STORY: THE HUSSY

There are some stories that have to be true--the sort that cannot be fabricated by a ready fiction-reckoner. And by the same token there are some men with stories to tell who cannot be doubted. Such a man was Julian Jones. Although I doubt if the average reader of this will believe the story Julian Jones told me. Nevertheless I believe it. So thoroughly am I convinced of its verity that I am willing, nay, eager, to invest capital in the enterprise and embark personally on the adventure to a far land.

It was in the Australian Building at the Panama Pacific Exposition that I met him. I was standing before an exhibit of facsimiles of the record nuggets which had been discovered in the goldfields of the Antipodes. Knobbed, misshapen and massive, it was as difficult to believe that they were not real gold as it was to believe the accompanying statistics of their weights and values.

"That's what those kangaroo-hunters call a nugget," boomed over my shoulder directly at the largest of the specimens.

I turned and looked up into the dim blue eyes of Julian Jones. I looked up, for he stood something like six feet four inches in height. His hair, a wispy, sandy yellow, seemed as dimmed and faded as his eyes. It may have been the sun which had washed out his colouring; at least his face bore the evidence of a prodigious and ardent sun-burn which had long since faded to yellow. As his eyes turned from the exhibit and focussed on mine I noted a queer look in them as of one who vainly tries to recall some fact of supreme importance.

"What's the matter with it as a nugget?" I demanded.

The remote, indwelling expression went out of his eyes as he boomed

"Why, its size."

"It does seem large," I admitted. "But there's no doubt it's authentic. The Australian Government would scarcely dare--"

"Large!" he interrupted, with a sniff and a sneer.

"Largest ever discovered--" I started on.

"Ever discovered!" His dim eyes smouldered hotly as he proceeded. "Do you think that every lump of gold ever discovered has got into the newspapers and encyclopedias?"

"Well," I replied judicially, "if there's one that hasn't, I don't
see how we're to know about it. If a really big nugget, or nugget-
finder, elects to blush unseen--"

"But it didn't," he broke in quickly. "I saw it with my own eyes,
and, besides, I'm too tanned to blush anyway. I'm a railroad man
and I've been in the tropics a lot. Why, I used to be the colour
of mahogany--real old mahogany, and have been taken for a blue-eyed
Spaniard more than once--"

It was my turn to interrupt, and I did.

"Was that nugget bigger than those in there, Mr.--er--?"

"Jones, Julian Jones is my name."

He dug into an inner pocket and produced an envelope addressed to
such a person, care of General Delivery, San Francisco; and I, in
turn, presented him with my card.

"Pleased to know you, sir," he said, extending his hand, his voice
booming as if accustomed to loud noises or wide spaces. "Of course
I've heard of you, seen your picture in the papers, and all that,
and, though I say it that shouldn't, I want to say that I didn't
care a rap about those articles you wrote on Mexico. You're wrong,

all wrong. You make the mistake of all Gringos in thinking a Mexican is a white man. He ain't. None of them ain't--Greasers, Spiggoties, Latin-Americans and all the rest of the cattle. Why, sir, they don't think like we think, or reason, or act. Even their multiplication table is different. You think seven times seven is forty-nine; but not them. They work it out different. And white isn't white to them, either. Let me give you an example. Buying coffee retail for house-keeping in one-pound or ten-pound lots--"

"How big was that nugget you referred to?" I queried firmly. "As big as the biggest of those?"

"Bigger," he said quietly. "Bigger than the whole blamed exhibit of them put together, and then some." He paused and regarded me with a steadfast gaze. "I don't see no reason why I shouldn't go into the matter with you. You've got a reputation a man ought to be able to trust, and I've read you've done some tall skylarking yourself in out-of-the-way places. I've been browsing around with an eye open for some one to go in with me on the proposition."

"You can trust me," I said.

And here I am, blazing out into print with the whole story just as he told it to me as we sat on a bench by the lagoon before the Palace of Fine Arts with the cries of the sea gulls in our ears. Well, he should have kept his appointment with me. But I

anticipate.

As we started to leave the building and hunt for a seat, a small woman, possibly thirty years of age, with a washed-out complexion of the farmer's wife sort, darted up to him in a bird-like way, for all the world like the darting veering gulls over our heads and fastened herself to his arm with the accuracy and dispatch and inevitableness of a piece of machinery.

"There you go!" she shrilled. "A-trottin' right off and never givin' me a thought."

