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NO MORE MISERY COTTON

THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER

XII (Continued)

WADE plodded down through the deep snow, stepping in his old tracks, and as he toiled on his thoughts were deep and comforting. He was thinking that if he had his life to live over he would begin at once to find real and lasting happiness in other people's happiness.

Upon arriving at his cabin he set to work cleaning a path to the dog corral. The snow had drifted there and he had no easy task. It was well that he had built an inclosed house for the hounds to winter in. Such a heavy snow as this one would put an end to hunting for the time being. The ranch had ample supply of deer, bear and elk meat, all solidly frozen this morning, that would surely keep well until used.

Wade reflected that his tasks round the ranch would be feeding hounds and stock, chopping wood and doing such chores as came along in wintertime. The pack of hounds, which he had thinned out to a smaller number, would be a care on his hands. Kane had become a much-prized possession of Columbine's and lived at the house, where he had things his own way and always greeted Wade with a look of disdain and distrust. Kane would never forgive the hand that had hurt him. Samson and Jim and Fox, of course, shared Wade's cabin and vociferously announced his return.

Early in the afternoon Wade went down to the ranch house. The snow was not so deep there, having blown considerably in the open places. Someone was pounding iron in the blacksmith shop; horses were cavorting in the corrals; cattle were bawling round the hayricks in the barnyard. The hunter knocked on Columbine's door.

"Come in," she called.

Wade entered to find her alone. She was sitting up in bed, propped up with pillows, and she wore a warm woolly jacket and a dressing gown. Her paleness was now

By Zane Grey

Author of "Wildfire," "The Desert of Wheat," "Riders of the Purple Sage," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK B. HOFFMAN

safety of some article. Columbine blushed. She held out her hands. She was repentant of her words and curious as to his.

"Why, Ben Wade, I count the minutes before you come," she said. "What'd you bring me?"

"Who's been in here?" he asked, going forward. "That's a poor fire. I'll have to fix it."

"Mrs. Andrews just left. It was good of her to drive up. She came in the sled, she said. Oh, Ben, it's winter. There was snow on my bed when I woke up. I think I am better to-day. Jack hasn't been in here yet!"

At this Wade laughed and Columbine followed suit.

"Well, you look a little sassy to-day, which I take is a good sign," said Wade. "I've got some news that will come near to makin' you well."

"Oh, tell it quick!" she cried.

"Wils won't lose his leg. It's gettin' well. An' there was a letter from his father, forgivin' him for somethin' he never told me."

"My prayers were answered!" whispered Columbine, and she closed her eyes.

"An' his father wants him to come home to run the ranch," quietly went on Wade.

"Oh!" Her eyes popped open with sudden fright.

"But he can't—he won't go?"

"I reckon not. He wouldn't if he could. But some day he will an' take you home with him."

Columbine covered her face with trembling hands.

"Such prophecies! They—they can't—"

"Ahuh! I know. The strange fact is, lass, that they all come true. I wish I had all happy ones, instead of them black croakin' ones that come like ravens. . . . Well, you're better to-day?"

"Yes; oh, yes. Ben, what have you got for me?"

"You're in an awful hurry. I want to talk to you, an' if I show what I've got then there will be no talkin'. You say Jack hasn't been in to-day."

"Not yet, thank goodness."

"How about Old Bill?"

"Ben, you never call him my dad. I wish you would. When you don't, it always reminds me that he's really not my dad."

"Ahuh! Well, well," replied Wade with his head bowed. "It is just queer I can never remember. . . . An' how was he to-day?"

"For a wonder he didn't mention poor me. He was full of talk about going to Kremmling. Means to take Jack along. Do you know, Ben, dad can't fool me. He's afraid to leave Jack here alone with me. So dad talked a lot about selling stock an' buying supplies, and how he needed Jack to go, and so forth. I'm mighty glad he means to take him. But my, won't Jack be sore!"

"I reckon. It's time he broke out."

"And now, dear Ben—what have you got for me? I know it's from Wilson," she coaxed.

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"Well, well, an' so you kissed ugly old Ben t Wade?"

"Yes, and I've wanted to do it before," she retorted. The dark excitement in her eyes, the flush of her pale cheeks, made her beautiful then. "Lass, now you read your letter an' answer it. You can tear out the pages. I'll sit here an' be makin' out to be readin' aloud out of this book here, if anyone happens in suddenlike!"

