

Justice In The Painted Hills

The story of a dog's revenge

By Alexander Hull

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MEAD SCHAEFFER

LIN TAYLOR had murdered his partner. He had known he was going to do that for three days, ever since in the rotten, friable detritus of the mountain meadow they had found the fabulously rich deposit of gold. The source of the stream upon which this placer gold lay was so near at hand, the high valley so restricted in area, that the finding of the lode from which the deposits had disintegrated and been washed into the little basin seemed a practical certainty, and the task, it might be, merely of days, certainly of no more than a few weeks.

Both men had been experienced prospectors, partners for more than three years, years, however, that had never paid out in more than day wages. Late in the preceding fall pronounced traces of color in lower Paint Creek had sent them climbing, through the next spring, farther and farther toward the headwaters among the mountain summits which, rising steep and snow-garbed out of the high plateau, gave the stream its name. Convinced at length that they were near the mother lode, that it must, in fact, lie up this particular branch, they had built a cabin at the foot of the meadow within sight of the marvelous peaks of the Painted Hills, which gleamed in red and green and blue and yellow, mingled with the white and violet and rose of the snow fields, like some incomparable color scheme of a superhuman futurist painter.

Three days ago their theory had found confirmation. In the very roots of the meadow grass and flowers they had discovered pay dirt, literally thousands of dollars' worth of loose gold in a plot scarcely half as large as a city lot! Moreover, just up-stream there was certainly the vein which, discovered, would make them rich as the dreams of avarice.

From that dizzy moment Lin Taylor had known that he alone must profit by that wealth. If by some malevolent stroke of fate he failed to find the vein from which this gold had come, why, there was altogether too little in the meadow washing to be shared with another man. And even if he did locate the mother lode—No! John Harvey must die!

That they had broken bread together for years, shared the same cabin, the same fire and tobacco, that Harvey believed him to be his friend, that Harvey actually was his friend—none of these things mattered for an instant compared to the insatiable and ferocious lust that had lighted its fires in his veins at the sight of those big yellow flares in his gold-pan. Mingled with those funous flames there was the ice

of an implacable determination to kill; there was no heat in that. It was a cold, deliberately planned, irrevocable intention.

This morning, as they rounded a spur high up on Firetop Mountain, a massive dome which took its name from the scarlet rock of its peak, his chance had come. At a critical moment he had suddenly halted in the trail and thrust out a foot. Harvey, stumbling upon the edge of a yawning abyss, tottered for seconds which seemed like infinity to Lin Taylor, and then pitched downward in utter silence, but with a look on his face of horror and incredulous amazement.

Lin Taylor stood alone on the trail, breathing heavily from sheer nervousness and excitement. His knees were trembling. He leaned back against the scarp of rock that towered upward from the trail. Here, in a moment, his strength and determination came back to him rapidly, and with them a feeling of intense exaltation.

HE WAS a rich man at last! Forty-three years he had been the world's under dog, but now—

He straightened up confidently, stood away from the wall behind him. Kneeling in the trail he leaned far over the edge and peered down into the chasm. Far below, lying like a heap of old clothing, he discerned upon the jagged rocks of the canyon floor all that remained of John Harvey.

Yes, he told himself, as he got to his feet, the job was done—and well done! And there was not a chance that the way it had been done ever would come to light. No living being knew, or would ever know!

Close upon that thought he noticed how very still it was. It was always still in the high mountains, though, and for weeks one might hear no human sound. It was suddenly impressed upon him that he would hear none from this moment, save those which he made himself. . . . But there was one sound now afloat upon the clear high atmosphere, a distant, faint baying, miles away to the south, Shep, John Harvey's dog, on the trail of a rabbit or a coyote.

Just then a pressure of wind came off the ice fields of Blue Peak in the opposite direction and passed, sounding and cold, over Lin Taylor, the canyon, and the dead man, and was gone. It had blown for a minute, perhaps, with a low, keening moan, blotting out the other sound, that of the hunting dog. And when it was gone there was no sound at all, neither wind, nor bird, nor dog—utter silence, complete and somehow menacing.

Lin Taylor stirred from his immobility and, turning, made his way back in the direction from which he had come. Not long after he reached the floor of the canyon, and threading his way among massive boulders and sharp outcroppings of the stratified bedrock he came at length to the huddled heap that had been John Harvey, his partner.

