

Red Saunders

By HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS

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CHAPTER V—(Continued.)

Each obliged. And the gate hinges out of whack. Miss Saunders says you know. Come over and take a look at 'em in the near by and by, you? May as well fix it up all at once, come on, boys!"

It was thus that the greatest enterprise that Fairfield had seen in many years was undertaken. Miss Mattie simply astounded as the army of men down upon the house. "Whatever in the world is Cousin doing?" said she, but resting in the faith that it was necessary for all right she was content to do for dinner and an explanation, so the postmistress, the agonies unrequited that morning until she was summoned up her resolution and asked the smith plump out what it all meant would have been experienced to be appreciated. The smith kept her hanging for a while, too, saying to himself in justification that it wasn't right the way old gal had to get into everybody's rest of the us—he could see a beam if it was in his own

CHAPTER VI.

There was a great din of whacking and hammering that morning. Red worked like a horse now, that he had a sudden thought struck him, "Mattie," said he. "Well, Will?" "I see a use for the rest of that nice roast of beef I smell in the oven. Let's have all those fellows stay to dinner and give 'em one good feed. What do you say?" "Why, I'd like to, Will, but I don't know where I'll get 'em." "Couple of boards outside for a table—let them sit on boxes or something, and plates and things enough?" "My, yes! Plenty of such things, then if it ain't too much trouble for us we'll let it go."

"No trouble at all, Will—it will be a grand picnic." "Box, you'll eat with me this day," said Red. "They spread the board table beneath the apple tree and cleaned up for the feast in the kitchen storm shed with an apologetic "Sorry to trouble Miss Saunders," or such a matter as each went in.

Miss Mattie was withdrawn from the meat from the oven there came back at the door. "Goodness, gracious!" she exclaimed. "Can that be now? Will, will you see who that is? I can't go."

"Here," said Red and went to the door. They stood two women of that middle period between forty and fifty, very decently dressed and with the agitation visible in the way they were adjusted various parts of their

They started at the sudden spectacle of the huge man who said pleasantly, "Der do, ladies?" "Why, how do you do?" replied the one instantly and in a voice she had never heard before. "I hope you're all right, sir," a remark which filled her with surprise. "Thanks, I'm able to assume the particular, as you can see," responded the other with a handsome smile of welcome. "How do you find yourself?" "Pretty well," said the dustered one. "How do you do?" "I'm glad if we ain't right back where we started from," mourned Red to himself. "If it's one of the customs of this country saying 'how der do' an' a stretch, I pass it up." "Auntie," said the other, "coming along fine. How's the father?" "Cuss me if I don't get out a little anyhow," he added. "Why, he's very well indeed!" exclaimed the lady, with fervor. "How—" "I got no further on the query, for the other woman interrupted in a tone of exclamation. "Mary Ann Demitt, how do you talk like that? Your father's been dead this five year last August!" The horror of the moment was broken by the appearance of Miss Mattie, who stepped hastily on seeing the visitor. "Why, Mary and Pauline, how do you do?"

The shorter one, Pauline, looked up and said sharply, "We're well enough. Sue was weary of the form. 'Come right in,' said Miss Mattie. "You're just in time for dinner." There was a great protest at this. "I hadn't a moment to spare," they were just going down to the river and had stopped to say, etc. "I've got to help me," said Miss Mattie. "Will here has invited the gentleman, and it won't be any more than Christian for you to help me."

"Ladies," said Red, "if you don't want to starve a man who's deserving a better fate take off your fixings and come out to dinner. No," he continued, "their protests, which he observed were growing weaker, "it's no use at all. There's plenty for everybody. Come on, come all, this evening shall fix clean off its base as it is. Now, for heaven's sake,

peculiar fact is that my name is Lettiss. "Lettuce?" cried Red. "Mattie, I apologise—he is a vegetable." At which they all laughed again. "And now," said Red, "I'm Red Saunders, late of the Chanta Seechoo ranch, territory of Dakota—state of North Dakota, I mean. Can't get used to the state business. There's a Bill and a Dick on this side of me and two Johns and a Sammy on the other. Foot of the table is Miss Mattie Saunders, next to her—just as they run—Miss Pauline Doolittle and Miss Mary Ann Demitt, who may be kin to the gentleman you're seeking."

"Mr. Thomas F. Demitt?" asked the stranger. "He's my sister," responded Miss Mary Ann. Whereat the youths buried their faces in the plates, as Mr. Thomas F., in spite of many excellent qualities, bore a pathetic resemblance to the title.

"I mean," continued the lady hurriedly, "that I'm his brother."

"By Jimmy, ma'am," exclaimed Red, "but yours is a strange family!"

"What Miss Demitt wishes to say," cut in Miss Doolittle, with some asperity, "is that Mr. Thomas Faulkenstone Demitt is her brother." She did not add, as extreme candor would have urged, "And I have some hope—remote, alas, but there—of becoming sister to Miss Demitt myself."