"Oh, how you think of everything!"

The hunter sat beside pretending to be occupied with the book he had taken from the table when really he was stealing glances at her face. Indeed, she was more than pretty then. Illness and pain had enhanced the sweetness of her expression.

As she read on it was manifest that she had forgotten the hunter's presence. She grew pink, rosy, scarlet, radiant. And Wade thrilled with her as she thrilled, loved her more and more as she loved. Moore must have written words of enchantment. Wade's hungry heart suffered a pang of jealousy but would not harbor it. He read in her perusal of that letter what no other dreamed of, not even the girl herself; and it was certitude of tragic and brief life for her if she could not live for Wilson Moore.

Those moments of watching her were unutterably precious to Wade. He saw how some divine guidance had directed his footsteps to this home. How many years had it taken him to get there! Columbine read and read and reread, a girl with her first love letter. And for Wade, with his keen eyes that seemed to see the senses and the soul, there shone something infinite through her rapture. Never until that unguarded moment had he divined her innocence, nor had any conception of the exquisite torture of her maiden fears or the havoc of love fighting for itself. He learned then much of the mystery and meaning of a woman's heart.

XIII

"DEAR WILSON: The note and letter from you have taken my breath away. I couldn't tell—I wouldn't dare tell—how they made me feel."

"Your good news fills me with joy. And when Ben told me you wouldn't lose your leg—that you would get well—then my eyes filled and my heart choked me, and I thanked God who'd answered my prayers."

"After all the heartache and dread, it's so wonderful to find things not so terrible as they seemed. Oh, I am thankful. You have only to take care of yourself now, to lie patiently and wait, and obey Ben, and soon the time will have flown by and you will be well again."

"Maybe, after all, your foot will not be so bad. Maybe you can ride again, if not so wonderfully as before, then well enough to ride on your father's range and look after his stock. For, Wilson dear, you'll have to go home. It's your duty. Your father must be getting old now. He needs you. He has forgiven you—you bad boy! And you are very lucky. It almost kills me to think of your leaving White Slides. But that is selfish. I'm going to learn to be like Ben Wade. He never thinks of himself."

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marked, and the shadows under her eyes made them appear large and mournful.

"Ben Wade, you don't care for me any more!" she exclaimed.

"Why not, lass?" he asked.

"You were so long in coming," she replied, now with petulance. "That shows you had forgotten about me. I guess now I don't want you at all."

"Ahuh! That's the reward of people who worry an' work for others. Well, then, I reckon I'll go back an' not give you what I brought."

He made a pretense of leaving, and he put a hand to his pocket as if to insure the

Bent Wade Was
Hiding in the Willows Along the Trail



(Continued from Page 16)

"Rest assured, Wilson, that I will never marry Jack Bellounds. It seems years since that awful October first. I gave my word then and I would have lived up to it. But I've changed. I'm older. I see things differently. I love dad as well. I feel as sorry for Jack Bellounds. I still think I might help him. I still believe in my duty to his father. But I can't marry him. It would be a sin. I have no right to marry a man whom I do not love. When it comes to thought of his touching me, then I hate him. Duty toward dad is one thing, and I hold it high, but that is not reason enough for a woman to give herself. Some duty to myself is higher than that. It's hard for me to tell you—for me to understand. Love of you has opened my eyes. Still I don't think it's love of you that makes me selfish. I'm true to something in me that I never knew before. I could marry Jack, loving you, and utterly sacrifice myself if it were right. But it would be wrong. I never realized this until you kissed me. Since then the thought of anything that approaches personal relations—any hint of intimacy with Jack—fills me with disgust.

"So I'm not engaged to Jack Bellounds and I'm never going to be. There will be trouble here. I feel it. I see it coming. Dad keeps at me persistently. He grows older. I don't think he's failing, but then there's a loss of memory and an almost childish obsession in regard to the marriage he has set his heart on. Then his passion for Jack seems greater as he learns little by little that Jack is not all he might be.

