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"FIREBRAND" TREVISON

INSTINCTIVELY EACH KNEW THE OTHER FOR A FOE.
[*Page 25*]

"FIREBRAND" TREVISON

BY

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

AUTHOR OF
THE VENGENCE OF JEFFERSON GAWNE,
THE BOSS OF THE LAZY Y,
THE RANGE BOSS, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
P. V. E. IVORY

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Illustrations

“Firebrand” Trevison

CHAPTER I

THE RIDER OF THE BLACK HORSE

The trail from the Diamond K broke around the base of a low hill dotted thickly with scraggly oak and fir, then stretched away, straight and almost level (except for a deep cut where the railroad gang and a steam shovel were eating into a hundred-foot hill) to Manti. A month before, there had been no Manti, and six months before that there had been no railroad. The railroad and the town had followed in the wake of a party of khaki-clad men that had made reasonably fast progress through the country, leaving a trail of wooden stakes and little stone monuments behind. Previously, an agent of the railroad company had bartered through, securing a right-of-way. The fruit of the efforts of these men was a dark gash on a sun-scorched level, and two lines of steel laid as straight as skilled eye and transit could make them—and Manti.

Manti could not be overlooked, for the town obtruded upon the vision from where “Brand” Trevison was jogging along the Diamond K trail astride his big black horse, Nigger. Manti dominated the landscape, not because it was big and imposing, but because it was new. Manti’s buildings were scattered—there had been no need for crowding; but from a distance—from Trevison’s distance, for instance, which was a matter of three miles or so—Manti looked insignificant, toy-like, in comparison with the vast world on whose bosom it sat. Manti seemed futile, ridiculous. But Trevison knew that the coming of the railroad marked an epoch, that the two thin, thread-like lines of steel were the tentacles of the man-made monster that had gripped the East—business reaching out for newer fields—and that Manti, futile and ridiculous as it seemed, was an outpost fortified by unlimited resource. Manti had come to stay.

And the cattle business was going, Trevison knew. The railroad company had built corrals at Manti, and Trevison knew they would be needed for several years to come. But he could foresee the day when they would be replaced by building and factory. Business was extending its lines, cattle must retreat before them. Several homesteaders had already appeared in the country, erecting fences around their claims. One of the homesteaders, when Trevison had come upon him a few days before, had impertinently inquired why Trevison did not fence the Diamond K range. Fence in five thousand acres! It had never been done in this section of the country. Trevison had permitted himself a cold grin, and had kept his answer to himself. The incident was not important, but it foreshadowed a day when a dozen like inquiries would make the building of a range fence imperative.

Trevison already felt the irritation of congestion—the presence of the homesteaders nettled him. He frowned as he rode. A year ago he would have sold out—cattle, land and buildings—at the market price. But at that time he had not known the value of his land. Now—

He kicked Nigger in the ribs and straightened in the saddle, grinning.

“She’s not for sale now—eh, Nig?”

Five minutes later he halted the black at the crest of the big railroad cut and looked over the edge appraisingly. Fifty laborers—directed by a mammoth personage in dirty blue overalls, boots, woolen shirt, and a wide-brimmed felt hat, and with a face undeniably Irish—were working frenziedly to keep pace with the huge steam shovel, whose iron jaws were biting into the earth with a regularity that must have been discouraging to its human rivals. A train of flat-cars, almost loaded, was on the track of the cut, and a dinky engine attached to them wheezed steam from a safety valve, the engineer and fireman lounging out of the cab window, lazily watching.

Patrick Carson, the personage—construction boss, good-natured, keen, observant—was leaning against a boulder at the side of the track, talking to the engineer at the instant Trevison appeared at the top of the cut. He glanced up, his eyes lighting.

“There’s thot mon, Trevison, ag’in, Murph’,” he said to the engineer. “Bedad, he’s a pitcher now, ain’t he?”

An imposing figure Trevison certainly was. Horse and rider were outlined against the sky, and in the dear light every muscle and feature of man and beast stood but boldly and distinctly. The big black horse was a powerful brute, tall and rangy, with speed and courage showing plainly in contour, nostril and eye; and with head and ears erect he stood motionless, statuesque, heroic. His rider seemed to have been proportioned to fit the horse. Tall, slender of waist, broad of shoulder, straight, he sat loosely in the saddle looking at the scene below him, unconscious of the admiration he excited. Poetic fancies stirred Carson vaguely.

“Luk at ’im now, Murph; wid his big hat, his leather pants, his spurs, an’ the rist av his conthraptions! There’s a divvil av a conthrast here now, if ye’d only glimpse it. This civillyzation, ripraysinted be this railroad, don’t seem to fit, noways. It’s like it had butted into a pitcher book! Ain’t he a darlin’?”

“I’ve never seen him up close,” said Murphy. There was none of Carson’s enthusiasm in his voice. “It’s always seemed to me that a felluh who rigs himself out like that has got a lot of show-off stuff in him.”

“The first time I clapped me eyes on wan av them cowbhoys I thought so, too,” said Carson. “That was back on the other section. But I seen so manny av them rigged out like thot, thot I comminced to askin’ questions. It’s a domned purposeful rig, mon. The big felt hat is a daisy for keepin’ off the sun, an’ that gaudy bit av a rag around his neck keeps the sun and sand from blisterin’ the skin. The leather pants is to keep his legs from gettin’ clawed up be the thorns av prickly pear an’ what not, which he’s got to ride through, an’ the high heels is to keep his feet from slippin’ through the stirrups. A kid c’ud tell ye what he carries the young cannon for, an’ why he wears it so low on his hip. Ye’ve nivver seen him up close, eh Murph’? Well, I’m askin’ him down so’s ye can have a good look at him.” He stepped back from the boulder and waved a hand at Trevison, shouting:

“Make it a real visit, bhoy!”

“I’ll be pullin’ out of here before he can get around,” said Murphy, noting that the last car was almost filled.

Carson chuckled. “Hold tight,” he warned; “he’s comin’.”

The side of the cut was steep, and the soft sand and clay did not make a secure footing. But when the black received the signal from Trevison he did not hesitate. Crouching like a great cat at the edge, he slid his forelegs over until his hoofs sank deep into the side of the cut. Then with a gentle lurch he drew his hind legs after him, and an instant later was gingerly descending, his rider leaning far back in the saddle, the reins held loosely in his hands.

It looked simple enough, the way the black was doing it, and Trevison’s demeanor indicated perfect trust in the animal and in his own skill as a rider. But the laborers ceased working and watched, grouped, gesturing; the staccato coughing of the steam shovel died gaspingly, as the engineer shut off the engine and stood, rooted, his mouth agape; the fireman in the dinky engine held tightly to the cab window. Murphy muttered in astonishment, and Carson chuckled admiringly, for the descent was a full hundred feet, and there were few men in the railroad gang that would have dared to risk the wall on foot.

The black had gained impetus with distance. A third of the slope had been covered when he struck some loose earth that shifted with his weight and carried his hind quarters to one side and off balance. Instantly the rider swung his body toward the wall of the cut, twisted in the saddle and swung the black squarely around, the animal scrambling like a cat. The black stood, braced, facing the crest of the cut, while the dislodged earth, preceded by pebbles and small boulders, clattered down behind him. Then, under the urge of Trevison’s gentle hand and voice, the black wheeled again and faced the descent.

“I wouldn’t ride a horse down there for the damned railroad!” declared Murphy.

“Thrue for ye—ye c’udn’t,” grinned Carson.

“A man could ride anywhere with a horse like that!” remarked the fireman, fascinated.

“Ye’d have brought a cropper in that slide, an’ the road wud be minus a coal-heaver!” said Carson. “Wud ye luk at him now!”

The black was coming down, forelegs asprawl, his hind quarters sliding in the sand. Twice as his fore-hoofs struck some slight obstruction his hind quarters lifted and he stood, balanced, on his forelegs, and each time Trevison averted the impending catastrophe by throwing himself far back in the saddle and slapping the black’s hips sharply.

“He’s a circus rider!” shouted Carson, gleefully. “He’s got the coolest head of anny mon I iver seen! He’s a divvil, thot mon!”

The descent was spectacular, but it was apparent that Trevison cared little for its effect upon his audience, for as he struck the level and came riding toward Carson and the others, there was no sign of self-consciousness in his face or manner. He smiled faintly, though, as a cheer from the laborers reached his ears. In the next instant he had halted Nigger near the dinky engine, and Carson was introducing him to the engineer and fireman.

Looking at Trevison “close up,” Murphy was constrained to mentally label him “some man,” and he regretted his deprecatory words of a few minutes before. Plainly, there was no “show-off stuff” in Trevison. His feat of riding down the wall of the cut had not been performed to impress anyone; the look of reckless abandon in the otherwise serene eyes that held Murphy’s steadily,

convinced the engineer that the man had merely responded to a dare-devil impulse. There was something in Trevison's appearance that suggested an entire disregard of fear. The engineer had watched the face of a brother of his craft one night when the latter had been driving a roaring monster down a grade at record-breaking speed into a wall of rain-soaked darkness out of which might thunder at any instant another roaring monster, coming in the opposite direction. There had been a mistake in orders, and the train was running against time to make a switch. Several times during the ride Murphy had caught a glimpse of the engineer's face, and the eyes had haunted him since—defiance of death, contempt of consequences, had been reflected in them. Trevison's eyes reminded him of the engineer's. But in Trevison's eyes was an added expression—cold humor. The engineer of Murphy's recollection would have met death dauntlessly. Trevison would meet it no less dauntlessly, but would mock at it. Murphy looked long and admiringly at him, noting the deep chest, the heavy muscles, the blue-black sheen of his freshly-shaven chin and jaw under the tan; the firm, mobile mouth, the aggressive set to his head. Murphy set his age down at twenty-seven or twenty-eight. Murphy was sixty himself—the age that appreciates, and secretly envies, the virility of youth. Carson was complimenting Trevison on his descent of the wall of the cut.

"You're a daisy rider, me bhoy!"

"Nigger's a clever horse," smiled Trevison. Murphy was pleased that he was giving the animal the credit. "Nigger's well trained. He's wiser than some men. Tricky, too." He patted the sleek, muscular neck of the beast and the animal whinnied gently. "He's careful of his master, though," laughed Trevison. "A man pulled a gun on me, right after I'd got Nigger. He had the drop, and he meant business. I had to shoot. To disconcert the fellow, I had to jump Nigger against him. Since then, whenever Nigger sees a gun in anyone's hand, he thinks it's time to bowl that man over. There's no holding him. He won't even stand for anyone pulling a handkerchief out of a hip pocket when I'm on him." Trevison grinned. "Try it, Carson, but get that boulder between you and Nigger before you do."

"I don't like the look av the baste's eye," declined the Irishman. "I wudn't doubt ye're worrud for the wurrold. But he wudn't jump a mon divvil a bit quicker than his master, or I'm a sinner!"

Trevison's eyes twinkled. "You're a good construction boss, Carson. But I'm glad to see that you're getting more considerate."

"Av what?"

"Of your men." Trevison glanced back; he had looked once before, out of the tail of his eye. The laborers were idling in the cut, enjoying the brief rest, taking advantage of Carson's momentary dereliction, for the last car had been filled.

"I'll be rayported yet, begob!"

Carson waved his hands, and the laborers dove for the flat-cars. When the last man was aboard, the engine coughed and moved slowly away. Carson climbed into the engine-cab, with a shout: "So-long bhoy!" to Trevison. The latter held Nigger with a firm rein, for the animal was dancing at the noise made by the engine, and as the cars filed past him, running faster now, the laborers grinned at him and respectfully raised their hats. For they had come from one of the Latin countries of Europe, and for them, in the person of this heroic figure of a man who had ridden his horse down the steep wall of the cut, was romance.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH HATRED IS BORN

For some persons romance dwells in the new and the unusual, and for other persons it dwells not at all. Certain of Rosalind Benham's friends would have been able to see nothing but the crudities and squalor of Manti, viewing it as Miss Benham did, from one of the windows of her father's private car, which early that morning had been shunted upon a switch at the outskirts of town. Those friends would have seen nothing but a new town of weird and picturesque buildings, with more saloons than seemed to be needed in view of the noticeable lack of citizens. They would have shuddered at the dust-windrowed street, the litter of refuse, the dismal lonesomeness, the forlornness, the utter isolation, the desolation. Those friends would have failed to note the vast, silent reaches of green-brown plain that stretched and yawned into aching distances; the wonderfully blue and cloudless sky that covered it; they would have overlooked the timber groves that spread here and there over the face of the land, with their lure of mystery. No thoughts of the bigness of this country would have crept in upon them—except as they might have been reminded of the dreary distance from the glitter and the tinsel of the East. The mountains, distant and shining, would have meant nothing to them; the strong, pungent aroma of the sage might have nauseated them.

But Miss Benham had caught her first glimpse of Manti and the surrounding country from a window of her berth in the car that morning just at dawn, and she loved it. She had lain for

some time cuddled up in her bed, watching the sun rise over the distant mountains, and the breath of the sage, sweeping into the half-opened window, had carried with it something stronger—the lure of a virgin country.

Aunt Agatha Benham, chaperon, forty—maiden lady from choice—various uncharitable persons hinted humorously of pursued eligibles—found Rosalind gazing ecstatically out of the berth window when she stirred and awoke shortly after nine. Agatha climbed out of her berth and sat on its edge, yawning sleepily.

“This is Manti, I suppose,” she said acridly, shoving the curtain aside and looking out of the window. “We should consider ourselves fortunate not to have had an adventure with Indians or outlaws. We have *that* to be thankful for, at least.”

Agatha’s sarcasm failed to penetrate the armor of Rosalind’s unconcern—as Agatha’s sarcasms always did. Agatha occupied a place in Rosalind’s affections, but not in her scheme of enjoyment. Since she *must* be chaperoned, Agatha was acceptable to her. But that did not mean that she made a confidante of Agatha. For Agatha was looking at the world through the eyes of Forty, and the vision of Twenty is somewhat more romantic. 12

“Whatever your father thought of in permitting you to come out here is a mystery to me,” pursued Agatha severely, as she fussed with her hair. “It was like him, though, to go to all this trouble—for me—merely to satisfy your curiosity about the country. I presume we shall be returning shortly.”

“Don’t be impatient, Aunty,” said the girl, still gazing out of the window. “I intend to stretch my legs before I return.”

“Mercy!” gasped Agatha; “such language! This barbaric country has affected you already, my dear. Legs!” She summoned horror into her expression, but it was lost on Rosalind, who still gazed out of the window. Indeed, from a certain light in the girl’s eyes it might be adduced that she took some delight in shocking Agatha.

“I shall stay here quite some time, I think,” said Rosalind. “Daddy said there was no hurry; that he might come out here in a month, himself. And I have been dying to get away from the petty conventionalities of the East. I am going to be absolutely human for a while, Aunty. I am going to ‘rough it’—that is, as much as one can rough it when one is domiciled in a private car. I am going to get a horse and have a look at the country. And Aunty—” here the girl’s voice came chokingly, as though some deep emotion agitated her “—I am going to ride ‘straddle’!”

She did not look to see whether Agatha had survived this second shock—but Agatha had survived many such shocks. It was only when, after a silence of several minutes, Agatha spoke again, that the girl seemed to remember there was anybody in the compartment with her. 13 Agatha’s voice was laden with contempt:

“Well, I don’t know what you see in this outlandish place to compensate for what you miss at home.”

The girl did not look around. “A man on a black horse, Aunty,” she said. “He has passed here twice. I have never seen such a horse. I don’t remember to have ever seen a man quite like the rider. He looks positively—er—*heroish*! He is built like a Roman gladiator, he rides the black horse as though he had been sculptured on it, and his head has a set that makes one feel he has a mind of his own. He has furnished me with the only thrill that I have felt since we left New York!”

“He hasn’t seen *you*!” said Agatha, coldly; “of course you made sure of *that*?”

The girl looked mischievously at the older woman. She ran her fingers through her hair—brown and vigorous-looking—then shaded her eyes with her hands and gazed at her reflection in a mirror near by. In deshabille she looked fresh and bewitching. She had looked like a radiant goddess to “Brand” Trevison, when he had accidentally caught a glimpse of her face at the window while she had been watching him. He had not known that the lady had just awakened from her beauty sleep. He would have sworn that she needed no beauty sleep. And he had deliberately ridden past the car again, hoping to get another glimpse of her. The girl smiled.

“I am not so positive about that, Aunty. Let us not be prudish. If he saw me, he made no sign, 14 and therefore he is a gentleman.” She looked out of the window and smiled again. “There he is now, Aunty!”

It was Agatha who parted the curtains, this time. The horseman’s face was toward the window, and he saw her. An expression of puzzled astonishment glowed in his eyes, superseded quickly by disappointment, whereat Rosalind giggled softly and hid her tousled head in a pillow.

“The impertinent brute! Rosalind, he dared to look directly at me, and I am sure he would have winked at me in another instant! A gentleman!” she said, coldly.

“Don’t be severe, Aunty. I’m sure he is a gentleman, for all his curiosity. See—there he is, riding away without so much as looking back!”

Half an hour later the two women entered the dining-room just as a big, rather heavy-featured, but handsome man, came through the opposite door. He greeted both ladies effusively, and smilingly looked at his watch.

“You over-slept this morning, ladies—don’t you think? It’s after ten. I’ve been rummaging around town, getting acquainted. It’s rather an unfinished place, after the East. But in time—” He made a gesture, perhaps a silent prophecy that one day Manti would out-strip New York, and

bowed the ladies to seats at table, talking while the colored waiter moved obsequiously about them.

“I thought at first that your father was over-enthusiastic about Manti, Miss Benham,” he continued. “But the more I see of it the firmer becomes my conviction that your father was right. There are tremendous possibilities for growth. Even now it is a rather fertile country. We shall make it hum, once the railroad and the dam are completed. It is a logical site for a town—there is no other within a hundred miles in any direction.” 15

“And you are to anticipate the town’s growth—isn’t that it, Mr. Corrigan?”

“You put it very comprehensively, Miss Benham; but perhaps it would be better to say that I am the advance agent of prosperity—that sounds rather less mercenary. We must not allow the impression to get abroad that mere money is to be the motive power behind our efforts.”

“But money-making is the real motive, after all?” said Miss Benham, dryly.

“I submit there are several driving forces in life, and that money-making is not the least compelling of them.”

“The other forces?” It seemed to Corrigan that Miss Benham’s face was very serious. But Agatha, who knew Rosalind better than Corrigan knew her, was aware that the girl was merely demurely sarcastic.

“Love and hatred are next,” he said, slowly.

“You would place money-making before love?” Rosalind bantered.

“Money adds the proper flavor to love,” laughed Corrigan. The laugh was laden with subtle significance and he looked straight at the girl, a deep fire slumbering in his eyes. “Yes,” he said slowly, “money-making is a great passion. I have it. But I can hate, and love. And when I do either, it will be strongly. And then—” 16

Agatha cleared her throat impatiently. Corrigan colored slightly, and Miss Benham smothered something, artfully directing the conversation into less personal channels:

“You are going to build manufactories, organize banks, build municipal power-houses, speculate in real estate, and such things, I suppose?”

“And build a dam. We already have a bank here, Miss Benham.”

“Will father be interested in those things?”

“Silently. You understand, that being president of the railroad, your father must keep in the background. The actual promoting of these enterprises will be done by me.”

Miss Benham looked dreamily out of the window. Then she turned to Corrigan and gazed at him meditatively, though the expression in her eyes was so obviously impersonal that it chilled any amorous emotion that Corrigan might have felt.

“I suppose you are right,” she said. “It must be thrilling to feel a conscious power over the destiny of a community, to direct its progress, to manage it, and—er—figuratively to grab industries by their—” She looked slyly at Agatha “—lower extremities and shake the dollars out of them. Yes,” she added, with a wistful glance through the window; “that must be more exciting than being merely in love.”

Agatha again followed Rosalind’s gaze and saw the black horse standing in front of a store. She frowned, and observed stiffly: 17

“It seems to me that the people in these small places—such as Manti—are not capable of managing the large enterprises that Mr. Corrigan speaks of.” She looked at Rosalind, and the girl knew that she was deprecating the rider of the black horse. Rosalind smiled sweetly.

“Oh, I am sure there must be *some* intelligent persons among them!”

“As a rule,” stated Corrigan, dogmatically, “the first citizens of any town are an uncouth and worthless set.”

“The Four Hundred would take exception to that!” laughed Rosalind.

Corrigan laughed with her. “You know what I mean, of course. Take Manti, for instance. Or any new western town. The lowest elements of society are represented; most of the people are very ignorant and criminal.”

The girl looked sharply at Corrigan, though he was not aware of the glance. Was there a secret understanding between Corrigan and Agatha? Had Corrigan also some knowledge of the rider’s pilgrimages past the car window? Both had maligned the rider. But the girl had seen intelligence on the face of the rider, and something in the set of his head had told her that he was not a criminal. And despite his picturesque rigging, and the atmosphere of the great waste places that seemed to envelop him, he had made a deeper impression on her than had Corrigan, darkly handsome, well-groomed, a polished product of polite convention and breeding, whom her father wanted her to marry. 18

“Well,” she said, looking at the black horse; “I intend to observe Manti’s citizens more closely before attempting to express an opinion.”

Half an hour later, in response to Corrigan’s invitation, Rosalind was walking down Manti’s one street, Corrigan beside her. Corrigan had donned khaki clothing, a broad, felt hat, boots, neckerchief. But in spite of the change of garments there was a poise, an atmosphere about him,

that hinted strongly of the graces of civilization. Rosalind felt a flash of pride in him. He was big, masterful, fascinating.

Manti seemed to be fraudulent, farcical, upon closer inspection. For one thing, its crudeness was more glaring, and its unpainted board fronts looked flimsy, transient. Compared to the substantial buildings of the East, Manti's structures were hovels. Here was the primitive town in the first flush of its creation. Miss Benham did not laugh, for a mental picture rose before her—a bit of wild New England coast, a lowering sky, a group of Old-world pilgrims shivering around a blazing fire in the open, a ship in the offing. That also was a band of first citizens; that picture and the one made by Manti typified the spirit of America.

There were perhaps twenty buildings. Corrigan took her into several of them. But, she noted, he did not take her into the store in front of which was the black horse. She was introduced to several of the proprietors. Twice she overheard parts of the conversation carried on between Corrigan and the proprietors. In each case the conversation was the same: 19

"Do you own this property?"

"The building."

"Who owns the land?"

"A company in New York."

Corrigan introduced himself as the manager of the company, and spoke of erecting an office. The two men spoke about their "leases." The latter seemed to have been limited to two months.

"See me before your lease expires," she heard Corrigan tell the men.

"Does the railroad own the town site?" asked Rosalind as they emerged from the last store.

"Yes. And leases are going to be more valuable presently."

"You don't mean that you are going to extort money from them—after they have gone to the expense of erecting buildings?"

His smile was pleasant. "They will be treated with the utmost consideration, Miss Benham."

He ushered her into the bank. Like the other buildings, the bank was of frame construction. Its only resemblance to a bank was in the huge safe that stood in the rear of the room, and a heavy wire netting behind which ran a counter. Some chairs and a desk were behind the counter, and at the desk sat a man of probably forty, who got up at the entrance of his visitors and approached them, grinning and holding out a hand to Corrigan.

"So you're here at last, Jeff," he said. "I saw the car on the switch this morning. The show will open pretty soon now, eh?" He looked inquiringly at Rosalind, and Corrigan presented her. She heard the man's name, "Mr. Crofton Braman," softly spoken by her escort, and she acknowledged the introduction formally and walked to the door, where she stood looking out into the street. 20

Braman repelled her—she did not know why. A certain crafty gleam of his eyes, perhaps, strangely blended with a bold intentness as he had looked at her; a too effusive manner; a smoothly ingratiating smile—these evidences of character somehow made her link him with schemes and plots.

She did not reflect long over Braman. Across the street she saw the rider of the black horse standing beside the animal at a hitching rail in front of the store that Corrigan had passed without entering. Viewed from this distance, the rider's face was more distinct, and she saw that he was good-looking—quite as good-looking as Corrigan, though of a different type. Standing, he did not seem to be so tall as Corrigan, nor was he quite so bulky. But he was lithe and powerful, and in his movements, as he unhitched the black horse, threw the reins over its head and patted its neck, was an ease and grace that made Rosalind's eyes sparkle with admiration.

The rider seemed to be in no hurry to mount his horse. The girl was certain that twice as he patted the animal's neck he stole glances at her, and a stain appeared in her cheeks, for she remembered the car window. 21

And then she heard a voice greet the rider. A man came out of the door of one of the saloons, glanced at the rider and raised his voice, joyously:

"Well, if it ain't ol' 'Brand'! Where in hell you been keepin' yourself? I ain't seen you for a week!"

Friendship was speaking here, and the girl's heart leaped in sympathy. She watched with a smile as the other man reached the rider's side and wrung his hand warmly. Such effusiveness would have been thought hypocritical in the East; humanness was always frowned upon. But what pleased the girl most was this evidence that the rider was well liked. Additional evidence on this point collected quickly. It came from several doors, in the shapes of other men who had heard the first man's shout, and presently the rider was surrounded by many friends.

The girl was deeply interested. She forgot Braman, Corrigan—forgot that she was standing in the doorway of the bank. She was seeing humanity stripped of conventionalities; these people were not governed by the intimidating regard for public opinion that so effectively stifled warm impulses among the persons she knew.

She heard another man call to him, and she found herself saying: "'Brand'! What an odd name!"

But it seemed to fit him; he was of a type that one sees rarely—clean, big, athletic, virile, magnetic. His personality dominated the group; upon him interest centered heavily. Nor did his popularity appear to destroy his poise or make him self-conscious. The girl watched closely for signs of that. Had he shown the slightest trace of self-worship she would have lost interest in him. He appeared to be a trifle embarrassed, and that made him doubly attractive to her. He bantered gayly with the men, and several times his replies to some quip convulsed the others.

And then while she dreamily watched him, she heard several voices insist that he “show Nigger off.” He demurred, and when they again insisted, he spoke lowly to them, and she felt their concentrated gaze upon her. She knew that he had declined to “show Nigger off” because of her presence. “Nigger,” she guessed, was his horse. She secretly hoped he would overcome his prejudice, for she loved the big black, and was certain that any performance he participated in would be well worth seeing. So, in order to influence the rider she turned her back, pretending not to be interested. But when she heard exclamations of satisfaction from the group of men she wheeled again, to see that the rider had mounted and was sitting in the saddle, grinning at a man who had produced a harmonica and was rubbing it on a sleeve of his shirt, preparatory to placing it to his lips.

The rider had gone too far now to back out, and Rosalind watched him in frank curiosity. And in the next instant, when the strains of the harmonica smote the still morning air, Nigger began to prance.

What followed reminded the girl of a scene in the ring of a circus. The horse, proud, dignified, began to pace slowly to the time of the accompanying music, executing difficult steps that must have tried the patience of both animal and trainer during the teaching period; the rider, lithe, alert, proud also, smiling his pleasure.

Rosalind stood there long, watching. It was a clever exhibition, and she found herself wondering about the rider. Had he always lived in the West?

The animal performed a dozen feats of the circus arena, and the girl was so deeply interested in him that she did not observe Corrigan when he emerged from the bank, stepped down into the street and stood watching the rider. She noticed him though, when the black, forced to her side of the street through the necessity of executing a turn, passed close to the easterner. And then, with something of a shock, she saw Corrigan smiling derisively. At the sound of applause from the group on the opposite side of the street, Corrigan’s derision became a sneer. Miss Benham felt resentment; a slight color stained her cheeks. For she could not understand why Corrigan should show displeasure over this clean and clever amusement. She was looking full at Corrigan when he turned and caught her gaze. The light in his eyes was positively venomous.

“It is a rather dramatic bid for your interest, isn’t it, Miss Benham?” he said.

His voice came during a lull that followed the applause. It reached Rosalind, full and resonant. It carried to the rider of the black horse, and glancing sidelong at him, Rosalind saw his face whiten under the deep tan upon it. It carried, too, to the other side of the street, and the girl saw faces grow suddenly tense; noted the stiffening of bodies. The flat, ominous silence that followed was unreal and oppressive. Out of it came the rider’s voice as he urged the black to a point within three or four paces of Corrigan and sat in the saddle, looking at him. And now for the first time Rosalind had a clear, full view of the rider’s face and a quiver of trepidation ran over her. For the lean jaws were corded, the mouth was firm and set—she knew his teeth were clenched; it was the face of a man who would not be trifled with. His chin was shoved forward slightly; somehow it helped to express the cold humor that shone in his narrowed, steady eyes. His voice, when he spoke to Corrigan, had a metallic quality that rang ominously in the silence that had continued:

“Back up your play or take it back,” he said slowly.

Corrigan had not changed his position. He stared fixedly at the rider; his only sign of emotion over the latter’s words was a quickening of the eyes. He idly tapped with his fingers on the sleeve of his khaki shirt, where the arm passed under them to fold over the other. His voice easily matched the rider’s in its quality of quietness:

“My conversation was private. You are interfering without cause.”

Watching the rider, filled with a sudden, breathless premonition of impending tragedy, Rosalind saw his eyes glitter with the imminence of physical action. Distressed, stirred by an impulse to avert what threatened, she took a step forward, speaking rapidly to Corrigan:

“Mr. Corrigan, this is positively silly! You know you were hardly discreet!”

Corrigan smiled coldly, and the girl knew that it was not a question of right or wrong between the two men, but a conflict of spirit. She did not know that hatred had been born here; that instinctively each knew the other for a foe, and that this present clash was to be merely one battle of the war that would be waged between them if both survived.

Not for an instant did Corrigan’s eyes wander from those of the rider. He saw from them that he might expect no further words. None came. The rider’s right hand fell to the butt of the pistol that swung low on his right hip. Simultaneously, Corrigan’s hand dropped to his hip pocket.

Rosalind saw the black horse lunge forward as though propelled by a sudden spring. A dust cloud rose from his hoofs, and Corrigan was lost in it. When the dust swirled away, Corrigan was disclosed to the girl’s view, doubled queerly on the ground, face down. The black horse had struck him with its shoulder—he seemed to be badly hurt.

For a moment the girl stood, swaying, looking around appealingly, startled wonder, dismay and horror in her eyes. It had happened so quickly that she was stunned. She had but one conscious emotion—thankfulness that neither man had used his pistol.

No one moved. The girl thought some of them might have come to Corrigan's assistance. She did not know that the ethics forbade interference, that a fight was between the fighters until one acknowledged defeat.

Corrigan's face was in the dust; he had not moved. The black horse stood, quietly now, several feet distant, and presently the rider dismounted, walked to Corrigan and turned him over. He worked the fallen man's arms and legs, and moved his neck, then knelt and listened at his chest. He got up and smiled mirthlessly at the girl. 26

"He's just knocked out, Miss Benham. It's nothing serious. Nigger—"

"You coward!" she interrupted, her voice thick with passion.

His lips whitened, but he smiled faintly.

"Nigger—" he began again.

"Coward! Coward!" she repeated, standing rigid before him, her hands clenched, her lips stiff with scorn.

He smiled resignedly and turned away. She stood watching him, hating him, hurling mental anathemas after him, until she saw him pass through the doorway of the bank. Then she turned to see Corrigan just getting up.

Not a man in the group across the street had moved. They, too, had watched Trevison go into the bank, and now their glances shifted to the girl and Corrigan. Their sympathies, she saw plainly, were with Trevison; several of them smiled as the easterner got to his feet.

Corrigan was pale and breathless, but he smiled at her and held her off when she essayed to help him brush the dust from his clothing. He did that himself, and mopped his face with a handkerchief.

"It wasn't fair," whispered the girl, sympathetically. "I almost wish that you had killed him!" she added, vindictively.

"My, what a fire-eater!" he said with a broad smile. She thought he looked handsomer with the dust upon him, than he had ever seemed when polished and immaculate. 27

"Are you badly hurt?" she asked, with a concern that made him look quickly at her.

He laughed and patted her arm lightly. "Not a bit hurt," he said. "Come, those men are staring."

He escorted her to the step of the private car, and lingered a moment there to make his apology for his part in the trouble. He told her frankly, that he was to blame, knowing that Trevison's action in riding him down would more than outweigh any resentment she might feel over his mistake in bringing about the clash in her presence.

She graciously forgave him, and a little later she entered the car alone; he telling her that he would be in presently, after he returned from the station where he intended to send a telegram. She gave him a smile, standing on the platform of the car, dazzling, eloquent with promise. It made his heart leap with exultation, and as he went his way toward the station he voiced a sentiment:

"Entirely worth being ridden down for."

But his jaws set savagely as he approached the station. He did not go into the station, but around the outside wall of it, passing between it and another building and coming at last to the front of the bank building. He had noted that the black horse was still standing in front of the bank building, and that the group of men had dispersed. The street was deserted.

Corrigan's movements became quick and sinister. He drew a heavy revolver out of a hip pocket, shoved its butt partly up his sleeve and concealed the cylinder and barrel in the palm of his hand. Then he stepped into the door of the bank. He saw Trevison standing at one of the grated windows of the wire netting, talking with Braman. Corrigan had taken several steps into the room before Trevison heard him, and then Trevison turned, to find himself looking into the gaping muzzle of Corrigan's pistol. 28

"You didn't run," said the latter. "Thought it was all over, I suppose. Well, it isn't." He was grinning coldly, and was now deliberate and unexcited, though two crimson spots glowed in his cheeks, betraying the presence of passion.

"Don't reach for that gun!" he warned Trevison. "I'll blow a hole through you if you wriggle a finger!" Watching Trevison, he spoke to Braman: "You got a back room here?"

The banker stepped around the end of the counter and opened a door behind the wire netting. "Right here," he directed.

Corrigan indicated the door with a jerking movement of the head. "Move!" he said shortly, to Trevison. The latter's lips parted in a cold, amused grin, and he hesitated slightly, yielding presently.

An instant later the three were standing in the middle of a large room, empty except for a cot upon which Braman slept, some clothing hanging on the walls, a bench and a chair. Corrigan ordered the banker to clear the room. When that had been done, Corrigan spoke again to the

banker:

“Get his gun.”

A snapping alertness of the eyes indicated that Trevison knew what was coming. That was the reason he had been so quiescent this far; it was why he made no objection when Braman passed his hands over his clothing in search of other weapons, after his pistol had been lifted from its holster by the banker.

“Now get out of here and lock the doors!” ordered Corrigan. “And let nobody come in!”

Braman retired, grinning expectantly.

Then Corrigan backed away until he came to the wall. Reaching far up, he hung his revolver on a nail.

“Now,” he said to Trevison, his voice throaty from passion; “take off your damned foolish trappings. I’m going to knock hell out of you!”

CHAPTER III

BEATING A GOOD MAN

Trevison had not moved. He had watched the movements of the other closely, noting his huge bulk, his lithe motions, the play of his muscles as he backed across the room to dispose of the pistol. At Corrigan’s words though, Trevison’s eyes glowed with a sudden fire, his teeth gleamed, his straight lips parting in a derisive smile. The other’s manner toward him had twanged the chord of animosity that had been between them since the first exchange of glances, and he was as eager as Corrigan for the clash that must now come. He had known that the first conflict had been an unfinished thing. He laughed in sheer delight, though that delight was tempered with savage determination.

“Save your boasts,” he taunted.

Corrigan sneered. “You won’t look so damned attractive when you leave this room.” He took off his hat and tossed it into a corner, then turned to Trevison with an ugly grin.

“Ready?” he said.

“Quite.” Trevison had not accepted Corrigan’s suggestion about taking off his “damned foolish trappings,” and he still wore them—cartridge belt, leather chaps, spurs. But now he followed Corrigan’s lead and threw his hat from him. Then he crouched and faced Corrigan.

They circled cautiously, Trevison’s spurs jingling musically. Then Trevison went in swiftly, jabbing with his left, throwing off Corrigan’s vicious counter with the elbow, and ripping his right upward. The fist met Corrigan’s arm as the latter blocked, and the shock forced both men back a step. Corrigan grinned with malicious interest and crowded forward.

“That’s good,” he said; “you’re not a novice. I hope you’re not a quitter. I’ve quite a bit to hand you for riding me down.”

Trevison grinned derisively, but made no answer. He knew he must save his wind for this man. Corrigan was strong, clever; his forearm, which had blocked Trevison’s uppercut, had seemed like a bar of steel.

Trevison went in again with the grim purpose of discovering just how strong his antagonist was. Corrigan evaded a stiff left jab intended for his chin, and his own right cross missed as Trevison ducked into a clinch. With arms locked they strained, legs braced, their lungs heaving as they wrestled, doggedly.

Corrigan stood like a post, not giving an inch. Vainly Trevison writhed, seeking a position which would betray a weakened muscle, but though he exerted every ounce of his own mighty strength Corrigan held him even. They broke at last, mutually, and Corrigan must have felt the leathery quality of Trevison’s muscles, for his face was set in serious lines. His eyes glittered malignantly as he caught a confident smile on Trevison’s lips, and he bored in silently, swinging both hands.

Trevison had been the cool boxer, carefully trying out his opponent. He had felt little emotion save that of self-protection. At the beginning of the fight he would have apologized to Corrigan—with reservations. Now he was stirred with the lust of battle. Corrigan’s malignance had struck a responsive passion in him, and the sodden impact of fist on flesh, the matching of strength against strength, the strain of iron muscles, the contact of their bodies, the sting and burn of blows, had aroused the latent savage in him. He was still cool, however, but it was the crafty coolness of the trained fighter, and as Corrigan crowded him he whipped in ripping blows that sent the big man’s head back. Corrigan paid little heed to the blows; he shook them off, grunting. Blood was trickling thinly from his lips; he spat bestially over Trevison’s shoulder in a clinch, and tried to sweep the latter from his feet.

The agility of the cow-puncher saved him, and he went dancing out of harm's way, his spurs jingling. Corrigan was after him with a rush. A heavy blow caught Trevison on the right side of the neck just below the ear and sent him, tottering, against the wall of the building, from which he rebounded like a rubber ball, smothering Corrigan with an avalanche of deadening straight-arm punches that brought a glassy stare into Corrigan's eyes. The big man's head wabbled, and Trevison crowded in, intent on ending the fight quickly, but Corrigan covered instinctively, and when Trevison in his eagerness missed a blow, the big man clinched with him and hung on 33
doggedly until his befoggled brain could clear. For a few minutes they rocked around the room, their heels thudding on the bare boards of the floor, creating sounds that filtered through the enclosing walls and smote the silence of the outside world with resonant rumblings. Mercilessly, Trevison hammered at the heavy head that sought a haven on his shoulder. Corrigan had been stunned and wanted no more long range work. He tried to lock his big arms around the other's waist in an attempt to wrestle, realizing that in that sort of a contest lay his only hope of victory, but Trevison, agile, alert to his danger, slipped elusively from the grasping hands and thudded uppercuts to the other's mouth and jaws that landed with sickening force. But none of the blows landed on a vital spot, and Corrigan hung grimly on.

At last, lashing viciously, wriggling, squirming, swinging around in a wide circle to get out of Corrigan's clutches, Trevison broke the clinch and stood off, breathing heavily, summoning his reserve strength for a finishing blow. Corrigan had been fearfully punished during the last few minutes, but he was gradually recovering from his dizziness, and he grinned hideously at Trevison through his smashed lips. He surged forward, reminding Trevison of a wounded bear, but Trevison retreated warily as he measured the distance from which he would drive the blow that would end it

He was still retreating, describing a wide circle. He swung around toward the door through which Braman had gone—his back was toward it. He did not see the door open slightly as he 34
passed; he had not seen Braman's face in the slight crevice that had been between door and jamb all along. Nor did he see the banker jab at his legs with the handle of a broom. But he felt the handle hit his legs. It tripped him, forcing him to lose his balance. As he fell he saw Corrigan's eyes brighten, and he twisted sideways to escape a heavy blow that Corrigan aimed at him. He only partially evaded it—it struck him glancingly, a little to the left of the chin, stunning him, and he fell awkwardly, his left arm doubling under him. The agonizing pain that shot through the arm as he crumpled to the floor told him that it had been broken at the wrist. A queer stupor came upon him, during which he neither felt nor saw. Dimly, he sensed that Corrigan was striking at him; with a sort of vague half-consciousness he felt that the blows were landing. But they did not hurt, and he laughed at Corrigan's futile efforts. The only feeling he had was a blind rage against Braman, for he was certain that it had been the banker who had tripped him. Then he saw the broom on the floor and the crevice in the doorway. He got to his feet some way, Corrigan hanging to him, raining blows upon him, and he laughed aloud as, his vision clearing a little, he saw Corrigan's mouth, weak, open, drooling blood, and remembered that when Braman had tripped him Corrigan had hardly been in shape to do much effective hitting. He tottered away from Corrigan, taunting him, though afterwards he could not remember what his words were. Also, he heard Corrigan cursing him, though he could never 35
remember *his* words, either. He tried to swing his left arm as Corrigan came within range of it, but found he could not lift it, and so ducked the savage blow that Corrigan aimed at him and slipped sideways, bringing his right into play. Several times as they circled he uppercut Corrigan with the right, he retreating, side-stepping; Corrigan following him doggedly, slashing venomously at him, hitting him occasionally. Corrigan could not hurt him, and he could not resist laughing at Corrigan's face—it was so hideously repulsive.

A man came out of the front door of Hanrahan's saloon across the street from the bank building, and stood in the street for a moment, looking about him. Had Miss Benham seen the man she would have recognized him as the one who had previously come out of the saloon to greet the rider with: "Well, if it ain't ol' 'Brand'!" He saw the black horse standing in front of the bank building, but Trevison was nowhere in sight. The man mumbled: "I don't want him to git away without me seein' him," and crossed the street to the bank window and peered inside. He saw Braman peering through a half-open door at the rear of the banking room, and he heard sounds —queer, jarring sounds that made the glass window in front of him rattle and quiver.

He dove around to the side of the building and looked in a window. He stood for a moment, watching with bulging eyes, half drew a pistol, thought better of the notion and replaced it, and 36
then darted back to the saloon from which he had emerged, croaking hoarsely: "Fight! fight!"

Trevison had not had the agility to evade one of Corrigan's heavy blows. It had caught him as he had tried to duck, striking fairly on the point of the jaw, and he was badly dazed. But he still grinned mockingly at his enemy as the latter followed him, tensed, eager, snarling. He evaded other blows that would have finished him—through instinct, it seemed to Corrigan; and though there was little strength left in him he kept working his right fist through Corrigan's guard and into his face, pecking away at it until it seemed to be cut to ribbons.

Voices came from somewhere in the banking room, voices raised in altercation. Neither of the two men, raging around the rear room, heard them—they had become insensate savages oblivious of their surroundings, drunken with passion, with the blood-mania gripping their brains.

Trevison had brought the last ounce of his remaining strength into play and had landed a crushing blow on Corrigan's chin. The big man was wabbling crazily about in the general

direction of Trevison, swinging his arms wildly, Trevison evading him, snapping home blows that landed smackingly without doing much damage. They served merely to keep Corrigan in the semi-comatose state in which Trevison's last hard blow had left him. And that last blow had sapped Trevison's strength; his spirit alone had survived the drunken orgy of rage and hatred. 37
As the tumult around him increased—the tramp of many feet, scuffling; harsh, discordant voices, curses, yells of protest, threats—not a sound of which he heard, so intent was he with his work of battering his adversary, he ceased to retreat from Corrigan, and as the latter shuffled toward him he stiffened and drove his right fist into the big man's face. Corrigan cursed and grunted, but lunged forward again. They swung at the same instant—Trevison's right just grazing Corrigan's jaw; Corrigan's blow, full and sweeping, thudding against Trevison's left ear. Trevison's head rolled, his chin sagged to his chest, and his knees doubled like hinges. Corrigan smirked malevolently and drove forward again. But he was too eager, and his blows missed the reeling target that, with arms hanging wearily at his sides, still instinctively kept to his feet, the taunting smile, now becoming bitterly contemptuous, still on his face. It meant that though exhausted, his arm broken, he felt only scorn for Corrigan's prowess as a fighter.

Fighting off the weariness he lunged forward again, swinging the now deadened right arm at the blur Corrigan made in front of him. Something collided with him—a human form—and thinking it was Corrigan, clinching with him, he grasped it. The momentum of the object, and his own weakness, carried him back and down, and with the object in his grasp he fell, underneath, to the floor. He saw a face close to his—Braman's—and remembering that the banker had tripped him, he began to work his right fist into the other's face. 38

He would have finished Braman. He did not know that the man who had greeted him as "ol' 'Brand'" had smashed the banker in the forehead with the butt of a pistol when the banker had tried to bar his progress at the doorway; he was not aware that the force of the blow had hurled Braman against him, and that the latter, half unconscious, was not defending himself. He would not have cared had he known these things, for he was fighting blindly, doggedly, recklessly—fighting two men, he thought. And though he sensed that there could be but one end to such a struggle, he hammered away with ferocious malignance, and in the abandon of his passion in this extremity he was recklessly swinging his broken left arm, driving it at Braman, groaning each time the fist landed.

He felt hands grasping him, and he fought them off, smashing weakly at faces that appeared around him as he was dragged to his feet. He heard a voice say: "His arm's bruk," and the voice seemed to clear the atmosphere. He paused, holding back a blow, and the dancing blur of faces assumed a proper aspect and he saw the man who had hit the banker.

"Hello Mullarky!" he grinned, reeling drunkenly in the arms of his friends. "Come to see the picnic? Where's my—"

He saw Corrigan leaning against a wall of the room and lurched toward him. A dozen hands held him back—the room was full of men; and as his brain cleared he recognized some of them. He heard threats, mutterings, against Corrigan, and he laughed, bidding the men to hold their peace, that it was a "fair fight." Corrigan was unmoved by the threats—as he was unmoved by 39
Trevison's words. He leaned against the wall, weak, his arms hanging at his sides, his face macerated, grinning contemptuously. And then, despite his objections, Trevison was dragged away by Mullarky and the others, leaving Braman stretched out on the floor, and Corrigan, his knees sagging, his chin almost on his chest, standing near the wall. Trevison turned as he was forced out of the door, and grinned tauntingly at his tired enemy. Corrigan spat at him.

Half an hour later, his damaged arm bandaged, and some marks of the battle removed, Trevison was in the banking room. He had forbidden any of his friends to accompany him, but Mullarky and several others stood outside the door and watched him.

A bandage around his head, Braman leaned on the counter behind the wire netting, pale, shaking. In a chair at the desk sat Corrigan, glowering at Trevison. The big man's face had been attended to, but it was swollen frightfully, and his smashed lips were in a horrible pout. Trevison grinned at him, but it was to the banker that he spoke.

"I want my gun, Braman," he said, shortly.

The banker took it out of a drawer and silently shoved it across the counter and through a little opening in the wire netting. The banker watched, fearingly, as Trevison shoved the weapon into its holster. Corrigan stolidly followed his movements.

The gun in its holster, Trevison leaned toward the banker. 40

"I always knew you weren't straight, Braman. But we won't quarrel about that now. I just want you to know that when this arm of mine is right again, we'll try to square things between us. Broom handles will be barred that day."

Braman was silent and uneasy as he watched Trevison reach into a pocket and withdraw a leather bill-book. From this he took a paper and tossed it in through the opening of the wire netting.

"Cash it," he directed. "It's about the matter we were discussing when we were interrupted by our bloodthirsty friend, there."

He looked at Corrigan while Braman examined the paper, his eyes alight with the mocking, unfearing gleam that had been in them during the fight. Corrigan scowled and Trevison grinned at him—the indomitable, mirthless grin of the reckless fighting man; and Corrigan filled his lungs slowly, watching him with half-closed eyes. It was as though both knew that a distant day

would bring another clash between them.

Braman fingered the paper uncertainly, and looked at Corrigan.

