

July 5 1919

The Mysterious Ride
17, 18
Vol. LXXXIV, No. 27. Published Weekly at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
Entered as Second-Class Matter July 7, 1911, at the Post Office at Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania, Under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Five Cents the Copy

The COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

The OURNAL in the WORLD

Joseph T. Crutcher
Circulation
12-27-18
6-12-21



Painted by J. Knowles Hare

Beginning **HIS DOG**—By Albert Payson Terhune

The Mysterious Rider

By Zane Grey

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

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK B. HOFFMAN

"She didn't—she didn't!"

"How do you know?" he queried with feigned surprise. He was bent upon torturing her.

"You meant me. I'm the girl you lost."

"Yes, you are," replied Moore, this time with genuine emotion in his voice.

thought and blood to Jack's face gave her a further sinking of the heart. The situation unnerved her.

Wilson Moore had grown a shade paler. He gathered up his reins.

"Bellounds, I came up after my things I'd left in the bunk," he said coolly. "Happened to meet Columbine and stopped to chat a minute."

Soon Wade
Joined Her. "Lass,
I'm Askin' You Not to
Tell Bellounds Thet I'm
Carin' for Wils," He Said

VII

COLUMBINE was awakened in the gray dawn by the barking of coyotes. She dreaded the daylight thus heralded. Never before in her life had she hated the rising of the sun. Resolutely she put the past behind her and faced the future, believing now that with the great decision made she needed only to keep her mind off what might have been and to attend to her duty.

At breakfast she found the rancher in better spirits than he had been for weeks. He informed her that Jack had ridden off early for Kremmling, to make arrangements for the wedding on October first.

"Jack's out of his head," said Bellounds. "Wal, thet comes only onct in a man's life. I remember. . . . Jack's goin' to drive you to Kremmlin' an' thar take stage for Denver. I allow you'd better put in your best licks on fixin' up an' packin' the clothes you'll need. Women-folk naturally want to look smart on weddin' trips."

"Dad!" exclaimed Columbine in dismay. "I never thought of clothes. And I don't want to leave White Slides."

"But, lass, you're goin' to be married!" expostulated Bellounds.

"Didn't it occur to Jack to take me to Kremmling? I can't make new dresses out of old ones."

"Wal, I reckon neither of us thought of thet. But you can buy what you like in Denver."

Columbine resigned herself. After all, what did it matter to her?

To Columbine's surprise and to the rancher's concern the prospective bridegroom did not return from Kremmling on the second day. When night came Bellounds reluctantly gave up looking for him.

Jack's nonappearance suited Columbine, and she would have been glad to be let alone until October first, which date now seemed appallingly close. On the afternoon of Jack's third day of absence from the ranch Columbine rode out for some needed exercise. Pronto not being available she rode another mustang and one that kept her busy. On the way back to the ranch she avoided the customary trail which led by the cabins of Wade and the cowboys. Columbine had not seen any of her friends since the unfortunate visit to the Andrews Ranch. She particularly shrank from meeting Wade, which feeling was in strange contrast to her former impulses.

As she rode round the house she encountered Wilson Moore seated in a light wagon. Her mustang reared, almost unseating her. But she handled him roughly, being suddenly surprised and angry at this unexpected meeting with the cowboy.

"Howdy, Columbine," greeted Wilson as she brought the mustang to his feet. "You're sure learning to handle a horse—since I left this here ranch. Wonder who's teaching you!"

The cowboy had drawled out his admiring speech, half amused and half satiric.

"I'm—mad!" declared Columbine. "That's why."

"What're you mad at?" queried Wilson. She did not reply, but kept on gazing steadily at him. Moore still looked pale and drawn, but he had improved since last she saw him.

"Aren't you going to speak to a fellow?" he went on.

"How are you, Wils?" she asked.

"Pretty good for a clubfooted, has-been cow-puncher."

"I wish you wouldn't call yourself such names," rejoined Columbine peevishly.

"You're not a clubfoot. I hate that word!"

"Me too. Well, joking aside, I'm better. My foot is fine. Now if I don't hurt it again I'll sure never be a clubfoot."

"You must be careful," she said earnestly.

"Sure. But it's hard for me to be idle. Think of me lying still all day with nothing to do but read! That's what knocked me out. I wouldn't have minded the pain if I could have gotten about. . . . Columbine, I've moved in!"

"What? Moved in?" she queried blankly.

"Sure. I'm in my cabin on the hill. It's plumb great. Tom Andrews and Bert, and your hunter, Wade, fixed up the cabin for me. That Wade is sure a good fellow. And say, what he can do with his hands! He's been kind to me. Took an interest in me, and between you and me he sort of cheered me up."

