

Bob Bowen Comes to Town

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I—MINING STOCK.

The fat man squeezed himself into the chair of the smoking-room, eyed the lean man and the drummer who had stretched out on the cushioned seat, wiped his beaded brow, and sighed.

“This central California,” he observed squeakily, “is the hottest place this side of Topheth! Thank Heaven, we get into Frisco to-night.”

The drummer from San Francisco resented the diminutive and gave him a casual stare. The lean man said nothing. Then the drummer turned to the lean man and picked up a thread of conversation which had apparently been broken by the fat man’s entrance.

“This here ruby silver, now,” he argued. “I’ve heard it ain’t up to snuff. Ain’t nothin’ in working it, they tell me.”

The lean man smiled. When he smiled, his jaw looked a little leaner and stronger, and he was quite a likeable chap.

“You can hear ’most anything, especially about ores,” he remarked, between pulls at his cigar. “But Tonopah was founded on ruby silver, and the Tonopah mines are not exactly poor properties to own.” His eyes twinkled, as if at some secret jest.

“But they tell me,” persisted the drummer, “that ruby silver’s got too much arsenic in it to make development and smelting pay. Besides it comes in small veins—”

"It has not too much arsenic to make smelting pay—sometimes! It does not come in small veins—sometimes! Look at the Yellow Jack, the richest mine over at Tonopah! They busted into ruby silver; last week a bunch of mining sharks come and look over the outcrop. They wire east, and their principals pay a cool million and a half cash for the property. That's what ruby silver did for the Yellow Jack!"

"How d'you know so much about, it?" demanded the drummer. "You been up that way yourself, eh?"

"I'm the man who sold out the Yellow Jack." The lean man smiled again as he threw back his elbows into the cushions and puffed his cigar.

"Gee!" The drummer stared sidewise at his informant. Very manifestly, that mention of a million and a half was running in his mind. His eyes began to bulge under the force of impact. "Gee! Say, are you stringin' me?"

Carelessly, the lean man reached into his vest pocket and extended a pasteboard.

"Here's my card." The twinkle in his gray eyes deepened a bit. "Bob Bowen—I guess 'most everybody around Tonopah knows me. I'm going to Frisco to sell a couple more mines."

This time, the drummer took no umbrage at the hated word "Frisco." Instead, he put out his hand with quick affability.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Bowen! Here's my card. Going to the Palace?"

Before the lean man could respond, the fat man leaned forward in his chair. He stared intently at Bowen, then spoke.

“Do I understand, sir,” he squeaked, “that you are Robert Bowen, and that you have sold the Yellow Jack mine?”

“You do,” said Bowen, eyeing him.

“Upon my word!” The ejaculation was one of surprise and was followed by a chuckle. “My name is Dickover—of New York, Mr. Bowen. If I’m not mistaken, it was my agent who bought that mine of yours! Am I right?”

Bowen’s gray eyes hardened for a moment, and then they twinkled again and his lean hand shot forth.

“Well, well!” he exclaimed heartily. “Talk about unadulterated coincidence! And you’re actually Dickover; *the* Dickover? You’re the man who owns half the copper mines in Arizona and two-thirds of Tonopah?”

“Uhuh. Glad to meet you, Bowen. Going to Frisco, are you?”

The drummer looked from one to the other, agape. And small wonder! The name of Dickover was known wherever ores were smelted or mining stocks sold.

Bowen and Dickover gazed at each other, appraisingly. After a moment they began to discuss mining stocks. The drummer listened attentively, and after venturing one timid assertion which was promptly quashed by Dickover, ventured no more. At length the train slowed down, and he sprang to his feet.

“Gee, I’d plumb forgotten that I had to make a stop!” he said regretfully, and held out his hand. “Mighty glad to ’ve met you, Mr. Bowen. And you, Mr. Dickover. Mighty glad! May see you at the Palace in three-four days. Look me up, won’t you? So-long.”

So, breezily, he swung out of the smoking-room and from the train. Bowen carelessly watched him depart, then sat up with quickening interest.

“Gone into the telegraph office—”

The great magnate broke in with a falsetto chuckle.

“Sure! You can gamble that he knows one or two newspaper men in Frisco. He’s tipping ’em off that we’re on the Limited. Get our names in the paper.”

Bowen looked a trifle startled. “Oh, hell!” he uttered disgustedly.