“I suppose this is all regular?” he said. “You ought to know something about it—it’s a check from the railroad company for the right-of-way through Mr. Trevison’s land.”

Corrigan’s eyes brightened as he examined the check. They filled with a hard, sinister light.

“No,” he said; “it isn’t regular.” He took the check from Braman and deliberately tore it into small pieces, scattering them on the floor at his feet. He smiled vindictively, settling back into his chair. “‘Brand’ Trevison, eh?” he said. “Well, Mr. Trevison, the railroad company isn’t ready to close with you.”

Trevison had watched the destruction of the check without the quiver of an eyelash. A faint, ironic smile curved the corners of his mouth as Corrigan concluded.

“I see,” he said quietly. “You were not man enough to beat me a little while ago—even with the help of Braman’s broom. You’re going to take it out on me through the railroad; you’re going to sneak and scheme. Well, you’re in good company—anything that you don’t know about skinning people Braman will tell you. But I’m letting you know this: The railroad company’s option on my land expired last night, and it won’t be renewed. If it’s fight you’re looking for, I’ll do my best to accommodate you.”

Corrigan grunted, and idly drummed with the fingers of one hand on the top of the desk, watching Trevison steadily. The latter opened his lips to speak, changed his mind, grinned and went out. Corrigan and Braman watched him as he stopped for a moment outside to talk with his friends, and their gaze followed him until he mounted Nigger and rode out of town. Then the banker looked at Corrigan, his brows wrinkling.

“You know your business, Jeff,” he said; “but you’ve picked a tough man in Trevison.”

Corrigan did not answer. He was glowering at the pieces of the check that lay on the floor at his feet.

CHAPTER IV

THE LONG ARM OF POWER

Presently Corrigan lit a cigar, biting the end off carefully, to keep it from coming in contact with his bruised lips. When the cigar was going well, he looked at Braman.

“What is Trevison?”

Pale, still dizzy from the effects of the blow on the head, Braman, who was leaning heavily on the counter, smiled wryly:

“He’s a holy terror—you ought to know that. He’s a reckless, don’t-give-a-damn fool who has forgotten there’s such a thing as consequences. ‘Firebrand’ Trevison, they call him. And he lives up to what that means. The folks in this section of the country swear by him.”

Corrigan made a gesture of impatience. “I mean—what does he do? Of course I know he owns some land here. But how much land does he own?”

“You saw the figure on the check, didn’t you? He owns five thousand acres.”

“How long has he been here?”

“You’ve got me. More than ten years, I guess, from what I can gather.”

“What was he before he came here?”

“I couldn’t even surmise that—he don’t talk about his past. From the way he waded into you, I should judge he was a prize fighter before becoming a cow-puncher.”

Corrigan glared at the banker. “Yes; it’s damned funny,” he said. “How did he get his land?”

“Proved on a quarter-section. Bought the rest of it—and bought it mighty cheap.” Braman’s eyes brightened. “Figure on attacking *his* title?”

Corrigan grunted. “I notice he asked you for cash. You’re not his banker, evidently.”

“He banks in Las Vegas, I guess.”

“What about his cattle?”

“He shipped three thousand head last season.”

“How big is his outfit?”

“He’s got about twenty men. They’re all hard cases—like him, and they’d shoot themselves for him.”

Corrigan got up and walked to the window, from where he looked out at Manti. The town looked like an army camp. Lumber, merchandise, supplies of every description, littered the street in mounds and scattered heaps, awaiting the erection of tent-house and building. But there was none of that activity that might have been expected from the quantity of material on hand; it seemed that the owners were waiting, delaying in anticipation of some force that would give them encouragement. They were reluctant to risk their money in erecting buildings on the strength of mere rumor. But they had come, hoping.

Corrigan grinned at Braman. “They’re afraid to take a chance,” he said, meaning Manti’s citizens.

“Don’t blame them. I’ve spread the stuff around—as you told me. That’s all they’ve heard. They’re here on a forlorn hope. The boom they are looking for, seems, from present conditions, to be lurking somewhere in the future, shadowed by an indefiniteness that to them is vaguely connected with somebody’s promise of a dam, agricultural activity to follow, and factories. They haven’t been able to trace the rumors, but they’re here, and they’ll make things hum if they get a chance.”

“Sure,” grinned Corrigan. “A boom town is always a graft for first arrivals. That is, boom towns *have* been. But Manti—” He paused.

“Yes, different,” chuckled the banker. “It must have cost a wad to shove that water grant through.”

“Benham kicked on the price—it was enough.”

“That maximum rate clause is a pippin. You can soak them the limit right from the jump.”

“And scare them out,” scoffed Corrigan. “That isn’t the game. Get them here, first. Then—”

The banker licked his lips. “How does old Benham take it?”

“Mr. Benham is enthusiastic because everything will be done in a perfectly legitimate way—he thinks.”

“And the courts?”

“Judge Lindman, of the District Court now in Dry Bottom, is going to establish himself here. Benham pulled that string.”

“Good!” said Braman. “When is Lindman coming?”

Corrigan’s smile was crooked; it told eloquently of conscious power over the man he had named.

“He’ll come whenever I give the word. Benham’s got something on him.”

“You always were a clever son-of-a-gun!” laughed the banker, admiringly.

Ignoring the compliment, Corrigan walked into the rear room, where he gazed frowningly at his reflection in a small glass affixed to the wall. Re-entering the banking room he said:

“I’m in no condition to face Miss Benham. Go down to the car and tell her that I shall be very busy here all day, and that I won’t be able to see her until late tonight.”

Miss Benham’s name was on the tip of the banker’s tongue, but, glancing at Corrigan’s face, he decided that it was no time for that particular brand of levity. He grabbed his hat and stepped out of the front door.

Left alone, Corrigan paced slowly back and forth in the room, his brows furrowed thoughtfully. Trevison had become an important figure in his mind. Corrigan had not hinted to Braman, to Trevison, or to Miss Benham, of the actual situation—nor would he. But during his first visit to town that morning he had stood in one of the front windows of a saloon across the street. He had not been getting acquainted, as he had told Miss Benham, for the saloon had been the first place that he had entered, and after getting a drink at the bar he had sauntered to the window. From there he had seen “Brand” Trevison ride into town, and because Trevison made an impressive figure he had watched him, instinctively aware that in the rider of the black horse was a quality of manhood that one meets rarely. Trevison’s appearance had caused him a throb of disquieting envy.

He had noticed Trevison’s start upon getting his first glimpse of the private car on the siding. He had followed Trevison’s movements carefully, and with increased disquiet. For, instead of dismounting and going into a saloon or a store, Trevison had urged the black on, past the private car, which he had examined leisurely and intently. The clear morning air made objects at a distance very distinct, and as Trevison had ridden past the car, Corrigan had seen a flutter at one of the windows; had caught a fleeting glimpse of Rosalind Benham’s face. He had seen Trevison ride away, to return for a second view of the car a few minutes later. At breakfast, Corrigan had not failed to note Miss Benham’s lingering glances at the black horse, and again, in the bank, with her standing at the door, he had noticed her interest in the black horse and its rider. His quickly-aroused jealousy and hatred had driven him to the folly of impulsive action, a method which, until now, he had carefully evaded. Yes, he had found “Brand” Trevison a worthy antagonist—Braman had him appraised correctly.

Corrigan’s smile was bitter as he again walked into the rear room and surveyed his reflection in the glass. Disgusted, he turned to one of the windows and looked out. From where he stood he could see straight down the railroad tracks to the cut, down the wall of which, some hours before, Trevison had ridden the black horse. The dinky engine, with its train of flat-cars, was steaming toward him. As he watched, engine and cars struck the switch and ran onto the siding,

where they came to a stop. Corrigan frowned and looked at his watch. It lacked fully three hours to quitting time, and the cars were empty, save for the laborers draped on them, their tools piled in heaps. While Corrigan watched, the laborers descended from the cars and swarmed toward their quarters—a row of tent-houses near the siding. A big man—Corrigan knew him later as Patrick Carson—swung down from the engine-cab and lumbered toward the little frame station house, in a window of which the telegrapher could be seen, idly scanning a week-old newspaper. Carson spoke shortly to the telegrapher, at which the latter motioned toward the bank building and the private car. Then Carson came toward the bank building. An instant later, Carson came in the front door and met Corrigan at the wire netting.

"Hullo," said the Irishman, without preliminaries; "the agent was tellin' me I'd find a mon named Corrigan here. You're in charge, eh?" he added at Corrigan's affirmative. "Well, bedad, somebody's got to be in charge from now on. The Willie-boy engineer from who I've been takin' me orders has sneaked away to Dry Bottom for a couple av days, shovin' the raysponsibility on me—an' I ain't feelin' up to it. I'm a daisy construction boss, if I do say it meself, but I ain't enough of a fightin' mon to buck the business end av a six-shooter."

"What's up?"

"Mebbe you'd know—he said you'd be sure to. I've been parleyin' wid a fello' named 'Firebrand' Trevison, an' I'm that soaked wid perspiration that me boots is full av it, after me thryin' to urge him to be dacently careful wid his gun!" 48

"What happened?" asked Corrigan, darkly.

"This mon Trevison came down through the cut this mornin', goin' to town. He was pleasant as a mon who's had a raise in wages, an' he was joshin' wid us. A while ago he comes back from town, an' he's that cold an' polite that he'd freeze ye while he's takin' his hat off to ye. One av his arms is busted, an' he's got a welt or two on his face. But outside av that he's all right. He rides down into the cut where we're all workin' fit to kill ourselves. He halts his big black horse about forty or fifty feet away from the ol' rattle-box that runs the steam shovel, an' he grins like a tiger at me an' says:

"'Carson, I'm wantin' you to pull your min off. I can't permit anny railroad min on the Diamond K property. You're a friend av mine, an' all that, but you'll have to pull your freight. You've got tin minutes.'

"'I've got me orders to do this work,' I says—begging his pardon.

"'Here's your orders to stop doin' it!' he comes back. An' I was inspectin' the muzzle av his six-shooter.

"'Ye wudn't shoot a mon for doin' his duthy?' I says.

"'Thry me,' he says. 'You're trespassers. The railroad company didn't come through wid the coin for the right-of-way. Your mon, Corrigan, has got an idea that he's goin' to bluff me. I'm callin' his bluff. You've got tin minutes to get out av here. At the end av that time I begin to shoot. I've got six cattridges in the gun, an' fifty more in the belt around me middle. An' I seldom miss whin I shoot. It's up to you whether I start a cemetery here or not,' he says, cold an' ca'mlike. 49

"The ginneys knowed somethin' was up, an' they crowded around. I thought Trevison was thryin' to run a bluff on *me*, an' I give orders for the ginneys to go back to their work.

"Trevison didn't say another word, but at the end av the tin minutes he grins that tiger grin av his an' busts the safety valve on the rattle-box wid a shot from his pistol. He smashes the water-gauge wid another, an' jammed one shot in the ol' rattle-box's entrails, an' she starts to blow off steam——shriekin' like a soul in hell. The ginneys throwed down their tools an' started to climb up the walls of the cut like a gang av monkeys, Trevison watchin' thim with a grin as cold as a barrow ful ov icicles. Murph', the engineer av the dinky, an' his fireman, ducks for the engine-cab, l'avin' me standin' there to face the music. Trevison yells at the engineer av the rattle-box, an' he disappears like a rat into a hole. Thin Trevison swings his gun on me, an' I c'u'd feel me knees knockin' together. 'Carson,' he says, 'I hate like blazes to do it, but you're the boss here, an' these min will do what you tell thim to do. Tell thim to get to hell out of here an' not come back, or I'll down you, sure as me name's Trevison!' 50

"I'm old enough to know from lookin' at a mon whether he manes business or not, an' Trevison wasn't foolin'. So I got the bhoys away, an' here we are. If you're in charge, it's up to you to smooth things out. Though from the looks av your mug 'Firebrand's' been maulin' you some, too!"

Corrigan's answer was a cold glare. "You quit without a fight, eh?" he taunted; "you let one man bluff half a hundred of you!"

Carson's eyes brightened. "My recollection is that 'Firebrand' is still holdin' the forrt. Whin I got me last look at him he was sittin' on the top av the cut, like he was intendin' to stay there indefinite. If ye think he's bluffin', mebbe it'd be quite an idee for you to go out there yourself, an' call it. I'd be willin' to give ye me moral support."

"I'll call him when I get ready." Corrigan went to the desk and sat in the chair, ignoring Carson, who watched him narrowly. Presently he turned and spoke to the man:

"Put your men at work trueing up the roadbed on the next section back, until further orders."

"An' let 'Firebrand' hold the forrt?"

"Do as you're told!"

Carson went out to his men. Near the station platform he turned and looked back at the bank building, grinning. “There’s two bulldogs comin’ to grips in this deal or I’m a domn poor prophet!” he said.

When Braman returned from his errand he found Corrigan staring out of the window. The banker announced that Miss Benham had received Corrigan’s message with considerable equanimity, and was rewarded for his levity with a frown.

“What’s Carson and his gang doing in town?” he queried.

Corrigan told him, briefly. The banker whistled in astonishment, and his face grew long. “I told you he is a tough one!” he reminded.

Corrigan got to his feet. “Yes—he’s a tough one,” he admitted. “I’m forced to alter my plans a little—that’s all. But I’ll get him. Hunt up something to eat,” he directed; “I’m hungry. I’m going to the station for a few minutes.”

He went out, and the banker watched him until he vanished around the corner of a building. Then Braman shook his head. “Jeff’s resourceful,” he said. “But Trevison—” His face grew solemn. “What a damned fool I was to trip him with that broom!” He drew a pistol from a pocket and examined it intently, then returned it to the pocket and sat, staring with unseeing eyes beyond the station at the two lines of steel that ran out upon the plains and stopped in the deep cut on the crest of which he could see a man on a black horse.

Down at the station Corrigan was leaning on a rough wooden counter, writing on a yellow paper pad. When he had finished he shoved the paper over to the telegrapher, who had been waiting:

> J. Chalfant Benham, B— Building, New York.
>
> Unexpected opposition developed. Trevison. Give Lindman removal order immediately. Communicate with me at Dry Bottom tomorrow morning. Corrigan.

Corrigan watched the operator send the message and then he returned to the bank building, where he found Braman setting out a meager lunch in the rear room. The two men talked as they ate, mostly about Trevison, and the banker’s face did not lose its worried expression. Later they smoked and talked and watched while the afternoon sun grew mellow; while the somber twilight descended over the world and darkness came and obliterated the hill on which sat the rider of the black horse.

Shortly after dark Corrigan sent the banker on another errand, this time to a boarding-house at the edge of town. Braman returned shortly, announcing: “He’ll be ready.” Then, just before midnight Corrigan climbed into the cab of the engine which had brought the private car, and which was waiting, steam up, several hundred feet down the track from the car.

“All right!” said Corrigan briskly, to the engineer, as he climbed in and a flare from the fire-box suffused his face; “pull out. But don’t make any fuss about it—I don’t want those people in the car to know.” And shortly afterwards the locomotive glided silently away into the darkness toward that town in which a judge of the United States Court had, a few hours before, received orders which had caused him to remark, bitterly: “So does the past shape the future.”

CHAPTER V

A TELEGRAM AND A GIRL

Banker Braman went to bed on the cot in the back room shortly after Corrigan departed from Manti. He stretched himself out with a sigh, oppressed with the conviction that he had done a bad day’s work in antagonizing Trevison. The Diamond K owner would repay him, he knew. But he knew, too, that he need have no fear that Trevison would sneak about it. Therefore he did not expect to feel Trevison at his throat during the night. That was some satisfaction.

He dropped to sleep, thinking of Trevison. He awoke about dawn to a loud hammering on the rear door, and he scrambled out of bed and opened the door upon the telegraph agent. That gentleman gazed at him with grim reproof.

“Holy Moses!” he said; “you’re a hell of a tight sleeper! I’ve been pounding on this door for an age!” He shoved a sheet of paper under Braman’s nose. “Here’s a telegram for you.”

Braman took the telegram, scanning it, while the agent talked on, ramblingly. A sickly smile came over Braman’s face when he finished reading, and then he listened to the agent:

“I got a wire a little after midnight, asking me if that man, Corrigan, was still in Manti. The engineer told me he was taking Corrigan back to Dry Bottom at midnight, and so I knew he wasn’t here, and I clicked back ‘No.’ It was from J. C. He must have connected with Corrigan at Dry Bottom. That guy Trevison must have old Benham’s goat, eh?”

Braman re-read the telegram; it was directed to him:

Send my daughter to Trevison with cash in amount of check destroyed by Corrigan yesterday. Instruct her to say mistake made. No offense intended. Hustle. J. C. Benham.

Braman slipped his clothes on and ran down the track to the private car. He had known J. C. Benham several years and was aware that when he issued an order he wanted it obeyed, literally. The negro autocrat of the private car met him at the platform and grinned amply at the banker's request.

"Miss Benham done tol' me she am not to be disturbed till eight o'clock," he objected. But the telegram in Braman's hands had instant effect upon the black custodian of the car, and shortly afterward Miss Benham was looking at the banker and his telegram in sleepy-eyed astonishment, the door of her compartment open only far enough to permit her to stick her head out.

Braman was forced to do much explaining, and concluded by reading the telegram to her. She drew everything out of him except the story of the fight.

"Well," she said in the end, "I suppose I shall have to go. So his name is 'Brand' Trevison. And he won't permit the men to work. Why did Mr. Corrigan destroy the check?" 55

Braman evaded, but the girl thought she knew. Corrigan had yielded to an impulse of obstinacy provoked by Trevison's assault on him. It was not good business—it was almost childish; but it was human to feel that way. She felt a slight disappointment in Corrigan, though; the action did not quite accord with her previous estimate of him. She did not know what to think of Trevison. But of course any man who would deliberately and brutally ride another man down, would naturally not hesitate to adopt other lawless means of defending himself.

She told Braman to have the money ready for her in an hour, and at the end of that time with her morocco handbag bulging, she emerged from the front door of the bank and climbed the steps of the private car, which had been pulled down to a point in front of the station by the dinky engine, with Murphy presiding at the throttle.

Carson was standing on the platform when Miss Benham climbed to it, and he grinned and greeted her with:

"If ye have no objections, ma'am, I'll be ridin' down to the cut with ye. Me name's Patrick Carson, ma'am."

"I have no objection whatever," said the lady, graciously. "I presume you are connected with the railroad?"

"An' wid the ginneys that's buildin' it, ma'am," he supplemented. "I'm the construction boss av this section, an' I'm the mon that had the unhappy experience av lookin' into the business end 56 av 'Firebrand's' six-shooter yisterday."

"'Firebrand's'?" she said, with a puzzled look at him.

"Thot mon, Trevison, ma'am; that's what they call him. An' he fits it bedad—beggin' your pardon."

"Oh," she said; "then you know him." And she felt a sudden interest in Carson.

"Enough to be certain he ain't to be monkeyed with, ma'am."

She seemed to ignore this. "Please tell the engineer to go ahead," she told him. "And then come into the car—I want to talk with you."

A little later, with the car clicking slowly over the rail-joints toward the cut, Carson diffidently followed the negro attendant into a luxurious compartment, in which, seated in a big leather-covered chair, was Miss Benham. She motioned Carson to another chair, and in the conversation that followed Miss Benham received a comprehensive estimate of Trevison from Carson's viewpoint. It seemed unsatisfying to her—Carson's commendation did not appear to coincide with Trevison's performances.

"Have you heard what happened in Manti yesterday?" she questioned. "This man, Trevison, jumped his horse against Mr. Corrigan and knocked him down."

"I heard av it," grinned Carson. "But I didn't see it. Nor did I see the daisy scrap that tuk place right after."

"Fight?" she exclaimed. 57

Carson reddened. "Sure, ye haven't heard av it, an' I'm blabbin' like a kid."

"Tell me about it." Her eyes were aglow with interest.

"There's devilish little to tell—beggin' your pardon, ma'am. But thim that was in at the finish is waggin' their tongues about it bein' a dandy shindy. Judgin' from the talk, nobuddy got licked—it was a fair dhraw. But I sh'ud judge, lookin' at Corrigan's face, that it was a darlin' av a scrap."

She was silent, gazing contemplatively out of the car window. Corrigan had returned, after escorting her to the car, to engage in a fight with Trevison. That was what had occupied him; that was why he had gone away without seeing her. Well, Trevison had given him plenty of provocation.

"Trevison's horse knockin' Corrigan down was what started it, they've been tellin' me," said Carson. "But thim that know Trevison's black knows that Trevison wasn't to blame."

"Not to blame?" she asked; "why not?"

“For the simple rayson thot in a case like thot the mon has no control over the baste, ma’am. ‘Firebrand’ told me only yisterday mornin’ thot there was no holdin’ the black whin somebuddy tried to shoot wid him on his back.”

The girl remembered how Trevison had tried to speak to her immediately after the upsetting of Corrigan, and she knew now, that he had wanted to explain his action. Reviewing the incident in the light of Carson’s explanation, she felt that Corrigan was quite as much at fault as Trevison. Somehow, that knowledge was vaguely satisfying.

She did not succeed in questioning Carson further about Trevison, though there were many points over which she felt a disturbing curiosity, for Agatha came in presently, and after nodding stiffly to Carson, seated herself and gazed aloofly out of a window.

Carson, ill at ease in Agatha’s presence, soon invented an excuse to go out upon the platform, leaving Rosalind to explain his presence in the car.

“What on earth could you have to say to a section boss—or he to you?” demanded Agatha. “You are becoming very—er—indiscreet, Rosalind.”

The girl smiled. It was a smile that would have betrayed the girl had Agatha possessed the physiognomist’s faculty of analyzation, for in it was much relief and renewed faith. For the rider of the black horse was not the brutal creature she had thought him.

When the private car came to a stop, Rosalind looked out of the window to see the steep wall of the cut towering above her. Aunt Agatha still sat near, and when Rosalind got up Agatha rose also, registering an objection:

“I think your father might have arranged to have some *man* meet this outlaw. It is not, in my opinion, a proper errand for a girl. But if you are determined to go, I presume I shall have to follow.”

“It won’t be necessary,” said Rosalind. But Agatha set her lips tightly. And when the girl reached the platform Agatha was close behind her.

But both halted on the platform as they were about to descend the steps. They heard Carson’s voice, loud and argumentative:

“There’s a lady aboored, I tell ye! If ye shoot, you’re a lot of damned rapscallions, an’ I’ll come up there an’ bate the head off ye!”

“Stow your gab an’ produce the lady!” answered a voice. It came from above, and Rosalind stepped down to the floor of the cut and looked upward. On the crest of the southern wall were a dozen men—cowboys—armed with rifles, peering down at the car. They shifted their gaze to her when she stepped into view, and one of them laughed.

“Correct, boys,” he said; “it’s a lady.” There was a short silence; Rosalind saw the men gather close—they were talking, but she could not hear their voices. Then the man who had spoken first stepped to the edge of the cut and called: “What do you want?”

The girl answered: “I want to speak with Mr. Trevison.”

“Sorry, ma’am,” came back the voice; “but Trevison ain’t here—he’s at the Diamond K.”

Rosalind reached a decision quickly. “Aunty,” she said; “I am going to the Diamond K.”

“I forbid you!” said Agatha sternly. “I would not trust you an instant with those outlaws!”

“Nonsense,” smiled Rosalind. “I am coming up,” she called to the man on the crest; “do you mind?”

The man laughed. “I reckon not, ma’am.”

Rosalind smiled at Carson, who was watching her admiringly, and to the smile he answered, pointing eastward to where the slope of the hill melted into the plains: “You’ll have to go thot way, ma’am.” He laughed. “You’re perfectly safe wid thim min, ma’am—they’re Trevison’s—an’ Trevison wud shoot the last mon av thim if they’d harm a hair av your pretty head. Go along, ma’am, an’ God bless ye! Ye’ll be savin’ a heap av throuble for me an’ me ginneys, an’ the railroad company.” He looked with bland derision at Agatha who gave him a glance of scornful reproof as she followed after her charge.

The girl was panting when she reached the crest of the cut. Agatha was a little white, possibly more from apprehension than from indignation, though that emotion had its influence; but their reception could not have been more formal had it taken place in an eastern drawing-room. For every hat was off, and each man was trying his best to conceal his interest. And when men have not seen a woman for a long time, the appearance of a pretty one makes it rather hard to maintain polite poise. But they succeeded, which spoke well for their manliness. If they exchanged surreptitious winks over the appearance of Agatha, they are to be excused, for that lady’s demeanor was one of frigid haughtiness, which is never quite impressive to those who live close to nature.

In an exchange of words, brief and pointed, Rosalind learned that it was three miles to the Diamond K ranchhouse, and that Trevison had given orders not to be disturbed unless the railroad company attempted to continue work at the cut. Could she borrow one of their horses, and a guide?

“You bet!” emphatically returned the spokesman who, she learned later, was Trevison’s foreman. She should have the gentlest “cayuse” in the “bunch,” and the foreman would do the

guiding, himself. At which word Agatha, noting the foreman's enthusiasm, glared coldly at him.

But here Agatha was balked by the insurmountable wall of convention. She had ridden horses, to be sure, in her younger days; but when the foreman, at Rosalind's request, offered her a pony, she sniffed scornfully and marched down the slope toward the private car, saying that if Rosalind was *determined* to persist she might persist without *her* assistance. For there was no side-saddle in the riding equipment of the outfit. And Rosalind, quite aware of the prudishness exhibited by her chaperon, and not unmindful of the mirth that the men were trying their best to keep concealed, rode on with the foreman, with something resembling thankfulness for the temporary freedom tugging at her heart.

Trevison had camped all night on the crest of the cut. It was only at dawn that Barkwell, the foreman who had escorted Rosalind, had appeared at the cut on his way to town, and discovered him, and then the foreman's plans were changed and he was dispatched to the Diamond K for reinforcements. Trevison had ridden back to the Diamond K to care for his arm, which had pained him frightfully during the night, and at ten o'clock in the morning he was stretched out, fully dressed and wide awake on the bed in his room in the ranchhouse, frowningly reviewing the events of the day before. 62

He was in no good humor, and when he heard Barkwell hallooing from the yard near the house, he got up and looked out of a window, a scowl on his face.

Rosalind was not in the best of spirits, herself, for during the ride to the ranchhouse she had been sending subtly-questioning shafts at the foreman—questions that mostly concerned Trevison—and they had all fell, blunted and impotent, from the armor of Barkwell's reticence. But a glance at Trevison's face, ludicrous in its expression of stunned amazement, brought a broad smile to her own. She saw his lips form her name, and then she waited demurely until she saw him coming out of the ranchhouse door toward her.

He had quite recovered from his surprise, she noted; his manner was that of the day before, when she had seen him riding the black horse. When she saw him coming lightly toward her, she at first had eyes for nothing but his perfect figure, feeling the strength that his close-fitting clothing revealed so unmistakably, and an unaccountable blush glowed in her cheeks. And then she observed that his left arm was in a sling, and a flash of wondering concern swept over her—also unaccountable. And then he was at her stirrup, smiling up at her broadly and cordially.

"Welcome to the Diamond K, Miss Benham," he said. "Won't you get off your horse?"

"Thank you; I came on business and must return immediately. There has been a misunderstanding, my father says. He wired me, directing me to apologize, for him, for Mr. Corrigan's actions of yesterday. Perhaps Mr. Corrigan over-stepped his authority—I have no means of knowing." She passed the morocco bag over to him, and he took it, looking at it in some perplexity. "You will find cash in there to the amount named by the check that Mr. Corrigan destroyed. I hope," she added, smiling at him, "that there will be no more trouble." 63

"The payment of this money for the right-of-way removes the provocation for trouble," he laughed. "Barkwell," he directed, turning to the foreman; "you may go back to the outfit." He looked after the foreman as the latter rode away, turning presently to Rosalind. "If you will wait a few minutes, until I stow this money in a safe place, I'll ride back to the cut with you and pull the boys off."

She had wondered much over the rifles in the hands of his men at the cut. "Would your men have used their guns?" she asked.

He had turned to go to the house, and he wheeled quickly, astonished. "Certainly!" he said; "why not?"

"That would be lawlessness, would it not?" It made her shiver slightly to hear him so frankly confess to murderous designs.

"It was not my quarrel," he said, looking at her narrowly, his brows contracted. "Law is all right where everybody accepts it as a governor to their actions. I accept it when it deals fairly with me—when it's just. Certain rights are mine, and I'll fight for them. This situation was brought on by Corrigan's obstinacy. We had a fight, and it peeved him because I wouldn't permit him to hammer my head off. He destroyed the check, and as the company's option expired yesterday it was unlawful for the company to trespass on my land." 64

"Well," she smiled, affected by his vehemence; "we shall have peace now, presumably. And—" she reddened again "—I want to ask your pardon on my own account, for speaking to you as I did yesterday. I thought you brutal—the way you rode your horse over Mr. Corrigan. Mr. Carson assured me that the horse was to blame."

"I am indebted to Carson," he laughed, bowing. Rosalind watched him go into the house, and then turned and inspected her surroundings. The house was big, roomy, with a massive hip roof. A paved gallery stretched the entire length of the front—she would have liked to rest for a few minutes in the heavy rocker that stood in its cool shadows. No woman lived here, she was certain, because there was a lack of evidence of woman's handiwork—no filmy curtains at the windows—merely shades; no cushion was on the chair—which, by the way, looked lonesome—but perhaps that was merely her imagination. Much dust had gathered on the gallery floor and on the sash of the windows—a woman would have had things looking differently. And so she divined that Trevison was not married. It surprised her to discover that that thought had been in her mind, and she turned to continue her inspection, filled with wonder that it had been there. 65

She got an impression of breadth and spaciousness out of her survey of the buildings and the surrounding country. The buildings were in good condition; everything looked substantial and homelike and her contemplation of it aroused in her a yearning for a house and land in this section of the country, it was so peaceful and dignified in comparison with the life she knew.

She watched Trevison when he emerged from the house, and smiled when he returned the empty handbag. He went to a small building near a fenced enclosure—the corral, she learned afterward—and came out carrying a saddle, which he hung on the fence while he captured the black horse, which she had already observed. The animal evaded capture, playfully, but in the end it trotted mincingly to Trevison and permitted him to throw the bridle on. Then, shortly afterward he mounted the black and together they rode back toward the cut.

As they rode the girl's curiosity for the man who rode beside her grew acute. She was aware—she had been aware all along—that he was far different from the other men of Manti—there was about him an atmosphere of refinement and quiet confidence that mingled admirably with his magnificent physical force, tempering it, suggesting reserve power, hinting of excellent mental capacity. She determined to know something about him. And so she began subtly:

"In a section of country so large as this it seems that our American measure of length—a mile—should be stretched to something that would more adequately express size. Don't you think so?"

66

He looked quickly at her. "That is an odd thought," he laughed, "but it inevitably attacks the person who views the yawning distances here for the first time. Why not use the English mile if the American doesn't satisfy?"

"There is a measure that exceeds that, isn't there? Wasn't there a Persian measure somewhat longer, fathered by Herodotus or another of the ancients? I am sure there was—or is—but I have forgotten?"

"Yes," he said, "—a parasang." He looked narrowly at her and saw her eyes brighten.

She had made progress; she felt much satisfaction.

"You are not a native," she said.

"How do you know?"

"Cowboys do not commonly measure their distances with parasangs," she laughed.

"Nor do ordinary women try to shake off ennui by coming West in private cars," he drawled.

She started and looking quickly at him. "How did you know that was what happened to me?" she demanded.

"Because you're too spirited and vigorous to spend your life dawdling in society. You yearn for action, for the broad, free life of the open. You're in love with this country right now."

"Yes, yes," she said, astonished; "but how do you know?"

"You might have sent a man here in your place—Braman, for instance; he could be trusted. You came yourself, eager for adventure—you came on a borrowed horse. When you were looking at the country from the horse in front of my house, I saw you sigh."

67

"Well," she said, with flushed face and glowing eyes; "I *have* decided to live out here—for a time, at least. So you were watching me?"

"Just a glance," he defended, grinning; "I couldn't help it. Please forgive me."

"I suppose I'll have to," she laughed, delighted, reveling in this freedom of speech, in his directness. His manner touched a spark somewhere in her, she felt strangely elated, exhilarated. When she reflected that this was only their second meeting and that she had not been conventionally introduced to him, she was amazed. Had a stranger of her set talked to her so familiarly she would have resented it. Out here it seemed to be perfectly natural.

"How do you know I borrowed a horse to come here?" she asked.

"That's easy," he grinned; "there's the Diamond K brand on his hip."

"Oh."

They rode on a little distance in silence, and then she remembered that she was still curious about him. His frankness had affected her; she did not think it impertinent to betray curiosity.

"How long have you lived out here?" she asked.

"About ten years."

"You weren't born here, of course—you have admitted that. Then where did you come from?"

"This is a large country," he returned, unsmilingly.

It was a reproof, certainly—Rosalind could go no farther in that direction. But her words had brought a mystery into existence, thus sharpening her interest in him. She was conscious, though, of a slight pique—what possible reason could he have for evasion? He had not the appearance of a fugitive from justice.

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"So you're going to live out here?" he said, after an interval. "Where?"

"I heard father speak of buying Blakeley's place. Do you know where it is?"

"It adjoins mine." There was a leaping note in his voice, which she did not fail to catch. "Do you see that dark line over there?" He pointed eastward—a mile perhaps. "That's a gully; it divides

my land from Blakeley's. Blakeley told me a month ago that he was dickering with an eastern man. If you are thinking of looking the place over, and want a trustworthy escort I should be pleased to recommend—myself." And he grinned widely at her.

"I shall consider your offer—and I thank you for it," she returned. "I feel positive that father will buy a ranch here, for he has much faith in the future of Manti—he is obsessed with it."

He looked sharply at her. "Then your father is going to have a hand in the development of Manti? I heard a rumor to the effect that some eastern company was interested, had, in fact, secured the water rights for an enormous section."

She remembered what Corrigan had told her, and blushingly dissembled:

"I put no faith in rumor—do you? Mr. Corrigan is the head of the company which is to develop 69
Manti. But of course *that* is an eastern company, isn't it?"

He nodded, and she smiled at a thought that came to her. "How far is it to Blakeley's ranchhouse?" she asked.

"About two parasangs," he answered gravely.

"Well," she said, mimicking him; "I could *never* walk there, could I? If I go, I shall have to borrow a horse—or buy one. Could you recommend a horse that would be as trustworthy as the escort you have promised me?"

"We shall go to Blakeley's tomorrow," he told her. "I shall bring you a trustworthy horse at ten o'clock in the morning."

They were approaching the cut, and she nodded an acceptance. An instant later he was talking to his men, and she sat near him, watching them as they raced over the plains toward the Diamond K ranchhouse. One man remained; he was without a mount, and he grinned with embarrassment when Rosalind's gaze rested on him.

"Oh," she said; "you are waiting for your horse! How stupid of me!" She dismounted and turned the animal over to him. When she looked around, Trevison had also dismounted and was coming toward her, leading the black, the reins looped through his arm. Rosalind flushed, and thought of Agatha, but offered no objection.

It was a long walk down the slope of the hill and around its base to the private car, but they made it still longer by walking slowly and taking the most roundabout way. Three persons saw 70
them coming—Agatha, standing rigid on the platform; the negro attendant, standing behind Agatha in the doorway, his eyes wide with interest; and Carson, seated on a boulder a little distance down the cut, grinning broadly.

"Bedad," he rumbled; "the bhoy's made a hit wid her, or I'm a sinner! But didn't I know he wud? The two bulldogs is goin' to have it now, sure as I'm a foot high!"

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CHAPTER VI

A JUDICIAL PUPPET

Bowling along over the new tracks toward Manti in a special car secured at Dry Bottom by Corrigan, one compartment of which was packed closely with books, papers, ledger records, legal documents, blanks, and even office furniture, Judge Lindman watched the landscape unfold with mingled feelings of trepidation, reluctance, and impotent regret. The Judge's face was not a strong one—had it been he would not have been seated in the special car, talking with Corrigan. He was just under sixty-five years, and their weight seemed to rest heavily upon him. His eyes were slightly bleary, and had a look of weariness, as though he had endured much and was utterly tired. His mouth was flaccid, the lips pouting when he compressed his jaws, giving his face the sullen, indecisive look of the brooder lacking the mental and physical courage of independent action and initiative. The Judge could be led; Corrigan was leading him now, and the Judge was reluctant, but his courage had oozed, back in Dry Bottom, when Corrigan had mentioned a culpable action which the Judge had regretted many times.

Some legal records of the county were on the table between the two men. The Judge had 72
objected when Corrigan had secured them from the compartment where the others were piled.

"It isn't regular, Mr. Corrigan," he had said; "no one except a legally authorized person has the right to look over those books."

"We'll say that I am legally authorized, then," grinned Corrigan. The look in his eyes was one of amused contempt. "It isn't the only irregular thing you have done, Lindman."

The Judge subsided, but back in his eyes was a slumbering hatred for this man, who was forcing him to complicity in another crime. He regretted that other crime; why should this man deliberately remind him of it?

After looking over the records, Corrigan outlined a scheme of action that made the Judge's face blanch.

"I won't be a party to any such scurrilous undertaking!" he declared when, he could trust his voice; "I—I won't permit it!"

Corrigan stretched his legs out under the table, shoved his hands into his trousers' pockets and laughed.

"Why the high moral attitude, Judge? It doesn't become you. Refuse if you like. When we get to Manti I shall wire Benham. It's likely he'll feel pretty sore. He's got his heart set on this. And I have no doubt that after he gets my wire he'll jump the next train for Washington, and—"

The Judge exclaimed with weak incoherence, and a few minutes later he was bending over the records with Corrigan—the latter making sundry copies on a pad of paper, which he placed in a pocket when the work was completed. 73

At noon the special car was in Manti. Corrigan, the Judge, and Braman, carried the Judge's effects and stored them in the rear room of the bank building. "I'll build you a courthouse, tomorrow," he promised the Judge; "big enough for you and a number of deputies. You'll need deputies, you know." He grinned as the Judge shrank. Then, leaving the Judge in the room with his books and papers, Corrigan drew Braman outside.

"I got hell from Benham for destroying Trevison's check—he wired me to attend to my other deals and let him run the railroad—the damned old fool! You must have taken the cash to Trevison—I see the gang's working again."

"The cash went," said the banker, watching Corrigan covertly, "but I didn't take it. J. C. wired explicit orders for his daughter to act."

Corrigan cursed viciously, his face dark with wrath as he turned to look at the private car, on the switch. The banker watched him with secret, vindictive enjoyment. Miss Benham had judged Braman correctly—he was cold, crafty, selfish, and wholly devoid of sympathy. He was for Braman, first and last—and in the interim.

"Miss Benham went to the cut—so I hear," he went on, smoothly. "Trevison wasn't there. Miss Benham went to the Diamond K." His eyes gleamed as Corrigan's hands clenched. "Trevison rode back to the car with her—which she had ordered taken to the cut," went on the banker. 74
"And this morning about ten o'clock Trevison came here with a led horse. He and Miss Benham rode away together. I heard her tell her aunt they were going to Blakeley's ranch—it's about eight miles from here."

Corrigan's face went white. "I'll kill him for that!" he said.

"Jealous, eh?" laughed the banker. "So, that's the reason—"

Corrigan turned and struck bitterly. The banker's jaws clacked sharply—otherwise he fell silently, striking his head against the edge of the step and rolling, face down, into the dust.

When he recovered and sat up, Corrigan had gone. The banker gazed foolishly around at a world that was still reeling—felt his jaw carefully, wonder and astonishment in his eyes.

"What do you know about that?" he asked of the surrounding silence. "I've kidded him about women before, and he never got sore. He must be in love!"

Riding through a saccaton basin, the green-brown tips so high that they caught at their stirrups as they rode slowly along; a white, smiling sky above them and Blakeley's still three miles away, Miss Benham and Trevison were chatting gayly at the instant the banker had received Corrigan's blow.

Miss Benham had spent the night thinking of Trevison, and she had spent much of her time during the present ride stealing glances at him. She had discovered something about him that had eluded her the day before—an impulsive boyishness. It was hidden behind the manhood of 75
him, so that the casual observer would not be likely to see it; men would have failed to see it, because she was certain that with men he would not let it be seen. But she knew the recklessness that shone in his eyes, the energy that slumbered in them ready to be applied any moment in response to any whim that might seize him, were traits that had not yet yielded to the stern governors of manhood—nor would they yield in many years to come—they were the fountains of virility that would keep him young. She felt the irresistible appeal of him, responsive to the youth that flourished in her own heart—and Corrigan, older, more ponderous, less addicted to impulse, grew distant in her thoughts and vision. The day before yesterday her sympathies had been with Corrigan—she had thought. But as she rode she knew that they were threatening to desert him. For this man of heroic mold who rode beside her was disquietingly captivating in the bold recklessness of his youth.

They climbed the far slope of the basin and halted their horses on the crest. Before them stretched a plain so big and vast and inviting that it made the girl gasp with delight.

"Oh," she said, awed; "isn't it wonderful?"

"I knew you'd like it."

"The East has nothing like this," she said, with a broad sweep of the hand.

"No," he said.

She turned on him triumphantly. "There!" she declared; "you have committed yourself. You are 76

from the East!”

“Well,” he said; “I’ve never denied it.”

Something vague and subtle had drawn them together during the ride, bridging the hiatus of strangeness, making them feel that they had been acquainted long. It did not seem impertinent to her that she should ask the question that she now put to him—she felt that her interest in him permitted it:

“You are an easterner, and yet you have been out here for about ten years. Your house is big and substantial, but I should judge that it has no comforts, no conveniences. You live there alone, except for some men, and you have male servants—if you have any. Why should you bury yourself here? You are educated, you are young. There are great opportunities for you in the East!”

She paused, for she saw a cynical expression in his eyes.

“Well?” she said, impatiently, for she had been very much in earnest.

“I suppose I’ve got to tell you,” he said, soberly. “I don’t know what has come over me—you seem to have me under a spell. I’ve never spoken about it before. I don’t know why I should now. But you’ve got to know, I presume.”

“Yes.”

“On your head rest the blame,” he said, his grin still cynical; “and upon mine the consequences. It isn’t a pretty story to tell; it’s only virtue is its brevity. I was fired out of college for fighting. The fellows I licked deserved what they got—and I deserved what I got for breaking rules. I’ve always broken rules. I may have broken laws—most of us have. My father is wealthy. The last time I saw him he said I was incorrigible and a dunce. I admit the former, but I’m going to make him take the other back. I told him so. He replied that he was from Missouri. He gave me an opportunity to make good by cutting off my allowance. There was a girl. When my allowance was cut off she made me feel cold as an Eskimo. Told me straight that she had never liked me in the way she’d led me to believe she did, and that she was engaged to a *real* man. She made the mistake of telling me his name, and it happened to be one of the fellows I’d had trouble with at college. The girl lost her temper and told me things he’d said about me. I left New York that night, but before I hopped on the train I stopped in to see my rival and gave him the bulliest trimming that I had ever given anybody. I came out here and took up a quarter-section of land. I bought more—after a while. I own five thousand acres, and about a thousand acres of it is the best coal land in the United States. I wouldn’t sell it for love or money, for when your father gets his railroad running, I’m going to cash in on ten of the leanest and hardest and lonesomest years that any man ever put in. I’m going back some day. But I won’t stay. I’ve lived in this country so long that it’s got into my heart and soul. It’s a golden paradise.”

She did not share his enthusiasm—her thoughts were selfishly personal, though they included him.

“And the girl!” she said. “When you go back, would you—”

“Never!” he scoffed, vehemently. “That would convince me that I am the dunce my father said I was!”

The girl turned her head and smiled. And a little later, when they were riding on again, she murmured softly:

“Ten years of lonesomeness and bitterness to save his pride! I wonder if Hester Keyes knows what she has missed?”

CHAPTER VII

TWO LETTERS GO EAST

After Agatha retired that night Rosalind sat for a long time writing at a little desk in the private car. She was tingling with excitement over a discovery she had made, and was yearning for a confidante. Since it had not been her habit to confide in Agatha, she did the next best thing, which was to indite a letter to her chum, Ruth Gresham. In one place she wrote:

“Do you remember Hester Keyes’ love affair of ten years ago? You certainly must remember it! If you cannot, permit me to brush the dust of forgetfulness away. You cannot forget the night you met William Kinkaid? Of course you cannot forget that, for when you are Mrs. Kinkaid—But there! I won’t poke fun at you. But I think every married person needs to treasure every shred of romance against inevitable hum-drum days. Isn’t that a sad sentiment? But I want to get ahead with my reminder.”

There followed much detail, having to do with Hester Keyes’ party, to which neither Rosalind nor Ruth Gresham had been invited, for reasons which Rosalind presently made obvious. She

continued:

"Of course, custom does not permit girls of fourteen to figure prominently at 'coming-out' parties, but after one is there and is relegated to a stair-landing, one may use one's eyes without restriction. Do you remember my pointing out Hester Keyes' 'fellow'? But of course you didn't pay much attention to him after Billy Kinkaid sailed into your vision! But I envied Hester Keyes her eighteen years—and Trevison Brandon! He had the blackest eyes and hair! And he simply adored Hester! It made me feel positively savage when I heard shortly afterward that she had thrown him over—after his father cut him off—to take up with that fellow Harvey—I never could remember his first name. And she married Harvey—and regretted it, until Harvey died.

"Ruth, Trevison Brandon is out here. He calls himself 'Brand' Trevison. I met him two days ago, and I did not recognize him, he has changed so much. He puzzled me quite a little; but not even when I heard his name did I connect him with the man I had seen at Hester's party. Ten years is *such* a long time, isn't it? And I never did have much of a memory for names. But today he went with me to a certain ranch—Blakeley's—which, by the way, *father is going to buy*—and on the way we became very much acquainted, and he told me about his love affair. I placed him instantly, then, and why I didn't keel over was, I suppose, because of the curious big saddles they have out here, with enormous wooden *stirrups* on them. I can hear you exclaim over that plural, but there are no side-saddles. That is how it came that I was unchaperoned—Agatha won't take liberties with them, the saddles. Thank Heaven!"

There followed much more, with only one further reference to Trevison:

"He must be nearly thirty now, but he doesn't look it, he's so boyish. I gather, though, that he is regarded as a *man* out here, where, I understand, manhood is measured by something besides mere appearances. He owns acres and acres of land—some of it has coal on it; and he is sure to be enormously wealthy, some day. But I am twenty-four, myself."

The startling irrelevance of this sentence at first surprised Ruth Gresham, and then caused her eyes to brighten understandingly, as she read the letter a few days later. She remarked, musingly:

"The inevitable hum-drum days, eh? And yet most people long for them."

Another letter was written when the one to Ruth was completed. It was to J. Chalfant Benham.

> "DEAR DADDY:
>
> "The West is a golden paradise. I could live here many, many years. I visited Mr. Blakeley today. He calls his ranch the Bar B. We wouldn't have to change the brand, would we? Trevison says the ranch is worth all Blakeley asks for it. Mr. Blakeley says we can take possession immediately, so I have decided to stay here. Mrs. Blakeley has invited me, and I am going to have my things taken over tomorrow. Since the Blakeley's are anxious to sell out and return South, don't you think you had better conclude the deal at once?
>
> "Lovingly,
> "ROSALIND."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHAOS OF CREATION

The West saw many "boom" towns. They followed in the wake of "gold strikes;" they grew, mushroom-like, overnight—garish husks of squalor, palpitating, hardy, a-tingle with extravagant hopes. A few, it is true, lived to become substantial cities buzzing with the American spirit, panting, fighting for progress with an energy that shamed the Old World, lethargic in its smug and self-sufficient superiority. But many towns died in their gangling youth, tragic monuments to hopes; but monuments also to effort, and to the pioneer courage and the dreams of an empire-building people.