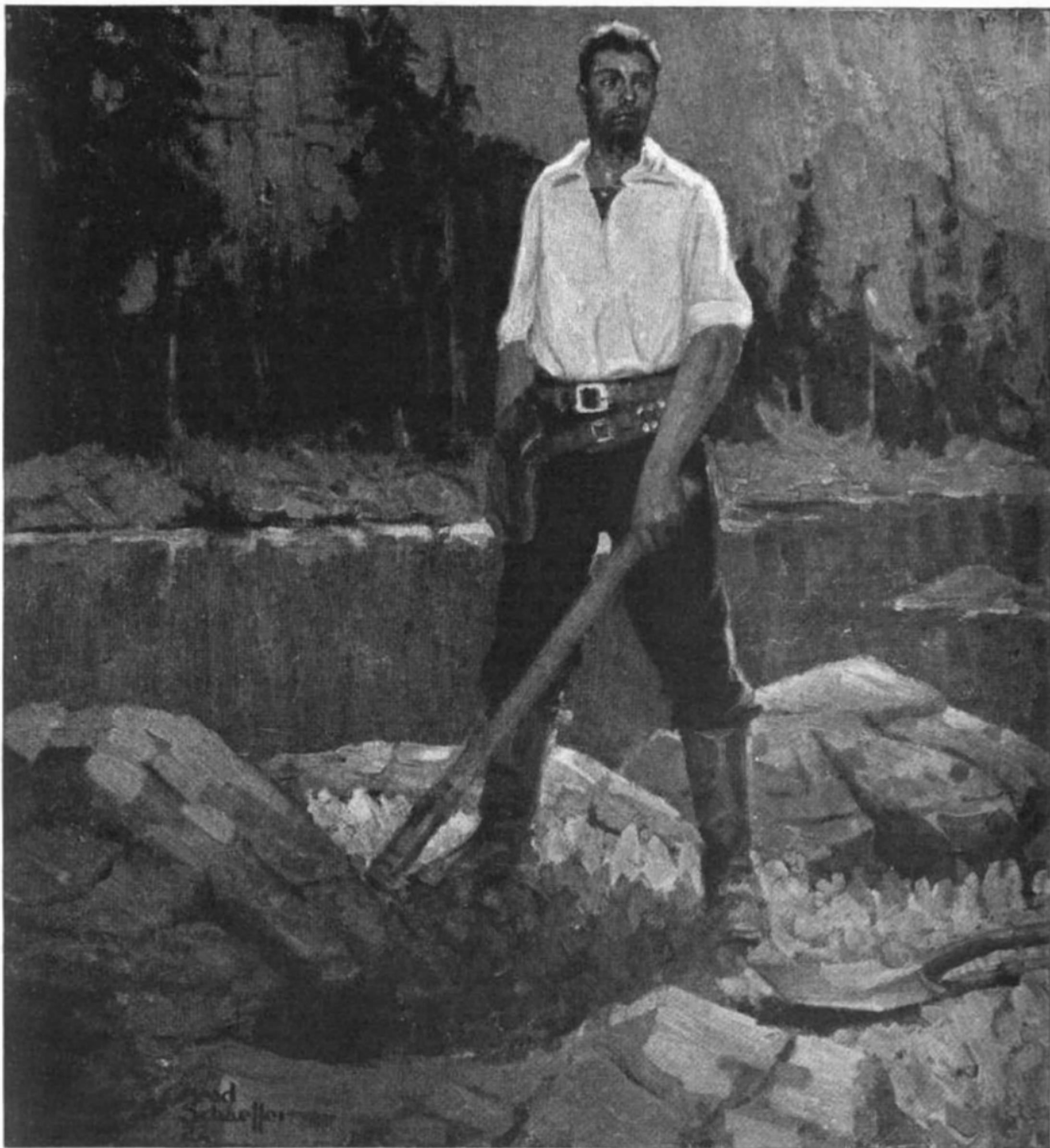
If there had been an eye then to see him, the eye of an intelligence that hoped or expected to see him flinch, it would have been disappointed. Lin Taylor was not a man to feel remorse. There are such men, introspective men, who, committing a murder in a passion, are driven, harried and hounded by their own thoughts and imaginations, into betraying themselves at last to punishment. Lin Taylor was not that sort of man. Introspection as a word was unfamiliar to him; the process itself was scarcely less so. He would never betray himself. He would never see ghosts. It takes the eye of belief to see ghosts, and Lin Taylor believed only in the things that can be handled—food and drink, women, gold. The things of the spirit (and ghosts are essentially things of the spirit) did not exist for him.

And now, at the side of his victim, he felt neither remorse nor fear. Bending over the bloodstained and broken thing, he ascertained that there was nothing of value in its clothing, drew from its belt a prospector's pick, then, catching it hardily by the boot, he dragged it a few feet away to a shallow depression in the floor and set about heaping over it a cairn of rocks. Stones of every size were plentiful and half an hour saw his work done.