"Wilson, I give you my word, I believe if dad ever really sees Jack as I see him or you see him then something dreadful will happen. In spite of everything dad still believes in Jack. It's beautiful and terrible. That's one reason why I've wanted to help Jack. Well, it's not to be. Every day, every hour, Jack Bellounds grows farther from me. He and his father will try to persuade me to consent to this marriage. They may even try to force me. But in that way I'll be as hard and as cold as Old White Slides. No! Never!

"For the rest I'll do my duty to dad. I'll stick to him. I could not engage myself to you, no matter how much I love you. And that's more every minute! . . . So don't mention taking me to your home, don't ask me again. Please, Wilson, your asking shook my very soul! Oh, how sweet that would be—your wife! . . . But if dad turns me away—I don't think he would. Yet he's so strange and like iron for all concerning Jack. If ever he turned me out, I'd have no home. I'm a waif, you know. Then—then, Wilson. . . . Oh, it's horrible to be in the position I'm in. I won't say any more. You'll understand.

"It's your love that awoke me and it's Ben Wade who has saved me. Wilson, I love him almost as I do dad, only strangely. Do you know I think he had something to do with Jack's getting drunk that awful October first. I don't mean Ben would stoop to get Jack drunk. But he might have cunningly put that opportunity in Jack's way. Drink is Jack's weakness as gambling is his passion. Well, I know that the liquor was some fine old stuff which Ben gave to the cowboys. And it's significant now how Jack avoids Ben. He hates him. He's afraid of him. He's jealous because Ben is so much with me. I've heard Jack rave to dad about this. But dad is just to others.

"And so I want you to know that it's Ben Wade who has saved me. Since I've been sick I've learned more of Ben. He's like a woman. He understands. I never have to tell him anything. You, Wilson, were sometimes stupid or stubborn—forgive me—about little things that girls feel but can't explain. Ben knows. I tell you this because I want you to understand how and why I love him. I think I love

him most for his goodness to you. Dear boy, if I hadn't loved you before Ben Wade came I'd have fallen in love with you since, just listening to his talk of you. But this will make you conceited. So I'll go on about Ben. He's our friend. Why, Wilson, that sweetness, softness, gentleness about him, the heart that makes him love us, that must be only the woman in him. I don't know what a mother would feel like, but I do know I seem strangely happier since I've confessed my troubles to this man. It was Lem who told me how Ben offered to be a friend to Jack. And Jack flouted him. I've a queer notion that the moment Jack did this he turned his back on a better life.

"To repeat then, Ben Wade is our friend, and to me something more that I've tried to explain. Maybe telling you this will make you think more of him and listen to his advice. I hope so. Did any boy and girl ever before so need a friend? I need that something he instills in me. If I lost it I'd be miserable. And, Wilson, I'm such a coward. I'm so weak. I have such sinkings and burnings and tossings. Oh, I'm only a woman! But I'll die fighting. That is what Ben Wade instills into me. While there was life this strange little man would never give up hope. He makes me feel that he knows more than he tells. Through him I shall get the strength to live up to my convictions, to be true to myself, to be faithful to you.

"With love, COLUMBINE."

"DECEMBER THIRD.

"Dearest Collie: Your last was only a note and I told Wade if he didn't fetch more than a note next time there would be trouble round this bunk house. And then he brought your letter!

"I'm feeling exuberant—I think it's that—to-day. First time I've been up.

I'll tell him everything, and if Ben and I can't win him to our side then you can. Father could never resist you. When he has fallen in love with you, which won't take long, then we'll go to Old Bill Bellounds and lay the case before him. Are you still in the saddle, Collie?

"Well, if you are be sure to get a better hold, for I'm going to run some next. Ben Wade approved of my plan. He says Bellounds can be brought to reason. He says he can make him see the ruin for everybody, were you forced to marry Jack. Strange, Collie, how Wade included himself, with you, me, Jack and the old man, in the foreshadowed ruin! Wade is as deep as the cañon there. Sometimes when he's thoughtful he gives me a creepy feeling. At others, when he comes out with one of his easy, cool assurances that we are all right—that we will get each other—why, then something grim takes possession of me. I believe him, I'm happy, but there crosses my mind a fleeting realization—not of what our friend is now, but what he has been. And it disturbs me, chills me, I don't understand it. For, Collie, though I understand your feeling of what he is, I don't understand mine. You see I'm a man. I've been a cowboy for ten years and more. I've seen some hard experiences and worked with a good many rough boys and men. Cowboys, Indians, Mexicans, miners, prospectors, ranchers, hunters—some of whom were bad medicine. So I've come to see men as you couldn't see them. And Ben Wade has been everything a man could be. He seems all men in one. And despite all his kindness and goodness and hopefulness, there is the sense I have of something deadly and terrible and inevitable in him.