"Thank you," said Lettiss. "Shall I be able to see him this afternoon?" "Oh, mercy, yes!" said Miss Mary Ann. "Tom is home all day."

"I can thank the kind fates for that," said Lettiss. "I had begun to think he was a myth," and he fell in upon the tender meat with a vigorous appetite of youth and a good digestion.

Nathaniel Lettiss was by no means a fool, and he had experience in business, but the mansprink of the young fellow was frankness, and in the course of the dinner he told his errand. Mr. Demitt had written to his firm explaining the advantages of starting a strawboard factory in Fairfield. It was too small a thing for the firm to be interested in, but Lettiss had a small capital which he wished to invest in an enterprise of his own handling, and it had struck him that there might be a chance for independence; therefore he had come to find out the lay of the land.

Red Saunders' first glance liking of the stranger deepened as he told of his business. The cowman did not blame people who took obvious ways and dealt in ambiguities, for his experience in the world, which was pretty fairly complete, had told him that craft was a necessity for weak natures; nevertheless he cared not for those who used it.

In his part of the west a man would no more think of giving a false impression of his financial standing to alter his position in one's regard than he would wear cresets. Money was of small consequence; its sequelae of less. Men spoke openly of how much they made, how they liked the job, how their claims were paying. Such matters were neutral ground of chance conversation as the weather is in the east. The rapid and unpredictable changes of fortune gave a tendency to make light of one's present condition. A man would say "I'm busted" without any more feeling than he would say "I have a cold." Now, in Fairfield, that is not likely lonesome in that respect, one of the principal objects in life was to conceal the poverty which would persist in sticking its gaunt elbows through the cloth of words spread over it. Red asked straightforward questions—shrewd ones, too—seeing that the other was one of his own kind and would not resent it.

Lettiss wanted nothing better than a chance to expand on the subject. It was close to his heart. He had been a subordinate about as long as a proud and masterful young fellow ought to be. Now he was quivering to try his own strength, and, seeing, for his part, that his host was inspired with a genuine interest and not curiosity, he gave him all the information in his power.

"But a plant like that is going to cost some money, ain't it?" asked Red. "Too much for me, I'm afraid," replied Lettiss. "I have \$5,000 to put in, and I suppose I could borrow the rest, but that's saddling the business with too heavy charges right in the beginning. Still, it may not be as bad as I fancy."

Red drummed on the table, thinking. "I wouldn't mind getting into a business of some kind as long as it was making things," he said. "I don't hanker to keep store much. Suppose I go along with you when you look up how much straw is raised and the rest of it?"

"Would you?" cried the young fellow eagerly. "By George, sir, I wish you could see your way clear to take hold of it! Could you stand \$10,000, for instance? Excuse the question, but I'm so anxious over this—" "Lord, what's the harm of asking facts?" said Red. Then, with a gleam of genial pride, "Ten thousand wouldn't break me by a durn sight."

Lettiss' boyish face fairly glowed. "It was my good angel made me stop in front of your fence," he said. "I saw you all eating in here, and you looked so jolly that I thought I'd stop on the chance you might be the man I was looking for. Now I'll go right on and see Mr. Demitt and find out what he wants to do in the matter."

"Wait for the wagon and you can ride," said Red. "Boy's gone home to see his dad about working for me this afternoon. In the meantime, if you're not too proud to take hold and help us with this dod ratted fence, I'll be obliged to you."

"Bring on your fence! I'm ready," said Lettiss. "Come on, boys," said Red, and the

party rose from the table. Later the wagon came up. "Well, good day, Lettiss," said Red. "If you can't get quarters anywhere else, come on and help me hold the barn down."

"Do you sleep in the barn? Then I'll come back sure. Tell you how it is, Mr. Saunders, I've been stuck up in a three by nine office for four years—nose held to 'A to M, western branch,' and if I'm not sick of it there's no such thing as sickness. To get out and breathe the fresh air, to see the country, to be my own master—well, sir, it just makes me tremble to think of it! I hope you find the strawboard what you want to take up."

"I shouldn't wonder if it would be," answered Red. "We'll make a corking team to do business, Lettiss, I can see that—so cautious and full of tricks and all that."

The young man laughed and then sobered down. "Of course I know the whole thing would look insane to most people," he said sturdily, "but I've been in business long enough to see sharp gentlemen come to grief in spite of their funny work. I don't believe a man'll come to any more harm by believing people mean well by him than he would by working on the other tack."

"Good boy!" said Red, slapping him on the back. "You stick to that and you'll get a satisfaction out of it that money couldn't buy you. Another thing, you'd never get a cent out of me in this world if you were one of these smooth young men. My eye teeth are cut, son, for all I may seem easy. The man that does me a trick has a chance for bad luck, and you can bet on that."

