



# THE DEVIL'S HALF

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It occurred to me simply to call this a story. Didsey Leeds is a study in affliction. It may be both. At all events, it began with the coming of the Flint twins to Discord, Arizona, where we two and others had already foregathered.

Discord isn't poetic, even to look back upon. It was close to the Mexican border where I've always noted human morals to sicken. Then there wasn't enough women about to keep us bright; in a word too much nose-paint, too little hair-dye. Discord was a sort of Potter's field for human hopes.

The Flints came to town in a modest sort of hand-in-hand fashion. It was just a few days after Mary Clive settled down to make buns, pies, ginger-bread and coffee-cake. She was young, delectable as her cookies, and Discord treasured her from the start. She could have made a living in mud-pies. . . . The Flints were medium-sized men, quick, small-footed, slope-shouldered and low-voiced. They seemed conditioned and sophisticated, but my good friend, Didsey Leeds, remarked:

"I've always been dead-set against spittin' human packages into twins. The annuals of mankind prove that there ain't more than enough virtues shelled out per nativity. Look at Abe Lincoln now! There's my style of a man in all respects, but suppose he'd had to divvy the cristinn' facilitations with an Ike!"

"Now you take them twins, Steve and Martin," Didsey went on, "roll 'em together and bile 'em down to a light-weight figure, and you'd have one pretty good gent, not a world-whipper, but a good average male mammal."

"But what's the matter with 'em now, Didsey?" I inquired. "They're decent so far, graceful with 'em likker and carry same genial—as becomes strangers—"

"There you are—that's just it!" Didsey exclaimed with victorious spirit. "What?"

"You don't say 'he.' You don't say 'This here Mart' or 'This here Steve stacks up to a pretty good gent,' but 'they!'"

Didsey has a convincing way. . . . Not for a month or so were any of us able to tell the twins apart, and they didn't help a great deal in the matter of distinguishing garments. They weren't alike inside, however. I presently began to develop the case this way: if either of the Flints said anything with point and delicacy, it was Steve; if either tarried long at Biltong's bar during working hours, it was Steve; if only one was working the claim at any time, it wasn't Steve; if either countenance lit up like a dance-hall—it wasn't Martin's. Close familiarity with a pair of true-hatched honey-bees will finally enable you to tell them apart; so it was with the brothers. Say, four months, and everybody in the settlement understood that Steve was the luxury and Martin the substance. Of the latter's love for his weaker, flashier half—well, opinion is still divided in Discord, some holding it godly and some insane.

Martin early showed town-spirit, preserving a comeliness about his cabin and an unobtrusive but seemingly sincere interest in the luck of all men. As natural a family man as I ever knew, he was—even habits, a hard worker, a man who loved the cabin doorway and approach clean and flowering—just the quiet type of human value that would rejoice the heart of a fine woman for half a century. . . .

A busy night at Biltong's, six months after the twins set up in Discord. . . . Steve had been packing Biltong's hell-seepage in two-ounce jolts, since the staring day broke over the eastern fringe. Moreover, he had been gaining momentum in this sort of thing for several days, while Martin worked the claim; so that now he carried a burden like a house boat on a burro. His laugh—naturally ripping and fluent—had lost its melody. It would have made the reputation of a villain on the boards—hard as a parrot's tone, that laugh. It made me think of disks of metal thumping down steel stairs. There was a look in his eye, too, of a man whose soul has been fumed out for the nonce, and whose body doesn't care. Steve had shown quite formidable class for treatments at Biltong's, but nothing like this, heretofore. Martin entered in mid-evening, stepped up to his brother and talked low, rather suggesting than pleading.

The answer silenced the bar-room—a penetrating poison in words. It burned and burned in men's minds, without destroying itself.

"Don't mind what he says now, fellers," Martin begged, turning to us. His face was

dirty gray, like dust-dimmed glass. "Steve's never this way when he's himself."

There was something of an unlovely yellow in the skin, inasmuch as Steve didn't take such a thing with any of the rest of us. He knew the meaning of the endurance lay. The day was well started when Steve awoke the next morning. Martin came in from the claim frequently to see if his brother needed help.

"You roughed me a good deal last night, Steve," he said.