"Cheered you up! Wils, were you unhappy?" she asked directly.

"Well, rather. What'd you expect of a cowboy who'd crippled himself—and lost his girl?"

Columbine felt the smart of tingling blood in her face, and she looked from Wilson to the wagon. It contained saddles, blankets and other cowboy accouterments, for which he had evidently come.

"That's a double misfortune," she replied evenly. "It's too bad both came at once. It seems to me if I were a cowboy and—and felt so toward a girl I'd have let her know."

"This girl I mean knew, all right," he said, nodding his head.

"But you—you never told me—you never told me," faltered Columbine in distress.

"Never told you what? That you were my girl?"

"No—no. But that you—you cared —"

"Columbine Bellounds, I told you—let you see—in every way under the sun," he flashed at her.

"Let me see—what?" faltered Columbine, feeling as if the world were about to end.

"That I loved you."

"Oh! . . . Wilson!" whispered Columbine wildly.

"Yes—loved you. Could you have been so innocent—so blind you never knew? I can't believe it."

"But I never dreamed you—you —"

She broke off dazedly, overwhelmed by a tragic, glorious truth.

"Collie! . . . Would it have made any difference?"

"Oh, all the difference in the world!" she wailed.

"What difference?" he asked passionately.

Columbine gazed wide-eyed and helpless at the young man. She did not know how to tell him what all the difference in the world really was.

Suddenly Wilson turned away from her to listen. Then she heard rapid beating of hoofs on the road.

"That's Buster Jack," said the cowboy.

"Just my luck! There wasn't anyone here when I arrived. Reckon I oughtn't have stayed. Columbine, you look pretty much upset."

"What do I care how I look!" she exclaimed with a sharp resentment attending this abrupt and painful break in her agitation.

Next moment Jack Bellounds galloped a foam-lashed horse into the courtyard and hauled up short with the recklessness he was noted for. He swung down hard and violently cast the reins from him.

"Ahuh! I gambled on just this," he declared harshly.

His bold and glaring eyes, hot with sudden temper, passed slowly from her to the cowboy. Columbine became aware then that Jack was under the influence of liquor. His heated red face grew darker with a sneering contempt.

"Where's dad?" he asked, wheeling toward her.

"I don't know. He's not here," replied Columbine, dismounting. The leap of

"That's what you say," sneered Bellounds. "You were making love to Columbine. I saw that in her face. You know it—and she knows it—and I know it. . . . You're a liar!"

"Bellounds, I reckon I am," replied Moore, turning white. "I did tell Columbine what I thought she knew—what I ought to have told long ago."

"Ahuh! Well, I don't want to hear it. But I'm going to search that wagon."

"What!" ejaculated the cowboy.

"You just hold on till I see what you've got in there," went on Bellounds, and he reached over into the wagon and pulled at a saddle.

"Say, do you mean anything? . . . This stuff's mine, every strap of it. Take your hands off."

Bellounds leaned on the wagon and looked up with insolent, dark intent.

"Moore, I wouldn't trust you. You'd steal anything you got your hands on."

Columbine uttered a passionate little cry of shame and protest:

"Jack, how dare you!"

"You shut up! Go in the house!" he ordered.

"You insult me," she replied in bitter humiliation.

"Will you go in?" he shouted.

"No, I won't."

"All right; look on, then. I'd just as lief have you." Then he turned to the cowboy. "Moore, show up that wagon-load of stuff unless you want me to throw it out in the road."

"Bellounds, you know I can't do that," replied Moore coldly. "And I'll give you a hunch. You'd better shut up yourself and let me drive on. . . . If not for her sake then for your own."

Bellounds grasped the reins and with a sudden jerk pulled them out of the cowboy's hands.

"You damn clubfoot! Your gift of gab doesn't go with me," yelled Bellounds as he swung up on the hub of the wheel.

"Columbine, please hand me up the reins," Wils said. "I'm lame, you know. Then I'll be going."

Columbine stepped forward to comply, when Bellounds, leaping down from the

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wheel, pushed her back with masterful hand.

"You keep out of this or I'll teach you who's boss here," he said stridently.

"You're going too far," burst out Columbine.

Meanwhile Wilson had laboriously climbed down out of the wagon, and utilizing his crutch he hobbled to where Bellounds had thrown the reins and stooped to pick them up. Bellounds shoved Columbine farther back and then he leaped to confront the cowboy.