I was formally introduced to her. It was patent that she had never heard of me, and she surveyed me bleakly with shrewd black eyes, set close together and as beady and restless as a bird's.

"You ain't goin' to tell him about that hussy?" she complained.

"Well, now, Sarah, this is business, you see," he argued plaintively. "I've been lookin' for a likely man this long while, and now that he's shown up it seems to me I got a right to give him the hang of what happened."

The small woman made no reply, but set her thin lips in a needle-like line. She gazed straight before her at the Tower of Jewels with so austere an expression that no glint of refracted sunlight

could soften it. We proceeded slowly to the lagoon, managed to obtain an unoccupied seat, and sat down with mutual sighs of relief as we released our weights from our tortured sightseeing feet.

"One does get so mortal weary," asserted the small woman, almost defiantly.

Two swans waddled up from the mirroring water and investigated us. When their suspicions of our niggardliness or lack of peanuts had been confirmed, Jones half-turned his back on his life-partner and gave me his story.

"Ever been in Ecuador? Then take my advice--and don't. Though I take that back, for you and me might be hitting it for there together if you can rustle up the faith in me and the backbone in yourself for the trip. Well, anyway, it ain't so many years ago that I came ambling in there on a rusty, foul-bottomed, tramp collier from Australia, forty-three days from land to land. Seven knots was her speed when everything favoured, and we'd had a two weeks' gale to the north'ard of New Zealand, and broke our engines down for two days off Pitcairn Island.

"I was no sailor on her. I'm a locomotive engineer. But I'd made friends with the skipper at Newcastle an' come along as his guest for as far as Guayaquil. You see, I'd heard wages was 'way up on the American railroad runnin' from that place over the Andes to

Quito. Now Guayaquil--"

"Is a fever-hole," I interpolated.

Julian Jones nodded.

"Thomas Nast died there of it within a month after he landed.--He was our great American cartoonist," I added.

"Don't know him," Julian Jones said shortly. "But I do know he wasn't the first to pass out by a long shot. Why, look you the way I found it. The pilot grounds is sixty miles down the river.
'How's the fever?' said I to the pilot who came aboard in the early morning. 'See that Hamburg barque,' said he, pointing to a sizable ship at anchor. 'Captain and fourteen men dead of it already, and the cook and two men dying right now, and they're the last left of her.'

"And by jinks he told the truth. And right then they were dying forty a day in Guayaquil of Yellow Jack. But that was nothing, as I was to find out. Bubonic plague and small-pox were raging, while dysentery and pneumonia were reducing the population, and the railroad was raging worst of all. I mean that. For them that insisted in riding on it, it was more dangerous than all the other diseases put together.

"When we dropped anchor off Guayaquil half a dozen skippers from other steamers came on board to warn our skipper not to let any of his crew or officers go ashore except the ones he wanted to lose. A launch came off for me from Duran, which is on the other side of the river and is the terminal of the railroad. And it brought off a man that soared up the gangway three jumps at a time he was that eager to get aboard. When he hit the deck he hadn't time to speak to any of us. He just leaned out over the rail and shook his fist at Duran and shouted: 'I beat you to it! I beat you to it!'

"'Who'd you beat to it, friend?' I asked. 'The railroad,' he said, as he unbuckled the straps and took off a big '44 Colt's automatic from where he wore it handy on his left side under his coat, 'I staved as long as I agreed--three months--and it didn't get me. I was a conductor.'

"And that was the railroad I was to work for. All of which was nothing to what he told me in the next few minutes. The road ran from sea level at Duran up to twelve thousand feet on Chimborazo and down to ten thousand at Quito on the other side the range. And it was so dangerous that the trains didn't run nights. The through passengers had to get off and sleep in the towns at night while the train waited for daylight. And each train carried a guard of Ecuadoriano soldiers which was the most dangerous of all. They were supposed to protect the train crews, but whenever trouble started they unlimbered their rifles and joined the mob. You see,

whenever a train wreck occurred, the first cry of the spiggoties was 'Kill the Gringos!' They always did that, and proceeded to kill the train crew and whatever chance Gringo passengers that'd escaped being killed in the accident. Which is their kind of arithmetic, which I told you a while back as being different from ours.