"Did I—I didn't know?" was the satisfaction he drew, as the other started off for Biltong's.

Now in this woman matter, I intend to go light and keep in my own shadow. . . . Mary Clive was one with Discord in hates and hopes; of the center and import in our midst, it might be said, of the moon in our hot night skies. I looked from afar at the soft-skinned, yellow-haired young woman, and the light rich figure of her—all unhurt by toil. She was as far from me as the moon. It was sober Martin Flint who seemed to make the headway to her heart.

I have said that he was by nature a marrying man—a reckonable state-builder, not a maverick. Didsey and I blessed his progress. Steve spent his nights at Biltong's and his days in watching his brother work. Their claim was a very good one, as the river went; and the town figured, as months drew on and the romance prospered, that Martin must have quite a leather stocking cached somewhere for the bride. We all hoped so, and were glad for all the good that could come to Mart, because he was showing whiter and braver every month in the little ways that count—the patience with sin, the soft hand with a mount, the quick hand with a gun in time of stress, and the voice that wins the child. Finally, when Steve appeared to realize that he was entering into a three-sided arrangement, instead of losing a partner, and began a moral clean-up, it really seemed as if the decent brother had come into his high noon of happiness.

For true, there never was a sorer face on a man than the night when Martin took his brother over to the bakery to meet the bride.

It was well that he did this, though the music of his life was broken. It was better so, than after he had married the woman. As for Mary Clive's part, I haven't a word to say in comment. The naked fact is that her heart turned from Martin to the more imperious attraction of the other. Steve was the sort that could make a woman's heart beat—at least the kind of women we know. There is no use expatiating on the ugly event. Months of gentle and tender wooing were forgotten in a night. Within a fortnight after he had first looked into the eyes of his brother's chosen, Steve and Mary Clive fled together. Also was taken, the gold which brother Martin had bitten out of the Cañon. Thus was the latter looted in a day—heard and *cache*.

There were no words for us. We couldn't tell him that a woman who would do this on the eve of her marriage, might have been tempted afterward. I never pitied a man so. He seemed suddenly depleted of health, muscle and heart. We used to go and sit with him for a while in the evenings—a sort of running guard of us—clumsy but eager to do any good we could. Martin wouldn't talk, seldom came down to the heart of town, but worked like a fiend and sat in his doorway, unwashed from the terric days in the Cañon. More than once I caught him thus, staring into the red-plumed west with eyes of a man whose brain is running down.

Neatest of all about his cabin before, the place began to take on the look of a boar's nest. I don't believe he would have taken trouble to replenish his food stock, if we hadn't started in to bring him stuff. That jerked up old Martin, for he was proud and a self-deceitful. How he worked! Often I heard the ring of his pick at that gray hour when the blanket is a soft seduction, and more than once he was still at it, fifteen hours later, when black night drove him up to the twilight of the Cañon's rim. Full ten weeks passed before the crisis lifted. One Sunday morning Didsey and I strolled over to find him bath-bricking the cabin floor. Everything washable was breezing in the sun outside. Martin was sweating over the sloshing suds, but we rejoiced to find the eyes straight in his head again, and lively.

"My Gawd, neighbor," Didsey remarked, "I'm sure afraid you're goin' to live."

Martin smiled. It was the first. . . . Four or five nights later we were sitting as usual in his doorway, discussing bugs, tobacco and the sundown, when Gil Reeks, the letter-carrier, who does his two hundred miles along the Cañon every ten days, brought a letter. Martin took it in a swift, nervous way, and disappeared. We heard him fumbling with matches inside. Gil Reeks was disposed to whisper a reflection upon the courtesy of the twin.

"That's all right," said Didsey, briefly. "He'll thank you soon enough. He's had some mortal troubles."

Gil went back to town grumbling. He's getting old and crabbed—been a guest so

much along his route that he forgets he's a public servant. Didsey and I cleared our voices to depart—when Martin called. He was shaking, and very white in the candle-light of the cabin; his face shone with sweat, but his voice was controlled:

"You two have been powerful good to me," he began simply, handing over the letter. "It's hard for me to work this out alone. I've never had to do all the thinking before."