"I've got you now, Moore," he said, hoarse and low. Stripped of all pretense he showed the ungovernable nature of his temper. His face grew corded and black. "You smooth-tongued liar! I'm on to your game. I know you'd put her against me. I know you'd try to win her—less than a week before her wedding day. . . . But it's not for that I'm going to beat hell out of you! It's because I hate you! Ever since I can remember! My father held you up to me! And he sent me to—to—he sent me away because of you. That's why I hate you!"

"Bellounds, you're mighty brave to stack up this way against a one-legged man," declared the cowboy with biting sarcasm.

"If you had two club-feet I'd only be the gladder," yelled Bellounds, and swinging his arm he slapped Moore so that it nearly toppled him over. Only the injured foot, coming down hard, saved him.

"It's a lucky thing for you I'm not packing a gun," said Moore grimly. "But you knew—or you'd never hit me—you coward."

"I'll make you swallow that," snarled Bellounds; and this time he swung his fist, aiming a heavy blow at Moore.

Then the cowboy whirled aloft the heavy crutch. "If you hit at me again I'll let out what little brains you've got. That's little enough! . . . Bellounds, I'm going to call you to your face—before this girl your bat-eyed old man means to give you. You're not drunk. You're only ugly—mean. You've got a chance now to lick me because I'm crippled. And you're going to make the most of it. Why, you cur, I could come near licking you with only one leg. But if you touch me again I'll brain you!"

"I'll kill you!" bawled Bellounds, black with fury.

Moore wielded the crutch menacingly, but as he was not steady on his feet he was at the disadvantage his adversary had calculated upon. Bellounds ran round the cowboy and suddenly plunged in to grapple with him. The crutch descended, but to little purpose. Bellounds' heavy onslaught threw Moore to the ground. Before he could rise Bellounds pounced upon him.

During the ensuing moments it was an equal battle so far as Columbine could tell. Repelled yet fascinated she watched. They beat each other, grappled and rolled over, first one on top, then the other. But the advantage of being uppermost presently was Bellounds'. Moore was weakening. That became noticeable more and more after each time he had wrestled and rolled about.

Then Bellounds, getting this position, lay with his weight upon Moore, holding him down and at the same time kicking with all his might. He was aiming to disable the cowboy by kicking the injured foot. And he was succeeding. Moore let out a strangled cry and struggled desperately. But he was held and weighted down. Bellounds raised up now, and looking backward he deliberately and furiously kicked Moore's bandaged foot, once, twice, again and again, until the straining form under him grew limp. Columbine, slowly freezing with horror, saw all this. She could not move. She could not scream. She wanted to rush in and

drag Jack off of Wilson, to hurt him, to kill him, but her muscles were paralyzed. In her agony she could not even look away. Bellounds got up astride his prostrate adversary and began to beat him brutally; swinging, heavy, sodden blows. His face then was terrible to see. He meant murder.

Columbine heard approaching voices and the thumping of hasty feet. That unclamped her cloven tongue. Wildly she screamed. Old Bill Bellounds appeared striding off the porch. And the hunter Wade came running down the path.

"Dad! He's killing Wilson!" cried Columbine.

"Hyar, you devil!" roared the rancher. Jack Bellounds got up. Panting, disheveled, with hair ruffled and face distorted he was not a pleasant sight for even the father. Moore lay unconscious, with ghastly, bloody features, and his bandaged foot showed great splotches of red.

"Son!" gasped Old Bill. "You didn't pick on this hyar crippled boy!"

The evidence was plain in Moore's quiet pathetic form, in the panting purple-faced son. Jack Bellounds did not answer. He was in the grip of a passion that had at last been wholly unleashed and was still

excuse for going off his head. He caught me—talking sweet to Columbine. . . . And then—I called him all the names—I could lay my tongue to."

"Ahuh!" The old man seemed at a loss for words, and presently he turned away, sagging in the shoulders, into the house.

The cowboy, supported by Wade on one side, with Columbine on the other, was helped to an upright position, and with considerable difficulty was gotten into the wagon. He tried to sit up, but made a sorry showing of it.

"I'll drive him home an' look after him," said Wade. "Now, Miss Collie, you're upset, which ain't no wonder. But now you brace. It might have been worse. Just you go to your room till you're sure of yourself again."

Moore smiled another wan smile at her. "I'm sorry," he said.

"What for? Me?" she asked.

"I mean I'm sorry I was so infernal unlucky—running into you—and bringing all this distress—to you. It was my fault. If I'd only kept—my mouth shut!"

"You need not be sorry you met me," she said with her eyes straight upon his. "I'm glad. . . . But oh! If your foot is badly hurt I'll never—never —"

"Thet was the drink," remonstrated the old man, pathetic and earnest in his motive to smooth over the quarrel.

