

# The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from Friday.)

"I am not going to be unfair to any one if I can help it. But if the road's earnings don't meet the operating expenses the general will sell it to the M. and W. Do you understand what that means? It will knock Antioch higher than a kite, for the shops will be closed. I guess when all hands get through their heads they will take it easier."

"That's just the point I made. Who is going to enlighten them if it isn't me? I don't suppose you will care to go around telling everybody what a fine fellow you are and how thankful they should be that you have stopped their wages. We can work double, Oakley. I want Hoadley kept because he's promised me his influence for Kenyon if I'd exert myself in his behalf. He's of importance up at the Junction. Of course we know he's a drunk on beast, but that's got nothing to do with it."

"I am sorry, but he's got to go," said Oakley doggedly. "A one horse railroad can't carry dead timber."

"Very well," And Ryder pulled in his legs and rose slowly from his chair. "If you can't and won't see it as I do it's your lookout."

Oakley laughed shortly. "I guess I'll be able to meet the situation, Mr. Ryder."

He scouted the idea that Ryder with his little country newspaper could either help or harm him.

## CHAPTER VII.

D. R. EMORY and Dan were standing on the street corner before the hotel. Oakley had just come uptown from the office. He was full of awkward excuses and apologies, but Dr. Emory cut them short.

"I suppose I've a right to be angry at the way you've avoided us, but I'm not. On the contrary, I'm going to take you home to dinner with me."

If Dan had consulted his preferences in the matter, he would have begged off, but he felt he couldn't without giving offense, so he allowed the doctor to lead him away, but he didn't appear as pleased or as grateful as he should have been at this temporary release from the low diet of the American House.

Miss Emory was waiting for her father on the porch. An errand of hers had taken him downtown.

She seemed surprised to see Oakley, but was graciously disposed toward him. While he fell short of her standards, he was decidedly superior to the local youth with whom she had at first been inclined to class him. Truth to tell, the local youth fought rather shy of the doctor's beautiful daughter. Mr. Burt Smith, the gentlemanly druggist and acknowledged social leader, who was much sought after by the most exclusive circles in such centers of fashion as Buckhorn and Harrison, had been so chucked by her manner when, meeting her on the street, he had attempted to revive an acquaintance which dated back to their childhood that he was a mental wreck for days afterward and had hardly dared trust himself to fill even the simplest prescription.

Dr. Emory excused himself and went into the house. Dan made himself comfortable on the steps at Miss Emory's side. In the very nearness there was something luxurious and satisfying. He was silent, because he feared the antagonism of speech.

"I was with friends of yours this afternoon, Mr. Oakley," she said by way of starting the conversation.

"Friends of mine here?"

"Yes, the Joyces."

"I must go around and see them. They have been very kind to my father," said Dan, with hearty good will. "How long is your father to remain in Antioch, Mr. Oakley?" inquired Constance.

"As long as I remain, I suppose. There are only the two of us, you know."

"What does he find to do here?"

"Oh," laughed Dan, "he finds plenty to do. His energy is something dreadful. Then, too, he's employed at the shops. That keeps him pretty busy, you see."

But Miss Emory hadn't known this before. She elevated her eyebrows in mild surprise. She was not sure she understood.

"I didn't know that he was one of the officers of the road," with deceptive indifference.

"He's not. He's a cabinetmaker," explained the literal Oakley, to whom a cabinetmaker was quite as respectable as any one else. There was a brief pause, while Constance turned this over in her mind. It struck her as very singular that Oakley's father should be one of the hands. Perhaps she credited him with a sensitiveness of which he was entirely innocent.

She rested her chin in her hands and gazed out into the dusty street.

"Isn't it infinitely pathetic to think of that poor little man and his work?" going back to Joyce. "Do you know, I could have cried? And his wife's faith, it is sublime, even if it is mistaken." She laughed in a dreary fashion. "What is to be done for people like that, whose lives are quite uncompensated?"

They were joined by the doctor, who had caught a part of what Constance said and divined the rest.

"You see only the pathos. Joyce is just as well off here as he would be anywhere else, and perhaps a little better. He makes a decent living with his pictures." As he spoke he crossed the porch and stood at her side, with his hand resting affectionately on her shoulder.

"I guess there's a larger justice to the world than we conceive," said Oakley.

"But not to know, to go on blindly doing something that is really very dreadful and never to know!"

She turned to Oakley. "I am afraid I rather agree with your father. He seems happy enough, and he is doing work for which there is a demand."

"Would you be content to live here with no greater opportunity than he has?"

Oakley laughed and shook his head. "No, but that's not the same. I'll pull the Huckleberry up and make it pay and then go in for something bigger."

"And if you can't make it pay?"

"I won't bother with it, then."

"But if you had to remain?"

Oakley gave her an incredulous smile.

"That couldn't be possible. I have done all sorts of things but stick in what I found to be undesirable berths, but of course business is not at all the same."

"But isn't it? Look at Mr. Ryder. He says that he is buried here in the pine woods, with no hope of ever getting back into the world, and I am sure he is able, and journalism is certainly a business, like anything else."

Oakley made no response to this. He didn't propose to criticize Ryder; but, all the same, he doubted his ability.

"Griff's frightfully lazy," remarked the doctor. "He prefers to settle down to an effortless sort of an existence rather than make a struggle."

"Don't you think Mr. Ryder extremely clever, Mr. Oakley?"

"I know him so slightly, Miss Emory, but no doubt he is."

Mrs. Emory appeared in the doorway, placid and smiling.

"Constance, you and Mr. Oakley come on in; dinner's ready."

When Dan went home that night he told himself savagely that he would never go to the Emorys' again. The experience had been most unsatisfactory. In spite of Constance's evident disposition toward tolerance where he was concerned, she exasperated him. Her unconscious condescension was a bitter memory of which he could not rid himself. Certainly women must be petty, small souled creatures if she was at all representative of her sex. Yet in spite of his determination to avoid Constance, even at the risk of seeming rude, he found it required greater strength of will than he possessed to keep away from the Emorys.

He realized in the course of the next few weeks that a new stage in his development had been reached. Inspired by what he felt was a false but beautiful confidence in himself he called off, and as time wore on the frequency of these calls steadily increased. All this while he thought about Miss Emory a great deal and was sorry for her or admired her, according to his mood.

In Constance's attitude toward him there was a certain fickleness that he resented. Sometimes she was friendly and companionable, and then again she seemed to revive all her lingering prejudices and was utterly indifferent to him, and her indifference was the most complete thing of its kind he had ever encountered.

Naturally Dan and Ryder met very frequently, and when they met they clashed. It was not especially pleasant, of course, but Ryder was persistent and Oakley was dogged. Once he started in pursuit of an object he never gave up or owned that he was beaten. In some form he had accomplished everything he set out to do, and if the results had not always been just what he had anticipated he had at least had the satisfaction of bringing circumstances under his control. He endured the editor's sarcasms and occasionally retaliated with a vengeance so heavy as to leave Griff quivering with the smart of it.

Miss Emory found it difficult to maintain the peace between them, but she admired Dan's mode of warfare; it was so conclusive, and he showed such grim strength in his ability to look out for himself.

But Dan felt that he must suffer by any comparison with the editor. He had no genius for trifles, but rather a ponderous capacity. He had worked hard, with the single determination to win success. He had the practical man's contempt, born of his satisfied ignorance, for all useless things, and to his mind the useless things were those whose value it was impossible to reckon in dollars and cents.

(To be continued.)

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