

# The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from Saturday.)

"I wish I could manage to run over a few," muttered the doctor savagely. As they neared the forks of the road Dr. Emory pulled in his horses. A heavy farm wagon blocked the way, and the driver was stolidly indifferent alike to his entreaties and to McClintock's threat to break his head for him if he didn't move on. They were still shouting at him when a savage cry swelled up from the throats of those in advance. The murderer was being brought in from the east road.

The brutes!" muttered the doctor, and he turned helplessly to McClintock. "What are we going to do? What can we do?"

By way of answer McClintock stood up.

"I wish I could see Jim."

But Jim had taken the west road three hours before and was driving toward Barrow's Sawmills as fast as McElroy's best team could take him. When he reached there it was enough to make one's blood run cold to hear the good man curse.

"You wait here, doctor," cried McClintock. "You can't get past, and they seem to be coming this way now."

"Look out for yourself, Mitt."

"Never fear for me."

He jumped down into the dusty, trampled road and foot by foot fought his way forward.

As he had said, those in front were turning back. The result was a horrible jam, for those behind were still struggling to get within sight of the murderer. A drunken man at McClintock's elbow was shouting, "Lynch him!" at the top of his lungs.

The master mechanic wrenched an arm free and struck at him with the flat of his hand. The man appeared surprised, but not at all angry. He merely wiped the blood from his lips and asked in an injured tone, which conveyed a mild reproach: "What did you want to do that for? I don't know you." And as he sought to maintain his place at McClintock's side he kept repeating: "Say, neighbor, I don't know you. You certainly got the advantage of me."

Soon McClintock was in the very thick of the mob, and then he saw the captive. His hands were bound, and he was tied with ropes to the front seat of a buckboard drawn by two jaded horses. His captors were three iron jawed, hard faced countrymen. They were armed with shotguns and were enjoying their splendid triumph to the full.

McClintock gave only one look at the prisoner. An agony of fear was on him. The collar of his shirt was stiff with blood from a wounded face. His hat was gone, and his coat was torn. Scared and wondering, his eyes shifted unweasily over the crowd.

But the one look sufficed McClintock, and he lost all interest in the scene.

There would be no lynching that night, for the man was not Roger Oakley. Further than that, he was gray haired and burly. He was as unlike the old convict as one man could well be unlike another.

Suddenly the cry was raised: "It ain't him! You fellows got the wrong man!"

The cry was taken up and banded back down the road. The mob drew a great, free breath of rejoicing. It became good natured with a noisy hilarity.

Interest in the poor bound wretch in the buckboard. Perhaps, too, they were grateful to him because he was the wrong man.

"Oh, nothing much," unweasily, "only he put up a good fight."

"Of course he did. He didn't want to be banged!" And there was a good natured roar from the crowd. Already those nearest the prisoner were reaching up to throw off the ropes that bound him. His captors looked on in stupid surprise, but did not seek to interfere.

The prisoner himself, now that he saw he was surrounded by well wishers and, being in a somewhat surly temper, which was pardonable enough under the circumstances, fell to complaining bitterly and loudly of the treatment he had received. Presently the mob began to disperse, some to slink back into town, rather ashamed of their fury, while the ever lengthening procession which had followed the four men in the buckboard since early in the day faced about and drove off into the night.

An hour afterward the prisoner was airing his grievances in sagacious Mr. Britt's saloon, whither he had been conveyed by the latter gentleman, who had been quick to recognize that, temporarily at least, he possessed great drawing powers. He was only a battered vagabond on his way east from the harvests in the Dakota wheatfields, and he knew that he had looked into the very eyes of death.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Roger Oakley fled from Antioch on the night of the murder he was resolved that, happen what might, he would not be taken.

For half an hour he traversed back alleys and grass grown "side streets," seeing no one and unobserved, and presently found himself to the north of the town.

Then he sat down to rest and consider the situation.

He was on the smooth, round top of a hillside. At his back were woods and fields, while down in the hollow below him, beyond a middle space that was neither town nor country, he saw the lights of Antioch twinkling among the trees. Dannie he there somewhere, wondering why he did not return. Nearer at hand, across a narrow lane, where the ragweed and Jimson and pokeweed flourished rankly, was the cemetery.

The night was profoundly still, until suddenly the town bell rang the alarm. The old convict's face blanched at the sound, and he came slowly to his feet. The bell rang on. The lights among the trees grew in number, dogs barked, there was the murmur of voices. He clapped his hands to his ears and plunged into the woods.

He had no clear idea of where he was going, but all night long he plodded steadily forward, his one thought to be as far from Antioch as possible by morning. When at last morning came, with its song of half awakened birds and its level streaks of light piercing the gray dawn, he remembered that he was hungry and that he had eaten nothing since noon the day before. He stopped at the first farmhouse he came to for breakfast, and at his request the farmer's wife put up a lunch for him to carry away.

It was night again when he reached Barrow's Sawmills. He ventured boldly into the one general store and made a number of purchases. The storekeeper was frankly curious to learn what he was doing and where he was going, but the old convict met his questions with surly reserve.

When he left the store he took the one road out of the place, and half a mile farther on forsook the road for the woods.

It was nearly midnight when he went into camp. He built a fire and toasted some thin strips of bacon. He made his supper of these and a few crackers. He realized that he must harbor his slender stock of provisions.

He had told himself over and over that he was not fit to live among men. He would have to dwell alone like a dangerous animal, shunning his fellows. The solitude and the loneliness suited him. He would make a permanent camp somewhere close to the lakes, in the wildest spot he could find, and end his days there.

He carried in his pocket a small railroad map of the state, and in the morning, after a careful study of it, marked out his course. That day, and for several days following, he plodded on and on in a tireless, patient fashion, and with but the briefest stops at noon for his meager lunch. Each morning he was up and on his way with the first glimmer of light, and he kept his even pace until the glow faded from the sky in the west.

Beyond Barrow's Sawmills the pine woods stretched away to the north in one unbroken wilderness. At long intervals he passed loggers' camps and more rarely a farm in the forest, but he avoided these. Instinct told him that the news of Ryder's murder had traveled far and wide. In all that range of country there was no inhabited spot where he dare show his face.

(To be continued.)

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