

"I'm not finding fault."

"No back talk, now, young fellow, or I'll shut you up."

The quartet of "tarriers" exchanged looks. March was getting into one of his infrequent rages, and they prepared to give him his distance if necessary. He was a bad man when angry.

"I'll fix you!" March went on. "A word to old John Conlen—"

"Hold on, March," said Harley sternly. "Don't drag any one else into this."

March stood in front of Harley and shook his fist under the latter's nose.

"A word to old John Conlen about his daughter bein' led astray by you—"

Harley dropped the spike-maul with an oath and sprang at him. They sparred savagely a moment; then Harley's right fist caught the foreman square in the mouth. The rail tripped March as he staggered back from the force of the blow. In an instant he was rolling over and over to the bottom of the steep embankment.

The fight was not renewed. In silence March clambered up again wiping his bleeding lips; while, equally grim and quiet, Harley swung the spike-maul.

It is an unwritten law of the section that no man shall quit, no matter what his grievance, until the track is safe for rolling-stock. Half an hour later, when the south-bound local, the last train before six o'clock, rumbled by, Harley was free to go. The spike-maul was still in his hands. Twice he whirled it about his head, as if to test his strength, and then let go. Describing a mighty arc, it sailed fifty yards away into a wheat-field bordering the right of way.

"I'm done," he said briefly, and, turning, strode down the track to Azalea.

About supper-time the heat terminated in a thunder-shower, which settled into an all-night rain, gentle but persistent. That kept the four in the Conlen cottage together. March, though his face was swollen and discolored from Harley's blow, was in rare good humor. He had won the long struggle with his rival, for Harley must now leave town to seek another job.

The young man was down-hearted at the prospect of leaving. He had considerably told his sweetheart only that portion of the trouble concerning the broken rail, representing that as the cause of his discharge. March's triumphant smile gave way to an uncomfortable grin when Nora occasionally shot him a look of fiery contempt.

Old John was in the midst of a story

of war-time section work when above the patter of the rain were heard hurrying footsteps on the walk. Without waiting for the formality of an invitation, a man threw open the door. It was the operator from Azalea depot, and with a nod all round he stated his business.

"Wreck three miles up the track. Engine 416, extra freight south, is in the ditch with five cars. Nobody hurt. McKay was on the train. They tapped the wire, and the wrecking crew has been called. The wreck-train's all ready. They want Section 17's gang."

"Three miles up, you say?" asked March, rising and reaching for coat and hat. "Why, that's where we worked today."

"I know it. McKay wired that in. Say, I got a message here. It concerns both you fellows. Shall I read it?"

Something of awkwardness in the operator's manner made March pause, his coat half on.

"Why, sure," he said.

"Go ahead, Billy"—from Harley, at whom the operator looked as if for instructions.

"All right; here goes:

"March, section foreman, discharged for carelessness. Wreck tonight due broken rail on Section 17. Rail was spiked this afternoon, but not inspected. Harley appointed foreman, with pay from tonight.

MCKAY, Roadmaster."

Old John was the first to speak, as the operator, after a single comprehensive glance, hurried back to his key.

"Uh-huh!" he grunted, with great satisfaction. "I s'pose there'll be a weddin' pretty quick now. She's yours, Dick. I'll keep me word. You've got the siction and the ger-rl both."

"There'll be a weddin' just as quick as the Lord and Father Downey will let us have it," replied Dick, with a side glance at March. The deposed foreman, his lower jaw hanging, was still endeavoring to comprehend it all. "Kiss me, Nora dear, till I go out and rouse up the 'tarriers.' We have a night of it before us."

And Nora, smiling, kissed him.

M. J. Phillips.

The Sheriff's Dream.

THE shadows of the mountains, heralds of approaching night, crept slowly eastward across the undulating plain toward the little, lonely house.

From the recesses of the darkening pass the night owls hooted derisive answer to the coyotes' calls. Outside the solitary dwelling a little boy paused in his play

to listen, wide-eyed, to the clamorous concert, while his childish fancies peopled peak and gorge with hideous monsters, voracious enforcers of maternal edicts.

