

**TAHOE: OR, LIFE IN
CALIFORNIA:
A ROMANCE**

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Tahoe: or, Life in California: a romance by Sallie B. Morgan

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Tahoe: or Life in California.

CHAPTER I.

LAKE TAHOE AND SIERRAN VILLA.

"Oh, sweet indeed the rest upon the mountains,
This blessed strength from the eternal hills,
This draught of life from the purest upland fountains,
This sight of heaven that all my vision fills!"

Twenty-two miles from the sage-brush capital of the Silver State, far away, 'neath Western skies, in the crown-shaped tops of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, just upon the border line of California, resting in cloudless quiet, lies a lake of surpassing beauty. The scene is lovely "beyond compare." The Western waves of ebbing day, play upon the surface of the calm, smooth, glass-like waters, 'till the eye, tired and dimmed by the reflected brightness, is forced to close and turn away. Fairy haunts have been painted; but where is the artist, whose skillful pencil can picture this scene in all its gorgeous beauty—can give shading to the shining tints of the glistening waters below, or with his brush, paint the colorings of the terraced clouds above? Atmospheric in clearness, dazzling in brightness, and so motionless on this spring evening, as to remind one as he looks upon the bosom of the lake, of the description given of the ice-clad Arctic, by travellers who have ventured far toward the Northern Pole, and stolen a glimpse of those distant regions. But all ideas of cold, bleak and desolate lands are dissipated, on glancing up. Here tropical verdure greets the eye on every side, and the tall pines of the forest, contrast strangely with the low, richly colored matted ferns and mosses, that border the water, and are reflected from its surface. Narcissus could here have found a mirror

worthy of his image, had this been the land of poesy and song, instead of the hunting ground of the wild savage of Western America. Echo, too, could here have found a voice, the sweetest, to sorrow for his loss. Joseph Rodman Drake had no such scene as this, to inspire his "Culprit Fay," for Hudson's waters are not so bright, nor Hudson's banks so green. Como and Geneva, imbedded amid the spring time flowers of lovely Switzerland, surrounded by castle homes, adorned by nature and by art, pale before Tahoe's crystal depths. Italy, with her mountain tops of Alpine scenery, near and distant, and all aglow with morning's early sunlight, "that, glancing, quivers among the firs that crown the crags below," and her vales dotted with lakes, like silver stars upon green velvet carpetings, offers no comparison. Niagara in its power, pouring its sparkling waters on and on forever, thundering, dashing, twirling, gurgling and surging, is grandeur; but Tahoe is beauty. And a charm there is, that winds itself into the depths of the heart, that calls up the deep, abiding spirit of the past, and brings new hopes for the future. Cold must be the heart whose pulses do not quicken under the influence of a scene like this. Dead must be to all ennobling sentiments, who sees and hears, yet feels not these influences. The setting sun, gleaming through the clear atmosphere, leaves little to wonder at in the old Piate legend, that the nearest point of earth to the sun is at Lake Tahoe; that this is also a sacred place, being nearest the happy hunting grounds; that it is better to die here, as the flight of the soul is shorter, to reach its final home, and that the Great Spirit hovers more particularly over this sacred place. There is another belief among the Indians of this locality, that the trout and silversides that lave themselves in these pure waters, each contains a soul of some departed papoose or squaw. They love to watch them shoot about like arrows, scarce causing a wave, as they pass through the transparent element; so transparent that it is difficult to discern the line that divides the water and air. The wild canary and other birds in the trees around the lake-shore, singing the "sweetest songs ear ever heard," are thought to contain the souls of their warrior braves who have perished in battle.

"Whose house is this?" And a man paused at the side-gate, near a handsome villa of modern architecture, on the California side of Lake Tahoe. "I say, heathen, whose house is this?" he again reiterated, as a Chinaman in the garb of his nationality, turned enquiringly toward him. "Why don't you answer me, you yellow, crooked eyed wretch, and open the gate, or I'll break it down."

"Whosee housee," said the Chinaman, coming forward, "whosee housee, say manee—Melican—manee?" "Yes, you stupid fool, whose house is this?"

"Housee," repeated the Chinaman, pointing towards the villa.

"Bossee Heartee housee. Rich heap, rich manee, Melican manee."