Manti was destined to live. It was a boom town with material reasons for substantial growth. Behind it were the resources of a railroad company which would anticipate the development of a section of country bigger than a dozen Old-world states, and men with brains keen enough to realize the commercial possibilities it held. It had Corrigan for an advance agent—big, confident, magnetic, energetic, suave, smooth.

Manti had awaited his coming; he was the magic force, the fulfillment of the rumored promise. He had stayed away for three weeks, following his departure on the special car after bringing Judge Lindman, and when he stepped off the car again at the end of that time Manti was "humming," as he had predicted. During the three weeks of his absence, the switch at Manti had never been unoccupied. Trains had been coming in regularly bearing merchandise, men, tools, machines, supplies. Engineers had arrived; the basin near Manti, choked by a narrow gorge at its westerly end (where the dam was to be built) was dotted with tents, wagons,

digging implements, a miscellany of material whose hauling had worn a rutted trail over the plains and on the slope of the basin, continually active with wagon-train and pack horse, and articulate with sweating, cursing drivers.

“She’s a pippin!” gleefully confided a sleek-looking individual who might have been mistaken for a western “parson” had it not been for a certain sophisticated cynicism that was prominent about him, and which imparted a distasteful taint of his profession. “Give me a year of this and I’ll open a joint in Frisco! I cleaned out a brace of bull-whackers in the *Plaza* last night—their first pay. Afterward I stung a couple of cattlemen for a hundred each. Look at her hum!”

Notwithstanding that it was midday, Manti was teeming with life and action. Since the day that Miss Benham had viewed the town from the window of the private car, Manti had added more than a hundred buildings to its total. They were not attractive; they were ludicrous in their pitiful masquerade of substantial types. Here and there a three-story structure reared aloft, sheathed with galvanized iron, a garish aristocrat seemingly conscious of its superiority, brazen, 84
in its bid for attention; more modest buildings seemed dwarfed, humiliated, squatting sullenly and enviously. There were hotels, rooming-houses, boarding-houses, stores, dwellings, saloons—and others which for many reasons need not be mentioned. But they were pulsating with life, electric, eager, expectant. Taking advantage of the scarcity of buildings, an enterprising citizen had erected tents in rows on the street line, for whose shelter he charged enormously—and did a capacity business.

“A hundred came in on the last train,” complained the over-worked station agent. “God knows what they all expect to do here!”

Corrigan had kept his promise to build Judge Lindman a courthouse. It was a flat-roofed structure, one story high, wedged between a saloon and Braman’s bank building. A sign in the front window of Braman’s bank announced that Jefferson Corrigan, agent of the Land & Improvement Company, of New York, had office space within, but on the morning of the day following his return to Manti, Corrigan was seated at one side of a flat-top desk in the courthouse, talking with Judge Lindman, who sat at the other side.

“Got them all transcribed?” asked Corrigan.

The Judge drew a thin ledger from his desk and passed it over to Corrigan. As Corrigan turned the pages and his face lighted, the Judge’s grew correspondingly troubled.

“All right,” exulted Corrigan. “This purports to be an accurate and true record of all the land transactions in this section from the special grant to the Midland Company, down to date. It 85
shows no intermediate owners from the Midland Company to the present claimants. As a document arraigning carelessness on the part of land buyers it cannot be excelled. There isn’t a present owner that has a legal leg to stand on!”

“There is only one weak point in your case,” said the Judge, and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction, which he concealed by bowing his head. “It is that since these records show no sale of its property by the Midland Company, the Midland Company can come forward and re-establish its title.”

Corrigan laughed and flipped a legal-looking paper in front of the Judge. The latter opened it and read, showing eagerness. He laid it down after reading, his hands trembling.

“It shows that the Midland Company—James Marchmont, president—transferred to Jefferson Corrigan, on a date prior to these other transactions, one-hundred thousand acres of land here—the Midland Company’s entire holdings. Why, man, it is forgery!”

“No,” said Corrigan quietly. “James Marchmont is alive. He signed his name right where it is. He’ll confirm it, too, for he happens to be in something of the fix that you are in. Therefore, there being no records of any sales on your books—as revised, of course—” he laughed; “Jeff Corrigan is the legal possessor of one-hundred thousand acres of land right in the heart of what is going to be the boom section of the West!” He chuckled, lit a cigar, leaned back in his chair 86
and looked at the Judge. “All you have to do now is to enter that transaction on your records.”

“You don’t expect the present owners to yield their titles without a fight, do you?” asked the Judge. He spoke breathlessly.

Corrigan grunted. “Sure; they’ll fight. But they’ll lose. I’ve got them. I’ve got the power—the courts—the law, behind me. I’ve got them, and I’ll squeeze them. It means a mint of money, man. It will make you. It’s the biggest thing that any man ever attempted to pull off in this country!”

“Yes, it’s big,” groaned the Judge; “it’s stupendous! It’s frightful! Why, man, if anything goes wrong, it would mean—” He paused and shivered.

Corrigan smiled contemptuously. “Where’s the original record?” he asked.

“I destroyed it,” said the Judge. He did not look at Corrigan. “How?” demanded the latter.

“Burned it.”

“Good.” Corrigan rubbed his palms together. “It’s too soon to start anything. Things are booming, and some of these owners will be trying to sell. Hold them off—don’t record anything. Give them any excuse that comes to your mind. Have you heard from Washington?”

“The establishment of the court here has been confirmed.”

“Quick work,” laughed Corrigan. He got up, murmuring something about having to take care of

some leases. When he turned, it was to start and stand rigid, his jaws set, his face pale. A man stood in the open doorway—a man of about fifty apparently, furtive-eyed, slightly shabby, though with an atmosphere about him that hinted of past dignity of carriage.

“Jim Marchmont!” said Corrigan. He stepped forward, threateningly, his face dark with wrath. Without speaking another word he seized the newcomer by the coat collar, snapping his head back savagely, and dragged him back of a wooden partition. Concealed there from any of the curious in the street, he jammed Marchmont against the wall of the building, held him there with one hand and stuck a huge fist into his face.

“What in hell are you doing here?” he demanded. “Come clean, or I’ll tear you apart!”

The other laughed, but there was no mirth in it, and his thin lips were curved queerly, and were stiff and white. “Don’t get excited, Jeff,” he said; “it won’t be healthy.” And Corrigan felt something hard and cold against his shirt front. He knew it was a pistol and he released his hold and stepped back.

“Speaking of coming clean,” said Marchmont. “You crossed me. You told me you were going to sell the Midland land to two big ranch-owners. I find that you’re going to cut it up into lots and make big money—loads of it. You handed me a measly thousand. You stand to make millions. I want my divvy.”

“You’ve got your nerve,” scoffed Corrigan. “You got your bit when you sold the Midland before. You’re a self-convicted crook, and if you make a peep out here I’ll send you over the road for a thousand years!”

“Another thousand now,” said Marchmont: “and ten more when you commence to cash in. Otherwise, a thousand years or not, I’ll start yapping here and queer your game.”

Corrigan’s lips were in an ugly pout. For an instant it seemed he was going to defy his visitor. Then without a word to him he stepped around the partition, walked out the door and entered the bank. A few minutes later he passed a bundle of greenbacks to Marchmont and escorted him to the front door, where he stood, watching, his face unpleasant, until Marchmont vanished into one of the saloons.

“That settles *you*, you damned fool!” he said.

He stepped down into the street and went into the bank. Braman fawned on him, smirking insincerely. Corrigan had not apologized for striking the blow, had never mentioned it, continuing his former attitude toward the banker as though nothing had happened. But Braman had not forgiven him. Corrigan wasted no words:

“Who’s the best gun-man in this section?”

Braman studied a minute. “Clay Levins,” he said, finally.

“Can you find him?”

“Why, he’s in town today; I saw him not more than fifteen minutes ago, going into the *Elk*!”

“Find him and bring him here—by the back way,” directed Corrigan.

Braman went out, wondering. A few minutes later he returned, coming in at the front door, smiling with triumph. Shortly afterward Corrigan was opening the rear door on a tall, slender man of thirty-five, with a thin face, a mouth that drooped at the corners, and alert, furtive eyes. He wore a heavy pistol at his right hip, low, the bottom of the holster tied to the leather chaps, and as Corrigan closed the door he noted that the man’s right hand lingered close to the butt of the weapon.

“That’s all right,” said Corrigan; “you’re perfectly safe here.”

He talked in low tones to the man, so that Braman could not hear. Levins departed shortly afterwards, grinning crookedly, tucking a piece of paper into a pocket, upon which Corrigan had transcribed something that had been written on the cuff of his shirt sleeve. Corrigan went to his desk and busied himself with some papers. Over in the courthouse, Judge Lindman took from a drawer in his desk a thin ledger—a duplicate of the one he had shown Corrigan—and going to the rear of the room opened the door of an iron safe and stuck the ledger out of sight under a mass of legal papers.

When Marchmont left Corrigan he went straight to the *Plaza*, where he ordered a lunch and ate heartily. After finishing his meal he emerged from the saloon and stood near one of the front windows. One of the hundred dollar bills that Corrigan had given him he had “broke” in the *Plaza*, getting bills of small denomination in change, and in his right trousers’ pocket was a roll that bulked comfortably in his hand. The feel of it made him tingle with satisfaction, as, except for the other thousand that Corrigan had given him some months ago, it was the only money he had had for a long time. He knew he should take the next train out of Manti; that he had done a hazardous thing in baiting Corrigan, but he was lonesome and yearned for the touch and voice of the crowds that thronged in and out of the saloons and the stores, and presently he joined them, wandering from saloon to saloon, drinking occasionally, his content and satisfaction increasing in proportion to the quantity of liquor he drank.

And then, at about three o’clock, in the barroom of the *Plaza*, he heard a discordant voice at his elbow. He saw men crowding, jostling one another to get away from the spot where he stood—crouching, pale of face, their eyes on him. It made him feel that he was the center of interest, and he wheeled, staggering a little—for he had drunk much more than he had intended—to see

what had happened. He saw Clay Levins standing close to him, his thin lips in a cruel curve, his eyes narrowed and glittering, his body in a suggestive crouch. The silence that had suddenly descended smote Marchmont's ears like a momentary deafness, and he looked foolishly around him, uncertain, puzzled. Levins' voice shocked him, sobered him, whitened his face:

"Fork over that coin you lifted from me in the *Elk*, you light-fingered hound!" said Levins.

Marchmont divined the truth now. He made his second mistake of the day. He allowed a flash of rage to trick him into reaching for his pistol. He got it into his hand and almost out of the pocket before Levins' first bullet struck him, and before he could draw it entirely out the second savage 91
bark of the gun in Levins' hand shattered the stillness of the room. Soundlessly, his face wreathed in a grin of hideous satire, Marchmont sank to the floor and stretched out on his back.

Before his body was still, Levins had drawn out the bills that had reposed in his victim's pocket. Crumpling them in his hand he walked to the bar and tossed them to the barkeeper.

"Look at 'em," he directed. "I'm provin' they're mine. Good thing I got the numbers on 'em." While the crowd jostled and crushed about him he read the numbers from the paper Corrigan had given him, grinning coldly as the barkeeper confirmed them. A deputy sheriff elbowed his way through the press to Levins' side, and the gun-man spoke to him, lightly: "I reckon everybody saw him reach for his gun when I told him to fork the coin over," he said, indicating his victim. "So you ain't got nothin' on me. But if you're figgerin' that the coin ain't mine, why I reckon a guy named Corrigan will back up my play."

The deputy took him at his word. They found Corrigan at his desk in the bank building.

"Sure," he said when the deputy had told his story; "I paid Levins the money this morning. Is it necessary for you to know what for? No? Well, it seems that the pickpocket got just what he deserved." He offered the deputy a cigar, and the latter went out, satisfied.

Later, Corrigan looked appraisingly at Levins, who still graced the office. 92

"That was rather an easy job," he said. "Marchmont was slow with a gun. With a faster man—a man, say—" he appeared to meditate "—like Trevison, for instance. You'd have to be pretty careful—"

"Trevison's my friend," grinned Levins coldly as he got to his feet. "There's nothin' doin' there—understand? Get it out of your brain-box, for if anything happens to 'Firebrand,' I'll perforate you sure as hell!"

He stalked out of the office, leaving Corrigan looking after him, frowningly.

93

CHAPTER IX

STRAIGHT TALK

Ten years of lonesomeness, of separation from all the things he held dear, with nothing for his soul to feed upon except the bitterness he got from a contemplation of the past; with nothing but his pride and his determination to keep him from becoming what he had seen many men in this country become—dissolute irresponsibles, drifting like ships without rudders—had brought into Trevison's heart a great longing. He was like a man who for a long time has been deprived of the solace of good tobacco, and—to use a simile that he himself manufactured—he yearned to capture someone from the East, sit beside him and fill his lungs, his brain, his heart, his soul, with the breath, the aroma, the spirit of the land of his youth. The appearance of Miss Benham at Manti had thrilled him. For ten years he had seen no eastern woman, and at sight of her the old hunger of the soul became acute in him, aroused in him a passionate worship that made his blood run riot. It was the call of sex to sex, made doubly stirring by the girl's beauty, her breeziness, her virile, alluring womanhood—by the appeal she made to the love of the good and the true in his character. His affection for Hester Keyes, he had long known, had been merely 94
the vanity-tickling regard of the callow youth—the sex attraction of adolescence, the "puppy" love that smites all youth alike. For Rosalind Benham a deeper note had been struck. Its force rocked him, intoxicated him; his head rang with the music it made.

During the three weeks of her stay at Blakeley's they had been much together. Rosalind had accepted his companionship as a matter of course. He had told her many things about his past, and was telling her many more things, as they sat today on an isolated excrescence of sand and rock and bunch grass surrounded by a sea of sage. From where they sat they could see Manti—Manti, alive, athrob, its newly-come hundreds busy as ants with their different pursuits.

The intoxication of the girl's presence had never been so great as it was today. A dozen times, drunken with the nearness of her, with the delicate odor from her hair, as a stray wisp fluttered into his face, he had come very near to catching her in his arms. But he had grimly mastered the feeling, telling himself that he was not a savage, and that such an action would be suicidal to his hopes. It cost him an effort, though, to restrain himself, as his flushed face, his burning eyes and his labored breath, told.

His broken wrist had healed. His hatred of Corrigan had been kept alive by a recollection of the fight, by a memory of the big man's quickness to take advantage of the banker's foul trick, and by the passion for revenge that had seized him, that held him in a burning clutch. Jealousy of the big man he would not have admitted; but something swelled his chest when he thought of Corrigan coming West in the same car with the girl—a vague, gnawing something that made his teeth clench and his facial muscles cord.

Rosalind had not told him that she had recognized him, that during the ten years of his exile he had been her ideal, but she could close her eyes at this minute and imagine herself on the stair-landing at Hester Keyes' party, could feel the identical wave of thrilling admiration that had passed over her when her gaze had first rested on him. Yes, it had survived, that girlhood passion, but she had grown much older and experienced, and she could not let him see what she felt. But her curiosity was keener than ever; in no other man of her acquaintance had she felt this intense interest.

"I remember you telling me the other day that your men would have used their rifles, had the railroad company attempted to set men to work in the cut. I presume you must have given them orders to shoot. I can't understand you. You were raised in the East, your parents are wealthy; it is presumed they gave you advantages—in fact, you told me they had sent you to college. You must have learned respect for the law while there. And yet you would have had your men resist forcibly."

"I told you before that I respected the law—so long as the law is just and the fellow I'm fighting is governed by it. But I refuse to fight under a rule that binds one of my hands, while my opponent sails into me with both hands free. I've never been a believer in the doctrine of 'turn the other cheek.' We are made with a capacity for feeling, and it boils, unrestrained, in me. I never could play the hypocrite; I couldn't say 'no' when I thought 'yes' and make anybody believe it. I couldn't lie and evade and side-step, even to keep from getting licked. I always told the truth and expressed my feelings in language as straight, simple, and direct as I could. It wasn't always the discreet way. Perhaps it wasn't always the wise way. I won't argue that. But it was the only way I knew. It caused me a lot of trouble—I was always in trouble. My record in college would make a prize fighter turn green with envy. I'm not proud of what I've made of my life. But I haven't changed. I do what my heart prompts me to do, and I say what I think, regardless of consequences."

"That would be a very good method—if everybody followed it," said the girl. "Unfortunately, it invites enmity. Subtlety will take you farther in the world." She was smitten with an impulse, unwise, unconventional. But the conventions! The East seemed effete and far. Besides, she spoke lightly:

"Let us be perfectly frank, then. I think that perhaps you take yourself too seriously. Life is a tragedy to the tragic, a joke to the humorous, a drab canvas to the unimaginative. It all depends upon what temperament one sees it through. I dare say that I see you differently than you see yourself. 'O wad some power the giftie gi'e us to see oursel's as ithers see us'," she quoted, and laughed at the queer look in his eyes, for his admiration for her had leaped like a living thing at her bubbling spirits, and he was, figuratively, forced to place his heel upon it. "I confess it seems to me that you take a too tragic view of things," she went on. "You are like D'Artagnan, always eager to fly at somebody's throat. Possibly, you don't give other people credit for unselfish motives; you are too suspicious; and what you call plain talk may seem impertinence to others—don't you think? In any event, people don't like to hear the truth told about themselves—especially by a big, earnest, sober-faced man who seems to speak with conviction, and, perhaps, authority. I think you look for trouble, instead of trying to evade it. I think, too," she said, looking straight at him, "that you face the world in a too physical fashion; that you place too much dependence upon brawn and fire. That, following your own method of speaking your mind, is what I think of you. I tremble to imagine what you think of me for speaking so plainly."

He laughed, his voice vibrating, and bold passion gleamed in his eyes. He looked fairly at her, holding her gaze, compelling it with the intensity of his own, and she drew a deep, tremulous breath of understanding. There followed a tense, breathless silence. And then—

"You've brought it on yourself," he said. "I love you. You are going to marry me—someday. That's what I think of you!"

"YOU ARE GOING TO MARRY ME—SOME DAY. THAT'S WHAT I THINK OF YOU!"

She got to her feet, her cheeks flaming, confused, half-frightened, though a fierce exultation surged within her. She had half expected this, half dreaded it, and now that it had burst upon her in such volcanic fashion she realized that she had not been entirely prepared. She sought refuge in banter, facing him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes dancing.

"'Firebrand,'" she said. "The name fits you—Mr. Carson was right. I warned you—if you remember—that you placed too much dependence on brawn and fire. You are making it very hard for me to see you again."

He had risen too, and stood before her, and he now laughed frankly.

"I told you I couldn't play the hypocrite. I have said what I think. I want you. But that doesn't mean that I am going to carry you away to the mountains. I've got it off my mind, and I promise not to mention it again—until you wish it. But don't forget that some day you are going to love me."

"How marvelous," said she, tauntingly, though in her confusion she could not meet his gaze, looking downward. "How do you purpose to bring it about?"

"By loving you so strongly that you can't help yourself."

"With your confidence—" she began. But he interrupted, laughing:

"We're going to forget it, now," he said. "I promised to show you that *Pueblo,* and we'll have just about time enough to make it and back to the Bar B before dark."

And they rode away presently, chatting on indifferent subjects. And, keeping his promise, he said not another word about his declaration. But the girl, stealing glances at him, wondered much—and reached no decision.

When they reached the abandoned Indian village, many of its houses still standing, he laughed. "That would make a dandy fort."

"Always thinking of fighting," she mocked. But her eyes flashed as she looked at him.

CHAPTER X

THE SPIRIT OF MANTI

The Benham private car had clacked eastward over the rails three weeks before, bearing with it as a passenger only the negro autocrat. At the last moment, discovering that she could not dissuade Rosalind from her mad decision to stay at Blakeley's ranch, Agatha had accompanied her. The private car was now returning, bearing the man who had poetically declared to his fawning Board of Directors: "Our railroad is the magic wand that will make the desert bloom like the rose. We are embarked upon a project, gentlemen, so big, so vast, that it makes even your president feel a pulse of pride. This project is nothing more nor less than the opening of a region of waste country which an all-wise Creator has permitted to slumber for ages, for no less purpose than to reserve it to the horny-handed son of toil of our glorious country. It will awaken to the clarion call of our wealth, our brains, and our genius." He then mentioned Corrigan and the Midland grant—another reservation of Providence, which a credulous and asinine Congress had bestowed, in fee-simple, upon a certain suave gentleman, named Marchmont—and disseminated such other details as a servile board of directors need know; and then he concluded with a flowery peroration that left his hearers smirking fatuously.

And today J. Chalfant Benham was come to look upon the first fruits of his efforts.

As he stepped down from the private car he was greeted by vociferous cheers from a jostling and enthusiastic populace—for J. C. had very carefully wired the time of his arrival and Corrigan had acted accordingly, knowing J. C. well. J. C. was charmed—he said so, later, in a speech from a flimsy, temporary stand erected in the middle of the street in front of the *Plaza*—and in saying so he merely told the truth. For, next to money-making, adulation pleased him most. He would have been an able man had he ignored the latter passion. It seared his intellect as a pernicious habit blasts the character. It sat on his shoulders—extravagantly squared; it shone in his eyes—inviting inspection; his lips, curved with smug complacence, betrayed it as, sitting in Corrigan's office after the conclusion of the festivities, he smiled at the big man.

"Manti is a wonderful town—a *wonderful* town!" he declared. "It may be said that success is lurking just ahead. And much of the credit is due to your efforts," he added, generously.

Corrigan murmured a polite disclaimer, and plunged into dry details. J. C. had a passion for dry details. For many hours they sat in the office, their heads close together. Braman was occasionally called in. Judge Lindman was summoned after a time. J. C. shook the Judge's hand warmly and then resumed his chair, folding his chubby hands over his corpulent stomach.

"Judge Lindman," he said; "you thoroughly understand our position in this Midland affair."

The Judge glanced at Corrigan. "Thoroughly."

"No doubt there will be some contests. But the present claimants have no legal status. Mr. —(here J. C. mentioned a name that made the Judge's eyes brighten) tells me there will be no hitch. There could not be, of course. In the absence of any court record of possible transfers, the title to the land, of course, reverts to the Midland Company. As Mr. Corrigan has explained to me, he is entirely within his rights, having secured the title to the land from Mr. Marchmont, representing the Midland. You have no record of any transfers from the Midland to the present claimants or their predecessors, have you? There is no such record?"

The Judge saw Corrigan's amused grin, and surmised that J. C. was merely playing with him.

"No," he said, with some bitterness.

"Then of course you are going to stand with Mr. Corrigan against the present claimants?"

"I presume so."

"H'm," said J. C. "If there is any doubt about it, perhaps I had better remind you—"

The Judge groaned in agony of spirit. "It won't be necessary to remind me."

"So I thought. Well, gentlemen—" J. C. arose "—that will be all for this evening."

Thus he dismissed the Judge, who went to his cot behind a partition in the courthouse, while Corrigan and J. C. stepped outside and walked slowly toward the private car. They lingered at the steps, and presently J. C. called and a negro came out with two chairs. J. C. and Corrigan draped themselves in the chairs and smoked. Dusk was settling over Manti; lights appeared in the windows of the buildings; a medley of noises reached the ears of the two men. By day Manti was lively enough, by night it was a maelstrom of frenzied action. A hundred cow-ponies were hitched to rails that skirted the street in front of store and saloon; cowboys from ranches, distant and near, rollicked from building to building, touching elbows with men less picturesquely garbed; the strains of crude music smote the flat, dead desert air; yells, shouts, laughter filtered through the bedlam; an engine, attached to a train of cars on the main track near the private car, wheezed steam in preparation for its eastward trip, soon to begin.

Benham had solemn thoughts, sitting there, watching.

"That crowd wouldn't have much respect for law. They're living at such a pitch that they'd lose their senses entirely if any sudden crisis should arise. I'd feel my way carefully, Corrigan—if I were you."

Corrigan laughed deeply. "Don't lose any sleep over it. There are fifty deputy marshals in that crowd—and they're heeled. The rear room in the bank building is a young arsenal."

Benham started. "How on earth—" he began.

"Law and order," smiled Corrigan. "A telegram did it. The territory wants a reputation for safety."

"By the way," said Benham, after a silence; "I *had* to take that Trevison affair out of your hands. We don't want to antagonize the man. He will be valuable to us—later." 104

"How?"

"Carrington, the engineer I sent out here to look over the country before we started work, did considerable nosing around Trevison's land while in the vicinity. He told me there were unmistakable signs of coal of a good quality and enormous quantity. We ought to be able to drive a good bargain with Trevison one of these days—if we handle him carefully."

Corrigan frowned and grunted. "His land is included in that of the Midland grant. He shall be treated like the others. If that is your only objection—"

"It isn't," said Benham. "I have discovered that 'Brand' Trevison is really Trevison Brandon, the disgraced son of Orrin Brandon, the millionaire."

The darkness hid Corrigan's ugly pout. "How did you discover that?" he said, coolly, after a little.

"My daughter mentioned it in one of her letters to me. I confirmed, by quizzing Brandon, senior. Brandon is powerful and obstinate. If he should discover what our game is he would fight us to the last ditch. The whole thing would go to smash, perhaps."

"You didn't tell him about his son being out here?"

"Certainly not!"

"Good!"

"What do you mean?"

"That it's my land; that I'm going to take it away from Trevison, father or no father. I'm going to break him. That's what I mean!" Corrigan's big hands were clenched on the arms of his chair; his eyes gleamed balefully in the semi-darkness. J. C. felt a tremor of awed admiration for him. He laughed, nervously. "Well," he said, "if you think you can handle it—" 105

They sat there for a long time, smoking in silence. One thought dominated Corrigan's mind: "Three weeks, and exchanging confidences—damn him!"

A discordant note floated out of the medley of sound in palpitating Manti, sailed over the ridiculous sky line and smote the ears of the two on the platform. The air rocked an instant later with a cheer, loud, pregnant with enthusiasm. And then a mass of men, close-packed, undulating, moved down the street toward the private car.

Benham's face whitened and he rose from his chair. "Good God!" he said; "what's happened?" He felt Corrigan's hand on his shoulder, forcing him back into his chair.

"It can't concern us," said the big man; "wait; we'll know pretty soon. Something's broke loose."

The two men watched—Benham breathless, wide-eyed; Corrigan with close-set lips and out-thrust chin. The mass moved fast. It passed the *Plaza*, far up the street, receiving additions each second as men burst out of doors and dove to the fringe; and grew in front as other men skittered into it, hanging to its edge and adding to the confusion. But Corrigan noted that the mass had a point, like a wedge, made by three men who seemed to lead it. Something familiar in the stature and carriage of one of the men struck Corrigan, and he strained his eyes into the darkness the better to see. He could be sure of the identity of the man, presently, and he set his jaws tighter and continued to watch, with bitter malignance in his gaze, for the man was Trevison. There was no mistaking the broad shoulders, the set of the head, the big, bold and confident poise of the man. At the point of the wedge he looked what he was—the leader; he dominated the crowd; it became plain to Corrigan as the mass moved closer that he was intent on something that had aroused the enthusiasm of his followers, for there were shouts of: "That's the stuff! Give it to them! Run 'em out!" 106

For an instant as the crowd passed the *Elk* saloon, its lights revealing faces in its glare, Corrigan thought its destination was the private car, and his hand went to his hip. It was withdrawn an instant later, though, when the leader swerved and marched toward the train on the main track. In the light also, Corrigan saw something that gave him a hint of the significance of it all. His laugh broke the tension of the moment.

"It's Denver Ed and Poker Charley," he said to Benham. "It's likely they've been caught cheating and have been invited to make themselves scarce." And he laughed again, with slight contempt, at Benham's sigh of relief.

The mass surged around the rear coach of the train. There was some laughter, mingled with jeers, and while this was at its height a man broke from the mass and walked rapidly toward Corrigan and Benham. It was Braman. Corrigan questioned him. 107

"It's two professional gamblers. They've been fleecing Manti's easy marks with great facility. Tonight they had Clay Levins in the back room of the *Belmont*. He had about a thousand dollars (the banker looked at Corrigan and closed an eye), and they took it away from him. It looked square, and Levins didn't kick. Couldn't anyway—he's lying in the back room of the *Belmont* now, paralyzed. I think that somebody told Levins' wife about him shooting Marchmont yesterday, and Mrs. Levins likely sent Trevison after hubby—knowing hubby's appetite for booze. Levins isn't giving the woman a square deal, so far as that is concerned," went on the banker; "she and the kids are in want half the time, and I've heard that Trevison's helped them out on quite a good many occasions. Anyway, Trevison appeared in town this afternoon, looking

for Levins. Before he found him he heard these two beauties framing up on him. That's the result—the two beauties go out. The crowd was for stringing them up, but Trevison wouldn't have it."

"Marchmont?" interrupted Benham. "It isn't possible—"

"Why not?" grinned Corrigan. "Yes, sir, the former president of the Midland Company was shot to death yesterday for pocket-picking."

"Lord!" said Benham.

"So Levins' wife sent Trevison for hubby," said Corrigan, quietly. "She's *that* thick with Trevison, is she?"

"Get that out of your mind, Jeff," returned the banker, noting Corrigan's tone. "Everybody that knows of the case will tell you that everything's straight there." 108

"Well," Corrigan laughed, "I'm glad to hear it."

The train steamed away as they talked, and the crowd began to break up and scatter toward the saloons. Before that happened, however, there was a great jam around Trevison; he was shaking hands right and left. Voices shouted that he was "all there!" As he started away he was forced to shove his way through the press around him.

Benham had been watching closely this evidence of Trevison's popularity; he linked it with some words that his daughter had written to him regarding the man, and as a thought formed in his mind he spoke it.

"I'd reconsider about hooking up with that man Trevison, Corrigan. He's one of those fellows that win popularity easily, and it won't do you any good to antagonize him."

"That's all right," laughed Corrigan, coldly.

109

CHAPTER XI

FOR THE "KIDDIES"

Trevison dropped from Nigger at the dooryard of Levins' cabin, and looked with a grim smile at Levins himself lying face downward across the saddle on his own pony. He had carried Levins out of the *Belmont* and had thrown him, as he would have thrown a sack of meal, across the saddle, where he had lain during the four-mile ride, except during two short intervals in which Trevison had lifted him off and laid him flat on the ground, to rest. Trevison had meditated, not without a certain wry humor, upon the strength and the protracted potency of Manti's whiskey, for not once during his home-coming had Levins shown the slightest sign of returning consciousness. He was as slack as a meal sack now, as Trevison lifted him from the pony's back and let him slip gently to the ground at his feet. A few minutes later, Trevison was standing in the doorway of the cabin, his burden over his shoulder, the weak glare of light from within the cabin stabbing the blackness of the night and revealing him to the white-faced woman who had answered his summons.

Her astonishment had been of the mute, agonized kind; her eyes, hollow, eloquent with unspoken misery and resignation, would have told Trevison that this was not the first time, had he not known from personal observation. She stood watching, gulping, shame and mortification bringing patches of color into her cheeks, as Trevison carried Levins into a bedroom and laid him down, removing his boots. She was standing near the door when Trevison came out of the bedroom; she was facing the blackness of the desert night—a blacker future, unknowingly—and Trevison halted on the threshold of the bedroom door and set his teeth in sympathy. For the woman deserved better treatment. He had known her for several years—since the time when Levins, working for him, had brought her from a ranch on the other side of the Divide, announcing their marriage. It had been a different Levins, then, as it was a different wife who stood at the door now. She had faded; the inevitable metamorphosis wrought by neglect, worry and want, had left its husks—a wan, tired-looking woman of thirty who had only her hopes to nourish her soul. There were children, too—if that were any consolation. Trevison saw them as he glanced around the cabin. They were in another bed; through an archway he could see their chubby faces. His lungs filled and his lips straightened. 110

But he grinned presently, in an effort to bring cheer into the cabin, reaching into a pocket and bringing out the money he had recovered for Levins.

"There are nearly a thousand dollars here. Two tin-horn gamblers tried to take it from Clay, but I headed them off. Tell Clay—"

Mrs. Levins' face whitened; it was more money than she had ever seen at one time. 111

"Clay's?" she interrupted, perplexedly. "Why, where—"

"I haven't the slightest idea—but he had it, they tried to take it away from him—it's here now—it

belongs to you." He shoved it into her hands and stepped back, smiling at the stark wonder and joy in her eyes. He saw the joy vanish—concern and haunting worry came into her eyes.

"They told me that Clay shot—killed—a man yesterday. Is it true?" She cast a fearing look at the bed where the children lay.

"The damned fools!"

"Then it's true!" She covered her face with her hands, the money in them. Then she took the hands away and looked at the money in them, loathingly. "Do you think Clay—"

"No!" he said shortly, anticipating. "That couldn't be. For the man Clay killed had this money on him. Clay accused him of picking his pocket. Clay gave the bartender in the *Plaza* the number of each bill before he saw them after taking the bills out of the pickpocket's clothing. So it can't be as you feared."

She murmured incoherently and pressed both hands to her breast. He laughed and walked to the door.

"Well, you need it, you and the kiddies. I'm glad to have been of some service to you. Tell Clay he owes me something for cartage. If there is anything I can do for you and Clay and the kiddies I'd be only too glad."

"Nothing—now," said the woman, gratitude shining from her eyes, mingling with a worried gleam. "Oh!" she added, passionately; "if Clay was only different! Can't you help him to be 112
strong, Mr. Trevison? Like you? Can't you be with him more, to try to keep him straight for the sake of the children?"

"Clay's odd, lately," Trevison frowned. "He seems to have changed a lot. I'll do what I can, of course." He stepped out of the door and then looked back, calling: "I'll put Clay's pony away. Good night." And the darkness closed around him.

Over at Blakeley's ranch, J. C. Benham had just finished an inspection of the interior and had sank into the depths of a comfortable chair facing his daughter. Blakeley and his wife had retired, the deal that would place the ranch in possession of Benham having been closed. J. C. gazed critically at his daughter.

"Like it here, eh?" he said. "Well, you look it." He shook a finger at her. "Agatha has been writing to me rather often, lately," he added. There followed no answer and J. C. went on, narrowing his eyes at the girl. "She tells me that this fellow who calls himself 'Brand' Trevison has proven himself a—shall we say, persistent?—escort on your trips of inspection around the ranch."

Rosalind's face slowly crimsoned.

"H'm," said Benham.

"I thought Corrigan—" he began. The girl's eyes chilled.

"H'm," said Benham, again.

113

CHAPTER XII

EXPOSED TO THE SUNLIGHT

It was a month before Trevison went to town, again. Only once during that time did he see Rosalind Benham, for the Blakeleys had vacated, and goods and servants had arrived from the East and needed attention. Rosalind presided at the Bar B ranchhouse, under Agatha's chaperonage, and she had invited Trevison to visit her whenever the mood struck him. He had been in the mood many times, but had found no opportunity, for the various activities of range work claimed his attention. After a critical survey of Manti and vicinity, J. C. had climbed aboard his private car to be whisked to New York, where he reported to his Board of Directors that Manti would one day be one of the greatest commercial centers of the West.

Vague rumors of a legal tangle involving the land around Manti had reached Trevison's ears, and this morning he had jumped on Nigger, determined to run the rumors down. He made a wide swing, following the river, which took him miles from his own property and into the enormous basin which one day the engineers expected to convert into a mammoth lake from which the thirst of many dry acres of land was to be slaked; and halting Nigger near the mouth of the gorge, watched the many laborers, directed by various grades of bosses, at work building 114
the foundation of the dam. Later, he crossed the basin, followed the well-beaten trail up the slope to the level, and shortly he was in Hanrahan's saloon across the street from Braman's bank, listening to the plaint of Jim Lefingwell, the Circle Cross owner, whose ranch was east of town. Lefingwell was big, florid, and afflicted with perturbation that was almost painful. So exercised was he that he was at times almost incoherent.

“She’s boomin’, ain’t she? Meanin’ this man’s town, of course. An’ a man’s got a right to cash in on a boom whenever he gits the chance. Well, I’d figgered to cash in. I ain’t no hawg an’ I got savvy enough to perceive without the aid of any damn fortune-teller that cattle is done in this country—considered as the main question. I’ve got a thousand acres of land—which I paid for in spot cash to Dick Kessler about eight years ago. If Dick was here he’d back me up in that. But he ain’t here—the doggone fool went an’ died about four years ago, leavin’ me unprotected. Well, now, not digressin’ any, I gits the idea that I’m goin’ to unload consid’able of my thousand acres on the sufferin’ fools that’s yearnin’ to come into this country an’ work their heads off raisin’ alfalfa an’ hawgs, an’ cabbages an’ sons with Pick-a-dilly collars to be eddicated East an’ come back home some day an’ lift the mortgage from the old homestead—which job they always falls down on—findin’ it more to their likin’ to mortgage their souls to buy jew’l’ry for fast wimmin. Well, not digressin’ any, I run a-foul of a guy last week which was dead set on investin’ 115
in ten acres of my land, skirtin’ one of the irrigation ditches which they’re figgerin’ on puttin’ in. The price I wanted was a heap satisfyin’ to the guy. But he suggests that before he forks over the coin we go down to the courthouse an’ muss up the records to see if my title is clear. Well, not digressin’ any, she ain’t! She ain’t even nowheres clear a-tall—she ain’t even there! She’s wiped off, slick an’ clean! There ain’t a damned line to show that I ever bought my land from Dick Kessler, an’ there ain’t nothin’ on no record to show that Dick Kessler ever owned it! What in hell do you think of that?

“Now, not digressin’ any,” he went on as Trevison essayed to speak; “that ain’t the worst of it. While I was in there, talkin’ to Judge Lindman, this here big guy that you fit with—Corrigan—comes in. I gathers from the trend of his remarks that I never had a legal title to my land—that it belongs to the guy which bought it from the Midland Company—which is him. Now what in hell do you think of that?”

“I knew Dick Kessler,” said Trevison, soberly. “He was honest.”

“Square as a dollar!” violently affirmed Lefingwell.

“It’s too bad,” sympathized Trevison. “That places you in a mighty bad fix. If there’s anything I can do for you, why—”

“Mr. ‘Brand’ Trevison?” said a voice at Trevison’s elbow. Trevison turned, to see a short, heavily built man smiling mildly at him.

“I’m a deputy from Judge Lindman’s court,” announced the man. “I’ve got a summons for you. Saw you coming in here—saves me a trip to your place.” He shoved a paper into Trevison’s 116
hands, grinned, and went out. For an instant Trevison stood, looking after the man, wondering how, since the man was a stranger to him, he had recognized him—and then he opened the paper to discover that he was ordered to appear before Judge Lindman the following day to show cause why he should not be evicted from certain described property held unlawfully by him. The name, Jefferson Corrigan, appeared as plaintiff in the action.

Lefingwell was watching Trevison’s face closely, and when he saw it whiten, he muttered, understandingly:

“You’ve got it, too, eh?”

“Yes.” Trevison shoved the paper into a pocket. “Looks like you’re not going to be skinned alone, Lefingwell. Well, so-long; I’ll see you later.”

He strode out, leaving Lefingwell slightly stunned over his abrupt leave-taking. A minute later he was in the squatty frame courthouse, towering above Judge Lindman, who had been seated at his desk and who had risen at his entrance.

Trevison shoved the summons under Lindman’s nose.

“I just got this,” he said. “What does it mean?”

“It is perfectly understandable,” the Judge smiled with forced affability. “The plaintiff, Mr. Jefferson Corrigan, is a claimant to the title of the land now held by you.”

“Corrigan can have no claim on my land; I bought it five years ago from old Buck Peters. He got it from a man named Taylor. Corrigan is bluffing.”

The Judge coughed and dropped his gaze from the belligerent eyes of the young man. “That will 117
be determined in court,” he said. “The entire land transactions in this county, covering a period of twenty-five years, are recorded in that book.” And the Judge indicated a ledger on his desk.

“I’ll take a look at it.” Trevison reached for the ledger, seized it, the Judge protesting, half-heartedly, though with the judicial dignity that had become habitual from long service in his profession.

“This is a high-handed proceeding, young man. You are in contempt of court!” The Judge tried, but could not make his voice ring sincerely. It seemed to him that this vigorous, clear-eyed young man could see the guilt that he was trying to hide.

Trevison laughed grimly, holding the Judge off with one hand while he searched the pages of the book, leaning over the desk. He presently closed the book with a bang and faced the Judge, breathing heavily, his muscles rigid, his eyes cold and glittering.

“There’s trickery here!” He took the ledger up and slammed it down on the desk again, his voice vibrating. “Judge Lindman, this isn’t a true record—it is not the original record! I saw the original record five years ago, when I went personally to Dry Bottom with Buck Peters to have my deed recorded! This record is a fake—it has been substituted for the original! I demand that

you stay proceedings in this matter until a search can be made for the original record!"

"This is the original record." Again the Judge tried to make his voice ring sincerely, and again he failed. His one mistake had not hardened him and judicial dignity could not help him to conceal his guilty knowledge. He winced as he felt Trevison's burning gaze on him, and could not meet the young man's eyes, boring like metal points into his consciousness. Trevison sprang forward and seized him by the shoulders.

"By God—you know it isn't the original!"

The Judge succeeded in meeting Trevison's eyes, but his age, his vacillating will, his guilt, could not combat the overpowering force and virility of this volcanic youth, and his gaze shifted and fell.

He heard Trevison catch his breath—shrilling it into his lungs in one great sob—and then he stood, white and shaking, beside the desk, looking at Trevison as the young man went out of the door—a laugh on his lips, mirthless, bitter, portending trouble and violence.

Corrigan was sitting at his desk in the bank building when Trevison entered the front door. The big man seemed to have been expecting his visitor, for just before the latter appeared at the door Corrigan took a pistol from a pocket and laid it on the desk beside him, placing a sheet of paper over it. He swung slowly around and faced Trevison, cold interest in his gaze. He nodded shortly as Trevison's eyes met his.

In a dozen long strides Trevison was at his side. The young man was pale, his lips were set, he was breathing fast, his nostrils were dilated—he was at that pitch of excitement in which a word, a look or a movement brings on action, instantaneous, unrecking of consequences. But he exercised repression that made the atmosphere of the room tingle with tension of the sort that precedes the clash of mighty forces—he deliberately sat on one corner of Corrigan's desk, one leg dangling, the other resting on the floor, one hand resting on the idle leg, his body bent, his shoulders drooping a little forward. His voice was dry and light—Patrick Carson would have said his grin was tiger-like.

"So that's the kind of a whelp you are!" he said.

Corrigan caught his breath; his hands clenched, his face reddened darkly. He shot a quick glance at the sheet of paper under which he had placed the pistol. Trevison interpreted it, brushed the paper aside, disclosing the weapon. His lips curled; he took the pistol, "broke" it, tossed cartridges and weapon into a corner of the desk and laughed lowly.

"So you were expecting me," he said. "Well, I'm here. You want my land, eh?"

"I want the land that I'm entitled to under the terms of my purchase—the original Midland grant, consisting of one-hundred thousand acres. It belongs to me, and I mean to have it!"

"You're a liar, Corrigan," said the young man, holding the other's gaze coldly; "you're a lying, sneaking crook. You have no claim to the land, and you know it!"

Corrigan smiled stiffly. "The record of the deal I made with Jim Marchmont years before any of you people usurped the property is in my pocket at this minute. The court, here, will uphold it."

Trevison narrowed his eyes at the big man and laughed, bitter humor in the sound. It was as though he had laughed to keep his rage from leaping, naked and murderous, into this discussion.

"It takes nerve, Corrigan, to do what you are attempting; it does, by Heaven—sheer, brazen gall! It's been done, though, by little, pettifogging shysters, by piking real-estate crooks—thousands of parcels of property scattered all over the United States have been filched in that manner. But a hundred-thousand acres! It's the biggest steal that ever has been attempted, to my knowledge, short of a Government grab, and your imagination does you credit. It's easy to see what's been done. You've got a fake title from Marchmont, antedating ours; you've got a crooked judge here, to befuddle the thing with legal technicalities; you've got the money, the power, the greed, and the cold-blooded determination. But I don't think you understand what you're up against—do you? Nearly every man who owns this land that you want has worked hard for it. It's been bought with work, man—work and lonesomeness and blood—and souls. And now you want to sweep it all away with one stroke. You want to step in here and reap the benefit; you want to send us out of here, beggars." His voice leaped from its repression; it now betrayed the passion that was consuming him; it came through his teeth: "You can't hand me that sort of a raw deal, Corrigan, and make me like it. Understand that, right now. You're bucking the wrong man. You can drag the courts into it; you can wriggle around a thousand legal corners, but damn you, you can't avert what's bound to come if you don't lay off this deal, and that's a fight!" He laughed, full-throated, his voice vibrating from the strength of the passion that blazed in his eyes. He revealed, for an instant to Corrigan the wild, reckless untamed youth that knew no law save his own impulses, and the big man's eyes widened with the revelation, though he gave no other sign. He leaned back in his chair, smiling coldly, idly flecking a bit of ash from his shirt where it had fallen from his cigar.

"I am prepared for a fight. You'll get plenty of it before you're through—if you don't lie down and be good." There was malice in his look, complacent consciousness of his power. More, there was an impulse to reveal to this young man whom he intended to ruin, at least one of the motives that was driving him. He yielded to the impulse.

"I'm going to tell you something. I think I would have let you out of this deal, if you hadn't been

so fresh. But you made a grand-stand play before the girl I am going to marry. You showed off your horse to make a bid for her favor. You paraded before her window in the car to attract her attention. I saw you. You rode me down. You'll get no mercy. I'm going to break you. I'm going to send you back to your father, Brandon, senior, in worse condition than when you left, ten years ago." He sneered as Trevison started and stepped on the floor, rigid.

"How did you recognize me?" Curiosity had dulled the young man's passion; his tone was hoarse.

"How?" Corrigan laughed, mockingly. "Did you think you could repose any confidence in a woman you have known only about a month? Did you think she wouldn't tell me—her promised husband? She has told me—everything that she succeeded in getting out of you. She is heart and soul with me in this deal. She is ambitious. Do you think she would hesitate to sacrifice a clod-hopper like you? She's very clever, Trevison; she's deep, and more than a match for you in wits. Fight, if you like, you'll get no sympathy there." 122

Trevison's faith in Miss Benham had received a shock; Corrigan's words had not killed it, however.

"You're a liar!" he said.

Corrigan flushed, but smiled icily. "How many people know that you have coal on your land, Trevison?"

He saw Trevison's hands clench, and he laughed in grim amusement. It pleased him to see his enemy writhe and squirm before him; the grimness came because of a mental picture, in his mind at this minute, of Trevison confiding in the girl. He looked up, the smile freezing on his lips, for within a foot of his chest was the muzzle of Trevison's pistol. He saw the trigger finger contracting; saw Trevison's free hand clenched, the muscles corded and knotted—he felt the breathless, strained, unreal calm that precedes tragedy, grim and swift. He slowly stiffened, but did not shrink an inch. It took him seconds to raise his gaze to Trevison's face, and then he caught his breath quickly and smiled with straight lips.

"No; you won't do it, Trevison," he said, slowly; "you're not that kind." He deliberately swung around in the chair and drew another cigar from a box on the desk top, lit it and leaned back, again facing the pistol. 123

Trevison restored the pistol to the holster, brushing a hand uncertainly over his eyes as though to clear his mental vision, for the shock that had come with the revelation of Miss Benham's duplicity had made his brain reel with a lust to kill. He laughed hollowly. His voice came cold and hard:

"You're right—it wouldn't do. It would be plain murder, and I'm not quite up to that. You know your men, don't you—you coyote's whelp! You know I'll fight fair. You'll do yours underhandedly. Get up! There's your gun! Load it! Let's see if you've got the nerve to face a gun, with one in your own hand!"