"Shucks! Before the day was out I was to find out for myself that that ex-conductor wasn't lying. It was over at Duran. I was to take my run on the first division out to Quito, for which place I was to start next morning--only one through train running every twenty-four hours. It was the afternoon of my first day, along about four o'clock, when the boilers of the Governor Hancock exploded and she sank in sixty feet of water alongside the dock. She was the big ferry boat that carried the railroad passengers across the river to Guayaquil. It was a bad accident, but it was the cause of worse that followed. By half-past four, big trainloads began to arrive. It was a feast day and they'd run an excursion up country but of Guayaquil, and this was the crowd coming back.

"And the crowd--there was five thousand of them--wanted to get ferried across, and the ferry was at the bottom of the river, which wasn't our fault. But by the Spiggoty arithmetic, it was. 'Kill the Gringos!' shouts one of them. And right there the beans were spilled. Most of us got away by the skin of our teeth. I raced on

the heels of the Master Mechanic, carrying one of his babies for him, for the locomotives that was just pulling out. You see, way down there away from everywhere they just got to save their locomotives in times of trouble, because, without them, a railroad can't be run. Half a dozen American wives and as many children were crouching on the cab floors along with the rest of us when we pulled out; and the Ecuadoriano soldiers, who should have been protecting our lives and property, turned loose with their rifles and must have given us all of a thousand rounds before we got out of range.

"We camped up country and didn't come back to clean up until next day. It was some cleaning. Every flat-car, box-car, coach, asthmatic switch engine, and even hand-car that mob of Spiggoties had shoved off the dock into sixty feet of water on top of the Governor Hancock. They'd burnt the round house, set fire to the coal bunkers, and made a scandal of the repair shops. Oh, yes, and there were three of our fellows they'd got that we had to bury mighty quick. It's hot weather all the time down there."

Julian Jones came to a full pause and over his shoulder studied the straight-before-her gaze and forbidding expression of his wife's face.

"I ain't forgotten the nugget," he assured me.

"Nor the hussy," the little woman snapped, apparently at the mud-hens paddling on the surface of the lagoon.

"I've been travelling toward the nugget right along--"

"There was never no reason for you to stay in that dangerous country," his wife snapped in on him.

"Now, Sarah," he appealed. "I was working for you right along." And to me he explained: "The risk was big, but so was the pay. Some months I earned as high as five hundred gold. And here was Sarah waiting for me back in Nebraska--"

"An' us engaged two years," she complained to the Tower of Jewels.

"--What of the strike, and me being blacklisted, and getting typhoid down in Australia, and everything," he went on. "And luck was with me on that railroad. Why, I saw fellows fresh from the States pass out, some of them not a week on their first run. If the diseases and the railroad didn't get them, then it was the Spiggoties got them. But it just wasn't my fate, even that time I rode my engine down to the bottom of a forty-foot washout. I lost my fireman; and the conductor and the Superintendent of Rolling Stock (who happened to be running down to Duran to meet his bride) had their heads knifed off by the Spiggoties and paraded around on poles. But I lay snug as a bug under a couple of feet of tender

coal, and they thought I'd headed for tall timber--lay there a day and a night till the excitement cooled down. Yes, I was lucky. The worst that happened to me was I caught a cold once, and another time had a carbuncle. But the other fellows! They died like flies, what of Yellow Jack, pneumonia, the Spiggoties, and the railroad. The trouble was I didn't have much chance to pal with them. No sooner'd I get some intimate with one of them he'd up and die--all but a fireman named Andrews, and he went loco for keeps.

"I made good on my job from the first, and lived in Quito in a 'dobe house with whacking big Spanish tiles on the roof that I'd rented. And I never had much trouble with the Spiggoties, what of letting them sneak free rides in the tender or on the cowcatcher. Me throw them off? Never! I took notice, when Jack Harris put off a bunch of them, that I attended his funeral muy pronto--"

"Speak English," the little woman beside him snapped.

"Sarah just can't bear to tolerate me speaking Spanish," he apologized. "It gets so on her nerves that I promised not to. Well, as I was saying, the goose hung high and everything was going hunky-dory, and I was piling up my wages to come north to Nebraska and marry Sarah, when I run on to Vahna--"

"The hussy!" Sarah hissed.

"Now, Sarah," her towering giant of a husband begged, "I just got to mention her or I can't tell about the nugget.--It was one night when I was taking a locomotive--no train--down to Amato, about thirty miles from Quito. Seth Manners was my fireman. I was breaking him in to engineer for himself, and I was letting him run the locomotive while I sat up in his seat meditating about Sarah here. I'd just got a letter from her, begging as usual for me to come home and hinting as usual about the dangers of an unmarried man like me running around loose in a country full of senoritas and fandangos. Lord! If she could only a-seen them. Positive frights, that's what they are, their faces painted white as corpses and their lips red as--as some of the train wrecks I've helped clean up.

