Red Saunders

... By ...

HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS

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CHAPTER IV—(Continued.)

..they ain't bad people if you ..right," said Red. "Not that I ..any better on the ground ..it," he added hastily, fearful ..raying the sentiment of his .."but I never had but one real ..eat man to man. Black Wolf ..come together over a matter of ..owned my cayuse, and from ..we backed off and got to shoot- ..He raked me from knee to hip, as ..kneeling down, doing the best ..by him and wasting ammuni- ..because I was in a hurry. Still, I ..his ankle. In the middle of ..a stray shot hit the cayuse in ..and he croaked without a ..so there we were, a pair of ..miles from home with nothing ..quarrel about! You could have ..an egg on a rock that day, and it ..makes you thirsty to get shot ..serious, thinking of which I ..peace to old Black Wolf and ..him I'd pull straws with him to ..he took my canteen down to the ..and got some fresh water. He ..agreeable and we hunched up to ..other. It ain't to my credit to ..but I was worse hurt than that ..so I worked him. He got the ..straw, and had to crawl a mile ..cactus, while I sat comforta- ..the cause of the disagreement ..to him that he looked like ..and other things that an In- ..didn't feel was a compliment." ..back and roared. "I can ..now putting his hands down ..and turning back every ..while to cuss me. Turned out ..was his cayuse too. Feller that ..me had stole it from him. I ..to laugh over it, but I can't ..snicker when I think how I ..bajum."

..ally speaking, Miss Mattie had ..sense of humor, but the joke ..was lost on her. Her educa- ..been that getting shot was ..funny.

..I should have thought you ..have died, Will!"

..For a little crack in the ..Red, with some impatience. ..people must quit easy in this ..—Be nothin'. One of our ..came along and took us to camp, ..was up and doing again in no ..'Course, Black Wolf has a game ..good, but the worst that's ..me is a yank or two of rheu- ..in the rainy season. I paid ..for his cayuse," he finished ..fiercely. "I had the laugh on ..anyhow."

..Mattie told him she thought ..noble of him, which tribute ..as medicine and shifted the ..with speed to practical affairs. ..Miss Mattie how much mon- ..had and how she managed to .. Now, it was one of the ..of good manners in Fairfield ..speak of material matters, per- ..because there was so little ma- ..matter in the community, but ..Mattie, doomed to a thousand ..petty economies, had often ..for a sympathetic ear to pour ..good honest complaint of hat- ..do this and that. She could not ..go this far with Cousin Will, ..could say it was pretty hard ..along and gave some details. ..that she knew him so very ..those few hours! Red heard ..of assent. He had scented ..at once.

..any fun skidding on the ..said he when they had con- ..talk. "I've had to count the ..put in the pot, and it made me ..arithmetic worse than when I ..yonder to school. Well, ..have gone by for you, Mat- ..reached down and, pulling ..roll, slapped it on the cen- .."Now that in and limber ..remember that there's more ..

..Mattie's pride rose at a leap. ..she said, "I hope you don't ..told you this to get money .."

..forward, put his hand on ..and held her eyes with a ..of sternness and au-

"I hope, Mattie," said he, "that ..think that I think anything .."

..stared into each other's ..full minute; then Miss Mat- .."No, Will," said she, "I ..you do."

..think I did," retorted ..in thunder would I do ..that money? Why, good ..I could paper your house ..! Now you try to fly ..kites, like I tell you."

..broke down. The not ful- ..strain of fifteen years had ..felt when the cord snap- ..know how to thank you. ..what to say. Oh, Wil- ..too good to be true!"

..crying about, Mattie?" ..in sore distress. "Now hold ..to me a minute! There's ..I want you to do for me." ..it?" she asked, drying her

..dinner tomorrow," he replied. ..a roast of beef about that ..washtub. ..was complete.

"Why, Will! What would we ever do with it?" said she.

"Do with it? Why, eat it!"

"But we couldn't eat all that!"

"Then throw what's left to the cats.

Miss Mattie stood in the half opened door and listened.

You ain't going to fall down on me the first favor I ask?" with mock seriousness.

"You shall have the roast of beef. 'Pears to me that you're fond of your stomach, Will," said Miss Mattie, with a recovering smile.

