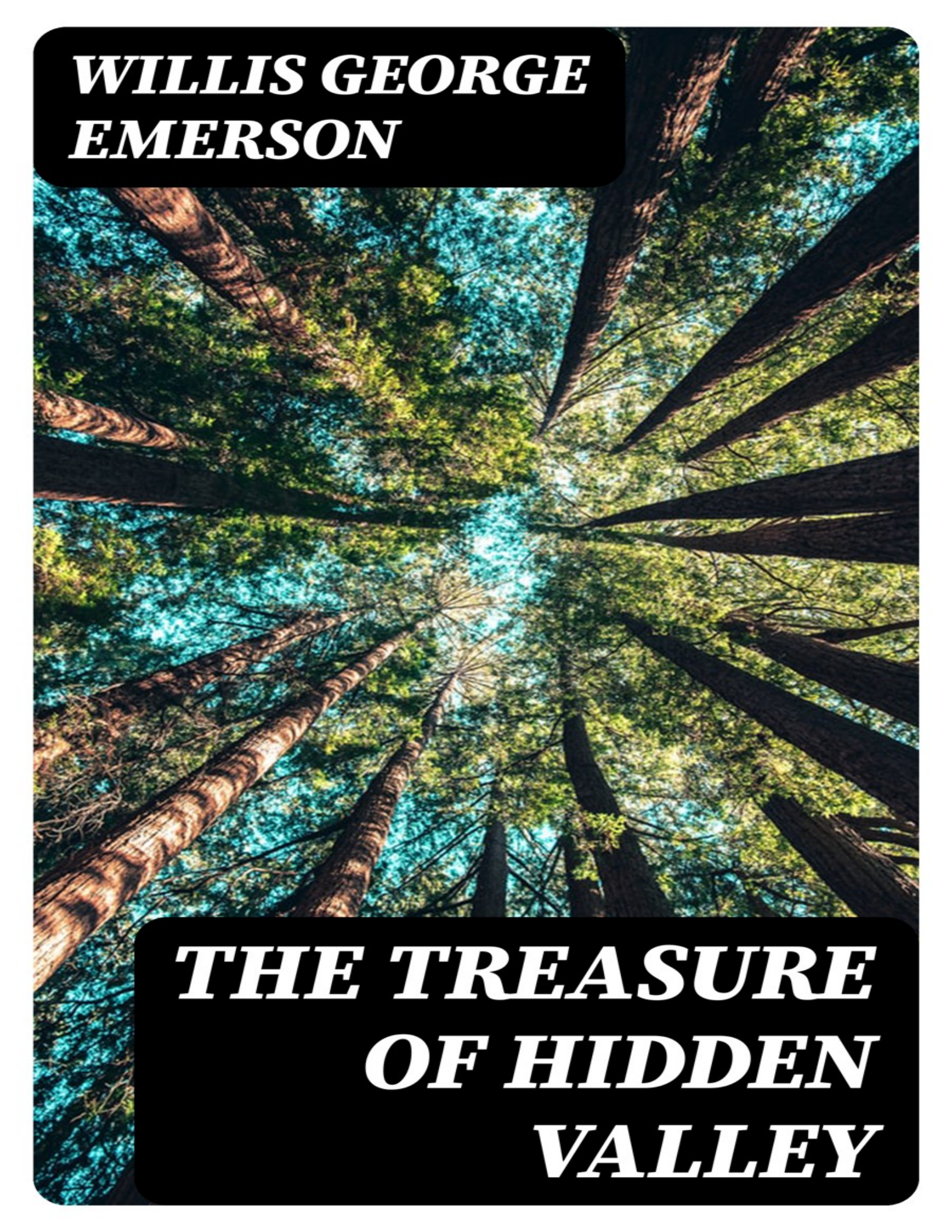




***WILLIS GEORGE
EMERSON***

***THE TREASURE
OF HIDDEN
VALLEY***

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Willis George Emerson

The Treasure of Hidden Valley

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CHAPTER I—AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

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IT was a dear, crisp October morning. There was a shrill whistle of a locomotive, and then a westbound passenger train dashed into the depot of an Iowa town. A young man descended the car steps with an armful of luggage. He deposited his parcels on the platform, and half expectantly looked about him.