"Dad, you're as good as gold," said Columbine, softening. How could she feel hard toward him?

"Collie, then you're not agoin' back on the ole man?"

"No."

"I was afeared you'd change your mind about marryin' Jack."

"When I promised I meant it. I didn't make it on conditions."

"But, lass, promises can be broke," he said with the sonorous roll in his voice.

"I never yet broke one of mine."

"Wal, I hev. Not often, mebbe, but I hev. . . . An', lass, it's reasonable. Thar's times when a man jest can't live up to what he swore by. An' fer a girl—why, I can see how easy she'd change an' grow overnight. It's only fair fer me to say thet no matter what you think you owe me you couldn't be blamed now fer dislikin' Jack."

"Dad, if by marrying Jack I can help him to be a better son to you and more of a man, I'll be glad," she replied.

Later when she went out to ride she saw the cowboy Lem working in the shop.

"Wal, Miss Collie, air you-all still hangin' round this hyar ranch?" he asked with welcoming smile.

"Lem, I'm almost ashamed now to face my good friends, I've neglected them so long," she replied.

"Aw, now, what're friends fer but to go to? . . . You're lookin' pale, I reckon. More like thet thar flower I see so much on the hills."

"Lem, I want to ride Pronto. Do you think he's all right now?"

"I reckon some movin' round will do Pronto good. He's eatin' his haid off."

The cowboy went with her to the pasture gate and whistled Pronto up. The mustang came trotting, evidently none the worse for his injuries, and eager to resume the old climbs with his mistress. Lem saddled him, paying particular attention to the cinch.

"Reckon we'd better not cinch him tight," said Lem. "You jest be careful an' remember your saddle's loose."

"All right, Lem," replied Columbine as she mounted. "Where are the boys this morning?"

"Blud an' Jim air repairin' fence up the crick."

"And where's Ben?"

"Ben? Oh, you mean Wade. Wal, I ain't seen him since yestidday. He was skinnin' a lion then over hyar on the ridge. Thet was in the mawnin'.

I reckon he's round, fer I seen some of the hounds."

"Then, Lem—you haven't heard about the fight yesterday between Jack and Wilson Moore?"

Lem straightened up quickly. "Nope, I ain't heard a word."

"Well, they fought all right," said Columbine hurriedly. "I saw it. I was the only one there. Wilson was badly used up before dad and Ben got there. Ben drove off with him."

"But, Miss Collie, how'd it come off? I seen Wils the other day. Was up to his homestead. An' the boy jest manages to rustle round on a crutch. He couldn't fight."

"That was just it. Jack saw his opportunity and he forced Wilson to fight—accused him of stealing. Wils tried to avoid trouble. Then Jack jumped him. Wilson fought and held his own until Jack began to kick his injured foot. Then Wilson fainted and—and Jack beat him."

Lem dropped his head, evidently to hide his expression. "Wal, dog-gone me!" he ejaculated. "Thet's too bad."

Columbine left the cowboy and rode up the lane toward Wade's cabin. The trail led across the brook at a wide shallow place where the splashing made by Pronto sent the trout scurrying for deeper



"He Says They Call Him Hell-Bent Wade. I Call Him Heaven-Sent Wade!"

unsatisfied. Yet a malignant and exultant gratification showed in his face.

"That—even us up, Moore," he panted and stalked away.

Columbine rose to totter into the house. She saw a red stain on the hand she had laid upon the cowboy's face, and with a strange hot bursting sensation, strong and thrilling, she put that red place to her lips. Running out with the things required by Wade she was in time to hear the rancher say: "Looks hurt bad to me."

"Yes, I reckon," replied Wade.

While Columbine held Moore's head upon her lap the hunter bathed the bloody face. It was battered and bruised and cut, and in some places, as fast as Wade washed away the red, it welled out again.

Columbine watched that quiet face while her heart throbbed and swelled with emotions wholly beyond her control and understanding. When at last Wilson opened his eyes, fluttering at first, and then wide, she felt a surge that shook her whole body. He smiled wanly at her and at Wade, and then his gaze lifted to Bellounds.

"I guess—he licked me," he said in a weak voice. "He kept kicking my sore foot till I fainted. But he licked me—all right."

"Wils, mebbe he did lick you," replied the old rancher brokenly, "but I reckon he's damn little to be proud of—lickin' a crippled man—thet way."

"Boss, Jack'd been drinking," said Moore weakly. "And he sure had—some

Then she ran toward the house and up on the porch, to enter the living room with heaving breast and flashing eyes. Manifestly the rancher was berating his son. The former gaped at sight of her and the latter shrank.