The two smoked in silence, no one else entering their compartment. Slowly the train pulled out and with gathering speed slipped westward. The fat man leaned forward again, his eyes on Bowen. Mirth shook his ponderous frame.

“Say!” he uttered. “I happen to know about that Yellow Jack mine. It was sold to Dickover of New York, all right; but it was sold by a big Swede named Olafson. No offense, pardner—but you’re some liar! What made you string that poor boob?”

Bowen laughed unassumedly, and the fat man laughed in sympathy with him.

“He asked too many questions—too curious. Anyway, I told him the exact truth!”

“Come on, come on!” squeaked the fat man scornfully. “I’m no chicken. You can’t put it over *me*, young man!”

“I’m not trying to,” said Bowen coolly, his eyes twinkling. “It’s a matter of record that I sold the Yellow Jack mine. Only, as it happens, I sold it to Olafson two years ago, before we dreamed there was any ruby ore in that locality! And I sold it for five hundred dollars. Now who’s the boob? Me, Bob Bowen! Don’t hold back, stranger; when old Olafson sold out for a million and a half, I quit Tonopah for good.”

The fat man chuckled. The chuckle deepened into a billowing laugh that shook his broad frame, and the laugh became a roar of mirth. Bowen grinned wryly.

“Laugh your fool head off—I deserve it!” he went on. “Still, I’ll hand it to you at that. You with your talk of Dickover! That’s what made our late friend really sit up and rubber. Did you notice what reverent attention he paid to your fool dissertation on curb stocks? I’ll bet a nickel he’ll invest twenty dollars or so in Big Daisy or Apex Crown on the strength of your remarks.”

The fat man choked over his cigar, and flung it away.

“Didn’t you think much of my spiel?” he demanded. “Why, I thought I knew a little—”

“Huh!” grunted Bowen, yet no whit unpleasantly. “Stranger, if you really want to *learn* a little about curb stocks, you go and

float around the mining country a bit. If I took your pointers on stocks, I'd be in a poorhouse next month!"

"Then you're a broker?"

"No. Not by a long sight!" snapped Bowen. "I play a straight game."

"No offense." The fat man chuckled again. "You're really going to sell a couple of mines in Frisco? Or was that bunk, too?"

"No, that was straight enough; not the selling part, maybe, but the trying." Bowen sighed a little, and older lines showed in his lean face. "I've got two properties close in to the Yellow Jack."

"Why didn't you try selling them to Dickover's agent?"

"Him!" Bowen grunted in disgust. "Stranger, that guy Henderson, just between you and me, is crooked as hell! Know what he did? Made Olafson give him fifty thousand dollars before he'd approve the sale! I sure do feel sorry for old man Dickover; some day that confidential agent, Henderson, is going to get into him good and deep, believe me!"

The fat man carefully extracted two fat, gold-banded, amazing cigars from a case, and extended one to Bowen.

"Smoke. You seem to be sore on that agent."

"Not me, stranger. You can ask anybody on the ground."

"H-m! Going to the Palace, I suppose? Best way to sell mines is to put up at the best place and make a splurge. But you know that, I guess."

“I didn’t; but maybe I’ll take your advice. It listens good. No, don’t get the notion that I’m sore on the Dickover crowd. My ground isn’t the sort they’re after. It’s low-grade ore and heaps of it. I’ll get after the low-graders in Frisco, see?”

The fat man nodded knowingly. “What are your properties?”

“The Sunburst and the Golden Lode.”

For a space the two men smoked in silence. Bowen enjoyed his cigar; it had been long months since he had smoked a cigar whose aroma even approached this. Evidently the fat man was no pauper.

The word struck bitterness into Bowen. Pauper! He himself had just thirty dollars to his name. He would look fine, going to the Palace! Yet, why not? He could get by with it and let the bill run, on his appearance; if he sold his two mines, or either of them, everything would be fine.

And if not—well, something would turn up.

“Yep,” he said abruptly, ending his thoughts in speech before he could check the impulse, “I guess that was good advice. I’ll go to the Palace.”

The fat man eyed him shrewdly, but Bowen was again lost in frowning thought.

At eight that evening the Limited was “in.” Bowen took a taxi up to the Palace. When he stepped up to the register of the big Market Street hostelry, he found his way blocked by the bulky figure of the fat man, who had just finished signing. The fat

man turned from the desk, saw Bowen, and took him by the arm.