Just then there was a “honk! honk!” from a huge automobile as it came to a palpitating halt, and a familiar voice called out: “Hello, Roderick, old man!” And a moment later Roderick Warfield was shaking hands with his boon friend of former college days, Whitley Adams. Both were in their early twenties, stalwart, well set up, clean-cut young fellows.

Whitley’s face was all aglow in the happiness of reunion. But Roderick, after the first cordial greeting, wore a graver look. He listened quietly while his comrade rambled on.

“Mighty glad to receive your wire last night at the club. But what brings you home so unexpectedly? We’ve been hearing all sorts of glowing stories—about your being in the thick of affairs in little old New York and rolling in the shekels to beat the band.”

“Fairy tales,” was the laconic reply, accompanied by a look that was compounded of a sigh and a wistful smile.

“How’s that?” asked young Adams, glancing up into the other’s face and for the first time noticing its serious

expression. "Don't tell me you've struck a financial snag thus early in your Stock Exchange career."

"Several financial snags—and struck 'em pretty badly too, I'm afraid."

"Whew!" exclaimed Adams.

"Oh, I'm not down and out," laughed Roderick, half amused at the look of utter discomfiture on his companion's countenance. "Not by a long chalk! I'm in on several good deals, and six months from date will be standing on velvet. That is to say," he added, somewhat dubiously, "if Uncle Allen opens up his money bags to tide me over meanwhile."

"A pretty big 'if,' eh?" For the moment there was sympathetic sobriety in the youth's tone, but he quickly regained his cheerfulness. "However, he'll come through probably all right, Rod, dear boy. It's the older fellows' privilege, isn't it? My good dad has had the same experience, as you will no doubt have guessed. There, let me see; how long have you been away? Eight months! Gee! However, I have just gotten home myself. My old man was a bit furious at my tardiness in coming and the geometrical increase of my expense account. To do Los Angeles and San Francisco thoroughly, you know, runs into a pot of money. But now everything is fixed up after a fashion with no evidence in sight of further squalls." He laughed the laugh of an overgrown boy laboring under the delusion that because he has finished a collegiate course he is a "man."

"Of course," he continued with a swagger, "we chaps who put in four long years at college should not be expected to settle down without having some sort of a valedictory fling."

"There has not been much of a fling in my case," protested Warfield. "I tackled life seriously in New York from the start."

"But got a tumble all the same," grinned Adams. "However, there's no use in pulling a long face—at least not until your Uncle Allen has been interviewed and judiciously put through his paces. Come now, let us get your things aboard."

The conversation was halted while the young owner of the big 60 H. P. car helped his chauffeur to stow away the luggage. "To the club," he called out as he seated himself in the tonneau with his boyhood friend—college chum and classmate.

"Not this morning!" exclaimed Roderick, shaking his head as he looked frankly and a bit nervously into the eyes of Whitley Adams. "No club for me until I have squared things up on the hill."

"Oh, well, just as you say; if it's as bad as that, why of course—" He broke off and did not finish the sentence, but directed the chauffeur to the residence of Allen Miller, the banker.

They rode a little way in silence and then Whitley Adams observed: "You've made a muddle of things, no doubt," and he turned with a knowing look and a smile toward Roderick, who in turn flushed, as though hit.

"No doubt," he concurred curtly.

"Then when shall I see you?" asked Whitley as the auto slowed down at the approach to the stately Miller home.

"I'll 'phone you," replied Roderick. "Think I can arrange to be at the club this evening."

“Very well,” said his friend, and a minute later he had whirled away leaving a cloud of dust in the trail of the machine.

Roderick Warfield met with a motherly reception at the hands of his Aunt Lois, Mrs. Allen Miller. The greetings over and a score of solicitous questions by his Aunt Lois answered, he went to his room for a bath and a change of clothes. Then without further delay he presented himself at the bank, and in a few moments was closeted in the president’s private room with his uncle and guardian, Allen Miller.

The first friendly greetings were soon followed by the banker skidding from social to business considerations. “Yes,” said Allen Miller, “I am glad to see you, Roderick, mighty glad. But what do you mean by writing a day ahead that a good big sum is required immediately, this without mention of securities or explanation of any kind?” He held up in his hand a letter that ran to just a few niggardly lines. “This apology for a business communication only reached me by last night’s mail.”