AN HOUR later Lin Taylor entered his cabin. Hurriedly getting together the dead man's effects, he loaded them upon one of the two pack mules grazing beside the cabin and, packing the saddle bags of the other animal with some food, he was in less than half an hour on his way out of the Painted Hills. With him he took nothing more to show for the season's work than one small bag of dust and nuggets, about the same number of ounces in weight that he and Harvey had averaged for the last three seasons.

The third day he reached Nordness, a settlement of three hundred inhabitants, the link between civilization and the mountain fastnesses, where for three seasons he and John Harvey had wintered, and whence in the first thawings of spring they had set out again on their quest for gold.

There was here no questioning of his story of Harvey's death, and he had known there would not be any. A cave,



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less step on the edge of a perilous cliff, a little loose rock underfoot—how often that had happened! Harvey's nearest relative, a cousin in New York, would never question the manner in which he became the receiver of some seven hundred unexpected and welcome dollars, half the proceeds of the dust which Lin Taylor had brought in. There was little interest anywhere in John Harvey, the poor and unimportant prospector. He had always been a silent man, sitting by the hotel stove through the winter days, with his dog at his feet as silent as himself, smoking his pipe, not surly, but uncommunicative in the extreme.

Lin Taylor himself, because of a bluff and hearty manner that gave him at least

the appearance of cordiality, was the better liked of the two. And rather than suspicion he encountered sympathy. Dan Blake, who owned the general store in Nordness, mentioned the loss thus the first time that Lin entered the store.

"**MIGHTY** hard luck, losing Harvey. Quiet sort of man, but I always had a notion he'd be a mighty good, dependable sort of fellow, if a man knew him. Makes it right hard for you, I guess."

Lin Taylor nodded.

"Fell off a cliff, I heard say? How'd it come to happen? Did you see it?"

Lin answered without hesitation: "No, I didn't see it. Must've happened that way, though. He started out to climb

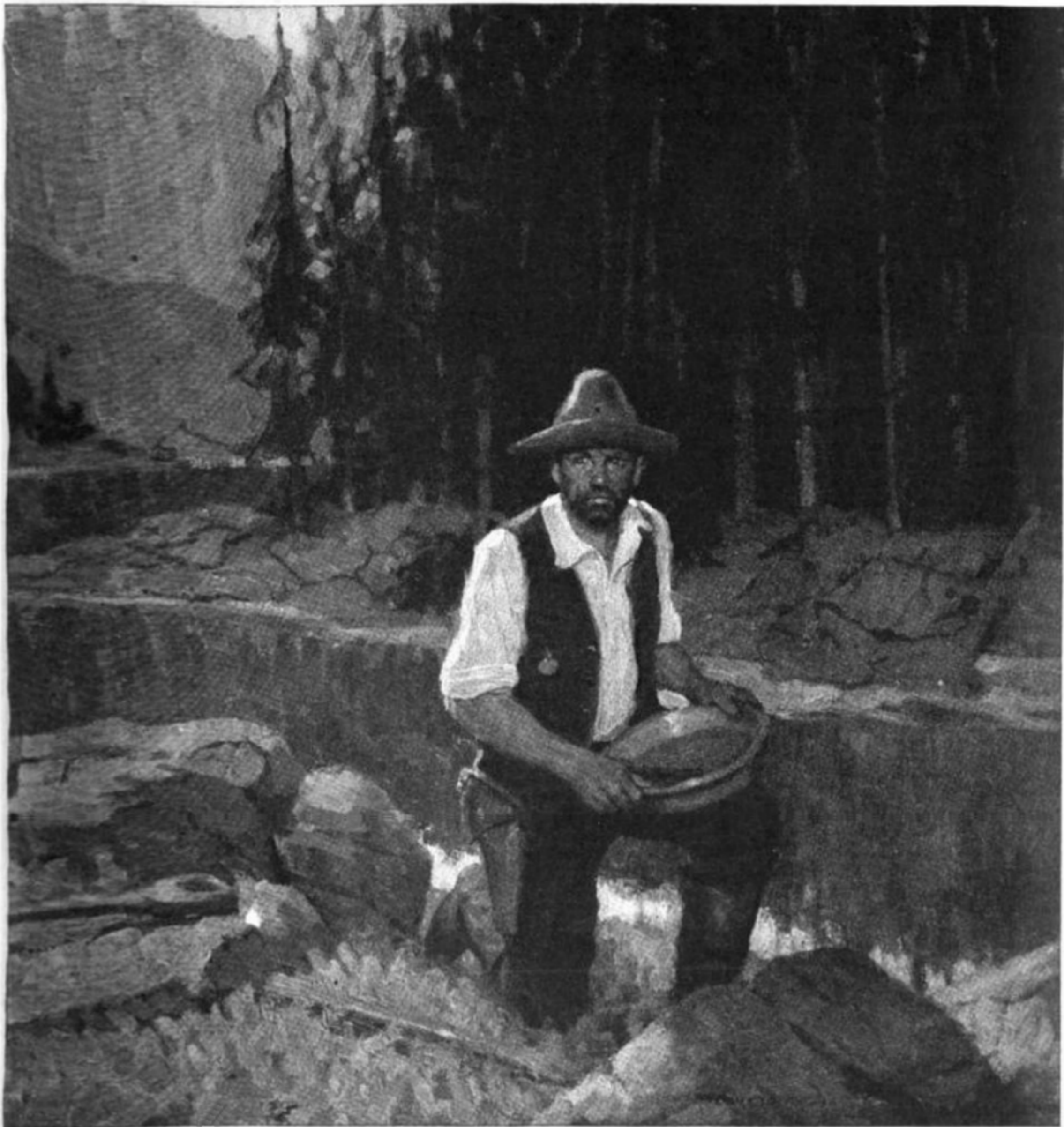
Firetop pretty early in the morning, and I figured he'd be back by noon or a little after. It's a good trail, you know."