"Lord, I believe you," replied Lettiss, taking in the dimensions of his new friend. "Well, goodbye for the present, Mr. Saunders. Thank you for the dinner and have put into me."

At seven o'clock the fence was not quite finished.

"If you'll stay with me until the thing's done, I'll stand another dollar all around," said Red. "I don't want it to stare me in the face tomorrow."

The eldest spoke up. "We'll stay with you, Mr. Saunders, but we don't want any money for it, do we, fellows?"

"No," they replied in chorus, well meaning what they said.

"Why, you're perfectly welcome to the cash," said Red. "And you're welcome to the work," retorted the boy. "We're paid plenty as it is."

"If that's the way you look at it, I'm much obliged to you," said Red, who would not have discouraged such a feeling for anything. He said to himself, "This don't seem much like the kind of people I've heard inhabited these parts. Those boys are all right. Reckon if you use people decent they'll play up to your lead, no matter what country it is."

At 7:30 the fence was done, gorgeous in a coat of fresh red paint, and the hands departed, each with a slice of Miss Mattie's chocolate cake, a thing to make the heathen gods feel contemptuous of ambrosia.

They went straight to the blacksmith's shop, where they were anxiously expected.

"Good Lord!" he said a little later, "if you fellows will talk one at a time, I'll give you a hand with what's happened. Now, Sammy, s'pose you do the speaking?"

Whereupon Sammy faithfully chronicled the events of the day. The boys had behaved themselves as if there was nothing out of the common happening while they were with Red, being held up by a sense of pride, but naturally the splendid physique of the cowman, his picturesque attire, his abandoned way of scattering money around and the air of a frolic he had managed to impart to a day's hard work—all had effect on imagination, and the boys were very much excited.

"I'd like to know how many Injuns that feller's killed!" piped up the youngest. "Hy! He could grab hold of a man and wring his neck like a chicken."

"Aw, tst!" remonstrated the blacksmith. But the elders stood by the youngster this time.

"Yes, he could, Mr. Farrell!" said they. "You ought to see him when he rolled up his sleeves! He's got an arm on him like the hind leg of a horse, and he uses an ax like a tack hammer. He got mad once when he pounded his thumb and busted the post square in two with one crack."

"Well, he looks like a husky man," admitted the blacksmith. "But why didn't you boys take the extra dollar when he made the offer? He 'pears to know what he was about, and it looks kind of foolish to say 'no' to it."

There was a moment's silence. "We wanted to show him we were just as good as the folks he knew," explained the eldest somewhat shamefacedly.

The blacksmith straightened himself. "Quite right, too," said he. "We air when you come to that. A little pride is a wonderful tonic. Each man of that gathering felt himself the better for the display of it."

In the meantime Red was repairing the ravages of the day opposite Miss Mattie at a supper table which was beautifully spread. Miss Mattie put two and two together and found they meant a larger sum of estates than she had hitherto felt sufficient, and, with a little pang at the thought of the inadequacy of her first offering to her cousin, provided such fatness as the land of Fairfield boasted.

They discussed the events of the day with satisfaction.

"My," said Miss Mattie. "You do things wholesale while you are about it, Will, don't you?"

Red smiled in pleased acknowledgment. "I'm no pennant stand, old lady," said he. "I like to see things

move."

Then Miss Mattie broached the question she had been hovering around ever since her guests had taken their leave. "Do you think you'll really go into business with that young man who was here to dinner?" she asked. "Why, I think it's kinder likely," said Red. "But you don't know anything about him, Will," she continued, putting the

little crop of long greens securely planted in the bank where the wild time doesn't grow and thusly being able to envent around as it sweetly pleases me, why, I like the country. It's sport to take hold of a place like this that's only held together by its suspenders and try to make a real live man's town out of it."

Miss Mattie drew a deep breath of relief. "You came like the hero in a fairy story, Will, and I was afraid you'd go away like one," she said. He reached across the table and patted her hand. "You'd have had to go, too," said he. "The family'll stick together."

She thanked him in a soft little voice. "Dear me," she murmured, "it does seem that you've been here a year, Will!"

"Never was told that I was such slow company before."

"You know perfectly well that that isn't what I mean."

"Well, you'll have to put up with me for awhile whatever I am, inasmuch as I'm to be a manufacturer and the Lord knows what. Then some day I'm going to have an awful hankering for the land where the breeze blows, and then we'll take a shute for open prairie. It's cruelty to animals for me to straddle a horse now, yet there's where I'm at home, and I'm going to buy me a cayuse of some kind. Say, I ought to get at that. If I'm going around with Lettiss I want to ride a horse. Know anybody that's got a real live horse for sale, Mattie? No? Well, I'll stop in and see the lady that deals the mail. I'll bet you what that woman doesn't know about what's going on in this camp will never get into history. Be back right away!"

