

A POWDER RIVER ROMANCE.

"Haven't you finished checking that farce report yet?"

"Not quite; I will have it done in about ten minutes."

"Well, it's too nice a night to sit in a tent and figure. I won't bother you if I sit outside and fiddle, will I?" and I hauled my fiddle out from under the bunk.

"No, I shall be glad to have you" and he bent once more over his work.

It was a perfect night. The glorious harvest moon was riding through the heavens. The stars grew pale at her coming. Far off to the north an occasional flash of heat-lightning illuminated the edge of the horizon. There was a faint rustle in the tops of the cottonwoods that stood around our tent. The river that ran along just under the bank was murmuring, murmuring as if repeating to itself some tale of rocky caverns in the far off mountains, the sound of the pile-driver at the bridge farther up, came in pitiful throbs, mingled with the blow of a ponderous hammer.

I sat drinking in the beauties of the night, thrumming the strings of my fiddle with my fingers.

"Why don't you play something instead of sitting there thumbing?"

I looked up. Dick was leaning his handsome six feet five against the tent pole.

"Well," I said, "you are through, are you not? What shall I play you? Some hoe-down I suppose."

"No, I don't care for any jigs to-night," he replied with a smile; then wistfully, "Did you ever hear an old love song called 'Laughing Eyes of Long Ago?'"

"Why, yes," I exclaimed. "Do you know that old song?"

"Play it."

I played it. He was silent. He was half turned from me and was standing with folded arms, looking across the valley. Presently he started, "Let's go for a walk. I want to tell you—something."

The bluffs were standing out sharp and clear in the moonlight. The black pines scattered here and there over their sides seemed like the entrances to caverns, as we approached. We walked in silence. The cage brush rasped against us as we went. A rabbit bounced out of a clump of grass and scurried off into the dusk. A flock of sage hens went over our heads with whistling wings. At last, after a breathless scramble up the face of the bluffs, we threw ourselves upon the grassy summit.

"Now then," I said, "go ahead with your story. She used to sing, of course, and you used to think that there was only one girl in the whole world that could sing, whereas there were several others; and when she sang 'Blue Eyes, True Eyes Unto Me,' you fancied that she was the only girl in the world that had blue eyes, which again was not strictly true."

"You seem to know so much about me and about my story you had better tell it yourself."

"All right," I cried, "it would be strange if I could not come somewhere near it, after listening to the romances of three engineers already. Let's see. What next! Ah, yes. She was a beautiful talker. She never said much, but what she did, you thought about afterward. Some times she would perplex you. Some times she would make you laugh. Some times she would fire your soul with noble thoughts; and all the time you thought you were doing the talking and she the listening."

"Well," he grunted.

"And then," I went on, "she always laughed at your jokes and made you think you were very witty indeed. It has taken long weary years, Dick, to dispel the hallucination. Alas! after all my careful training you still relapse into your old habits."

Dick was pushing off pieces of lime rock and sending them rolling down into the valley below.