"Never been up there," said Blake.

"Well, it is. I don't know what it was—presentiment, I guess. But along about three in the afternoon I began to get uneasy. So I started out. Well, I found him. Foot of a cliff about three-four hundred feet high—all broken to pieces. Slipped, I suppose."

"Mighty hard luck," said Blake again. "You'll miss him a lot. Been working together quite a spell, haven't you?"

"Going on four years," said Taylor shortly, with the manner of one who had rather not go on with the topic under discussion.



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Blake perceived his reluctance, said to himself that Taylor was pretty hard hit by the accident, and forbore to question him further in that way, but asked briskly: "Well, what can I do for you?"

"Want to get a few supplies."

"Going out again?"

Taylor nodded.

"Pretty late in the season to be starting out, ain't it?"

"Yes, but I've got a good cabin that me and Harvey built."

"Going back up there?" queried Blake, in surprise.

It was obvious that he thought it odd. He was recalling all that he had heard said about the Painted Hills country, that prospectors hereabout were universally

agreed that it was poor prospecting ground. True, a few colors had been found in the lower reaches of Paint Creek, as they had been in every stream in this part of the country, but no one had found more than that, despite the fact that the stream had been overrun with prospectors thirty years before, and had been tried from time to time, as a forlorn hope, by a good many men since. Lin Taylor and his partner had got barely day wages out of it this season. And those mountains should now be doubly distasteful to Taylor because of the death of Harvey. It did look odd. Blake, pondering, wondered if Taylor was going to turn "queer." He saw no signs of it in the man's appearance; but, anyway, prospectors were

pretty nearly all queer. Losing his partner that way was no doubt going to make Lin Taylor like the rest of them.

"Yeh, I guess I will."

"Get snowed in, won't you?"

"Won't likely be much snow for another month. Anyway, I've got a notion to winter it up there."

"Man! They say the snow gets thirty feet deep in that country!"

"I'm used to snow country. Take a few traps, maybe, and get some fur. Plenty of firewood up there. And if I don't like it, why, I can come out on snowshoes or skis."

Blake shook his head, now thoroughly convinced that Taylor had gone queer. "You don't really

think there's gold in that country, do you?"

"Think?" said Lin. "No! I know there is! How do you suppose the lower creek gets its colors? It's bound to be there, somewhere! The only trouble is finding it. It's there, though. It's got to be. It's got to wash down from somewhere, hasn't it?"

"Oh, sure," said Blake indulgently. "Sure. I admit there's gold up there. It's all around in these hills, for that matter; but it's badly spotted. Nobody ever finds much and nobody has located a good vein yet. Little pockets now and then; but that ain't what I mean. The big strike—"

"It's there," said Taylor stubbornly. "It's got to be. All you say doesn't prove anything except that nobody's made it yet."

"That's right," admitted Blake. "In theory, anyway. But it's a big country, too."

"I know that," said Taylor. "But if it's in the water, it's got to come from somewhere the water drains, hasn't it? Thunder! We worked pretty well up to the headwaters, Harvey and me. Harvey, he had a hunch we were going to find it this summer. I didn't take much stock in it right at first, but—I tell you, Blake, it looks mighty promising. It's awful good-looking country. There ought to be gold in it."