“Say!” he exclaimed. “Just a minute, Bowen. I want to thank you, old man, for that tip about my agent. I’ll sure bear it in mind. You’re all right!”

Slapping Bowen on the shoulder, he departed after an obsequious bellhop. For a moment Bob Bowen did not understand that speech; but as he leaned over the register and saw the signature of the fat man, he gulped in sudden, stark amazement.

Great glory! The fat man *was* Dickover, after all!

II—CALLED IN FOR CONSULTATION.

That evident recognition, that low murmur of confidential speech, that friendly slap on the shoulder, turned the trick. This Robert Bowen of Tonopah was manifestly known to the great Dickover; was palpably a friend of the great Dickover; was clearly and openly a confidant of the great Dickover!

Realizing this, Bowen grinned to himself as the desk clerk doffed all haughtiness and became cordially human. He realized it with greater emphasis as he turned from the desk and found a brisk young man at his elbow with extended card.

“Mr. Bowen? I’m Harkness of the *Chronicle*. May I have two minutes of your time?”

Bowen affected to eye the young man in consideration.

Publicity! Well, why not? It might affect untold wonders for him. He was arriving in San Francisco unknown and unknowing. He had ore samples and assayers’ reports galore in his grip; but these might do him no good unless he got the impetus he needed. And publicity would give it to him. At least, publicity could not hurt him!

“Sure,” he said, nodding toward the parlors. “Come along and sit down.”

A moment later the two men pulled chairs together and relaxed comfortably.

“Shoot,” commanded Bowen laconically. The reporter grinned.

“I got a tip that you sold the Yellow Jack mine to Dickover for a million and—”

“Pause right there, Harkness!” Bowen lifted his hand, but smiled in his whimsical, likable fashion. “You’ve got it wrong. Dickover has just bought the Yellow Jack, but not from me. Don’t start me off with a false report like that, for the love of Mike!”

“Whew! Good thing you put me wise,” said Harkness frankly. “Well, do you mind telling me what mine you did sell to Dickover?”

Bowen gazed at him again, heavy-lidded. Was this rank deception? He decided that it was not. There was nothing crooked about it. Besides, Dickover had certainly known just how his words and manner to Bowen would be seen and recognized; Dickover had tried to do him a good turn. He was justified in taking advantage of the situation.

“Frankly, Harkness,” said Bowen slowly, “I don’t want to name any names. I’m here to try and dispose of some low-grade properties; rich in ore, but not in rich ore. Maybe you know that the Dickover people touch nothing but pretty rich propositions in the silver field.”

“Sure, I understand.” Harkness nodded assent. “But I heard a rumor that Dickover was here for the purpose of opening up a low-grade system; somebody had invented a means of smelting—”

“Nothing to it,” asserted Bowen. “At least, I was talking about it with Dickover on the train, and he didn’t say—”

He checked himself abruptly. He had no business talking like this. Harkness, however, came to his feet as if unwilling to detain the magnate further.

“Much obliged for your time, Mr. Bowen; mighty good of you, I’m sure! No special news from Tonopah way? Nothing on the inside that you’d pass along—”

“Oh, sure!” Bowen grinned. “The Yellow Jack was sold to Dickover by a Swede named Olafson. I sold the mine to Olafson two years ago—for five hundred beans!”

Harkness whistled. “Say—but you wouldn’t let me use that, of course.”

“Go ahead. I should worry!” Bowen chuckled. “The joke is on me, and everybody up at Tonopah knows it. Only don’t make me out a fool, Harkness; two years ago there was no ruby vein known in that property.”

“Trust me! Thanks, a thousand times.”

Bowen went to his room, and sighed at the luxury of it. After that talk with the mining reporter, he had almost believed in his own assured wealth.

When he sought the “hotel personals” in the next morning’s *Chronicle*, he smiled!

With Mr. Dickover, on the Overland, arrived Mr. Robert Bowen, of Tonopah, who, it is rumored, has recently disposed of large holdings in the Dickover interests. Mr. Bowen is heavily interested in low-grade silver properties near Tonopah.

And upon the mining page were separate stories; one concerning the Yellow Jack, the other, by the authority of Dickover himself, flatly contradicting the rumor that the Dickover interests had anything to do with low-grade silver ores.

“If nobody calls my little bluff, all right!” thought Bowen. “Now for work.”

Having a list of every one who might put capital into his holdings, Bowen engaged a car by the day and set forth.