Near the brick-red barn a brindled cow contentedly chewed the cud while a sun-bonneted woman milked her with rapid fingers. A squeaking windmill, whose slow-moving sails blazoned the enterprise of an Eastern firm, reluctantly forced sparkling treasure from subterranean depths in gurgling and intermittent spurts.

Silently, warily, with ready gun, and every sense alert, a man emerged from out the deepest shadows and approached the boy. He was dusty, tattered, and unkempt. A sullen, desperate courage glittered in the restless eyes. Drawn across one bronzed and bony cheek, a fresh and livid scar marred and distorted the once handsome face.

"Folks at home, sonny?" he inquired.

"Mam is. Pap ain't. He's out huntin' Jack Bayliss."

"Hunting Jack Bayliss, eh? And what's your pap's name, sonny?"

"Jim Ross. He's th' sheriff, pap is," the boy answered proudly.

The man with the scar laughed softly. Then he threw his gun over his left arm, strode round the little house, and met the woman near the door. She started back, and her bucket of foaming milk fell to the ground. The little lad, who had run through the house, clung to her skirts. Her eyes flashed toward the revolver hanging in its holster just within the open door.

The man with the scar, following her glance, stepped through the door and buckled the weapon about his waist; then he removed his hat and bowed.

"Sorry to intrude, Mrs. Sheriff, but I'm hungry, and——"

"Not a bite do you git in this house. You'd better clear out, and go quick. Jim's due here enny minnit, an' ef he corners you again you'll git more'n a scar!"

"Madam, your prevarication is really painful. You know that my dear friend, the sheriff, is far distant, seeking one Bayliss, who doesn't happen to be in the same vicinity. Come, Mrs. Ross, I don't wish to be rude, but my time is valuable. If you'll not oblige me I must help myself, and a man makes such a litter about the kitchen, you know."

The woman dropped into a chair and gazed up at the man defiantly.

"Not a step do I take fer th' likes of you," she exclaimed.

"Thank you. I am pleased to experience the proverbial hospitality of the people of the plains. Fortunately, this cupboard seems to be plentifully stocked."

The man ate hastily, but heartily, while the woman and child watched him silently. Finally he arose.

"Now, Mrs. Sheriff," he said jocularly. "I shall have to borrow a horse—your husband very carelessly shot mine, you know."

"Hain't a horse on the place," said the woman exultantly. "Jim took 'em both. Ef he sees you he'll be glad to give you a lift, though."

"No doubt—a high and a long one. Good-day, Mrs. Sheriff. Your cordiality shall never be forgotten. Your cheering words spur me to fresh effort along my chosen line of endeavor. I sincerely hope this little incident may not give you nervous prostration. Give my regards to Jim when he returns. Sorry he wasn't in!"

On the threshold he bowed again, and jauntily strode away. The woman slammed and bolted the door behind him.

Peering cautiously into the gloomy night, the man with the scar suddenly halted, half crouched. The keen and restless eyes had caught the reflection of a strange red glow upon the eastern sky. Gazing wonderingly for a moment, he slung the gun across his sinewy back and nimbly ascended the squeaking windmill. From its top he watched the red glare deepen and expand. At the edge of the horizon flames danced and flickered, darting yellow tongues athwart the cloudy sky. Dark, swiftly-moving forms, silhouetted against the fiery glow, appeared and vanished intermittently. Echoing up to him came strange, faint cries, terribly significant to ears that knew their meaning.

The man with the scar descended swiftly, rapped at the bolted door, and called to the woman.

"I thought you was gone fer good," she answered angrily. "You can't come——"

"Mrs. Ross, a war party of Apaches crossed the line last week, to the south of us. Some or all of them are only a few miles to the east, murdering and burning. The cavalry must have turned them this way. They are headed for the pass yonder, and this ranch is directly in their path."

"It won't work, Jack Bayliss. There ain't been no Injuns this far north fer years. Ef you wasn't lyn' you'd be hustlin' away to save your own scalp."