The kindly look of greeting had changed to one that was fairly flinty in its hardness. “What am I to expect from such a demand? A bunch of unpaid accounts, I suppose.” As he uttered this last sentence, there was a wicked twang in his voice—a suggestion of the snarl of an angry wolf ready for a fierce encounter. It at least proved him a financier.

A flush of resentment stole over Roderick’s brow. His look was more than half-defiant. On his side it showed at once that there would be no cringing for the favor he had come to ask.

But he controlled himself, and spoke with perfect calm.

"My obligations are not necessarily disgraceful ones, as your manner and tone, Uncle, might imply. As for any detailed explanation by letter, I thought it best to come and put the whole business before you personally."

"And the nature of the business?" asked the banker in a dry harsh voice.

"I am in a big deal and have to find my *pro rata* contribution immediately."

"A speculative deal?" rasped the old man.

"Yes; I suppose it would be called speculative, but it is gilt-edged all the same. I have all the papers here, and will show them to you." He plunged a hand into the breast pocket of his coat and produced a neatly folded little bundle of documents.

"Stop," exclaimed the banker. "You need not even undo that piece of tape until you have answered my questions. A speculative deal, you admit."

"Be it so."

"A mining deal, may I ask?"

Roderick's face showed some confusion. But he faced the issue promptly and squarely.

"Yes, sir, a mining deal."

The banker's eyes fairly glittered with steely wrathfulness.

"As I expected. By gad, it seems to run in the blood! Did I not warn you, when you insisted on risking your meagre capital of two thousand dollars in New York instead of settling down with what would have been a comfortable nest egg here, that if you ever touched mining it would be

your ruin? Did I not tell you your father's story, how the lure of prospecting possessed him, how he could never throw it off, how it doomed him to a life of hardship and poverty, and how it would have left you, his child, a pauper but for an insurance policy which it was his one redeeming act of prudence in carrying?"

"Please do not speak like that of my father," protested Roderick, drawing himself up with proud

The banker's manner softened; a kindlier glow came into his eyes.

"Well, boy, you know I loved your father. If your father had only followed my path he would have shared my prosperity. But it was not to be. He lost all he ever made in mining, and now you are flinging the little provision his death secured for you into the same bottomless pool. And this despite all my warnings, despite my stern injunctions so long as it was my right as your guardian to enjoin. The whole thing disgusts me more than words can tell."

Into the banker's voice the old bitterness, if not the anger, had returned. He rose and restlessly paced the room. A silence followed that was oppressive. Roderick Warfield's mind was in the future; he was wondering what would happen should his uncle remain obdurate. The older man's mind was in the past; he was recalling events of the long ago.

Roderick Warfield's father and Allen Miller had as young men braved perils together in an unsuccessful overland trip when the great California gold rush in the early fifties occurred. At that time they were only boys in their 'teens. Years afterward they married sisters and settled down in

their Iowa homes—or tried to settle down in Warfield's case, for in his wanderings he had been smitten with the gold fever and he remained a mining nomad to the end of his days. Allen Miller had never been blessed with a child, and it was not until late in their married life that any addition came to the Warfield family. This was the beginning of Roderick Warfield's career, but cost the mother's life. Ten years later John Warfield died and his young son Roderick was given a home with Mr. and Mrs. Allen Miller, the banker accepting the guardianship of his old friend's only child.

The boy's inheritance was limited to a few thousand dollars of life insurance, which in the hands of anyone but Allen Miller would have fallen far short of putting him through college. However, that was not only accomplished, but at the close of a fairly brilliant college career the young man had found himself possessed of a round couple of thousand dollars. Among his college friends had been the son of a well-to-do New York broker, and it was on this friend's advice that Roderick had at the outset of his business life adventured the maelstrom of Gotham instead of accepting the placid backwaters of his Iowan home town. Hence the young man's present difficulties and precarious future, and his uncle's bitterness of spirit because all his past efforts on Roderick's account had proved of such little avail.

At last the banker resumed his chair. The tightly closed lips showed that his mind was made up to a definite line of action. Roderick awaited the decision in silence—it was not in his nature to plead a cause at the cost of losing his own

self-respect He had already returned the unopened bundle of mining papers to the inner pocket of his coat.