At four that afternoon, with ten dollars left in his pocket and no hope left in his soul, Bob Bowen of Tonopah reentered his room at the hotel and threw down his grip.

He had covered everybody, even to those in whom he had looked for no interest. And always the same story: courtesy, a good reception, growing caution, flat refusal. It seemed that nobody in San Francisco would put a cent into low-grade silver. The Arizona crash had scared every investor away from mines for the next six months.

Bowen swore savagely to himself. Then, at the jingle of the telephone bell, he stumbled across the room to the instrument.

“Mr. Bowen? A party has called you three times since this morning. Left the number: Mission 34852. Do you wish to call them?”

“If you please.”

Bowen hung up. Sudden hope was reborn within him for a brief moment. Who was so infernally anxious to see him? Who

but some one to whom he had talked that morning—some one who wanted him to return—some one who now wanted to invest!

The telephone jingled again.

“Mr. Bowen?” To his intense disappointment, a feminine voice impinged upon his ear. Then his feeling changed. It was a nice voice and he liked it. It held a softly appealing note. He imagined that it held a trace of tears.

“Mr. Bowen, I’m a stranger to you; my name is Alice Ferguson. I used to be a stenographer for your friend Judge Lyman in Tonopah. In this morning’s paper I saw that you were here, and I wondered if I might see you for five minutes on a matter of business. It—it is about some stock in Apex Crown, and it means everything to me; and if I could possibly impose on you to the extent of asking your advice—”

“My dear Miss Ferguson,” exclaimed Bowen, warmth in his voice, “I remember you very well indeed, although I never met you formally. Sure, I’ll be only too glad to do anything in my power. Where are you now?”

“In my office at the Crothers Building. I’ll come over—”

“Not a bit of it! I’ll be there in five minutes. Good-by!”

Bob Bowen remembered Judge Lyman’s stenographer as a girl not particularly striking, but looking very feminine, capable, and as level-headed as a girl could be. He seized his hat and sought the quickest way to the Crothers Building.

As he strode along, his mind was busy—very busy. Apex Crown! That was a small producing mine over in the Tonopah district; like his own futures, Apex Crown was low-grade ore and barely paid expenses. It had been scraping alone for about three years with the stock down to five cents and less.

But on the train, the great Dickover had said to—buy Apex Crown!

Had Dickover been uttering a grim jest, thinking that the drummer and Bowen would rush to operate on his tip? Was Apex Crown worthless? And what was Alice Ferguson's interest in this stock, this stock which on the curb market was unsought and unbought?

Bob Bowen reached the Crothers Building. The elevator-man informed him that Miss Ferguson was a public stenographer. Two minutes later he was shaking hands with her.

She was as he remembered her—dark, lithe, rather grave-eyed just at present but with merriment latent in her face; and altogether feminine. Bowen would have been amazed had he realized how he himself was smiling as he seldom smiled.

"I've often heard Judge Lyman say that you were the squarest man he knew, Mr. Bowen," said the girl frankly, and smiled as Bowen stammered dissent. "Nonsense! That is why I called on you. I'm up against it and don't know what I should do."

"Neither do I," returned Bowen cheerfully. "What's the trouble?"

“Well, my father was a business man in Tonopah. He died three years ago, leaving me alone. After his death, it developed that he had sunk all his money in Apex Crown stock; this was in the early days, you know. The stock looked valuable, but there was no immediate demand for it. Then gradually it went down, and stayed down—”

“How much stock?” demanded Bowen.

“Ten thousand shares.”

“Whew! Say, that was a shame! A shame—”

“No. My father had good judgment as a rule,” was the grave rebuke, and Bowen fell silent. The girl pursued her subject coolly. “This morning a broker looked me up and made me an offer of ten cents a share for the stock. I refused him, and he went up to twenty cents—”

“He—what?” broke out Bowen. “Twenty cents?”

“Yes. I told him that I’d give him my answer to-morrow. The paper said that you were largely interested in low-grade ores, and I thought you might know something about this Apex Crown. If it’s really worth anything, of course I don’t want to throw it away—”

“Hold on a minute!” Bowen drew forth an afternoon paper which he had bought and had stuffed into his overcoat pocket without reading. “I don’t know anything definite, but if anything has broken loose—ah! Here we are! Look at this!”

Excitedly he laid on the desk before her the opened paper. His finger pointed to an obscure paragraph—a list of curb stocks.

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