"Jack Bellounds," she cried, "you're not half a man. . . . You're a coward and a brute!"

One tense moment she stood there, lightning scorn and passion in her gaze, and then she rushed out, impetuously as she had come.

VIII

COLUMBINE did not leave her room any more that day. What she suffered there she did not want anyone to know. What it cost her to conquer herself again she had only faint conception of. She did conquer, however, and that night made up the sleep she had lost the night before.

When she presented herself at the breakfast table Jack was absent. The old rancher greeted her with more than usual solicitude.

"Jack's sick," he remarked presently.

"Indeed," replied Columbine.

"Yes. He said it was the drinkin' he's not accustomed to. Wal, I reckon it was what you called him. He didn't take much store on what I called him, which was wuss. . . . Jack's set his heart so hard on you thet it's turrible."

"Queer way he has of showing the—the affections of his heart," replied Columbine shortly.

(Continued on Page 44)

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The Mysterious Rider

(Continued from Page 20)

water. Columbine kept to that trail, knowing that it led up into Sage Valley, where Wilson Moore had taken up the homestead property. Fresh horse tracks told her that Wade had ridden along there sometime earlier. Pronto shied at the whirring of sage hens. Presently Columbine ascertained they were flushed by the hound Kane, which had broken loose and followed her. He had done so before, and the fact had not displeased her.

The cabin stood high upon a level terrace, with clusters of aspens behind it, and was sheltered from winter blasts by a gray cliff, picturesque and crumbling, with its face overgrown by creeping vines and colorful shrubs. Wilson Moore could not have chosen a more secluded and beautiful valley for his homesteading adventure.

The door of the cabin was open. Kane trotted past the hesitating Columbine and went in.

"You son of a hound-dog!" came to Columbine's listening ears in Wade's well-known voice. "I'll have to beat you—sure as you're born."

"I heard a horse," came in a lower voice that was Wilson's.

"Damn me if I'm not gettin' deader every day," was the reply.

Then Wade appeared in the doorway.

"It's nobody but Miss Collie," he announced as he made way for her to enter.

"Good morning," said Columbine in a voice that had more than cheerfulness in it.

"Collie! . . . Did you come to see me?"

She heard this incredulous query just an instant before she saw Wilson at the far end of the room, lying under the light of a window. The inside of the cabin seemed vague and unfamiliar.

"I surely did," she replied, advancing.

"How are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Ticked to death, right now. . . . Only, I hate to have you see this battered mug of mine."

"You needn't care," said Columbine unsteadily. And indeed, in that first glance she did not see him clearly. A mist blurred her sight and there was a lump in her throat. Then, to recover herself, she looked round the cabin.

"Well—Wils Moore—if this isn't fine!" she ejaculated in amaze and delight. A magic hand had transformed the interior of that rude old prospector's abode. A carpenter and a mason and a decorator had been wonderfully at work. From one end to the other Columbine gazed, from the big window under which Wilson lay on a blanketed couch to the open fireplace where Wade grinned she looked and looked, and then up to the clean aspen-ple roof and down to the floor carpeted with deer hides. The chinks between the logs of the walls were plastered with red clay; the dust and dirt were gone; the place smelled like sage and wood-smoke and fragrant meat. Indeed, there was a glowing bed of embers and a steaming kettle and a smoking pot; and the way the smoke and steam curled up into the gray old chimney attested to its splendid draft. In each corner hung a deer head, from the antlers of which depended accouterments of a cowboy—spurs, ropes, belts, scarfs, guns. One corner contained a cupboard, ceiling-high, with new clean doors of wood, neatly made; and next to it stood a table, just as new. On the blank wall beyond that were pegs holding saddles, bridles, blankets, clothes.

"He did it—all this inside," burst out Moore, delighted with her delight. "Quicker than a flash! Collie, isn't this great? I don't mind being down on my back. . . . And he says they call him Hell-Bent Wade. I call him Heaven-Sent Wade!"

"Ben, it's perfectly possible that you've been sent by heaven," she remarked with a humor which still held gravity in it.

Her downcast gaze saw that Wilson's right hand was bandaged, and she touched it with an unconscious tenderness.

"Your hand! Why is it all wrapped up?"

The cowboy laughed with grim humor.

"Have you seen Jack this morning?"

"No," she replied shortly.

"Well, if you had, you'd know what happened to my fist."

"Did you hurt it on him?" she asked with a queer little shudder that was not unpleasant.

"Collie, I busted that fist on his handsome face."

"Oh, it was dreadful," she murmured.

"Wilson, he meant to kill you."