"As for any advance to meet speculative mining commitments," began the man of finance, "I do not even desire to know the amount you have had in mind. That is a proposition I cannot even entertain—on principle and for your own ultimate good, young man."

"Then I lose all the money I have put in to date."

"Better a present loss than hopeless future entanglements. Your personal obligations? As you have been using all available funds for speculation, I presume you are not free from some debts."

"Less than a thousand dollars all told."

"Well, you have, I believe, \$285.75 standing to your personal credit in this bank—the remnant of your patrimony."

"I did not know I had so much," remarked Roderick with a faint smile.

"All the better, perhaps," replied the banker, also smiling grimly. "The amount would have doubtless been swallowed up with the rest of your money. As matters stand, some payment can be made to account of your obligations and arrangements entered into for the gradual liquidation of the outstanding balance." Young Warfield winced. The banker continued: "This may involve some personal humiliation for you. But again it is against my principles to pay any man's debts. Anyone who deliberately incurs a liability should have the highly beneficial experience of earning the money to liquidate it I propose to give you the chance to do so."

Roderick raised his eyebrows in some surprise. "In New York?" he enquired.

"No, sir," replied Allen Miller rather brusquely and evidently nettled at the very audacity of the question. "Not in New York, but right here—in Keokuk. Calm your impatience, please. Just listen to the proposals I have to make—they have been carefully thought out by me and by your Aunt Lois as well. In the first place, despite your rather reckless and improvident start in life, I am prepared to make you assistant cashier of this bank at a good salary." Again Roderick evinced amazement. He was quite nonplussed at his uncle's changed demeanor. The conciliatory manner and kindly tone disarmed him. But could he ever come to renounce his New York ambitions for humdrum existence in the old river town of Keokuk? He knew the answer in his heart. The thing was impossible.

"And if you are diligent," continued the banker, "prove capable and make good, you may expect in time to be rewarded with a liberal block of stock in the bank. Come now, what do you say to this part of my programme?" urged the speaker as Roderick hesitated.

The young man's mind was already made up. The offer was not even worth considering. And yet, he must not offend his guardian. It was true, Allen Miller's guardianship days were past, but still in his rapid mental calculations Roderick thought of his stanch old stand-by, Uncle Allen Miller, as "Guardian." He lighted a cigar to gain time for the framing of a diplomatic answer.

"Well," said the banker, with a rising inflection, "does it require any time to consider the generous offer I make?"

Roderick pulled a long breath at his cigar and blew rings of smoke toward the ceiling, and said: "Your offer, Uncle, is princely, but I hardly feel that I should accept until I have thought it all over from different points of view and have the whole question of my future plans fully considered. What are the other items on your programme?"

"They should be rather counted as conditions," replied the banker drily. "The conditions on which the offer I have just made are based."

"And they are what?"

"You must quit speculation, give up all expensive habits, marry and settle down." The words were spoken with all the definiteness of an ultimatum.

Again Roderick winced. He might have been led to all or at least some of these things. But to be driven, and by such rough horse-breaking methods—. never! no, never. He managed to restrain himself, however, and replied quietly: "My dear uncle, the idea of marrying for some years yet, to tell you the truth, has never entered my head. Of course," he went on lightly, "there is a young lady over at Galesburg, Stella Rain, where my Knox college days were spent, the 'college widow,' in a way a very lovely sort and in whom I have been rather interested for some two years, but—"

"That will do, young man," interrupted Allen Miller, sharply and severely. "Never mind your society flyers—these lady friends of yours in Galesburg. Your Aunt Lois and myself have already selected your future wife."

He laughed hoarsely, and the laugh sounded brutal even to his own ears. Allen Miller realized uncomfortably that he had been premature and scored against himself.

“Oh, is that so?” ejaculated Roderick in delicate irony. A pink flush had stolen into his cheeks.

The old banker hesitated in making reply. He grew hot and red and wondered if he had begun his match-making too abruptly—the very thing about which his good wife Lois had cautioned him. In truth, despite the harsh methods often imposed on him by his profession as a banker, a kinder heart than Allen Miller’s never beat. But in this new rôle he was out of his element and readily confused. Finally after clearing his throat several times, he replied: “Yes, Roderick, in a way, your Aunt Lois and I have picked out the girl we want you to marry. Her father’s wealth is equal to mine and some day perhaps—well, you can’t tell—I’ll not live always and, provided you don’t disobey me, you may inherit under my will a control of the stock of this banking house, and so be at the head of an important and growing financial institution.”