HE STRODE AROUND THE LITTLE HOUSE, AND MET THE WOMAN NEAR THE DOOR. SHE STARTED BACK, AND HER BUCKET OF FOAMING MILK FELL TO THE GROUND.

The man with the scar hesitated and glanced toward the mountains, where shelter and safety awaited him. Then he stepped back, hurled himself against the door, and crashed into the room. The woman faced him with an uplifted axe.

The man rushed, parried a desperate blow, and wrenched the weapon from the woman's hands. He seized the boy and sprang out over the wrecked door. The mother followed fiercely. Out on the open plain the man halted, and, as the woman came up, released the screaming child.

"Look and listen!" he cried.

The fiery tongues, seen now from where they stood, leaped higher up the sky. The fiendish yells swept faintly down the freshening wind, mingling with a woman's shriek of mortal agony. The woman saw and heard—and understood.

"My God!" she moaned, hugging the boy to her breast. "And Jim's out there somewhere. It's all my fault! Jim wanted to move to town when he was elected, an' I wouldn't."

"Don't worry about Jim," said the man with the scar. "He'll take care of himself. Come quick! We must reach the mountains before they see us. We can't stand them off here—they'd roast us out; and we daren't take to the prairie—the moon will soon be up. Give me the boy."

Half way to the mountains they heard a dull crescendo of galloping hoofs.

"They're coming fast," muttered the man with the scar, seizing the panting woman's hand. "Don't hold so tight, sonny; you're choking me."

The hoof-beats ceased. A fresh light flickered overhead, faint at first, then stronger, brighter, brilliant, illuminating the mountainsides, causing fantastic shadows to dance and dart across the rocky crags.

"They've fired the ranch," panted the man, as they halted to gather breath for the climb. "They'll see us now."

A chorus of exultant yells rang out; the sound of galloping hoofs started afresh and swiftly swelled.

"They've seen us!" exclaimed the man with the scar. "Hurry, now! Up there, to the left—around that boulder, and then back under the ledge. Good, we're sheltered from the light! Here, take the boy and lie down flat!" He handed her the revolver. "Don't shoot unless they get in—and then only three times. Save two for the boy and yourself. Do you understand?"

The woman gripped the weapon, nodded, and shuddered.

Unslinging his Winchester, the man with the scar crouched behind the rocks at the mouth of the cavity. The light of battle shone in the restless eyes; the broad, strong jaw was rigid. He looked down on the approaching foe and calmly counted them—ten demons, almost naked, hideously bedaubed. Ten for but a moment, for there were only nine after the Winchester spoke!

Swerving, separating right and left, the nine vanished into the darkness that flanked the glare on either side. The hoof-beats ceased.

With weapon poised, the man with the scar crouched low. His eyes flashed swiftly from right to left, from left to right, his ears were strained to catch the slightest sound. A rattle of rocks to the right—a fitting of a crouching, dusky form—a shot—a wailing yell—a crash! The man with the scar pumped up a fresh cartridge as he quickly shifted his position.

A flash and report to the left—the shrill song of a bullet glancing from the rock he had just left.

"Too slow, my friend!" he muttered.

The moments passed. The flames from the ranch died down. The darkness deepened.

Two forms sprang forward from the rocks below, and dropped an instant before the Winchester flashed. An answering flash came from the left; a bullet cut its way through the left forearm of the man with the scar and sped on singing.

"One on me," laughed the man with the scar, setting his teeth.

The woman tore a strip from her apron, crawled forward, and bound the bleeding arm. Then there came a volley from front, right, and left. The man with the scar swayed on his knees and slowly sank upon his hands, the blood streaming over his face. The woman, sobbing hysterically, raised the revolver and turned toward the boy.

The pounding of rushing horses rose from the eastward plain. From out the night a bugle-call rang clear, mingled with shouts. The man with the scar struggled to his knees, essayed to cheer, clutched at the flinty rocks, and pitched forward, motionless, upon his face.

A scamper of ponies, devil-ridden, fleeing up the pass—the thunder of pursuing cavalry—a man's voice calling:

"Mary, Mary, for God's sake, are you up there?"