"It was a lovely April night, not a breath of wind, and a tremendous big moon shining right over the top of Chimborazo.--Some mountain that. The railroad skirted it twelve thousand feet above sea level, and the top of it ten thousand feet higher than that.

"Mebbe I was drowsing, with Seth running the engine; but he slammed on the brakes so sudden hard that I darn near went through the cab window.

"'What the--' I started to yell, and 'Holy hell,' Seth says, as both of us looked at what was on the track. And I agreed with Seth entirely in his remark. It was an Indian girl--and take it from

me, Indians ain't Spiggoties by any manner of means. Seth had managed to fetch a stop within twenty feet of her, and us bowling down hill at that! But the girl. She--"

I saw the form of Mrs. Julian Jones stiffen, although she kept her gaze fixed balefully upon two mud-hens that were prowling along the lagoon shallows below us. "The hussy!" she hissed, once and implacably. Jones had stopped at the sound, but went on immediately.

"She was a tall girl, slim and slender, you know the kind, with black hair, remarkably long hanging, down loose behind her, as she stood there no more afraid than nothing, her arms spread out to stop the engine. She was wearing a slimpsy sort of garment wrapped around her that wasn't cloth but ocelot skins, soft and dappled, and silky. It was all she had on--"

"The hussy!" breathed Mrs. Jones.

But Mr. Jones went on, making believe that he was unaware of the interruption.

"'Hell of a way to stop a locomotive,' I complained at Seth, as I climbed down on to the right of way. I walked past our engine and up to the girl, and what do you think? Her eyes were shut tight. She was trembling that violent that you would see it by the

moonlight. And she was barefoot, too.

"'What's the row?' I said, none too gentle. She gave a start, seemed to come out of her trance, and opened her eyes. Say! They were big and black and beautiful. Believe me, she was some looker--"

"The hussy!" At which hiss the two mud-hens veered away a few feet. But Jones was getting himself in hand, and didn't even blink.

"'What are you stopping this locomotive for?' I demanded in Spanish. Nary an answer. She stared at me, then at the snorting engine and then burst into tears, which you'll admit is uncommon behaviour for an Indian woman.

"'If you try to get rides that way,' I slung at her in Spiggoty Spanish (which they tell me is some different from regular Spanish), 'you'll be taking one smeared all over our cowcatcher and headlight, and it'll be up to my fireman to scrape you off.'

"My Spiggoty Spanish wasn't much to brag on, but I could see she understood, though she only shook her head and wouldn't speak. But great Moses, she was some looker--"

I glanced apprehensively at Mrs. Jones, who must have caught me out

of the tail of her eye, for she muttered: "If she hadn't been do you think he'd a-taken her into his house to live?"

"Now hold on, Sarah," he protested. "That ain't fair. Besides, I'm telling this.--Next thing, Seth yells at me, 'Goin' to stay here all night?'

"'Come on,' I said to the girl, 'and climb on board. But next time you want a ride don't flag a locomotive between stations.' She followed along; but when I got to the step and turned to give her a lift-up, she wasn't there. I went forward again. Not a sign of her. Above and below was sheer cliff, and the track stretched ahead a hundred yards clear and empty. And then I spotted her, crouched down right against the cowcatcher, that close I'd almost stepped on her. If we'd started up, we'd have run over her in a second. It was all so nonsensical, I never could make out her actions. Maybe she was trying to suicide. I grabbed her by the wrist and jerked her none too gentle to her feet. And she came along all right. Women do know when a man means business."

I glanced from this Goliath to his little, bird-eyed spouse, and wondered if he had ever tried to mean business with her.

"Seth kicked at first, but I boosted her into the cab and made her sit up beside me--"

"And I suppose Seth was busy running the engine," Mrs. Jones observed.

"I was breaking him in, wasn't I?" Mr. Jones protested. "So we made the run into Amato. She'd never opened her mouth once, and no sooner'd the engine stopped than she'd jumped to the ground and was gone. Just like that. Not a thank you kindly. Nothing.

"But next morning when we came to pull out for Quito with a dozen flat cars loaded with rails, there she was in the cab waiting for us; and in the daylight I could see how much better a looker she was than the night before.