"I WISH I had a dollar for every square mile of good-looking country I've seen," said Blake.

Taylor laughed grudgingly. "Me, too, for that matter. But I've got a hunch I'm going to strike it—fore I come down again. Maybe Harvey passed the hunch on to me—I don't know—but—I've got that hunch."

Blake nodded. He well knew it. They all had that hunch. They kept going back into those lean mountains until they were grizzled and old, and their joints were swollen with rheumatism, and their bones rasped as they walked, and their eyes were bleared and half blind. And Blake, perhaps a little pharisaically, thanked God that he was a sensible man without the gold fever.

"Well," he said, "I hope your hunch is good, Taylor. I'd sure like to see you make the ten-strike!"

"Thanks," said Taylor. "Now then . . . let's see. Tobacco, first of all. There'll sure be plenty of time for smoking if I don't come out till the spring."

For an hour he made purchases, and when he had finished he asked Blake if he had extra pack horses, and finally completed arrangements by which Blake's son was to take the stores in as far as the north branch, where they could be cached in a lean-to, from which Taylor could pack them to his cabin. He turned to go, but at the door paused, halted by Blake's inquiry:

"Say, Taylor! Whatever became of Harvey's dog?"

"Why—nothing. He's still up there."

"He is?"

"Yes. He's a great hunter, that dog. Goes out by himself, maybe be gone all day, maybe two days. Hear him baying off on the mountain somewhere. He was gone that way when I came down."

"Didn't know about Harvey being dead, then?"

Taylor shook his head.

"Wonder how he'll take it?"

"Darned if I know."

"He'll be all broke up over it, shouldn't wonder."

"H'm." The monosyllable might have meant anything.

"THAT was the darnedest, smartest dog I ever saw," pursued Blake. "He was the same one that tended that bunch of sheep over in the Cascades, wasn't he?"

Blake was referring to the time, some years before, when Shep, working with a grazing outfit, had become separated in a heavy fog from the main bunch of animals, and had disappeared with fifty of the sheep that were being brought down from the high country into the lowlands for the winter. That was early in October, and neither dog nor sheep were seen for almost five months and a half, and it was supposed they had perished in the cold, or had become the prey of coyotes, wolves, or cougars. But one morning in April the band of sheep appeared at the ranch-house, seventy miles from the spot where they had been lost, every sheep plump and well-conditioned, not one missing. Shep had wintered them alone, no man knew how nor where!

Taylor admitted it was the same dog.

"And that's some dog," said Blake admiringly. "Did you know Harvey—of course you did, though—refused a thousand dollars for him?"

"Yeh, I knew it. Sure."

"Not much to look at, either," Blake went on. "'Bout half collie and half something else."

"Airedale, I guess," said Taylor.

"Just goes to show," said Blake, the true philistine. "You can talk about your thoroughbred dogs all you want. And after all what are they good for? Why, to take a blue ribbon at a swell dog-show! Then you take a dog like Shep—Say, I'd like to see some of those pure-breds put that stunt over!"

"A dog like Shep, though, he's been up against things; he understands. He's got the experience of life. He savvies. That was the most knowing dog I ever did see."

"Wouldn't make up to me, though. Oh, he wasn't ugly, of course. Only, he just wasn't very friendly. Let me pet him, all right, but wouldn't wag his tail while I was doing it. One-man dog, I guess. That's the Airedale in him, I suppose."

"He was always friendly enough with me," said Taylor.

This was a lie, but it seemed best to him to say it. That a dog should not be friendly with those with whom he is in daily contact is unusual, so unusual, indeed, that it awakens our distrust of the person for whom the dog shows distrust. There had never been any liking between Taylor and Harvey's dog. Taylor was that anomalous being, the man who didn't like dogs. Shep reciprocated the dislike, certainly. The antagonism had never been open, for at the slightest show of restiveness on the dog's part there had always come the quick, sharp command of Harvey, whose lightest word was the dog's law. But Taylor did not intend Blake should know that; the instinct for self-protection warned him against it.

"He's always been friendly enough with me," he repeated.

"Of course. He knew you mighty well, he'd lived with you," nodded the storekeeper. "Well, I can't help wondering: You really aim to stay the winter out?"

"Going to make that ten-strike. Before the snow flies, if I can; if not, I'll surely stay!"

"Luck to you!" said Blake. "No man I'd rather see make it!"