Roderick instead of being fifty-four and calculating, was only twenty-four and indifferent to wealth, and the red blood of his generous youth revolted at the mercenary methods suggested by his uncle regarding this unknown girl’s financial prospects. And then, too, the inducement thrown out that under conditions of obedience he might inherit the fortune of his uncle, was, he interpreted, nothing short of an attempt to bribe and deprive him of his liberty. He flushed with indignation and anger. Yet with a strong effort he still controlled his feelings, and presently asked: “Who is the fair lady?”

“The daughter of an old friend of mine. They live only a short distance down the river. Their home is at Quincy,

Illinois. Mighty fine old family, I can tell you. Am sure you'll like her immensely."

"Am I to understand," asked Roderick rather caustically, "that the young lady acquiesces and enters graciously into your plans?"

"Well, I can't say that!" replied Allen Miller, rubbing his chin. "But your Aunt Lois and I have talked over the possible alliance in all its lights."

"With the young lady's family, I presume?"

"No, not even that. But we are perfectly certain that we have only to speak the word to put the business through all right."

"Business!"—Roderick repeated the word with bitter emphasis.

"Yes, sir, business," retorted Allen Miller, with some warmth. "To my mind matrimony is one of the most important deals in life—perhaps *the* most important."

"If the money is right," laughed the young man contemptuously. "But don't you think that before another word is said about such a matter I should have the chance of seeing the young lady and the young lady a chance of seeing me?"

The humor of the situation had brought a pleasant smile to his face. The banker looked relieved.

"Wait now, my boy," he replied musingly. "Do you remember when you were a little chap, perhaps twelve or thirteen years old, going with your Aunt Lois and myself to St. Louis on the Diamond Joe boat line?"

"Yes, I remember it perfectly."

“Well, then,” continued Allen Miller, “you perhaps haven’t forgotten a lady and gentleman with a little tot of a girl only five or six years old, who joined us at Quincy. You engaged in a regular boyish love affair at first sight with that little girl. Well, she is the one—a mighty fine young lady now—just passed eighteen and her father is rated away up in the financial world.”

For the moment Roderick’s indignation over the cold-blooded, cut-and-dried, matrimonial proposition was arrested, and he did not even notice the renewed reference to finance. He had become pensive and retrospective.

“How very long ago,” he mused more to himself than to his Uncle Allen—“How very long ago since that trip down the river. Yes, I remember well the little blue-eyed, black-curly-headed chick of a girl. It was my first steamboat ride and of course it was a holiday and a fairyland affair to my boyish fancy.”

He drew in a long breath and looked out through the window at the snow which was now falling, as if many chapters of the world’s history had been written in his own life since that far away yet well remembered trip. He fell silent for a spell.

Allen Miller chuckled to himself. At last his scheme was working. All his life he had been a success with men and affairs, and his self-confidence was great. He rubbed his hands together and smiled, while he humored Roderick’s silence. He would tell his wife Lois of his progress. Presently he said: “She is an only child, Roderick, and I think her father could qualify for better than a quarter of a million.”

This time the reiterated money recommendation jarred unpleasantly on Roderick's nerves and revived his antagonism. He hastily arose from his chair and walked back and forth across the room. Presently he halted before his uncle and with forced deliberation—for his anger was keyed to a high tension—said: "I am pleased, Uncle, to know the young lady is not a party to this shameful piece of attempted barter and sale business. When I marry, if ever, it shall be someone as regards whom wealth will count as of least importance. True love loathes avarice and greed. I require no further time to consider your proposals. I flatly reject your offer of a position in the bank, and shall leave Keokuk tomorrow. I prefer hewing out my own destiny and while doing so retaining my freedom and my self-respect. This is my decision, and it is an irrevocable one."

The ebullition of pent-up feelings had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that Allen Miller was momentarily overwhelmed. He had arisen and was noticeably agitated. His face was very white, and there was a look in his eyes that Roderick Warfield had never seen before.