"Jim! Oh, Jim! We're safe, thank God—and Jack Bayliss!"

Later in the night the man with the

scar stirred, opened his eyes, and sat up. He lifted his hand to his bandaged head and looked about him. The woman and the little boy were sleeping. The sheriff sat at his feet, a gun across his knees. The man with the scar smiled grimly.

"You come to quicker 'n I expected," the sheriff remarked. "You'll be good as new by mornin'."

"You were winner anyhow," said the man with the scar pleasantly. "Reward's the same, you know, dead or alive."

The sheriff glanced at the woman and child, then looked out over the moon-lit prairie toward the smoking ruins.

"I jest had a little nap, bein' purty well tuckered out," he remarked reflectively, "an' I dreamt the blamedest, queerest dream. Want to tell it to ye before we start. Dreamt you was dead, or we thought ye was, an' while Mary an' the boy was sleepin' I went down to kind o' invoice what was left on the ranch. While I was nosin' 'round down there, derned ef you didn't rise from the tomb, grab your gun an' belt there, an' sneak down an' jump on one of my two hosses down yonder—in that clump of chaparral. It was lucky I'd took most of th' money off you, so as to ease up th' bank. Dreamt ye dug out straight for the Blue Pass, the only one that hain't guarded jest now, an' was over the line before we struck your trail. Terrible onlucky fer you that dreams allers goes by contraries!"

There was something in the tone that caused the man with the scar to look up quizzically.

The sheriff arose, yawned, stretched his arms, and clambered down toward the smoldering house.

The man with the scar struggled to his feet, seized gun and belt, and vanished in the direction of the clump of chaparral.

Frank N. Stratton.

A Sentimental Episode.

I.

INTO the library the jocund sunlight never penetrated. Through a far-domed skylight a pale antidote to darkness filtered, and high above the shelves of books were narrow apertures through which a dusty-pearly glimmer came. The unstirred air was heavy with the musty scents of leather and yellowing pages.

All the habitués of the big, quiet rooms, the attendants among the aisles and cases, the readers at the long tables, seemed to partake of the quality of the place. Pale, intent, unruffled, they bent above their

work, apparently unvisited by the gusty currents of ardor and ambition that belong to the world whose realities are action and not learning, emotion and not theory. If occasionally some vigorous youth, some dewy maiden, added themselves to the list of workers, either they soon ceased to come at all or they gradually merged into the drab fellowship of the older readers.

Winslow, angular, earnest, somewhat anemic, had been working daily in the library for almost six months. He had brought many illusions with him from rural New England, and chief among them the belief that the literary life is, next to the priestly, the highest. That he should be working a slow way through the theological school on the income derived from his labors as exchange editor of the *Weekly Christian Fireside Corner* seemed to him to make him the most highly favored of mortals. The musty atmosphere of the library appealed to him as the subtle aroma of learning, and he rejoiced that the meager resources of his office made him so dependent upon the institution.

But even a devoutly content young man of narrow experience and ignorant enthusiasms has his periods of gloom. One of these was upon Winslow a certain April morning. He had heard a great preacher the night before, and had been depressed by the realization of the gulf between his powers, even his beliefs, and those of the eloquent divine. He had come away wondering if, after all, he were not fitter to dig and hoe as his fathers had done before him than to stir men's hearts and consciences.

He disposed his papers and magazines dully. Truly this was a poor makeshift for intellectual work, this of his! "Jottings from the Mission Field in Polynesia," "Winter Work of the Ladies' Auxiliary of Lima, Ohio"—and somewhere in the world men thought out problems, felt truth and beauty, wrought them out with hand and word, were stirred to deeds of selfless love! He set his lips and plunged into the pile before him like the conscientious hack he was.

Suddenly, across the gloom of his mood, which even labor could not subdue, he was conscious of a fragrance, as if an opened door had let in a warm breath from a sweetbrier hedge. A sense of sunshine glowed about him. He looked up. A girl had seated herself in the vacant chair beside him at the table. He knew at once that it was the yellow of her hair