"It makes my heart almost stop beating to know I have this man on my side.

hills. And for your own sake you must not be blind to what Wade is capable of. If you keep on loving him and idealizing him, blind to what has made him great, that is, blind to the tragic side of him, then if he did something terrible here for you and for me the shock would be bad for you. Lord knows I have no suspicions of Wade. I have no clear ideas at all. But I do know that for you he would not stop at anything. He loves you as much as I do, only differently. Such power a pale sweet-faced girl has over the lives of men!

"Good-by for this time.

"Faithfully, WILSON."

"JANUARY TENTH.

"Dear Wilson: In every letter I tell you I'm better! Why pretty soon there'll be nothing left to say about my health. I've been up and round now for days, but only lately have I begun to gain. Since Jack has been away I'm getting fat. I eat, and that's one reason I suppose. Then I move round more.

"You ask me to tell you all I do. Goodness! I couldn't and I wouldn't. You are getting mighty bossy since you're able to hobble round, as you call it. But you can't boss me! However, I'll be nice and tell you a little. I don't work very much. I've helped dad with his accounts, all so hopelessly muddled since he let Jack keep the books. I read a good deal. Your letters are worn out! Then when it snows I sit by the window and watch. I love to see the snowflakes fall, so fleecy and white and soft! But I don't like the snowy world after the storm has passed. I shiver and hug the fire. I must have Indian in me. On moonlit nights to look out at Old White Slides, so cold and icy and grand, and over the white hills and ranges makes me shudder. I don't know why. It's all beautiful. But it seems to me like death. . . . Well, I sit idly a lot and think of you and how terribly big my love has grown and— But that's all about that!

"As you know, Jack has been gone since before New Year's Day. He said he was going to Kremmling. But dad heard he went to Elgeria. Well, I didn't tell you that dad and Jack quarreled over money. Jack kept up his good behavior for so long that I actually believed he'd changed for the better. He kept at me, not so much on the marriage question, but to love him. Wilson, he nearly drove me frantic with his love-making. Finally I got mad, and I pitched into him. Oh, I convinced him! Then he came back to his own self again. Like a flash he was Buster Jack once more. 'You can go to hell!' he yelled at me. And such a look! . . . Well he went out and that's when he quarreled with dad. It was about money. I couldn't help but hear some of it. I don't know whether or not

dad gave Jack money, but I think he didn't. Anyway Jack went.

"Dad was all right for a few days. Really he seemed nicer and kinder for Jack's absence. Then all at once he sunk into the glooms. I couldn't cheer him up. When Ben Wade came in after supper, dad always got him to tell some of those terrible stories. You know what perfectly terrible stories Ben can tell. Well, dad had to hear the worst ones. And poor me, I didn't want to listen, but I couldn't resist. Ben can tell stories. And, oh, what he's lived through!

"I got the idea it wasn't Jack's absence so much that made dad sit by the hour before the fire, staring at the coals, sighing and looking so God-forsaken. My heart just aches for dad. He broods and broods. He'll break out some day and then I don't want to be here. There doesn't seem to be any idea when Jack will come home. He might never come. But Ben says he will. He says Jack hates work and that he couldn't be gambler

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"I Had a Shooting Scrape With a Man Named Elbert, in Smith's Place at Elgeria. He Drew on Me. But He Missed. Then I Shot Him"

Collie, I'm able to get up! Whoopee! I walk with a crutch and don't dare put my foot down. Not that it hurts, but that my boss would have a fit! I'm glad you've stopped heaping praise upon our friend Ben. Because now I can get over my jealousy and be half decent. He's the whitest man I ever knew.

"Now listen, Collie. I've had ideas lately. I've begun to eat and get stronger and to feel good. The pain is gone. And to think I swore to Wade I'd forgive Jack Bellounds and never hate him—or kill him! . . . There, that's letting the cat out of the bag, and it's done now. But no matter. The truth is, though, that I never could stop hating Jack while the pain lasted. Now I could shake hands with him and smile at him.