"Young man," he said, and his voice was husky and trembling with suppressed rage—"you shall never have a dollar of my fortune unless you marry as I direct I will give you until tomorrow to agree to my plans. If you do not desire to accept my offer without change or modification in any shape, then take the balance of your money in the bank and go your way. I wash my hands of you and your affairs. Go and play football with the world or let the world play football with you, and see how it feels to be the 'pigskin' in life's game."

With these words the old man swung a chair round to the fireplace, dropped into it, and began vigorously and viciously pounding at a lump of coal. There was an interval of silence. At last Roderick spoke; his voice was firm and low.

“There will not be the slightest use, Uncle, in reopening this question tomorrow. My mind, as I have said, is already made up—unalterably.” The last word was uttered with an emphasis that rang finality.

The banker flung down the poker, and rose to his feet. His look was equally determined, equally final, equally unalterable.

“All right,” he snapped. “Then we’ll get through the banking business now.”

He touched a push-button by the side of the mantel. During the brief interval before a clerk responded to the summons, not another word was spoken.

“Bring me the exact figure of Mr. Warfield’s credit balance,” he said to his subordinate, “and cash for the amount. He will sign a check to close the account.”

Five minutes later Roderick had the little wad of bills in his pocket, and was ready to depart. Uncle and nephew were again alone.

“There is one other matter,” said the banker with cold formality. “There is a paper in my possession which was entrusted to my keeping by your father just before he died. I was to deliver it to you at my discretion after you had attained your majority, but in any case on your reaching the age of twenty-five. I will exercise my discretion, and hand over the paper to you now.”

He advanced to a safe that stood open at one side of the room, unlocked a little drawer, and returned to the fireplace with a long linen envelope in his hand. A big red splash of wax showed that it had been carefully sealed.

"This is yours," said the banker shortly, handing it over to the young man.

The latter was greatly agitated. A message from his dead father! What could it mean? But he mastered his emotions and quietly bestowed the packet in his breast pocket—beside the papers connected with the mining deal.

"I'll read this later," he said. And then he extended his hand. There was yearning affection in his eyes, in the tremor of his voice: "Uncle, we surely will part as friends."

"You can regain my friendship only by doing my will. I have nothing more to say. Good-by."

And without taking the proffered hand, Allen Miller turned away, leaning an elbow on the mantelshelf. His attitude showed that the interview was at an end.

Without another word Roderick Warfield left the room. Outside the soft snow was falling in feathery silence. At a street corner the young man hesitated. He glanced up the road that led to his old home—Allen Miller's stately mansion on the hill. Then he took the other turning.

"I guess I'll sleep at the Club to-night," he murmured to himself. "I can bid Aunt Lois good-by in the morning."



CHAPTER II—A MESSAGE FROM THE GRAVE

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A LLEN MILLER, the rich banker, was alone—alone in the president's room at his bank, and feeling alone in the fullest sense of the word now that Roderick Warfield had gone, the youth he had reared and loved and cherished as his own child, now turned out of doors by the old man's deliberate act.

For full an hour he walked slowly back and forth the whole length of the apartment. But at last he halted once again before the open grate where some slumbering chunks of coal were burning indifferently. He pushed them together with the iron poker, and a bright blaze sprung up.

Looking deep into the fire his thoughts went back to his boyhood days and he saw John Warfield, his chum of many years. He thought of their experience in the terrible massacre in the Sierra Madre Mountains in the region of Bridger Peak, of a lost trail, of hunger and thirst and weary tramps over mountain and down precipitous canyons, of abrupt gashes that cut the rocky gorges, of great bubbling springs and torrents of mountain streams, of a narrow valley between high mountains—a valley without a discoverable outlet—of a beautiful waterway that traversed this valley and lost itself in the sides of an abrupt mountain, and of the exhausting hardships in getting back to civilization.

Then Allen Miller, the flint-hearted financier, the stoic, the man of taciturn habits, did a strange thing. Standing there before the blazing fire, leaning against the mantel, he

put his handkerchief to his eyes and his frame was convulsed with a sob. Presently he turned away from the open grate and muttered aloud: "Yes, John Warfield, I loved you and I love your boy, Roderick. Some day he shall have all I've got. But he is self-willed—a regular outlaw—and I must wake him up to the demands of a bread-winner, put the bits into his mouth and make him bridle-wise. Gad! He's a dynamo, but I love him;" and he half smiled, while his eyes were yet red and his voice husky.