"Sure. And I'd cheerfully have killed him."

"You two must never meet again," she went on.

"I hope we never do," replied Moore with a dark earnestness that meant more than his actual words.

"Wilson, will you avoid him—for my sake?" implored Columbine, unconsciously clasping the bandaged hand.

"I will. I'll take the back trails. I'll sneak like a coyote. I'll hide and I'll watch. . . . But, Columbine Bellbonds, if he ever corners me again—"

"Why, you'll leave him to Hell-Bent Wade," interrupted the hunter, and he looked up from where he knelt, fixing those great inscrutable eyes upon the cowboy. "An' now, Miss Collie," he went on, "I reckon you'll want to wait on our invalid. He's got to be fed."

"I surely will," replied Columbine gladly; and she sat down on the edge of the bed. "Ben, you fetch that box and put his dinner on it."

While Wade complied Columbine, shyly aware of her nearness to the cowboy, sought to keep up conversation.

"Couldn't you help yourself with your left hand?" she inquired.

"That one's worse," he answered, taking it from under the blanket.

"Oh!" cried Columbine in dismay.

"Broke two bones in this one," said Wilson with animation. "Say, Collie, our friend Wade is a doctor too. Never saw his beat!"

"And a cook, too, for here's your dinner. You must sit up," she ordered.

"Fold that blanket and help me up on it," replied Moore.

How strange and disturbing for Columbine to bend over him, to slip her arms under him and lift him! It recalled a long-forgotten motherliness of her doll-playing days. And her face flushed hot.

"Can't you move?" she asked, suddenly becoming aware of how dead a weight the cowboy appeared.

"Not—very much," he replied. Drops of sweat appeared on his bruised brow.

"You said your foot was all right."

"It is," he returned. "It's still on my leg, as I know darned well."

"Oh!" exclaimed Columbine dubiously. Without further comment she began to feed him.

"It's worth getting licked to have this treat," he said.

"Nonsense!" she rejoined.

"I'd stand it again—to have you come here and feed me. . . . But not from him."

"Wilson, I never knew you to be facetious before. Here, take this."

But Columbine had trouble in feeding him. What with his helplessness, and his propensity to watch her face instead of her hands, and her own mounting sensations of a sweet natural joy and fitness in her proximity to him, she was hard put to it to show some dexterity as a nurse.

"I can't—eat any more," declared Moore at last.

"You've done very well for an invalid," observed Columbine. Then, changing the subject, she asked: "Wilson, you're going to stay here—winter here, dad would call it?"

"Yes."

"Are those your cattle down in the valley?"

"Sure. I've got near a hundred head. I saved my money and bought cattle."

"That's a good start for you. I'm glad. But who's going to take care of you and your stock until you can work again?"

"Why, my friend there, Heaven-Sent Wade," replied Moore, indicating the little man busy with the utensils on the table and apparently hearing nothing.

"Can I fetch you anything to eat—or read?" she inquired.

"Fetch yourself," he replied softly.

"But, boy, how could I fetch you anything without fetching myself?"

"Sure; that's right. Then fetch me some jam and a book—to-morrow. Will you?"

"I surely will."

"That's a promise. I know your promises of old."

"Then good-by till to-morrow. I must go. I hope you'll be better."
"I'll stay sick in bed till you stop coming."

Columbine left rather precipitately, and when she got outdoors it seemed that the hills had never been so softly, dreamily gray, or their loneliness so sweet, or the sky so richly and deeply blue. As she untied Pronto the hunter came out with Kane at his heels.

"Miss Collie, if you'll go easy I'll ketch my horse an' ride down with you," he said.

She mounted and walked Pronto out to the trail and slowly faced the gradual descent.

Soon Wade joined her.

"Lass, I'm askin' you not to tell Bell-lounds that I'm carin' for Wils," he said in his gentle persuasive way.

"I won't. But why not tell dad? He wouldn't mind. He'd do that sort of thing himself."

"Reckon he would. But this deal's out of the ordinary. An' Wils's not in as good shape as he thinks. I'm not takin' any chances. I don't want to lose my job an' I don't want to be hindered from attendin' to this boy."

"Ben, tell me," she whispered, with a hand going to his arm.

"Miss Collie, I'm a sort of doctor in my way. I studied some medicine an' surgery, an' I know. I wouldn't tell you this if it wasn't that I've got to rely on you to help me."

"I will—but go on—tell me," interposed Columbine, trying to fortify herself.