"'Huh! she's adopted you,' Seth grins. And it looked like it. She just stood there and looked at me--at us--like a loving hound dog that you love, that you've caught with a string of sausages inside of him, and that just knows you ain't going to lift a hand to him. 'Go chase yourself!' I told her pronto." (Mrs. Jones her proximity noticeable with a wince at the Spanish word.) "You see, Sarah, I'd no use for her, even at the start."

Mrs. Jones stiffened. Her lips moved soundlessly, but I knew to what syllables.

"And what made it hardest was Seth jeering at me. 'You can't shake her that way,' he said. 'You saved her life--' 'I didn't,' I said

sharply; 'it was you.' 'But she thinks you did, which is the same thing,' he came back at me. 'And now she belongs to you. Custom of the country, as you ought to know.'"

"Heathenish," said Mrs. Jones, and though her steady gaze was set upon the Tower of Jewels I knew she was making no reference to its architecture.

"'She's come to do light housekeeping for you,' Seth grinned. I let him rave, though afterwards I kept him throwing in the coal too fast to work his mouth very much. Why, say, when I got to the spot where I picked her up, and stopped the train for her to get off, she just flopped down on her knees, got a hammerlock with her arms around my knees, and cried all over my shoes. What was I to do?"

With no perceptible movement that I was aware of, Mrs. Jones advertised her certitude of knowledge of what SHE would have done.

"And the moment we pulled into Quito, she did what she'd done before--vanished. Sarah never believes me when I say how relieved I felt to be quit of her. But it was not to be. I got to my 'dobe house and managed a cracking fine dinner my cook had ready for me. She was mostly Spiggoty and half Indian, and her name was Paloma.--Now, Sarah, haven't I told you she was older'n a grandmother, and looked more like a buzzard than a dove? Why, I couldn't bear to eat with her around where I could look at her. But she did make

things comfortable, and she was some economical when it came to marketing.

"That afternoon, after a big long siesta, what'd I find in the kitchen, just as much at home as if she belonged there, but that blamed Indian girl. And old Paloma was squatting at the girl's feet and rubbing the girl's knees and legs like for rheumatism, which I knew the girl didn't have from the way I'd sized up the walk of her, and keeping time to the rubbing with a funny sort of gibberish chant. And I let loose right there and then. As Sarah knows, I never could a-bear women around the house--young, unmarried women, I mean. But it was no go! Old Paloma sided with the girl, and said if the girl went she went, too. Also, she called me more kinds of a fool than the English language has accommodation for. You'd like the Spanish lingo, Sarah, for expressing yourself in such ways, and you'd have liked old Paloma, too. She was a good woman, though she didn't have any teeth and her face could kill a strong man's appetite in the cradle.

"I gave in. I had to. Except for the excuse that she needed Vahna's help around the house (which she didn't at all), old Paloma never said why she stuck up for the girl. Anyway, Vahna was a quiet thing, never in the way. And she never gadded. Just sat in-doors jabbering with Paloma and helping with the chores. But I wasn't long in getting on to that she was afraid of something. She would look up, that anxious it hurt, whenever anybody called, like

some of the boys to have a gas or a game of pedro. I tried to worm it out of Paloma what was worrying the girl, but all the old woman did was to look solemn and shake her head like all the devils in hell was liable to precipitate a visit on us.

"And then one day Vahna had a visitor. I'd just come in from a run and was passing the time of day with her--I had to be polite, even if she had butted in on me and come to live in my house for keeps--when I saw a queer expression come into her eyes. In the doorway stood an Indian boy. He looked like her, but was younger and slimmer. She took him into the kitchen and they must have had a great palaver, for he didn't leave until after dark. Inside the week he came back, but I missed him. When I got home, Paloma put a fat nugget of gold into my hand, which Vahna had sent him for. The blamed thing weighed all of two pounds and was worth more than five hundred dollars. She explained that Vahna wanted me to take it to pay for her keep. And I had to take it to keep peace in the house.

"Then, after a long time, came another visitor. We were sitting before the fire--"

"Him and the hussy," quoth Mrs. Jones.

"And Paloma," he added quickly.

"Him and his cook and his light housekeeper sitting by the fire,"

she amended.

"Oh, I admit Vahna did like me a whole heap," he asserted recklessly, then modified with a pang of caution: "A heap more than was good for her, seeing that I had no inclination her way.