Said he to the postmistress: "My name's Saunders, ma'am—constin to Miss Mattie. I just stopped in to find out if you knew any one that had a riding horse for sale—horse with four good legs that'll carry me all day, and about the rest I don't care a frolle—some cuss."

The postmistress replied at such length and with such velocity that Red was amazed. He gathered from her remarks that a certain Mr. Upton had an animal, purchased of a chance horse dealer; which it was altogether likely he would dispose of, as the first time he had tried the brute it went up into the air all sorts of ways and roused the owner to perform such tricks before high heaven as made the angels weep.

"Where does this man live?" asked Red, with a kindling eye.

"He lives about three miles out on the Peterville road, but he's in town tonight visitin' Miss Alders. Johnny!" to a small boy who had been following the conversation, his wide open eyes bent on Red and his mouth and wigging bare toes expressing their delight in vigorous contortions, "Johnny, you run tell Mr. Upton there's a gentleman in here wants to see him about buying a horse."

"Don't disturb him if he's visiting," remonstrated Red.

"He won't call that disturbing him," replied the postmistress, with a shrill laugh. "He'll be here in no time."

She was a true prophet. It seemed as if the boy had barely left the store when he returned with a stoop shouldered, solemn faced man, who had a brush heap of chin whisker decorating the lower part of his face. After greetings and the explanation of the errand, Mr. Upton stroked his chin whisker regretfully. "Young man," said he, "I'm in a peccoliar and on-peccoliar position. There's mighty few things I wouldn't do in a hawse trade, but I draw the line on murder. That there hawse'll kill you, just'sure as you're fool enough to put yourself on his back. I'll sell you a real hawse mighty reasonable."

"I'll risk him," cut in Red. "Could you lead him down here in the morning?"

"Yes, indeedly—here's a perfect lady of a horse to lead—you can pick up any foot—climb all over him, in fact—long's you don't try to ride him or hitch him up. If you do that—well, young man, you'll get a pretty fair idea of what is meant by one of the demons of hell."

"What kind of saddle have you got?"

"One of them outlandish western affairs that the scamp threw in with the animal—you see, I thought I'd take up horseback riding for my health; I was in bed three weeks after my fust try."

"I'll go you \$75 for the outfit, just

as you got it—chaps, taps and latigo straps, if you'll have it in front of my house at 9 o'clock tomorrow."

"All right, young man; all right, sir. Now don't blame me, if you air took home shoes fust."

"Nary," said Red. "Come and see the fun."

"I shorly will," replied the old gentleman.

CHAPTER VII.

At 9 the next morning there was a crowd in front of the house. "What have you been doing now, Will?" asked Miss Mattie, with prescience.

"Only buying a horse, Mattie," returned Red soberly. "Seems to be quite an event here."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, so help me Bob!" Red had a suspicion that there would be objections if she knew what kind of a horse it was.

Lettiss, who had roomed with Red overnight, was in the secret.

The horse arrived, leading very quietly, as Mr. Upton had said. It was a buckskin, fat and hearty from long resting. Nothing could be more docile than the pensive lower lip and the meek curve of the neck. Nothing could be more contradictory than the light of its eye, a brooding, baleful fire, quietly hiding its time.

"Scatter, friends!" cried Red as he put his foot in the stirrup. "Don't be too proud to take to timber!"

He swung over as lightly as a trapeze performer, deftly catching his other stirrup. The horse groaned and shivered.

"Don't let him get his head down! Go ding it! Don't you!" screamed Mr. Upton in wild excitement.

Red threw the bridle over the horn of the saddle. "Go it, you devil!" cried he. And they went. Six feet straight in the air, first pass. The crowd scattered, as requested. They hurried at that. Red gave the brute the benefit of his 250 as they touched earth, and his opponent grunted when he felt the jar of it. They rocketed and ricocheted; they were here, they were there, they were everywhere, the buckskin squealing like a pig and fighting with every ounce of the strength that lay in his steel strung legs. The dust rose in clouds; Red's hat flew in no time; he was yelling like a maniac, and the crowd was yelling like more maniacs. Now and then a glimpse of the rider's face could be caught, transported with joy of the struggle; then the dust would roll up and hide everything. No one was more pleased at the spectacle than the blacksmith. He was capering in the middle of the road, waving a hand hammer and shouting: "Hold him down! Hold him down! Why do you let him jump up like that? If I was on that horse I'd show you! Aw, there it is again. Stop him! Stop him!"

