

### THE DOCTOR.

We took to him from the first. He walked quietly into the Angel's Bower, at New Paradise, one night, when a half dozen of us miners sat smoking, drinking and exchanging reminiscences of the civil war, in which every one of us had taken part on one side or the other, emerging therefrom with a treasury of wounds, hair breadth escapes and desperate experiences enough to raise the hair on the heads of the tenderfeet present and to draw comments from the toughened veterans themselves.

He came in as softly as though he suspected we were all asleep and he was afraid of waking us. He was the handsomest fellow that had ever shown up in the Golconda diggings. Six feet tall, straight, a natural and graceful athlete, even the full yellow beard that covered his face could not hide its symmetry and wonderful winsomeness. The nose was slightly aquiline, the brown eyes bright and the head, with its scant covering, was as matchless as any that Rubens ever immortalized on canvas.

He greeted us familiarly and captured all by a general invitation to the bar—an invitation promptly and enthusiastically accepted. There was some surprise when he named lemonade, but only one of the company objected. He was Red Mike, the most vicious desperado that ever had a price set on his head, and tolerated at New Paradise only because we were afraid of him. If half the rumors about Red Mike were true, he ought to have been hanged a dozen times over. He was quick to draw, forever hunting a quarrel and played the king bully over all. He was a frowzy, snarling wretch, slouchy of gait, husky of voice, with beady eyes, tangled red beard—a tramp in dress, a giant in strength and a devil in disposition.

"I observed, stranger," said he, after gulping down his share, "that you insulted us."

"How is that?" asked the new comer, in his gentle voice, the twitching of the beard at the sides of his mouth and a twinkle of his womanly mouth showing that he was smiling.

"You drunk some pizen, while the rest of us took ours straight."

"You drank what you preferred and I did the same."

Every one of us sympathized with the stranger, but, like cowards, kept our mouths closed. We knew what was coming.

"What did yer swaller?" continued Red Mike, stepping in front of the man, leaning one elbow on the bar and glaring into the face of the smiling stranger.

"Lemonade; I never drink anything stronger."

"Wal, by —, when you're with this crowd you've got to drink the same as the rest of us."

"I shall exercise the same right as you—that of choosing my own drink."

I plucked up enough manhood at this point to interpose, seeing that Mike was determined to force a quarrel.

"You forget yourself, Mike. This gentleman is a stranger. He comes among us, and we have all drunk with him. He took, as he says, what he preferred and we did the same. You have no cause to object."

"I'll tend to you when I'm through with him," he growled, flashing his flaming visage on me and turning back the same instant. "Stranger, you have the choice of drinking a tumbler of mountain dew or you die."

He slid his hand down to his hip as he spoke, but the other was quicker than he, so quick that none of us ever rightly understood how it was done. Two pistol shots reports rang through the little barroom of the Angel's Bower, but one was a second ahead of the other. With a frightful oath Red Mike lurched against the bar, sagged sideways and then collapsed, going down on the floor, his hat tumbling off, his weapon dropping from his nerveless hand and both arms flapping out above his head as he thumped over on his back at full length.

His bullet had nipped the ear of the stranger and embedded itself in the timbers behind him; the other had passed through his neck, and it looked as if the time had come for Red Mike to die with his boots on.

None of us moved. The stranger shoved his pistol into his pocket, stepped forward and knelt on one knee beside the head of the senseless miscreant. He ran his fingers along the wound, bending his head lower and examining the hurt in a way that made us suspect on the instant that he was a doctor.

"Hit him where I intended," he remarked, looking around and up in our faces. "He won't die, but when he gets well he'll know more than he did. A swallow of brandy will help him, and, gentlemen, you will oblige me once more."

He drew the bulky form one side, as though it was that of a child, set it upright, with the back against the wall, with the ugly head flopping limply to the right and left. The brandy was held to the whiskered lips, and after Mike had swallowed the stuff and showed signs of reviving the attendant bandaged the wound with some rags abstracted from the superabundance around Mike's person.

"Now you will come all right," remarked the visitor, walking back to the bar, where glasses in hand, we awaited him. He lifted his lemonade again and said, "Your health, gentlemen."

While the bottom of my glass was tilted upward I shot a look alongside of it at Mike. His shaggy head dropped forward, but it was done purposely and the lower whites of his eyes showed. He was glaring from under the beetling ridge of his brows at the stranger, who, having drank again, was fishing out with his forefinger a piece of the dried lemon in the bottom of the dirty glass. Mike's head was bent so far over that it was hard to see what he was doing, but he was studying his master and that master knew it.

"How do you feel?" he asked, in the sympathetic tone of a physician.

