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The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from last week)

A look of pained surprise crossed Roger Oakley's face. He was quite shocked at the un-Christian feeling Griff was displaying. "No, you don't mean that!" he made haste to say. "You can't mean it."

"Can't I?" cynically.

Roger Oakley stole a glance from under his thick, bushy eyebrows at the editor. He wondered if an apt quotation from the Scriptures would be of any assistance. The moral logic with which he had intended to overwhelm

Ryder staggered back.

him had somehow gone astray. He presented the singular spectacle of a man who was in the wrong and who knew he was in the wrong and was yet determined to persist in it.

"There's something I'll tell you that I haven't told any one else." He glanced again at Ryder to see the effect of the proposed confidence, and again the latter nodded for him to go on.

"I am going away. I haven't told my son yet, but I've got it all planned, and when I am gone you won't have any reason to hate Dannie, will you?"

"That's an admirable idea, Mr. Oakley, and if Dannie, as you call him, has half your good sense he'll follow your example."

"No; he can't leave. He must stay. He's the manager of the road," with evident pride. "He's got to stay, but I'll go. Won't that do just as well?" a little anxiously, for he could not fathom the look on Ryder's dark face. Ryder only gave him a smile in answer, and he continued hurriedly:

"You see, the trouble's been about me and my working in the shops. If I hadn't come here there'd have been no strike. As for Dannie, he's made a man of himself. You don't know and I don't know how hard he's worked and how faithful he's been. What I've done mustn't reflect on him. It all happened when he was a little boy—so high," extending his hand.

"Mr. Oakley," said Ryder coldly and insultingly, "I propose, if I can, to make this town too hot to hold your son, and I am grateful to you for the unconscious compliment you have paid me by this visit."

"Dannie don't know I came," quickly.

"No, I don't suppose he does. I take it it was an inspiration of your own."

Roger Oakley had risen from his seat.

"What's Dannie ever done to you?" he asked, with just the least perceptible tremor in his tones.

Ryder shrugged his shoulders. "We don't need him in Antioch."

The old man mastered his wrath and said gently:

"You can't afford to be unfair, Mr. Ryder. No one can afford to be unfair. You are too young a man to persevere in what you know to be wrong."

To maintain his composure required a great effort. In the riotous days of his youth he had concluded most arguments in which he had become involved with his fists. Aged and broken, his religion overlay his still vigorous physical strength but thinly, as a veneer. He squared his massive shoulders and stood erect, like a man in his prime, and glowered heavily on the editor.

"I trust you have always been able to make right your guiding star," retorted Ryder pointedly. The anger instantly faded from the old convict's face. He was recalled to himself.

Ordinarily that is, in the presence of others, he would have felt bound to treat Roger Oakley with the defference due to his years. Alone, as they were, he was restrained by no such obligation. He was in the right, and he proceeded to prove it right.

"I wish you'd mind your own business," he said suddenly. "What do you mean by coming here to tell me what I ought to do? If you want to know, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I am going to hound you and that precious son of yours out of this part of the country."

The old man straightened up again as Ryder spoke. The restraint of years dropped from him in a twinkling. He told him he was a scoundrel, and he prefaced it with an oath, a slip he did not notice in his excitement.

"Hey! What's that?"

"You're a scoundrel!" repeated Roger Oakley, white with rage. He took a step around the table and came nearer the editor. "I don't know but what I ought to break every bone in your body! You are trying to ruin my son!" He hit the table a mighty blow with his clinched fist and, thrusting his head forward, glared into Ryder's face.

"You have turned his friends against him. Why, he ain't got none left any more. They have all gone over to the other side. And you done it, you done it, and it's got to stop!"

Ryder had been taken aback for the moment by Roger Oakley's fierce anger, which vibrated in his voice and flashed in his dark, sunken eyes.

"Get out of here!" he shouted, losing control of himself. "Get out or I'll kick you out!"

"When I'm ready to go I'll leave," retorted the old man calmly, "and that will be when I've said my say."

"You'll go now." And he shoved him in the direction of the door. The shove was almost a blow, and as it fell on his broad chest Roger Oakley gave a hoarse, inarticulate cry and struck out with his heavy hand. Ryder staggered back, caught at the end of the table as he plunged past it and fell his length upon the floor. The breath whistled sharply from the old man's lips. "There," he muttered, "you'll keep your hands off!"

Ryder did not speak or move. All was hushed and still in the room. Suddenly a nervous chill seized the old convict. He shook from head to heel.

"I didn't mean to hit you," he said, speaking to the prostrate figure at his feet. "Here, let me help you."

He stooped and felt around on the floor until he found Ryder's hand. He released it instantly to take the lamp from the table. Then he knelt beside the editor. In the corner where the latter lay stood a rusty wood stove. In his fall Griff's head had struck against it.

The lamp shook in Roger Oakley's hand like a leaf in a gale. Ryder's eyes were open and seemed to look into his own with a mute reproach. For the rest he lay quite limp, his head twisted to one side. The old man felt of his heart. One or two minutes elapsed. His bearing was one of terrible intensity. He listened [illegible] outside on the street and the sound of a [illegible] died out in the distance. Ryder's heart had ceased to beat. Fully convinced of this he replaced the lamp on the table [illegible] in the chair by the door, [illegible] painfully, his face [illegible] and eyes protruding. "I've killed him," he [illegible] "I didn't go to do it."

Presently he got up and [illegible] and examination. [illegible] most wonderful. His first [illegible] was to surrender himself to the town marshal, as he had done [illegible] under similar circumstances.

