Red Saunders

... By ...

HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS

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CHAPTER V—(Continued.)

...lodged. And the gate hinges ...d whack. Miss Saunders' ...know. Come over and take ...of 'em in the near by and by, ...May as well fix it up all at ...ce on, boys!"

...thus that the greatest enter... ...Fairfield had seen in many ...s undertaken. Miss Mattie ...ly astounded as the army ...upon the house.

...ver in the world is Cousin ...ing!" said she, but resting ...the faith that it was neces... ...fight she was content to ...dinner and an explanation. ...postmistress. The agonies ...veiled curiosity the worthy ...suffered that morning until ...at summoned up her resolu... ...asked the smith plump out ...what it all meant would have ...perienced to be appreciated. ...smith kept her hanging for ...bo, saying to himself in justi... ...that it wasn't right the way ...gal had to get into every... ...siness. The smith was like ...the rest of us—he could see ...a beam if it was in his own

CHAPTER VI.

...RE was a great din of ...hacking and hammering that ...morning. Red worked like a ...rse now, that he had con... ...a sudden thought struck him, ...ght into the house.

..." said he.

...Will?"

...use for the rest of that nice ...of beef I smell in the oven ...re all these fellers stay to ...al give 'em one good feed. ...you say?"

...'d like to, Will, but I don't ...there'll I set them?"

...of boards outside for a ta... ...then sit on boxes or something. ...s and things enough?"

...es! Plenty of such things, ...

...'ll ain't too much trouble for ...'ll it go."

...uble at all, Will—it will be a ...picnic."

...you'll eat with me this day," ...d.

...ecead the board table beneath ...apple tree and cleaned up for ...st in the kitchen storm shed ...apologetic "Sorry to trouble ...s Saunders," or such a mat... ...ach went in.

...s Miss Mattie was withdraw... ...ment from the oven there came ...at the door.

...ness, gracious!" she exclaimed. ...can that be now? Will, will ...who that is? I can't go."

..." said Red and went to the ...There stood two women of that ...le period between forty and ...very decently dressed and with ...ination visible in the way they ...adjusted various parts of their ...

...started at the sudden spectacle ...huge man who said pleasantly, ...her do, ladies?"

..., how do you do?" replied the ...stantly and in a voice she had ...heard before. "I hope you're ...," a remark which filled her ...rprise.

...ank, I'm able to assume the per... ...ir, as you can see," responded ...th a handsome smile of wel... "How do you find yourself?"

...pretty well," said the flustered ..."How do you do?"

...ed if we ain't right back where ...rted from," mourned Red to ... "If it's one of the customs of ...untry saying 'how der do' an ...a stretch, I pass it up." Aloud ... "Coming along fine. How's ...father?" "Cuss me if I don't ...cut a little anyhow," he add... ...dly.

..."he's very well indeed!" ex... ...the lady, with fervor. "How"— ...no further on the query, for ...woman interrupted in a tone ...ital. "Mary Ann Demilt, how ...talk like that? Your father's ...ead this five year last August!" ...horror of the moment was bro... ...the appearance of Miss Mattie, ...hospitably on seeing the visit... ...Mary and Pauline, how do ...

...shorter one, Pauline, looked up ...at sharply. "We're well enough. ...She was weary of the form. ...right in," said Miss Mattie. ...just in time for dinner."

...was a great protest at this. ...hadn't a moment to spare;" ...re "just going down to the ...and had stopped to say," etc. ...ve got to help me," said Miss ... "Will here has invited the ...so are working for him to stay ...but it won't be any more ...Canadian for you to help me ...

..." said Red, "if you don't ...starve a man who's deserving ...other fate take off your fixings ...one out to dinner. No," he con... ...to their protests, which he ob... ...were growing weaker, "it's no ...at all. There's plenty for ev... ...Come one, come all, this ...shall my clean off its base as ...as I! Now, for heaven's sake, ...ladies, it's all settled—come

Whereat they laughed nervously and took off their hats.

It was a jolly dinner party. The young fellows Red had picked up in the blacksmith's shop were not the ordinary quality of loungers. They were boys of good country parentage, with a common school education, who unfortunately could find nothing to do but the occasional odd job. Of course it would not take long to transform them into common ne'er do wells, but now they were merely thoughtless boys.

The whole affair had an al fresco flavor which stoppered convention. The two women visitors pitched in and had as good a time as anybody.

In the middle of the festivities a young man walked past the front fence—a stranger evidently, for his clothes wore the cut of a city, and a cosmopolitan, up to date city at that. He stopped and looked at the house, hesitated a moment and then walked in, back to where the folk were eating.