"I have a good stomach that's always done the right thing by me when I've done the right thing by it," said Red. "And, moreover, just look at the constitution I have to support. But say, old lady, look at that!" pointing to the clock. "Eleven-thirty; time decent people were putting up for the night."

The words brought to an acute stage a wandering fear which had passed through Miss Mattie's mind at intervals during the evening. Where was she to look for sleeping accommodations for a man? She revolted against the convention that in her own mind as well as the rest of Fairfield forbade the use of her house for the purpose. Long habit of thought had made these niceties constitutional. It was almost as difficult for Miss Mattie to say "I'll fix up your bed right there on the sofa" as it would have been for Red to pick a man's pocket, yet when she thought of his instant and open generosity and what a dismal return therefor it would be to thrust him out for reasons which she divined would have no meaning for him, she heroically resolved to throw custom to the winds and speak.

But the difficulty was cut in another fashion.

"There's a little barn in the backyard that caught my eye," said Red, "and if you'll lend me a blanket I'll roll it out there."

"Sleep in the barn! You'll not do any such thing!" cried Miss Mattie. "You'll sleep right here on the sofa or upstairs in my bed, just as you choose."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not. So help me Bob, I'd smother in here. Had the darnedest time coming on that ever was—hotels. Little white rooms with the walls coming in on you. Worse than rattlesnakes for keeping a man awake. Reminds me of the hospital. Horse fell on me once and smashed me up so that I had to be sent to get puttied up again, and I never struck such a month as that since I was born. The doc told me I mustn't move, but I told him I'd chuck him out of the window if he tried to stop me, and up I got. I'd have gone dead sure if they'd held me a week more. I speak for the barn, Mattie, and I speak real loud; that is, I mean to say I'm going to sleep in the barn, unless there's somebody a heap larger than you on the premises. Now, there's no use for you to talk—I'm going to do just as I say."

"Well, I think that's just dreadful!" said Miss Mattie. "I'd like to know what folks will think of me to hear I turned my own cousin out in the barn." Her voice trailed off a little at the end as the gist of what they might say if he stayed in the house occurred to her. "Well," she continued, "if you're set I suppose I can't object." Miss Mattie was not a good hand at playing a part.

"I'm set," said Red. "Get me a blanket." As she came in with this he added, "Say, Mattie, could you let me have a loaf of bread? I've got a habit of wanting something to eat in the middle of the night."

"Certainly! Don't you want some butter with it? Here, I'll fix it for you on a plate."

"No, don't waste dish washing. I'll show you how to fix it." He cut the loaf of bread in half, pulled out a portion of the soft part and filled the hole with butter. "There we are, and nothing to bother with afterward."

"That's a right smart notion, Will, but you'll want a knife."

In answer he drew out a leather case from his breast pocket and opened it. Within was knife, fork, spoon and two flat boxes for salt and pepper. "You see, I'm fixed," said he.

"Isn't that a cute trick?" she cried admiringly. "You're ready for most anything."

"Sure," said Red. "Now, good night, old lady." He bent down in so natural a fashion that Miss Mattie had kissed him before she knew what she was going to do.

Down to the barn, through the soft June evening, went Red, whistling a Mexican love song most melodiously.

Miss Mattie stood in the half opened door and listened. Without was balm and starlight, and the spirit of flowers breathed out in odors. The quaint and pretty tune rose and fell, quavered, lilted along as it listed without regard for law and order. It struck Miss Mattie to the heart. Her girlhood, with its misty dreams of happiness, came back to her on the wings of music.

"Isn't that a sweet tune?" she said, with a lump in her throat.

She went up into her room and sat down a moment in confusion, trying to grasp the reality of all that had happened. In the middle of the belief that these things were not so came the regret of a sensitive mind for errors committed. She remembered, with a sudden sinking, that she had not thanked him for the necklace. And the money lay even now on the parlor table where he had cast it! This added the physical fear of thieves. Down she went and got the money, counted out, to her unmitigated astonishment, $500 and thrust it beneath her pillow, with a shiver. She wished she had thought to tell him to take care of it. But suppose the thieves were to fall on him as he slept? Red's friends would have spent their sympathy on the thieves. She rejoiced that the money was where it was. Then she tried to remember what she had said throughout the evening.