"I'll do my fighting in my own way." Corrigan's eyes kindled, but he did not move. Trevison made a gesture of contempt, and wheeled, to go. As he turned he caught a glimpse of a hand holding a pistol, as it vanished into a narrow crevice between a jamb and the door that led to the rear room. He drew his own weapon with a single movement, and swung around to Corrigan, his muscles tensed, his eyes alert and chill with menace.

"I'll bore you if you wink an eyelash!" he warned, in a whisper.

He leaped, with the words, to the door, lunging against it, sending it crashing back so that it smashed against the wall, overbalancing some boxes that reposed on a shelf and sending them clattering. He stood in the opening, braced for another leap, tall, big, his muscles swelling and rippling, recklessly eager. Against the partition, which was still swaying, his arms outstretched, a pistol in one hand, trying to crowd still farther back to escape the searching glance of Trevison's eyes, was Braman. 124

He had overheard Trevison's tense whisper to Corrigan. The cold savagery in it had paralyzed him, and he gasped as Trevison's eyes found him, and the pistol that he tried to raise dangled futilely from his nerveless fingers. It thudded heavily upon the boards of the floor an instant later, a shriek of fear mingling with the sound as he went down in a heap from a vicious, deadening blow from Trevison's fist.

Trevison's leap upon Braman had been swift; he was back in the doorway instantly, looking at Corrigan, his eyes ablaze with rage, wild, reckless, bitter. He laughed—the sound of it brought a grayish pallor to Corrigan's face.

"That explains your nerve!" he taunted. "It's a frame-up. You sent the deputy after me—pointed me out when I went into Hanrahan's! That's how he knew me! You knew I'd come in here to have it out with you, and you figured to have Braman shoot me when my back was turned! Ha, ha!" He swung his pistol on Corrigan; the big man gripped the arms of his chair and sat rigid, staring, motionless. For an instant there was no sound. And then Trevison laughed again.

"Bah!" he said; "I can't use your methods! You're safe so long as you don't move." He laughed again as he looked down at the banker. Reaching down, he grasped the inert man by the scruff of the neck and dragged him through the door, out into the banking room, past Corrigan, who watched him wonderingly and to the front, there he dropped him and turning, answered the question that he saw shining in Corrigan's eyes: 125

“I don’t work in the dark! We’ll take this case out into the sunlight, so the whole town can have a look at it!”

He stooped swiftly, grasped Braman around the middle, swung him aloft and hurled him through the window, into the street, the glass, shattered, clashing and jangling around him. He turned to Corrigan, laughing lowly:

“Get up. Manti will want to know. I’m going to do the talking!”

He forced Corrigan to the front door, and stood on the threshold behind him, silent, watching.

A hundred doorways were vomiting men. The crash of glass had carried far, and visions of a bank robbery filled many brains as their owners raced toward the doorway where Trevison stood, the muzzle of his pistol jammed firmly against Corrigan’s back.

The crowd gathered, in the manner peculiar to such scenes, coming from all directions and converging at one point, massing densely in front of the bank building, surrounding the fallen banker, pushing, jostling, straining, craning necks for better views, eager-voiced, curious.

No one touched Braman. On the contrary, there were many in the front fringe that braced their bodies against the crush, shoving backward, crying that a man was hurt and needed breathing space. They were unheeded, and when the banker presently recovered consciousness he was lifted to his feet and stood, pressed close to the building, swaying dizzily, pale, weak and shaken. 126

Word had gone through the crowd that it was not a robbery, for there were many there who knew Trevison; they shouted greetings to him, and he answered them, standing back of Corrigan, grim and somber.

Foremost in the crowd was Mullarky, who on another day had seen a fight at this same spot. He had taken a stand directly in front of the door of the bank, and had been using his eyes and his wits rapidly since his coming. And when two or three men from the crowd edged forward and tried to push their way to Corrigan, Mullarky drew a pistol, leaped to the door landing beside Trevison and trained his weapon, on them.

“Stand back, or I’ll plug you, sure as I’m a foot high! There’s hell to pay here, an’ me friend gets a square deal—whatever he’s done!”

“Right!” came other voices from various points in the crowd; “a square deal—no interference!”

Judge Lindman came out into the street, urged by curiosity. He had stepped down from the doorway of the courthouse and had instantly been carried with the crowd to a point directly in front of Corrigan and Trevison, where he stood, bare-headed, pale, watching silently. Corrigan saw him, and smiled faintly at him. The easterner’s eye sought out several faces in the crowd near him, and when he finally caught the gaze of a certain individual who had been eyeing him inquiringly for some moments, he slowly closed an eye and moved his head slightly toward the rear of the building. Instantly the man whistled shrilly with his fingers, as though to summon someone far down the street, and slipping around the edge of the crowd made his way around to the rear of the bank building, where he was joined presently by other men, roughly garbed, who carried pistols. One of them climbed in through a window, opened the door, and the others—numbering now twenty-five or thirty, dove into the room. 127

Out in front a silence had fallen. Trevison had lifted a hand and the crowd strained its ears to hear.

“I’ve caught a crook!” declared Trevison, the frenzy of fight still surging through his veins. “He’s not a cheap crook—I give him credit for that. All he wants to do is to steal the whole county. He’ll do it, too, if we don’t head him off. I’ll tell you more about him in a minute. There’s another of his stripe.” He pointed to Braman, who cringed. “I threw him out through the window, where the sunlight could shine on him. He tried to shoot me in the back—the big crook here, framed up on me. I want you all to know what you’re up against. They’re after all the land in this section; they’ve clouded every title. It’s a raw, dirty deal. I see now, why they haven’t sold a foot of the land they own here; why they’ve shoved the cost of leases up until it’s ruination to pay them. They’re land thieves, commercial pirates. They’re going to euchre everybody out of—”

Trevison caught a gasp from the crowd—concerted, sudden. He saw the mass sway in unison, stiffen, stand rigid; and he turned his head quickly, to see the door behind him, and the broken window through which he had thrown Braman—the break running the entire width of the building—filled with men armed with rifles. 128

He divined the situation, sensed his danger—the danger that faced the crowd should one of its members make a hostile movement.

“Steady there, boys!” he shouted. “Don’t start anything. These men are here through prearrangement—it’s another frame-up. Keep your guns out of sight!” He turned, to see Corrigan grinning contemptuously at him. He met the look with naked exultation and triumph.

“Got your body-guard within call, eh?” he jeered. “You need one. You’ve cut me short, all right; but I’ve said enough to start a fire that will rage through this part of the country until every damned thief is burned out! You’ve selected the wrong man for a victim, Corrigan.”

He stepped down into the street, sheathing his pistol. He heard Corrigan’s voice, calling after him, saying:

“Grand-stand play again!”

Trevison turned; the gaze of the two men met, held, their hatred glowing bitter in their eyes; the gaze broke, like two sharp blades rasping apart, and Corrigan turned to his deputies, scowling; while Trevison pushed his way through the crowd.

Five minutes later, while Corrigan was talking with the deputies and Braman in the rear room of the bank building, Trevison was standing in the courthouse talking with Judge Lindman. The Judge stared out into the street at some members of the crowd that still lingered. 129

"This town will be a volcano of lawlessness if it doesn't get a square deal from you, Lindman," said Trevison. "You have seen what a mob looks like. You're the representative of justice here, and if we don't get justice we'll come and hang you in spite of a thousand deputies! Remember that!"

He stalked out, leaving behind him a white-faced, trembling old man who was facing a crisis which made the future look very black and dismal. He was wondering if, after all, hanging wouldn't be better than the sunlight shining on a deed which each day he regretted more than on the preceding day. And Trevison, riding Nigger out of town, was estimating the probable effect of his crowd-drawing action upon Judge Lindman, and considering bitterly the perfidy of the woman who had cleverly drawn him on, to betray him.

130

CHAPTER XIII

ANOTHER LETTER

That afternoon, Corrigan rode to the Bar B. The ranchhouse was of the better class, big, imposing, well-kept, with a wide, roofed porch running across the front and partly around both sides. It stood in a grove of fir-balsam and cottonwood, on a slight eminence, and could be seen for miles from the undulating trail that led to Manti. Corrigan arrived shortly after noon, to find Rosalind gone, for a ride, Agatha told him, after she had greeted him at the edge of the porch.

Agatha had not been pleased over Rosalind's rides with Trevison as a companion. She was loyal to her brother, and she did not admire the bold recklessness that shone so frankly and unmistakably in Trevison's eyes. Had she been Rosalind she would have preferred the big, sleek, well-groomed man of affairs who had called today. And because of her preference for Corrigan, she sat long on the porch with him and told him many things—things that darkened the big man's face. And when, as they were talking, Rosalind came, Agatha discreetly retired, leaving the two alone.

For a time after the coming of Rosalind, Corrigan sat in a big rocking chair, looking thoughtfully down the Manti trail, listening to the girl talk of the country, picturing her on a distant day—not too distant, either, for he meant to press his suit—sitting beside him on the porch of another house that he meant to build when he had achieved his goal. These thoughts thrilled him as they had never thrilled him until the entrance of Trevison into his scheme of things. He had been sure of her then. And now the knowledge that he had a rival, filled him with a thousand emotions, the most disturbing of which was jealousy. The rage in him was deep and malignant as he coupled the mental pictures of his imagination with the material record of Rosalind's movements with his rival, as related by Agatha. It was not his way to procrastinate; he meant to exert every force at his command, quickly, resistlessly, to destroy Trevison, to blacken him and damn him, in the eyes of the girl who sat beside him. But he knew that in the girl's presence he must be wise and subtle. 131

"It's a great country, isn't it?" he said, his eyes on the broad reaches of plain, green-brown in the shimmering sunlight. "Look at it—almost as big as some of the Old-world states! It's a wonderful country. I feel like a feudal baron, with the destinies of an important principality in the clutch of my hand!"

"Yes; it must give one a feeling of great responsibility to know that one has an important part in the development of a section like this."

He laughed, deep in his throat, at the awe in her voice. "I ought to have seen its possibilities years ago—I should have been out here, preparing for this. But when I bought the land I had no idea it would one day be so valuable." 132

"Bought it?"

"A hundred thousand acres of it. I got it very cheap." He told her about the Midland grant and his purchase from Marchmont.

"I never heard of that before!" she told him.

"It wasn't generally known. In fact, it was apparently generally considered that the land had been sold by the Midland Company to various people—in small parcels. Unscrupulous agents engineered the sales, I suppose. But the fact is that I made the purchase from the Midland Company years ago—largely as a personal favor to Jim Marchmont, who needed money badly. And a great many of the ranch-owners around here really have no title to their land, and will

have to give it up."

She breathed deeply. "That will be a great disappointment to them, now that there exists the probability of a great advance in the value of the land."

"That was the owners' lookout. A purchaser should see that his deed is clear before closing a deal."

"What owners will be affected?" She spoke with a slight breathlessness.

"Many." He named some of them, leaving Trevison to the last, and then watching her furtively out of the corners of his eyes and noting, with straightened lips, the quick gasp she gave. She said nothing; she was thinking of the great light that had been in Trevison's eyes on the day he had told her of his ten years of exile; she could remember his words, they had been vivid 133
fixtures in her mind ever since: "I own five thousand acres, and about a thousand acres of it is the best coal land in the United States. I wouldn't sell it for love or money, for when your father gets his railroad running, I'm going to cash in on ten of the leanest and hardest and lonesomest years that any man ever put in."

How hard it would be for him to give it all up; to acknowledge defeat, to feel those ten wasted years behind him, empty, unproductive; full of shattered hopes and dreams changed to nightmares! She sat, white of face, gripping the arms of her chair, feeling a great, throbbing sympathy for him.

"You will take it all?"

"He will still hold one hundred and sixty acres—the quarter-section granted him by the government, which he has undoubtedly proved on."

"Why—" she began, and paused, for to go further would be to inject her personal affairs into the conversation.

"Trevison is an evil in the country," he went on, speaking in a judicial manner, but watching her narrowly. "It is men like him who retard civilization. He opposes law and order—defies them. It is a shock, I know, to learn that the title to property that you have regarded as your own for years, is in jeopardy. But still, a man can play the man and not yield to lawless impulses."

"What has happened?" She spoke breathlessly, for something in Corrigan's voice warned her.

"Very little—from Trevison's viewpoint, I suppose," he laughed. "He came into my office this 134
morning, after being served with a summons from Judge Lindman's court in regard to the title of his land, and tried to kill me. Failing in that, he knocked poor, inoffensive little Braman down —who had interfered in my behalf—and threw him bodily through the front window of the building, glass and all. It's lucky for him that Braman wasn't hurt. After that he tried to incite a riot, which Judge Lindman nipped in the bud by sending a number of deputies, armed with rifles, to the scene. It was a wonderful exhibition of outlawry. I was very sorry to have it happen, and any more such outbreaks will result in Trevison's being jailed—if not worse."

"My God!" she panted, in a whisper, and became lost in deep thought.

They sat for a time, without speaking. She studied the profile of the man and compared its reposeful strength with that of the man who had ridden with her many times since her coming to Blakeley's. The turbulent spirit of Trevison awed her now, frightened her—she feared for his future. But she pitied him; the sympathy that gripped her made icy shivers run over her.

"From what I understand, Trevison has always been a disturber," resumed Corrigan. "He disgraced himself at college, and afterwards—to such an extent that his father cut him off. He hasn't changed, apparently; he is still doing the same old tricks. He had some sort of a love affair before coming West, your father told me. God help the girl who marries him!" 135

The girl flushed at the last sentence; she replied to the preceding one:

"Yes. Hester Keyes threw him over, after he broke with his father."

She did not see Corrigan's eyes quicken, for she was wondering if, after all, Hester Keyes had not acted wisely in breaking with Trevison. Certainly, Hester had been in a position to know him better than some of those critics who had found fault with her for her action—herself, for instance. She sighed, for the memory of her ideal was dimming. A figure that represented violence and bloodshed had come in its place.

"Hester Keyes," said Corrigan, musingly. "Did she marry a fellow named Harvey—afterwards? Winslow Harvey, if I remember rightly. He died soon after?"

"Yes—do you know her?"

"Slightly." Corrigan laughed. "I knew her father. Well, well. So Trevison worshiped there, did he? Was he badly hurt—do you know?"

"I do not know."

"Well," said Corrigan, getting up, and speaking lightly, as though dismissing the subject from his mind; "I presume he was—and still is, for that matter. A person never forgets the first love." He smiled at her. "Won't you go with me for a short ride?"

The ride was taken, but a disturbing question lingered in Rosalind's mind throughout, and would not be solved. Had Trevison forgotten Hester Keyes? Did he think of her as—as—well, as she, herself, sometimes thought of Trevison—as she thought of him now—with a haunting 136
tenderness that made his faults recede, as the shadows vanish before the sunshine?

What Corrigan thought was expressed in a satisfied chuckle, as later, he loped his horse toward Manti. That night he wrote a letter and sent it East. It was addressed to Mrs. Hester Harvey, and was subscribed: “Your old friend, Jeff.”

CHAPTER XIV

A RUMBLE OF WAR

The train that carried Corrigan’s letter eastward bore, among its few other passengers, a young man with a jaw set like a steel trap, who leaned forward in his seat, gripping the back of the seat in front of him; an eager, smoldering light in his eyes, who rose at each stop the train made and glared belligerently and intolerantly at the coach ends, muttering guttural anathemas at the necessity for delays. The spirit of battle was personified in him; it sat on his squared shoulders; it was in the thrust of his chin, stuck out as though to receive blows, which his rippling muscles would be eager to return. Two other passengers in the coach watched him warily, and once, when he got up and walked to the front of the coach, opening the door and looking out, to let in the roar and whir and the clatter, one of the passengers remarked to the other: “That guy is in a temper where murder would come easy to him.”

The train left Manti at nine o’clock in the evening. At midnight it pulled up at the little frame station in Dry Bottom and the young man leaped off and strode rapidly away into the darkness of the desert town. A little later, J. Blackstone Graney, attorney at law, and former Judge of the United States District Court at Dry Bottom, heard a loud hammering on the door of his residence at the outskirts of town. He got up, with a grunt of resentment for all heavy-fisted fools abroad on midnight errands, and went downstairs to admit a grim-faced stranger who looked positively bloodthirsty to the Judge, under the nervous tension of his midnight awakening.

“I’m ‘Brand’ Trevison, owner of the Diamond K ranch, near Manti,” said the stranger, with blunt sharpness that made the Judge blink. “I’ve a case on in the Manti court at ten o’clock tomorrow —today,” he corrected. “They are going to try to swindle me out of my land, and I’ve got to have a lawyer—a real one. I could have got half a dozen in Manti—such as they are—but I want somebody who is wise in the law, and with the sort of honor that money and power can’t blast—I want you!”

Judge Graney looked sharply at his visitor, and smiled. “You are evidently desperately harried. Sit down and tell me about your case.” He waved to a chair and Trevison dropped into it, sitting on its edge. The Judge took another, and with the kerosene lamp between them on a table, Trevison related what had occurred during the previous morning in Manti. When he concluded, the Judge’s face was serious.

“If what you say is true, it is a very awkward, not to say suspicious, situation. Being the only lawyer in Dry Bottom, until the coming of Judge Lindman, I have had occasion many times to consult the record you speak of, and if my memory serves me well, I have noted several times—quite casually, of course, since I have never been directly concerned with the records of the land in your vicinity—that several transfers of title to the original Midland grant have been recorded. Your deed would show, of course, the date of your purchase from Buck Peters, and we shall, perhaps, be able to determine the authenticity of the present record in that manner. But if, as you believe, the records have been tampered with, we are facing a long, hard legal battle which may or may not result in an ultimate victory for us—depending upon the power behind the interests opposed to you.”

“I’ll fight them to the Supreme Court of the United States!” declared Trevison. “I’ll fight them with the law or without it!”

“I know it,” said Graney, with a shrewd glance at the other’s grim face. “But be careful not to do anything that will jeopardize your liberty. If those men are what you think they are, they would be only too glad to have you break some law that would give them an excuse to jail you. You couldn’t do much fighting then, you know.” He got up. “There’s a train out of here in about an hour—we’ll take it.”

About six o’clock that morning the two men stepped off the train at Manti. Graney went directly to a hotel, to wash and breakfast, while Trevison, a little tired and hollow-eyed from loss of sleep and excitement, and with a two days’ growth of beard on his face, which made him look worse than he actually felt, sought the livery stable where he had left Nigger the night before, mounted the animal and rode rapidly out of town toward the Diamond K. He took a trail that led through the cut where on another morning he had startled the laborers by riding down the wall —Nigger eating up the ground with long, sure, swift strides—passing Pat Carson and his men at a point on the level about a quarter of a mile beyond the cut. He waved a hand to Carson as he flashed by, and something in his manner caused Carson to remark to the engineer of the dinky engine: “Somethin’s up wid Trevison ag’in, Murph—he’s got a domned mean look in his eye. I’m the onluckiest son-av-a-gun in the worruld, Murph! First I miss seein’ this fire-eater bate the

face off the big ilephant, Corrigan, an' yisterday I was figgerin' on goin' to town—but didn't; an' I miss seein' that little whiffet of a Braman flyin' through the windy. Do ye's know that there's a feelin' ag'in Corrigan an' the railroad in town, an' thot this mon Trevison is the fuse that wud bust the boom av discontint. I'm beginnin' to feel a little excited meself. Now what do ye suppose that gang av min wid Winchesters was doin', comin' from thot direction this mornin'?" He pointed toward the trail that Trevison was riding. "An' that big stiff, Corrigan, wid thim!"

Trevison got the answer to this query the minute he reached the Diamond K ranchhouse. His foreman came running to him, pale, disgusted, his voice snapping like a whip:

"They've busted your desk an' rifled it. Twenty guys who said they was deputies from the court in Manti, an' Corrigan. I was here alone, watchin', as you told me, but couldn't move a finger—damn 'em!"

Trevison dismounted and ran into the house. The room that he used as an office was in a state of disorder. Papers, books, littered the floor. It was evident that a thorough search had been made—for something. Trevison darted to the desk and ran a hand into the pigeonhole in which he kept the deed which he had come for. The hand came out, empty. He sprang to the door of a small closet where, in a box that contained some ammunition that he kept for the use of his men, he had placed the money that Rosalind Benham had brought to him. The money was not there. He walked to the center of the room and stood for an instant, surveying the mass of litter around him, reeling, rage-drunken, murder in his heart. Barkwell, the foreman, watching him, drew great, long breaths of sympathy and excitement.

"Shall I get the boys an' go after them damn sneaks?" he questioned, his voice tremulous. "We'll clean 'em out—smoke 'em out of the county!" he threatened. He started for the door.

"Wait!" Trevison had conquered the first surge of passion; his grin was cold and bitter as he crossed glances with his foreman. "Don't do anything—yet. I'm going to play the peace string out. If it doesn't work, why then—" He tapped his pistol holster significantly.

"You get a few of the boys and stay here with them. It isn't probable that they'll try anything like that again, because they've got what they wanted. But if they happen to come again, hold them until I come. I'm going to court."

Later, in Manti, he was sitting opposite Graney in a room in the hotel to which the Judge had gone.

"H'm," said the latter, compressing his lips; "that's sharp practice. They are not wasting any time."

"Was it legal?"

"The law is elastic—some judges stretch it more than others. A search-warrant and a writ of attachment probably did the business in this case. What I can't understand is why Judge Lindman issued the writ at all—if he did so. You are the defendant, and you certainly would have brought the deed into court as a means of proving your case."

Trevison had mentioned the missing money, though he did not think it important to explain where it had come from. And Judge Graney did not ask him. But when court opened at the appointed time, with a dignity which was a mockery to Trevison, and Judge Graney had explained that he had come to represent the defendant in the action, he mildly inquired the reason for the forcible entry into his client's house, explaining also that since the defendant was required to prove his case it was optional with him whether or not the deed be brought into court at all.

Corrigan had been on time; he had nodded curtly to Trevison when he had entered to take the chair in which he now sat, and had smiled when Trevison had deliberately turned his back. He smiled when Judge Graney asked the question—a faint, evanescent smirk. But at Judge Lindman's reply he sat staring stolidly, his face an impenetrable mask:

"There was no mention of a deed in the writ of attachment issued by the court. Nor has the court any knowledge of the existence of such a deed. The officers of the court were commanded to proceed to the defendant's house, for the purpose of finding, if possible, and delivering to this court the sum of twenty-seven hundred dollars, which amount, representing the money paid to the defendant by the railroad company for certain grants and privileges, is to remain in possession of the court until the title to the land in litigation has been legally awarded."

"But the court officers seized the defendant's deed, also," objected Judge Graney.

Judge Lindman questioned a deputy who sat in the rear of the room. The latter replied that he had seen no deed. Yes, he admitted, in reply to a question of Judge Graney's, it might have been possible that Corrigan had been alone in the office for a time.

Graney looked inquiringly at Corrigan. The latter looked steadily back at him. "I saw no deed," he said, coolly. "In fact, it wouldn't be *possible* for me to see any deed, for Trevison has no title to the property he speaks of."

Judge Graney made a gesture of impotence to Trevison, then spoke slowly to the court. "I am afraid that without the deed it will be impossible for us to proceed. I ask a continuance until a search can be made."

Judge Lindman coughed. "I shall have to refuse the request. The plaintiff is anxious to take possession of his property, and as no reason has been shown why he should not be permitted to do so, I hereby return judgment in his favor. Court is dismissed."

“I give notice of appeal,” said Graney.

Outside a little later Judge Graney looked gravely at Trevison. “There’s knavery here, my boy; there’s some sort of influence behind Lindman. Let’s see some of the other owners who are likely to be affected.”

This task took them two days, and resulted in the discovery that no other owner had secured a deed to his land. Lefingwell explained the omission.

“A sale is a sale,” he said; “or a sale *has* been a sale until now. Land has changed hands out here just the same as we’d trade a horse for a cow or a pipe for a jack-knife. There was no questions asked. When a man had a piece of land to sell, he sold it, got his money an’ didn’t bother to give a receipt. Half the damn fools in this country wouldn’t know a deed from a marriage license, an’ they haven’t been needin’ one or the other. For when a man has a wife she’s continually remindin’ him of it, an’ he can’t forget it—he’s got her. It’s the same with his land—he’s got it. So far as I know there’s never been a deed issued for my land—or any of the land in that Midland grant, except Trevison’s.”

“It looks as though Corrigan had considered that phase of the matter,” dryly observed Judge Graney. “The case doesn’t look very hopeful. However, I shall take it before the Circuit Court of Appeals, in Santa Fe.”

He was gone a week, and returned, disgusted, but determined.

“They denied our appeal; said they might have considered it if we had some evidence to offer showing that we had some sort of a claim to the title. When I told them of my conviction that the 145
records had been tampered with, they laughed at me.” The Judge’s eyes gleamed indignantly. “Sometimes, I feel heartily in sympathy with people who rail at the courts—their attitude is often positively asinine.”

“Perhaps the long arm of power has reached to Santa Fe?” suggested Trevison.

“It won’t reach to Washington,” declared the Judge, decisively. “And if you say the word, I’ll go there and see what I can do. It’s an outrage!”

“I was hoping you’d go—there’s no limit,” said Trevison. “But as I see the situation, everything depends upon the discovery of the original record. I’m convinced that it is still in existence, and that Judge Lindman knows where it is. I’m going to get it, or—”

“Easy, my friend,” cautioned the Judge. “I know how you feel. But you can’t fight the law with lawlessness. You lie quiet until you hear from me. That is all there is to be done, anyway—win or lose.”

Trevison clenched his teeth. “I might feel that way about it, if I had been as careless of my interests as the other owners here, but I safeguarded my interests, trusted them to the regularly recognized law out here, and I’m going to fight for them! Why, good God, man; I’ve worked ten years for that land! Do you think I will see it go *without* a fight?” He laughed, and the Judge shook his head at the sound.

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CHAPTER XV

A MUTUAL BENEFIT ASSOCIATION

Unheeding the drama that was rapidly and invisibly (except for the incident of Braman and the window) working itself out in its midst, Manti lunged forward on the path of progress, each day growing larger, busier, more noisy and more important. Perhaps Manti did not heed, because Manti was itself a drama—the drama of creation. Each resident, each newcomer, settled quickly and firmly into the place that desire or ambition or greed urged him; put forth whatever energy nature had endowed him with, and pushed on toward the goal toward which the town was striving—success; collectively winning, unrecking of individual failure or tragedy—those things were to be expected, and they fell into the limbo of forgotten things, easily and unnoticed. Wrecks, disasters, were certain. They came—turmoil engulfed them.

Which is to say that during the two weeks that had elapsed since the departure of Judge Graney for Washington, Manti had paid very little attention to “Brand” Trevison while he haunted the telegraph station and the post-office for news. He was pointed out, it is true, as the man who had hurled banker Braman through the window of his bank building; there was a hazy 147
understanding that he was having some sort of trouble with Corrigan over some land titles, but in the main Manti buzzed along, busy with its visions and its troubles, leaving Trevison with his.

The inaction, with the imminence of failure after ten years of effort, had its effect on Trevison. It fretted him; he looked years older; he looked worried and harassed; he longed for a chance to come to grips in an encounter that would ease the strain. Physical action it must be, for his brain was a muddle of passion and hatred in which clear thoughts, schemes, plans, plots, were swallowed and lost. He wanted to come into physical contact with the men and things that were

thwarting him; he wanted to feel the thud and jar of blows; to catch the hot breath of open antagonism; he yearned to feel the strain of muscles—this fighting in the dark with courts and laws and lawyers, according to rules and customs, filled him with a raging impotence that hurt him. And then, at the end of two weeks came a telegram from Judge Graney, saying merely: “Be patient. It’s a long trail.”

Trevison got on Nigger and returned to the Diamond K.

The six o’clock train arrived in Manti that evening with many passengers, among whom was a woman of twenty-eight at whom men turned to look the second time. Her traveling suit spoke eloquently of that personal quality which a language, seeking new and expressive phrases describes as “class.” It fitted her smoothly, tightly, revealing certain lines of her graceful figure that made various citizens of Manti gasp. “Looks like she’d been poured into it,” remarked an interested lounger. She lingered on the station platform until she saw her trunks safely deposited, and then, drawing her skirts as though fearful of contamination, she walked, self-possessed and cool, through the doorway of the *Castle* hotel—Manti’s aristocrat of hostelries.

Shortly afterwards she admitted Corrigan to her room. She had changed from her traveling suit to a gown of some soft, glossy material that accentuated the lines revealed by the discarded habit. The worldly-wise would have viewed the lady with a certain expressive smile that might have meant much or nothing. And the lady would have looked upon that smile as she now looked at Corrigan, with a faint defiance that had quite a little daring in it. But in the present case there was an added expression—two, in fact—pleasure and expectancy.

“Well—I’m here.” She bowed, mockingly, laughingly, compressing her lips as she noted the quick fire that flamed in her visitor’s eyes.

“That’s all over, Jeff; I won’t go back to it. If that’s why—”

“That’s all right,” he said, smiling as he took the chair she waved him to; “I’ve erased a page or two from the past, myself. But I can’t help admiring you; you certainly are looking fine! What have you been doing to yourself?”

She draped herself in a chair where she could look straight at him, and his compliment made her mouth harden at the corners.

“Well,” she said; “in your letter you promised you’d take me into your confidence. I’m ready.”

“It’s purely a business proposition. Each realizes on his effort. You help me to get Rosalind Benham through the simple process of fascinating Trevison; I help you to get Trevison by getting Miss Benham. It’s a sort of mutual benefit association, as it were.”

“What does Trevison look like, Jeff—tell me?” The woman leaned forward in her chair, her eyes glowing.

“Oh, you women!” said Corrigan, with a gesture of disgust. “He’s a handsome fool,” he added; “if that’s what you want to know. But I haven’t any compliments to hand him regarding his manners—he’s a wild man!”

“I’d love to see him!” breathed the woman.

“Well, keep your hair on; you’ll see him soon enough. But you’ve got to understand this: He’s on my land, and he gets off without further fighting—if you can hold him. That’s understood, eh? You win him back and get him away from here. If you double-cross me, he finds out what you are!” He flung the words at her, roughly.

She spoke quietly, though color stained her cheeks. “Not ‘are,’ Jeff—what I was. That would be bad enough. But have no fear—I shall do as you ask. For I want him—I have wanted him all the time—even during the time I was chained to that little beast, Harvey. I wouldn’t have been what I am—if—if—”

“Cut it out!” he advised brutally; “the man always gets the blame, anyway—so it’s no novelty to hear that sort of stuff. So you understand, eh? You choose your own method—but get results—quick! I want to get that damned fool away from here!” He got up and paced back and forth in the room. “If he takes Rosalind Benham away from me I’ll kill him! I’ll kill him, anyway!”

“Has it gone very far between them?” The concern in her voice brought a harsh laugh from Corrigan.

“Far enough, I guess. He’s been riding with her; every day for three weeks, her aunt told me. He’s a fiery, impetuous devil!”

“Don’t worry,” she consoled. “And now,” she directed; “get out of here. I’ve been on the go for days and days, and I want to sleep. I shall go out to see Rosalind tomorrow—to surprise her, Jeff—to surprise her. Ha, ha!”

“I’ll have a rig here for you at nine o’clock,” said Corrigan. “Take your trunks—she won’t order you away. Tell her that Trevison sent for you—don’t mention my name; and stick to it! Well, pleasant dreams,” he added as he went out.

As the door closed the woman stood looking at it, a sneer curving her lips.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEREIN A WOMAN LIES

“Aren’t you going to welcome me, dearie?”

From the porch of the Bar B ranchhouse Rosalind had watched the rapid approach of the buckboard, and she now stood at the edge of the step leading to the porch, not more than ten or fifteen feet distant from the vehicle, shocked into dumb amazement.

“Why, yes—of course. That is—Why, what on earth brought you out here?”

“A perfectly good train—as far as your awfully crude town of Manti; and this—er—spring-legged thing, the rest of the way,” laughed Hester Harvey. She had stepped down, a trifle flushed, inwardly amused, outwardly embarrassed—which was very good acting; but looking very attractive and girlish in the simple dress she had donned for the occasion—and for the purpose of making a good impression. So attractive was she that the contemplation of her brought a sinking sensation to Rosalind that drooped her shoulders, and caused her to look around, involuntarily, for something to lean upon. For there flashed into her mind at this instant the conviction that she had herself to blame for this visitation—she had written to Ruth Gresham, and Ruth very likely had disseminated the news, after the manner of all secrets, and Hester had heard it. And of course the attraction was “Brand” Trevison! A new emotion surged through Rosalind at this thought, an emotion so strong that it made her gasp—jealousy!

She got through the ordeal somehow—with an appearance of pleasure—though it was hard for her to play the hypocrite! But so soon as she decently could, without cutting short the inevitable inconsequential chatter which fills the first moments of renewed friendships, she hurried Hester to a room and during her absence sat immovable in her chair on the porch staring stonily out at the plains.

It was not until half an hour later, when they were sitting on the porch, that Hester delivered the stroke that caused Rosalind’s hands to fall nervelessly into her lap, her lips to quiver and her eyes to fill with a reflection of a pain that gripped her hard, somewhere inside. For Hester had devised her method, as suggested by Corrigan.

“It may seem odd to you—if you know anything of the manner of my breaking off with Trevison Brandon—but he wrote me about a month ago, asking me to come out here. I didn’t accept the invitation at once—because I didn’t want him to be too sure, you know, dearie. Men are always presuming and pursuing, dearie.”

“Then you didn’t hear of Trevison’s whereabouts from Ruth Gresham?”

“Why, no, dearie! He wrote directly to me.”

Rosalind hadn’t *that* to reproach herself with, at any rate!

“Of course, I couldn’t go to his ranch—the Diamond K, isn’t it?—so, noting from one of the newspapers that you had come here, I decided to take advantage of *your* hospitality. I’m just wild to see the dear boy! Is his ranch far? For you know,” she added, with a malicious look at the girl’s pale face; “I must not keep him waiting, now that I am here.”

“You won’t find him prosperous.” It hurt Rosalind to say that, but the hurt was slightly offset by a savage resentment that gripped her when she thought of how quickly Hester had thrown Trevison over when she had discovered that he was penniless. And she had a desperate hope that the dismal aspect of Trevison’s future would appall Hester—as it would were the woman still the mercenary creature she had been ten years before. But Hester looked at her with grave imperturbability.

“I heard something about his trouble. About some land, isn’t it? I didn’t learn the particulars. Tell me about it—won’t you, dearie?”

Rosalind’s story of Trevison’s difficulties did not have the effect that she anticipated.

“The poor, dear boy!” said Hester—and she seemed genuinely moved. Rosalind gulped hard over the shattered ruins of this last hope and got up, fighting against an inhospitable impulse to order Hester away. She made some slight excuse and slipped to her room, where she stayed long, elemental passions battling riotously within her.

She realized now how completely she had yielded to the spell that the magnetic and impetuous exile had woven about her; she knew now that had he pressed her that day when he had told her of his love for her she must have surrendered. She thought, darkly, of his fiery manner that day, of his burning looks, his hot, impulsive words, of his confidences. Hypocrisy all! For while they had been together he must have been thinking of sending for Hester! He had been trifling with her! Faith in an ideal is a sacred thing, and shattered, it lights the fires of hate and scorn, and the emotions that seethed through Rosalind’s veins as in her room she considered Trevison’s unworthiness, finally developed into a furious vindictiveness. She wished dire, frightful calamities upon him, and then, swiftly reacting, her sympathetical womanliness forced the dark passions back, and she threw herself on the bed, sobbing, murmuring: “Forgive me!”

Later, when she had made herself presentable, she went downstairs again, concealing her misery behind a steady courtesy and a smile that sometimes was a little forced and bitter, to entertain her guest. It was a long, tiresome day, made almost unbearable by Hester’s small talk.

But she got through it. And when, rather late in the afternoon, Hester inquired the way to the Diamond K, announcing her intention of visiting Trevison immediately, she gave no evidence of the shocked surprise that seized her. She coolly helped Hester prepare for the trip, and when she drove away in the buckboard, stood on the ground at the edge of the porch, watching as the buckboard and its occupant faded into the shimmering haze of the plains.

CHAPTER XVII

JUSTICE VS. LAW

Impatience, intolerable and vicious, gripped Trevison as he rode homeward after his haunting vigil at Manti. The law seemed to him to be like a house with many doors, around and through which one could play hide and seek indefinitely, with no possibility of finding one of the doors locked. Judge Graney had warned him to be cautious, but as he rode into the dusk of the plains the spirit of rebellion seized him. Twice he halted Nigger and wheeled him, facing Manti, already agleam and tumultuous, almost yielding to his yearning to return and force his enemy to some sort of physical action, but each time he urged the horse on, for he could think of no definite plan. He was half way to the Diamond K when he suddenly started and sat rigid and erect in the saddle, drawing a deep breath, his nerves tingling from excitement. He laughed lowly, exultingly, as men laugh when under the stress of adversity they devise sudden, bold plans of action, and responding to the slight knee press Nigger turned, reared, and then shot like a black bolt across the plains at an angle that would not take him anywhere near the Diamond K.

Half an hour later, in a darkness which equaled that of the night on which he had carried the limp and drink-saturated Clay Levins to his wife, Trevison was dismounting at the door of the gun-man's cabin. A little later, standing in the glare of lamplight that shone through the open doorway, he was reassuring Mrs. Levins and asking for her husband. Shortly afterward, he was talking lowly to Levins as the latter saddled his pony out at the stable.

"I'll do it—for you," Levins told him. And then he chuckled. "It'll seem like old times."

"It's Justice versus Law, tonight," laughed Trevison; "it's a case of 'the end justifying the means.'"

Manti never slept. At two o'clock in the morning the lights in the gambling rooms of the *Belmont* and the *Plaza* were still flickering streams out into the desert night; weak strains of discord were being drummed out of a piano in a dance hall; the shuffling of feet smote the dead, flat silence of the night with an odd, weird resonance. Here and there a light burned in a dwelling or store, or shone through the wall of a tent-house. But Manti's one street was deserted—the only peace that Manti ever knew, had descended.

Two men who had dismounted at the edge of town had hitched their horses in the shadow of a wagon shed in the rear of a store building, and were making their way cautiously down the railroad tracks toward the center of town. They kept in the shadows of the buildings as much as possible—for space was valuable now and many buildings nuzzled the railroad tracks; but when once they were forced to pass through a light from a window their faces were revealed in it for an instant—set, grim and determined.

"We've got to move quickly," said one of the men as they neared the courthouse; "it will be daylight soon. Damn a town that never sleeps!"

The other laughed lowly. "I've said the same thing, often," he whispered. "Easy now—here we are!"

They paused in the shadow of the building and whispered together briefly. A sound reached their ears as they stood. Peering around the corner nearest them they saw the bulk of a man appear. He walked almost to the corner of the building where they crouched, and they held their breath, tensing their muscles. Just when it seemed they must be discovered, the man wheeled, walked away, and vanished into the darkness toward the other side of the building. Presently he returned, and repeated the maneuver. As he vanished the second time, the larger man of the two in wait, whispered to the other:

"He's the sentry! Stand where you are—I'll show Corrigan—"

The words were cut short by the reappearance of the sentry. He came close to the corner, and wheeled, to return. A lithe black shape leaped like a huge cat, and landed heavily on the sentry's shoulders, bringing a pained grunt from him. The grunt died in a gurgle as iron fingers closed on his throat; he was jammed, face down, into the dust and held there, smothering, until his body slacked and his muscles ceased rippling. Then a handkerchief was slipped around his mouth and drawn tightly. He was rolled over, still unconscious, his hands tied behind him. Then he was borne away into the darkness by the big man, who carried him as though he were a child.

“Locked in a box-car,” whispered the big man, returning: “They’ll get him; they’re half unloaded.”

Without further words they returned to the shadow of the building.

Judge Lindman had not been able to sleep until long after his usual hour for retiring. The noise, and certain thoughts, troubled him. It was after midnight when he finally sought his cot, and he was in a heavy doze until shortly after two, when a breath of air, chilled by its clean sweep over the plains, searched him out and brought him up, sitting on the edge of the cot, shivering.

The rear door of the courthouse was open. In front of the iron safe at the rear of the room he saw a man, faintly but unmistakably outlined in the cross light from two windows. He was about to cry out when his throat was seized from behind and he was borne back on the cot resistlessly. Held thus, a voice which made him strain his eyes in an effort to see the owner’s face, hissed in his ear:

“I don’t want to kill you, but I’ll do it if you cry out! I mean business! Do you promise not to betray us?”

The Judge wagged his head weakly, and the grip on his throat relaxed. He sat up, aware that the fingers were ready to grip his throat again, for he could feel the big shape lingering beside him. 159

“This is an outrage!” he gasped, shuddering. “I know you—you are Trevison. I shall have you punished for this.”

The other laughed lowly and vibrantly. “That’s your affair—if you dare! You say a word about this visit and I’ll feed your scoundrelly old carcass to the coyotes! Justice is abroad tonight and it won’t be balked. I’m after that original land record—and I’m going to have it. You know where it is—you’ve got it. Your face told me that the other day. You’re only half-heartedly in this steal. Be a man—give me the record—and I’ll stand by you until hell freezes over! Quick! Is it in the safe?”

The Judge wavered in agonized indecision. But thoughts of Corrigan’s wrath finally conquered.

“It—it isn’t in the safe,” he said. And then, aware of his error because of the shrill breath the other drew, he added, quaveringly: “There is no—the original record is in my desk—you’ve seen it.”

“Bah!” The big shape backed away—two or three feet, whispering back at the Judge. “Open your mouth and you’re a dead man. I’ve got you covered!”

Cowering on his cot the Judge watched the big shape join the other at the safe. How long it remained there, he did not know. A step sounded in the silence that reigned outside—a third shape loomed in the doorway.

“Judge Lindman!” called a voice.

“Y-es?” quavered the Judge, aware that the big shape in the room was now close to him, menacing him.

“Your door’s open! Where’s Ed? There’s something wrong! Get up and strike a light. There’ll be 160
hell to pay if Corrigan finds out we haven’t been watching your stuff. Damn it! A man can’t steal time for a drink without something happens. Jim and Bill and me just went across the street, leaving Ed here. They’re coming right—”

He had been entering the room while talking, fingering in his pockets for a match. His voice died in a quick gasp as Trevison struck with the butt of his pistol. The man fell, silently.

Another voice sounded outside. Trevison crouched at the doorway. A form darkened the opening. Trevison struck, missed, a streak of fire split the night—the newcomer had used his pistol. It went off again—the flame-spurt shooting ceilingward, as Levins clinched the man from the rear. A third man loomed in the doorway; a fourth appeared, behind him. Trevison swung at the head of the man nearest him, driving him back upon the man behind, who cursed, plunging into the room. The man whom Levins had seized was shouting orders to the others. But these suddenly ceased as Levins smashed him on the head with the butt of a pistol. Two others remained. They were stubborn and courageous. But it was miserable work, in the dark—blows were misdirected, friend striking friend; other blows went wild, grunts of rage and impotent curses following. But Trevison and Levins were intent on escaping—a victory would have been hollow—for the thud and jar of their boots on the bare floor had been heard; doors were slamming; from across the street came the barking of a dog; men were shouting questions at 161
one another; from the box-car on the railroad tracks issued vociferous yells and curses. Trevison slipped out through the door, panting. His opponent had gone down, temporarily disabled from sundry vicious blows from a fist that had worked like a piston rod. A figure loomed at his side. “I got mine!” it said, triumphantly; “we’d better slope.”

“Another five minutes and I’d have cracked it,” breathed Levins as they ran. “What’s Corrigan havin’ the place watched for?”

“You’ve got me. Afraid of the Judge, maybe. The Judge hasn’t his whole soul in this deal; it looks to me as though Corrigan is forcing him. But the Judge has the original record, all right; and it’s in that safe, too! God! If they’d only given us a minute or two longer!”

They fled down the track, running heavily, for the work had been fast and the tension great, and when they reached the horses and threw themselves into the saddles, Manti was ablaze with light. As they raced away in the darkness a grim smile wreathed Trevison’s face. For though he had not succeeded in this enterprise, he had at least struck a blow—and he had corroborated his

previous opinion concerning Judge Lindman's knowledge of the whereabouts of the original record.

It was three o'clock and the dawn was just breaking when Trevison rode into the Diamond K corral and pulled the saddle from Nigger. Levins had gone home.

Trevison was disappointed. It had been a bold scheme, and well planned, and it would have succeeded had it not been for the presence of the sentries. He had not anticipated that. He laughed grimly, remembering Judge Lindman's fright. Would the Judge reveal the identity of his early-morning visitor? Trevison thought not, for if the original record were in the safe, and if for any reason the Judge wished to conceal its existence from Corrigan, a hint of the identity of the early-morning visitors—especially of one—might arouse Corrigan's suspicions. 162

But what if Corrigan knew of the existence of the original record? There was the presence of the guards to indicate that he did. But there was Judge Lindman's half-heartedness to disprove that line of reasoning. Also, Trevison was convinced that if Corrigan knew of the existence of the record he would destroy it; it would be dangerous, in the hands of an enemy. But it would be an admirable weapon of self-protection in the hands of a man who had been forced into wrong-doing—in the hands of Judge Lindman, for instance. Trevison opened the door that led to his office, thrilling with a new hope. He lit a match, stepped across the floor and touched the flame to the wick of the kerosene lamp—for it was not yet light enough for him to see plainly in the office—and stood for an instant blinking in its glare. A second later he reeled back against the edge of the desk, his hands gripping it, dumb, amazed, physically sick with a fear that he had suddenly gone insane. For in a big chair in a corner of the room, sleepy-eyed, tired, but looking very becoming in her simple dress with a light cloak over it, the collar turned up, so that it gave her an appearance of attractive negligence, a smile of delighted welcome on her face, was Hester Harvey. 163

She got up as he stood staring dumfoundedly at her and moved toward him, with an air of artful supplication that brought a gasp out of him—of sheer relief.

"Won't you welcome me, Trev? I have come very far, to see you." She held out her hands and went slowly toward him, mutely pleading, her eyes luminous with love—which she did not pretend, for the boy she had known had grown into the promise of his youth—big, magnetic—a figure for any woman to love.

He had been looking at her intently, narrowly, searchingly. He saw what she herself had not seen—the natural changes that ten years had brought to her. He saw other things—that she had not suspected—a certain blasé sophistication; a too bold and artful expression of the eyes—as though she knew their power and the lure of them; the slightly hard curve in the corners of her mouth; a second character lurking around her—indefinite, vague, repelling—the subconscious self, that no artifice can hide—the sin and the shame of deeds unrepented. If there had been a time when he had loved her, its potence could not leap the lapse of years and overcome his repugnance for her kind, and he looked at her coldly, barring her progress with a hand, which caught her two and held them in a grip that made her wince.

"What are you doing here? How did you get in? When did you come?" He fired the questions at her roughly, brutally. 164

"Why, Trev." She gulped, her smile fading palely. The conquest was not to be the easy one she had thought—though she really wanted him—more than ever, now that she saw she was in danger of losing him. She explained, earnestly pleading with eyes that had lost their power to charm him.

"I heard you were here—that you were in trouble. I want to help you. I got here night before last—to Manti. Rosalind Benham had written about you to Ruth Gresham—a friend of hers in New York. Ruth Gresham told me. I went directly from Manti to Benham's ranch. Then I came here—about dusk, last night. There was a man here—your foreman, he said. I explained, and he let me in. Trev—won't you welcome me?"