"Well, as I said, I've ideas. They're great. Grab hold of the pommel now so you won't get thrown! I'm going to pitch! . . . When I get well—able to ride and go about, which Ben says will be in the spring—I'll send for my father to come to White Slides. He'll come. Then

Because I sense in him the man element, the physical—oh, I can't put it in words, but I mean something great in him that can't be beaten. What he says must come true! . . . And so I've already begun to dream and to think of you as my wife. If you ever are—no! when you are—then I will owe it to Bent Wade. No man ever owed another for so precious a gift. But, Collie, I can't help a little vague dread—of what, I don't know, unless it's a sense of the possibilities of Hell-Bent Wade.

"Dearest, I don't want to worry you or frighten you, and I can't follow out my own gloomy fancies. Don't you mind too much what I think. Only you must realize that Wade is the greatest factor in our hopes of the future. My faith in him is so unshakable that it's foolish. Next to you I love him best. He seems even dearer to me than my own people. He has made me look at life differently. Likewise he has inspired you.

"But you, dearest Columbine, are only a sensitive, delicate girl, a frail and tender thing like the columbine flowers of the

THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER

(Continued from Page 19)

enough or wicked enough to support himself without working. Can't you hear Ben Wade say that?

"Ben Wade is supernatural. Sometimes, just for a moment, I dare to let myself believe in what he says—that our dream will come true and I'll be yours. Then Oh! Oh! Oh! Joy and stars and bells and heaven! I—I— But what am I writing? Wilson Moore, this is quite enough for to-day. Take care you don't believe I'm so—so very much in love."

"Ever, COLUMBINE."

"FEBRUARY —"

"Dearest Collie: I don't know the date, but spring's coming. To-day I kicked Bent Wade with my once sore foot. It didn't hurt me, but hurt Wade's feelings."

"Collie, I can get round first-rate. Don't need my crutch any more. I can make a fire and cook a meal. I can rustle round too. Haven't been far yet. My stock has wintered fairly well. I'm hoping for spring now, and the good old sunshine on the gray sage hills. And summer with its columbines!"

"To-day when Wade came with your letter he asked me sort of queer: 'Say Wils, do you know how many letters I've fetched you from Collie?' I said: 'No, I don't, but they're a lot.' Then he said there were just forty-seven letters. Forty-seven! I couldn't believe it and told him he was crazy. I never had such good fortune. Well, he made me count them and dog-gone it, he was right. Forty-seven wonderful, love letters from the sweetest girl on earth! But think of Wade remembering every one! It beats me. He's beyond understanding."

"So Jack Bellounds still stays away from White Slides. Collie, I'm sure sorry for his father. What it would be to have a son like Buster Jack! But for your sake I go round yelling and singing like a locoed Indian. Pretty soon spring will come. Then, you wild flower of the hills, you girl with the sweet mouth and the sad eyes—then I'm coming after you! And all the king's horses and all the king's men can never take you away from me again! Your faithful WILSON."

"MARCH NINETEENTH."

"Dearest Wilson: Your last letters have been read and reread, and kept under my pillow, and have been both my help and my weakness during these trying days since Jack's return."

"Jack came home on the night of March second. You'll remember that day, so gloomy and dark and dreary. It snowed and sleeted and rained. I remember how the rain roared on the roof. It roared so loud we didn't hear the horse. But we heard heavy boots on the porch outside the living room, and the swish of a slicker thrown to the floor. There was a bright fire. Dad looked up with a wild joy. All of a sudden he changed. He blazed. He recognized the heavy tread of his son. If I ever pitied and loved him it was then. I thought of the return of the Prodigal Son! . . . There came a knock on the door. Then dad recovered. He threw it open wide. The streaming light fell upon Jack Bellounds indeed, but not as I knew him. He entered. It was the first time I ever saw Jack look in the least like a man. He was pale, haggard, much older, sullen and bold. He strode in with a 'Howdy, folks,' and threw his wet hat on the floor and walked to the fire. His boots were soaked with water and mud. His clothes began to steam."

"When I looked at dad I was surprised. He seemed cool and bright, with the self-contained force usual for him when something critical is about to happen."

"Ahuh, so you come back," he said.

"Yes, I'm home," replied Jack.

"Wal, it took you quite a spell to get hyar."