"None of your — business," grunted the desperado.

"A good sign when a patient talks like that," remarked the stranger, champing the bit of withered lemon; "if you'll place him on the couch where he can be quiet for several days, he will soon come round again. I will drop in to-morrow and look at him."

Landlord McGuigan helped the snorting Mike to wobble to the back room, where he was dumped on McGuigan's only spare couch and once more and finally he collapsed.

"I judge you are a physician?" I said to the visitor.

"Yes, I was a surgeon for the Confederacy from Manassas to the sunset at Appomattox—Dr. Edward Creighton, at your service."

He lifted his army hat with a "Good night, gentlemen," and passed out into the darkness, carrying our hearts with him, for he was a born knight, with the daring of a lion.

The next morning Red Mike was wilder than a loon. McGuigan was scared out of his wits and begged the Doctor to give him a dose right off that would kill or soothe him, preferably the former. Ten minutes later Mike was sleeping as sweetly as when an innocent infant, though it is hard to imagine him, even at that early stage, guiltless of any of the crimes attainable by fallen human nature. A week later he was substantially well, though the wound troubled him for a considerable while.

That was how Dr. Ned Creighton and Red Mike became partners. That burly, tumbled knot of concentrated devilry was now the meek bulldog, never so content as when allowed to lick the hand that had smitten him. He was as ready as ever to strike, bite, claw, gonge and shoot with any one except the Doctor. One glance of those soft brown eyes electrified him. He was happy only in the Doctor's company. Shrinking in one corner, doubled up and introverted like a turtle, he fixed his beady eyes on his master, who talked and laughed and captivated all by his wonderful magnetism, unconscious apparently of those unwavering orbs that seemed not to wink for an hour at a time.

Crack! sounded Mike's revolver, and Boston Hank leaped from his seat with a questioning glare at the fellow, who from his place on a smashed barrel held his smoking revolver still levelled.

"What did you do that for?"

"Cause you interrupted the Doctor when he was talkin'."

"I didn't say a word."

"But you opened your mouth and war goin' to lip in; I shet you off."

"I was gaping—that's all."

"I judged from your looks that you meant to speak, when you got them jaws of yourn back ag'in to place. The Doctor isn't to be interrupted; you hear me, pard."

The Doctor had his secret and we all saw it. Naturally genial, talkative and the soul of the company, spells came upon him now and then when his melancholy was too profound to be shaken off. At such times he would wander into the mountains, not allowing even Mike, the bulldog, to slouch at his heels. Sometimes he was gone for a short while only and again for half a day or more.

He and Mike had their cabin in Devil's Gulch, a few hundred yards from the settlement modestly called New Paradise. I was the only one with whom Mike would ever talk about his master.

"He gets 'em bad sometime," he said in a low voice, glancing round for cowens.

"When he thinks I'm asleep, 'cause my eyes ar' shet, he sneaks off his cot, lights the candle and sits for hours without speaking."

"Doing what?"

"Blamed if I know, 'cept he has a picter that he takes out from his inside westcoat pocket—over his heart I s'pose—and holds it ahind the light and never takes his eyes offen it, onless to read a letter that he carries in the same place."

"Are you sure he never says anything?"

"I've heard him mutter once or twice, heaving a big sigh, but the only word I've ever been able to catch was 'Maggie' and I'm not sure of that. He kisses the picter over so many times, and when he is through puts 'em back together. He is the most



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## W. D. MACKAY

considerate man I ever knowed. He never forgits me, and moves about like a cat, fearing of waking me, not 'specting' cause my eyes appear to be shet I'm peeping between the lids."

"And then does he lie down?"

"He slips out of doors, coming back just afore daylight to prevent my waking up and finding him gone. I think that's some woman in the business, and, if a woman," added the philosopher, "then a man, and," resumed the bull dog, showing his fangs, "I want to find that man!"

"And has the Doctor never explained anything of this?"

"I can't 'zactly say no. He was so infarnal blue three nights ago that I up and asks him whether I couldn't do nothing for him. He looked at me steady-like for a minute and then says, says he, 'Mike, what do you think I come out to the mines for?'"

"To dig gold," I says, innocent like.

"No," says he; "I'm looking for a man."

"It took me all aback when he said that and I continues after a proper pause:

"And what are you going to do with the man when you find him?"

"I say, did you ever see blood red thunder and lightning mixed up with the fire from the eyes of a rattler when he snaps back his head to strike? Wal, that was the Doctor's face when I drops down on him with that question, and when he says: 'Wait till I find him; he's somewhar on top of the 'arth and I come out to the Golconda to look for him.'"

(To be Continued.)

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