"Well, as I was saying, she had another visitor. He was a lean, tall, white-headed old Indian, with a beak on him like an eagle. He walked right in without knocking. Vahna gave a little cry that was half like a yelp and half like a gasp, and flumped down on her knees before me, pleading to me with deer's eyes and to him with the eyes of a deer about to be killed that don't want to be killed. Then, for a minute that seemed as long as a life-time, she and the old fellow glared at each other. Paloma was the first to talk, in his own lingo, for he talked back to her. But great Moses, if he wasn't the high and mighty one! Paloma's old knees were shaking, and she cringed to him like a hound dog. And all this in my own house! I'd have thrown him out on his neck, only he was so old.

"If the things he said to Vahna were as terrible as the way he looked! Say! He just spit words at her! But Paloma kept whimpering and butting in, till something she said got across, because his face relaxed. He condescended to give me the once over and fired some question at Vahna. She hung her head, and looked foolish, and blushed, and then replied with a single word and a shake of the head. And with that he just naturally turned on his

heel and beat it. I guess she'd said 'No.'

"For some time after that Vahna used to fluster up whenever she saw me. Then she took to the kitchen for a spell. But after a long time she began hanging around the big room again. She was still mighty shy, but she'd keep on following me about with those big eyes of hers--"

"The hussy!" I heard plainly. But Julian Jones and I were pretty well used to it by this time.

"I don't mind saying that I was getting some interested myself--oh, not in the way Sarah never lets up letting me know she thinks. That two-pound nugget was what had me going. If Vahna'd put me wise to where it came from, I could say good-bye to railroading and hit the high places for Nebraska and Sarah.

"And then the beans were spilled . . . by accident. Come a letter from Wisconsin. My Aunt Eliza 'd died and up and left me her big farm. I let out a whoop when I read it; but I could have canned my joy, for I was jobbed out of it by the courts and lawyers afterward--not a cent to me, and I'm still paying 'm in instalments.

"But I didn't know, then; and I prepared to pull back to God's country. Paloma got sore, and Vahna got the weeps. 'Don't go!

Don't go!' That was her song. But I gave notice on my job, and wrote a letter to Sarah here--didn't I, Sarah?

"That night, sitting by the fire like at a funeral, Vahna really loosened up for the first time.

"'Don't go,' she says to me, with old Paloma nodding agreement with her. 'I'll show you where my brother got the nugget, if you don't go.' 'Too late,' said I. And I told her why.

"And told her about me waiting for you back in Nebraska," Mrs. Jones observed in cold, passionless tones.

"Now, Sarah, why should I hurt a poor Indian girl's feelings? Of course I didn't.

"Well, she and Paloma talked Indian some more, and then Vahna says: 'If you stay, I'll show you the biggest nugget that is the father of all other nuggets.' 'How big?' I asked. 'As big as me?' She laughed. 'Bigger than you,' she says, 'much, much bigger.' 'They don't grow that way,' I said. But she said she'd seen it and Paloma backed her up. Why, to listen to them you'd have thought there was millions in that one nugget. Paloma 'd never seen it herself, but she'd heard about it. A secret of the tribe which she couldn't share, being only half Indian herself."

Julian Jones paused and heaved a sigh.

"And they kept on insisting until I fell for--"

"The hussy," said Mrs. Jones, pert as a bird, at the ready instant.

"'No; for the nugget. What of Aunt Eliza's farm I was rich enough to quit railroading, but not rich enough to turn my back on big money--and I just couldn't help believing them two women. Gee! I could be another Vanderbilt, or J. P. Morgan. That's the way I thought; and I started in to pump Vahna. But she wouldn't give down. 'You come along with me,' she says. 'We can be back here in a couple of weeks with all the gold the both of us can carry.' 'We'll take a burro, or a pack-train of burros,' was my suggestion. But nothing doing. And Paloma agreed with her. It was too dangerous. The Indians would catch us.

"The two of us pulled out when the nights were moonlight. We travelled only at night, and laid up in the days. Vahna wouldn't let me light a fire, and I missed my coffee something fierce. We got up in the real high mountains of the main Andes, where the snow on one pass gave us some trouble; but the girl knew the trails, and, though we didn't waste any time, we were a full week getting there. I know the general trend of our travel, because I carried a pocket compass; and the general trend is all I need to get there again, because of that peak. There's no mistaking it. There ain't

another peak like it in the world. Now, I'm not telling you its particular shape, but when you and I head out for it from Quito I'll take you straight to it.

