things. An’—it might be too late to tell her.”

“You mean that I ought to tell my gal what we know about her?” demanded Marta’s father. “Is that what you’re tryin’ to say?”

“You guessed it, Pardner,” returned the critical one cheerfully. “It’s time that your gal knowed about herself. Bein’ her daddy, it’s up to you to tell her.”

The other exploded:

“Which is exactly what I tried all last week to tell *you*, when you was her daddy, you blamed old numskull, an’ you wouldn’t near listen to me. A healthy father you are. When it’s *your* daughter that ought to be told, you can’t even whisper, but when she’s mine you can yell your fool head off tellin’ me what *I* ought to do. Besides, you said yourself that we don’t actually know enough to tell her anything.”

“But that was last week, you see,” returned Bob calmly. “You was doin’ the talkin’ then—now *I’m* tellin’ you.”

When Thad, without replying, fell to rubbing Nugget’s glossy hide with such energy that the little horse squirmed like a schoolboy undergoing maternal inspection, Bob continued:

“Marta is bound to know, when she stops to think about it, that she jest can’t have two fathers. It’s plumb unnateral, even for two such daddies as she’s got. So far she ain’t give it much thought. She’s sort of growed up with the idea an’ accepted things as young folks do—up to a certain time, that is. My point is, that from now on her time is liable to come any day. Right now, if she thinks of it at all she jest smiles an’ plays the game with us, but that’s ’cause she’s mostly kid yet. You wait ’til the woman in her is woke up—right there she’ll quit playin’ an’ somethin’ is due to happen.

You ain't doin' right by your daughter, Thad, not to tell her—you sure ain't."

Thad Grove faced his old pardner miserably. "I know you're right, Bob. Marta ought to be told what we know about her. I can see that it'll look mighty bad to her some day if she ain't. But, hang darn it, it's jest like you said last week—we don't know enough for me to tell her anything. If I was to tell her what little we do know, it would look a heap sight worse to her than it possibly can with her not bein' told anything, like she is now. The way I figger, if the gal don't know nothin', she's got a chance to ride over it; but if she knows the little that we know she'll be plumb ruined."

"I don't reckon it's near so bad as that, Pardner," said the other soothingly. "I'm here to tell you that there ain't nothin' could ruin that gal of yourn."

At this, the fire of old Thad's soul flared up anew.

"Is that so?" he returned in a voice of withering scorn. "Is that so? Well, I'm a tellin' *you* that you can ruin *anybody*."

"Saint Jimmy, for instance?" retorted Bob with sarcasm.

"Yes, Saint Jimmy. You can't tell what sort of a scoundrel Saint Jimmy would a-been if he hadn't happened to a-turned sick. There's many a man in the pen, right now, jest on account of havin' too much good health."

"I reckon you're speakin' gospel for once," agreed Bob reluctantly. Then, as if he had not forgotten his critical privileges, he added: "But there's something else you ought to tell your gal—something that the best authorities all agree ought to be told every gal by somebody—an' bein' as you're her father, an' she ain't never had no real ma, why—it would look like it was up to you."

“What’s that?” demanded Thad suspiciously.

“That’s what they call love,” returned the other gently. “Growin’ up like Marta has, with jest us two old, dried-up, desert rats, she don’t know no more about love an’ its consequences than—than—nothin’.”

Marta’s father dropped his brush and kicked it viciously across the stable. Nugget danced with excitement.

“Love! Holy Cats! What fool notion’ll take you next? You don’t need to worry none. Some feller will happen along some day an’ tell her more about love in a minute than you’ve ever knowed in all your life.”

“That’s jest it,” returned the other. “Some feller is bound to tell her, jest like you say. He’ll slip up on her quiet like, when she ain’t suspicionin’ nothin’, an’ break it to her sudden ’fore she knows where she’s at. That’s how them consequences happen. An’ that’s why she ought to know beforehand, so’s she can be watchin’ out.”