"Do you want me to stay?"

"This question from Jack seemed to stump dad. He stared. Jack had appeared suddenly and his manner was different from that with which he used to face dad. He had something up his sleeve, as the cowboys say. He wore an air of defiance and indifference."

"I reckon I do," replied dad deliberately. "What do you mean by askin' me that?"

"I'm of age, long ago. You can't make me stay home. I can do as I like."

"Ahuh; I reckon you think you can. But not hyar at White Slides. If you ever expect to get this property you'll not do as you like."

"To hell with that. I don't care whether I ever get it or not."

"Dad's face went as white as a sheet. He seemed shocked. After a moment he told me I'd better go to my room. I was about to go when Jack said: 'No, let her stay. She'd best hear now what I've got to say. It concerns her.'"

"So ho! Then you've got a heap to say?" exclaimed dad queerly. "All right; you have your say first."

"Jack then began to talk in a level and monotonous voice, so unlike him that I

back to Kremmling. And I tried myself out again. I worked a while for Judson, who is the rancher I had borrowed most from. At night I went into town and to the saloons where I met my gambling cronies. I put myself in the atmosphere of drink and cards. And I resisted both. I could make myself indifferent to both. As soon as I was sure of myself I decided to come home. And here I am."

"This long speech of Jack's had a terrible effect upon me. I was stunned and sick. But if it did that to me what did it do to dad? Heaven knows I can't tell you. Dad gave a lurch and a great heave, as if at the removal of a rope that had all but strangled him."

"Ahuh—huh!" he groaned. "An' now you're hyar—what's thet mean?"

SHEEP AS LAWNMOWERS



W. S. Dunham, Who Owns a Country Home Near Elgin, Illinois, Keeps His Extensive Lawns Looking Like a Well-Mown City Park by Turning His Sheep Upon Them for a Few Hours Now and Then. There Were 396 Animals Grazing on the Lawn When This Picture Was Taken

sat there, amazed. He told how, early in the winter before he left the ranch, he had found out that he was honestly in love with me. That it had changed him—made him see he had never been any good—and inflamed him with the resolve to be better. He had tried. He had succeeded. For six weeks he had been all that could have been asked of any young man. I am bound to confess that he was! . . . Well, he went on to say how he had fought it out with himself until he absolutely knew he could control himself. The courage and inspiration had come from his love for me. That was the only good thing he'd ever felt. He wanted dad and he wanted me to understand absolutely without any doubt that he had found a way to hold on to his good intentions and good feelings. And that was for me! . . . I was struck all a-tremble at the truth. It was time! Well, then he forced me to a decision. Forced me without ever hinting of this change, this possibility in him. I had told him I couldn't love him. Never! Then he'd said I could go to hell and he gave up. Failing to get money from dad he stole it, without compunction and without regret! He had gone to Kremmling, then to Elgeria."

"I let myself go," he said without shame, "and I drank and gambled. When I was drunk I didn't remember Collie. But when I was sober I did. And she haunted me. That grew worse all the time. So I drank to forget her. . . . The money lasted a great deal longer than I expected. But that was because I won as much as I lost, until lately. Then I borrowed, a good deal from those men I gambled with, but mostly from ranchers who knew my father would be responsible. . . . I had a shooting scrape with a man named Elbert, in Smith's place at Elgeria. We quarreled over cards. He cheated. And when I hit him he drew on me. But he missed. Then I shot him. . . . He lived three days—and died. That sobered me. And once more there came to me truth of what I might have been. I went

"It means that it's not yet too late," replied Jack. "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not repenting with that side of me which is bad. But I've sobered up. I've had a shock. I see my ruin. I still love you, dad, despite—the cruel thing you did to me. I'm your son and I'd like to make up to you for all my shortcomings. And, so help me, I can do that and will do it if Collie will marry me. Not only marry me—that'd not be enough—but love me! I'm crazy for her love. It's terrible."

"You spoiled weaklin'!" thundered dad. "How can I believe you?"

"Because I know it," declared Jack, standing right up to his father, white and unflinching.

"I think it took dad longer to read something strange and convincing in Jack than it took me. Anyway dad got the stunning consciousness that Jack knew by some divine or intuitive power that his reformation was inevitable, if I loved him. Never have I had such a distressing and terrible moment as that revelation brought to me! I felt the truth. I could save Jack Bellounds!"