"Where is his wife; is she at home?" inquired the man, still holding to the locked gate.

"Bossee Heartee wiffee? He goee heavenee, he goee heavenee long time go, stayee byee Melican manee, Joss—long time go," replied the Chinaman, pointing upward.

"Do you mean the woman is dead, you wretched fool?" Said the exasperated tramp, and uttering volumes of oaths, he shook the gate furiously.

"He dedee, he dedee, long time heap," said the Chinaman, advancing near the gate.

"What is your name, you yellow snipe?" he finally asked.

"Me namee Wee Wing, me namee Wee Wing."

"Well, Wee Wing, or Wee Devil, er Wee what you please, where is the master of that establishment?"

"Bossee Heartee? He gonee, gonee awayee."

"Gone away has he? What's he gone for?"

"Gonee Frisco with he chillee, Missee Bossee Alice."

"He's got a child then, a daughter named Alice, that he has gone to Frisco with? How old is the daughter—is she pretty—is she a young lady, or little girl? Has he other children?"

"Bossee Missee Alice, prettee youngee ladee, nolittee girlee. Bossee Heartee no more childee."

"By gracious!" Said the man in an under tone, "I must make capital of this," then raising his voice, he said, "Wee Wing, who is here with you?"

"No bodee heree; Bertinee, Griffin, gonee too—two niggee, Wee Wing byee selfee—takee caree housee tiller Bossee Heartee geteee backee, somee howee, Wee Wing lovee Bossee Heartee. Wee Wing doee bestee for Bossee Heartee—cookee, washee heap—stayee with Bossee Heartee, seven yearree—lovee Bossee Heartee—"

"Hush your jargon and let me in at the gate," said the man, growing bolder when he found the Chinaman was entirely alone. Wee Wing trembling, approached, drew a key from his pocket, and turning it in the lock, threw the gate back upon its hinges, then silently followed the ruffian, as he strode towards the rear entrance of the house, where the kitchen was situated. There could scarcely be a greater contrast than that between these two men. The first belonged to that type of American, known as the tramp, or perhaps something worse. His form was thick set and compact, his head bending forward, rested almost upon his shoulders, covered with a heavy mat of uncombed

brown hair, that hung over his unwashed brow, like a lion's mane, beneath which glared two eyes, each so different from the other, that it was scarcely possible to realize that they both belonged in the same head; one glanced upward and was of a sinister gray, while the other looked downward and outward, and was of a fiendish black. His feet, long and turning inward, were covered with coarse, almost worn-out shoes, above which might be seen his ragged and soiled hose; his clothes had assumed that greenish color, known as "seedy," and his elbows protruded through his sleeves, below which hung his hands, broad as they were long, suggesting the idea of club fists, whenever he closed them. The little finger of the left hand was gone, having been cut off, just above the first joint; his gait was shambling, and as he walked on, Wee Wing followed him and marked well the missing finger. Wee Wing, on the contrary, was slight in figure as a woman. His national costume was spotlessly clean, and his well combed queue dangled to his heels, his white hose above his wooden-bottomed, cloth-tipped shoes, bespoke neatness and care. A Mongolian, his complexion was of that color peculiar to his race. His head was shaven, and his clear black eyes had the Chinese slant, but withal, wore an expression of honesty which was not to be mistaken, though from fright, like those of a servile class, he would deviate from truth, when in fear of great bodily harm. The stranger entered the kitchen and Wee Wing close behind him.

"Mongolian," he said, turning full upon the poor terrified, "Child of the Sun," "I want something to eat."

"Me no eattee heree," said Wee Wing, cowering.

"You lie, sir, you have. Get me something to eat directly or I'll make you wish you had. Do you hear? instantly. What are you grinning at, standing there as if you had not sense enough to bake a biscuit? I have traveled far, and I will have a good warm supper to-night." Frightened Wee Wing flew to the cupboard, and taking therefrom a pan of cold rice and a pitcher of tea, set them upon the kitchen table, and placing a chair, motioned to the man to take a seat. A flush of anger passed over his swarthy face, and his lips grew livid; he squirmed with rage and glared upon the Chinaman. Wee Wing returned the gaze tremblingly, "Niece teace, nicee ricee—takee somee."

