

**MARK CHESTER, OR, A
MILL AND A
MILLION: A TALE OF
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

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CARLYLE PETERSILEA

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OR

A MILL AND A MILLION

A Tale of Southern California

BY

CARLYLE PETERSILEA, 1844-190.

AUTHOR OF "THE DISCOVERED COUNTRY," "OCEANIDES,"

"MARY ANNE CAREW," "PHILIP CARLISLE,"

AND MANY OTHERS.

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MARK CHESTER.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE, YET NOT ALONE.

It was New Year's eve. The bright golden sun of Southern California was rapidly sinking toward the horizon. The sky was clear and cloudless—too cloudless, in fact, to suit the ranchmen and fruit-growers of this semi-tropical land which was parched and arid, thirsting for the cloud and the rain which would not come.

The waters of the Pacific lay clear and placid; but very few people were straying upon the beach at this season, especially at this time of day. Although the afternoon has been sunny, and comparatively warm, yet all Californians knew that the instant the last rays of the sun disappeared, the night would be clear and very cold.

Redondo beach was nearly deserted; two or three small fishing boats were being drawn ashore by weary fishermen and one after another of these men hastened inland, a couple of long "yellow-tails" dangling from each hand.

The sun, by this time, had disappeared, and the cold, uncomfortable night was fast approaching; the twilight being exceedingly short in this part of the world.

The beach is now apparently deserted—no, not quite—one solitary figure is sitting motionless on that far-off bench, the very last bench toward the south. It would seem that this person, whoever he may be, wishes to escape observation. As he cannot see us, however, we will observe him as closely as possible.

It grows darker and darker each moment, and now he is swallowed up within the darkness and becomes invisible, not to us, however; we can see, and hear, and understand. Is he a tramp that he does not seek home and warmth on this chill New Year's eve? He scarcely looks like a vagabond. He is a young man—not over one and twenty at the most—with a fine, intelligent face, high, broad brow, large, dark blue eyes, firm chin, broad shoulders, strong, supple, and well-built; his expression is frank and genial, his clothing, and general appearance clean and respectable. The night has set in cold and dark. He shivers as the chilly air penetrates to the very marrow of his bones. He looks slightly dejected, still there is a brave, determined air about him that is irresistible: we find ourselves in love with him at once. Putting his hand into his pocket he draws forth an old, obsolete coin—one mill. Snapping it lightly into the air with his thumb and finger, he mutters:

"This mite constitutes all the wealth I have in this world—a present from Santa Claus ten years ago—found it among other toys in my stocking—was sure, at that time, it was good old Santa Claus himself who filled my Christmas stocking with gifts; but the fast fleeting years have dispelled my boyish illusion: the gifts were from you, my dear sainted mother, trying to make your boy happy. How well I remember, after pulling out all the toys, feeling something still left in the extreme end of the toe of the sock; and after fishing, with clumsy fingers, for some little time, drawing this mill forth triumphantly. It was carefully wrapped up in a note—my precious little mill! The note was in my mother's handwriting. I well remember my surprise at this. I should like to see Santa Claus with my own eyes, I thought: but the note ran thus:

"Dear boy: This is all the money I can give you. There are so many thousands of children that even a mill to each would be more than I could carry; My sleigh would be too heavy for the fleet reindeer and I should not get round in time, I fear; but this mill shall yet prove a fortune to you. All you have to do, when you desire anything while you live, is to take this little coin from your pocket, where I hope you will always keep

it and, while gazing upon it intently, repeat to yourself this formula or prayer. "Dear mother: wherever you may be, within the limitless universe, come to your boy! I need your love, your help. In the name of Santa Claus, I conjure you! Come, oh, come!" Your mother shall hear your prayer and come to you. This is the last and best gift of Santa Claus.'

"This is the first time, since my dear mother's death, that I have been utterly destitute and forlorn—the first night of my life that I have ever found myself without food or shelter—this, the first time that I have found it necessary to take the little coin in my hands, for the purpose of repeating the prayer.