"Ah, John," he mused as he looked again into the fire, "you might have been alive today to help me break this young colt to the plough, if you had only taken my advice and given up the search for that gold mine in the mountains. Thank God for the compact of secrecy between us—the secret shall die with me. The years, John, you spent in trying to re-dis-cover the vault of wealth—and what a will-o'-the-wisp it proved to be—and then the accident. But now I shall be firm—firm as a rock—and Roderick, the reckless would-be plunger, shall at last feel the iron hand of his old guardian beneath the silken glove of my foolish kindness. He's got to be subdued and broken, even if I have to let him live on husks for a while. Firm, firm—that's the only thing to be."

As he muttered the last words, Allen Miller shut his square jaws together with an ugly snap that plainly told the stern policy he had resolved on and would henceforth determinedly pursue. He put on his great fur-lined cloak, and silently went out into the evening shadows and thick maze of descending snow-flakes.

Meanwhile Roderick Warfield had reached his club, engaged a bedroom, and got a cheerful fire alight for companionship as well as comfort. He had telephoned to Whitley Adams to dine with him, but for two hours he would be by himself and undisturbed. He wanted a little time to think. And then there was the letter from his father. He had settled himself in an easy chair before the fire, the sealed envelope was in his hand, and the strange solemn feeling had descended upon him that he was going to hear his dead father speak to him again.

There was in the silence that enveloped him the pulsing sensation of a mysterious presence. The ordeal now to be faced came as a climax to the stormy interview he had just passed through. He had reached a parting of the ways, and dimly realized that something was going to happen that would guide him as to the path he should follow. The letter seemed a message from another world. Unknown to himself the supreme moment that had now arrived was a moment of transfiguration—the youth became a man—old things passed away.

With grave deliberation he broke the seal. Inside the folds of a long and closely written letter was a second cover with somewhat bulky contents. This he laid for the meantime on a little table by his side. Then he set himself to a perusal of the letter. It ran as follows:

“My dear Son:—

“This is for you to read when you have come to man’s estate—when you are no longer a thoughtless boy, but a thoughtful man. With this letter you will find your mother’s picture and a ring of pure gold which I

placed upon her finger the day I married her—gold with a special sentiment attached to it, for I took it from the earth myself—also a few letters—love letters written by her to me and a tress of her hair. I am sure you will honor her memory by noble deeds. I loved her dearly.

“I was younger at the time than you are now, Roderick, my son. Your Uncle Allen Miller—about my own age—and myself planned a trip to California. It was at the time of the great gold excitement in that far off land.

“The Overland Train of some two score of ox teams that we were with traveled but slowly; frequently not more than eight or ten miles a day. I remembered we had crossed the south fork of the Platte River and had traveled some two days on westward into the mountains and were near a place called Bridger Peak. It must have been about midnight when our camp was startled with the most terrific and unearthly yells ever heard by mortals. It was a band of murderous Indians, and in less time than it takes to describe the scene of devastation, all of our stock was stampeded; our wagons looted and then set on fire. Following this a general massacre began. Your Uncle Allen and myself, both of us mere boys in our ‘teens, alert and active, managed to make our escape in the darkness. Being fleet of foot we ran along the mountain side, following an opening but keeping close to a dense forest of pine trees. In this way we saved our lives. I afterwards learned that every other member of the party was killed.

“We were each equipped with two revolvers and a bowie knife and perhaps jointly had one hundred rounds

of cartridges. A couple of pounds of jerked beef and a half a loaf of bread constituted our provisions. Fortunately, Allen Miller carried with him a flint and steel, so that we were enabled to sustain ourselves with cooked food of game we killed during the weary days that followed.

“With this letter I enclose a map, roughly drawn, but I am sure it will help you find the lost canyon where flows a beautiful stream of water, and where your Uncle Allen and myself discovered an amazing quantity of gold—placer gold. It is in a valley, and the sandbar of gold is about a mile up stream from where the torrent of rapid water loses itself at the lower end of the valley—seemingly flowing into the abrupt side of a mountain. At the place where we found the gold, I remember, there was a sandbar next to the mountain brook, then a gorge or pocket like an old channel of a creek bed, and it was here in this old sandbar of a channel that the nuggets of gold were found—so plentiful indeed, that notwithstanding we loaded ourselves with them to the limit of our strength, yet our ‘takings’ could scarcely be missed from this phenomenal sandbar of riches. We brought all we could possibly carry away with us in two bags which we made from extra clothing. Unfortunately we lost our way and could not find an opening from the valley, because the waters of the stream disappeared, as I have described, and we were compelled, after many unsuccessful attempts to find a water grade opening, to retrace our steps and climb out by the same precipitous

trail that we had followed in going down into this strange valley.