"It isn't the first time I've been in trouble." His laugh was harsh; it made her cringe and cry:

"I've repented for that. I shouldn't have done it; I don't know what was the matter with me. Harvey had been telling me things about you—"

"You wouldn't have believed him—" He laughed, cynically. "There's no use of haggling over *that*—it's buried, and I've placed a monument over it: 'Here lies a fool that believed in a woman.' I don't reproach you—you couldn't be blamed for not wanting to marry an idiot like me. But I haven't changed. I still have my crazy ideas of honor and justice and square-dealing, and my double-riveted faith in my ability to triumph over all adversity. But women—Bah! you're all alike! You scheme, you plot, you play for place; you are selfish, cold; you snivel and whine—There is more of it, but I can't think of any more. But—let's face this matter squarely. If you still like me, I'm sorry for you, for I can't say that the sight of you has stirred any old passion in me. You shouldn't have come out here." 165

"You're terribly resentful, Trev. And I don't blame you a bit—I deserve it all. But don't send me away. Why, I—love you, Trev; I've loved you all these years; I loved you when I sent you away—while I was married to Harvey; and more afterwards—and now, deeper than ever; and—"

He shook his head and looked at her steadily—cynicism, bald derision in his gaze. "I'm sorry; but it can't be—you're too late."

He dropped her hands, and she felt of the fingers where he had gripped them. She veiled the

quick, savage leap in her eyes by drooping the lids.

“You love Rosalind Benham,” she said, quietly, looking at him with a mirthless smile. He started, and her lips grew a trifle stiff. “You poor boy!”

“Why the pity?” he said grimly.

“Because she doesn’t care for you, Trev. She told me yesterday that she was engaged to marry a man named Corrigan. He is out here, she said. She remarked that she had found you very amusing during the three or four weeks of Corrigan’s absence, and she seemed delighted because the court out here had ruled that the land you thought was yours belongs to the man who is to be her husband.”

He stiffened at this, for it corroborated Corrigan’s words: “She is heart and soul with me in this deal, She is ambitious.” Trevison’s lips curled scornfully. First, Hester Keyes had been ambitious, and now it was Rosalind Benham. He fought off the bitter resentment that filled him and raised his head, laughing, glossing over the hurt with savage humor. 166

“Well, I’m doing some good in the world, after all.”

“Trev,” Hester moved toward him again, “don’t talk like that—it makes me shiver. I’ve been through the fire, boy—we’ve both been through it. I wasted myself on Harvey—you’ll do the same with Rosalind Benham. Ten years, boy—think of it! I’ve loved you for that long. Doesn’t that make you understand—”

“There’s nothing quite so dead as a love that a man doesn’t want to revive,” he said shortly; “do you understand that?”

She shuddered and paled, and a long silence came between them. The cold dawn that was creeping over the land stole into the office with them and found the fires of affection turned to the ashes of unwelcome memory. The woman seemed to realize at last, for she gave a little shiver and looked up at Trevison with a wan smile.

“I—I think I understand, Trev. Oh, I am *so* sorry! But I am not going away. I am going to stay in Manti, to be near you—if you want me. And you will want me, some day.” She went close to him. “Won’t you kiss me—once, Trev? For the sake of old times?”

“You’d better go,” he said gruffly, turning his head. And then, as she opened the door and stood upon the threshold, he stepped after her, saying: “I’ll get your horse.” 167

“There’s two of them,” she laughed tremulously. “I came in a buckboard.”

“Two, then,” he said soberly as he followed her out. “And say—” He turned, flushing. “You came at dusk, last night. I’m afraid I haven’t been exactly thoughtful. Wait—I’ll rustle up something to eat.”

“I—I couldn’t touch it, thank you. Trev—” She started toward him impulsively, but he turned his back grimly and went toward the corral.

Sunrise found Hester back at the Bar B. Jealous, hurt eyes had watched from an upstairs window the approach of the buckboard—had watched the Diamond K trail the greater part of the night. For, knowing of the absence of women at the Diamond K, Rosalind had anticipated Hester’s return the previous evening—for the distance that separated the two ranches was not more than two miles. But the girl’s vigil had been unrewarded until now. And when at last she saw the buckboard coming, scorn and rage, furious and deep, seized her. Ah, it was bold, brazen, disgraceful!

But she forced herself to calmness as she went down stairs to greet her guest—for there might have been some excuse for the lapse of propriety—some accident—something, anything.

“I expected you last night,” she said as she met Hester at the door. “You were delayed I presume. Has anything happened?” 168

“Nothing, dearie.” Only the bold significance of Hester’s smile hid its deliberate maliciousness. “Trev was so glad to see me that he simply wouldn’t let me go. And it was daylight before we realized it.”

The girl gasped. And now, looking at the woman, she saw what Trevison had seen—staring back at her, naked and repulsive. She shuddered, and her face whitened.

“There are hotels at Manti, Mrs. Harvey,” she said coldly.

“Oh, very well!” The woman did not change her smile. “I shall be very glad to take advantage of your kind invitation. For Trev tells me that presently there will be much bitterness between your crowd and himself, and I am certain that he wouldn’t want me to stay here. If you will kindly have a man bring my trunks—”

And so she rode toward Manti. Not until the varying undulations of the land hid her from view of the Bar B ranchhouse did she lose the malicious smile. Then it faded, and furious sobs of disappointment shook her.

CHAPTER XVIII

LAW INVOKED AND DEFIED

As soon as the deputies had gone, two of them nursing injured heads, and all exhibiting numerous bruises, Judge Lindman rose and dressed. In the ghostly light preceding the dawn he went to the safe, his fingers trembling so that he made difficult work with the combination. He got a record from out of the safe, pulled out the bottom drawer, of a series filled with legal documents and miscellaneous articles, laid the record book on the floor and shoved the drawer in over it. An hour later he was facing Corrigan, who on getting a report of the incident from one of the deputies, had hurried to get the Judge's version. The Judge had had time to regain his composure, though he was still slightly pale and nervous.

The Judge lied glibly. He had seen no one in the courthouse. His first knowledge that anyone had been there had come when he had heard the voice of one, of the deputies, calling to him. And then all he had seen was a shadowy figure that had leaped and struck. After that there had been some shooting. And then the men had escaped.

"No one spoke?"

"Not a word," said the Judge. "That is, of course, no one but the man who called to me."

"Did they take anything?"

"What is there to take? There is nothing of value."

"Gieger says one of them was working at the safe. What's in there?"

"Some books and papers and supplies—nothing of value. That they tried to get into the safe would seem to indicate that they thought there was money there—Manti has many strangers who would not hesitate at robbery."

"They didn't get into the safe, then?"

"I haven't looked inside—nothing seems to be disturbed, as it would were the men safe-blowers. In their hurry to get away it would seem, if they had come to get into the safe, they would have left something behind—tools, or something of that character."

"Let's have a look at the safe. Open it!" Corrigan seemed to be suspicious, and with a pulse of trepidation, the Judge knelt and worked the combination. When the door came open Corrigan dropped on his knees in front of it and began to pull out the contents, scattering them in his eagerness. He stood up after a time, scowling, his face flushed. He turned on the Judge, grasped him by the shoulders, his fingers gripping so hard that the Judge winced.

"Look here, Lindman," he said. "Those men were not ordinary robbers. Experienced men would know better than to crack a safe in a courthouse when there's a bank right next door. I've an idea that it was some of Trevison's work. You've done or said something that's given him the notion that you've got the original record. Have you?"

"I swear I have said nothing," declared the Judge.

Corrigan looked at him steadily for a moment and then released him. "You burned it, eh?"

The Judge nodded, and Corrigan compressed his lips. "I suppose it's all right, but I can't help wishing that I had been here to watch the ceremony of burning that record. I'd feel a damn sight more secure. But understand this: If you double-cross me in any detail of this game, you'll never go to the penitentiary for what Benham knows about you—I'll choke the gizzard out of you!" He took a turn around the room, stopping at last in front of the Judge.

"Now we'll talk business. I want you to issue an order permitting me to erect mining machinery on Trevison's land. We need coal here."

"Graney gave notice of appeal," protested the Judge.

"Which the Circuit Court denied."

"He'll go to Washington," persisted the Judge, gulping. "I can't legally do it."

Corrigan laughed. "Appoint a receiver to operate the mine, pending the Supreme Court decision. Appoint Braman. Graney has no case, anyway. There is no record or deed."

"There is no need of haste," Lindman cautioned; "you can't get mining machinery here for some time yet."

Corrigan laughed, dragging the Judge to a window, from which he pointed out some flat-cars standing on a siding, loaded with lumber, machinery, corrugated iron, shutes, cables, trucks, "T" rails, and other articles that the Judge did not recognize.

The Judge exclaimed in astonishment. Corrigan grunted.

"I ordered that stuff six weeks ago, in anticipation of my victory in your court. You can see how I trusted in your honesty and perspicacity. I'll have it on the ground tomorrow—some of it today. Of course I want to proceed legally, and in order to do that I'll have to have the court order this

morning. You do whatever is necessary."

At daylight he was in the laborers' camp, skirting the railroad at the edge of town, looking for Carson. He found the big Irishman in one of the larger tent-houses, talking with the cook, who was preparing breakfast amid a smother of smoke and the strong mingled odors of frying bacon and coffee. Corrigan went only to the flap of the tent, motioning Carson outside.

Walking away from the tent toward some small frame buildings down the track, Corrigan said:

"There are several carloads of material there," pointing to the flat-cars which he had shown to the Judge. "I've hired a mining man to superintend the erection of that stuff—it's mining machinery and material for buildings. I want you to place as many of your men as you can spare at the disposal of the engineer; his name's Pickand, and you'll find him at the cars at eight o'clock. I'll have some more laborers sent over from the dam. Give him as many men as he wants; go with him yourself, if he wants you."

"What are ye goin' to mine?"

"Coal."

"Where?" 173

"I've been looking over the land with Pickand; he says we'll sink a shaft at the base of the butte below the mesa, where you are laying tracks now. We won't have to go far, Pickand says. There's coal—thick veins of it—running back into the wall of the butte."

"All right, sir," said Carson. But he scratched his head in perplexity, eyeing Corrigan sidelong. "Ye woudn't be sayin' that ye'll be diggin' for coal on the railroad's right av way, wud ye?"

"No!" snapped Corrigan.

"Thin it will be on Trevison's land. Have ye bargained wid him for it?"

"No! Look here, Carson. Mind your own business and do as you're told!"

"I'm elicted, I s'pose; but it's a job I ain't admirin' to do. If ye've got half the sinse I give ye credit for havin', ye'll be lettin' that mon Trevison alone—I'd a lot sooner smoke a segar in that shed av dynamite than to cross him!"

Corrigan smiled and turned to look in the direction in which the Irishman was pointing. A small, flat-roofed frame building, sheathed with corrugated iron, met his view. Crude signs, large enough to be read hundreds of feet distant, were affixed to the walls:

"CAUTION. DYNAMITE."

"Do you keep much of it there?"

"Enough for anny blastin' we have to do. There's plenty—half a ton, mebbe." 174

"Who's got the key?"

"Meself."

Corrigan returned to town, breakfasted, mounted a horse and rode out to the dam, where he gave orders for some laborers to be sent to Carson. At nine o'clock he was back in Manti talking with Pickand, and watching the dinky engine as it pulled the loaded flat-cars westward over the tracks. He left Pickand and went to his office in the bank building, where he conferred with some men regarding various buildings and improvements in contemplation, and shortly after ten, glancing out of a window, he saw a buckboard stop in front of the *Castle* hotel. Corrigan waited a little, then closed his desk and walked across the street. Shortly he confronted Hester Harvey in her room. He saw from her downcast manner that she had failed. His face darkened.

"Wouldn't work, eh? What did he say?"

The woman was hunched down in her chair, still wearing the cloak that she had worn in Trevison's office; the collar still up, the front thrown open. Her hair was disheveled; dark lines were under her eyes; she glared at Corrigan in an abandon of savage dejection.

"He turned me down—cold." Her laugh held the bitterness of self-derision. "I'm through, there, Jeff."

"Hell!" cursed the man. She looked at him, her lips curving with amused contempt.

"Oh, you're all right—don't worry. That's all you care about, isn't it?" She laughed harshly at the quickened light in his eyes. "You'd see me sacrifice myself; you wouldn't give me a word of 175 sympathy. That's you! That's the way of all men. Give, give, give! That's the masculine chorus—the hunting-song of the human wolf-pack!"

"Don't talk like that—it ain't like you, kid. You were always the gamest little dame I ever knew." He essayed to take the hand that was twisted in the folds of her cloak, but she drew it away from him in a fury. And the eagerness in his eyes betrayed the insincerity of his attempt at consolation; she saw it—the naked selfishness of his look—and sneered at him.

"You want the good news, eh? The good for you? That's all you care about. After you get it, I'll get the husks of your pity. Well, here it is. I've poisoned them both—against each other. I told him she was against him in this land business. And it hurt me to see how gamely he took it, Jeff!" her voice broke, but she choked back the sob and went on, hoarsely: "He didn't make a whimper. Not even when I told him you were going to marry her—that you were engaged. But there was a fire in those eyes of his that I would give my soul to see there for me!"

“Yes—yes,” said the man, impatiently.

“Oh, you devil!” she railed at him. “I’ve made him think it was a frame-up between you and her—to get information out of him; I told him that she had strung him along for a month or so—amusing herself. And he believes it.”

“Good!”

“And I’ve made her believe that he sent for me,” she went on, her voice leaping to cold savagery. “I stayed all night at his place, and I went back to the Bar B in the morning—this morning—and made Rosalind Benham think—Ha, ha! She ordered me away from the house—the hussy! She’s through with him—any fool could tell that. But it’s different with him, Jeff. He won’t give her up; he isn’t that kind. He’ll fight for her—and he’ll have her!” 176

The eager, pleased light died out of Corrigan’s face, his lips set in an ugly pout. But he contrived to smile as he got up.

“You’ve done well—so far. But don’t give him up. Maybe he’ll change his mind. Stay here—I’ll stake you to the limit.” He laid a roll of bills on a stand—she did not look at them—and approached her in a second endeavor to console her. But she waved him away, saying: “Get out of here—I want to think!” And he obeyed, looking back before he closed the door.

“Selfish?” he muttered, going down the street. “Well, what of it? That’s a human weakness, isn’t it? Get what you want, and to hell with other people!”

Trevison had gone to his room for a much-needed rest. He had watched Hester Harvey go with no conscious regret, but with a certain grim pity, which was as futile as her visit. But, lying on the bed he fought hard against the bitter scorn that raged in him over the contemplation of Rosalind Benham’s duplicity. He found it hard to believe that she had been duping him, for during the weeks of his acquaintance with her he had studied her much—with admiration-weighted prejudice, of course, since she made a strong appeal to him—and he had been certain, then, that she was as free from guile as a child—excepting any girl’s natural artifices by which she concealed certain emotions that men had no business trying to read. He had read some of them—his business or not—and he had imagined he had seen what had fired his blood—a reciprocal affection. He would not have declared himself, otherwise. 177

He went to sleep, thinking of her. He awoke about noon, to see Barkwell standing at his side, shaking him.

“Have you got any understandin’ with that railroad gang that they’re to do any minin’ on the Diamond K range?”

“No.”

“Well, they’re gettin’ ready to do it. Over at the butte near the railroad cut. I passed there a while ago an’ quizzed the big guy—Corrigan—about a gang workin’ there. He says they’re goin’ to mine coal. I asked him if he had your permission an’ he said he didn’t need it. I reckon they ain’t none shy on gall where that guy come from!”

Trevison got out of bed and buckled on his cartridge belt and pistol. “The boys are working the Willow Creek range,” he said, sharply. “Get them, tell them to load up with plenty of cartridges, and join me at the butte.”

He heard Barkwell go leaping down the stairs, his spurs striking the step edges, and a few minutes later, riding Nigger out of the corral he saw the foreman racing away in a dust cloud. He followed the bed of the river, himself, going at a slow lope, for he wanted time to think—to gain control of the rage that boiled in his veins. He conquered it, and when he came in sight of the butte he was cool and deliberate, though on his face was that “mean” look that Carson had once remarked about to his friend Murphy, partly hidden by the “tiger” smile which, the Irishman had discovered, preceded action, ruthless and swift. 178

The level below the butte was a-buzz with life and energy. Scores of laborers were rushing about under the direction of a tall, thin, bespectacled man who seemed to be the moving spirit in all the activity. He shouted orders to Carson—Trevison saw the big figure of the Irishman dominating the laborers—who repeated them, added to them; sending men scampering hither and thither. Pausing at a little distance down the level, Trevison watched the scene. At first all seemed confusion, but presently he was able to discern that method ruled. For he now observed that the laborers were divided into “gangs.” Some were unloading the flat-cars, others were “assembling” a stationary engine near the wall of the butte. They had a roof over it, already. Others were laying tracks that intersected with the main line; still others were erecting buildings along the level. They were on Trevison’s land—there was no doubt of that. Moreover, they were erecting their buildings and apparatus at the point where Trevison himself had contemplated making a start. He saw Corrigan seated on a box on one of the flat-cars, smoking a cigar; another man, whom Trevison recognized as Gieger—he would have been willing to swear the man was one of those who had thwarted his plans in the courthouse—standing beside him, a Winchester rifle resting in the hollow of his left arm. Trevison urged Nigger along the level, down the track, and halted near Corrigan and Gieger. He knew that Corrigan had seen him, but it pleased the other to pretend that he had not. 179

“This is your work, Corrigan—I take it?” said Trevison, bluntly.

Corrigan turned slowly. He was a good actor, for he succeeded in getting a fairly convincing counterfeit of surprise into his face as his gaze fell on his enemy.

“You have taken it correctly, sir.” He smiled blandly, though there was a snapping alertness in his eyes that belied his apparent calmness. He turned to Gieger, ignoring Trevison. “Organization is the thing. Pickand is a genius at it,” he said.

Trevison’s eyes flamed with rage over this deliberate insult. But in it he saw a cold design to make him lose his temper. The knowledge brought a twisting smile to his face.

“You have permission to begin this work, I suppose?”

Corrigan turned again, as though astonished at the persistence of the other. “Certainly, sir. This work is being done under a court order, issued this morning. I applied for it yesterday. I am well within my legal rights, the court having as you are aware, settled the question of the title.”

“You know I have appealed the case?”

“I have not been informed that you have done so. In any event such an appeal would not prevent me mining the coal on the property, pending the hearing of the case in the higher court. Judge 180
Lindman has appointed a receiver, who is bonded; and the work is to proceed under his direction. I am here merely as an onlooker.”

He looked fairly at Trevison, his eyes gleaming with cold derision. The expression maddened the other beyond endurance, and his eyes danced the chill glitter of meditated violence, unrecking consequences.

“You’re a sneaking crook, Corrigan, and you know it! You’re going too far! You’ve had Braman appointed in order to escape the responsibility! You’re hiding behind him like a coward! Come out into the open and fight like a man!”

Corrigan’s face bloated poisonously, but he made no hostile move. “I’ll kill you for that some day!” he whispered. “Not now,” he laughed mirthlessly as the other stiffened; “I can’t take the risk right now—I’ve too much depending on me. But you’ve been damned impertinent and troublesome, and when I get you where I want you I’m going to serve you like this!” And he took the cigar from his mouth, dropped it to the floor of the car and ground it to pieces under his heel. He looked up again, at Trevison, and their gaze met, in each man’s eyes glowed the knowledge of imminent action, ruthless and terrible.

Trevison broke the tension with a laugh that came from between his teeth. “Why delay?” he mocked. “I’ve been ready for the grinding process since the first day.”

“Enough of this!” Corrigan turned to Gieger with a glance of cold intolerance. “This man is a 181
nuisance,” he said to the deputy. “Carry out the mandate of the court and order him away. If he doesn’t go, kill him! He is a trespasser, and has no right here!” And he glared at Trevison.

“You’ve got to get out, mister,” said the deputy. He tapped his rifle menacingly, betraying a quick accession of rage that he caught, no doubt, from Corrigan. Trevison smiled coldly, and backed Nigger a little. For an instant he meditated resistance, and dropped his right hand to the butt of his pistol. A shout distracted his attention. It came from behind him—it sounded like a warning, and he wheeled, to see Carson running toward him, not more than ten feet distant, waving his hands, a huge smile on his face.

“Domned if it ain’t Trevison!” he yelled as he lunged forward and caught Trevison’s right hand in his own, pulling the rider toward him. “I’ve been wantin’ to spake a word wid ye for two weeks now—about thim cows which me brother in Illinoy has been askin’ me about, an’ divvil a chance have I had to see ye!” And as he yanked Trevison’s shoulders downward with a sudden pressure that there was no resisting, he whispered, rapidly.

“Diputies—thirty av thim wid Winchesters—on the other side av the flat-cars. It’s a thrap to do away wid ye—I heard ’em cookin’ it!”

“An’ ye wudn’t be sellin’ ’em to me at twinty-five, eh?” he said, aloud. “Go ’long wid ye—ye’re a domned hold-up man, like all the rist av thim!” And he slapped the black horse playfully in the ribs and laughed gleefully as the animal lunged at him, ears laid back, mouth open. 182

His eyes cold, his lips hard and straight, Trevison spurred the black again to the flat-car.

“The bars are down between us, Corrigan; it’s man to man from now on. Law or no law, I give you twenty-four hours to get your men and apparatus off my land. After that I won’t be responsible for what happens!” He heard a shout behind him, a clatter, and he turned to see ten or twelve of his men racing over the level toward him. At the same instant he heard a sharp exclamation from Corrigan; heard Gieger issue a sharp order, and a line of men raised their heads above the flat-cars, rifles in their hands, which they trained on the advancing cowboys.

Nigger leaped; his rider holding up one hand, the palm toward his men, as a sign to halt, while he charged into them. Trevison talked fast to them, while the laborers, suspending work, watched, muttering; and the rifles, resting on the flat-cars, grew steadier in their owners’ hands. The silence grew deeper; the tension was so great that when somewhere a man dropped a shovel, it startled the watchers like a sudden bomb.

It was plain that Trevison’s men wanted to fight. It was equally plain that Trevison was arguing to dissuade them. And when, muttering, and casting belligerent looks backward, they finally drew off, Trevison following, there was a sigh of relief from the watchers, while Corrigan’s face was black with disappointment.

CHAPTER XIX

A WOMAN RIDES IN VAIN

Out of Rosalind Benham's resentment against Trevison for the Hester Harvey incident grew a sudden dull apathy—which presently threatened to become an aversion—for the West. Its crudeness, the uncouthness of its people; the emptiness, the monotony, began to oppress her. Noticing the waning of her enthusiasm, Agatha began to inject energetic condemnations of the country into her conversations with the girl, and to hint broadly of the contrasting allurements of the East.

But Rosalind was not yet ready to desert the Bar B. She had been hurt, and her interest in the country had dulled, but there were memories over which one might meditate until—until one could be certain of some things. This was hope, insistently demanding delay of judgment. The girl could not forget the sincere ring in Trevison's voice when he had told her that he would never go back to Hester Harvey. Arrayed against this declaration was the cold fact of Hester's visit, and Hester's statement that Trevison had sent for her. In this jumble of contradiction hope found a fertile field.

If Corrigan had anticipated that the knowledge of Hester's visit to Trevison would have the effect of centering Rosalind's interest on him, he had erred. Corrigan was magnetic; the girl felt the lure of him. In his presence she was continually conscious of his masterfulness, with a dismayed fear that she would yield to it. She knew this sensation was not love, for it lacked the fire and the depth of the haunting, breathless surge of passion that she had felt when she had held Trevison off the day when he had declared his love for her—that she felt whenever she thought of him. But with Trevison lost to her—she did not know what would happen, then. For the present her resentment was sufficient to keep her mind occupied.

She had a dread of meeting Corrigan this morning. Also, Agatha's continued deprecatory speeches had begun to annoy her, and at ten o'clock she ordered one of the men to saddle her horse.

She rode southward, following a trail that brought her to Levins' cabin. The cabin was built of logs, smoothly hewn and tightly joined, situated at the edge of some timber in a picturesque spot at a point where a shallow creek doubled in its sweep toward some broken country west of Manti.

Rosalind had visited Mrs. Levins many times. The warmth of her welcome on her first visit had resulted in a quick intimacy which, with an immediate estimate of certain needs by Rosalind, had brought her back in the rôle of Lady Bountiful. "Chuck" and "Sissy" Levins welcomed her vociferously as she splashed across the river to the door of the cabin this morning.

"You're clean spoilin' them, Miss Rosalind!" declared the mother, watching from the doorway; "they've got so they expect you to bring them a present every time you come."

Sundry pats and kisses sufficed to assuage the pangs of disappointment suffered by the children, and shortly afterward Rosalind was inside the cabin, talking with Mrs. Levins, and watching Clay, who was painstakingly mending a breach in his cartridge belt.

Rosalind had seen Clay once only, and that at a distance, and she stole interested glances at him. There was a certain attraction in Clay's lean face, with its cold, alert furtiveness, but it was an attraction that bred chill instead of warmth, for his face revealed a wild, reckless, intolerant spirit, remorseless, contemptuous of law and order. Several times she caught him watching her, and his narrowed, probing glances disconcerted her. She cut her visit short because of his presence, and when she rose to go he turned in his chair.

"You like this country, ma'am?"

"Well—yes. But it is much different, after the East."

"Some smoother there, eh? Folks are slicker?"

She eyed him appraisingly, for there was an undercurrent of significance in his voice. She smiled. "Well—I suppose so. You see, competition is keener in the East, and it rather sharpens one's wits, I presume."

"H'm. I reckon you're right. This railroad has brought some *mighty* slick ones here. Mighty slick an' gally." He looked at her truculently. "Corrigan's one of the slick ones. Friend of yours, eh?"

"Clay!" remonstrated his wife, sharply.

He turned on her roughly. "You keep out of this! I ain't meanin' nothin' wrong. But I reckon when anyone's got a sneakin' coyote for a friend an' don't know it, it's doin' 'em a good turn to spit things right out, frank an' fair.

"This Corrigan ain't on the level, ma'am. Do you know what he's doin'? He's skinnin' the folks in this country out of about a hundred thousand acres of land. He's clouded every damn title. He's got a fake bill of sale to show that he bought the land years ago—which he didn't—an' he's got a little beast of a judge here to back him up in his play. They've done away with the original

record of the land, an' rigged up another, which makes Corrigan's title clear. It's the rankest robbery that any man ever tried to pull off, an' if he's a friend of yourn you ought to cut him off your visitin' list!"

"How do you know that? Who told you?" asked the girl, her face whitening, for the man's vehemence and evident earnestness were convincing.

"'Brand' Trevison told me. It hits him mighty damned hard. He had a deed to his land. Corrigan broke open his office an' stole it. Trevison's certain sure his deed was on the record, for he went to Dry Bottom with Buck Peters—the man he bought the land from—an' seen it wrote down on the record!" He laughed harshly. "There's goin' to be hell to pay here. Trevison won't stand for it—though the other gillies are advisin' caution. Caution hell! I'm for cleanin' the scum out! Do you know what Corrigan done, yesterday? He got thirty or so deputies—pluguglies that he's hired—an' hid 'em behind some flat-cars down on the level where they're erectin' some minin' machinery. He laid a trap for 'Firebrand,' expectin' him to come down there, rippin' mad because they was puttin' the minin' machinery up on his land, wi'out his permission. They was goin' to shoot him—Corrigan put 'em up to it. That Carson fello' heard it an' put 'Firebrand' wise. An' the shootin' didn't come off. But that's only the beginnin'!" 187

"Did Trevison tell you to tell me this?" The girl was stunned, amazed, incredulous. For her father was concerned in this, and if he had any knowledge that Corrigan was stealing land—if he *was* stealing it—he was guilty as Corrigan. If he had no knowledge of it, she might be able to prevent the steal by communicating with him.

"Trevison tell me?" laughed Levins, scornfully; "'Firebrand' ain't no pussy-kitten fighter which depends on women standin' between him an' trouble. I'm tellin' you on my own hook, so's that big stiff Corrigan won't get swelled up, thinkin' he's got a chance to hitch up with you in the matrimonial wagon. That guy's got murder in his heart, girl. Did you hear of me shootin' that sneak, Marchmont?" The girl had heard rumors of the affair; she nodded, and Levins went on. "It was Corrigan that hired me to do it—payin' me a thousand, cash." His wife gasped, and he spoke gently to her. "That's all right, Ma; it wasn't no cold-blooded affair—Jim Marchmont knowed a sister of mine pretty intimate, when he was out here years ago, an' I settled a debt that I thought I owed to her, that's all. I ain't none sorry, neither—I knowed him soon as Corrigan mentioned his name. But I hadn't no time to call his attention to things—I had to plug him, sudden. I'm sorry I've said this, ma'am, now that it's out," he said in a changed voice, noting the girl's distress; "but I felt you ought to know who you're dealin' with." 188

Rosalind went out, swaying, her knees shaking. She heard Levins' wife reproving him; heard the man replying gruffly. She felt that it *must* be so. She cared nothing about Corrigan, beyond a certain regret, but a wave of sickening fear swept over her at the growing conviction that her father *must* know something of all this. And if, as Levins said, Corrigan was attempting to defraud these people, she felt that common justice required that she head him off, if possible. By defeating Corrigan's aim she would, of course, be aiding Trevison, and through him Hester Harvey, whom she had grown to despise, but that hatred should not deter her. She mounted her horse in a fever of anxiety and raced it over the plains toward Manti, determined to find Corrigan and force him to tell her the truth.

Half way to town she saw a rider coming, and she slowed her own horse, taking the rider to be Corrigan, coming to the Bar B. She saw her mistake when the rider was within a hundred feet of her. She blushed, then paled, and started to pass the rider without speaking, for it was Trevison. She looked up when he urged Nigger against her animal, blocking the trail, frowning.

"Look here," he said; "what's wrong? Why do you avoid me? I saw you on the Diamond K range the other day, and when I started to ride toward you you whipped up your horse. You tried to pass me just now. What have I done to deserve it?" 189

She could not tell him about Hester Harvey, of course, and so she was silent, blushing a little. He took her manner as an indication of guilt, and gritted his teeth with the pain that the discovery caused him, for he had been hoping, too—that his suspicions of her were groundless.

"I do not care to discuss the matter with you." She looked fairly at him, her resentment flaming in her eyes, fiercely indignant over his effrontery in addressing her in that manner, after his affair with Hester Harvey. She was going to help him, but that did not mean that she was going to blind herself to his faults, or to accept them mutely. His bold confidence in himself—which she had once admired—repelled her now; she saw in it the brazen egotism of the gross sensualist, seeking new victims.

"I am in a hurry," she said, stiffly; "you will pardon me if I proceed."

He jumped Nigger off the trail and watched with gloomy, disappointed eyes, her rapid progress toward Manti. Then he urged Nigger onward, toward Levins' cabin. "I'll have to erect another monument to my faith in women," he muttered. And certain reckless, grim thoughts that had rioted in his mind since the day before, now assumed a definiteness that made his blood leap with eagerness.

Later, when Rosalind sat opposite Corrigan at his desk, she found it hard to believe Levins' story. The big man's smooth plausibility made Levins' recital seem like the weird imaginings of a disordered mind, goaded to desperation by opposition. And again, his magnetism, his polite consideration for her feelings, his ingenuous, smiling deference—so sharply contrasted with Trevison's direct bluntness—swayed her, and she sat, perplexed, undecided, when he finished the explanation she had coldly demanded of him. 190

“It is the invariable defense of these squatters,” he added; “that they are being robbed. In this case they have embellished their hackneyed tale somewhat by dragging the court into it, and telling you that absurd story about the shooting of Marchmont. Could you tell me what possible interest I could have in wanting Marchmont killed? Don’t you think, Miss Rosalind, that Levins’ reference to his sister discloses the real reason for the man’s action? Levins’ story that I paid him a thousand dollars is a fabrication, pure and simple. I paid Jim Marchmont a thousand dollars that morning, which was the balance due him on our contract. The transaction was witnessed by Judge Lindman. After Marchmont was shot, Levins took the money from him.”

“Why wasn’t Levins arrested?”

“It seems that public opinion was with Levins. A great many people here knew of the ancient trouble between them.” He passed from that, quickly. “The tale of the robbery of Trevison’s office is childlike, for the reason that Trevison had no deed. Judge Lindman is an honored and respected official. And—” he added as a last argument “—your father is the respected head of a large and important railroad. Is it logical to suppose that he would lend his influence and his good name to any such ridiculous scheme?”

She sighed, almost convinced. Corrigan went on, earnestly:

“This man Trevison is a disturber—he has always been that. He has no respect for the law or property. He associates with the self-confessed murderer, Levins. He is a riotous, reckless, egotistical fool who, because the law stands in the way of his desires, wishes to trample it under foot and allow mob rule to take its place. Do you remember you mentioned that he once loved a woman named Hester Keyes? Well, he has brought Hester here—”

She got up, her chin at a scornful angle. “I do not care to hear about his personal affairs.” She went out, mounted her horse, and rode slowly out the Bar B trail. From a window Corrigan watched her, and as she vanished into the distance he turned back to his desk, meditating darkly.

“Trevison put Levins up to that. He’s showing yellow.”

CHAPTER XX

AND RIDES AGAIN—IN VAIN

Rosalind’s reflections as she rode toward the Bar B convinced her that there had been much truth in Corrigan’s arraignment of Trevison. Out of her own knowledge of him, and from his own admission to her on the day they had ridden to Blakeley’s the first time, she adduced evidence of his predilection for fighting, of his utter disregard for accepted authority—when that authority disagreed with his conception of justice; of his lawlessness when his desires were in question. His impetuosity was notorious, for it had earned him the sobriquet “Firebrand,” which he could not have acquired except through the exhibition of those traits that she had enumerated.

She was disappointed and spiritless when she reached the ranchhouse, and very tired, physically. Agatha’s questions irritated her, and she ate sparingly of the food set before her, eager to be alone. In the isolation of her room she lay dumbly on the bed, and there the absurdity of Levins’ story assailed her. It must be as Corrigan had said—her father was too great a man to descend to such despicable methods. She dropped off to sleep.

When she awoke the sun had gone down, and her room was cheerless in the semi-dusk. She got up, washed, combed her hair, and much refreshed, went downstairs and ate heartily, Agatha watching her narrowly.

“You are distraught, my dear,” ventured her relative. “I don’t think this country agrees with you. Has anything happened?”

The girl answered evasively, whereat Agatha compressed her lips.

“Don’t you think that a trip East—”

“I shall not go home this summer!” declared Rosalind, vehemently. And noting the flash in the girl’s eyes, belligerent and defiant; her swelling breast, the warning brilliance of her eyes, misty with pent-up emotion, Agatha wisely subsided and the meal was finished in a strained silence.

Later, Rosalind went out, alone, upon the porch where, huddled in a big rocker, she gazed gloomily at the lights of Manti, dim and distant. Something of the turmoil and the tumult of the town in its young strength and vigor, assailed her, contrasting sharply with the solemn peace of her own surroundings. Life had been a very materialistic problem to her, heretofore. She had lived it according to her environment, a mere onlooker, detached from the scheme of things. Something of the meaning of life trickled into her consciousness as she sat there watching the flickering lights of the town—something of the meaning of it all—the struggle of these new residents twanged a hidden chord of sympathy and understanding in her. She was able to

visualize them as she sat there. Faces flashed before her—strong, stern, eager; the owner of each a-thrill with his ambition, going forward in the march of progress with definite aim, planning, plotting, scheming—some of them winning, others losing, but all obsessed with a feverish desire of success. The railroad, the town, the ranches, the new dam, the people—all were elements of a conflict, waged ceaselessly. She sat erect, her blood tingling. Blows were being struck, taken.

“Oh,” she cried, sharply; “it’s a game! It’s the spirit of the nation—to fight, to press onward, to win!” And in that moment she was seized with a throbbing sympathy for Trevison, and filled with a yearning that he might win, in spite of Corrigan, Hester Harvey, and all the others—even her father. For he was a courageous player of this “game.” In him was typified the spirit of the nation.

Rosalind might have added something to her thoughts had she known of the passions that filled Trevison when, while she sat on the porch of the Bar B ranchhouse, he mounted Nigger and sent him scurrying through the mellow moonlight toward Manti. He was playing the “game,” with justice as his goal. The girl had caught something of the spirit of it all, but she had neglected to grasp the all-important element of the relations between men, without which laws, rules, and customs become farcical and ridiculous. He was determined to have justice. He knew well that Judge Graney’s mission to Washington would result in failure unless the deed to his property could be recovered, or the original record disclosed. Even then, with a weak and dishonest judge on the bench the issue might be muddled by a mass of legal technicalities. The court order permitting Braman to operate a mine on his property goaded him to fury.

He stopped at Hanrahan’s saloon, finding Lefingwell there and talking with him for a few minutes. Lefingwell’s docile attitude disgusted him—he said he had talked the matter over with a number of the other owners, and they had expressed themselves as being in favor of awaiting the result of his appeal. He left Lefingwell, not trusting himself to argue the question of the man’s attitude, and went down to the station, where he found a telegram awaiting him. It was from Judge Graney:

> Coming home. Case sent back to Circuit Court for hearing. Depend on you to get evidence.

Trevison crumpled the paper and shoved it savagely into a pocket. He stood for a long time on the station platform, in the dark, glowering at the lights of the town, then started abruptly and made his way into the gambling room of the *Plaza*, where he somberly watched the players. The rattle of chips, the whir of the wheel, the monotonous drone of the faro dealer, the hum of voices, some eager, some tense, others exultant or grumbling, the incessant jostling, irritated him. He went out the front door, stepped down into the street, and walked eastward. Passing an open space between two buildings he became aware of the figure of a woman, and he wheeled as she stepped forward and grasped his arm. He recognized her and tried to pass on, but she clung to him.

“Trev!” she said, appealingly; “I want to talk with you. It’s very important—really. Just a minute, Trev. Won’t you talk *that* long! Come to my room—where—”

“Talk fast,” he admonished, holding her off,“—and talk here.”

She struggled with him, trying to come closer, twisting so that her body struck his, and the contact brought a grim laugh out of him. He seized her by the shoulders and held her at arm’s length. “Talk from there—it’s safer. Now, if you’ve anything important—”

“O Trev—please—” She laughed, almost sobbing, but forced the tears back when she saw derision blazing in his eyes.

“I told you it was all over!” He pushed her away and started off, but he had taken only two steps when she was at his side again.

“I saw you from my window, Trev. I—I knew it was you—I couldn’t mistake you, anywhere. I followed you—saw you go into the *Plaza*. I came to warn you. Corrigan has planned to goad you into doing some rash thing so that he will have an excuse to jail or kill you!”

“Where did you hear that?”

“I—I just heard it. I was in the bank today, and I overheard him talking to a man—some officer, I think. Be careful, Trev—very careful, won’t you?”

“Careful as I can,” he laughed, lowly. “Thank you.” He started on again, and she grasped his arm. “Trev,” she pleaded.

“What’s the use, Hester?” he said; “it can’t be.”

“Well, God bless you, anyway, dear,” she said chokingly.

He passed on, leaving her in the shadows of the buildings, and walked far out on the plains. Making a circuit to avoid meeting the woman again, he skirted the back yards, stumbling over tin cans and debris in his progress. When he got to the shed where he had hitched Nigger he mounted and rode down the railroad tracks toward the cut, where an hour later he was joined by Clay Levins, who came toward him, riding slowly and cautiously.

Patrick Carson had wooed sleep unsuccessfully. For hours he lay on his cot in the tent, staring out through the flap at the stars. A vague unrest had seized him. He heard the hilarious din of Manti steadily decrease in volume until only intermittent noises reached his ears. But even

when comparative peace came he was still wide awake.

"I'll be gettin' the willies av I lay here much longer widout slape," he confided to his pillow. "Mebbe a turn down the track wid me dujeen wud do the thrick." He got up, lighted his pipe and strode off into the semi-gloom of the railroad track. He went aimlessly, paying little attention to objects around him. He passed the tents wherein the laborers lay—and smiled as heavy snores smote his ears. "They slape a heap harder than they worruk, bedad!" he observed, grinning. "Nothin' c'ud trouble a ginney's conscience, annyway," he scoffed. "But, accordin' to 198
that they must be a heap on me own!" Which observation sent his thoughts to Corrigan. "Begob, there's a man! A domned rogue, if iver they was one!"

He passed the tents, smoking thoughtfully. He paused when he came to the small buildings scattered about at quite a distance from the tents, then left the tracks and made his way through the deep alkali dust toward them.

"Whativer wud Corrigan be askin' about the dynamite for? 'How much do ye kape av it?' he was askin'. As if it was anny av his business!"

He stopped puffing at his pipe and stood rigid, watching with bulging eyes, for he saw the door of the dynamite shed move outward several inches, as though someone inside had shoved it. It closed again, slowly, and Carson was convinced that he had been seen. He was no coward, but a cold sweat broke out on him and his knees doubled weakly. For any man who would visit the dynamite shed around midnight, in this stealthy manner, must be in a desperate frame of mind, and Carson's virile imagination drew lurid pictures of a gun duel in which a stray shot penetrated the wall of the shed. He shivered at the roar of the explosion that followed; he even drew a gruesome picture of stretchers and mangled flesh that brought a groan out of him.

But in spite of his mental stress he lunged forward, boldly, though his breath wheezed from his lungs in great gasps. His body lagged, but his will was indomitable, once he quit looking at the pictures of his imagination. He was at the door of the shed in a dozen strides. 199

The lock had been forced; the hasp was hanging, suspended from a twisted staple. Carson had no pistol—it would have been useless, anyway.

Carson hesitated, vacillating between two courses. Should he return for help, or should he secrete himself somewhere and watch? The utter foolhardiness of attempting the capture of the prowler single handed assailed him, and he decided on retreat. He took one step, and then stood rigid in his tracks, for a voice filtered thinly through the doorway, hoarse, vibrant:

"Don't forget the fuses."

Carson's lips formed the word: "Trevison!"

Carson's breath came easier; his thoughts became more coherent, his recollection vivid; his sympathies leaped like living things. When his thoughts dwelt upon the scene at the butte during Trevison's visit while the mining machinery was being erected—the trap that Corrigan had prepared for the man—a grim smile wreathed his face, for he strongly suspected what was meant by Trevison's visit to the dynamite shed.

He slipped cautiously around a corner of the shed, making no sound in the deep dust surrounding it, and stole back the way he had come, tingling.

"Begob, I'll slape now—a little while!"

As Carson vanished down the tracks a head was stuck out through the doorway of the shed and turned so that its owner could scan his surroundings.

"All clear," he whispered.

"Get going, then," said another voice, and two men, their faces muffled with handkerchiefs, 200
bearing something that bulked their pockets oddly, slipped out of the door and fled noiselessly, like gliding shadows, down the track toward the cut.

Rosalind had been asleep in the rocker. A cool night breeze, laden with the strong, pungent aroma of sage, sent a shiver over her and she awoke, to see that the lights of Manti had vanished. An eerie lonesomeness had settled around her.

"Why, it must be nearly midnight!" she said. She got up, yawning, and stepped toward the door, wondering why Agatha had not called her. But Agatha had retired, resenting the girl's manner.

Almost to the door, Rosalind detected movement in the ghostly semi-light that flooded the plains between the porch and the picturesque spot, more than a mile away, on which Levins' cabin stood. She halted at the door and watched, and when the moving object resolved into a horse, loping swiftly, she strained her eyes toward it. At first it seemed to have no rider, but when it had approached to within a hundred yards of her, she gasped, leaped off the porch and ran toward the horse. An instant later she stood at the animal's head, voicing her astonishment.

"Why, it's Chuck Levins! Why on earth are you riding around at this hour of the night?"

"Sissy's sick. Maw wants you to please come an' see what you can do—if it ain't too much trouble."

"Trouble?" The girl laughed. "I should say not! Wait until I saddle my horse!" 201

She ran to the porch and stole silently into the house, emerging with a small medicine case, which she stuck into a pocket of her coat. Once before she had had occasion to use her simple remedies on Sissy—an illness as simple as her remedies; but she could feel something of Mrs.

Levins' concern for her offspring, and—and it was an ideal night for a gallop over the plains.

It was almost midnight by the Levins' clock when she entered the cabin, and a quick diagnosis of her case with an immediate application of one of her remedies, brought results. At half past twelve Sissy was sleeping peacefully, and Chuck had dozed off, fully dressed, no doubt ready to re-enact his manly and heroic rôle upon call.

It was not until Rosalind was ready to go that Mrs. Levins apologized for her husband's rudeness to his guest.

"Clay feels awfully bitter against Corrigan. It's because Corrigan is fighting Trevison—and Trevison is Clay's friend—they've been like brothers. Trevison has done so much for us."

Rosalind glanced around the cabin. She had meant to ask Chuck why his father had not come on the midnight errand, but had forebore. "Mr. Levins isn't here?"

"Clay went away about nine o'clock." The woman did not meet Rosalind's direct gaze; she flushed under it and looked downward, twisting her fingers in her apron. Rosalind had noted a strangeness in the woman's manner when she had entered the cabin, but she had ascribed it to the child's illness, and had thought nothing more of it. But now it burst upon her with added force, and when she looked up again Rosalind saw there was an odd, strained light in her eyes—a fear, a dread—a sinister something that she shrank from. Rosalind remembered the killing of Marchmont, and had a quick divination of impending trouble. 202

"What is it, Mrs. Levins? What has happened?"

The woman gulped hard, and clenched her hands. Evidently, whatever her trouble, she had determined to bear it alone, but was now wavering.

"Tell me, Mrs. Levins; perhaps I can help you?"

"You can!" The words burst sobbingly from the woman. "Maybe you can prevent it. But, oh, Miss Rosalind, I wasn't to say anything—Clay told me not to. But I'm so afraid! Clay's so hot-headed, and Trevison is so daring! I'm afraid they won't stop at anything!"

"But what is it?" demanded Rosalind, catching something of the woman's excitement.

"It's about the machinery at the butte—the mining machinery. My God, you'll never say I told you—will you? But they're going to blow it up tonight—Clay and Trevison; they're going to dynamite it! I'm afraid there will be murder done!"

"Why didn't you tell me before?" The girl stood rigid, white, breathless.

"Oh, I ought to," moaned the woman. "But I was afraid you'd tell—Corrigan—somebody—and—and they'd get into trouble with the law!"

"I won't tell—but I'll stop it—if there's time! For your sake. Trevison is the one to blame." 203

She inquired about the location of the butte; the shortest trail, and then ran out to her horse. Once in the saddle she drew a deep breath and sent the animal scampering into the flood of moonlight.

Down toward the cut the two men ran, and when they reached a gully at a distance of several hundred feet from the dynamite shed they came upon their horses. Mounting, they rode rapidly down the track toward the butte where the mining machinery was being erected. They had taken the handkerchiefs off while they ran, and now Trevison laughed with the hearty abandon of a boy whose mischievous prank has succeeded.

"That was easy. I thought I heard a noise, though, when you backed against the door and shoved it open."

"Nobody usually monkeys around a dynamite shed at night," returned Levins. "Whew! There's enough of that stuff there to blow Manti to Kingdom Come—wherever that is."

They rode boldly across the level at the base of the butte, for they had reconnoitered after meeting on the plains just outside of town, and knew Corrigan had left no one on guard.

"It's a cinch," Levins declared as they dismounted from their horses in the shelter of a shoulder of the butte, about a hundred yards from where the corrugated iron building, nearly complete, loomed somberly on the level. "But if they'd ever get evidence that we done it—"

Trevison laughed lowly, with a grim humor that made Levins look sharply at him. "That abandoned pueblo on the creek near your shack is built like a fortress, Levins." 204

"What in hell has this job got to do with that dobie pile?" questioned the other.

"Plenty. Oh, you're curious, now. But I'm going to keep you guessing for a day or two."

"You'll go loco—give you time," scoffed Levins.

"Somebody else will go crazy when this stuff lets go," laughed Trevison, tapping his pockets.