"Wils' foot is all messed up. Buster Jack kicked it all out of shape. An' it's a hundred times worse than ever. I'm afraid of blood poisonin' an' gangrene. You know gangrene is a dyin' an' rottin' of the flesh. . . . I told the boy straight out that he'd better let me cut his foot off. An' he swore he'd keep his foot or die! . . . Well, if gangrene does set in we can't save his leg an' maybe not his life."

"Oh, it can't be as bad as all that!" cried Columbine. "Oh, I knew—I knew there was something. . . . Ben, you mean even at best now—he'll be a —" She broke off, unable to finish.

"Miss Collie, in any case Wils'll never ride again—not like a cowboy."

That for Columbine seemed the worst and the last straw. Hot tears blinded her, hot blood gushed over her, hot heart-beats throbbed in her throat.

"Poor boy! That'll—ruin him," she cried. "He loved a horse. He loved to ride. He was the best rider of them all. And now he's ruined! He'll be lame—a cripple—clubfooted! . . . All because of that Jack Bell-lounds! The brute—the coward! I hate him! Oh, I hate him! . . . And I've got to marry him—on October first!"

Blindly Columbine reeled out of her saddle and slowly drooped to the grass, where she burst into a violent storm of sobs and tears. It shook her every fiber. It was hopeless, terrible grief. The dry grass received her flood of tears and her mingled sobs and incoherent words.

Wade dismounted and, kneeling beside her, placed a gentle hand upon her heaving shoulder; but he spoke no word. By and by, when the storm had begun to subside, he raised her head.

"Lass, nothin' is ever so bad as it seems," he said softly. "Come, sit up. Let me talk to you."

"Oh, Ben, something terrible has happened," she cried. "It's in me! I don't know what it is. But it'll kill me."

"I know," he replied as her head fell upon his shoulder. "Miss Collie, I'm an old fellow that's had everythin' happen to him, an' I'm livin' yet, tryin' to help people along. No one dies so easy. Why, you're a fine strong girl—an' somethin' tells me you was made for happiness. I know how things turn out. Listen —"

"But Ben—you don't know—about me," she

said in a choking voice. "I've told you—I hate Jack Bell-lounds. But I've—got to marry him! . . . His father raised me—from a baby. He brought me up. I owe him—my life. . . . I've no relation—no mother—no father! No one loves me—for myself!"

"Nobody loves you!" echoed Wade, with an exquisite tone of repudiation. "Strange how people fool themselves! Lass, you're huggin' your troubles too hard. An' you're wrong. Why, everybody loves you. Lem an' Jim—why you just brighten the hard world they live in. An' that poor hot-headed Jack—he loves you as well as he can love anything. An' the old man—no daughter could be loved more. . . . An' I—I love you, lass, just like—as if you—might have been my own. I'm goin' to be the friend—the brother you need. An' I reckon I can come somewhere near bein' a mother, if you'll let me."

Something, some subtle power or charm, stole over Columbine, assuaging her terrible sense of loss, of grief. There was tenderness in this man's hands, in his voice, and through them throbbed strong and passionate life and spirit.

"Do you really love me—love me?" she whispered, somehow comforted, somehow feeling that what he offered was what she had missed as a child. "And you want to be all that to me?"

"Yes, lass, an' I reckon you'd better try me."

"Oh, how good you are! I felt that—the very first time I was with you. I've wanted to come to you—to tell you my troubles. I love dad, and he loves me, but he doesn't understand. Dad is wrapped up in his son. I've had no one. I never had any one."

"You have some one now," returned Wade, with a rich deep mellowness in his voice that soothed Columbine and made her wonder. "An' because I've been through so much, I can tell you what'll help you. . . . Lass, if a woman isn't big an' brave, how will a man ever be? There's more in women than in men. Life has given you a hard knock, placin' you here—no real parents—an' makin' you responsible to a man whose only fault is blinded love for his son. Well, you've got to meet it, face it, with what a woman has more of than any man. Courage! Suppose you do hate this Buster Jack."

"Suppose you do love this poor crippled Wilson Moore. . . . Lass, don't look like that! Don't deny. You do love that boy. . . . Well, it's hell. But you can never tell what'll happen when you're honest and square. If you feel it your duty to pay your debt to the old man you call dad—to pay it by marryin' his son, why do it, an' be a woman. There's nothin' as great as a woman can be. There's happiness that comes in strange unheard-of ways. There's more in this life than what you want most. You didn't place yourself in this fix. So if you meet it with courage an' faithfulness to yourself, why, it'll not turn out as you dread."