"Well, I suppose I must have acted like a ninny," she concluded. "But isn't he just splendid!" And as Cousin Will's handsome face, with its daring, kind eyes, came to her vision she felt comforted. "I don't believe but what he'll make every allowance for how excited I was," said she. "He seems to understand those things for all he's such a large man. Well, it doesn't seem as if it could be true." With a half sigh, Miss Mattie knelt and sent up her modest petition to her Maker and got into her little white bed.

In the meantime Red's actions would have awakened suspicion. He hunted around until he found a tin can, then lit a match and rummaged the barn amid terror stricken squawks from the inhabitants, the hens.

"One, two, three, four," he counted. "Reckon I can last out till morning on that. Mattie, she's white people—just the nicest I ever saw—but she ain't used to providing for a full grown man."

He stepped to the back of the barn and looked about him. "Nobody can see me from here," he said in satisfaction. Then he scraped together a pile of chips and sticks and built a fire, filled the tin can at the brook, sat it on two stones over the fire, rolled himself a cigarette and waited. A large, yellow tomcat came out of the brush and threw his green headlights on him, meowing tentatively.

"Hello, pussy!" said Red. "You hungry too? Well, just wait a minute and we'll help that feeling. Like bread, pussy?" The cat gobbled the morsel greedily, came closer and begged for more. The tin can boiled over. Red popped the eggs in, puffed his cigarette to a bright coal and looked at his watch by the light. "Gee! Ten minutes more now!" said he. "Hardly seems to me as if I could wait." He pulled the watch out several times. "What's the matter with the d—n thing? I believe it's stopped," he growled. But at last "Time!" he shouted, gleefully, kicked the can over and gathered up its treasures in his handkerchief.

"Now, Mr. Cat, we're going to do some real eating," said he. "Just sit right down and make yourself at home. This is kind of fun, by Jinks!" Down went the eggs, and down went the loaf of bread in generous slices, never forgetting a fair share for the cat.

"Woosh! I feel better!" cried Red. "And now for some sleep." He swung up into the hayloft, spread the blanket on the still fragrant old hay and rolled himself up in a trice.

"I did a good turn when I came on here," he mused. "If I have got only one relation, she's a dandy—so pretty and quiet and nice. She's a marker for all I've got, is Mattie."

The cat came up, purring and "making bread." He sniffed feline fashion at Red's face.

"Foo! Shoo! Go 'way, pussy! Settle yourself down and we'll pound our ear for another forty miles. I like you first rate when you don't walk on my face." He stretched and yawned enormously. "Yes, sir, Mattie's all right!" said he. "A-a-a-ll ri"— And Chanta Seechee Red was in the land of dreams. Here, back in God's country, within twenty miles of the place where he was born, the wanderer laid him down again, and in spite of raid and foray, whisky and poker cards, wear and tear, hard times and, hardest test of all, sudden fortune, he was much the same impulsive, honest, generous, devil-may-care boy who had left there twenty-four years ago.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning when Red awoke arrows of gold were shooting through the holes in the old barn, and outside the bird life, the twittering and chirping, the fluent whistle and the warble, the cackle and the pompous crow, were in full chorus.

"Where am I at this time?" said he as he took in the view. "Oh, I remember!" and his heart leaped. "I'm in my own home, by the Lord!"

He went down to the brook and washed, drying hands and face on the silk neckerchief, which is meant for use as well as for decoration.

In the meantime Miss Mattie had awakened with a sense of something delightful at hand, the meaning of which escaped her for the time. And then she remembered and sprang out of bed like a girl. She went to the window, threw open the shutters and let the stirring morning air flow in. This had been her habit for a long time. The window faced away from the road, and no one could see who was not on Miss Mattie's own premises.

But this morning Red had wandered around. Stopping at the rosebushes, he picked a rose.

"That has the real old time smell," he said as he held it to his nose. "Sweetbriers are good, and I don't go back on 'em, but they ain't got the fram these fellers have."

Bud in hand, he walked beneath Miss Mattie's windows, and he was the first thing her eye fell upon.