Thad was rubbing his bald head seeking, apparently, for an answer sufficiently crushing, when a clear call came from the house.

“Daddy—Oh, Daddy, I am ready.”

With frantic haste, the Pardners, working together as if they had never had a difference, saddled and bridled the pinto. Together they led the little horse to the house.

When the girl was in the saddle, she looked down into their upturned faces with such an expression of girlish affection and womanly thoughtfulness that the two old men grinned with sheepish delight and pride.

“You will find your dinner all ready for you,” she said, while Nugget tossed his head, impatient to be off. “It is on

the table, covered with a cloth. I'll be home in time for supper. *Adios.*" She lifted the bridle rein and the pinto loped away.

The Pardners stood watching while she opened and closed the gate, cowboy fashion, without dismounting. With a wave of her hand she rode on up the cañon while the two old men followed her with their eyes until she passed from sight around a turn in the cañon wall.

Thad spoke slowly:

"You're plumb right, Bob. The gal has mighty nigh growed into a woman, ain't she? It don't seem more'n a month or two neither, does it?"

"It sure don't," returned the other softly. "An' ain't she a wonder, Thad—ain't she jest a nateral-born wonder?"

"She's all of that," agreed Thad, "an' then some. It plumb scares me though, when I think of her findin' out about herself an' her all educated up by Saint Jimmy an' his mother like she is. Holy Cats, Bob! What'll we do?"

"She's bound to know some day," said Bob.

"She's bound to, sure," echoed Thad with a groan. "But my God a'mighty ain't either of us got nerve to tell her *now*. If she hadn't been goin' to school to Saint Jimmy these last five years—I mean if she was like she would a-been with jest me an' you to bring her up, it might not a-mattered. But now—now it's goin' to be plain hell for her when she finds out."

Bob murmured softly:

"Won't even let us work on Sundays 'cause it ain't the right way for Christians like us to do. We'd ought to a-told long ago, that's what we ought to a-done."

“Sure, we ought to told her,” cried Thad, “jest like we’d ought to done a lot of things we ain’t. But mournin’ over what ought to been done ain’t payin’ us nothin’. What’re we *goin’* to do, that’s what we got to figger out. The gal’s got to be told.”

“Yes,” returned Bob. “An’ she’s got to be told ’fore some sneakin’ varmint beats us to it an’ tells her for true what me an’ you are only suspicionin’. How’ll you ever do it?”

“How’ll / ever do it?” shrilled Thad. “Holy Cats! I can’t— How’ll you ever do it yourself?”

Bob answered helplessly:

“I can’t neither—an’ by smoke, I won’t.”

“She’s got to be told,” insisted Thad.

“She sure has,” said Bob.

CHAPTER IV

SAINT JIMMY

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Wise Mother Burton came to wonder, sometimes, if Saint Jimmy's teaching was not more a matter of love than even he perhaps realized.

DOCTOR Jimmy Burton and his mother spent their first year in Arizona at Tucson and Oracle. But when they were satisfied that Jimmy could live if he gave up his too strenuous professional work and remained in the Southwest, and that if he did not follow that course he would as surely die, they built the little white house on the mountain side at Juniper Springs, above the Cañada del Oro. As Jimmy explained, "it was quite necessary, under the circumstances, that they live where they could see out."

It was during that first summer in Oracle that the neighbors began to speak of his tender care of his mother, for, even in those days when he was too ill to do more than think, his thoughts were all for her. And so lovingly did he try to shield her from the pain of his suffering, so cheerfully did he accustom her to the thought of the utter hopelessness of his professional future, and so courageously, for her sake, did he accept the pitifully small portion that life offered him, that the people marveled at the spirit of the man. It was a question, they sometimes said, with a touch of sincere reverence in their voices, if Doctor Burton needed his mother as much as the doctor's mother

needed him. But Jimmy and his mother knew that the truth of the matter was they needed each other.

