

**THE LOST MINE OF THE
MONO; A TALE OF THE
SIERRA NEVADA**

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The lost mine of the Mono; a tale of the Sierra Nevada by C. H. B. Klette

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C. H. B. KLETTE

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A Tale of the Sierra Nevada

BY

C. H. B. KLETTE



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1909

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PART I



The Mystery of the Mountain

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CHAPTER I.

I ARRIVE AT THE SHEEP RANCH.

WHAT frail, intangible threads sometimes serve in this world to convey impressions over the tides of time! As an instance, Sutcliff was down to-day, like a breath from the hills, in an attempt to interest me once more in the lost mine. But it was not his appearance—welcome as that always is,—that has brought to mind this beautiful October day all those half-remembered, half-forgotten details of that story of the Mono, and our incredible connection therewith, bridging as it were the past and the present, the seen and the unseen. For long hours before—since the earliest morn in fact,—had my memory been occupied in the turning of its pages, and brought about by what frail prompting do you think? A subtle, immaterial something in the mellow radiance of the sun in its play over our rifled vineyards, and in the subdued intonation in the murmur of the wind that springs so balmily from the north-west—the last of our trades,—and stirs into a dreamy and half-melancholy life the long collonades of russetting poplars that rise here and there upon the landscape, white-stemmed, high into the glory of our skies. Nothing more.

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Not that it was October in which the adventure connecting us for all time with the tale took place. It was much earlier in the year in fact,—June, I think. But in a general way October in the valley is but little different from June in the high Sierra. There is in both that same soft glamor to the sunshine,—that same caressing touch to the breeze. What is wanting to make a similitude already striking even more so is a dash of greater crispness to this October air, to make it more suggestive of the nearness of the frost imps which seem forever to hover about the mountain tops. For away up there among the peaks summer's sojourn is at best fleeting,—lost in fact in the contending embraces of the springtime and the autumn. Barely have the snows disappeared from among the granite boulders above the timber line,—barely have the crisp grasses of the glacial meadows, splashed with the lilac of the daisy and the scarlet of the Indian pink, had time to flourish and seed, when through a dark, crystal-clear, starlit night comes the nip of frost to tell of the approach again of winter and its enloaking down of snow.

This was years ago,—in the middle eighties, to be precise. Some years before Waring and myself had been classmates at college, where we took an engineering course together. A steady correspondence during the subsequent years had ripened the acquaintance thus begun into a regard much warmer than is usual. It was in response to an oft-reiterated invitation to visit him at the ranch that I came,—my desires a little quickened perhaps in that the invitation held promise of a trip into the back mountains; and having come, and met Naomi, to most keenly regret not having accepted his invitation earlier in our acquaintance.

The Lost Mine of the Mono.

Shepherds Rest, as Waring's home was rather neatly named, was situated on the banks of a broad; shallow watercourse a short distance from where it debouched from the hills to trail a sinuous course over the plain far out into the mists of distance. Back of it arose the hills, where at almost any season of the year the Waring flocks were to be discerned in their slow trailings across their face;—hills that were brown and bare, yet unspeakably beautiful in their silence and loneliness; their winding gorges touched with a deepening purple. Before it spread the level pasture lands of the plains, —a lone butte or table alone breaking the monotony of view,—to where the wheat-fields of the middle valley spoke of another phase of our civilization that each succeeding year reached further into this voiceless haunt of nature. The white ranch-house itself, and its attendant stables and bunkhouse, were snugly ensconced in a clump of bluegums and peppertrees,—a dark blur upon the landscape visible for miles around;—the low, rambling, weatherworn shearing-sheds, and the malodorous dipping-pens, beneath some cottonwoods on the opposite bank, forming an effective picture in contrast. Such in a few words was Roger's sheepranch, where he had been born and raised, and had come to love nature with a depth of feeling that but few understood.

I remember he was alone when I arrived, the exact date of my coming, owing to business pressure, having been more or less a matter of doubt. His reception of me was cordial to a degree, and he seemed unable to do all that his heart would dictate for my comfort. He placed me to an appetizing lunch in a low-ceilinged room which opened on two of its sides upon a broad veranda, where the cool dusk made by the clambering