Her startled exclamation made him look up before she had time to withdraw.

"Hello, there!" he called joyfully. "How do you open up this day? You look pretty well!" he added, with a note of admiration. Miss Mattie had the wavy hair which is never in better order than when left to its own devices. Her idea of coiffure was not the most becoming that could have been selected, as she felt that a "young" style of hairdressing was foolish for a single woman of her years. Now, with the pretty soft hair flying, her eyes still humid with sleep and a touch of color in her face from the surprise, relieved against the fleecy shawl she had thrown about her shoulders, she was incontestably both a discreet and pretty picture. Yet Miss Mattie could not forget the bare feet and nightgown, although they were hidden from masculine eyes by wood and plaster, and she was embarrassed. Still, with all the supersensitive fancies, Miss Mattie had a strong backbone of New England common sense. She answered that she felt very well indeed and, to cover any awkwardness, inquired what he had in his hand.

"Good old rose," replied Red. "Old time smeller—better suited to you than to me—ketch!"

At the word he tossed it, and Miss Mattie caught it dexterously. Red had an exceedingly keen eye for some things, and he noticed the certainty of the action. He hated fumblers. "A person can do things right if they've got minds that work," was one of his pet sayings. "'Taint the muscles at all; it's in the head, and I like the kind of head that's in use all the time." Therefore this small affair made an impression on him.

"Why, you could be a baseball player," said he.

"I used to play with Joe when I was a girl," said Miss Mattie, smiling. "I always liked boys' play better than I did girls'. Joe taught me how to throw a ball too. He said he wouldn't play with me unless I learned not to 'scoop it,' girl fashion. I suppose you will be wanting breakfast." There was a hint of sarcasm in the doubt of the inquiry.

"That's what I do," said Red. "You must just hustle down and get things to boiling or I'll throw bricks through the windows. I've been up for the last two hours."

"Why, I don't believe it!" said Miss Mattie.

"No more do I, but it seems like it," replied Red. "Don't you want the fire started? Come down and open up the house."

When Miss Mattie appeared at the door in he strode with an armful of wood, dropping it, man fashion, crash, on the floor.

"Skip out of the way," said he. "I'll show you how to build a fire."

The early morning had been the most desolate time to Miss Mattie. As the day warmed up the feeling of loneliness vanished, perhaps to return at evening, but not then with the same absoluteness as when she walked about the kitchen to the echo of her own footsteps in the morning.

Now the slamming and the banging which accompanied Red's energetic actions rang in her ears most cheerily. She even found a relish in the smothered oath that heralded the thrust of a splinter in his finger. It was very wicked, but it was also very much alive.

Red arose and dusted off his knees. "Now we're off!" he said as the fire began to roar. "What's next?"

"If you'd grind the coffee, Will?" she suggested.

"Sure! Where's the hand organ?"

He put the mill between his knees and converted the beans to powder to the tune of "Old Dog Tray" through his nose, which Miss Mattie found very amusing.

She measured out the coffee, one spoonful for each cup and one for the pot. Red watched her patiently, and when she had finished he threw in the rest of the contents of the mill drawer. "I like it fairly strong," said he in explanation.

"Now, Will!" protested Miss Mattie. "Look at you! That will be as bitter as boneset!"

"Thin her up with milk and she'll be all right," replied Red.

"Well, such wasteful ways I never did see. Nobody'd think you were a day over fifteen."

"I'm not," said Red stoutly, "and," catching her chin in his hand and turning her face up toward him, "nobody'd put your score much higher than that neither if they trusted to their eyes this morning."

The compliment hit so tender a place that Miss Mattie lacked the resolution to tear it out; besides, it was so honest that it sounded much less like a compliment than a plain statement of fact. She bent hastily over the fire. "I'm glad I look young, Will," she said softly.

"So'm I!" he assented heartily. "What's the sense in being old, anyhow? I'm as limber and good for myself as ever I was in spite of my forty years."

"You're not forty years old!" exclaimed Miss Mattie. "You're joking."