"It's no easy thing to climb, and the person doesn't live that can climb it at night. We had to take the daylight to it, and didn't reach the top till after sunset. Why, I could take hours and hours telling you about that last climb, which I won't. The top was flat as a billiard table, about a quarter of an acre in size, and was almost clean of snow. Vahna told me that the great winds that usually blew, kept the snow off of it.

"We were winded, and I got mountain sickness so bad that I had to stretch out for a spell. Then, when the moon come up, I took a prowl around. It didn't take long, and I didn't catch a sight or a smell of anything that looked like gold. And when I asked Vahna, she only laughed and clapped her hands. Meantime my mountain sickness tuned up something fierce, and I sat down on a big rock to wait for it to ease down.

"'Come on, now,' I said, when I felt better. 'Stop your fooling and tell me where that nugget is.' 'It's nearer to you right now than I'll ever get,' she answered, her big eyes going sudden wistful. 'All you Gringos are alike. Gold is the love of your heart, and women don't count much.'

"I didn't say anything. That was no time to tell her about Sarah here. But Vahna seemed to shake off her depressed feelings, and began to laugh and tease again. 'How do you like it?' she asked. 'Like what?' 'The nugget you're sitting on.'

"I jumped up as though it was a red-hot stove. And all it was was a rock. I felt nay heart sink. Either she had gone clean loco or this was her idea of a joke. Wrong on both counts. She gave me the hatchet and told me to take a hack at the boulder, which I did, again and again, for yellow spots sprang up from under every blow. By the great Moses! it was gold! The whole blamed boulder!"

Jones rose suddenly to his full height and flung out his long arms, his face turned to the southern skies. The movement shot panic into the heart of a swan that had drawn nearer with amiably predatory designs. Its consequent abrupt retreat collided it with a stout old lady, who squealed and dropped her bag of peanuts. Jones sat down and resumed.

"Gold, I tell you, solid gold and that pure and soft that I chopped chips out of it. It had been coated with some sort of rain-proof paint or lacquer made out of asphalt or something. No wonder I'd taken it for a rock. It was ten feet long, all of five feet through, and tapering to both ends like an egg. Here. Take a look at this."

From his pocket he drew and opened a leather case, from which he took an object wrapped in tissue-paper. Unwrapping it, he dropped into my hand a chip of pure soft gold, the size of a ten-dollar gold-piece. I could make out the greyish substance on one side with which it had been painted.

"I chopped that from one end of the thing," Jones went on, replacing the chip in its paper and leather case. "And lucky I put it in my pocket. For right at my back came one loud word--more like a croak than a word, in my way of thinking. And there was that lean old fellow with the eagle beak that had dropped in on us one night. And there was about thirty Indians with him--all slim young fellows.

"Vahna'd flopped down and begun whimpering, but I told her, 'Get up and make friends with them for me.' 'No, no,' she cried. 'This is death. Good-bye, amigo--'"

Here Mrs. Jones winced, and her husband abruptly checked the particular flow of his narrative.

"'Then get up and fight along with me,' I said to her. And she did. She was some hellion, there on the top of the world, clawing and scratching tooth and nail--a regular she cat. And I wasn't idle, though all I had was that hatchet and my long arms. But they were too many for me, and there was no place for me to put my back

against a wall. When I come to, minutes after they'd cracked me on the head--here, feel this."

Removing his hat, Julian Jones guided my finger tips through his thatch of sandy hair until they sank into an indentation. It was fully three inches long, and went into the bone itself of the skull.

"When I come to, there was Vahna spread-eagled on top of the nugget, and the old fellow with a beak jabbering away solemnly as if going through some sort of religious exercises. In his hand he had a stone knife--you know, a thin, sharp sliver of some obsidian-like stuff same as they make arrow-heads out of. I couldn't lift a hand, being held down, and being too weak besides. And--well, anyway, that stone knife did for her, and me they didn't even do the honour of killing there on top their sacred peak. They chucked me off of it like so much carrion.

"And the buzzards didn't get me either. I can see the moonlight yet, shining on all those peaks of snow, as I went down. Why, sir, it was a five-hundred-foot fall, only I didn't make it. I went into a big snow-drift in a crevice. And when I come to (hours after I know, for it was full day when I next saw the sun), I found myself in a regular snow-cave or tunnel caused by the water from the melting snow running along the ledge. In fact, the stone above actually overhung just beyond where I first landed. A few feet

more to the side, either way, and I'd almost be going yet. It was a straight miracle, that's what it was.