At this point the buckskin made three enormous leaps for the blacksmith, as though he had understood. The smith cast dignity to the winds and went over the nearest fence in the style that little boys when coasting call "stomach whopper," or words to that effect, and took his next breath two minutes later. He might have saved the labor, as the horse wheeled on one foot and pulled fairly for the picket fence opposite. Red regretted the absence of barriers as the sharp pickets loomed near. It was no time for regrets. The horse was over with but little damage—a slight scratch; enough to rouse his temper, however, for he whaled away with both hind feet, and parts of the fence landed a hundred feet off. Then a dash through an ancient grape arbor, and they were lost to view of the road. Some reckless small boys scampered after, but the majority preferred to trace the progress of the conflict by the aboriginal "Yerhoops" that came from somewhere in behind the old houses.

"There they go!" piped up a shrill voice of the small boy brigade. "Right through Mis' Davisses hen coops! You ought to see them heus fly!" The triumphant glee beyond the reach of words. Simultaneous squawking verified the remark as well as a feminine voice urging a violent protest, cut short by a scream of terror, and the slam of a door. The inhabitants of "Mis' Davisses" house instantly appeared through the front door, seeking the street.

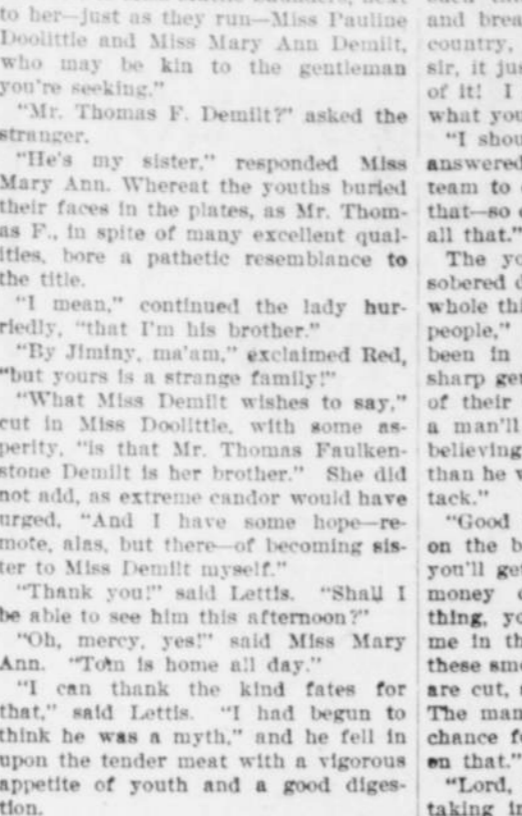
To show the erraticness of fate, no sooner had they reached the road than Red's mount cleared the parapet of the bridge in a single leap, a beautiful leap, and came down upon them in the road.

All got out of the way but a three-year-old, forgotten in the excitement. Upon this small lad, fallen flat in the road, bore the powerful man and horse. Then there were frantic cries of warning. Fifty feet between the youngster and those mauling hoofs—twenty-five! The crowd gasped. They were blotted together! Not so. A mighty hand had snatched the boy away in that instant of time. He was safe and very indignant in a howling, huddled heap in the ditch by the roadside, but alas for horse and rider! The buckskin was not used to such feats, and when Red's weight was thrown to the side for the reach he flung his stride, struck his feet together, and down they went, while the foot deep dust sprang into the air like an explosion.

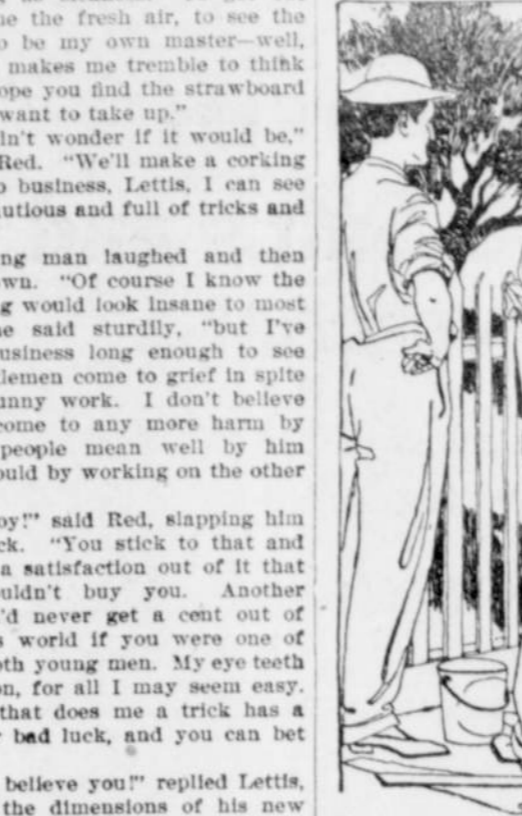
Miss Mattie rushed to the scene of the accident, followed by everybody. Young Lettiss, equally frightened, was close beside her.

"Oh, Will, are you killed?" she cried. And then a voice devoid of any signs of weakness, but loaded to the breaking point with wrath, told in such language as had never been heard in Fairfield that the owner was still much alive.