"Dad raised his huge fists high and higher, and all his body lifted and strained, towering and trembling, while his face was that of a righteous and angry god."

"My son, I take your word!" he rolled out, his voice filling the room and reverberating through the house. "I give you Collie. . . . She will be yours! . . . But, by the love I bore your mother—I swear—if you ever steal again—I'll kill you!"

"I can't say any more —"

XIV "COLUMBINE."

SPRING came early that year at White Slides ranch. The day came when the greens held their own with the grays; and this was the assurance of Nature that spring could not be denied and that summer would follow.

Bent Wade was hiding in the willows along the trail that followed one of the brooks. Of late on several mornings he

had skulked like an Indian under cover, watching for someone. On this morning when Columbine Bellounds came riding along he stepped out into the trail in front of her.

"Oh, Ben! You startled me!" she exclaimed, as she held hard onto the frightened horse.

"Good mornin', Collie," replied Wade. "I'm sorry to scare you, but I'm particular anxious to see you. An' considerin' how you avoid me these days, I had to waylay you in regular road-agent style."

Wade gazed up searchingly at her. It had been some time since he had been given the privilege and pleasure of seeing her close at hand. He needed only one look at her to confirm his fears. The pale, sweet, resolute face told him much.

"Well, now you've waylaid me, what do you want?" she queried deliberately. "I'm goin' to take you to see Wils Moore," replied Wade, watching her closely.

"No!" she cried, with the red staining her temples.

"Collie, see here. Wils let me read your last letter to him."

"I expected that."

"Lass, it was a fine brave letter—written by a girl facin' an upheaval of conscience an' soul. But in your own trouble you forgot the effect that letter might have on Wils Moore."

"Ben! . . . I—I've lain awake at night — Oh, was he hurt?"

"Collie, I reckon if you don't see Wils he'll kill himself or kill Buster Jack," replied Wade gravely.

"I'll see—him!" she faltered. "But what does he—want to see me—for? It'll only cause more pain—make matters worse."

"Reckon I don't agree with you. Wils just wants an' needs to see you. Why, he appreciates your position. I've heard him cry like a woman over it an' our helplessness. What ails him is lovesickness, the awful feelin' which comes to a man who believes he has lost his sweetheart's love."

"Poor boy! So he imagines I don't love him any more? How stupid men are! . . . I'll see him, Ben. Take me to him."

For answer Wade grasped the bridle of her horse, and turning him took a course leading away behind the hill that lay between them and the ranch house. The trail was narrow and brushy, making it necessary for him to walk ahead of the horse. So the hunter did not speak to her or look at her for some time.

Presently he led the horse out of the willows into the open, and up a low-sloping long slope of fragrant sage. Here he dropped back to Columbine's side and put his hand up on the pommel of her saddle. It was not long until her own hand softly fell upon his and clasped it.

"Lass, this isn't the first mornin' I've waited for you," he said presently. "An' when I had to go back to Wils without you—well, it was hard."

"Then he wants to see me—so badly?" she asked.

"Reckon you've not thought much about him or me lately," said Wade.

"No. I've tried to put you out of my mind. I've had so much to think of—why, even the sleepless nights have flown!"

"Are you goin' to confide in me—as you used to?"

"Ben, there's nothing to confide. I'm just where I left off in that letter to Wilson."

Wade greeted this reply with a long silence. It was enough to feel her hand upon his and to have the glad comfort and charm of her presence once more. He seemed to have grown older lately. The fragrant breath of the sage slopes came to him as something precious he must feel and love more. There was a cloud on Wade's horizon.

"Wils is waitin' down there," said Wade, pointing to a grove of aspens below. "Reckon it's pretty close to the house an' a trail runs along there. But Wils can't ride very well yet, an' this appeared to be the best place."

"Ben, I don't care if dad or Jack knows I've met Wilson. I'll tell them," said Columbine.