That was the perfunctory cordiality of the shopkeeper, however, and he probably would have said the same to any other prospector whom he hadn't personal reasons for disliking.

The last wash of gold was pouring over the marvelous domes and spires of the Painted Hills three days later when Lin Taylor entered his cabin. He had no eye for the ineffable beauty of that moment, however. He was dead tired; moreover, he meant to be up early in the morning and on his search for the vein of gold. That, he had determined, should be his first concern. The flakes in the roots of the meadow grass were already found, and could wait. He unpacked his supplies and picketed the mules. After a hurried supper he turned into his bunk and lay there, smoking his pipe, with the door open, for the night was strangely mild. When his pipe went out, he went to sleep.

SOMETHING woke him.

He lay still, listening. He could hear the lazy "champ-champ" of the mules at the grass near by the cabin. It couldn't have been a prowling wild animal, or they would have been disturbed. He decided finally that it had been nothing. He did not sleep immediately, though, and after a little he rose and went to the door to look at the big, misty stars. It must be, he decided, after eleven. And then again he heard the sound that, however faint, had awakened him.

Far away, yet distinct, a long, mournful howl . . . repeated . . . and repeated again. . . . Shep, his murdered partner's dog!

He listened for a few moments while he smoked another pipe. The mournful cadence was lifted again, and then again.

He was not moved by it. It was so far away that, now he had identified it, it would not again disturb his sleep and, since it was so far away, let the dog howl!

With grim lines about his mouth, Lin Taylor climbed again into his bunk. But the door was no longer open to the night. He had closed it. And now, with one ear buried in his pillow, he could not be sure whether he heard the desolate keening of the animal, or imagined it. If it was imagination . . . well, he was not strong on that! He drifted into a dreamless sleep.

He was up with the dawn, and could scarcely wait to consume his breakfast, so intense was his excitement. This morning he meant to follow the trail that he and Harvey had taken the morning he had murdered Harvey. The night preceding the two men had lain awake until nearly daylight, prospecting in advance the ensuing day's search.

"High up—probably just below the bend at the edge of Gray Spur," Harvey had said at last. "And there'll be a lot of loose stuff down at the edge of the water, and up above somewhere a scar, a new one, for there are flakes almost on top of last year's dead grass. We can take the Firetop trail and catch the branch just below the Spur."

THEY had taken the trail, and for Harvey it had led to eternity. To-day Lin Taylor meant to take it alone, and for him it would lead to fortune!

When he opened the cabin door he saw that Shep had come back. The dog rose from the beaten area before the door, a big-shouldered, magnificently built animal, and stood silent, looking into his face. Taylor spoke, but the dog made no reply: there was no friendliness in his attitude, no stirring of his body, no wagging of his tail. Taylor had a queer feeling for an instant as if he were facing some searching inquiry. . . .

With an effort he shook off the absurd notion, and set out on his day's search. Shep followed at a discreet distance, followed up the trail on Firetop, and down into the canyon, making no advance toward friendliness, but keeping always in sight.

Lin Taylor, after the first hour, paid the animal scant heed. He had other work on hand!

But he did not discover the vein that day, and though in the morning he had assured himself that he would, at sunset he told himself that he hadn't really expected to find it the first day. That would have been too absurdly easy. Tomorrow . . . ay, to-morrow!

He came down to his cabin, his mind preoccupied with the problem. He had been looking too far down the gash in the mountainside, he decided. Five hundred, a thousand, yards higher up—

Entering the cabin, he had left the door open, and disturbed by a sound behind him as he was kindling the fire he turned and saw that Shep had followed him in and was nosing at Harvey's bunk.

"Get out of here!" said Taylor sharply, making a movement toward the dog as he spoke.

Shep half turned and stiffened, bristling. Taylor paused with an instinctive feeling that it would be better to let the animal alone, and went back to his stove, saying nothing more.

Shep, after deliberately "smelling out" the cabin, turned and stepped slowly over the threshold and lay down outside.

Taylor closed the door, making a mental note that he wouldn't leave it open again, and then prepared his supper. He did not see the dog again that evening, but once, when he awakened late in the night, he heard it howl in the distance.

In the morning he set out early again and climbed steadily up the Firetop trail to resume his search farther up the canyon. When he reached the treacherous place where Harvey had lost his life, moved by some obscure impulse, he leaned over and looked down from the precise spot where his victim had gone over. He saw the cairn . . . yes, and there was something on it! Shep! The dog had found at last its master's grave, and it lay stretched upon the boulders, perhaps sleeping.

