

**BRET HAERTE'S WRITINGS;
TALES OF
THE ARGONAUTS
AND OTHER SKETCHES**

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Bret Haerte's Writings; Tales of the Argonauts And Other Sketches by Bret Harte

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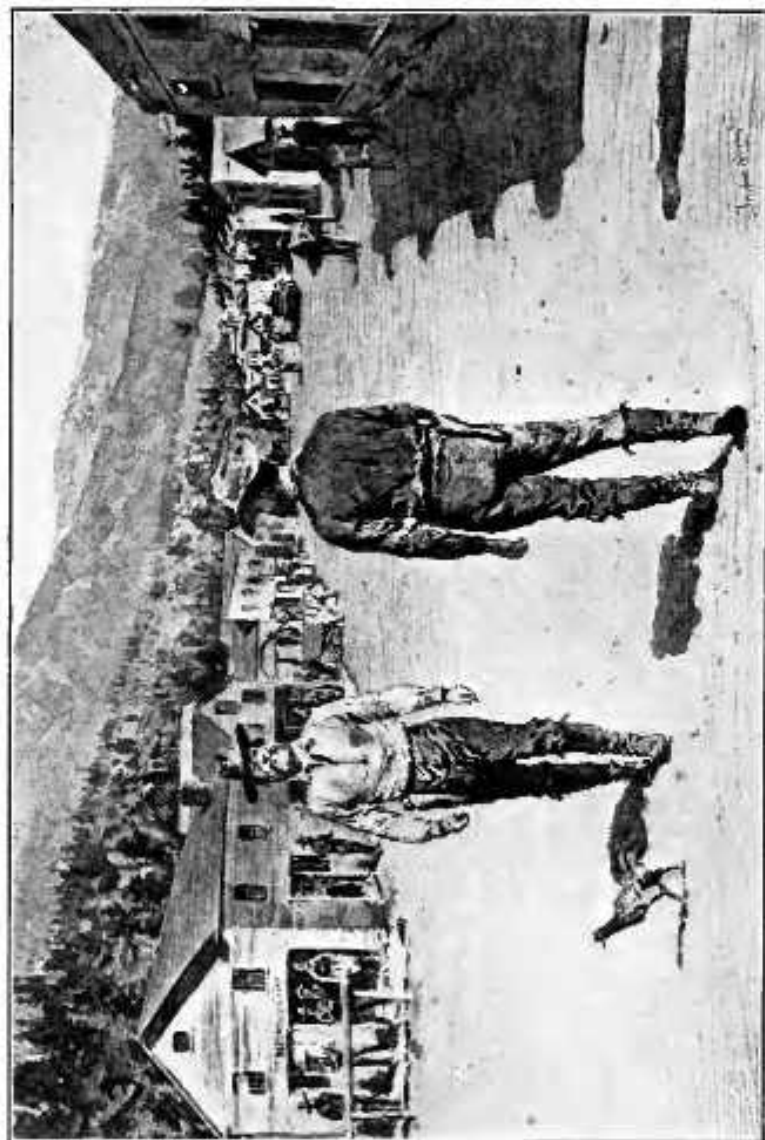
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The two opponents came nearer