"Excuse me," said he as they looked up at him, "but isn't this Mr. Demilt's house?"

A momentary silence followed, as it was not clear whose turn it was to answer. Miss Mattie glanced around and, finding Red's eye on her, replied: "No, sir. Mr. Demilt's house is about a mile farther up the road."

"Dear me!" said the young man ruefully. He was a spick and span, intelligent looking man, with less of the dandy about him than the air of a man who had never worn anything but clothes of the proper trim and become quite used to it. Nevertheless the sweat stood out in drops on his forehead, for Fairfield's front "street" savored of a less moral region than it really was on a broiling summer day.

The young man sighed frankly and wiped his head. "Well, that's too bad," he said. "I'm a stranger here—would you kindly tell me where I could get some dinner?"

"What's the matter with that?" inquired Red, pointing to the roast, which still preserved an air of fallen greatness. He had liked the look of the other instantly.

The stranger looked first at Red and then at the roast. "The only thing I can see the matter with that," he answered, "is that it is a slice too thick."

"Keno!" cried Red. "You get it, Mattie, another plate and weapons to fit. Sit down, sir, and rest your fevered feet. If you don't like walking any better than I do, you've probably strewn fragments of one of the commandments all the way from where the stage dropped you to this apple tree."

"It seems to me that I did make some remarks that I never learned at my mother's knee," returned the other, laughing. "And I'm exceedingly obliged for the invitation, as there doesn't seem to be a hotel here, and I am but a degree south of starvation."

"Red or black?" asked the host, with a quick glance at his guest.

The other caught the allusion. "I haven't followed the deal," he replied, "but I'll enance it on the red."

Somehow he felt instantly at home and at ease; it was a quality that Red Saunders dispersed wherever he went.

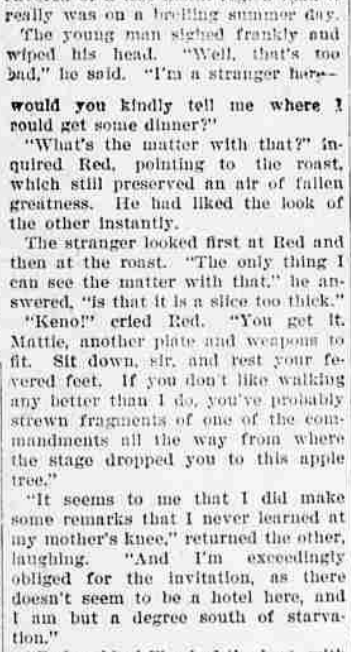
"There you are, sir," said Red, forwarding a plate full of juicy meat. "The ladies will supply the decorations."

"Do you like rice as a vegetable, sir?" inquired Miss Mattie.

"No, he doesn't," interrupted Red. "He likes it as an animal. Never saw any one who looked less like a vegetable than our friend." The young man's laugh rang out above the others.

Poor Miss Mattie was confused. "It's too bad of you, Will, to put such a meaning on my words," she said.

"The strange part of it is," spoke the young man, seeing an opportunity for a joke and to deal courteously with



"Foot of the table is Miss Mattie Saunders."

his entertainers at the same time—"the peculiar fact is that my name is Lettis."

"Lettuce?" cried Red. "Mattie, I apologize—he is a vegetable."

At which they all laughed again.

"And now," said Red, "I'm Red Saunders, late of the Chanta Seechee 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 Demilt, who may be kin to the gentleman you're seeking."

"Mr. Thomas F. Demilt?" 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 Jiminy, ma'am," exclaimed Red, "but yours is a strange family!"

"What Miss Demilt wishes to say," cut in Miss Doolittle, with some asperity, "is that Mr. Thomas Faulkenstone Demilt 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 Demilt myself."

"Thank you!" said Lettis. "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 Lettis. "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 Lettis was by no means a fool, and he had experience in business, but the mainspring of the young fellow was frankness, and in the course of the dinner he told his errand, Mr. Demilt 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 Lettis 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 corsets. 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.

Lettis 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 Lettis. "I have $5,000 to put in, and I suppose I could borrow the rest, but that's meddling 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."

Lettis' 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. Demilt 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 Lettis.

"Come on, boys!" said Red, and the party rose from the table. Later the wagon came up.

"Well, good day, Lettis," 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, Lettis, 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 e. The man that does me a trick has a chance for bad luck, and you can bet on that."

"Lord, I believe you!" replied Lettis, taking in the dimensions of his new friend. "Well, goodby for the present, Mr. Saunders. Thank you for the dinner and still more for the heart you have put into me."