"MARTIN: I don't ask you to forgive me, but you've got to believe I didn't know until just now, Steve stole your money. I mean when he took me away. It just came out now—the awful truth. I made a big mistake, and I'm doing the suffering, but I didn't know I was marrying a thief, and I won't live with one. I think Steve will kill me, because I don't let him in—"

The letter got a bit incoherent here for a space, as it had a license to be, but finished

"He was so like you when he came; and yet so different in just the ways I *thought* I wanted you a little different. I was blind and wicked, but oh, I am paying the cost. . . . I write to pray you to come here before someone is killed. Steve's awful. MARY CLIVE."

I liked the woman from that letter. . . . He was so like you when he came; and yet so different in just the ways I *thought* I wanted you to be a little different! This rang true to me. I could imagine Steve's magic after the silent adoring style of the heavier brother.

The more I think of it, too, there's something penetrating in Didsey's later comment, "The Flints bein' so much alike confused her morals."

I've never had a woman—never done a man's share, for them—good or bad. Anyway, it struck me solid as proper medicine to get busy in the case of Mary Clive. Putting everything else aside, she wanted to do the right thing now. She wanted a home. It may be because I haven't a wife, that I can't see why a woman isn't allowed to get up when she falls down once. Many choice male spirits develop a chronic crouch from practice in falling gracefully. True, Martin Flint was too white a man to be made a monkey of a second time, but I couldn't see Mary Clive trying it. A look in the cool gray eye of Didsey Leeds told me he was thinking my way.

"Martin," said I, "this woman needs you now more than ever she did. Steve's gone

part to shut your ears to that call. Then, lookin' at it solely from Steve's point of view: He'll swing easier—for some last words with you."

"But you couldn't understand," Martin replied mildly.

Anyway, we three went over to Mariposa. I won't soon forget the night we struck that town. Rio Rojo was sloping by, muddy, feverish and still. Night was coming on, but the sand was a griddle, still hot from noon-day burning. . . . Huts dim in the shadows, lights ahead and endless mountains around all. . . . A naked baby on the road before us was suddenly snatched away by a mad-faced woman, who ran from us to her door as if we were wild beasts; then stood there screaming crazily. Her man appeared from behind the hut with a shot-gun, and presently began to yell for his neighbor.

"What is this—some mountainous mad-house?" Didsey mumbled.

There were now a pair of Mariposers trailing us, a couple ahead and another skirting around to get into town before us. Really it wasn't like a village of white men at all, but stuffy as a dream. When the poor deers caught up the strength of a mob, they closed in and we three looked into enough guns to stop a stampede of steers.

"Do you all always welcome strangers to Mariposa this elaborate?" Didsey inquired.

"Whar did'ge pick up yer fren's, Lattice?" a long cool individual drawled, looking Martin in the eye. Of course, the trouble was now plain. Our companion was taken for Steve, who was Lattice in Mariposa. I thought of the woman snatching her babe away. Steve had been busy with something more than clean man-killing from that. Martin saw it now also, but did not answer. He was thinking too hard.

"The only thing botherin' us is yer fren's, Lattice," the big fellow drawled on. I liked him. Leadership sat well on him. "We've got to kill you good and quick, but how far and how deep in are these strangers? Dam' these complications!"

"What has this Lattice done?" Martin asked jerkily.

The crowd pressed in savagely for answer. Didsey who never stays long out of the talk-pot, now raised his voice: "Look a-here, strangers! You-all are way off the mainline

Which remark nettled Didsey, who likes to feel he's carrying the crowd when on the floor. "Oh, I don't know, enough truth ought to seep into even Mariposa over night to spoil that."

An ominous jeer went up from the crowd. "Twin brother!" had a shop-worn sound to me. I spoke to the big fellow whom they called Ping Delor.

"If you hit Discord, being sent for, we wouldn't keep you standing out here all evening, pickled in sweat on the edge of nothing. We generally listen to people we don't know—at least, let 'em buy a drink."

"All to the good for nerve," said Delor. "Come on, men, we can't do nothin' 'till we hear from the French Drip Cave delegation—an' you say you want to drag the woman into this dirty mess?"

"Only on the grounds that it ain't," remarked Didsey.

"What do you do with woman-beaters over'n your white man's town?"

I felt the shock of the words as they passed through poor Martin.