And so in their mutual need both mother and son found compensation for their dreams that now could never come true. In place of the professional honors that were predicted with such confidence for her boy, and toward which she had looked with such pride, the mother saw her son honored by the love of the unpretentious country folk. From plans that had failed and hopes that were buried, Jimmy himself turned to the grandeur of the mountains and the beauty of tree and bush and flower—to the limitless spaces of the desert and the peace of the quiet stars. The life of the great eastern city, with its hunger for fame, its struggle for riches, its endless tumult and its restless longings, faded farther and farther away. The simple, more primitive, more peaceful life of God's great unimproved world became every day more satisfying.

To the roaming cowboys and miners and their kind, and to the people of the little mountain village, that tiny white house on the hill was known. And many a man, when things were going wrong, came to spend an hour with this friend whose understanding was so clear and whose counsel was so true. Many a girl or woman in need of comfort, strength or courage came to sit a while with Mrs. Burton. And sometimes a tired rider of the range would hear in the twilight dusk the clear, sweet song of Jimmy's flute and, hearing, would smile and lift his wide-brimmed hat; or perhaps a lonely prospector, camped for the night in some gulch or wash would hear, and, hearing, would think again of things that in his search for gold he had forgotten. And

this is how Doctor James Burton became Saint Jimmy and Saint Jimmy's mother became Mother Burton to them all.

It was natural that the good doctor should become Marta Hillgrove's teacher, and that Mrs. Burton should mother the girl who, until her fathers brought her to the Cañada del Oro, had never known a woman's guiding love. Indeed, it was Saint Jimmy and his mother and all that their friendship meant to Marta that had kept the Pardners in that neighborhood. Never before since the beginning of their partnership had those wanderers stayed so long in one place. For four—nearly five—years Marta had been studying under Saint Jimmy; a fair equivalent of the usual college course. With this textbook education she had received from Mother Burton the kind of training that such a woman would have given a daughter of her own. And yet these most excellent teachers knew no more of their pupil's history than did those thoughtless ones who so freely discussed the girl and looked at her askance for what they thought her parentage might be.

It should be said, too, that this schooling which Marta had received from Saint Jimmy and his mother was wholly a matter of love. As Doctor Burton explained to the Pardners, when they insisted that he should be paid "same as a reg'lar teacher," the work was really a blessing to him in that his pupil contributed more to his life than he could possibly give to hers; while Mother Burton warned the anxious fathers, gently but firmly, that if they ever said another word about pay they would ruin everything.

But as the years passed and she watched the amazing development of the girl's mind, and saw the unfolding of her

richly endowed womanhood, wise Mother Burton came to wonder sometimes if Saint Jimmy's teaching was not more a matter of love than even he perhaps realized.

On that spring morning when Marta rode to Oracle and her fathers discussed the problem that so troubled them, Saint Jimmy sat in the yard before the cottage door. On every side he saw the Mariposa tulips lifting their lovely orange cups, and sweet pea blossoms swinging like pink and white fairies above a lilac carpet of wild verbena and purple fragrant hyptis, while against the rocks that were stained with splashes of gray and orange and red and yellow lichens stood the purple pentstemon. The mountain sides below were wondrous with the scarlet glory of the ocotillo and the indescribable beauty of the chollas and opuntias with their crowns and diadems of red and salmon and orange and pink. The slopes and benches of the lower levels were bright with great fields of golden brittle-bush; and beyond these, on the wide spaces of the mesa, he could see the yuccas (our Lord's candles) in countless thousands, raising their stately shafts with eight-foot clusters of creamy-white bloom.

Mrs. Burton, leaving her housework for a moment, came to stand in the doorway. When they had spoken of the beautiful sight that never failed to move them—calling each other's attention to different favorite views—Saint Jimmy said:

“Mother, doesn't it all make you sort of hungry for something—something that can't be told in words?” he laughed in boyish embarrassment.

His mother smiled.