"Nary joke—forty round trips from flying snow to roses since I hit land, Mattie—why, you were only a little girl when I left here—don't you remember? You and your folks came to see us the week before I left. I got a thrashing for taking you and Joe to the millpond and helping you to get good and wet. The thrashing was one of the things that gave me a hankering for the west. Very liberal man with the hickory, father. Spare the clothes and spoil the skin was his motto. He used to make me strip to the waist—phee-hew! Even a light breeze rested heavy on my back when dad got through with me. Say, Mattie, perhaps I oughtn't to say so, now that he's gone, but I don't think that's the proper way to use a boy, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Miss Mattie. "Your father meant well, but his way was useless and cruel."

"I've forgiven him the whole sweep," said Red. "But, d—n me, if I had a boy I wouldn't club the life out of him; I'd try to reason with him first, anyhow. Makes a boy as ugly as anybody else to get the hide whaled off his back for nothing—once in awhile he needs it. Boy that's got any life in him gets to be too much occasionally, and then a warming is healthful and nourishing. Lord, you'd think I was the father of my country to hear me talk, wouldn't you? If somebody'd write a book, 'What Red Saunders Don't Know About Raising Children' it would be full of valuable information. How's that breakfast coming on?"

"All ready—sit right down, Will."

"Go you!" cried Red, and incautiously flung himself upon one of the kitchen chairs, which collapsed instantly and dropped him to the floor.

"Mercy on us! Are you hurt?" cried Miss Mattie, rushing forward.

"Hurt?" said Red. "Try it! Just jump up in the air and sit on the floor where you are now, and see if you get hurt! Oh, no! I'm not hurt, but I'm astonished beyond measure, like the man that tickled the mule. I'll take my breakfast right here—shouldn't wonder a bit if the floor went back on me and landed me in the cellar. No, sir! I won't get up! Hand me the supplies. I know when I'm well off. If you want to eat breakfast with me, come sit on the floor. I'm not going to have my spine pushed through the top of my head twice in the same day."

"Will, you are the most ridiculous person I ever did see!" said Miss Mattie, and she laughed till she cried in sheer lightheartedness. "But there's a chair you can trust. Come on now."

"Well, if you'll take your solemn oath that this one has no mustache to deceive me," said Red doubtfully. "It looks husky. Well, I'll try it. Hooray! She didn't give an inch! This kind of reminds me of the time Jimmy Hendricks came back from town and walked off the edge of the bluff in the dark. It just happened that Old Scotty Ferguson's cabin was underneath him. Jim took most of the roof off with him as he went in. He sat awhile to figure out what was trumps, having come 150 feet too fast to do much thinking. Then, 'Hello!' he yells. Old Scotty was a sleeper from way back, but this woke him up.

"'Hello!' says he. 'Was'er matter?'

"Jim saw he wasn't more than half awake yet, so he says, 'Why, I was up on the bluff there, Scotty, and, seeing it was such a short distance, I thought I'd drop in!'

"'Aw ri',' grunted Scotty. 'Make y'self t' home,' and with that he rolls over.

"Jim couldn't wait for morning, and, though his leg was pretty badly sprained, he made the trip all the way round the trail and woke us up to tell us how he'd gone through Ferguson's roof and the old man asked him to make himself at home. Next morning there was Scotty out in front of his cabin, his thumbs in his vest holes, looking up.

"'What's the matter, Scotty?' says I.

"'Well, I wisht you'd tell me what in the name of God went through that roof?' says he.

"I swallered a laugh crossways and put on a serious face. 'Must have been a rock,' says I.

"'Rock nothin'!' says he. 'If it had been a rock 'twould have stayed in the cabin, wouldn't it? Well, there ain't the first blasted thing of any shape nor description in there but the hole. You can go in and look for yourself.'

"It cost Scotty one case of rye to make us forget those circumstances."

"I should have thought the man would be killed, striking on the roof that way," said Miss Mattie.

"Oh, no! Roof was made of quaking asp saplings, just about strong enough to break his fall. Scotty was the sleeper, though! It wasn't hardly natural the way that man could pound his ear through thick and thin. He had quite a surprising time of it once. He'd been prospecting round the Ruby refractory ore district and he came out at Hank Cutter's sawmill just at sundown. Hank's place was full of gold rushers, so Old Scotty thought he'd sleep outdoors in peace and quiet. He discovered some big boxes that Hank was making for ore bins for the new mill, and as the ground was kind of damp from a thunder shower they had that day he spreads his blanket inside the box and goes to sleep. Ore bins have to be smooth and dust tight, so it wasn't a bad shanty.