"No, sir!" replied the other, "I will have warm supper, make a fire in that stove; bake me some biscuit and make me a pot of hot coffee, I'll have none of your cold "nicee ricee, nicee teace!" Not that for me. Do you hear?" And Wee Wing obeyed, with palsied hands and unsteady feet. Gradually his fear was calmed, as the stranger sat and watched the preparation of the meal. At length it was done.

"Now," said he, "show me the way to your master's dining room." as Wee Wing was about to place the coffee upon the kitchen table. "I do not eat in the kitchens of rich men; I am your master's equal; just as big a bug as he; I will eat from his board, as well as of his bounty. He has no right to more than I have, and the day is coming, God speed it, when the hoarded wealth of these so-called nabobs will be equally distributed among their kind." This was more to himself than to Wee Wing, who has busy preparing the table for his accommodation. He sat down and ate with hungry greediness, the food which he had forced Wee Wing to cook, seemingly oblivious to all his surroundings for the time being. Wee Wing stood in attendance, his arms crossed upon his waiter and eyeing the stranger narrowly—wondering what he would be called upon to do next, and praying in his secret heart to his Joss, for his personal safety in this hour of peril. "Any milk?" said the tramp, with only a glance at the Chinaman. A glass was filled. "Any cheese?" Wee Wing placed it before him. At length the meal was ended and the chair pushed back.

"I want to see through this house," came from the greasy lips.

"Me no keyee," replied Wee Wing.

"Open the door or I'll kick them from their hinges," was the stern rejoinder. The Chinaman hastened to the cupboard, took therefrom a small basket of keys, and followed by the tramp, passed from room to room. One room on the second floor bore unmistakable evidences of a woman's occupancy—the work basket, tiny thimble, scissors, pictures, brackets and books. "Missee Bossee Alice," said Wee Wing, answering the enquiring look, and they passed on.

"What is this?" he said at length, laying his hand upon a piece of furniture in the library.

"Bossee Heartee's deskee," said the quailing Chinaman.

"Open it," said the other.

"Me no keyee; Bossee Heartee takee keyee awayee."

One glance sufficed to convince him that Wee Wing had spoken truthfully this time. Without another word he took from his pocket a small bunch of skeleton keys, and after trying two or three, the lock readily yielded, and the contents of the desk were at his mercy. He drew up a chair and ordered Wee Wing to bring a light—it was now too dark to see without one. He carefully looked over the papers, selecting such as he wished, he possessed himself of a roll of mining stocks and two or three pieces of paper, upon which the owner of the desk had carelessly scribbled his name, then closing and locking the desk again he proposed to go.

"Any carriage here?" he asked.

"Bossee Heartee carriage here—no hossee—Bossee sendee hossee awayee. Hossee kickce Chinee, hossee no kickee Mellican man. Hossee stayee, stable belly welly, Tahoe Citee."

"Well, I know I have no use for a carriage without the horses, so I'll walk on. I wish you to tell your master I enjoyed his hospitality and will call again one of these days when he least expects me. Now I've taught you how to treat a gentleman; you will know next time, so good night," and off he started. Wee Wing followed him with his eyes, then tipped gently to the fence and watched him down the road towards town. The shades of evening had fallen, and the full orb'd moon was in the sky; he turned the curve in the road around the lake bank, and Wee Wing slowly retraced his steps.

"Me hopee Melican man's Joss killee he," he said bitterly, as he carefully locked the door behind him. "Me hopee Melican man's Joss killee he in a strange countree, so he losee his soulee. He uglee heep." Having invoked upon the head of this rude stranger robber, to his mind, the worst of curses, Wee Wing went silently to work to put his master's house again in order, then seeking his narrow bunk, passed the night in fearful dreams, and awoke sighing for his native land.

* * * * *

There is an innate love of country in the human breast that can not be eradicated. Men may stray from the parental roof in early boyhood, but in after years the heart will wander back to its sheltering eaves and long for the rest it once afforded. Time may pass and changes come, still, still the heart beats for home. It may have been in cold, bleak northern wastes or beneath temperate skies, amid bright flowers and teeming fields, it may have been where the circling equator lies, beneath a scorching, tropical sun, 'tis all the same; human nature will triumph, and the heart of man will respond, be it of high or low degree.