"But I paid for it. It was two years and over before I knew what happened. All I knew was that I was Julian Jones and that I'd been blacklisted in the big strike, and that I was married to Sarah here. I mean that. I didn't know anything in between, and when Sarah tried to talk about it, it gave me pains in the head. I mean my head was queer, and I knew it was queer.

"And then, sitting on the porch of her father's farmhouse back in Nebraska one moonlight evening, Sarah came out and put that gold chip into my hand. Seems she'd just found it in the torn lining of the trunk I'd brought back from Ecuador--I who for two years didn't even know I'd been to Ecuador, or Australia, or anything! Well, I just sat there looking at the chip in the moonlight, and turning it over and over and figuring what it was and where it'd come from, when all of a sudden there was a snap inside my head as if something had broken, and then I could see Vahna spread-eagled on that big nugget and the old fellow with the beak waving the stone knife, and . . . and everything. That is, everything that had happened from the time I first left Nebraska to when I crawled to the daylight out of the snow after they had chucked me off the mountain-top. But everything that'd happened after that I'd clean forgotten. When Sarah said I was her husband, I wouldn't listen to her. Took all her family and the preacher that'd married us to

convince me.

"Later on I wrote to Seth Manners. The railroad hadn't killed him yet, and he pieced out a lot for me. I'll show you his letters. I've got them at the hotel. One day, he said, making his regular run, I crawled out on to the track. I didn't stand upright, I just crawled. He took me for a calf, or a big dog, at first. I wasn't anything human, he said, and I didn't know him or anything. As near as I can make out, it was ten days after the mountain-top to the time Seth picked me up. What I ate I don't know. Maybe I didn't eat. Then it was doctors at Quito, and Paloma nursing me (she must have packed that gold chip in my trunk), until they found out I was a man without a mind, and the railroad sent me back to Nebraska. At any rate, that's what Seth writes me. Of myself, I don't know. But Sarah here knows. She corresponded with the railroad before they shipped me and all that."

Mrs. Jones nodded affirmation of his words, sighed and evidenced unmistakable signs of eagerness to go.

"I ain't been able to work since," her husband continued. "And I ain't been able to figure out how to get back that big nugget. Sarah's got money of her own, and she won't let go a penny--"

"He won't get down to THAT country no more!" she broke forth.

"But, Sarah, Vahna's dead--you know that," Julian Jones protested.

"I don't know anything about anything," she answered decisively, "except that THAT country is no place for a married man."

Her lips snapped together, and she fixed an unseeing stare across to where the afternoon sun was beginning to glow into sunset. I gazed for a moment at her face, white, plump, tiny, and implacable, and gave her up.

"How do you account for such a mass of gold being there?" I queried of Julian Jones. "A solid-gold meteor that fell out of the sky?"

"Not for a moment." He shook his head. " It was carried there by the Indians."

"Up a mountain like that--and such enormous weight and size!" I objected.

"Just as easy," he smiled. "I used to be stumped by that proposition myself, after I got my memory back. Now how in Sam Hill--' I used to begin, and then spend hours figuring at it. And then when I got the answer I felt downright idiotic, it was that easy." He paused, then announced: "They didn't."

"But you just--said they did."

"They did and they didn't," was his enigmatic reply. "Of course they never carried that monster nugget up there. What they did was to carry up its contents."

He waited until he saw enlightenment dawn in my face.

"And then of course melted all the gold, or welded it, or smelted it, all into one piece. You know the first Spaniards down there, under a leader named Pizarro, were a gang of robbers and cut-throats. They went through the country like the hoof-and-mouth disease, and killed the Indians off like cattle. You see, the Indians had lots of gold. Well, what the Spaniards didn't get, the surviving Indians hid away in that one big chunk on top the mountain, and it's been waiting there ever since for me--and for you, if you want to go in on it."

And here, by the Lagoon of the Palace of Fine Arts, ended my acquaintance with Julian Jones. On my agreeing to finance the adventure, he promised to call on me at my hotel next morning with the letters of Seth Manners and the railroad, and conclude arrangements. But he did not call. That evening I telephoned his hotel and was informed by the clerk that Mr. Julian Jones and wife had departed in the early afternoon, with their baggage.

Can Mrs. Jones have rushed him back and hidden him away in

Nebraska? I remember that as we said good-bye, there was that in her smile that recalled the vulpine complacency of Mona Lisa, the Wise.

Kohala, Hawaii,
May 5, 1916.