BUT no, not sleeping! For, as the man looked down, the dog suddenly rose and looked up. Lin Taylor moved quickly back out of sight, compelled by a feeling that he scarcely understood. Fear? Absurd! What had he to fear from a dog? And yet, if he had had a gun with him . . . but he hadn't. He moved on.

When he returned from his second day's vain search for the lode he found the dog lying beside the cabin, and as he entered the door, glancing down, he noticed, lying between its paws, Harvey's prospecting pick. He recognized it at once by the thong of buckskin that Harvey had bound around the lower part of the handle, and he remembered that in burying Harvey he had taken the pick from the dead man's belt and dropped it beside the cairn and then had gone off, forgetting it. The dog, of course, had found it, scented its master, and brought it up. It was a good pick, too. . . . He stepped toward the animal and bent over.

Suddenly Shep rose and stood over the pick he had been nuzzling, stiff-legged, bristling, his teeth bared.

Taylor straightened up angrily. "Get out of here!" he shouted furiously. And at the same moment he let drive a kick.

The dog moved so that the blow was only a glancing one, then crouched and sprang.

It was Taylor's good fortune, unprepared as he was for the suddenness of the onslaught, to catch the dog's leap with a straight blow of both arms that flung the animal to the earth, snapping vainly as it rolled over and over. Before it could rise he had stooped and picked up a heavy piece of three-foot firewood. On the next leap the dog grazed his arm, but received in return a stunning blow from the club, and then, dazed, a second, still more deadly.

In a blaze of passion now, Taylor yet hesitated at actually beating the dog to death. . . .

He went into the cabin for his gun. The magazine was empty. He filled it; but the delay had cost him his victim.

The dog was gone. An incredible, almost miraculous recovery from the two blows on the skull! Far down the meadow, disappearing in a clump of trees, he saw it. He flung his gun to his shoulder and fired—once—twice. But in vain. Then in the flush of his anger he fired twice more at the spot where he had last seen it.

When his rage had somewhat cooled he thought of what might have happened if he had not found the piece of wood so ready to his hand, and a cold, sickly sensation permeated him. If he had not found the means for protection he would certainly have been cut to pieces by those slashing fangs. But this, he told himself, was a known danger and easily met. He had only to go armed hereafter, and at the first encounter—why, Shep would be a good dog because he would be a dead one!

SO IN the morning as he set out he buckled his pistol holster to his belt and put in the belt a dozen extra cartridges. And for three days, as he searched the upper end of the stream from the snow fields of Firetop down to the first bend, and searched vainly, he watched for Shep as well. But he did not see him—unless a brown shadow, half imagined, slinking through the rocks of the canyon at a great distance was the dog. It might as easily have been a coyote, or a cougar, or nothing at all. He thought with a sense of violent relief that perhaps his blows had been more deadly than he supposed, that the dog had lost itself in the forest to die.

But his relief ended that very night when, far and mournful, as he had first heard it, Shep took up his dirge once more upon his master's grave.

Well, if he kept that far away, Taylor said to himself, it was all right. And closing the door he got into his bunk and muffled his ears in the blankets, and drifted into a sound slumber that lasted until just before dawn. Then, in the dim cold grayness close by the cabin, there came a different note, a hoarse, menacing burst of sound that could not be ignored or shut out by door or bedclothing. With a start and an oath he got out of his bunk and caught up his automatic. From the windows he could see nothing. The dawn was yet thick and formless. He unbarred the door and emerged.

A full-throated cry to the right of the cabin announced that Shep had seen him; but he could not discern the dog, strain his eyes how he would. He fired at random in the direction in which he had heard the bark—a second time—then a third. But it was without result, he was well aware. There was no sound from the animal now, and yet he had a feeling that it had not left the vicinity. Three times he circled the cabin, revolver in hand, each time a little farther afield, but he did not see Shep. Finally, he returned to the cabin, angrily muttering to himself that he was a fool. There was no need for hunting the dog; sooner or later they would meet without hunting. Until that time it was folly indeed to waste his time and energy in such pre-dawn, mad activities!

Moreover, he needed all his energy for the search for the mother lode. If he could find it before the snows began to fly—No! Let the dog go! Every hour must be given to the search for the big vein that lay waiting for him on the red slope of Firetop!

Yet on the trail that morning he turned not less than a dozen times, the very hairs of his head tingling with the feeling that the dog was behind him and very near. But he could actually see nothing of it, and once, a little after noon, he again

heard the distant baying in the south that told him Shep was hunting. Yet again, as he took the trail down to his cabin, he found his hand ready at his holster, his eyes alert ahead, and his body turning frequently so that he could look back. . . .