"We don't feature 'em so's to make 'em popular," said Didsey, "bein' what you might call not strong on women-folks over home."

Big Ping stepped into the doorway of the bar-room, and faced the crowd outside. Only for a second or two at a time did his eyes leave Martin, but he appeared to address Didsey:

"Supposin' you'd shut up shop of an evenin' over'n your home-hamlet, when you sudden hears the screams of a whipped woman—hears the voice and the blows of the man who broke into her house? Supposin', when you an' others ran to help, you got shot at by this man—so's your townsmen and neighbors are perforated and on sick report unprecedented, an' your pore old Doc is buzzin' perturbed from sore to sore—"

"And you-all let this female-punisher—this shootin' gent get away?" Didsey inquired.

"Not ag-sactly," drawled Delor, cooling, his eye on Martin, "that is, we did have him herded up solitary in French Drip Cave awhile ago. Returns from that'll be in shortly. . . . Only Lattice wasn't dressed like this here—when we drove him into the dark yonder; in fact, he wasn't dressed much to speak of."

"Why don't you go in the cave and get him?" Didsey asked.

"There hain't no one died from the shootin' incidents yit," Delor replied concisely. "Deekin Deevy is hoverin', so t' speak. If Deekin dies, we go in an' get him at any price, allus providin' he's there—an' not here, which would simplify considerable. This here town is slow t' anger, an' doesn't care to rush through a zone of light in the range of a man in the dark with two guns. And then, Lattice has made some promises about usin' up all his ammunition. All in all, we've been content to starve him for a day or two."

Nails were driven into Martin Flint this hour. Literally he withered under the words of Big Ping.

"What of the woman?" I asked.

"She's changin' back to proper color as well as could be expected."

The thought was queer to me, queer and unpalatable—that Mary Clive's soft, white skin should be blackened by a man's hand.

"You say this Lattice broke into the woman's house?" I went on, after a minute.

"That's the idea," Delor replied, making clear that she had not lied in the letter. "Night came, when she wouldn't let him in. Maybe we're soft an' ol'-fashioned here in Mariposa, but we low fur a woman's natural institution of judgment. We told Lattice to sleep out that night, offerin' him accommodations various, suggestin' he turn up next mornin' with a shave an' shine an' try again. Stid o' that, he goes on drinkin'. Finally, two nights ago, he gives us the slip, breaks in, an' aforesaid screams starts the town. . . . Oh, he ain't pretty nor respectable inside, this Lattice. Yet, I've seen him look just as innercent and ready-to-burst-into-tears as this a-legged twin o' his'n."

It was now that Martin spoke up. His face was gray-white in the broken light from the saloon, and there was something in his voice I hadn't heard for long.

"Men of Mariposa," he said, clumsily, "it's my brother in the cave, an' my prisoner by rights. He run off with the woman I was going to marry, and took the money I had saved. His life belongs to me."

"Go and get it!" voices cried. "Go to the cave an' get your man!"

"That's what I'm askin'," Martin said, looking straight at Delor.

Didsey and I broke in, but a quick, imploring look from Martin's eyes made us silent. Delor, who seemed so slow in all things, missed nothing.

"Do you mean to kill him in there—or bring him out?"

"Do you mean to kill him—if I bring him out?" Martin shot back.

Delor waved his huge hand over the crowd which was loudly signifying the affirmative.

"What do you say?" the twin asked quickly and low.

Delor answered evasively, "You finish him, an' we won't have to."

Martin studied a moment. It was plain to me that Steve Flint's room in hell was to be used that night. The brother saw it, too. "Show me the way," he said, dully.

The mouth of the cave was in the hills a mile from town. We all set out.

"Martin, don't play the ferret here!" I whispered, on the way. "Steve's amuck. He'll kill you."

There was something akin to madness in the eyes which mutely implored me to say no more.

A big fire was burning at the mouth of the cave. Two men of the running guard reported that nothing had been heard of the prisoner, since the messenger had ridden back to town. They stood with repeating rifles just out of range from within. A rabbit couldn't have scurried out and lived.

Martin looked slowly about the firelit faces, pressed my hand and started toward the entrance. Really, it was now for the first time, that I realized how fond I was of Martin Flint. Didsey cursed softly under his breath. The crowd was silent now. We heard Martin's call—a tomb-like rumbling:

"Halloo-oo, Steve! . . . I'm comin' in. It's me—Martin!"