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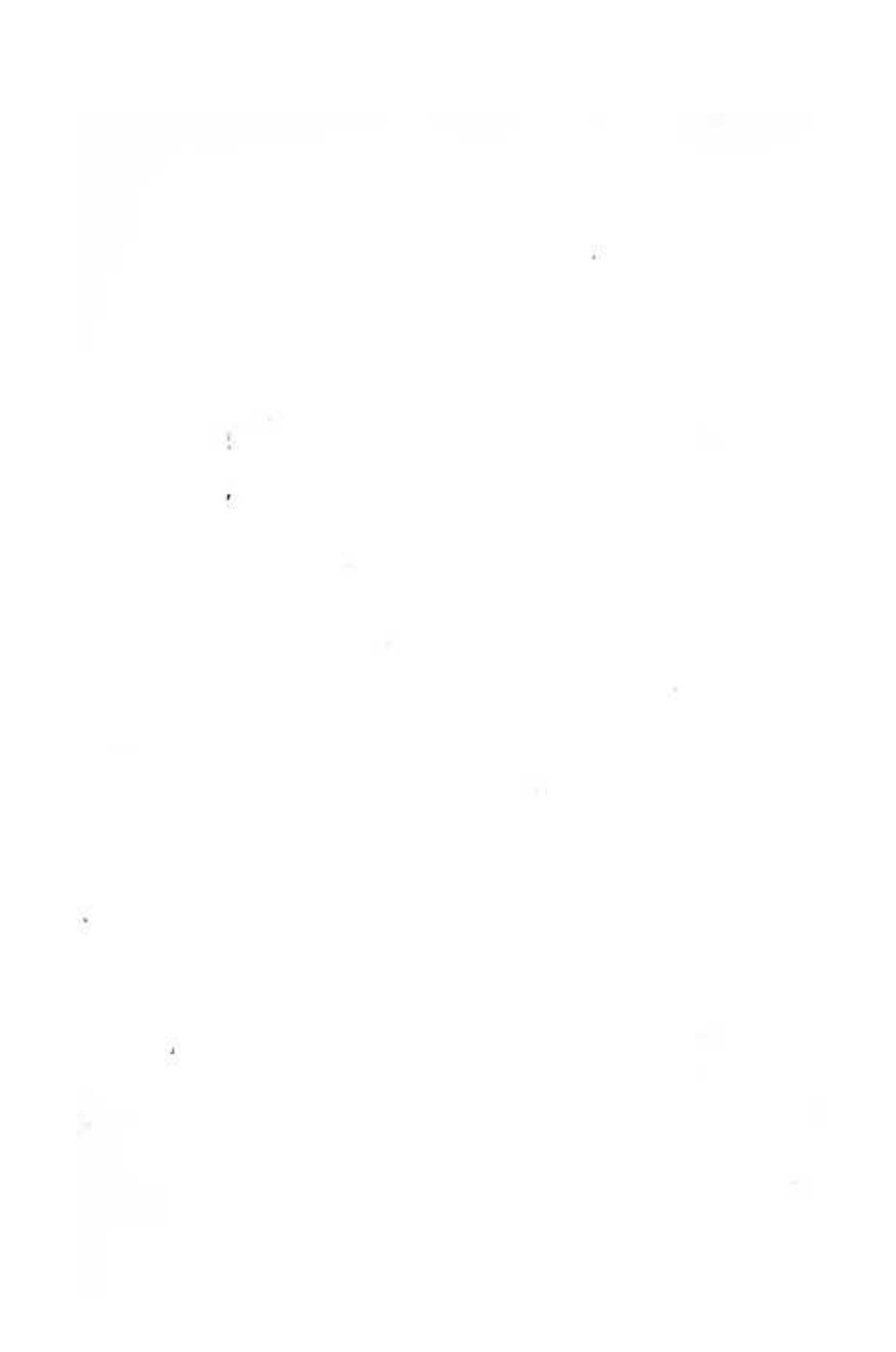
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THE ROSE OF TUOLUMNE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was nearly two o'clock in the morning. The lights were out in Robinson's Hall, where there had been dancing and revelry; and the moon, riding high, painted the black windows with silver. The cavalcade, that an hour ago had shocked the sedate pines with song and laughter, were all dispersed. One enamoured swain had ridden east, another west, another north, another south; and the object of their adoration, left within her bower at Chemical Ridge, was calmly going to bed.

I regret that I am not able to indicate the exact stage of that process. Two chairs were already filled with delicate inwrappings and white confusion; and the young lady herself, half-hidden in the silky threads of her yellow hair, had at one time borne a faint resemblance to a partly-husked ear of Indian corn. But she was now clothed in that one long, formless garment that makes all women equal; and the round shoulders and neat waist, that an hour

ago had been so fatal to the peace of mind of Four Forks, had utterly disappeared. The face above it was very pretty: the foot below, albeit shapely, was not small. "The flowers, as a general thing, don't raise their heads *much* to look after me," she had said with superb frankness to one of her lovers.

The expression of the "Rose" to-night was contentedly placid. She walked slowly to the window, and, making the smallest possible peep-hole through the curtain, looked out. The motionless figure of a horseman still lingered on the road, with an excess of devotion that only a coquette, or a woman very much in love, could tolerate. The "Rose," at that moment, was neither, and, after a reasonable pause, turned away, saying quite audibly that it was "too ridiculous for any thing." As she came back to her dressing-table, it was noticeable that she walked steadily and erect, without that slight affectation of lameness common to people with whom bare feet are only an episode. Indeed, it was only four years ago, that without shoes or stockings, a long-limbed, colty girl, in a waistless calico gown, she had leaped from the tail-board of her father's emigrant-wagon when it first drew up at Chemical Ridge. Certain wild habits of the "Rose" had outlived transplanting and cultivation.