Levins snickered. They trailed the reins over the heads of their horses, and walked swiftly toward the corrugated iron building. Halting in the shadow of it, they held a hurried conference, and then separated, Trevison going toward the engine, already set up, with its flimsy roof covering it, and working around it for a few minutes, then darting from it to a small building filled with tools and stores, and to a pile of machinery and supplies stacked against the wall of the butte. They worked rapidly, elusive as shadows in the deep gloom of the wall of the butte, and when their work was completed they met in the full glare of the moonlight near the

corrugated iron building and whispered again.

Lashing her horse over a strange trail, Rosalind Benham came to a thicket of gnarled fir-balsam and scrub oak that barred her way completely. She had ridden hard and her horse breathed heavily during the short time she spent looking about her. Her own breath was coming sharply, sobbing in her throat, but it was more from excitement than from the hazard and labor of the ride, for she had paid little attention to the trail, beyond giving the horse direction, trusting to the animal's wisdom, accepting the risks as a matter-of-course. It was the imminence of violence that had aroused her, the portent of a lawless deed that might result in tragedy. She had told Mrs. Levins that she was doing this thing for *her* sake, but she knew better. She *did* consider the woman, but she realized that her dominating passion was for the grim-faced young man who, discouraged, driven to desperation by the force of circumstances—just or not—was fighting for what he considered were his rights—the accumulated results of ten years of exile and work. She wanted to save him from this deed, from the results of it, even though there was nothing but condemnation in her heart for him because of it.

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"To the left of the thicket is a slope," Mrs. Levins had told her. She stopped only long enough to get her bearings, and at her panting, "Go!" the horse leaped. They were at the crest of the slope quickly, facing the bottom, yawning, deep, dark. She shut her eyes as the horse took it, leaning back to keep from falling over the animal's head, holding tightly to the pommel of the saddle. They got down, someway, and when she felt the level under them she lashed the horse again, and urged him around a shoulder of the precipitous wall that loomed above her, frowning and somber.

She heard a horse whinny as she flashed past the shoulder, her own beast tearing over the level with great catlike leaps, but she did not look back, straining her eyes to peer into the darkness along the wall of the butte for sight of the buildings and machinery.

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She saw them soon after passing the shoulder, and exclaimed her thanks sharply.

"All set," said one of the shadowy figures near the corrugated iron building. A match flared, was applied to a stick of punk in the hands of each man, and again they separated, each running, applying the glowing wand here and there.

Trevison's work took him longest, and when he leaped from the side of a mound of supplies Levins was already running back toward the shoulder where they had left their horses. They joined, then split apart, their weapons leaping into their hands, for they heard the rapid drumming of horse's hoofs.

"They're coming!" panted Trevison, his jaws setting as he plunged on toward the shoulder of the butte. "Run low and duck at the flash of their guns!" he warned Levins.

A wide swoop brought the oncoming horse around the shoulder of the butte into full view. As the moonlight shone, momentarily, on the rider, Trevison cried out, hoarsely:

"God, it's a woman!"

He leaped, at the words, out of the shadow of the butte into the moonlight of the level, straight into the path of the running horse, which at sight of him slid, reared and came to a halt, snorting and trembling. Trevison had recognized the girl; he flung himself at the horse, muttering: "Dynamite!" seized the beast by the bridle, forced its head around despite the girl's objections and incoherent pleadings—some phrases of which sank home, but were disregarded.

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"Don't!" she cried, fiercely, as he struck the animal with his fist to accelerate its movements. She was still crying to him, wildly, hysterically, as he got the animal's head around and slapped it sharply on the hip, his pistol crashing at its heels.

The frightened animal clattered over the back trail, Trevison running after it. He reached Nigger, flung himself into the saddle, and raced after Levins, who was already far down the level, following Rosalind's horse. At a turn in the butte he came upon them both, their horses halted, the girl berating Levins, the man laughing lowly at her.

"Don't!" she cried to Trevison as he rode up. "Please, Trevison—don't let *that* happen! It's criminal; it's outlawry!"

"Too late," he said grimly, and rode close to her to grasp the bridle of her horse. Standing thus, they waited—an age, to the girl, in reality only a few seconds. Then the deep, solemn silence of the night was split by a hollow roar, which echoed and re-echoed as though a thousand thunder storms had centered over their heads. A vivid flash, extended, effulgent, lit the sky, the earth rocked, the canyon walls towering above them seemed to sway and reel drunkenly. The girl covered her face with her hands. Another blast smote the night, reverberating on the heels of the other; there followed another and another, so quickly that they blended; then another, with a distinct interval between. Then a breathless, unreal calm, through which distant echoes rumbled; then a dead silence, shattered at last by a heavy, distant clatter, as though myriad big hailstones were falling on a pavement. And then another silence—the period of reeling calm after an earthquake.

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"O God!" wailed the girl; "it is horrible!"

"You've got to get out of here—the whole of Manti will be here in a few minutes! Come on!"

He urged Nigger farther down the canyon, and up a rocky slope that brought them to the mesa. The girl was trembling, her breath coming gaspingly. He faced her as they came to a halt,

pityingly, with a certain dogged resignation in his eyes.

“What brought you here? Who told you we were here?” he asked, gruffly.

“It doesn’t matter!” She faced him defiantly. “You have outraged the laws of your country tonight! I hope you are punished for it!”

He laughed, derisively. “Well, you’ve seen; you know. Go and inform your friends. What I have done I did after long deliberation in which I considered fully the consequences to myself. Levins wasn’t concerned in it, so you don’t need to mention his name. Your ranch is in that direction, Miss Benham.” He pointed southeastward, Nigger lunged, caught his stride in two or three jumps, and fled toward the southwest. His rider did not hear the girl’s voice; it was drowned in clatter of hoofs as he and Levins rode.

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CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER WOMAN RIDES

Trevison rode in to town the next morning. On his way he went to the edge of the butte overlooking the level, and looked down upon the wreck and ruin he had caused. Masses of twisted steel and iron met his gaze; the level was littered with debris, which a gang of men under Carson was engaged in clearing away; a great section of the butte had been blasted out, earth, rocks, sand, had slid down upon much of the wreckage, partly burying it. The utter havoc of the scene brought a fugitive smile to his lips.

He saw Carson waving a hand to him, and he answered the greeting, noting as he did so that Corrigan stood at a little distance behind Carson, watching. Trevison did not give him a second look, wheeling Nigger and sending him toward Manti at a slow lope. As he rode away, Corrigan called to Carson.

“Your friend didn’t seem to be much surprised.”

Carson turned, making a grimace while his back was yet toward Corrigan, but grinning broadly when he faced around.

“Didn’t he now? I wasn’t noticin’. But, begorra, how c’ud he be surprised, whin the whole domned country was rocked out av its bed be the blast! Wud ye be expictin’ him to fall over in a faint on beholdin’ the wreck?” 210

“Not he,” said Corrigan, coldly; “he’s got too much nerve for that.”

“Ain’t he, now!” Carson looked guilelessly at the other. “Wud ye be havin’ anny idee who done it?”

Corrigan’s eyes narrowed. “No,” he said shortly, and turned away.

Trevison’s appearance in Manti created a stir. He had achieved a double result by his deed, for besides destroying the property and making it impossible for Corrigan to resume work for a considerable time, he had caused Manti’s interest to center upon him sharply, having shocked into the town’s consciousness a conception of the desperate battle that was being waged at its doors. For Manti had viewed the devastated butte early that morning, and had come away, seething with curiosity to get a glimpse of the man whom everybody secretly suspected of being the cause of it. Many residents of the town had known Trevison before—in half an hour after his arrival he was known to all. Public opinion was heavily in his favor and many approving comments were heard.

“I ain’t blamin’ him a heap,” said a man in the *Belmont*. “If things is as you say they are, there ain’t much more that a *man* could do!”

“The laws is made for the guys with the coin an’ the pull,” said another, vindictively.

“An’ dynamite ain’t carin’ who’s usin’ it,” said another, slyly. Both grinned. The universal sympathy for the “under dog” oppressed by Justice perverted or controlled, had here found expression. 211

It was so all over Manti. Admiring glances followed Trevison; though he said no word concerning the incident; nor could any man have said, judging from the expression of his face, that he was elated. He had business in Manti—he completed it, and when he was ready to go he got on Nigger and loped out of town.

“That man’s nerve is as cold as a naked Eskimo at the North Pole,” commented an admirer. “If I’d done a thing like that I’d be layin’ low to see if any evidence would turn up against me.”

“I reckon there ain’t a heap of evidence,” laughed his neighbor. “I expect everybody knows he done it, but knowin’ an’ provin’ is two different things.”

A mile out of town Trevison met Corrigan. The latter halted his horse when he saw Trevison and waited for him to come up. The big man’s face wore an ugly, significant grin.

“You did a complete job,” he said, eyeing the other narrowly. “And there doesn’t seem to be any evidence. But look out! When a thing like that happens there’s always somebody around to see it, and if I can get evidence against you I’ll send you up for it!”

He noted a slight quickening of Trevison’s eyes at his mention of a witness, and a fierce exultation leaped within him.

Trevison laughed, looking the other fairly between the eyes. Rosalind Benham hadn’t informed on him. However, the day was not yet gone.

“Get your evidence before you try to do any bluffing,” he challenged. He spurred Nigger on, not looking back at his enemy.

Corrigan rode to the laborers’ tents, where he talked for a time with the cook. In the mess tent he stood with his back to a rough, pine-topped table, his hands on its edge. The table had not yet been cleared from the morning meal, for the cook had been interested in the explosion. He tried to talk of it with Corrigan, but the latter adroitly directed the conversation otherwise. The cook would have said they had a pleasant talk. Corrigan seemed very companionable this morning. He laughed a little; he listened attentively when the cook talked. After a while Corrigan fumbled in his pockets. Not finding a cigar, he looked eloquently at the cook’s pipe, in the latter’s mouth, belching much smoke.

“Not a single cigar,” he said. “I’m dying for a taste of tobacco.”

The cook took his pipe from his mouth and wiped the stem hastily on a sleeve. “If you don’t mind I’ve been suckin’ on it,” he said, extending it.

“I wouldn’t deprive you of it for the world.” Corrigan shifted his position, looked down at the table and smiled. “Luck, eh?” he said, picking up a black brier that lay on the table behind him. “Got plenty of tobacco?”

The cook dove for a box in a corner and returned with a cloth sack, bulging. He watched while Corrigan filled the pipe, and grinned while his guest was lighting it.

“Carson’ll be ravin’ today for forgettin’ his pipe. He must have left it layin’ on the table this mornin’—him bein’ in such a rush to get down, to the explosion.”

“It’s Carson’s, eh?” Corrigan surveyed it with casual interest. “Well,” after taking a few puffs “—I’ll say for Carson that he knows how to take care of it.”

He left shortly afterward, laying the pipe on the table where he had found it. Five minutes later he was in Judge Lindman’s presence, leaning over the desk toward the other.

“I want you to issue a warrant for Patrick Carson. I want him brought in here for examination. Charge him with being an accessory before the fact, or anything that seems to fit the case. But throw him into the cooler—and keep him there until he talks. He knows who broke into the dynamite shed, and therefore he knows who did the dynamiting. He’s friendly with Trevison, and if we can make him admit he saw Trevison at the shed, we’ve got the goods. He warned Trevison the other day, when I had the deputies lined up at the butte, and I found his pipe this morning near the door of the dynamite shed. We’ll make him talk, damn him!”

Banker Braman had closed the door between the front and rear rooms, pulled down the shades of the windows, lighted the kerosene lamp, and by its wavering flicker was surveying his reflection in the small mirror affixed to one of the walls of the building. He was pleased, as the fatuous self-complacence of his look indicated, and carefully, almost fastidiously dressed, and he could not deny himself this last look into the mirror, even though he was now five minutes late with his appointment. The five minutes threatened to become ten, for, in adjusting his tie-pin it slipped from his fingers, struck the floor and vanished, as though an evil fate had gobbled it.

He searched for it frenziedly, cursing lowly, but none the less viciously. It was quite by accident that when his patience was strained almost to the breaking point, he struck his hand against a board that formed part of the partition between his building and the courthouse next door, and tore a huge chunk of skin from the knuckles. He paid little attention to the injury, however, for the agitating of the board disclosed the glittering recreant, and he pounced upon it with the precision of a hawk upon its prey, snarling triumphantly.

“I’ll nail that damned board up, some day!” he threatened. But he knew he wouldn’t, for by lying on the floor and pulling the board out a trifle, he could get a clear view of the interior of the courthouse, and could hear quite plainly, in spite of the presence of a wooden box resting against the wall on the other side. And some of the things that Braman had already heard through the medium of the loose board were really interesting, not to say instructive, to him.

He was ten minutes late in keeping his appointment. He might have been even later without being in danger of receiving the censure he deserved. For the lady received him in a loose wrapper and gracefully disordered hair, a glance at which made Braman gasp in unfeigned admiration.

“What’s this?” he demanded with a pretense of fatherly severity, which he imagined became him very well in the presence of women. “Not ready yet, Mrs. Harvey?”

The woman waved him to a chair with unsmiling unconcern; dropped into another, crossed her legs and leaned back in her chair, her hands folded across the back of her head, her sleeves, wide and flaring, sliding down below her elbows. She caught Braman’s burning stare of interest in this revelation of negligence, and smiled at him in faint derision.

“I’m tired, Croft. I’ve changed my mind about going to the First Merchants’ Ball. I’d much rather sit here and chin you—if you don’t mind.”

“Not a bit!” hastily acquiesced the banker. “In fact, I like the idea of staying here much better. It is more private, you know.” He grinned significantly, but the woman’s smile of faint derision changed merely to irony, which held steadily, making Braman’s cheeks glow crimson.

“Well, then,” she laughed, exulting in her power over him; “let’s get busy. What do you want to chin about?”

“I’ll tell you after I’ve wet my whistle,” said the banker, gayly. “I’m dry as a bone in the middle of the Sahara desert!”

“I’ll take mine ‘straight,’” she laughed.

Braman rang a bell. A waiter with glasses and a bottle appeared, entered, was paid, and departed, grinning without giving the banker any change from a ten dollar bill. 216

The woman laughed immoderately at Braman’s wolfish snarl.

“Be a sport, Croft. Don’t begrudge a poor waiter a few honestly earned dollars!”

“And now, what has the loose-board telephone told you?” she asked, two hours later when flushed of face from frequent attacks on the bottle—Braman rather more flushed than she—they relaxed in their chairs after a tilt at poker in which the woman had been the victor.

“You’re sure you don’t care for Trevison any more—that you’re only taking his end of this because of what he’s been to you in the past?” demanded the banker, looking suspiciously at her.

“He told me he didn’t love me any more. I couldn’t want him after that, could I?”

“I should think not.” Braman’s eyes glowed with satisfaction. But he hesitated, yielding when she smiled at him. “Damn it, I’d knife Corrigan for you!” he vowed, recklessly.

“Save Trevison—that’s all I ask. Tell me what you heard.”

“Corrigan suspects Trevison of blowing up the stuff at the butte—as everybody does, of course. He’s determined to get evidence against him. He found Carson’s pipe at the door of the dynamite shed this morning. Carson is a friend of Trevison’s. Corrigan is going to have Judge Lindman issue a warrant for the arrest of Carson—on some charge—and they’re going to jail Carson until he talks.” 217

The woman cursed profanely, sharply. “That’s Corrigan’s idea of a square deal. He promised me that no harm should come to Trevison.” She got up and walked back and forth in the room, Braman watching her with passion lying naked in his eyes, his lips loose and moist.

She stopped in front of him, finally. “Go home, Croft—there’s a good boy. I want to think.”

“That’s cruelty to animals,” he laughed in a strained voice. “But I’ll go,” he added at signs of displeasure on her face. “Can I see you tomorrow night?”

“I’ll let you know.” She held the door open for him, and permitted him to take her hand for an instant. He squeezed it hotly, the woman making a grimace of repugnance as she closed the door.

Swiftly she changed from her loose gown to a simple, short-skirted affair, slipped on boots, a felt hat, gloves. Leaving the light burning, she slipped out into the hall and called to the waiter who had served her and Braman. By rewarding him generously she procured a horse, and a few minutes later she emerged from the building by a rear door, mounting the animal and sending it clattering out into the night.

Twice she lost her way and rode miles before she recovered her sense of direction, and when she finally pulled the beast to a halt at the edge of the Diamond K ranchhouse gallery, midnight was not far away. The ranchhouse was dark. She smothered a gasp of disappointment as she crossed the gallery floor. She was about to hammer on the door when it swung open and Trevison stepped out, peered closely at her and laughed shortly. 218

“It’s you, eh?” he said. “I thought I told you—”

She winced at his tone, but it did not lessen her concern for him.

“It isn’t that, Trev! And I don’t care how you treat me—I deserve it! But I can’t see them punish you—for what you did last night!” She felt him start, his muscles stiffen.

“Something has turned up, then. You came to warn me? What is it?”

“You were seen last night! They’re going to arrest—”

“So she squealed, did she?” he interrupted. He laughed lowly, bitterly, with a vibrant disappointment that wrung the woman’s heart with sympathy. But her brain quickly grasped the significance of his words, and longing dulled her sense of honor. It was too good an opportunity to miss. “Bah! I expected it. She told me she would. I was a fool to dream otherwise!” He turned on Hester and grasped her by the shoulders, and her flesh deadened under his fingers.

“Did she tell Corrigan?”

“Yes.” The woman told the lie courageously, looking straight into his eyes, though she shrank at the fire that came into them as he released her and laughed.

“Where did you get your information?” His voice was suddenly sullen and cold.

“From Braman.”

He started, and laughed in humorous derision.

“Braman and Corrigan are blood brothers in this deal. You must have captivated the little sneak completely to make him lose his head like that!”

“I did it for you, Trev—for you. Don’t you see? Oh, I despise the little beast! But he dropped a hint one day when I was in the bank, and I deliberately snared him, hoping I might be able to gain information that would benefit you. And I have, Trev!” she added, trembling with a hope that his hasty judgment might result to her advantage. And how near she had come to mentioning Carson’s name! If Trevison had waited for just another second before interrupting her! Fortune had played favorably into her hands tonight!

“For you, boy,” she said, slipping close to him, sinuously, whispering, knowing the “she” he had mentioned *must* be Rosalind Benham. “Old friends are best, boy. At least they can be depended upon not to betray one. Trev; let me help you! I can, and I will! Why, I love you, Trev! And you need me, to help you fight these people who are trying to ruin you!”

“You don’t understand.” Trevison’s voice was cold and passionless. “It seems I can’t *make* you understand. I’m grateful for what you have done for me tonight—very grateful. But I can’t live a lie, woman. I don’t love you!”

“But you love a woman who has delivered you into the hands of your enemies,” she moaned.

“I can’t help it,” he declared hoarsely. “I don’t deny it. I would love her if she sent me to the gallows, and stood there, watching me die!”

The woman bowed her head, and dropped her hands listlessly to her sides. In this instant she was thinking almost the same words that Rosalind Benham had murmured on her ride to Blakeley’s, when she had discovered Trevison’s identity: “I wonder if Hester Keyes knows what she has missed.”

CHAPTER XXII

A MAN ERRS—AND PAYS

For a time Trevison stood on the gallery, watching the woman as she faded into the darkness toward Manti, and then he laughed mirthlessly and went into the house, emerging with a rifle and saddle. A few minutes later he rode Nigger out of the corral and headed him southwestward. Shortly after midnight he was at the door of Levins’ cabin. The latter grinned with feline humor after they held a short conference.

“That’s right,” he said; “you don’t need any of the boys to help you pull *that* off—they’d mebbe go to actin’ foolish an’ give the whole snap away. Besides, I’m a heap tickled to be let in on that sort of a jamboree!” There followed an interval, during which his grin faded. “So she peached on you, eh? She told my woman she wouldn’t. That’s a woman, ain’t it? How’s a man to tell about ’em?”

“That’s a secret of my own that I am not ready to let you in on. Don’t tell your wife where you are going *tonight*.”

“I ain’t reckonin’ to. I’ll be with you in a jiffy!” He vanished into the cabin, reappeared, ran to the stable, and rode out to meet Trevison. Together they were swallowed up by the plains.

At eight o’clock in the morning Corrigan came out of the dining-room of his hotel and stopped at the cigar counter. He filled his case, lit one, and stood for a moment with an elbow on the glass of the show case, smoking thoughtfully.

“That was quite an accident you had at your mine. Have you any idea who did it?” asked the clerk, watching him furtively.

Corrigan glanced at the man, his lips curling.

“You might guess,” he said through his teeth.

“That fellow Trevison is a bad actor,” continued the clerk. “And say,” he went on, confidentially; “not that I want to make you feel bad, but the majority of the people of this town are standing with him in this deal. They think you are not giving the land-owners a square deal. Not that I’m ‘knocking’ *you*,” the clerk denied, flushing at the dark look Corrigan threw him. “That’s merely what I hear. Personally, I’m for you. This town needs men like you, and it can get along without fellows like Trevison.”

“Thank you,” smiled Corrigan, disgusted with the man, but feeling that it might be well to cultivate such ingratiating interest. “Have a cigar.”

“I’ll go you. Yes, sir,” he added, when he had got the weed going; “this town can get along without any Trevisons. These sagebrush rummies out here give me a pain. What this country

needs is less brute force and more brains!" He drew his shoulders erect as though convinced that he was not lacking in the particular virtue to which he had referred.

"You are right," smiled Corrigan, mildly. "Brains are all important. A hotel clerk must be well supplied. I presume you see and hear a great many things that other people miss seeing and hearing." Corrigan thought this thermometer of public opinion might have other information.

"You've said it! We've got to keep our wits about us. There's very little escapes us." He leered at Corrigan's profile. "That's a swell Moll in number eleven, ain't it?"

"What do you know about her?" Corrigan's face was inexpressive.

"Oh say now!" The clerk guffawed close to Corrigan's ear without making the big man wink an eyelash. "You don't mean to tell me that you ain't *on*! I saw you steer to her room one night—the night she came here. And once or twice, since. But of course us hotel clerks don't see anything! She is down on the register as Mrs. Harvey. But say! You don't see any married women running around the country dressed like her!"

"She may be a widow."

"Well, yes, maybe she might. But she shows speed, don't she?" He whispered. "You're a pretty good friend of mine, now, and maybe if I'd give you a tip you'd throw something in my way later on—eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, you might start a hotel here—or something. And I'm thinking of blowing this joint. This town's booming, and it can stand a swell hotel in a few months."

"You're on—if I build a hotel. Shoot!"

The clerk leaned closer, whispering: "She receives other men. You're not the only one."

"Who?"

The clerk laughed, and made a funnel of one hand. "The banker across the street—Braman."

Corrigan bit his cigar in two, and slowly spat that which was left in his mouth into a cuspidor. He contrived to smile, though it cost him an effort, and his hands were clenched.

"How many times has he been here?"

"Oh, several."

"When was he here last?"

"Last night." The clerk laughed. "Looked half stewed when he left. Kinda hectic, too. Him and her must have had a tiff, for he left early. And after he'd gone—right away after—she sent one of the waiters out for a horse."

"Which way did she go?"

"West—I watched her; she went the back way, from here."

Corrigan smiled and went out. The expression of his face was such as to cause the clerk to mutter, dazedly: "He didn't seem to be a whole lot interested. I guess I must have sized him up wrong."

Corrigan stopped at his office in the bank, nodding curtly to Braman. Shortly afterward he got up and went to the courthouse. He had ordered Judge Lindman to issue a warrant for Carson the previous morning, and had intended to see that it was served. But a press of other matters had occupied his attention until late in the night.

He tried the front door of the courthouse, to find it locked. The rear door was also locked. He tried the windows—all were fastened securely. Thinking the Judge still sleeping he went back to his office and spent an hour going over some correspondence. At the end of that time he visited the courthouse again. Angered, he went around to the side and burst the flimsy door in, standing in the opening, glowering, for the Judge's cot was empty, and the Judge nowhere to be seen.

Corrigan stalked through the building, cursing. He examined the cot, and discovered that it had been slept in. The Judge must have risen early. Obviously, there was nothing to do but to wait. Corrigan did that, impatiently. For a long time he sat in the chair at his desk, watching Braman, studying him, scowling, rage in his heart. "If he's up to any dirty work, I'll choke him until his tongue hangs out a yard!" was a mental threat that he repeated many times. "But he's just mush-headed over the woman, I guess—he's that kind of a fool!"

At ten o'clock Corrigan jumped on his horse and rode out to the butte where the laborers were working, clearing away the debris from the explosion. No one there had seen Judge Lindman. Corrigan rode back to town, fuming with rage. Finding some of the deputies he sent them out to search for the Judge. One by one they came in and reported their failure. At six-thirty, after the arrival of the evening train from Dry Bottom, Corrigan was sitting at his desk, his face black with wrath, reading for the third or fourth time a letter that he had spread out on the desk before him:

> "Mr. Jefferson Corrigan:
>
> "I feel it is necessary for me to take a short rest. Recent excitement in Manti has left me very nervous and unstrung. I shall be away from Manti for about two weeks, I think. During my absence any pending litigation must be postponed, of course."

The letter was signed by Judge Lindman, and postmarked “Dry Bottom.”

Corrigan got up after a while and stuffed the letter into a pocket. He went out, and when he returned, Braman had gone out also—to supper, Corrigan surmised. When the banker came in an hour later, Corrigan was still seated at his desk. The banker smiled at him, and Corrigan motioned to him.

Corrigan’s voice was silky. “Where were you last night, Braman?”

The banker’s face whitened; his thoughts became confused, but instantly cleared when he observed from the expression of the big man’s face that the question was, apparently, a casual one. But he drew his breath tremulously. One could never be sure of Corrigan.

“I spent the night here—in the back room.”

“Then you didn’t see the Judge last night—or hear him?”

“No.”

Corrigan drew the Judge’s letter from the pocket and passed it over to Braman, watching his face steadily as he read. He saw a quick stain appear in the banker’s cheeks, and his own lips tightened. 227

The banker coughed before he spoke. “Wasn’t that a rather abrupt leave-taking?”

“Yes—rather,” said Corrigan, dryly. “You didn’t hear him walking about during the night?”

“No.”

“You’re rather a heavy sleeper, eh? There is only a thin board partition between this building and the courthouse.”

“He must have left after daylight. Of course, any noise he might have made after that I wouldn’t have noticed.”

“No, of course not,” said Corrigan, passionlessly. “Well—he’s gone.” He seemed to have dismissed the matter from his mind and Braman sighed with relief. But he watched Corrigan narrowly during the remainder of the time he stayed in the office, and when he went out, Braman shook a vindictive fist at his back.

“Worry, damn you!” he sneered. “I don’t know what was in Judge Lindman’s mind, but I hope he never comes back! That will help to repay you for that knockdown!”

Corrigan went over to the *Castle* and ate supper. He was preoccupied and deliberate, for he was trying to weave a complete fabric out of the threads of Braman’s visits to Hester Harvey; Hester’s ride westward, and Judge Lindman’s abrupt departure. He had a feeling that they were in some way connected.

At a little after seven he finished his meal, went upstairs and knocked at the door of Hester Harvey’s room. He stepped inside when she opened the door, and stood, both hands in the pockets of his trousers, looking at her with a smile of repressed malignance. 228

“Nice night for a ride, wasn’t it?” he said, his lips parting a very little to allow the words to filter through.

The woman flashed a quick, inquiring look at him, saw the passion in his eyes, the gleam of malevolent antagonism, and she set herself against it. For her talk with Trevison last night had convinced her of the futility of hope. She had gone out of his life as a commonplace incident slips into the oblivion of yesteryear. Worse—he had refused to recall it. It hurt her, this knowledge—his rebuff. It had aroused cold, wanton passions in her—she had become a woman who did not care. She met Corrigan’s gaze with a look of defiant mockery.

“Swell. I enjoyed every minute of it. Won’t you sit down?”

He held himself back, grinning coldly, for the woman’s look had goaded him to fury.

“No,” he said; “I’ll stand. I won’t be here a minute. You saw Trevison last night, eh? You warned him that I was going to have Carson arrested.” He had hazarded this guess, for it had seemed to him that it must be the solution to the mystery, and when he caught the quick, triumphant light in the woman’s eyes at his words he knew he had not erred.

“Yes,” she said; “I saw him, and I told him—what Braman told me.” She saw his eyes glitter and she laughed harshly. “That’s what you wanted to know, isn’t it, Jeff—what Braman told me? Well, you know it. I knew you couldn’t play square with me. You thought you could dupe me —*again*, didn’t you? Well, you didn’t, for I snared Braman and pumped him dry. He’s kept me posted on your movements; and his little board telephone—Ha, ha! that makes you squirm, doesn’t it? But it was all wasted effort—Trevison won’t have me—he’s through. And I’m through. I’m not going to try any more. I’m going back East, after I get rested. You fight it out with Trevison. But I warn you, he’ll beat you—and I wish he would! As for that beast, Braman, I wish —Ah, let him go, Jeff,” she advised, noting the cold fury in his eyes. 229

“That’s all right,” he said with a dry laugh. “You and Braman have done well. It hasn’t done me any harm, and so we’ll forget about it. What do you say to having a drink—and a talk. As in old times, eh?” He seemed suddenly to have conquered his passion, but the queer twitching of his lips warned the woman, and when he essayed to move toward her, smiling pallidly, she darted to the far side of a stand near the center of the room, pulled out a drawer, produced a small revolver and leveled it at him, her eyes wide and glittering with menace.

“Stay where you are, Jeff!” she ordered. “There’s murder in your heart, and I know it. But I don’t intend to be the victim. I’ll shoot if you come one step nearer!”

He smirked at her, venomously. “All right,” he said. “You’re wise. But get out of town on the next train.” 230

“I’ll go when I get ready—you can’t scare me. Let me alone or I’ll go to Rosalind Benham and let her in on the whole scheme.”

“Yes you will—not,” he laughed. “If I know anything about you, you won’t do anything that would give Miss Benham to Trevison.”

“That’s right; I’d rather see her married to you—that would be the refinement of cruelty!”

He laughed sneeringly and stepped out of the door. Waiting a short time, the woman heard his step in the hall. Then she darted to the door, locked it, and leaned against it, panting.

“I’ve done it now,” she murmured. “Braman—Well, it serves him right!”

Corrigan stopped in the barroom and got a drink. Then he walked to the front door and stood in it for an instant, finally stepping down into the street. Across the street in the banking room he saw a thin streak of light gleaming through a crevice in the doorway that led from the banking room to the rear. The light told him that Braman was in the rear room. Selecting a moment when the street in his vicinity was deserted, Corrigan deliberately crossed, standing for a moment in the shadow of the bank building, looking around him. Then he slipped around the building and tapped cautiously on the rear door. An instant later he was standing inside the room, his back against the door. Braman, arrayed as he had been the night before, had opened the door. He had been just ready to go when he heard Corrigan’s knock. 231

“Going out, Croft?” said Corrigan pleasantly, eyeing the other intently. “All lit up, too! You’re getting to be a gay dog, lately.”

There was nothing in Corrigan’s bantering words to bring on that sudden qualm of sickening fear that seized the banker. He knew it was his guilt that had done it—guilt and perhaps a dread of Corrigan’s rage if he *should* learn of his duplicity. But that word “lately”! If it had been uttered with any sort of an accent he might have been suspicious. But it had come with the bantering ring of the others, with no hint of special significance. And Braman was reassured.

“Yes, I’m going out.” He turned to the mirror on the wall. “I’m getting rather stale, hanging around here so much.”

“That’s right, Croft. Have a good time. How much money is there in the safe?”

“Two or three thousand dollars.” The banker turned from the glass. “Want some? Ha, ha!” he laughed at the other’s short nod; “there are other gay dogs, I guess! How much do you want?”

“All you’ve got?”

“All! Jehoshaphat! You must have a big deal on tonight!”

“Yes, big,” said Corrigan evenly. “Get it.”

He followed the banker into the banking room, carefully closing the door behind him, so that the light from the rear room could not penetrate. “That’s all right,” he reassured the banker as the latter noticed the action; “this isn’t a public matter.” 232

He stuffed his pockets with the money the banker gave him, and when the other tried to close the door of the safe he interposed a restraining hand, laughing:

“Leave it open, Croft. It’s empty now, and a cracksman trying to get into it would ruin a perfectly good safe, for nothing.”

“That’s right.”

They went into the rear room again, Corrigan last, closing the door behind him. Braman went again to the glass, Corrigan standing silently behind him.

Standing before the glass, the banker was seized with a repetition of the sickening fear that had oppressed him at Corrigan’s words upon his entrance. It seemed to him that there was a sinister significance behind Corrigan’s present silence. A tension came between them, portentous of evil. Braman shivered, but the silence held. The banker tried to think of something to say—his thoughts were rioting in chaos, a dumb, paralyzing terror had seized him, his lips stuck together, the facial muscles refusing their office. He dropped his hands to his sides and stared into the glass, noting the ghastly pallor that had come over his face—the dull, whitish yellow of muddy marble. He could not turn, his legs were quivering. He knew it was conscience—only that. And yet Corrigan’s ominous silence continued. And now he caught his breath with a shuddering gasp, for he saw Corrigan’s face reflected in the glass, looking over his shoulder—a mirthless smirk on it, the eyes cold, and dancing with a merciless and cunning purpose. While he watched, he saw Corrigan’s lips open: 233

“Where’s the board telephone, Braman?”

The banker wheeled, then. He tried to scream—the sound died in a gasping gurgle as Corrigan leaped and throttled him. Later, he fought to loosen the grip of the iron fingers at his throat, twisting, squirming, threshing about the room in his agony. The grip held, tightened. When the banker was quite still Corrigan put out the light, went into the banking room, where he scattered the papers and books in the safe all around the room. Then he twisted the lock off the

door, using an iron bar that he had noticed in a corner when he had come in, and stepped out into the shadow of the building.

CHAPTER XXIII

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Judge Lindman shivered, though a merciless, blighting sun beat down on the great stone ledge that spread in front of the opening, smothering him with heat waves that eddied in and out, and though the interior of the low-ceilinged chamber pulsed with the fetid heat sucked in from the plains generations before. The adobe walls, gray-black in the subdued light, were dry as powder and crumbling in spots, the stone floor was exposed in many places; there was a strange, sickening odor, as though the naked, perspiring bodies of inhabitants in ages past had soaked the walls and floor with the man-scent, and intervening years of disuse had mingled their musty breath with it. But for the presence of the serene-faced, steady-eyed young man who leaned carelessly against the wall outside, whose shoulder and profile he could see, the Judge might have yielded completely to the overpowering conviction that he was dreaming, and that his adventures of the past twelve hours were horrors of his imagination. But he knew from the young man's presence at the door that his experience had been real enough, and the knowledge kept his brain out of the threatening chaos.

Some time during the night he had awakened on his cot in the rear room of the courthouse to hear a cold, threatening voice warning him to silence. He had recognized the voice, as he had recognized it once before, under similar conditions. He had been gagged, his hands tied behind him. Then he had been lifted, carried outside, placed on the back of a horse, in front of his captor, and borne away in the darkness. They had ridden many miles before the horse came to a halt and he was lifted down. Then he had been forced to ascend a sharp slope; he could hear the horse clattering up behind them. But he had not been able to see anything in the darkness, though he felt he was walking along the edge of a cliff. The walk had ended abruptly, when his captor had forced him into his present quarters with a gruff admonition to sleep. Sleep had come hard, and he had done little of it, napping merely, sitting on the stone floor, his back against the wall, most of the time watching his captor. He had talked some, asking questions which his captor ignored. Then a period of oblivion had come, and he had awakened to the sunshine. For an hour he had sat where he was, looking out at his captor and blinking at the brilliant sunshine. But he had asked no questions since awakening, for he had become convinced of the meaning of all this. But he was intensely curious, now.

"Where have you brought me?" he demanded of his jailor.

"You're awake, eh?" Trevison grinned as he wheeled and looked in at his prisoner. "This," he waved a hand toward the ledge and its surroundings, "is an Indian pueblo, long deserted. It makes an admirable prison, Judge. It is also a sort of a fort. There is only one vulnerable point—the slope we came up last night. I'll take you on a tour of examination, if you like. And then you must return here, to stay until you disclose the whereabouts of the original land record."

The Judge paled, partly from anger, partly from a fear that gripped him.

"This is an outrage, Trevison! This is America!"

"Is it?" The young man smiled imperturbably. "There have been times during the past few weeks when I doubted it, very much. It *is* America, though, but it is a part of America that the average American sees little of—that he knows little of. As little, let us say, as he knows of the weird application of its laws—as applied by *some* judges." He smiled as Lindman winced. "I have given up hoping to secure justice in the regular way, and so we are in the midst of a reversion to first principles—which may lead us to our goal."

"What do you mean?"

"That I *must* have the original record, Judge, I mean to have it."

"I deny—"

"Yes—of course. Deny, if you like. We shan't argue. Do you want to explore the place? There will be plenty of time for talk."

He stepped aside as the Judge came out, and grinned broadly as he caught the Judge's shrinking look at a rifle he took up as he turned. It had been propped against the wall at his side. He swung it to the hollow of his left elbow. "Your knowledge of firearms convinces you that you can't run as fast as a rifle bullet, doesn't it, Judge?"

The Judge's face indicated that he understood.

"Ever make the acquaintance of an Indian pueblo, Judge?"

"No. I came West only a year ago, and I have kept pretty close to my work."

“Well, you’ll feel pretty intimate with this one by the time you leave it—if you’re obstinate,” laughed Trevison. He stood still and watched the Judge. The latter was staring hard at his surroundings, perhaps with something of the awed reverence that overtakes the tourist when for the first time he views an ancient ruin.

The pueblo seemed to be nothing more than a jumble of adobe boxes piled in an indiscriminate heap on a gigantic stone level surmounting the crest of a hill. A sheer rock wall, perhaps a hundred feet in height, descended to the surrounding slopes; the latter sweeping down to join the plains. A dust, light, dry, and feathery lay thickly on the adobe boxes on the surrounding ledge on the slopes, like a gray ash sprinkled from a giant sifter. Cactus and yucca dotted the slopes, thorny, lancelike, repellent; lava, dull, hinting of volcanic fire, filled crevices and depressions, and huge blocks of stone, detached in the progress of disintegration, were scattered about.

“It has taken ages for this to happen!” the Judge heard himself murmuring.

Trevison laughed lowly. “So it has, Judge. Makes you think of your school days, doesn’t it? You hardly remember it, though. You have a hazy sort of recollection of a print of a pueblo in a geography, or in a geological textbook, but at the time you were more interested in Greek roots, the Alps, Louis Quinze, the heroes of mythology, or something equally foreign, and you forgot that your own country might hold something of interest for you. But the history of these pueblo towns must be pretty interesting, if one could get at it. All that I have heard of it are some pretty weird legends. There can be no doubt, I suppose, that the people who inhabited these communal houses had laws to govern them—and judges to apply the laws. And I presume that then, as now, the judges were swayed by powerful influences in—” 238

The Judge glared at his tormentor. The latter laughed.

“It is reasonable to presume, too,” he went on, “that in some cases the judges rendered some pretty raw decisions. And carrying the supposition further, we may believe that then, as now, the poor downtrodden proletariat got rather hot under the collar. There are always some hot-tempered fools among all classes and races that do, you know. They simply can’t stand the feel of the iron heel of the oppressor. Can you picture a hot-tempered fool of that tribe abducting a judge of the court of his people and carrying him away to some uninhabited place, there to let him starve until he decided to do the right thing?”

“Starve!” gasped the Judge.

“The chambers and tunnels connecting these communal houses—they look like mud boxes, don’t they, Judge? And there isn’t a soul in any of them—nor a bite to eat! As I was about to remark, the chambers and tunnels and the passages connecting these places are pretty bare and cheerless—if we except scorpions, horned toads, centipedes, tarantulas—and other equally undesirable occupants. Not a pleasant place to sojourn in until—How long can a man live without eating, Judge? You know, of course, that the Indians selected an elevated and isolated site, such as this, because of its strategical advantages? This makes an ideal fort. Nobody can get into it except by negotiating the slope we came up last night. And a rifle in the hands of a man with a yearning to use it would make *that* approach pretty unsafe, wouldn’t it?” 239

“My God!” moaned the Judge; “you talk like a man bereft of his senses!”

“Or like a man who is determined not to be robbed of his rights,” added Trevison. “Well, come along. We won’t dwell on such things if they depress you.”

He took the Judge’s arm and escorted him. They circled the broad stone ledge. It ran in wide, irregular sweeps in the general outline of a huge circle, surrounded by the dust-covered slopes melting into the plains, so vast that the eye ached in an effort to comprehend them. Miles away they could see smoke befouling the blue of the sky. The Judge knew the smoke came from Manti, and he wondered if Corrigan were wondering over his disappearance. He mentioned that to Trevison, and the latter grinned faintly at him. 240

“I forgot to mention that to you. It was all arranged last night. Clay Levins went to Dry Bottom on a night train. He took with him a letter, which he was to mail at Dry Bottom, explaining your absence to Corrigan. Needless to say, your signature was forged. But I did so good a job that Corrigan will not suspect. Corrigan will get the letter by tonight. It says that you are going to take a long rest.”

The Judge gasped and looked quickly at Trevison. The young man’s face was wreathed in a significant grin.

“In the first analysis, this looks like a rather strange proceeding,” said Trevison. “But if you get deeper into it you see its logic. You know where the original record is. I want it. I mean to have it. One life—a dozen lives—won’t stop me. Oh, well, we won’t talk about it if you’re going to shudder that way.”

He led the Judge up a flimsy, rotted ladder to a flat roof, forcing him to look into a chamber where vermin fled at their appearance. Then through numerous passages, low, narrow, reeking with a musty odor that nauseated the Judge; on narrow ledges where they had to hug the walls to keep from falling, and then into an open court with a stone floor, stained dark, in the center a huge oblong block of stone, surmounting a pyramid, appalling in its somber suggestiveness.

“The sacrificial altar,” said Trevison, grimly. “These stains here, are—”

He stopped, for the Judge had turned his back.

Trevison led him away. He had to help him down the ladder each time they descended, and when they reached the chamber from which they had started the Judge was white and shaking. 241

Trevison pushed him inside and silently took a position at the door. The Judge sank to the floor of the chamber, groaning.

The hours dragged slowly. Trevison changed his position twice. Once he went away, but returned in a few minutes with a canteen, from which he drank, deeply. The Judge had been without food or water since the night before, and thirst tortured him. The gurgle of the water as it came out of the canteen, maddened him.

“I’d like a drink, Trevison.”

“Of course. Any man would.”

“May I have one?”

“The minute you tell me where that record is.”

The Judge subsided. A moment later Trevison’s voice floated into the chamber, cold and resonant:

“I don’t think you’re in this thing for money, Judge. Corrigan has some sort of a hold on you. What is it?”

The Judge did not answer.

The sun climbed to the zenith. It grew intensely hot in the chamber. Twice during the afternoon the Judge asked for water, and each time he received the answer he had received before. He did not ask for food, for he felt it would not be given him. At sundown his captor entered the chamber and gave him a meager draught from the canteen. Then he withdrew and stood on the ledge in front of the door, looking out into the darkening plains, and watching him, a conviction of the futility of resisting him seized the Judge. He stood framed in the opening of the chamber, 242 the lines of his bold, strong face prominent in the dusk, the rifle held loosely in the crook of his left arm, the right hand caressing the stock, his shoulders squared, his big, lithe, muscular figure suggesting magnificent physical strength, as the light in his eyes, the set of his head and the firm lines of his mouth, brought a conviction of rare courage and determination. The sight of him thrilled the Judge; he made a picture that sent the Judge’s thoughts skittering back to things primitive and heroic. In an earlier day the Judge had dreamed of being like him, and the knowledge that he had fallen far short of realizing his ideal made him shiver with self-aversion. He stifled a moan—or tried to and did not succeed, for it reached Trevison’s ears and he turned quickly.

“Did you call, Judge?”

“Yes, yes!” whispered the Judge, hoarsely. “I want—to tell you everything! I have longed to tell you all along!”

An hour later they were sitting on the edge of the ledge, their feet dangling, the abyss below them, the desert stars twinkling coldly above them; around them the indescribable solitude of a desert night filled with mystery, its vague, haunting, whispering voice burdened with its age-old secrets. Trevison had an arm around the Judge’s shoulder. Their voices mingled—the Judge’s low, quavering; Trevison’s full, deep, sympathetic.

After a while a rider appeared out of the starlit haze of the plains below them. The Judge started. Trevison laughed. 243

“It’s Clay Levins, Judge. I’ve been watching him for half an hour. He’ll stay here with you while I go after the record. Under the bottom drawer, eh?”

Levins hallooed to them. Trevison answered, and he and the Judge walked forward to meet Levins at the crest of the slope.

“Slicker’n a whistle!” declared Levins, answering the question Trevison put to him. “I mailed the damn letter an’ come back on the train that brought it to him!” He grinned felinely at the Judge. “I reckon you’re a heap dry an’ hungry by this time?”

“The Judge has feasted,” said Trevison. “I’m going after the record. You’re to stay here with the Judge until I return. Then the three of us will ride to Las Vegas, where we will take a train to Santa Fe, to turn the record over to the Circuit Court.”

“Sounds good!” gloated Levins. “But it’s too long around. I’m for somethin’ more direct. Why not take the Judge with you to Manti, get the record, takin’ a bunch of your boys with you—an’ salivate that damned Corrigan an’ his deputies!”

Trevison laughed softly. “I don’t want any violence if I can avoid it. My land won’t run away while we’re in Santa Fe. And the Judge doesn’t want to meet Corrigan just now. I don’t know that I blame him.”

“Where’s the record?”

Trevison told him, and Levins grumbled. “Corrigan’ll have his deputies guardin’ the courthouse, most likely. If you run ag’in ’em, they’ll bore you, sure as hell!”

“I’ll take care of myself—I promise you that!” he laughed, and the Judge shuddered at the 244 sound. He vanished into the darkness of the ledge, returning presently with Nigger, led him down the slope, called a low “So-long” to the two watchers on the ledge, and rode away into the haze of the plains.

Trevison rode fast, filled with a grim elation. He pitied the Judge. An error—a momentary weakening of moral courage—had plunged the jurist into the clutches of Corrigan; he could hardly be held responsible for what had transpired—he was a puppet in the hands of an unscrupulous schemer, with a threat of exposure hanging over him. No wonder he feared Corrigan! Trevison's thoughts grew bitter as they dwelt upon the big man; the old longing to come into violent physical contact with the other seized him, raged within him, brought a harsh laugh to his lips as he rode. But a greater passion than he felt for the Judge or Corrigan tugged at him as he urged the big black over the plains toward the twinkling lights of Manti—a fierce exultation which centered around Rosalind Benham. She had duped him, betrayed him to his enemy, had played with him—but she had lost!

Yet the thought of his coming victory over her was poignantly unsatisfying. He tried to picture her—did picture her—receiving the news of Corrigan's defeat, and somehow it left him with a feeling of regret. The vengeful delight that he should have felt was absent—he felt sorry for her. He charged himself with being a fool for yielding to so strange a sentiment, but it lingered persistently. It fed his rage against Corrigan, however, doubled it, for upon him lay the blame. 245

It was late when he reached the outskirts of Manti. He halted Nigger in the shadow of a shed a hundred yards or so down the track from the courthouse, dismounted and made his way cautiously down the railroad tracks. He was beyond the radius of the lights from various windows that he passed, but he moved stealthily, not knowing whether Corrigan had stationed guards about the courthouse, as Levins had warned. An instant after reaching a point opposite the courthouse he congratulated himself on his discretion, for he caught a glimmer of light at the edge of a window shade in the courthouse, saw several indistinct figures congregated at the side door, outside. He slipped behind a tool shed at the side of the track, and crouching there, watched and listened. A mumbling of voices reached him, but he could distinguish no word. But it was evident that the men outside were awaiting the reappearance of one of their number who had gone into the building.