"Mother; dear mother! Do you still live somewhere within the limitless universe? If so, where, oh, where are you, my mother? My mind no longer accepts the myth, Santa Claus. How well I now know that it was the hands of my own mother that had stuffed the little sock with toys, that had placed the mill, with the note, in the toe of the stocking.

"This coin, then, is to be the talisman between her soul and mine. This little mill, is all the wealth I have in the world. Perhaps it may prove to be of more worth than the millions of a Vanderbilt, or a Rockefeller.

"Soul of my mother; come to me now! I know not what to do! I cannot remain out in this cold all night, and without money I cannot obtain shelter and a bed. I would sooner freeze and starve than beg. No; beg I never will! Certainly, I may be able to find employment when the morning comes. The boat arrived here late and my last cent was expended. They told me it was some eighteen or twenty miles to Los Angeles, the city I wish to reach. To be sure I might start and walk all night, but I should present a sorry appearance in the morning. Cold, weary, unkempt and hungry, my appearance would not be very prepossessing. I should simply be looked upon as a tramp, and then, I am sure, all hope would be gone.

"No: I much prefer to remain here and improve any opportunity that may present itself in the morning.

"Ugh!" he muttered. "How exceedingly cold it is! Really, I am thoroughly chilled. Not a human being

in sight, anywhere. Ah, the moon is rising over yonder hill! The sand-dunes out there look as cold and desolate as my own heart is at this moment. The face of the full moon seems as clear as crystal and as cold.

"I wonder if the people in this part of the world are as cold and sharp as their atmosphere? If so, I may not expect much sympathy.

"How startlingly clear all objects are, now that the moon is up. I would much rather the darkness covered me.

"When at home, I could, at least, hide myself within a London fog. The nights were warm in Africa; in China the people were sympathetic; in India they took me by the hand and called me brother; but I know absolutely nothing about this new world—this America. If my life here should prove as cold and barren as this, my first entrance into this country, it will be desolate indeed.

"What a number of little shanties there are all along this beach, to be sure; besides, a good many tents, but that great hotel over there looks like a palace, or the grandest bungalow in all India. Palaces, mansions, cottages, shanties and tents, seem to make up this town. Ah! yes. I remember. This is a sea-side resort. One of those smallest tents, and a bed, would make me happy tonight, at least; but even that I cannot obtain."

He rubbed the coin smartly between his thumb and finger: it glistened softly in the bright rays of the moon. He sat gazing steadily at it. A mist passed over his eyes as he gazed. The features of his own dear mother became distinctly visible to him, and her soft, loving eyes were gazing directly into his own. He thought that her warm arms enfolded him; her long hair swept about him, and as it did so, glowing warmth filled his entire body. A mother's soft, warm kisses were pressed on cheek and brow; and all this seemed as real to him as though she had actually been there in a mortal form. A soft voice whispered:

"My son—my own dear boy! Behold, I am here at your call. The Universe is not so vast that your cry cannot reach me. My soul is not so impotent that it cannot protect my child. My son, there is only a thin

veil between us, and your earnest desire has rent even that asunder. The veil is not impenetrable. You have come but a little way to meet me, and, see! I am here. Cheer up, dear boy; food, shelter, and a bed shall be yours this cold night. Your body shall not suffer. Keep your soul pure and bright. Brighten up that little coin, dear; let not a spot or blemish be upon it. It shall be a token between thee and me, and when you desire my aid, gaze upon its bright surface intently; this will help to part the veil between us and we will converse together.

"I will aid and comfort thee, my child, far more now than I should be able to do if I were still in the mortal form. It is better as it is, for if I were within the body I might not be here to assist thee, but now wherever thou art there can I be also.

"Dost see that little boat heaving toward the shore? In it is a belated fisherman. Upon him I will throw my influence, and he will be kind to thee. I have hypnotized thee, my son. I will also hypnotize him.

"Farewell for a space."