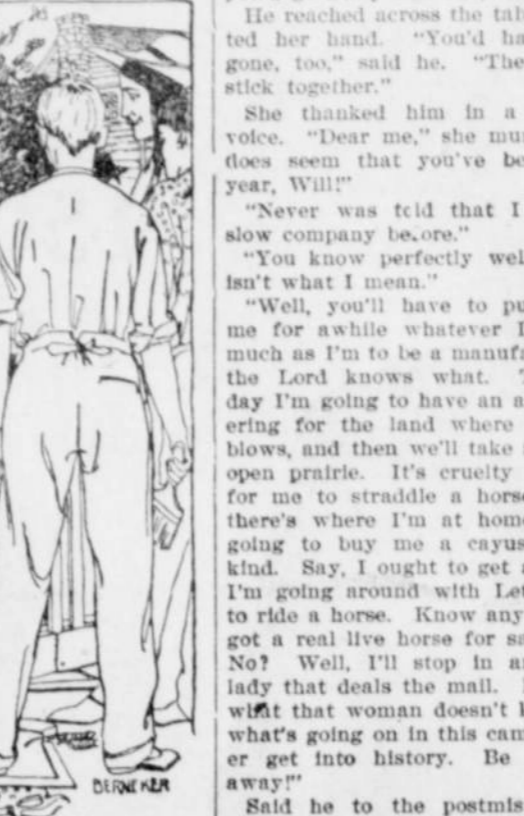
Foot of the table is Miss Mattie Saunders. His entertainers at the same time—the