Then he thought of Dan.

No, he must escape, and nobody should never be known who had killed Ryder. His death might even be attributed to an accident. In his excitement he forgot the boy he had met at the door. That incident had passed entirely from his mind, and he did not remember the meeting until days afterward.

He had been utterly indifferent to his own danger, but now he extinguished the lamp and made his way cautiously into the outer room and passed into the street. As he crouched in the darkness by the door he heard the town bell strike the hour. He counted the strokes. It was 8 o'clock. An instant later and he was hurrying down the street, fleeing from the ghastly horror of the white, upturned face and the eyes with their look of mute reproach.

When he reached the railroad track at the foot of Main street he paused irresolutely.

"If I could see Dannie once more, just once more!" he muttered under his breath, but he crossed the tracks with a single longing look turned toward the shops, a black blur in the night a thousand yards distant.

Main street became a dusty country road south of the tracks. He left it at this point and skirted a cornfield, going in the direction of the creek.

At the shops Dan had waited supper for his father until half past 7, when he decided he must have gone uptown, probably to the Joyces'. So he had eaten his supper alone. Then he drew his chair in front of an open window and lighted his pipe. It was very hot in the office, and by and by he carried his [illegible] where he and his father sleep. He arranged their two cots, blew out the light, which seemed to add to the heat, partly undressed and lay down. He heard the town bell strike 8 and then the half hour. Shortly after this he must have fallen asleep, for all at once he awoke with a start. From off in the night a confusion of sounds reached him. The town bell was ringing the alarm. At first he thought it was a fire, but there was no light in the sky, and the bell rang on and on.

He got up and put on his coat and hat and started out.

It was six blocks to the Herald office, and as he neared it he could distinguish a group of excited, half dressed men and women where they clustered on the sidewalk before the building. A carriage was standing in the street.

He elbowed into the crowd unnoticed and unrecognized. A small boy who had climbed into the low boughs of a maple tree now shouted in a perfect frenzy of excitement: "Hi, they're bringing him out! Jimmy Smith's got him by the legs!"

At the same moment Chris Berry appeared in the doorway. The crowd stood on tiptoe, breathless, tense and waiting.

"Drive up a little closer, Tom," Berry called to the man in the carriage. Then he stepped to one side, and two men pushed past him carrying the body of Ryder between them. The crowd gave a groan.

CHAPTER XVII.

RYDER'S murder furnished Antioch with a sensation the like of which it had not known in many a day. It was one long, breathless shudder, ramified with contingent horrors.

Dippy Ellsworth remembered that when he drove up in his cart on the night of the tragedy to light the street lamp which stood on the corner by the Herald office his horse had balked and refused to go near the curb. It was generally conceded that the sagacious brute smelled blood. Dippy himself said he would not sell that horse for $1,000, and it was admitted on all sides that such an animal possessed a value hard to reckon in mere dollars and cents.

Three men recalled that they had passed the Herald office and noticed that the door stood open. Within twenty-four hours they were hearing groans and within a week cries for help, but they were not encouraged.

Of course the real hero was Bob Bennett, Ryder's assistant, who had discovered the body when he went back to the office at half past 8 to close the forms. His account of the finding of Ryder dead on the floor was an exceedingly grizzly narrative, delightfully conducive of the shivers. He had been the quietest of youths, but two weeks after the murder he left for Chicago. He said there might be those who could stand it, but Antioch was too slow for him.

Not less remarkable was Ryder's posthumous fame. Men who had never known him in life now spoke of him with trembling voices and every outward evidence of the sincerest sorrow. It was as if they had sustained a personal loss, for his championship of the strike had given him a great popularity, and his murder, growing out of this championship, as all preferred to believe, made his death seem a species of martyrdom.

Indeed, the mere fact that he had been murdered would have been sufficient to make him popular at any time. He had supplied Antioch with a glorious sensation. It was something to talk over and discuss and shudder at, and the town was grateful and happy with the deep, calm joy of a perfect emotion.

It determined to give him a funeral which should be creditable alike to the cause for which he had died and to the manner of his death.

Meanwhile Dan had been arrested, examined and set at liberty again in the face of the prevailing sentiment that he should be held. No one doubted—he himself least of all—that Roger Oakley had killed Ryder. Bob Bennett recalled their meeting as he left the office to go home for supper on the night of the murder, and a red and yellow bandanna handkerchief was found under the table, which Dan identified as having belonged to his father.

Kenyon came to Antioch and made his redoubtable [illegible] almost certain by the offer of a reward of $500 for the arrest and conviction of the murderer. This stimulated a wonderful measure of activity. Parties of men and boys were soon scouring the woods and fields in quest of the old convict.

The day preceding that of the funeral a dusty countryman on a hard ridden plow horse dashed into town with the news that a man who answered perfectly to the description of Roger Oakley had been seen the night before twenty-six miles north of Antioch, at a place called Barrow's Sawmills, where he had stopped at a store and made a number of purchases. Then he had struck off through the woods. It was also learned that he had eaten his breakfast the morning after the murder at a farmhouse midway between Antioch and Barrow's Sawmills. The farmer's wife had at his request put up a lunch for him. Later in the day a man at work in a field had seen and spoken with him.

There was neither railroad, telegraph nor telephone at Barrow's Sawmills, and the fugitive had evidently considered it safe to venture into the place, trusting that he was ahead of the news of his crime. It was on the edge of a sparsely settled district, and to the north of it was the unbroken wilderness stretching away to the lakes and the Canada line.

(To be Continued)

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