"Well, there came a jar and waked him up. The box was rolling a little and going along, going along forty mile an hour. Scotty lit a match and found he was in a kind of big tunnel, but the wall was flying by so fast he couldn't make out just what kind of a tunnel it was. Now, he'd gone to sleep in peace and quiet on a side hill, and to wake up and find himself boat riding in a tunnel was enough to surprise anybody. First he pinched himself to see if it was Hank's pie or a cold fact; found it was a fact; then he lit another match and leaned over and looked at the black water underneath, but this made the box tip so it scart him, and he settled down in the bottom again. He didn't try to think. What was the use? No man living could have figured things out with the few facts Scotty had before him. All of a sudden the box made a rush and shot out into the air, and Scotty felt they were falling. 'God sakes!' he says to himself. 'What's next, I wonder?' Then they hit the water below with a kerflap that nearly telescoped Scotty and sent the spray flying. After that they went along smooth again. 'Well,' says Scotty, 'I don't know where I am, nor who I am, nor what's happened, nor who's it, nor nothing about this game. So far I ain't been hurt, though, and I might just as well lie down and get a little more rest.'

"It was broad daylight when he woke up again, and a man was looking into the box. 'Hello, pardner!' he says. 'I hope you've had a pleasant journey. Do you always travel this way?'

"Scotty raised up and found his craft was aground, high and dry—no water within a hundred feet of it. On one side was quite a little town.

"'Say,' says he, 'could I trouble you to tell me where I am, friend?'

"'You're at Placerville,' answers the other.

"'Placerville!' yells Scotty. 'And I went to sleep at Cutter's mill, sixty-five miles from here! What are you giving us, man?'

"'I'm putting it to you straight,' says the stranger. 'Take a look around you.'

"Scotty looked, and there was all kinds of wreckage, from a dead beef critter to a wheelbarrow.

"'What in nation's all this?' says he.

"'Washout,' says the man. 'Cloudburst up on the divide—worst we've ever had—your box is about high water mark—you see there was water enough for awhile—I reckon you're about the only thing that came through alive.'

"'Well, wouldn't that knock you?' says Scotty.

"While the rest of the folk at the mill was taking to the high ground for their lives, with the water roaring and tearing through the gulch, Scotty had

"What in nation's all this?" says he.

peacefully gone off in his little boat down the creek and, instead of going over the rapids, where he'd have been done, for all his luck, the box ambles through the flume they was building for the new mill. Of course there was the jounce over the tail race, but that hadn't hurt him much, and after he rocked in the cradle of the deep until he got beached at Placerville.

"'Come along, friend,' says Scotty to the feller. 'You and me are going to have a little drink on this, if it is the last act.' And I reckon probably they made it two, for when Scotty got back again he was in a condition that made everybody believe that he'd only guessed at the story he told. But they found out afterward it was a solemn fact. Mattie, give us some more coffee."

Thus abruptly recalled to Fairfield, Miss Mattie started up.

"Well, Will, it does seem as if that was a dangerous country to live in," said she.

"Oh, not so awful," said Red. "Just as many people die here as they do there. This world's a dangerous place to live in wherever you strike it, Mattie."

"That's so," said she thoughtfully.

"And now," said Red, pushing back his chair, "it's time I got to work and left you to do the housework undisturbed."

"What are you going to do, Will?"

"First place, there's fences and things to be tinkered up, I see. I suppose a millionaire like me ought to hire those things done, but I'd have measles of the mind if I sat around doing nothing."

"I have been wanting to get the place in good order for some time," said Miss Mattie, "but what with the money I had to spend for ... and that, and not being able to get Mr. Joyce to come in for a day's work when I wanted him, it's gone on until there is a good deal of wrack to it."

"We'll wrack it t'other way round in no time. Got any tools here?"

"Out in the barn is what's left of father's tools. People have borrowed 'em and forgot to return 'em, and they've rusted or been lost until I'm afraid there ain't many of 'em left."