“We wandered in the mountains as far south as a place now known as Hahn’s Peak, and then eastward, circling in every direction for many miles in extent. After tramping in an unknown wilderness for forty-seven days we finally came to the hut of a mountaineer, and were overjoyed to learn it was on a branch of the Overland trail. Not long after this we fell in with a returning caravan of ox team freighters and after many weeks of tedious travel arrived at St. Joseph, Mo., footsore and weary, but still in possession of our gold. A little later we reached our home near Keokuk, Iowa, and to our great joy learned that our treasure was worth many thousands of dollars. Your Uncle Allen Miller’s half was the beginning of his fortune. An oath of secrecy exists between your Uncle Allen Miller and myself that neither shall divulge during our lifetime that which I am now writing to you, but in thus communicating my story to you, my own flesh and blood, I do not feel that I am violating my promise, because the information will not come to you until years after my death.

“Since your mother’s death, I have made seven trips into the Rocky Mountain region hunting most diligently for an odd-shaped valley where abrupt mountains wall it in, seemingly on every side, and where we found the fabulously rich sandbar of gold.

“But I have not succeeded in locating the exact place, not even finding the lost stream—or rather the spot where the waters disappeared out of sight at the

base of a high mountain range. On my last trip, made less than one year ago, I met with a most serious accident that has permanently crippled me and will probably hasten my taking off. On the map I have made many notes while lying here ill and confined to my room, and they will give you my ideas of the location where the treasure may be found. To you, my beloved son, Roderick, I entrust this map. Study it well and if, as I believe, you have inherited my adventurous spirit, you will never rest until you find this lost valley and its treasure box of phenomenal wealth. In Rawlins, Wyoming, you will find an old frontiersman by the name of Jim Rankin. He has two cronies, or partners, Tom Sun and Boney Earnest. These three men rendered me great assistance. If you find the lost mine, reward them liberally.

“I have communicated to no one, not even your good Uncle Allen Miller, that I have decided on leaving this letter, and the information which it contains is for your eyes alone to peruse long after my mortal body has crumbled to dust. In imparting this information I do so feeling sure that your Uncle Allen will never make any effort to relocate the treasure, so that it is quite right and proper the secret should descend to you.

“My pen drags a little—I am weary and quite exhausted with the effort of writing. I now find myself wondering whether this legacy—a legacy telling you of a lost gold mine that may be found somewhere in the fastnesses of the mountains of Wyoming—will prove a blessing to you or a disquieting evil. I shall die hoping

that it will prove to your good and that your efforts in seeking this lost mine will be rewarded.

“With tenderest love and affection,

“Your father,

“John Warfield.”

When Roderick reached the end of the letter, he remained for a long time still holding it in his hands and gazing fixedly into the glowing embers. He was seeing visions—visions of a Wyoming gold mine that would bring him unbounded wealth. At last he broke from his reveries, and examined the other package. It was unsealed. The first paper to come forth proved to be the map to which his father had referred—it was a pencil drawing with numerous marginal notes that would require close examination. For the present he laid the document on the table. Then reverently and tenderly he examined the little bunch of love letters tied together by a ribbon, the tress of hair placed between two protecting pieces of cardboard, and the plain hoop of gold wrapped carefully in several folds of tissue paper. Lastly he gazed upon the photograph of his mother—the mother he had never seen, the mother who had given her life so that he might live. There were tears in his eyes as he gently kissed the sweet girlish countenance.

With thought of her and memories of the old boyhood days again he fell into a musing mood. Time sped unnoticed, and it was only the chiming of a church clock outside that aroused him to the fact that the dinner hour had arrived and that Whitley Adams would be waiting for him downstairs. He carefully placed all the papers in a writing desk that stood in a corner of the room, locked it,