At 6 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, fellers?"

"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 fellers will talk one at a time, p'r'aps I can make out 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, tut!" remonstrated the blacksmith. But the elders stood by the younker this time.

"Yes, he could, Mr. Farrel!" said they. "You ought to seen 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 extry 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 bountifully spread. Miss Mattie put two and two together and found they meant a larger sum of eatables 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 peanut 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

At seven-thirty the fence was done.

weak side of her desire forward in order to rest more securely if that stood the test.

"No, I don't," agreed Red. "But here's the way I feel about that: I want to be doing something according to my size; besides that, it would be a good thing for this place if some kind of a live doings was to start here. All right, that's my side of it. Now, as far as not knowing that young feller's concerned, I might think I knew him from cyclone cellar to roof tree, and he might do me to a crowded house. My idea is that life's a good deal like faro—you know how that is."

"I remember about his not letting the people go, but I'm afraid I don't know my Bible as well as I ought to, Will," apologized Miss Mattie, rather astonished at his allusion.

"Let the people go? Bible?" cried Red, laying down his knife and fork, still more astonished at her allusion. "Will you kindly tell me what that has to do with faro bank? Girl, one of us is full of ghost songs, and far, far off the reservation. What in the name of Brigham Young's off-ox are you talking about?"

"Why, you spoke of Pharaoh, Will, and I can remember about his holding the children of Israel captive, and the plagues, but I really don't see just how it applies."

"Oh!" said Red, as a great light broke upon him. "Oh, I see what you're thinking about. The old boy who corralled the Jews and made 'em work for the first and last time in their history, and they filled him full of fleas and darkness and all kinds of unpleasant experiences to break even? Well, I was not talking about him at all. My faro is a game played with a layout and a pack of cards and a little tin box that you ought to look at carefully before you put any money on the board, to see that it ain't arranged for dealing seconds; and there's a lookout and a case keeper and—well, I don't believe I could tell you just how it works, but some day I'll make a layout and we'll have some fun. It's a bully game, but I say, it's a great deal like life—the splits go to the dealer; that is to say, that if the king comes out to win and lose at the same time, you lose anyhow, see?"

"No," said Miss Mattie truthfully.

Red thrust his fingers through his hair and sighed. "I'm afraid I know too much about it to explain it clearly," he replied. "But what I mean is this: Some people try to play system at faro, and they last about as quick as those that don't. I always put the limit on the card that's handiest, and the game don't owe me a cent. As a matter of fact, some of the tin horns used to wear a pained expression when they saw me coming across the room. I've split 'em from stem to keelson more than once and never used a copper in my life. Played 'em wide open all the time. Now," and he brought his fist down on the table, "I'm going to play that young man wide open, and I'll bet you I don't lose by him neither. He looks as honest as a mastiff pup for all he dresses kind of nice. I might just as well try him on the fly as to go funk heading around and get stuck anyhow, with the unsatisfactory addition of feeling that I was a fool as well as confiding."

Most of the argument had been ancient Aryan to Miss Mattie, but the ring of the voice and the little she understood made the tenor plain. A sudden moisture gathered in her eyes as she said: "You're too good and honest and generous a man to distrust anybody. That's what I think, Will."

"Mattie, I wish you wouldn't talk like that," said he in an injured voice. "It ain't hardly respectable."

After which there was a silence for a short time. Then said Miss Mattie, "Do you think you could content yourself here, Will, after all the things you've seen?"

Red brightened at the change of topic. "I'll tell you how that is. If I hadn't any capital and had to work here as a poor man, I don't believe I'd take the trouble to try and live. I'd smother. But, having that pleasant little crop of long greens securely planted in the bank where the wild time doesn't grow and thusly being able to cavort 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 gone, 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 Lettis 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—cousin 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 frolicsome 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 caused 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 wiggling 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 shoul-

"I just stopped in to find out if you knew any one that had a riding horse for sale."

dered, 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 pecooliar and onpleasant position. There's mighty feyew things I wouldn't do in a hawse trade, but I draw the line on murder. That there hawse'll kill you, just's sure as you're fool enough to put yerself 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, indeedy—he's a perfect lady of a horse to lead—you can pick up airy foot—climb all over him, in fac'—s'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 idee 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 shorely 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.

Lettis, 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 broodling, baleful fire, quietly biding 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! Gol 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 ricochetted; 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 berders 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 hens fly!" The triumphant glee is 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 erraticalness 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 mangling 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 missed 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 Lettis, 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.

(Continued Next Friday.)