A TOUCH OF SUN
AND OTHER STORIES
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BY

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A TOUCH OF SUN

I

The five-o'clock whistle droned through the heat. Its deep, consequential chest-note belonged by right to the oldest and best paying member of the Asgard group, a famous mining property of northern California.

The Asgard Company owned a square league of prehistoric titles on the western slope of the foot-hills,—land enough for the preservation of a natural park within its own boundaries where fire-lines were cleared, forest-trees respected, and roads kept up. Wherever the company erected a board fence, gate, or building, the same was methodically painted a color known as "monopoly brown." The most conspicuous of these objects cropped out on the sunset dip of the property where the woods for twenty years had been cut, and the Sacramento valley surges up in heat and glare, with yearly visitations of malaria.

Higher than the buildings in brown, a gray-
shingled bungalow ranged itself on the lap of its broad lawns against a slope of orchard tops climbing to the dark environment of the forest. Not the original forest: of that only three stark pines were left, which rose one hundred feet out of a gulch below the house and lent their ancient majesty to the modern uses of electric wires and telephone lines. Their dreaming tops were in the sky; their feet were in the sluicings of the stamp-mill that reared its long brown back in a semi-recumbent posture, resting one elbow on the hill; and beneath the valley smouldered, a pale mirage by day, by night a vision of color transcendent and rich as the gates of the Eternal City.

At half past five the night watchman, on his way from town, stopped at the superintendent's gate, ran up the blazing path, and thrust a newspaper between the dark blue canvas curtains that shaded the entrance of the porch. For hours the house had slept behind its heat defenses, every shutter closed, yards of piazza blind and canvas awning fastened down. The sun, a ball of fire, went slowly down the west. Rose-vines drooped against the hanging lattices, printing their watery lines of split bamboo with a shadow-pattern of leaf and flower.