"Ahuh! Well, if I were you I wouldn't," he replied.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



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CHAFF

The Way of Some

"WELL, now Gabe," said the one-gallused farmer to his lop-eared son, "you go and hunt up the plow we left some-ers in a fence corner last year, and I'll see if the harrow, that's out in the field some place, is still hanging together. While you're at it you might see if you can find the cultivator—I forget whether we left it in the south forty or loaned it to some feller. Speaking of loaning things, who did I let have the corn planter? Somebody must have borried it, for I don't see it nowhurs round the place. I reckon I'd better look the harness over; 'peared sorter like it needed mending, the last time I noticed it. When we get everything located it'll be about time to knock off for the day, but we'll shore tear right into that there spring work of ourn bout sunup tomorrow, if it don't—yaw-w-w-wn!—rain, or something."

Absolute Justice

"WHAT kind of a hired man have you got now, Ezzy?"
"A conscientious objector," replied honest Farmer Hornbeak. "When pay day comes all I'll hand him will be a bill for his board and lodging."

Unheard Of

"WHILE my cousin, Tuck Beddigo, over on Fiddle Creek, was splitting stove wood tuther day," related Horse-faced Saunders, of Soup Creek, "he made a miss-lick and cut off two of his toes."
"What was he splitting wood for anyhow?" interestedly asked a neighbor.
"Has his wife left him or something that-a-way?"

Says Farmer Buckover

THE meadow lark is trilling his sweet and gladsome song.
The plowman wending o'er the lea goes whistling along.
All Nature maketh merry with whistle, song and laugh,
While I'm attempting weaning this dad-burned stubborn calf.
—Tennyson J. Daft.

Economical

AFTER visiting the city for several weeks Uncle Joe Tenaker returned home, brimming with news.
"It is certainly an interesting fact," he says, "to see the small amount of 'waist' there is at these large banquets."

Points for Drafters

A GOOD free walk he sure must have,
Clean joints and well-set legs.
Plenty of bone; wide hoof heads, too,
And thick frog on his pegs.

Live hoof wall on a big round foot,
Of medium depth at heel,
Back short and strong; a deep throatlatch
And eyes as sharp as steel.—J. Gabelle.

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Next, Please!

AN OLD neighbor was calling on a friend in the country.

"I say, Dan, don't you miss a barber out here?"

"No, not at all; I talk to myself all the time I am shaving."

Asking Too Much

"LOOK here, young man," said the old lady, with fire in her eye, "I have brought back this thermometer you have sold me. It ain't reliable. One time you look at it it says one thing and the next time it says another."

Too Particular

BUSHBY was sorely in need of an extra farm hand and advertised.

"What'll ye pay?" questioned an early applicant.

"I'll pay you what you're worth," promptly replied Bushby.

The applicant meditated thoughtfully for a moment, then turning on his heel decisively announced:

"I'll be durned if I'll work for that!"

The Pessimist

AS LONG as this world whirls about
Upon its well-known axis,
The Hons. will loudly shout "Reform!"
And go on wasting taxes.

A Mystery

"ONE thing that I never fully understood," said honest Farmer Hornbeak, "is how the dry-goods-box, nail-keg and grocery-store farmers know all about how to get rich farming, while only here and there an outdoor farmer knows how, and he isn't always by any means certain of it."

His Way

IT IS his way, we say, in apology for his rudeness. He is an honorable man, upright, and of some shrewdness. But his way is uncivil, tactless and discourteous. He continues in business with fair success only because we who are well acquainted with him know it is his way. So we permit him to go on snubbing us and hurting our feelings, because it is his way. There is nothing to prevent his taking himself aside, looking himself over and amending his shortcomings. He has no excuse for not being a gentleman, except that it is his way.

By and by he begins a business deal of some magnitude—one that if carried through successfully means much to him. But, unfortunately, he is now dealing with men from another locality who are accustomed to associating with gentlemen, and so at an especially flagrant exhibition of his boorishness they abruptly break off negotiations. And that, too, is his way.

Which One?

"OH, DEAR!" exclaimed the volunteer farmerette, gazing in despair at the cow. "I wish someone would tell me which handle to pull to get the cream."

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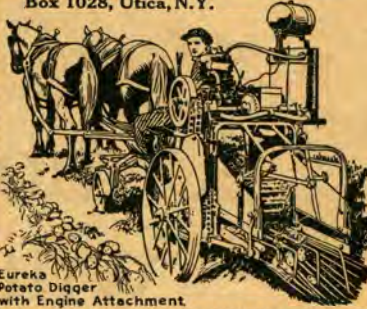
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