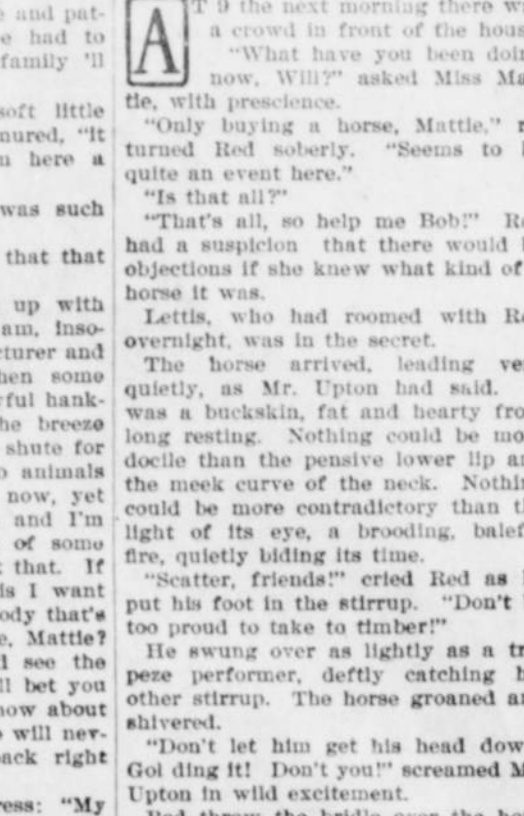
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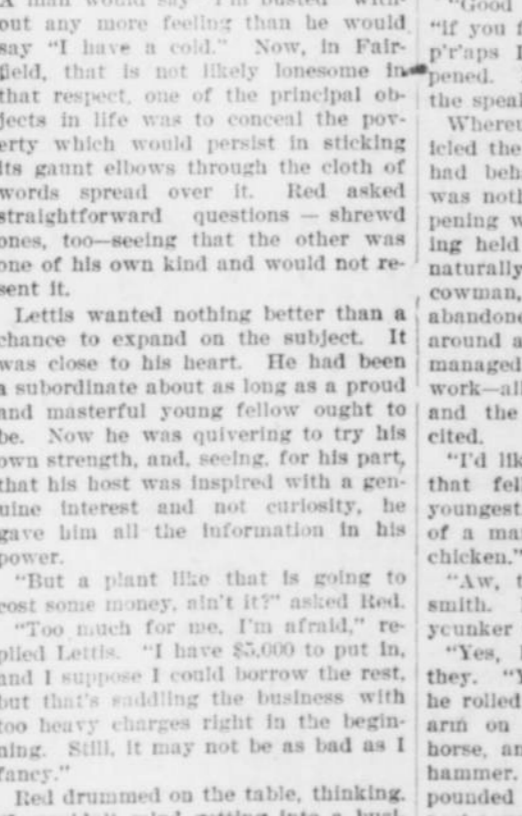
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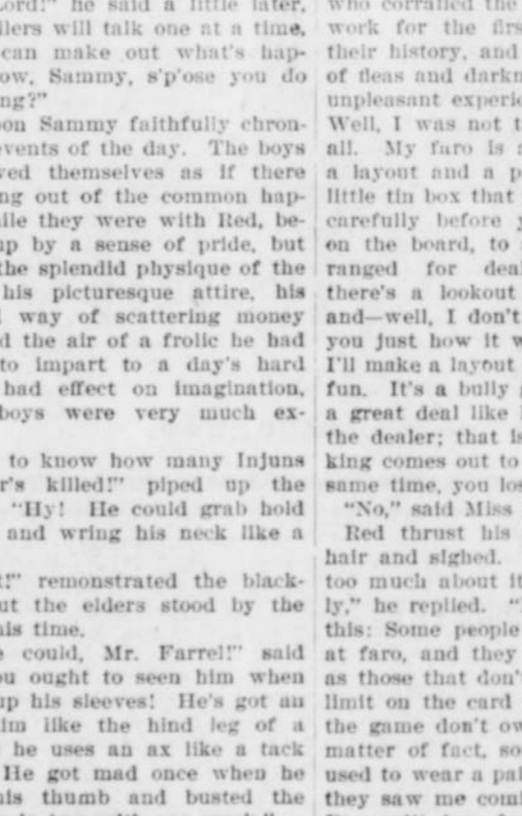
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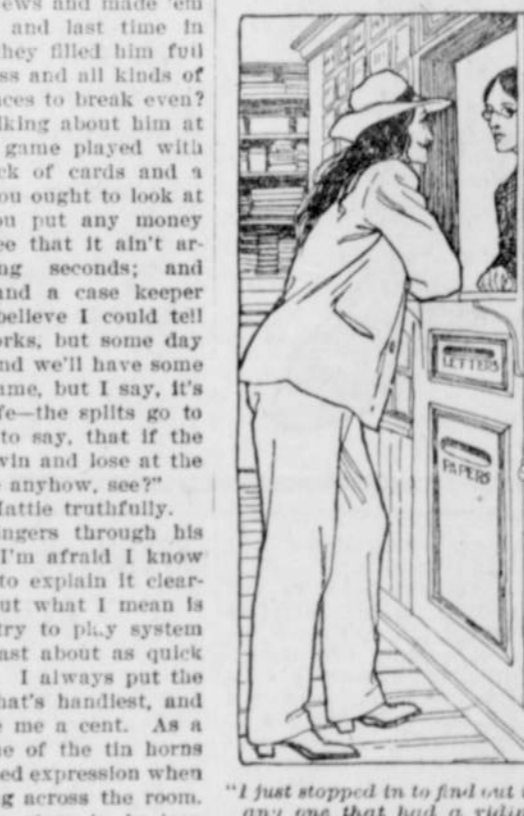
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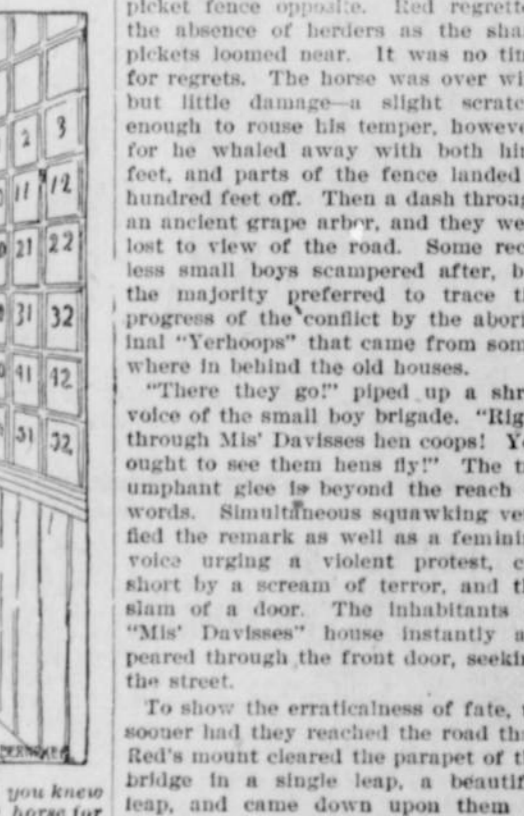