Trevison watched, impatiently. Then presently the side door opened, letting out a flood of light, which bathed the figures of the waiting men. Trevison scowled, for he recognized them as Corrigan's deputies. But he was not surprised, for he had half expected them to be hanging around the building. Two figures stepped down from the door as he watched, and he knew them for Corrigan and Gieger. Corrigan's voice reached him.

"The lock on this door is broken. I had to kick it in this morning. One of you stay inside, here. The rest of you scatter and keep your eyes peeled. There's trickery afoot. Judge Lindman didn't 246 go to Dry Bottom—the agent says he's sure of that because he saw every man that's got aboard a train here within the last twenty-four hours—and Judge Lindman wasn't among them! Levins was, though; he left on the one-thirty this morning and got back on the six-o'clock, tonight." He vanished into the darkness beyond the door, but called back: "I'll be within call. Don't be afraid to shoot if you see anything suspicious!"

Trevison saw a man enter the building, and the light was blotted out by the closing of the door. When his eyes were again accustomed to the darkness he observed that the men were standing close together—they seemed to be holding a conference. Then the group split up, three going toward the front of the building; two remaining near the side door, and two others walking around to the rear.

For an instant Trevison regretted that he had not taken Levins' advice about forming a posse of his own men to take the courthouse by storm, and he debated the thought of postponing action. But there was no telling what might happen during an interval of delay. In his rage over the discovery of the trick that had been played on him Corrigan might tear the interior of the building to pieces. He would be sure to if he suspected the presence of the original record. Trevison did not go for the help that would have been very welcome. Instead, he spent some time twirling the cylinder of his pistol.

He grew tired of crouching after a time and lay flat on his stomach in the shadow of the tool shed, watching the men as they tramped back and forth, around the building. He knew that 247 sooner or later there would be a minute or two of relaxation, and of this he had determined to take advantage. But it was not until sound in the town had perceptibly decreased in volume that there was any sign of the men relaxing their vigil. And then he noted them congregating at the front of the building.

"Hell," he heard one of them say; "what's the use of hittin' that trail *all* night! Bill's inside, an' we can see the door from here. I'm due for a smoke an' a palaver!" Matches flared up; the sounds of their voices reached Trevison.

Trevison disappointedly relaxed. Then, filled with a sudden decision, he slipped around the back of the tool shed and stole toward the rear of the courthouse. It projected beyond the rear of the bank building, adjoining it, forming an L, into the shadow of which Trevison slipped. He stood there for an instant, breathing rapidly, undecided. The darkness in the shadow was intense, and he was forced to feel his way along the wall for fear of stumbling. He was leaning heavily on his hands, trusting to them rather than to his footing, when the wall seemed to give way under them and he fell forward, striking on his hands and knees. Fortunately, he had made no sound in falling, and he remained in the kneeling position until he got an idea of what had happened. He had fallen across the threshold of a doorway. The door had been unfastened and the pressure of his hands had forced it inward. It was the rear door of the bank building. He looked 248 inward, wondering at Braman's carelessness—and stared fixedly straight into a beam of light that shone through a wedge-shaped crevice between two boards in the partition that separated

the buildings.

He got up silently, stepped stealthily into the room, closing the door behind him. He tried to fasten it and discovered that the lock was broken. For some time he stood, wondering, and then, giving it up, he made his way cautiously around the room, searching for Braman's cot. He found that, too, empty, and he decided that some one had broken into the building during Braman's absence. Moving away from the cot, he stumbled against something soft and yielding, and his pistol flashed into his hand in sinister preparation, for he knew from the feel of the soft object that it was a body, and he suspected that it was Braman, stalking him. He thought that until he remembered the broken lock, on the door, and then the significance of it burst upon him. Whoever had broken the lock had fixed Braman. He knelt swiftly and ran his hands over the prone form, drawing back at last with the low ejaculation: "He's a goner!" He had no time or inclination to speculate over the manner of Braman's death, and made catlike progress toward the crevice in the partition. Reaching it, he dropped on his hands and knees and peered through. A wooden box on the other side of the partition intervened, but above it he could see the form of the deputy. The man was stretched out in a chair, sideways to the crevice in the wall, sleeping. A grin of huge satisfaction spread over Trevison's face.

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His movements were very deliberate and cautious. But in a quarter of an hour he had pulled the board out until an opening was made in the partition, and then propping the board back with a chair he reached through and slowly shoved the box on the other side back far enough to admit his body. Crawling through, he rose on the other side, crossed the floor carefully, kneeled at the drawer where Judge Lindman had concealed the record, pulled it out and stuck it in the waistband of his trousers, in front, his eyes glittering with exultation. Then he began to back toward the opening in the partition. At the instant he was preparing to stoop to crawl back into the bank building, the deputy in the chair yawned, stretched and opened his eyes, staring stupidly at him. There was no mistaking the dancing glitter in Trevison's eyes, no possible misinterpretation of his tense, throaty whisper: "One chirp and you're a dead one!" And the deputy stiffened in the chair, dumb with astonishment and terror.

The deputy had not seen the opening in the partition, for it was partly hidden from his view by the box which Trevison had encountered in entering, and before the man had an opportunity to look toward the place, Trevison commanded him again, in a sharp, cold whisper:

"Get up and turn your back to me—quick! Any noise and I'll plug you! Move!"

The deputy obeyed. Then he received an order to walk to the door without looking back. He readied the door—halted.

"Now open it and get out!"

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The man did as bidden; diving headlong out into the darkness, swinging the door shut behind him. His yell to his companions mingled with the roar of Trevison's pistol as he shattered the kerosene lamp. The bullet hit the neck of the glass bowl, a trifle below the burner, the latter describing a parabola in the air and falling into the ruin of the bowl. The chimney crashed, the flame from the wick touched the oil and flared up brilliantly.

Trevison was half way through the wall by the time the oil ignited, and he grinned coldly at the sight. Haste was important now. He slipped through the opening, pulled the chair from between the board and wall, letting the board snap back, and placing the chair against it. He felt certain that the deputies would think that in some manner he had run their barricade and entered the building through the door.

He heard voices outside, a fusillade of shots, the tinkle of breaking glass; against the pine boards at his side came the wicked thud of bullets, the splintering of wood as they tore through the partition and embedded themselves in the outside wall. He ducked low and ran to the rear door, swinging it open. Braman's body bothered him; he could not leave it there, knowing the building would soon be in flames. He dragged the body outside, to a point several feet distant from the building, dropping it at last and standing erect for the first time to fill his lungs and look about him. Looking back as he ran down the tracks toward the shed where he had left Nigger, he saw shadowy forms of men running around the courthouse, which was now dully

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illuminated, the light from within dancing fitfully through the window shades. Flaming streaks rent the night from various points—thinking him still in the building the deputies were shooting through the windows. Manti, rudely awakened, was pouring its population through its doors in streams. Shouts, hoarse, inquisitive, drifted to Trevison's ears. Lights blazed up, flickering from windows like giant fireflies. Doors slammed, dogs were barking, men were running. Trevison laughed vibrantly as he ran. But his lips closed tightly when he saw two or three shadowy figures darting toward him, coming from various directions—one from across the street; another coming straight down the railroad track, still another advancing from his right. He bowed his head and essayed to pass the first figure. It reached out a hand and grasped his shoulder, arresting his flight.

"What's up?"

"Let go, you damned fool!"

The man still clung to him. Trevison wrenched himself free and struck, viciously. The man dropped with a startled cry. Another figure was upon Trevison. He wanted no more trouble at that minute.

"Hell to pay!" he panted as the second man loomed close to him in the darkness; "Trevison's in the courthouse!"

He heard the other gasp; saw him lunge forward. He struck again, bitterly, and the man went to his knees. He was up again instantly, as Trevison fled into the darkness, crying resonantly:

"This way, boys—here he is!"

"Corrigan!" breathed Trevison. He ducked as a flame-spurt split the night; reaching a corner of the shed where he had left his horse as a succession of reports rattled behind him. Corrigan was firing at him. He dared not use his own pistol, lest its flash reveal his whereabouts, and he knew he would have no chance against the odds that were against him. Nor was he intent on murder. He flung himself into the saddle, and for the first time since he had come into Trevison's possession Nigger knew the bite of spurs earnestly applied. He snorted, leaped, and plunged forward, the clatter of his hoofs bringing lancelike streaks of fire out of the surrounding blackness. Behind him Trevison heard Corrigan raging impotently, profanely. There came another scattering volley. Trevison reeled, caught himself, and then hung hard to the saddle-horn, as Nigger fled into the night, running as a coyote runs from the daylight.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANOTHER WOMAN LIES

Shortly before midnight Aunt Agatha Benham laid her book down, took off her glasses, wiped her eyes and yawned. She sat for a time stretched out in her chair, her hands folded in her lap, meditatively looking at the flicker of the kerosene lamp, thinking of the conveniences she had given up in order to chaperon a wilful girl who did not appreciate her services. It was the selfishness of youth, she decided—nothing less. But still Rosalind might understand what a sacrifice her aunt was making for her. Thrilling with self-pity, she got up, blew out the light and ascended the stairs to her room. She plumped herself in a chair at one of the front windows before beginning to undress, that she might again feel the delicious thrill, for that was the only consolation she got from a contemplation of her sacrifice, Rosalind never offered her a word of gratitude!

The thrill she anticipated was not the one she experienced—it was a thrill of apprehension that seized her—for a glowing midnight sky met her gaze as she stared in the direction of Manti, vast, extensive. In its center, directly over the town, was a fierce white glare with off-shoots of licking, leaping tongues of flame that reached skyward hungrily.

Agatha watched for one startled instant, and then she was in Rosalind's room, leaning over the bed, shaking her. The girl got up, dressed in her night clothes, and together they stood at one of the windows in the girl's room, watching.

The fierce white center of the fire seemed to expand.

"It's a fire—in Manti!" said the girl. "See! Another building has caught! Oh, I *do* hope they can put it out!"

They stood long at the window. Once, when the glow grew more brilliant, the girl exclaimed sharply, but after a time the light began to fade, and she drew a breath of relief.

"They have it under control," she said.

"Well, come to bed," advised Agatha.

"Wait!" said the girl. She pressed her face against the window and peered intently into the darkness. Then she threw up the sash, stuck her head out and listened. She drew back, her face slowly whitening.

"Some one is coming, Aunty—and riding very fast!"

A premonition of tragedy, associated with the fire, had seized the girl at her first glimpse of the light, though she had said nothing. The appearance of a rider, approaching the house at breakneck speed had added strength to her fears, and now, driven by the urge of apprehension that had seized her she flitted out of the room before Agatha could restrain her, and was down in the sitting-room in an instant, applying a match to the lamp. As the light flared up she heard the thunder of hoofs just outside the door, and she ran to it, throwing it open. She shrank back, drawing her breath gaspingly, for the rider had dismounted and stepped toward her, into the dim light of the open doorway.

"You!" she said.

A low laugh was her answer, and Trevison stepped over the threshold and closed the door behind him. From the foot of the stairs Agatha saw him, and she stood, nerveless and shaking with dread over the picture he made.

He had been more than forty-eight hours without sleep, the storm-center of action had left its impression on him, and his face was gaunt and haggard, with great, dark hollows under his eyes. The three or four days' growth of beard accentuated the bold lines of his chin and jaw; his

eyes were dancing with the fires of passion; he held a Winchester rifle under his right arm, the left, hanging limply at his side, was stained darkly. He swayed as he stood looking at the girl, and smiled with faint derision at the naked fear and wonder that had leaped into her eyes. But the derision was tinged with bitterness, for this girl with both hands pressed over her breast, heaving with the mingled emotions of modesty and dismay, was one of the chief factors in the scheme to rob him. The knowledge hurt him worse than the bullet which had passed through his arm. She had been uppermost in his thoughts during his reckless ride from Manti, and he would have cheerfully given his land, his ten years of labor, for the assurance that she was innocent. But he knew guilt when he saw it, and proof of it had been in her avoidance of him, in her ride to save Corrigan's mining machinery, in her subsequent telling of his presence at the butte on 256
the night of the dynamiting, in her bitter declaration that he ought to be punished for it. The case against her was strong. And yet on his ride from Manti he had been irresistibly drawn toward the Bar B ranchhouse. He had told himself as he rode that the impulse to visit her this night was strong within him because on his way to the pueblo he was forced to pass the house, but he knew better—he had lied to himself. He wanted to talk with her again; he wanted to show her the land record, which proved her fiance's guilt; he wanted to watch her as she looked at the record, to learn from her face—what he might find there.

He stood the rifle against the wall near the door, while the girl and her aunt watched him, breathlessly. His voice was vibrant and hoarse, but well under control, and he smiled with straight lips as he set the rifle down and drew the record from his waistband.

"I've something to show you, Miss Benham. I couldn't pass the house without letting you know what has happened." He opened the book and stepped to her side, swinging his left hand up, the index finger indicating a page on which his name appeared.

"Look!" he said, sharply, and watched her face closely. He saw her cheeks blanch, and set his lips grimly.

"Why," she said, after she had hurriedly scanned the page; "it seems to prove your title! But this is a court record, isn't it?" She examined the gilt lettering on the back of the volume, and looked up at him with wide, luminous eyes. "Where did you get that book?" 257

"From the courthouse."

"Why, I thought people weren't permitted to take court records—"

"I've taken this one," he laughed.

She looked at the blood on his hand, shudderingly. "Why," she said; "there's been violence! The fire, the blood on your hand, the record, your ride here—What does it mean?"

"It means that I've been denied my rights, and I've taken them. Is there any crime in that? Look here!" He took another step and stood looking down at her. "I'm not saying anything about Corrigan. You know what we think of each other, and we'll fight it out, man to man. But the fact that a woman is engaged to one man doesn't bar another man from the game. And I'm in this game to the finish. And even if I don't get you I don't want you to be mixed up in these schemes and plots—you're too good a girl for that!"

"What do you mean?" She stiffened, looking scornfully at him, her chin held high, outraged innocence in her manner. His cold grin of frank disbelief roused her to furious indignation. What right had he to question her integrity to make such speeches to her after his disgraceful affair with Hester Harvey?

"I do not care to discuss the matter with you!" she said, her lips stiff.

"Ha, ha!" The bitter derision in his laugh made her blood riot with hatred. He walked toward the door and took up the rifle, dimly remembering she had used the same words to him once before, 258
when he had met her as she had been riding toward Manti. Of course she wouldn't discuss such a thing—he had been a blind fool to think she would. But it proved her guilt. Swinging the rifle under his arm, he opened the door, turned when on the threshold and bowed to her.

"I'm sorry I troubled you, Miss Benham," he said. He essayed to turn, staggered, looked vacantly around the room, his lips in a queerly cold half-smile, and then without uttering a sound pitched forward, one shoulder against the door jamb, and slid slowly to his knees, where he rested, his head sinking limply to his chest. He heard the girl cry out sharply and he raised his head with an effort and smiled reassuringly at her, and when he felt her hands on his arm, trying to lift him, he laughed aloud in self-derision and got to his feet, hanging to the door jamb.

"I'm sorry, Miss Benham," he mumbled. "I lost some blood, I suppose. Rotten luck, isn't it. I shouldn't have stopped." He turned to go, lurched forward and would have fallen out of the door had not the girl seized and steadied him.

He did not resist when she dragged him into the room and closed the door, but he waved her away when she tried to take his arm and lead him toward the kitchen where, she insisted, she would prepare a stimulant and food for him. He tottered after her, tall and gaunt, his big, lithe figure strangely slack, his head rocking, the room whirling around him. He had held to the record and the rifle; the latter by the muzzle, dragging it after him, the record under his arm. 259

But his marvelous constitution, a result of his clean living and outdoor life, responded quickly to the stimulation of food and hot drinks, and in half an hour he got up, still a little weak, but with some color in his cheeks, and shame-facedly thanked the girl. He realized now, that he should not have come here; the past few hours loomed in his thoughts like a wild nightmare in which he had lost his sense of proportion, yielding to the elemental passions that had been aroused in

his long, sleepless struggle, making him act upon impulses that he would have frowned contemptuously away in a normal frame of mind.

"I've been nearly crazy, I think," he said to the girl with a wan smile of self-accusation. "I want you to forget what I said."

"What happened at Manti?" she demanded, ignoring his words.

He laughed at the recollection, tucking his rifle under his arm, preparatory to leaving. "I went after the record. I got it. There was a fight. But I got away."

"But the fire!"

"I was forced to smash a lamp in the courthouse. The wick fell into the oil, and I couldn't delay to—"

"Was anybody hurt—besides you?"

"Braman's dead." The girl gasped and shrank from him, and he saw that she believed he had killed the banker, and he was about to deny the crime when Agatha's voice shrilled through the doorway:

"There are some men coming, Rosalind!" And then, vindictively: "I presume they are desperadoes—too!"

"Deputies!" said Trevison. The girl clasped her hands over her breast in dismay, which changed to terror when she saw Trevison stiffen and leap toward the door. She was afraid for him, horrified over this second lawless deed, dumb with doubt and indecision—and she didn't want them to catch him!

He opened the door, paused on the threshold and smiled at her with straight, hard lips.

"Braman was—"

"Go!" she cried in a frenzy of anxiety; "go!"

He laughed mockingly, and looked at her intently. "I suppose I will never understand women. You are my enemy, and yet you give me food and drink and are eager to have me escape your accomplice. Don't you know that this record will ruin him?"

"Go, go!" she panted.

"Well, you're a puzzle!" he said. She saw him leap into the saddle, and she ran to the lamp, blew out the flame, and returned to the open door, in which she stood for a long time, listening to rapid hoof beats that gradually receded. Before they died out entirely there came the sound of many others, growing in volume and drawing nearer, and she beat her hands together, murmuring:

"Run, Nigger—run, run, run!"

She closed the door as the hoof beats sounded in the yard, locking it and retreating to the foot of the stairs, where Agatha stood.

"What does it all mean?" asked the elder woman. She was trembling.

"Oh, I don't know," whispered the girl, gulping hard to keep her voice from breaking. "It's something about Trevison's land. And I'm afraid, Aunty, that there is something terribly wrong. Mr. Corrigan says it belongs to him, and the court in Manti has decided in his favor. But according to the record in Trevison's possession, *he* has a clear title to it."

"There, there," consoled Agatha; "your father wouldn't permit—"

"No, no!" said the girl, vehemently; "he wouldn't. But I can't understand why Trevison fights so hard if—if he is in the wrong!"

"He is a desperado, my dear; a wild, reckless spirit who has no regard for law and order. Of course, if these men are after him, you will tell them he was here!"

"No!" said the girl, sharply; "I shan't!"

"Perhaps you shouldn't," acquiesced Agatha. She patted the girl's shoulder. "Maybe it would be for the best, dear—he may be in the right. And I think I understand why you went riding with him so much, dear. He may be wild and reckless, but he's a man—every inch of him!"

The girl squeezed her relative's hand and went to open the door, upon which had come a loud knock. Corrigan stood framed in the opening. She could see his face only dimly.

"There's no occasion for alarm, Miss Benham," he said, and she felt that he could see her better than she could see him, and thus must have discerned something of her emotion. "I must apologize for this noisy demonstration. I believe I'm a little excited, though. Has Trevison passed here within the last hour or so?"

"No," she said, firmly.

He laughed shortly. "Well, we'll get him. I've split my men up—some have gone to his ranch, the others have headed for Levins' place."

"What has happened?"

"Enough. Judge Lindman disappeared—the supposition is that he was abducted. I placed some men around the courthouse, to safeguard the records, and Trevison broke in and set fire to the

place. He also robbed the safe in the bank, and killed Braman—choked him to death. A most revolting murder. I'm sorry I disturbed you—good night."

The girl closed the door as he left it, and leaned against it, weak and shaking. Corrigan's voice had a curious note in it. He had told her he was sorry to have disturbed her, but the words had not rung true—there had been too much satisfaction in them. What was she to believe from this night's events? One thought leaped vividly above the others that rioted in her mind: Trevison had again sinned against the law, and this time his crime was murder! She shrank away from the door and joined Agatha at the foot of the stairs.

"Aunty," she sobbed; "I want to go away. I want to go back East, away from this lawlessness and confusion!"

"There, there, dear," soothed Agatha. "I am sure everything will come out all right. But Trevison *does* look to be the sort of a man who would abduct a judge, doesn't he? If I were a girl, and felt 263
that he were in love with me, I'd be mighty careful—"

"That he wouldn't abduct you?" laughed the girl, tremulously, cheered by the change in her relative's manner.

"No," said Agatha, slyly. "I'd be mighty careful that he *got* me!"

"Oh!" said the girl, and buried her face in her aunt's shoulder.

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CHAPTER XXV

IN THE DARK

Trevison faced the darkness between him and the pueblo with a wild hope pulsing through his veins. Rosalind Benham had had an opportunity to deliver him into the hands of his enemy and she had not taken advantage of it. There was but one interpretation that he might place upon her failure to aid her accomplice. She declined to take an active part in the scheme. She had been passive, content to watch while Corrigan did the real work. Possibly she had no conception of the enormity of the crime. She had been eager to have Corrigan win, and influenced by her affection and his arguments she had done what she could without actually committing herself to the robbery. It was a charitable explanation, and had many flaws, but he clung to it persistently, nurturing it with his hopes and his hunger for her, building it up until it became a structure of logic firmly fixed and impregnable. Women were easily influenced—that had been his experience with them—he was forced to accept it as a trait of the sex. So he absolved her, his hunger for her in no way sated at the end.

His thoughts ran to Corrigan in a riot of rage that pained him like a knife thrust; his lust for vengeance was a savage, bitter-visaged demon that held him in its clutch and made his temples 265
pound with a yearning to slay. And that, of course, would have to be the end. For the enmity that lay between them was not a thing to be settled by the law—it was a man to man struggle that could be settled in only one way—by the passions, naked, elemental, eternal. He saw it coming; he leaped to meet it, eagerly.

Every stride the black horse made shortened by that much the journey he had resolved upon, and Nigger never ran as he was running now. The black seemed to feel that he was on the last lap of a race that had lasted for more than forty-eight hours, with short intervals of rest between, and he did his best without faltering.

Order had come out of the chaos of plot and counterplot; Trevison's course was to be as direct as his hatred. He would go to the pueblo, take Judge Lindman and the record to Santa Fe, and then return to Manti for a last meeting with Corrigan.

A late moon, rising from a cleft in some distant mountains, bathed the plains with a silvery flood when horse and rider reached a point within a mile of the pueblo, and Nigger covered the remainder of the distance at a pace that made the night air drum in Trevison's ears. The big black slowed as he came to a section of broken country surrounding the ancient city, but he got through it quickly and skirted the sand slopes, taking the steep acclivity leading to the ledge of the pueblo in a dozen catlike leaps and coming to a halt in the shadow of an adobe house, heaving deeply, his rider flung himself out of the saddle and ran along the ledge to the door of 266
the chamber where he had imprisoned Judge Lindman.

Trevison could see no sign of the Judge or Levins. The ledge was bare, aglow, the openings of the communal houses facing it loomed dark, like the doors of tombs. A ghastly, unearthly silence greeted Trevison's call after the echoes died away; the upper tier of adobe boxes seemed to nod in ghostly derision as his gaze swept them. There was no sound, no movement, except the regular cough of his own laboring lungs, and the rustle of his clothing as his chest swelled and deflated with the effort. He exclaimed impatiently and retraced his steps, peering into recesses between the communal houses, certain that the Judge and Levins had fallen asleep in his absence. He turned at a corner and in a dark angle almost stumbled over Levins. He was lying

on his stomach, his right arm under his head, his face turned sideways. Trevison thought at first that he was asleep and prodded him gently with the toe of his boot. A groan smote his ears and he kneeled quickly, turning Levins over. Something damp and warm met his fingers as he seized the man by the shoulder, and he drew the hand away quickly, exclaiming sharply as he noted the stain on it.

His exclamation brought Levins' eyes open, and he stared upward, stupidly at first, then with a bright gaze of comprehension. He struggled and sat up, swaying from side to side.

"They got the Judge, 'Brand'—they run him off, with my cayuse!" 267

"Who got him?"

"I ain't reckonin' to know. Some of Corrigan's scum, most likely—I didn't see 'em close."

"How long ago?"

"Not a hell of a while. Mebbe fifteen or twenty minutes. I been missin' a lot of time, I reckon. Can't have been long, though."

"Which way did they go?"

"Off towards Manti. Two of 'em took him. The rest is layin' low somewhere, most likely. Watch out they don't get *you*! I ain't seen 'em run off, yet!"

"How did it happen?"

"I ain't got it clear in my head, yet. Just happened, I reckon. The Judge was settin' on the ledge just in front of the dobie house you had him in. I was moseyin' along the edge, tryin' to figger out what a light in the sky off towards Manti meant. I couldn't figger it out—what in hell was it, anyway?"

"The courthouse burned—maybe the bank."

Levins chuckled. "You got the record, then."

"Yes."

"An' I've lost the Judge! Ain't I a box-head, though!"

"That's all right. Go ahead. What happened?"

"I was moseyin along the ledge. Just when I got to the slope where we come up—passin' it—I seen a bunch of guys, on horses, coming out of the shadow of an angle, down there. I hadn't seen 'em before. I knowed somethin' was up an' I turned, to light out for shelter. An' just then one of 'em burns me in the back—with a rifle bullet. It couldn't have been no six, from that 268
distance. It took the starch out of me, an' I caved, I reckon, for a little while. When I woke up the Judge was gone. The moon had just come up an' I seen him ridin' away on my cayuse, between two other guys. I reckon I must have gone off again, when you shook me." He laughed, weakly. "What gets *me*, is where them other guys went, after the two sloped with the Judge. If they'd have been hangin' around they'd sure have got *you*, comin' up here, wouldn't they?"

Trevison's answer was a hoarse exclamation. He swung Levins up and bore him into one of the communal houses, whose opening faced away from the plains and the activity. Then he ran to where he had left Nigger, leading the animal back into the zig-zag passages, pulling his rifle out of the saddle holster and stationing himself in the shadow of the house in which he had taken Levins.

"They've come back, eh?" the wounded man's voice floated out to him.

"Yes—five or six of them. No—eight! They've got sharp eyes, too!" he added stepping back as a rifle bullet droned over his head, chipping a chunk of adobe from the roof of the box in whose shelter he stood.

Sullenly, Corrigan had returned to Manti with the deputies that had accompanied him to the Bar B. He had half expected to find Trevison at the ranchhouse, for he had watched him when he had ridden away and he seemed to have been headed in that direction. Jealousy dwelt darkly in the big man's heart, and he had found his reason for the suspicion there. He thought he knew 269
truth when he saw it, and he would have sworn that truth shone from Rosalind Benham's eyes when she had told him that she had not seen Trevison pass that way. He had not known that what he took for the truth was the cleverest bit of acting the girl had ever been called upon to do. He had decided that Trevison had swung off the Bar B trail somewhere between Manti and the ranchhouse, and he led his deputies back to town, content to permit his men to continue the search for Trevison, for he was convinced that the latter's visit to the courthouse had resulted in disappointment, for he had faith in Judge Lindman's declaration that he had destroyed the record. He had accused himself many times for his lack of caution in not being present when the record had been destroyed, but regrets had become impotent and futile.

Reaching Manti, he dispersed his deputies and sought his bed in the *Castle*. He had not been in bed more than an hour when an attendant of the hotel called to him through the door that a man named Gieger wanted to talk with him, below. He dressed and went down to the street, to find Gieger and another deputy sitting on their horses in front of the hotel with Judge Lindman, drooping from his long vigil, between them.

Corrigan grinned scornfully at the Judge.

"Clever, eh?" he sneered. He spoke softly, for the dawn was not far away, and he knew that a

voice carries resonantly at that hour.

“I don’t understand you!” Judicial dignity sat sadly on the Judge; he was tired and haggard, and his voice was a weak treble. “If you mean—” 270

“I’ll show you what I mean.” Corrigan motioned to the deputies. “Bring him along!” Leading the way he took them through Manti’s back door across a railroad spur to a shanty beside the track which the engineer in charge of the dam occasionally occupied when his duty compelled him to check up arriving material and supplies. Because plans and other valuable papers were sometimes left in the shed it was stoutly built, covered with corrugated iron, and the windows barred with iron, prison-like. Reaching the shed, Corrigan unlocked the door, shoved the Judge inside, closed the door on the Judge’s indignant protests, questioned the deputies briefly, gave them orders and then re-entered the shed, closing the door behind him.

He towered over the Judge, who had sunk weakly to a bench. It was pitch dark in the shed, but Corrigan had seen the Judge drop on the bench and knew exactly where he was.

“I want the whole story—without any reservations,” said Corrigan, hoarsely; “and I want it quick—as fast as you can talk!”

The Judge got up, resenting the other’s tone. He had also a half-formed resolution to assert his independence, for he had received certain assurances from Trevison with regard to his past which had impressed him—and still impressed him.

“I refuse to be questioned by you, sir—especially in this manner! I do not purpose to take further—”

The Judge felt Corrigan’s fingers at his throat, and gasped with horror, throwing up his hands to ward them off, failed, and heard Corrigan’s laugh as the fingers gripped his throat and held. 271

When the Judge came to, it was with an excruciatingly painful struggle that left him shrinking and nerveless, lying in a corner, blinking at the light of a kerosene lamp. Corrigan sat on the edge of a flat-topped desk watching him with an ugly, appraising, speculative grin. It was as though the man were mentally gambling on his chances to recover from the throttling.

“Well,” he said when the Judge at last struggled and sat up; “how do you like it? You’ll get more if you don’t talk fast and straight! Who wrote that letter, from Dry Bottom?”

Neither judicial dignity or resolutions of independence could resist the threatened danger of further violence that shone from Corrigan’s eyes, and the Judge whispered gaspingly:

“Trevison.”

“I thought so! Now, be careful how you answer this. What did Trevison want in the courthouse?”

“The original record of the land transfers.”

“Did he get it?” Corrigan’s voice was dangerously even, and the Judge squirmed and coughed before he spoke the hesitating word that was an admission of his deception:

“I told him—where—it was.”

Paralyzed with fear, the Judge watched Corrigan slip off the desk and approach him. He got to his feet and raised his hands to shield his throat as the big man stopped in front of him. 272

“Don’t, Corrigan—don’t, for God’s sake!”

“Bah!” said the big man. He struck, venomously. An instant later he put out the light and stepped down into the gray dawn, locking the door of the shanty behind him and not looking back.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE ASHES

Rosalind Benham got up with the dawn and looked out of a window toward Manti. She had not slept. She stood at the window for some time and then returned to the bed and sat on its edge, staring thoughtfully downward. She could not get Trevison out of her mind. It seemed to her that a crisis had come and that it was imperative for her to reach a decision—to pronounce judgment. She was trying to do this calmly; she was trying to keep sentiment from prejudicing her. She found it difficult when considering Trevison, but when she arrayed Hester Harvey against her longing for the man she found that her scorn helped her to achieve a mental balance that permitted her to think of him almost dispassionately. She became a mere onlooker, with a calm, clear vision. In this rôle she weighed him. His deeds, his manner, his claims, she arrayed against Corrigan and his counter-claims and ambitions, and was surprised to discover that were she to be called upon to pass judgment on the basis of this surface evidence she would have decided in favor of Trevison. She had fought against that, for it was a tacit admission that her father was in some way connected with Corrigan’s scheme, but she admitted it finally, with a 274

pulse of repugnance, and when she placed Levins' story on the mental balance, with the knowledge that she had seen the record which seemed to prove the contention of fraud in the land transaction, the evidence favored Trevison overwhelmingly.

She got up and began to dress, her lips set with determination. Corrigan had held her off once with plausible explanations, but she would not permit him to do so again. She intended to place the matter before her father. Justice must be done. Before she had half finished dressing she heard a rustle and turned to see Agatha standing in the doorway connecting their rooms.

"What is it, dear?"

"I can't stand the suspense any longer, Aunty. There is something very wrong about that land business. I am going to telegraph to father about it."

"I was going to ask you to do that, dear. It seems to me that that young Trevison is too much in earnest to be fighting for something that does not belong to him. If ever there was honesty in a man's face it was in his face last night. I don't believe for a minute that your father is concerned in Corrigan's schemes—if there are schemes. But it won't do any harm to learn what your father thinks about it. My dear—" she stepped to the girl and placed an arm around her waist "—last night as I watched Trevison, he reminded me of a—a very dear friend that I once knew. I saw the wreck of my own romance, my dear. He was just such a man as Trevison—reckless, impulsive, and impetuous—dare-devil who would not tolerate injustice or oppression. They wouldn't let me have him, my dear, and I never would have another man. He went away, joined the army, and was killed at the battle of Kenesaw Mountain. I have kept his memory fresh in my heart, and last night when I looked at Trevison it seemed to me that he must be the reincarnation of the only man I ever loved. There must be something terribly wrong to make him act the way he does, my dear. And he loves you." 275

The girl bit her lips to repress the swelling emotions which clamored in wild response to this sympathetic understanding. She looked at Agatha, to see tears in her eyes, and she wheeled impulsively and threw her arms around the other's neck.

"Oh, I know exactly how you feel, Aunty. But—" she gulped "—he doesn't love me."

"I saw it in his eyes, my dear." Agatha's smile was tender and reminiscent. "Don't you worry. He will find a way to let you know—as he will find a way to beat Corrigan—if Corrigan is trying to defraud him! He's that kind, my dear!"

In spite of her aunt's assurances the girl's heart was heavy as she began her ride to Manti. Trevison might love her,—she had read that it was possible for a man to love two women—but she could never return his love, knowing of his affair with Hester. He should have justice, however, if they were trying to defraud him of his rights!

Long before she reached Manti she saw the train from Dry Bottom, due at Manti at six o'clock, gliding over the plains toward the town, and when she arrived at the station its passengers had been swallowed by Manti's buildings and the station agent and an assistant were dragging and bumping trunks and boxes over the station platform. 276

The agent bowed deferentially to her and followed her into the telegraph room, clicking her message over the wires as soon as she had written it. When he had finished he wheeled his chair and grinned at her.

"See the courthouse and the bank?"

She had—all that was left of them—black, charred ruins with two iron safes, red from their baptism of fire, standing among them. Also two other buildings, one on each side of the two that had been destroyed, scorched and warped, but otherwise undamaged.

"Come pretty near burning the whole town. It took *some* work to confine *that* fire—coal oil. Trevison did a clean job. Robbed the safe in the bank. Killed Braman—guzzled him. An awful complete job, from Trevison's viewpoint. The town's riled, and I wouldn't give a plugged cent for Trevison's chances. He's sloped. Desperate character—I always thought he'd rip things loose—give him time. It was him blowed up Corrigan's mine. I ain't seen Corrigan since last night, but I heard him and twenty or thirty deputies are on Trevison's trail. I hope they get him." He squinted at her. "There's trouble brewing in this town, Miss Benham. I wouldn't advise you to stay here any longer than is *absolutely* necessary. There's two factions—looks like. It's about that land deal. Lefingwell and some more of them think they've been given a raw decision by the court and Corrigan. Excitement! Oh, Lord! This town is fierce. I ain't had any sleep in—Your answer? I can't tell. Mebbe right away. Mebbe in an hour." 277

Rosalind went out upon the platform. The agent's words had revived a horror that she had almost forgotten—that she wanted to forget—the murder of Braman.

She walked to the edge of the station platform, tortured by thoughts in which she could find no excuse for Trevison. Murderer and robber! A fugitive from justice—the very justice he had been demanding! Her thoughts made her weak and sick, and she stepped down from the platform and walked up the track, halting beside a shed and leaning against it. Across the street from her was the *Castle* hotel. A man in boots, corduroy trousers, and a flannel shirt and dirty white apron, his sleeves rolled to the elbows, was washing the front windows and spitting streams of tobacco juice on the board walk. She shivered. A grocer next to the hotel was adjusting a swinging shelf affixed to the store-front, preparatory to piling his wares upon it; a lean-faced man standing in a doorway in the building adjoining the grocery was inspecting a six-shooter that he had removed from the holster at his side. Rosalind shivered again. Civilization and

outlawry were strangely mingled here. She would not have been surprised to see the lean-faced man begin to shoot at the others. Filled with sudden trepidation she took a step away from the shed, intending to return to the station and wait for her answer.

As she moved she heard a low moan. She started, paling, and then stood stock still, trembling with dread, but determined not to run. The sound came again, seeming to issue from the 278
interior of the shed, and she retraced her step and leaned again against the wall of the building, listening.

There was no mistaking the sound—someone was in trouble. But she wanted to be certain before calling for help and she listened again to hear an unmistakable pounding on the wall near her, and a voice, calling frenziedly: “Help, help—for God’s sake!”

Her fears fled and she sprang to the door, finding it locked. She rattled it, impotently, and then left it and ran across the street to where the window-washer stood. He wheeled and spat copiously, almost in her face, as she rapidly told him her news, and then deliberately dropped his brush and cloth into the dust and mud at his feet and jumped after her, across the street.

“Who’s in here?” demanded the man, hammering on the door.

“It’s I—Judge Lindman! Open the door! Hurry! I’m smothering—and hurt!”

In what transpired within the next few minutes—and indeed during the hours following—the girl felt like an outsider. No one paid any attention to her; she was shoved, jostled, buffeted, by the crowd that gathered, swarming from all directions. But she was intensely interested.

It seemed to her that every person in Manti gathered in front of the shed—that all had heard of the abduction of the Judge. Some one secured an iron bar and battered the lock off the door; a half-dozen men dragged the Judge out, and he stood in front of the building, swaying in the 279
hands of his supporters, his white hair disheveled, his lips blood-stained and smashed, where Corrigan had hit him. The frenzy of terror held him, and he looked wildly around at the tiers of faces confronting him, the cords of his neck standing out and writhing spasmodically. Twice he opened his lips to speak, but each time his words died in a dry gasp. At the third effort he shrieked:

“I—I want protection! Don’t let him touch me again, men! He means to kill me! Don’t let him touch me! I—I’ve been attacked—choked—knocked insensible! I appeal to you as American citizens for protection!”

It was fear, stark, naked, cringing, that the crowd saw. Faces blanched, bodies stiffened; a concerted breath, like a sigh, rose into the flat, desert air. Rosalind clenched her hands and stood rigid, thrilling with pity.

“Who done it?” A dozen voices asked the question.

“Corrigan!” The Judge screamed this, hysterically. “He is a thief and a scoundrel, men! He has plundered this county! He has prostituted your court. Your judge, too! I admit it. But I ask your mercy, men! I was forced into it! He threatened me! He falsified the land records! He wanted me to destroy the original record, but I didn’t—I told Trevison where it was—I hid it! And because I wouldn’t help Corrigan to rob you, he tried to kill me!”

A murmur, low, guttural, vindictive, rippled over the crowd, which had now swelled to such proportions that the street could not hold it. It fringed the railroad track; men were packed 280
against the buildings surrounding the shed; they shoved, jostled and squirmed in an effort to get closer to the Judge. The windows of the *Castle* hotel were filled with faces, among which Rosalind saw Hester Harvey’s, ashen, her eyes aglow.

The Judge’s words had stabbed Rosalind—each like a separate knife-thrust; they had plunged her into a mental vacuum in which her brain, atrophied, reeled, paralyzed. She staggered—a man caught her, muttered something about there being too much excitement for a lady, and gruffly ordered others to clear the way that he might lead her out of the jam. She resisted, for she was determined to stay to hear the Judge to the end, and the man grinned hugely at her; and to escape the glances that she could feel were directed at her she slipped through the crowd and sought the front of the shed, leaning against it, weakly.

A silence had followed the murmur that had run over the crowd. There was a breathless period, during which every man seemed to be waiting for his neighbor to take the initiative. They wanted a leader. And he appeared, presently—a big, broad-shouldered man forced his way through the crowd and halted in front of the Judge.

“I reckon we’ll protect you, Judge. Just spit out what you got to say. We’ll stand by you. Where’s Trevison?”

“He came to the courthouse last night to get the record. I told him where it was. He forced me 281
to go with him to an Indian pueblo, and he kept me there yesterday. He left me there last night with Clay Levins, while he came here to get the record.”

“Do you reckon he got it?”

“I don’t know. But from the way Corrigan acted last night—”

“Yes, yes; he got it!”

The words shifted the crowd’s gaze to Rosalind, swiftly. The girl had hardly realized that she had spoken. Her senses, paralyzed a minute before, had received the electric shock of sympathy from a continued study of the Judge’s face. She saw remorse on it, regret, shame, and the birth

of a resolution to make whatever reparation that was within his power, at whatever cost. It was a weak face, but it was not vicious, and while she had been standing there she had noted the lines of suffering. It was not until the girl felt the gaze of many curious eyes on her that she realized she had committed herself, and her cheeks flamed. She set herself to face the stares; she must go on now.

"It's Benham's girl!" she heard a man standing near her whisper hoarsely, and she faced them, her chin held high, a queer joy leaping in her heart. She knew at this minute that her sympathies had been with Trevison all along; that she had always suspected Corrigan, but had fought against the suspicion because of the thought that in some way her father might be dragged into the affair. It had been a cowardly attitude, and she was glad that she had shaken it off. As her brain, under the spur of the sudden excitement, resumed its function, her thoughts flitted to the agent's babble during the time she had been sending the telegram to her father. She talked rapidly, her voice carrying far:

"Trevison got the record last night. He stopped at my ranch and showed it to me. I suppose he was going to the pueblo, expecting to meet Levins and Lindman there—"

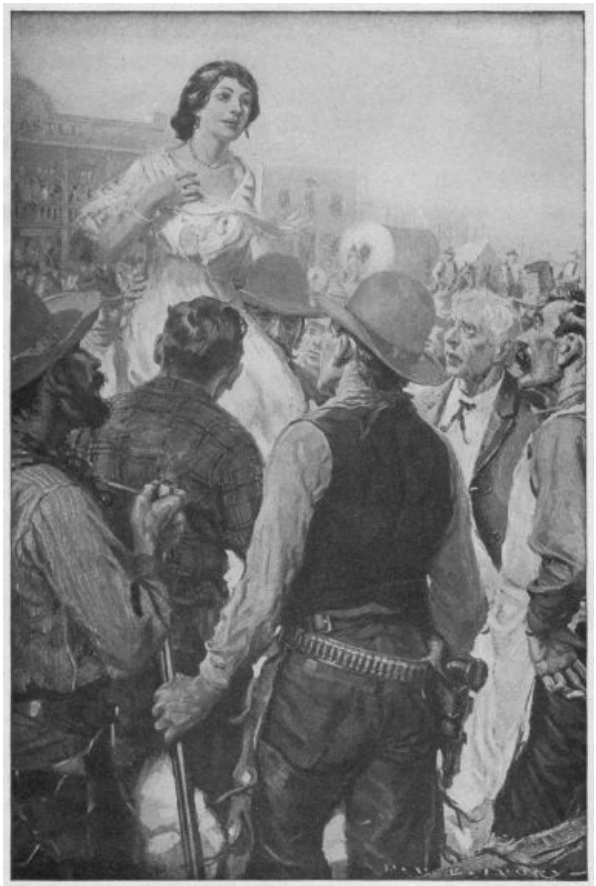
"By God!" The big, broad-shouldered man standing at Judge Lindman's side interrupted her. He turned and faced the crowd. "We're damned fools, boys—lettin' this thing go on like we have! Corrigan's took his deputies out, trailin' Trevison, chargin' him with murderin' Braman, when his real purpose is to get his claws on that record! Trevison's been fightin' our fight for us, an' we've stood around like a lot of gillies, lettin' him do it! It's likely that a man who'd cook up a deal like the Judge, here, says Corrigan has, would cook up another, chargin' Trevison with guzzlin' the banker. I've knowed Trevison a long time, boys, an' I don't believe he'd *guzzle* anybody—he's too square a man for that!" He stood on his toes, raising his clenched hands, and bringing them down with a sweep of furious emphasis.

The crowd swayed restlessly. Rosalind saw it split apart, men fighting to open a pathway for a woman. There were shouts of: "Open up, there!" "Let the lady through!" "Gangway!" "She's got somethin' to say!" And the girl caught her breath sharply, for she recognized the woman as Hester Harvey.

It was some time before Hester reached the broad-shouldered man's side. There was a stain in each of her cheeks, but outwardly, at least, she showed none of the excitement that had seized the crowd; her movements were deliberate and there was a resolute set to her lips. She got through, finally, and halted beside the big man, the crowd closing up behind her. She was swallowed in it, lost to sight.

"Lift her up, Lefingwell!" suggested a man on the outer fringe. "If she's got anything to say, let us all hear it!" The suggestion was caught up, insistently.

"If you ain't got no objections, ma'am," said the big man. He stooped at her cold smile and swung her to his shoulder. She spoke slowly and distinctly, though there was a tremor in her voice:



"YOU MEN ARE BLIND. CORRIGAN IS A CROOK WHO WILL STOP AT NOTHING."

“Trevison did not kill Braman—it was Corrigan. Corrigan was in my room in the *Castle* last night just after dark. When he left, I watched him from my window, after putting out the light. He had threatened to kill Braman. I watched him cross the street and go around to the rear of the bank building. There was a light in the rear room of the bank. After a while Braman and Corrigan entered the banking room. The light from the rear room shone on them for an instant and I recognized them. They were at the safe. When they went out they left the safe door open. After a while the light went out and I saw Corrigan come from around the rear of the building, recross the street and come into the *Castle*. You men are blind. Corrigan is a crook who will stop at nothing. If you let him injure Trevison for a crime that Trevison did not commit you deserve to be robbed!”

Lefingwell swung her down from his shoulder. 284

“I reckon that cinches it, boys!” he bellowed over the heads of the men nearest him. “There ain’t nothin’ plainer! If we stand for this we’re a bunch of cowardly coyotes that ain’t fit to look Trevison in the face! I’m goin’ to help him! Who’s comin’ along?”

A chorus of shouts drowned his last words; the crowd was in motion, swift, with definite purpose. It melted, streaming off in all directions, like the sweep of water from a bursted dam. It broke at the doors of the buildings; it sought the stables. Men bearing rifles appeared in the street, mounting horses and congregating in front of the *Belmont*, where Lefingwell had gone. Other men, on the board sidewalk and in the dust of the street, were running, shouting, gesticulating. In an instant the town had become a bedlam of portentous force; it was the first time in its history that the people of Manti had looked with collective vision, and the girl reeled against the iron wall of the shed, appalled at the resistless power that had been set in motion. On a night when she sat on the porch of the Bar B ranchhouse she had looked toward Manti, thrilled over a pretty mental fancy. She had thought it all a game—wondrous, joyous, progressive. She had neglected to associate justice with it then—the inexorable rule of fairness under which every player of the game must bow. She brought it into use now, felt the spirit of it, saw the dire tragedy that its perversion portended, groaned, and covered her face with her hands.

She looked around after a while. She saw Judge Lindman walking across the street toward the *Castle*, supported by two other men. A third followed; she did not know him, but Corrigan would 285
have recognized him as the hotel clerk who had grown confidential upon a certain day. The girl heard his voice as he followed after the Judge and the others—raucous, vindictive:

“We need men like Trevison in this town. We can get along without any Corrigans.”

She heard a voice behind her and she turned, swiftly, to see Hester Harvey walking toward her. She would have avoided the meeting, but she saw that Hester was intent on speaking and she drew herself erect, bowing to her with cold courtesy as the woman stopped within a step of her and smiled.

“You look ready to flop into hysterics, dearie! Won’t you come over to my room with me and have something to brace you up? A cup of tea?” she added with a laugh as Rosalind looked quickly at her. She did not seem to notice the stiffening of the girl’s body, but linked her arm within her own and began to walk across the street. The girl was racked with emotion over the excitement of the morning, the dread of impending violence, and half frantic with anxiety over Trevison’s safety. Hester’s offense against her seemed vague and far, and very insignificant, relatively. She yearned to exchange confidences with somebody—anybody, and this woman, even though she were what she thought her, had a capacity for feeling, for sympathy. And she was very, very tired of it all.