There was no answer. Martin's steps trailed into silence. The smell of earth came out of the cave, but it was warm and pent like a long-shut room. I heard the snapping of roots in the fire; then a sudden gust of men's whispering behind, but I couldn't turn to see. My eyes were lost in the inner dark. I felt the shirt sticking to my skin; the need for a drink. Hate for the seconds, as they passed, sunk life-deep into memory. . . . It seemed an hour. . . .

Then a voice from far within—tired, hoarse, hopeless. "It's all over, men! . . . Poor Steve—saved me—from the dirty work!"

Into the light he came, walking jerkily, like a wooden figure pushed from behind. It was the face of Martin grown old, it seemed to me, haggard, horrible with suffering. My thought was that only the beating of Mary Clive had steeled him to go in. Out into the firelight, he came, mumbled throatily the repetition—that all was over! Then I was conscious of a woman beside me—Mary Clive—heard a catch in her throat and her scream:

"That isn't Martin! That's Steve!—He's left his brother in there!"

For a second, the twin looked at the bruised beautiful face in the firelight—then burst into laughter. It was all plain with that laugh—hard as a parrot's tone—disks of metal thumping down steel stairs—the laugh of a man whose soul has fled and whose body doesn't care. . . . The hideous shock of a pistol—his own—and Steve was down.

We caught up brands from the fire, and rushed into the cave. Fear was savage in every brain that murder had been done within, but this was wrong. At a quick turn of the passage, fifty feet from the mouth, Martin stood at bay, squinting at the flares. He was half-dressed and had been getting into the rags Steve had worn. The word that he lived was shouted back—so that I knew the woman heard. . . . In all but spirit, this was the man whom the Mariposers had hunted. They inclined at first to be rough on account of the trick. Martin had heard the shot, and the voices had told him what Steve had done.

"I've got no favors to ask," he said dully. "I never intended to kill him. I couldn't let him starve! I meant him to take the long chance—of running for it in my clothes!"

Didsey patted his shoulder; I wrung the limp cold hand of the man who was making me think so fast. I was glad that he lived. Big Ping Delor rebuked his men, as one having authority.

"Quit yer grumblin', fellers!" he commanded. "This here's a family matter. All we've got to know is that Mariposa's dead lies yonder at the mouth of the cave."

Kindness broke down the strange fellow, as hostility never could have done.

"I didn't want to betray you-all," he said unsteadily, "but I couldn't lead him out to be strung up. Oh, Gawd, you never could understand! He—he was like the other half o' me!"

"The devil's half, Martin!"

The words startled, silenced all. The tone was soft, thrilling. Mary Clive had followed us in. The men stepped back, so that the way was clear between her and her old love. There seemed to be some big meaning in that unconscious clearing of the men between them. Tall, slender, the blue eyes shining but pitiful—she stood waiting for Martin to speak—in the smoky flare of the torches.

There was so much in what she had said, that I have been thinking about it ever since; and sometimes I have wished that I were born twin—and the devil's half slain, outright and for all.



I CAUGHT HIM THUS, STARING INTO THE RED-PLUMED WEST WITH EYES OF A MAN WHOSE BRAIN IS RUNNING DOWN

loco over in Mariposa where they hang for murder. Sure, she broke training—but, take it from me, that letter's from a woman who's bigger and finer for it."

He looked at us in his white terrified way, shaking his head. "I hadn't thought of seein' her again," he mumbled.

"We weren't discussing what you had thought of, or not, Mart," Didsey said in his high-handed way. "Mary Clive needs help. Think what it cost her to turn to you for it—an' yet her heart turned to you. That show's what's in it. It ain't no man's

and the block shows red. We came down here at the call of a woman, and entered this settlement proper. We're three days on the trail from Discord, and accounted for day and night before that—all of which is a negotiable fac' . . . If the lady's here, she'll prove what we say. She left Discord with this man's twin brother, who appears to be 'Lattice' in this section. He was Steve Flint over our way—and this here's Martin Flint yesterday, to-day and to-morrow—"

"To-morrer in hell," somebody said cheerfully.