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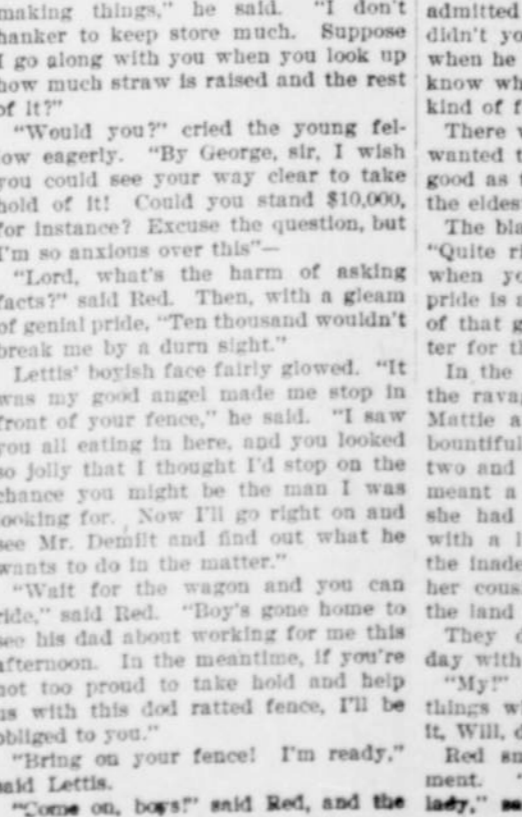
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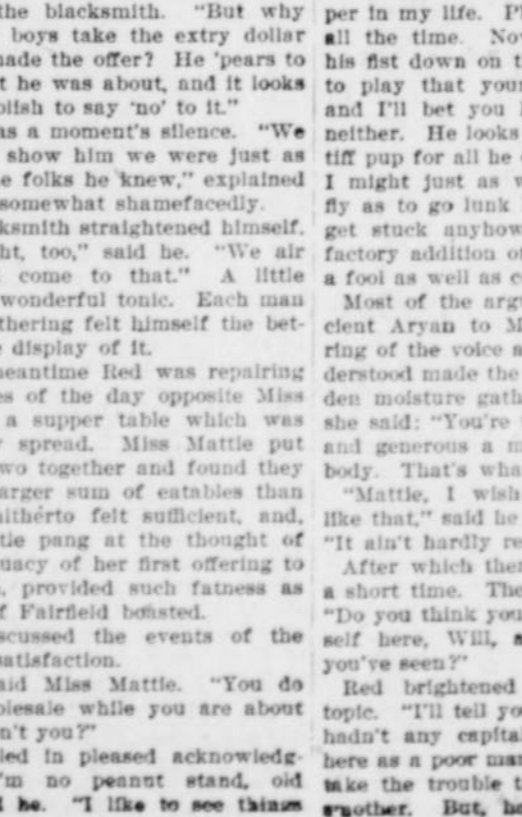
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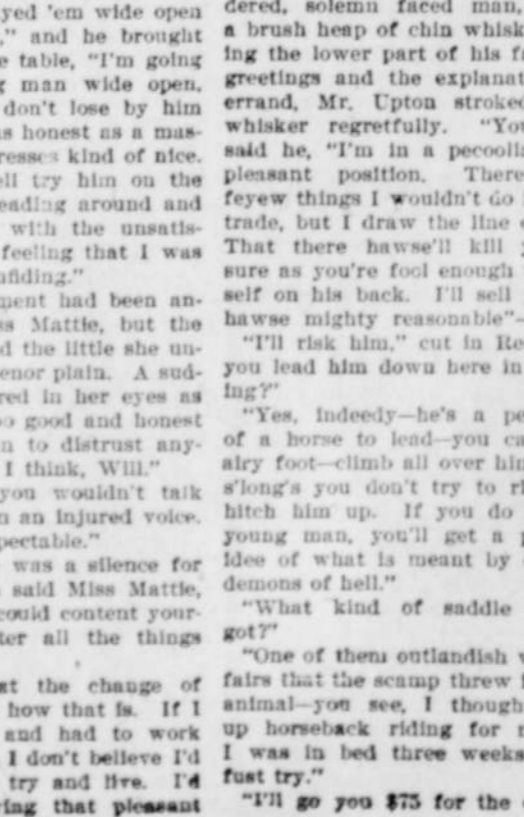
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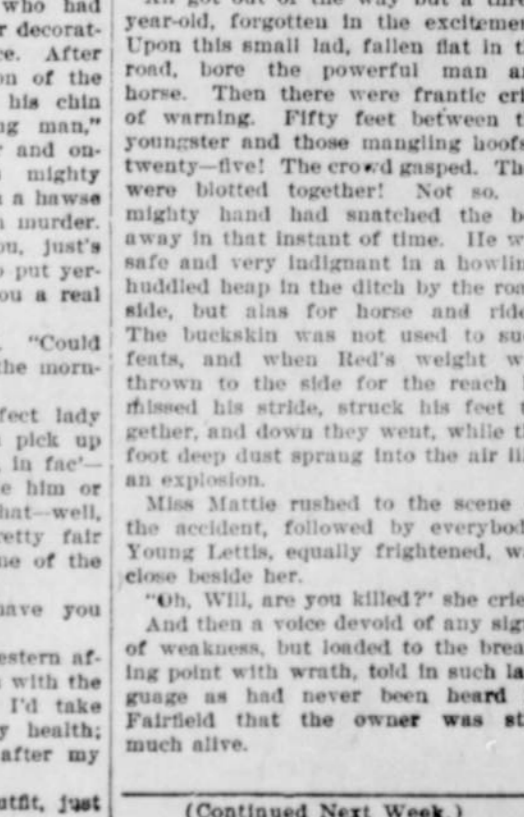
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(Continued Next Week.)