“It was fierce, wasn’t it?” said Hester a few minutes later in the privacy of her room, as she balanced her cup and watched Rosalind as the girl ate, hungrily. “These sagebrush rough-necks 286
out here will make Corrigan hump himself to keep out of their way. But he deserves it, the crook!”

The girl looked curiously at the other, trying hard to reconcile the vindictiveness of these words and the woman’s previous action in giving damaging testimony against Corrigan, with the significant fact that Corrigan had been in her room the night before, presumably as a guest. Hester caught the look and laughed. “Yes, dearie, he deserves it. How much do you know of what has been going on here?”

“Very little, I am afraid.”

“Less than that, I suspect. I happen to know considerable, and I am going to tell you about it. My trip out here has been a sort of a wild-goose chase. I thought I wanted Trevison, but I’ve discovered I’m not badly hurt by his refusal to resume our old relations.”

The girl gasped and almost dropped her cup, setting it down slowly afterward and staring at her hostess with doubting, fearing, incredulous eyes.

“Yes, dearie,” laughed the other, with a trace of embarrassment; “you can trust your ears on that statement. To make certain, I’ll repeat it: I am not very badly hurt by his refusal to resume our old relations. Do you know what that means? It means that he turned me down cold, dearie.”

“Do you mean—” began the girl, gripping the table edge.

“I mean that I lied to you. The night I went over to Trevison’s ranch he told me plainly that he didn’t like me one teenie, weenie bit any more. He wouldn’t kiss me, shake my hand, or 287

welcome me in any way. He told me he'd got over it, the same as he'd got over his measles days—he'd outgrown it and was going to throw himself at the feet of another goddess. Oh, yes, he meant you!" she laughed, her voice a little too high, perhaps, with an odd note of bitterness in it. "Then, determined to blot my rival out, I lied about you. I told him that you loved Corrigan and that you were in the game to rob him of his land. Oh, I blackened you, dearie! It hurt him, too. For when a man like Trevison loves a woman—"

"How could you!" said the girl, shuddering.

"Please don't get dramatic," jeered the other. "The rules that govern the love game are very elastic—for some women. I played it strong, but there was no chance for me from the beginning. Trevison thinks you are Corrigan's trump card in this game. It *is* a game, isn't it. But he loves you in spite of it all. He told me he'd go to the gallows for you. Aren't men the sillies! But just the same, dearie, we women like to hear them murmur those little heroic things, don't we? It was on the night I told him you'd told Corrigan about the dynamiting."

"Oh!" said the girl.

"That was my high card," laughed the woman, harshly. "He took it and derided me. I decided right then that I wouldn't play any more."

"Then he didn't send for you?"

"Corrigan did that, dearie."

"You—you knew Corrigan before—before you came here?" 288

"You *can* guess intelligently, can't you?"

"Corrigan planned it *all*?"

"All." Hester watched as the girl bowed her head and sobbed convulsively.

"What a brazen, crafty and unprincipled *thing* Trevison must think me!"

Hester reached out a hand and laid it on the girl's. "I—there was a time when I would have done murder to have him think of me as he thinks of you, dearie. He isn't for me, though, and I can't spoil any woman's happiness. There's little enough—but I'm not going to philosophize. I was going away without telling you this. I don't know why I am telling it now. I always was a little soft. But if you hadn't spoken as you did a while ago in that crowd—taking Trevison's end—I—I think you'd never have known. Somehow, it seemed you deserved him, dearie. And I couldn't bear to—to think of him facing any more disappointment. He—he took it so—"

The girl looked up, to see the woman's eyes filling with a luminous mist. A quick conception of what this all meant to the woman thrilled the girl. She got up and walked to the woman's side. "I'm *so* sorry, Hester," she said as her arms stole around the other's neck.

She went out a little later, into the glaring, shimmering sunlight of the morning, her cheeks red, her eyes aglow, her heart racing wildly, to see an engine and a luxurious private car just pulling from the main track to a switch.

"Oh," she whispered, joyously; "it's father's!" 289

And she ran toward it, tingling with a new-found hope.

In her room at the *Castle* sat a woman who was finding the world very empty. It held nothing for her except the sad consolation of repentance.

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE FIGHT

"The boss is sure a she-wolf at playin' a lone hand," growled Barkwell, shortly after dusk, to Jud Weaver, the straw boss. "Seems he thinks his friends is delicate ornaments which any use would bust to smithereens. Here's his outfit layin' around, bitin' their finger nails with ongwee an' pinin' away to slivers yearnin' to get into the big meal-lee, an' him racin' an' tearin' around the country fightin' it out by his lonesome. I call it rank selfishness!"

"He sure ought to have give us a chancst to claw the hair outen that damned Corrigan feller!" complained Weaver. "In some ways, though, I'm sorta glad the damned mine was blew up. 'Firebrand' would have sure got a-hold of her some day, an' then we'd be clawin' at the bowels of the earth instid of galivantin' around on our cayuses like gentlemen. I reckon things is all for the best."

The two had come in from the river range ostensibly to confer with Trevison regarding their work, but in reality to satisfy their curiosity over Trevison's movements. There was a deep current of concern for him under their accusations.

They had found the ranchhouse dark and deserted. But the office door was open and they had 291

entered, prepared supper, ate with a more than ordinary mingling of conversation with their food, and not lighting the lamps had gone out on the gallery for a smoke.

“He ain’t done any sleepin’ to amount to much in the last forty-eight hours, to my knowin’,” remarked Barkwell; “unless he’s done his sleepin’ on the run—an’ that ain’t in no ways a comfortable way. He’s sure to be driftin’ in here, soon.”

“This here country’s goin’ to hell, certain!” declared Weaver, after an hour of silence. “She’s gettin’ too eastern an’ flighty. Railroads an’ dams an’ hotels with bath tubs for every six or seven rooms, an’ resterawnts with filleedegree palms an’ leather chairs an’ slick eats is eatin’ the gizzard outen her. Railroads is all right in their place—which is where folks ain’t got no cayuses to fork an’ therefore has to hoof it—or—or ride the damn railroad.”

“Correct!” agreed Barkwell; “she’s a-goin’ the way Rome went—an Babylone—an’ Cincinnati—after I left. She runs to a pussy-cafe aristocracy—*an’* napkins.”

“She’ll be plumb ruined—follerin’ them foreign styles. The Uhmerican people ain’t got no right to adopt none of them new-fangled notions.” Weaver stared glumly into the darkening plains.

They aired their discontent long. Directed at the town it relieved the pressure of their resentment over Trevison’s habit of depending upon himself. For, secretly, both were interested admirers of Manti’s growing importance. 292

Time was measured by their desires. Sometime before midnight Barkwell got up, yawned and stretched.

“Sleep suits me. If ‘Firebrand’ ain’t reckonin’ on a guardian, I ain’t surprisin’ him none. He’s mighty close-mouthed about his doin’s, anyway.”

“You’re shoutin’. I ain’t never seen a man any stingier about hidin’ away his doin’s. He just nacherly hawgs all the trouble.”

Weaver got up and sauntered to the far end of the gallery, leaning far out to look toward Manti. His sharp exclamation brought Barkwell leaping to his side, and they both watched in perplexity a faint glow in the sky in the direction of the town. It died down as they watched.

“Fire—looks like,” Weaver growled. “We’re always too late to horn in on any excitement.”

“Uh, huh,” grunted Barkwell. He was staring intently at the plains, faintly discernable in the starlight. “There’s horses out there, Jud! Three or four, an’ they’re comin’ like hell!”

They slipped off the gallery into the shadow of some trees, both instinctively feeling of their holsters. Standing thus they waited.

The faint beat of hoofs came unmistakably to them. They grew louder, drumming over the hard sand of the plains, and presently four dark figures loomed out of the night and came plunging toward the gallery. They came to a halt at the gallery edge, and were about to dismount when Barkwell’s voice, cold and truculent, issued from the shadow of the trees:

“What’s eatin’ you guys?” 293

There was a short, pregnant silence, and then one of the men laughed.

“Who are you?” He urged his horse forward. But he was brought to a quick halt when Barkwell’s voice came again:

“Talk from where you are!”

“That goes,” laughed the man. “Trevison here?”

“What you wantin’ of him?”

“Plenty. We’re deputies. Trevison burned the courthouse and the bank tonight—and killed Braman. We’re after him.”

“Well, he ain’t here.” Barkwell laughed. “Burned the courthouse, did he? An’ the bank? An’ killed Braman? Well, you got to admit that’s a pretty good night’s work. An’ you’re wantin’ him!” Barkwell’s voice leaped; he spoke in short, snappy, metallic sentences that betrayed passion long restrained, breaking his self-control. “You’re deputies, eh? Corrigan’s whelps! Sneaks! Coyotes! Well, you slope—you hear? When I count three, I down you! One! Two! Three!”

His six-shooter stabbed the darkness at the last word. And at his side Weaver’s pistol barked viciously. But the deputies had started at the word “One,” and though Barkwell, noting the scurrying of their horses, cut the final words sharply, the four figures were vague and shadowy when the first pistol shot smote the air. Not a report floated back to the ears of the two men. They watched, with grim pouts on their lips, until the men vanished in the star haze of the plains. Then Barkwell spoke, raucously: 294

“Well, we’ve broke in the game, Jud. We’re Simon-pure outlaws—like our boss. I got one of them scum—I seen him grab leather. We’ll all get in, now. They’re after our boss, eh? Well, damn ’em, we’ll show ’em! They’s eight of the boys on the south fork. You get ’em, bring ’em here an’ get rifles. I’ll hit the breeze to the basin an’ rustle the others!” He was running at the last word, and presently two horses raced out of the corral gates, clattered past the bunk-house and were swallowed in the vast, black space.

Half an hour later the entire outfit—twenty men besides Barkwell and Weaver—left the ranchhouse and spread, fan-wise, over the plains west of Manti.

They lost all sense of time. Several of them had ridden to Manti, making a round of the places

that were still open, but had returned, with no word of Trevison. Corrigan had claimed to have seen him. But then, a man told his questioner, Corrigan claimed Trevison had choked the banker to death. He could believe both claims, or neither. So far as the man himself was concerned, he was not going to commit himself. But if Trevison had done the job, he'd done it well. The seekers after information rode out of Manti on the run. At some time after midnight the entire outfit was grouped near Clay Levins' house.

They held a short conference, and then Barkwell rode forward and hammered on the door of the cabin.

"We're wantin' Clay, ma'am," said Barkwell in answer to the scared inquiry that filtered through the closed door. "It's the Diamond K outfit." 295

"What do you want him for?"

"We was thinkin' that mebbe he'd know where 'Firebrand' is. 'Firebrand' is sort of lost, I reckon."

The door flew open and Mrs. Levins, like a pale ghost, appeared in the opening. "Trevison and Clay left here tonight. I didn't look to see what time. Oh, I hope nothing has happened to them!"

They quieted her fears and fled out into the plains again, charging themselves with stupidity for not being more diplomatic in dealing with Mrs. Levins. During the early hours of the morning they rode again to the Diamond K ranchhouse, thinking that perhaps Trevison had slipped by them and returned. But Trevison had not returned, and the outfit gathered in the timber near the house in the faint light of the breaking dawn, disgusted, their horses jaded.

"It's mighty hard work tryin' to be an outlaw in this damned dude-ridden country," wailed the disappointed Weaver. "Outlaws usual have a den or a cave or a mountain fastness, or somethin', anyhow—accordin' to all the literchoor I've read on the subject. If 'Firebrand's' got one, he's mighty bashful about mentionin' it."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Barkwell, weakly. "My brains is sure ready for the mourners! Where's 'Firebrand'? Why, where would you expect a man to be that'd burned up a courthouse an' a bank an' salivated a banker? He'd be hidin' out, wouldn't he, you mis'able box-head! Would he come driftin' back to the home ranch, an' come out when them damn deputies come along, bowin' an' scrapin' an' sayin': 'I'm here, gentlemen—I've been waitin' for you to come an' try 296
rope on me, so's you'd be sure to get a good fit!' Would he? You're mighty right he—wouldn't! He'd be populatin' that old pueblo that he's been tellin' me for years would make a good fort!" His horse leaped as he drove the spurs in, cruelly, but at the distance of a hundred yards he was not more than a few feet in advance of the others—and they, disregarding the rules of the game —were trying to pass him.

"There ain't a bit of sense of takin' any risk," objected Levins from the security of the communal chamber, as Trevison peered cautiously around a corner of the adobe house. "It'd be just the luck of one of them critters if they'd pot you."

"I'm not thinking of offering myself as a target for them," the other laughed. "They're still there," he added a minute later as he stepped into the chamber. "Them shooting you as they did, without warning, seems to indicate that they've orders to wipe us out, if possible. They're deputies. I bumped into Corrigan right after I left the bank building, and I suppose he has set them on us."

"I reckon so. Seems it ain't possible, though," Levins added, doubtfully. "They was here before you come. Your Nigger horse ain't takin' no dust. I reckon you didn't stop anywheres?"

"At the Bar B." Trevison made this admission with some embarrassment.

But Levins did not reproach him—he merely groaned, eloquently. 297

Trevison leaned against the opening of the chamber. His muscles ached; he was in the grip of a mighty weariness. Nature was protesting against the great strain that he had placed upon her. But his jaws set as he felt the flesh of his legs quivering; he grinned the derisive grin of the fighter whose will and courage outlast his physical strength. He felt a pulse of contempt for himself, and mingling with it was a strange elation—the thought that Rosalind Benham had strengthened his failing body, had provided it with the fuel necessary to keep it going for hours yet—as it must. He did not trust himself to yield to his passions as he stood there—that might have caused him to grow reckless. He permitted the weariness of his body to soothe his brain; over him stole a great calm. He assured himself that he could throw it off any time.

But he had deceived himself. Nature had almost reached the limit of effort, and the inevitable slow reaction was taking place. The tired body could be forced on for a while yet, obeying the lethargic impulses of an equally tired brain, but the break would come. At this moment he was oppressed with a sense of the unreality of it all. The pueblo seemed like an ancient city of his dreams; the adobe houses details of a weird phantasmagoria; his adventures of the past forty-eight hours a succession of wild imaginings which he now reviewed with a sort of detached interest, as though he had watched them from afar.

The moonlight shone on him; he heard Levins exclaim sharply: "Your arm's busted, ain't it?"

He started, swayed, and caught himself, laughing lowly, guiltily, for he realized that he had 298
almost fallen asleep, standing. He held the arm up to the moonlight, examining it, dropping it with a deprecatory word. He settled against the wall near the opening again.

"Hell!" declared Levins, anxiously, "you're all in!"

Trevison did not answer. He stole along the outside wall of the adobe house and peered out into the plains. The men were still where they had been when the shot had been fired, and the sight of them brought a cold grin to his face. He backed away from the corner, dropped to his stomach and wriggled his way back to the corner, shoving his rifle in front of him. He aimed the weapon deliberately, and pulled the trigger. At the flash a smothered cry floated up to him, and he drew back, the thud of bullets against the adobe walls accompanying him.

“That leaves seven, Levins,” he said grimly. “Looks like my trip to Santa Fe is off, eh?” he laughed. “Well, I’ve always had a yearning to be besieged, and I’ll make it mighty interesting for those fellows. Do you think you can cover that slope, so they can’t get up there while I’m reconnoitering? It would be certain death for me to stick my head around that corner again.”

At Levins’ emphatic affirmative he was helped to the shelter of a recess, from where he had a view of the slope, though himself protected by a corner of one of the houses; placed a rifle in the wounded man’s hands, and carrying his own, vanished into one of the dark passages that weaved through the pueblo.

He went only a short distance. Emerging from an opening in one of the adobe houses he saw a parapet wall, sadly crumpled in spots, facing the plains, and he dropped to his hands and knees 299
and crept toward it, secreting himself behind it and prodding the wall cautiously with the barrel of his rifle until he found a joint in the stone work where the adobe mud was rotted. He poked the muzzle of the rifle through the crevice, took careful aim, and had the satisfaction of hearing a savage curse in the instant following the flash. He threw himself flat immediately, listening to the spatter and whine of the bullets of the volley that greeted his shot. They kept it up long—but when there was a momentary cessation he crept back to the entrance of the adobe house, entered, followed another passage and came out on the ledge farther along the side of the pueblo. He halted in a dense shadow and looked toward the spot where the men had been. They had vanished.

There was nothing to do but to wait, and he sank behind a huge block of stone in an angle of the ledge, noting with satisfaction that he could see the slope that he had set Levins to guard.

“I’m the boss of this fort if I don’t go to sleep,” he told himself grimly as he stretched out. He lay there, watching, while the moonlight faded, while a gray streak in the east slowly widened, presaging the dawn. Stretched flat, his aching muscles welcoming the support of the cool stone of the ledge, he had to fight off the drowsiness that assailed him.

An hour dragged by. He knew the deputies were watching, no doubt having separated to conceal themselves behind convenient boulders that dotted the plains at the foot of the slope. 300
Or perhaps while he had been in the passages of the pueblo, changing his position, some of them might have stolen to the numerous crags and outcroppings of rock at the base of the pueblo. They might now be massing for a rush up the slope. But he doubted they would risk the latter move, for they knew that he must be on the alert, and they had cause to fear his rifle.

Once he rested his head on his extended right arm, and the contact was so agreeable that he allowed it to remain there—long. He caught himself in time; in another second he would have been too late. He saw the figure of a man on the slope a foot or two below the crest. He was flat on his stomach, no doubt having crept there during the minutes that Trevison had been enjoying his rest, and at the instant Trevison saw him he was raising his rifle, directing it at the recess where Levins had been left, on guard.

Trevison was wide awake now, and his marksmanship as deadly as ever. He waited until the man’s rifle came to a level. Then his own weapon spat viciously. The man rose to his knees, reeling. Another rifle cracked—from the recess where Levins was concealed, this time—and the man sank to the dust of the slope, rolling over and over until he reached the bottom, where he stretched out and lay prone. There was a shout of rage from a section of rock-strewn level near the foot of the slope, and Trevison’s lips curled with satisfaction. The second shot had told him that a fear he had entertained momentarily was unfounded—Levins was apparently quite alive. 301

He raised himself cautiously, backed away from the rock behind which he had been concealed, and wheeled, intending to join Levins. A faint sound reached his ears from the plains, and he faced around again, to see a group of horsemen riding toward the pueblo. They were coming fast, racing ahead of a dust cloud, and were perhaps a quarter of a mile distant. But Trevison knew them, and stepped boldly out to the edge of the stone ledge waving his hat to them, laughing full-throatedly, his voice vibrating a little as he spoke:

“Good old Barkwell!”

“That’s him!”

Barkwell pulled his horse to a sliding halt as he saw the figure on the pueblo, outlined distinctly in the clear white light of the dawn.

“He’s all right!” he declared to the others as they followed his example and drew their beasts down. “Them’s some of the scum that’s been after him,” he added as several horsemen swept around the far side of the pueblo. “It was them we heard shootin’.” The outfit sat silent on their horses and watched the men ride over the plains toward another group of horsemen that the Diamond K men had observed some time before riding toward the pueblo,

“Yep!” Barkwell said, now; “that other bunch is deputies, too. It’s mighty plain. This bunch rounded up ‘Firebrand’ an’ sent some one back for reinforcements.” He swept the Diamond K outfit with a snarling smile. “They’re goin’ to need ’em, too! I reckon we’d better wait for them

to play their hand. It's about a stand off in numbers. We don't stand no slack, boys. We're outlawed already, from the ruckus of last night, an' if they start anything we've got to wipe 'em out! You heard 'em shootin' at the boss, an' they ain't no pussy-kitten bunch! I'll do the gassin'—if there's any to be done—an' when I draw, you guys do your damnedest!" 302

The outfit set itself to wait. Over on the edge of the pueblo they could see Trevison. He was bending over something, and when they saw him stoop and lift the object, heaving it to his shoulder and walking away with it, a sullen murmur ran over the outfit, and lips grew stiff and white with rage.

"It's Clay Levins, boys!" said Barkwell. "They've plugged him! Do you reckon we've got to go back to Levins' shack an' tell his wife that we let them skunks get away after makin' orphants of her kids?"

"I'm jumpin'!" shrieked Jud Weaver, his voice coming chokingly with passion. "I ain't waitin' one damned minute for any palaver! Either them deputies is wiped out, or I am!" He dug the spurs into his horse, drawing his six-shooter as the animal leaped.

Weaver's horse led the outfit by only three or four jumps, and they swept over the level like a devastating cyclone, the spiral dust cloud that rose behind them following them lazily, sucked along by the wind of their passing.

The group of deputies had halted; they were sitting tense and silent in their saddles when the Diamond K outfit came up, slowing down as they drew nearer, and halting within ten feet of the others, spreading out in a crude semi-circle, so that each man had an unobstructed view of the deputies. 303

Barkwell had no chance to talk. Before he could get his breath after pulling his horse down, Weaver, his six-shooter in hand, its muzzle directed fairly at Gieger, who was slightly in advance of his men, fumed forth:

"What in hell do you-all mean by tryin' to herd-ride our boss? Talk fast, you eagle-beaked turkey buzzard, or I salivates you rapid!"

The situation was one of intense delicacy. Gieger might have averted the threatening clash with a judicious use of soft, placating speech. But it pleased him to bluster.

"We are deputies, acting under orders from the court. We are after a murderer, and we mean to get him!" he said, coldly.

"Deputies! Hell!" Barkwell's voice rose, sharply scornful and mocking. "Deputies! Crooks! Gun-fighters! Pluguglies!" His eyes, bright, alert, gleaming like a bird's, were roving over the faces in the group of deputies. "A damn fine bunch of guys to represent the law! There's Dakota Dick, there! Tinhorn, rustler! There's Red Classen! Stage robber! An' Pepper Ridgely, a plain, ornery thief! An' Kid Dorgan, a sneakin' killer! An' Buff Keller, an' Andy Watts, an' Pig Mugley, an'—oh, hell! Deputies! Law!——Ah—hah!"

One of the men had reached for his holster. Weaver's gun barked twice and the man pitched limply forward to his horse's neck. Other weapons flashed; the calm of the early morning was rent by the hoarse, guttural cries of men in the grip of the blood-lust, the sustained and venomous popping of pistols, the queer, sodden impact of lead against flesh, the terror-snorts of horses, and the grunts of men, falling heavily. 304

A big man in khaki, loping his horse up the slope of an arroyo half a mile distant, started at the sound of the first shot and raced over the crest. He pulled the horse to an abrupt halt as his gaze swept the plains in front of him. He saw riderless horses running frantically away from a smoking blot, he saw the blot streaked with level, white smoke-spurts that ballooned upward quickly; he heard the dull, flat reports that followed the smoke-spurts.

It seemed to be over in an instant. The blot split up, galloping horses and yelling men burst out of it. The big man had reached the crest of the arroyo at the critical second in which the balance of victory wavers uncertainly. With thrusting chin, lips in a hideous pout, and with sullen, blazing eyes, he watched the battle go against him. Fifteen cowboys—he counted them, deliberately, coldly, despite the rage-mania that had seized him—were spurring after eight other men whom he knew for his own. As he watched he saw two of these tumble from their horses. And at a distance he saw the loops of ropes swing out to enmesh four more—who were thrown and dragged; he watched darkly as the remaining two raised their hands above their heads. Then his lips came out of their pout and were wreathed in a bitter snarl. 305

"Licked!" he muttered. "Twelve put out of business. But there's thirty more—if the damn fools have come in to town! That's two to one!" He laughed, wheeled his horse toward Manti, rode a few feet down the slope of the arroyo, halted and sat motionless in the saddle, looking back. He smiled with cold satisfaction. "Lucky for me that cinch strap broke," he said.

Trevison was placing Levins' limp form across the saddle on Nigger's back when the faint morning breeze bore to his ears the report of Weaver's pistol. A rattling volley followed the first report, and Trevison led Nigger close to the edge of the ledge in time to observe the battle as Corrigan had seen it. He hurried Nigger down the slope, but he had to be careful with his burden. Reaching the level he lifted Levins off, laid him gently on the top of a huge flat rock, and then leaped into the saddle and sent Nigger tearing over the plains toward the scene of the battle.

It was over when he arrived. A dozen men were lying in the tall grass. Some were groaning,

writhing; others were quiet and motionless. Four or five of them were arrayed in chaps. His lips grimmed as his gaze swept them. He dismounted and went to them, one after another. He stooped long over one.

"They've got Weaver," he heard a voice say. And he started and looked around, and seeing no one near, knew it was his own voice that he heard. It was dry and light—as a man's voice might be who has run far and fast. He stood for a while, looking down at Weaver. His brain was 306
reeling, as it had reeled over on the ledge of the pueblo a few minutes before, when he had discovered a certain thing. It was not a weakness; it was a surge of reviving rage, an accession of passion that made his head swim with its potency, made his muscles swell with a strength that he had not known for many hours. Never in his life had he felt more like crying. His emotions seared his soul as a white-hot iron sears the flesh; they burned into him, scorching his pity and his impulses of mercy, withering them, blighting them. He heard himself whining sibilantly, as he had heard boys whine when fighting, with eagerness and lust for blows. It was the insensate, raging fury of the fight-madness that had gripped him, and he suddenly yielded to it and raised his head, laughing harshly, with panting, labored breath.

Barkwell rode up to him, speaking hoarsely: "We come pretty near wipin' 'em out, 'Firebrand!'"

He looked up at his foreman, and the latter's face blanched. "God!" he said. He whispered to a cowboy who had joined him: "The boss is pretty near loco—looks like!"

"They've killed Weaver," muttered Trevison. "He's here. They killed Clay, too—he's down on a rock near the slope." He laughed, and tightened his belt. The record book which he had carried in his waistband all along interfered with this work, and he drew it out, throwing it from him. "Clay was worth a thousand of them!"

Barkwell got down and seized the book, watching Trevison closely. 307

"Look here, Boss," he said, as Trevison ran to his horse and threw himself into the saddle; "you're bushed, mighty near—"

If Trevison heard his first words he had paid no attention to them. He could not have heard the last words, for Nigger had lunged forward, running with great, long, catlike leaps in the direction of Manti.

"Good God!" yelled Barkwell to some of the men who had ridden up; "the damn fool is goin' to town! They'll salivate him, sure as hell! Some of you stay here—two's enough! The rest of you come along with me!"

They were after Trevison within a few seconds, but the black horse was far ahead, running without hitch or stumble, as straight toward Manti as his willing muscles and his loyal heart could take him.

Corrigan had seen the black bolt that had rushed toward him out of the spot where the blot had been. He cursed hoarsely and drove the spurs deep into the flanks of his horse, and the animal, squealing with pain and fury, leaped down the side of the arroyo, crossed the bottom in two or three bounds and stretched away toward Manti.

A cold fear had seized the big man's heart. It made a sweat break out on his forehead, it caused his hand to tremble as he flung it around to his hip in search of his pistol. He tried to shake the feeling off, but it clung insistently to him, making him catch his breath. His horse was big, rangy, and strong, but he forced it to such a pace during the first mile of the ride that he could 308
feel its muscles quivering under the saddle skirts. And he looked back at the end of the mile, to see the black horse at about the same distance from him; possibly the distance had been shortened. It seemed to Corrigan that he had never seen a horse that traveled as smoothly and evenly as the big black, or that ran with as little effort. He began to loathe the black with an intensity equaled only by that which he felt for his rider.

He held his lead for another mile. Glancing back a little later he noted with a quickening pulse that the distance had been shortened by several hundred feet, and that the black seemed to be traveling with as little effort as ever. Also, for the first time, Corrigan noticed the presence of other riders, behind Trevison. They were topping a slight rise at the instant he glanced back, and were at least a mile behind his pursuer.

At first, mingled with his fear, Corrigan had felt a slight disgust for himself in yielding to his sudden panic. He had never been in the habit of running. He had been as proud of his courage as he had been of his cleverness and his keenness in planning and plotting. It had been his mental boast that in every crisis his nerve was coldest. But now he nursed a vagrant, furtive hope that waiting for him at Manti would be some of those men whom he had hired at his own expense to impersonate deputies. The presence of the hope was as inexplicable as the fear that had set him to running from Trevison. Two or three weeks ago he would have faced both Trevison and his men and brazened it out. But of late a growing dread of the man had seized 309
him. Never before had he met a man who refused to be beaten, or who had fought him as recklessly and relentlessly.

He jeered at himself as he rode, telling himself that when Trevison got near enough he would stand and have it out with him—for he knew that the fight had narrowed down between them until it was as Trevison had said, man to man—but as he rode his breath came faster, his backward glances grew more frequent and fearful, and the cold sweat on his forehead grew clammy. Fear, naked and shameful, had seized him.

Behind him, lean, gaunt, haggard; seeing nothing but the big man ahead of him, feeling nothing but an insane desire to maim or slay him, rode a man who in forty-eight hours had been transformed from a frank, guileless, plain-speaking human, to a rage-drunken savage—a monomaniac who, as he leaned over Nigger's mane, whispered and whined and mewed, as his forebears, in some tropical jungle, voiced their passions when they set forth to slay those who had sought to despoil them.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DREGS

When the Benham private car came to a stop on the switch, Rosalind swung up the steps and upon the platform just as J. C., ruddy, smiling and bland, opened the door. She was in his arms in an instant, murmuring her joy. He stroked her hair, then held her off for a good look at her, and inquired, unctuously:

"What are you doing in town so early, my dear?"

"Oh!" She hid her face on his shoulder, reluctant to tell him. But she knew he must be told, and so she steeled herself, stepping back and looking at him, her heart pounding madly.

"Father; these people have discovered that Corrigan has been trying to cheat them!"

She would have gone on, but the sickly, ghastly pallor of his face frightened her. She swayed and leaned against the railing of the platform, a sinking, deadly apprehension gnawing at her, for it seemed from the expression of J. C.'s face that he had some knowledge of Corrigan's intentions. But J. C. had been through too many crises to surrender at the first shot in this one. Still he got a good grip on himself before he attempted to answer, and then his voice was low and intoned with casual surprise:

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"Trying to cheat them? How, my dear?"

"By trying to take their land from them. You had no knowledge of it, Father?"

"Who has been saying that?" he demanded, with a fairly good pretense of righteous anger.

"Nobody. But I thought—I—Oh, thank God!"

"Well, well," he bluffed with faint reproach; "things are coming to a pretty pass when one's own daughter is the first to suspect him of wrong-doing."

"I didn't, Father. I was merely—I don't know what I *did* think! There has been so much excitement! Everything is *so* upset! They have blown up the mining machinery, burned the bank and the courthouse; Judge Lindman was abducted and found; Braman was killed—choked to death; the Vigilantes are—"

"Good God!" Benham interrupted her, staggering back against the rear of the coach. "Who has been at the bottom of all this lawlessness?"

"Trevison."

He gasped, in spite of the fact that he had suspected what her answer would be.

"Where is Corrigan? Where's Trevison?" He demanded, his hands shaking. "Answer me! Where are they?"

"I don't know," the girl returned, dully. "They say Trevison is hiding in a pueblo not far from the Bar B. And that Corrigan left here early this morning, with a number of deputies, to try to capture him. And those men—" She indicated the horsemen gathered in front of the *Belmont*, whom he had not seen, "are organizing to go to Trevison's rescue. They have discovered that 312
Corrigan murdered Braman, though Corrigan accused Trevison."

J. C. flattened himself against the rear wall of the coach and looked with horror upon the armed riders. There were forty or fifty of them now, and others were joining the group. "Where's Judge Lindman?" he faltered. "Can't this lawlessness be stopped?"

"It is only a few minutes ago that Judge Lindman was dragged from a shed into which he had been forced by Corrigan—after being beaten by him. He made a public confession of his part in the attempted fraud, and charged Corrigan with coercing him. Those men are aroused, Father. I don't know what the end will be, but I am afraid—I'm afraid they'll—"

"I shall give the engineer orders to pull my car out of here!" J. C.'s face was chalky white.

"No, no!" cried the girl, sharply. "That would make them think you were—Don't *run*, Father!" she begged, omitting the word which she dreaded to think might become attached to him should he go away, now that some of them had seen him. "We'll stand our ground, Father. If Corrigan has done those things he deserves to be punished!" Her lips, white and stiff, closed firmly.

"Yes, yes," he said; "that's right—we won't run." But he drew her inside, despite her objections,

and from a window they watched the members of the Vigilantes gathering, bristling with weapons, a sinister and ominous arm of that law which is the dread and horror of the evil-doer.

There came a movement, concerted, accompanied by a low rumble as of waves breaking on a rocky shore. It brought the girl out of her chair, through the door and upon the car platform, where she stood, her hands clasped over her breast, her breath coming gaspingly. His knees knocking together, his face the ashen gray of death, Benham stumbled after her. He did not want to go; did not care to see this thing—what might happen—what his terror told him *would* happen; but he was forced out upon the platform by the sheer urge of a morbid curiosity that there was no denying; it had laid hold of his soul, and though he cringed and shivered and tottered, he went out, standing close to the iron rail, gripping it with hands that grew blueish-white around the knuckles; watching with eyes that bulged, his lips twitching over soundless words. For he could not hold himself guiltless in this thing; it could not have happened had he tempered his smug complacence with thoughts of justice. He groaned, gibbering, for he stood on the brink at this minute, looking down at the lashing sea of retribution.

The girl paid no attention to him. She was watching the men down the street. The concerted movement had come from them. Nearly a hundred riders were on the move. Lefingwell, huge, grim, led them down the street toward the private car. For an instant the girl felt a throb of terror, thinking that they might have designs on the man who stood at the railing near her, unable to move—for he had the same thought. She murmured thankfully when they wheeled, and without looking in her direction loped their horses toward a wide, vacant space between some buildings, which led out into the plains, and through which she had ridden often when entering Manti. Watching the men, shuddering at the ominous aspect they presented, she saw a tremor run through them—as though they all formed one body. They came to a sudden stop. She heard a ripple of sound arise from them, amazement and anticipation. And then, as though with preconcerted design, though she had heard no word spoken, the group divided, splitting asunder with a precision that deepened the conviction of preconcertedness, ranging themselves on each side of the open space, leaving it gaping barrenly, unobstructed—a stretch of windrowed alkali dust, deep, light and feathery.

Silence, like a stroke, fell over the town. The girl saw people running toward the open space, but they seemed to make no noise—they might have been dream people. And then, noting that they all stared in one direction, she looked over their heads. Not more than four or five hundred feet from the open space, and heading directly toward it, thundered a rider on a tall, strong, rangy horse. The beast's chest was foam-flecked, the white lather that billowed around its muzzle was stained darkly. But it came on with heart-breaking effort, giving its rider its all. Behind the first rider came a second, not more than fifty feet distant from the other, on a black horse which ran with no effort, seemingly, sliding along with great, smooth undulations, his mighty muscles flowing like living things under his glossy, somber coat.

The girl saw the man on his back leaning forward, a snarling, terrible grin on his face. She saw the first rider wheel when he reached the edge of the open space near the waiting Vigilantes, bring his horse to a sliding halt and face toward his pursuer. He clawed at a hip pocket, drawing a pistol that flashed in the first rays of the morning sun—it belched fire and smoke in a continuous stream, seemingly straight at the rider of the black horse. One—two—three—four—five—six times! The girl counted. But the first man's hand wabbled, and the rider of the black horse came on like a demon astride a black bolt, a laugh of bitter derision on his lips. The black did not swerve. Straight and true in his headlong flight he struck the other horse. They went down in a smother of dust, the two horses grunting, scrambling and kicking. The girl had seen the rider of the black horse lunge forward at the instant of impact; he had thrown himself at the other man as she had seen football players launch themselves at players of the opposition, and they had both reeled out of their saddles to disappear in the smother of dust.

Men left the fringe of the living wall flanking the open space and seized the two horses, leading them away. The smother drifted, and the girl screamed at sight of the two raging things that rolled and burrowed in the deep dust of the street.

They got up as she watched them, springing apart hesitating for an awful instant to sob breath into their lungs; then they rushed together, striking bitter, sledge-hammer blows that sounded like the smashing of flat rocks, falling from a great height, on the surface of water. She shrieked once, wildly, beseeching someone to stop them, but no man paid any attention to her cry. They sat on their horses, silent, tense, grim, and she settled into a coma of terror, an icy paralysis gripping her. She heard her father muttering incoherently at her side, droning and puling something over and over in a wailing monotone—she caught it after a while; he was calling upon his God—in an hour that could not have been were it not for his own moral flaccidness.

The dust under the feet of the fighting men leveled under their shifting, dragging feet; it bore the print of their bodies where they had lain and rolled in it; erupting volcanoes belched it heavily upward; it caught and gripped their legs to the ankles, making their movements slow and sodden. This condition favored the larger man. He lashed out a heavy fist that caught Trevison full and fair on the jaw, and the latter's face turned ashy white as he sank to his knees. Corrigan stopped to catch his breath before he hurled himself forward, and this respite, brief as it was, helped the other to shake off the deadening effect of the blow. He moved his head slightly as Corrigan swung at it, and the blow missed, its force pulling the big man off his feet, so that he tumbled headlong over his adversary. He was up again in a flash though, for he was fresher than his enemy. They clinched, and stood straining, matching strength against strength, sheer, without trickery, for the madness of murder was in the heart of one and the desperation

of fear in the soul of the other, and they thought of nothing but to crush and batter and pound.

317 Corrigan's strength was slightly the greater, but it was offset by the other's fury. In the clinch the big man's right hand came up, the heel of the palm shoved with malignant ferocity against Trevison's chin. Corrigan's left arm was around Trevison's waist, squeezing it like a vise, and the whole strength of Corrigan's right arm was exerted to force the other's head back. Trevison tried to slip his head sideways to escape the hold, but the effort was fruitless. Changing his tactics, his breath lagging in his throat from the terrible pressure on it, Trevison worked his right hand into the other's stomach with the force and regularity of a piston rod. The big man writhed under the punishment, dropping his hand from Trevison's chin to his waist, swung him from his feet and threw him from him as a man throws a bag of meal.

He was after him before he landed, but the other writhed and wriggled in the air like a cat, and when the big man reached for him, trying again to clinch, he evaded the arm and landed a crushing blow on the other's chin that snapped his head back as though it were swung from a hinge, and sent him reeling, to his knees in the dust.

The watching girl saw the ring of men around the fighters contract; she saw Trevison dive headlong at the kneeling man; with fingers working in a fury of impotence she swayed at the iron rail, leaning far over it, her eyes strained, her breath bated, constricting her lungs as though a steel band were around them. For she seemed to feel that the end was near.

318 She saw them, locked in each other's embrace, stagger to their feet. Corrigan's head was wabbling. He was trying to hold the other to him that he might escape the lashing blows that were driven at his head. The girl saw his hold broken, and as he reeled, catching another blow in the mouth, he swung toward her and she saw that his lips were smashed, the blood from them trickling down over his chin. There was a gleam of wild, despairing terror in his eyes—revealing the dawning consciousness of approaching defeat, complete and terrible. She saw Trevison start another blow, swinging his fist upward from his knee. It landed with a sodden squish on the big man's jaw. His eyes snapped shut, and he dropped soundlessly, face down in the dust.

For a space Trevison stood, swaying drunkenly, looking down at his beaten enemy. Then he drew himself erect with a mighty effort and swept the crowd with a glance, the fires of passion still leaping and smoldering in his eyes. He seemed for the first time to see the Vigilantes, to realize the significance of their presence, and as he wheeled slowly his lips parted in a grin of bitter satisfaction. He staggered around the form of his fallen enemy, his legs bending at the knees, his feet dragging in the dust. It seemed to the girl that he was waiting for Corrigan to get up that he might resume the fight, and she cried out protestingly. He wheeled at the sound of her voice and faced her, rocking back and forth on his heels and toes, and the glow of dull astonishment in his eyes told her that he was now for the first time aware of her presence. He bowed to her, gravely, losing his balance in the effort, reeling weakly to recover it.

319 And then a crush of men blotted him out—the ring of Vigilantes had closed around him. She saw Barkwell lunging through the press to gain Trevison's side; she got a glimpse of him a minute later, near Trevison. The street had become a sea of jostling, shoving men and prancing horses. She wanted to get away—somewhere—to shut this sight from her eyes. For though one horror was over, another impended. She knew it, but could not move. A voice boomed hoarsely, commandingly, above the buzz of many others—it was Lefingwell's, and she cringed at the sound of it. There was a concerted movement; the Vigilantes were shoving the crowd back, clearing a space in the center. In the cleared space two men were lifting Corrigan to his feet. He was reeling in their grasp, his chin on his chest, his face dust-covered, disfigured, streaked with blood. He was conquered, his spirit broken, and her heart ached with pity for him despite her horror for his black deeds. The loop of a rope swung out as she watched; it fell with a horrible swish over Corrigan's head and was drawn taut, swiftly, and a hoarse roar of approval drowned her shriek.

She heard Trevison's voice, muttering in protest, but his words, like her shriek, were lost in the confusion of sound. She saw him fling his arms wide, sending Barkwell and another man reeling from him; he reached for the pistol at his side and leveled it at the crowd. Those nearest him shrank, their faces blank with fear and astonishment. But the man with the rope stood firm, as did Lefingwell, grim, his face darkening with wrath.

320 "This is the law actin' here, 'Firebrand,'" he said, his voice level. "You've done your bit, an' you're due to step back an' let justice take a hand. This here skunk has outraged every damned rule of decency an' honor. He's tried to steal all our land; he's corrupted our court, nearly guzzled Judge Lindman to death, killed Braman—an' Barkwell says the bunch of pluguglies he hired to pose as deputies, has killed Clay Levins an' four or five of the Diamond K men. That's plenty. We'd admire to give in to you. We'll do anything else you say. But this has got to be done."

While Lefingwell had been talking two of the Vigilantes had slipped to the rear of Trevison. As Lefingwell concluded they leaped. The arms of one man went around Trevison's neck; the other man lunged low and pinned his arms to his sides, one hand grasping the pistol and wrenching it from his hand. The crowd closed again. The girl saw Corrigan lifted to the back of a horse, and she shut her eyes and hung dizzily to the railing, while tumult and confusion raged around her.

She opened her eyes a little later, to see Barkwell and another man leading Trevison into the front door of the *Castle*. The street around the car was deserted, save for two or three men who were watching her curiously. She felt her father's arms around her, and she was led into the

car, her knees shaking, her soul sick with the horror of it all.

Half an hour later, as she sat at one of the windows, staring stonily out in the shimmering sunlight of the street, she saw some of the Vigilantes returning. She shrank back from the window, shuddering.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CALM

The day seemed to endure for an age. Rosalind did not leave the car; she did not go near her father, shut up alone in his apartment; she ate nothing, ignoring the negro attendant when he told her that lunch was served, huddled in a chair beside an open window she decided a battle. She saw the forces of reason and justice rout the hosts of hatred and crime, and she got up finally, her face pallid, but resolute, secure in the knowledge that she had decided wisely. She pitied Corrigan. Had it been within her power she would have prevented the tragedy. And yet she could not blame these people. They were playing the game honestly, and their patience had been sadly strained by one player who had persisted in breaking the rules. He had been swept away by his peers, which was as fair a way as any law—any human law—could deal with him. In her own East he would have paid the same penalty. The method would have been more refined, to be sure; there would have been a long legal squabble, with its tedious delays, but in the end Corrigan would have paid. There was a retributive justice for all those who infracted the rules of the game. It had found Corrigan.

At three o'clock in the afternoon she washed her face. The cool water refreshed her, and with reviving spirits she combed her hair, brushed the dust from her clothing, and looked into a mirror. There were dark hollows under her eyes, a haunting, dreading expression in them. For she could not help thinking about what had happened there—down the street where the Vigilantes had gone.

She dropped listlessly into another chair beside a window, this time facing the station. She saw her horse, hitched to the rail at the station platform, where she had left it that morning. *That* seemed to have been days ago! A period of aching calm had succeeded the tumult of the morning. The street was soundless, deserted. Those men who had played leading parts in the tragedy were not now visible. She would have deserted the town too, had it not been for her father. The tragedy had unnerved him, and she must stay with him until he recovered. She had asked the porter about him, and the latter had reported that he seemed to be asleep.

A breeze carried a whisper to her as she sat at the window:

"Where's 'Firebrand' now?" said a voice.

"Sleepin'. The clerk in the *Castle* says he's makin' up for lost time."

She did not bother to try to see the owners of the voices; her gaze was on the plains, far and vast; and the sky, clear, with a pearly shimmer that dazzled her. She closed her eyes. She could not have told how long she slept. She awoke to the light touch of the porter, and she saw Trevison standing in the open doorway of the car.

The dust of the battle had been removed. An admiring barber had worked carefully over him; a doctor had mended his arm. Except for a noticeable thinness of the face, and a certain drawn expression of the eyes, he was the same Trevison who had spoken so frankly to her one day out on the plains when he had taken her into his confidence. In the look that he gave her now was the same frankness, clouded a little, she thought, by some emotion—which she could not fathom.

"I have come to apologize," he said; "for various unjust thoughts with which I have been obsessed." Before she could reply he had taken two or three swift steps and was standing over her, and was speaking again, his voice vibrant and regretful: "I ought to have known better than to think—what I did—of you. I have no excuses to make, except that I was insane with a fear that my ten years of labor and lonesomeness were to be wasted. I have just had a talk with Hester Harvey, and she has shown me what a fool I have been. She—"

Rosalind got up, laughing lowly, tremulously. "I talked with Hester this morning. And I think—"

"She told you—" he began, his voice leaping.

"Many things." She looked straight at him, her eyes glowing, but they drooped under the heat of his. "You don't need to feel elated over it—there were two of us." She felt that the surge of joy that ran over her would have shown in her face had it not been for a sudden recollection of what the Vigilantes had done that morning. That recollection paled her cheeks and froze the smile on her lips.

He was watching her closely and saw her face harden. A shadow passed over his own. He thought he could see the hopelessness of staying longer. "A woman's love," he said, gloomily, "is

a wonderful thing. It clings through trouble and tragedy—never faltering." She looked at him, startled, trying to solve the enigma of this speech. He laughed, bitterly. "That's what makes a woman superior to mere man. Love exalts her. It makes a savage of a man. I suppose it is 'good-bye.'" He held out a hand to her and she took it, holding it limply, looking at him in wonderment, her heart heavy with regret. "I wish you luck and happiness," he said. "Corrigan is a man in spite of—of many faults. You can redeem him; you—"

"*Is* a man!" Her hand tightened on his; he could feel her tremble. "Why—why—I thought—Didn't they—"

"Didn't they tell you? The fools!" He laughed derisively. "They let him go. They knew I wouldn't want it. They did it for me. He went East on the noon train—quite alive, I assure you. I am glad of it—for your sake."

"For my sake!" Her voice lifted in mingled joy and derision, and both her hands were squeezing his with a pressure that made his blood leap with a longing to possess her. "For *my* sake!" she repeated, and the emphasis made him gasp and stiffen. "For *your* sake—for both of us, Trevison! Oh, what fools we were! What fools all people are, not to trust and believe!"

"What do you mean?" He drew her toward him, roughly, and held her hands in a grip that made her wince. But she looked straight at him in spite of the pain, her eyes brimming with a promise that he could not mistake.

"Can't you *see*?" she said to him, her voice quavering; "*must* I tell you?"

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ferocious “plant men,” creatures whose mighty tails swished their victims to instant death, and defies Issus, the terrible Goddess of Death, whom all Mars worships and reveres.

THE WARLORD OF MARS

Old acquaintances, made in the two other stories, reappear, Tars Tarkas, Tardos Mors and others. There is a happy ending to the story in the union of the Warlord, the title conferred upon John Carter, with Dejah Thoris.

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