A dull rage was burning in him that night as he went to bed, only to be awakened toward morning again by the threatening challenge of Shep near by. This morning, however, he did not get up, but lay there, awake and angry, catching, each time he drifted to the verge of sleep, the strident reiteration of the dog's bark. And again that day, another day of failure on the mountain, he had the same uneasy feeling that he was being constantly shadowed. . . . He remembered, with curses upon his monumental folly, that he had had an opportunity to slay the dog, that he might have beaten it to death when he had stunned it with the length of wood, and that he had, through some crazy compunction, hesitated.

And again the following morning, before the light came, the dog found and haunted the vicinity of the cabin, growing bolder, coming closer, until Lin Taylor at one time could have sworn he heard its breath puffing at the threshold, the sniff of its hot nostrils! He fired a shot through the door then and sprang up quickly and threw it wide open.

Nothing!

The dog was not at the door, had not even been at the door. There was not a single trace of his pads in the clean-swept, fine, damp dust before the cabin.

So it went through another week, and became increasingly difficult, and at last intolerable. Only once had he got a fair shot at the dog, having surprised it at the rock cairn, and then he had not scored a hit. The dog had leaped as he fired, and had been lost almost instantly among the boulders of the canyon.

HE KNEW now that the dog was shadowing him, for he saw it often, just out of range. He realized, too, that his prospecting was becoming less and less a search for the vein of gold, and more and more a tense watch for the dog. It could not go on so. He had a terrible feeling that if he failed to watch for the animal it would in some inexplicable way ambush him, and he could not keep his mind from that horrible contingency.

There was only one thing to do, he decided finally, and that was to hunt down the dog and kill it. Until that was done he would never be safe, never be at ease. And until that was done—here a thread of superstition wove through his mental processes—until that was done, he would never find the vein of gold that was to make him rich and powerful. He knew it! John Harvey, he muttered to himself, Harvey first, then Harvey's dog, and then—and only then—peace! Peace and riches! But there would be neither as long as the dog was living. That was written. It was Fate!

He was waiting, the next dawn, fully clothed, his pistol in his hand, his belt filled with extra cartridges, for the sound of the avenger, and at the dog's first bark he stepped from the door and took up the challenge that God had flung him.

All through the morning he trailed the animal, glimpsing him now and then, fir-

ing often, though the range was so great as to be prohibitive of surety. He followed him up the first gentle slopes of Blue Peak, through the sparse forest cover, to the timber line, and beyond. He saw him far ahead on a snow field, his head hanging low, his pace slow and laborious. He kept up the chase across the high ridge that intervened between Blue Peak and Firetop Mountain, and he plodded wearily after in the waning of the afternoon light as the dog found again the trail that led down Firetop to the valley. And now he saw the animal was going faster and faster, that to hope to overtake it was madness, that he would never come within shooting range again that day.

To-morrow he would begin again. His mistake to-day had been that he was too impetuous, too determined to get the thing done. A stern chase was always a long chase. To-morrow he would hide somewhere in the valley and watch for the dog . . . which now had completely vanished among the crags of the lower spur.

HE WAS horribly tired. He had been on edge all day. He paused for a moment to rest before beginning a steep descent along the edge of the deep canyon where all week he had been looking for the baffling vein of gold. And as he paused, reflecting how tired he was, he noticed his revolver was still in his hand, clutched tightly, almost painfully, and he realized that he had been holding it so, almost continuously ready, since early dawn. What a fool he had been! To let his nerves play fast and loose with him—over a dog! Just a dog! And when he tried to let go of the revolver he could only do so with an effort, for his fingers seemed paralyzed, frozen to the grip. He stuck the automatic in his holster and began, a moment later, to descend the trail. To-morrow, after a night's sleep . . . to-morrow—

He rounded a sharp turn of the trail and suddenly faced Shep, his enemy, whom he had given up for that day!

The dog stood rigid and menacing, athwart his way. In a terrified flash Lin Taylor saw that the dog would be upon him before he could draw his revolver from its holster with his clumsy, stiffened fingers. He uttered a sharp cry, wheeled about, and fled back up the trail. His foot turned on a loose bit of rock. He spun around, swayed for an instant on the edge of the cliff, and then, as John Harvey had done before him, he pitched over, his body hurtling through space, to land far below upon the deadly, jagged rocks of the canyon, broken, bloody, and lifeless.

AND it was here that the searchers in the spring found his rotted remains, here, with the broken bones of his hands actually clutching the crumbled outcropping of the richest vein of gold that the Painted Hills had ever offered, or perhaps ever would offer, to men.