"Some day, if you ever think you're broken-hearted I'll tell you my story. An' then you'll not think your lot so hard. For I've had a broken heart, an' ruined life, an' yet I've lived on an' on, findin' happiness I never dreamed would come, fightin', or workin'. An' how I found the world beautiful, an' how I love the flowers an' hills an' wild things so well—that, just that, would be enough to live for! . . . An' think, lass, of what a wonderful happiness will come to me in showin' all this to you. That'll be the crownin' glory. An' if it's that much to me then you be sure there's nothin' on earth I won't do for you."

Columbine lifted her tear-stained face with a light of inspiration.

"Oh, Wilson was right," she murmured. "You are Heaven-Sent! And I'm going to love you!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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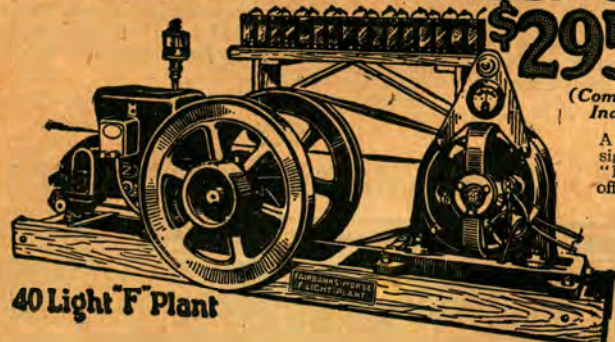
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His Superiority

"I WAS reading last night," said a neighbor who had come over to borrow a whiffletree, "about them snake charmers in Injy. Actually, Ezra, one of 'em will set in one spot and peedle-deedle on a whistle for a while, and all the snakes in the vicinity will come round him and weave and underlate in time to the music!"

"That's nothing in particular," replied Farmer Hornbeak. "I've got a hired man that will set in one spot perfectly motionless for hours at a time, and make me pay him wages for it."

A Reminiscence

"GEE, Gram'paw! Ain't the days long now?" "Shucks, Johnny!" squawked old man Totter. "This ain't nuth'n! I kin remember when I was a boy that the days were so long it took two clocks to tell the time of a whole day, by cracky!"

The Tenor's Notes

"THAT tenor of ours has a marvelous voice. He can hold one of his notes for half a minute." "That's nothing! I have held one of his notes for two years."

The Back Yard Farmer

I HAVE a clean potato patch. I toiled and did my best. I cleaned the weeds out every one; The bugs cleaned out the rest.
—Tennyson J. Daft.

His Little Lack

"MY NEPHEW, Orrin Onken, was a pretty smart and considerably diversified man, so to describe him," admitted old Timrod Totten. "He was a real witty auctioneer, and a natural bone-setter, and ran for the legislature quite a good deal, and was the most popular pall-bearer in the neighborhood, and could do card tricks like a professor, and was a pretty fair weather prophet, and invented a dentifrice that was first-rate for tanning hides and pelts, and was often called upon to sit up with the sick and to circulate petitions—he had such a soothing way in both instances. In fact, Orrin could do almost anything except make a living. But that didn't distress him much, for he was real handy at sponging everything he wanted from his relatives who didn't have any special talents."

It Can be Done

PHYLLIS: Do you think it possible for a man to love two women at once?

YOUNG SOLDIER: Yes; twenty at once if they were all like you!

An Honest Answer

BYSTANDER, who is brushing the dirt from a man who has been run over: My friend, are you hurt?

MAN: Well, I dunno; it ain't done me no good as I can see!

Getting Up Steam

LITTLE Emily was on her first visit to her grandmother in the country.

The family cat, a large black animal, settled himself luxuriously in front of the kitchen range and began to purr loudly.

The ways of cats were entirely new to Emily, and she regarded the animal with horror.

"Oh, gran'ma, gran'ma," cried the little girl excitedly, "come here quick! The cat's begun to boil."

Consistency

WHO is this girl that walks the street, In all this blazing summer heat, Fur clad?

She seems so young to suffer ills, Like rheumatism or the chills! Too bad!

But wait! Unless my eyes deceive, She is the girl, I do believe—

I know— Who wore kid pumps and silken hose When other people nearly froze! 'Tis so!

From summer breezes that might harm Her throat, now cuddled safe and warm With care, Through January's icy snows And February's blasts and blows Was bare.

No pearls or diamonds need she wear Or other jewels rich and rare,

Forsooth, Because the gem Consistency Doth make a great sufficiency, In truth! —B. F. Braley.

Its Victims

THE foot-and-mouth disease is an affliction confined chiefly to cattle and statesmen.

Earned His Rank

"DON'T keep calling me General! I'm only a colonel." "Scuse me, boss. I ain't disputin' yo' word, but any military gent dat gives me a dollar tip is jes' natcherly a 'gen'ral."

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