"Well, I'll get along today somehow, and later on we'll stock up. Want any help around the house?"

"Thank you, no, Will."

"Then I'm off."

It was almost with a feeling of terror that Miss Mattie beheld him root up the fence. Her idea of repairing was to put in a picket here and there where it was most needed. Red's was to knock it all flat first and set it up in A1 condition afterward. So in two hours' time he straightened up and snapped the sweat from his brow, beholding the slain pickets prone on the grass with thorough satisfaction. Yet he felt tired, for the day was already hot with a moist and soaking seacoast heat, to which the plainsman was unaccustomed. A three-quarter grown boy passed by, lounging on the seat of a farm wagon.

"Hey!" hailed Red. The boy stopped and turned slowly around.

"Yes, sir," he answered courteously enough.

"Want a job?" said Red.

"Well, I dunno," replied the boy. He was much astonished at the appearance of his interrogator, and he was a cautious New England boy to boot.

"You don't know?" retorted Red. "Well," with some sarcasm, "d'ye suppose I could find out at the postoffice?"

The boy looked at Red, with a twinkle in his eye and a comical drawing of his long mouth.

"I calc'late if you cud fin' out anyw'eres 'twould be there," said he.

Red laughed. He had noticed the busy postmistress rushing out of her store to waylay any one likely to have information on any subject, a stream of questions proceeding from her through the door.

"Say, you got anything particular to do?"

"No, sir; leastways th'ain't no hurry about it."

"Can I buy stuff to make a fence with around here?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Pettigrew's got all kinds of buildin' material at his store—two mile over yonder," pointing with the whip.

"You drive over there for me and get some—just like this here—pickets and posts and whatever you call them long pieces, and I'll make it right with you."

"Yes, sir. How much will I get?"

"Oh, tell him to fill the wagon up with it, and I'll send back what I don't want. Hustle, now, like a good boy; I want to get shut of this job; I liked it better before I begun."

When his Mercury had speeded on the journey at a faster gait than Red would have given him credit for the architect strode down to the blacksmith's shop. There was a larger crowd than usual around the forge, as the advent of the stranger had got into the wind, and the village Vulcan was a person who not only looked the whole world in the face, but no one of the maiden ladies of Fairfield could have excelled his interest in looking the whole world as much in the inside pocket as possible. The blacksmith was emphatically a man of gossip, as well as a hardworking, God fearing man.

"Say, there he comes now, Mr. Tuttle!" cried one of the loungers, and nudged the smith to look.

"Well, let him come!" retorted the smith testily, jamming a shoe in the fire with unnecessary force; as a matter of fact he was embarrassed. The loungers huddled together for moral support as the big cowman loomed through the doorway.

"Good morning, friends!" said he.

"Good morning, sir!" replied the blacksmith, rubbing his hands on his apron. "Nice day, sir."

"For the sake of good fellowship I'll say 'yes' to that," responded Red, "but if you want my honest opinion on the subject it's d—n hot."

"'Tis that," assented the smith, and a silence followed.

"Say, who's your crack fence builder around here," asked Red—"the man that can make two pickets grow where only one grew before and do it so easy that it's a pleasure to sit and look at him?"

"Hey?" inquired the smith, not precisely getting the meaning of the address.

"Why, I've got a fence to build," exclaimed Red, "and now I want some help—want it so bad I'll produce to the extent of three a day and call it a day from now till 6 o'clock. Any takers here? Make your bets while the little ball rolls."

The loungers understood the general drift of this and pricked up their ears, as did the blacksmith. "Guess one of the boys will help you," said the latter.

"Well, who's it?" asked Red, glancing at the circle of faces. Three dollars a day was enormous wages in that part of the country. Nobody knew just what to say.

"Oh, well," cried Red, "let's everybody run! I reckon I can find something to do for the five of you. Are you with me?"

"Yes, sir," they said promptly.

"Can I borrow a hammer or so off you, old man?" questioned Red of the smith.

"Certainly, sir," returned the latter heartily. "Take what you want."

(Continued Next Friday.)

Investors will double their money in two years if they buy lots or acre tracts in the Blair street addition. The city must build in that direction.