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By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from last week.)

"It's from the doctor. You needn't be afraid to open it; he's all right. He'll be back Saturday night, and he's bringing Mr. Oakley with him. I came up to see if you had any objection to my letting the town know."

Mrs. Emory saw no reason why the knowledge of Oakley's return should be withheld, and in less than half an hour Antioch, with bated breath, was discussing the news on street corners and over back fences.

That night the town council met in secret session to consider the weighty matter of his reception, for by common consent it was agreed that the town must take official action. It was suggested that he be given the freedom of the city. This sounded large and met with instant favor, but when the question arose as to how the freedom of the city was conferred the president turned, with a slightly embarrassed air, to the member who had made the motion. The member explained, with some reserve, that he believed the most striking feature had to do with the handing over of the city keys to the guest of honor. But unfortunately Antioch had no city keys to deliver. The only keys that by any stretch of the imagination could be so called were those of the courthouse, and they were lost.

Here an appeal was made to the Hon. Jeb Barrows, who was usually called in to straighten out any parliamentary tangles in which the council became involved. That eminent statesman was leaning dreamily against a pillar at the end of the council chamber. On one of the cards he had already pencilled the brief suggestion, "Feed him and have out the band." He handed the card to the president, and the council heaved a sigh of relief. The momentous question of Oakley's official reception was settled.

When Dan and Dr. Emory stepped from No. 7 Saturday night the station platform was crowded with men and boys. The brass band, which Antioch loved with a love that stifled criticism, perspiring and in dire haste, was turning the street corner half a block distant. Across the tracks at the railroad shops a steam whistle shrieked an ecstatic welcome.

Dan glanced at the doctor with a slightly puzzled air.

"What do you suppose is the matter?" he asked unsuspiciously.

"Why, man, don't you understand? It's you!"

There was no need for him to say more, for the crowd had caught sight of Dan and a hundred voices cried:

"There he is! There's Oakley!"

And in an instant Antioch, giving way to wild enthusiasm, was cheering itself black in the face, while above the sound of cheers and the crash of music the steam whistle at the shops shrieked and pealed.

The blood left Oakley's face. He looked down at the crowd and saw Turner Joyce, He saw McClintock and Holt and the men from the shops, who were, if possible, the noisiest of all. He turned helplessly to the doctor.

"Let's get out of this," he said between his teeth. The crowd and the noise and the excitement recalled that other night when he had ridden into Antioch. As he spoke he swung himself down from the steps of the coach, and the crowd closed about him with a glad shout of welcome.

The doctor followed more slowly. As he gained the platform the Hon. Jeb Barrows hurried to his side.

"Where is he to go, Doc?" he panted.

"To your house or to the hotel?"

"To my house."

"All right, then. The crowd's spoiling the whole business. I've got an address of welcome in my pocket that I was to have delivered, and there's to be a supper at the rink tonight. Don't let him get away from you."

Meanwhile Dan had succeeded in extricating himself from the outcries of his friends and was struggling toward a closed carriage at the end of the platform that he recognized as the Emorys'.

In his haste and the dusk of the dull October twilight he supposed the figure he saw in the carriage to be the doctor, who had preceded him, and called to the man on the box to drive home.

As he settled himself he said reproachfully:

"I hope you hadn't anything to do with this."

A slim, gloved hand was placed in his own, and a laughing voice said:

"How do you do, Mr. Oakley?"

He glanced up quickly and found himself face to face with Constance Emory.

There was a moment's silence, and then Dan said, the courage that had brought him all the way to Antioch suddenly deserting him:

"It's too bad, isn't it? I had hoped I could slip in and out of town without any one being the wiser."

"But you can't," with a little air of triumph. "Antioch is going to entertain you. It's been in a perfect fever of excitement ever since it knew you were coming back."

"Well, I suppose there is no help for

it," resignedly.

"Where is my father, Mr. Oakley?" "I guess we left him behind," with sudden cheerfulness. He leaned forward so that he could look into her face.

"Constance, I have returned because I couldn't stay away any longer. I tried to forget, but it was no use."

She had withdrawn her hand, but he had found it again, and now his fingers



"There he is! There's Oakley!"

closed over it and held it fast. He was feeling a sense of ownership.

"Did you come to meet me?" he asked.

"I came to meet papa."

"But you knew I was coming too."

"Oh, no!"

It was too dark for him to see the color that was slowly mounting to her face.

"Constance, I don't believe you," he cried.

"I was not sure you were coming," Constance said weakly.

"You might have known that I'd come back—that I couldn't stay away."

"Don't you think you have been a long time in making that discovery?"

"Well, yes, but when I saw your father—"

"What did papa say to you?" with keen suspicion in her tones.

"You mustn't blame him, Constance. It was not so much what he said as what he didn't say. I never knew any one to be quite so ostentatious about what was left unsaid."

Constance freed her hand and, shrinking into a corner, covered her face. She had a painful realization of the direction those confidences must have

new! Probably the boy had never had on such clothes before in his life. It was masquerading, trying to appear what he was not.

At this moment came a stumbling outside and an ineffectual groping for the latch string, then an "Open de do! I say, open de do!"

Herkamer spring forward to comply, and as the door swung back a short, squatly figure half fell into the room.

"The half breed!" ejaculated Herkamer, forgetting to shut the door in his consternation. "What's up, Baptiste? Where's Seth?"

"Busted," responded Baptiste, throwing out his arms dramatically. "Tree fall on shanty, break t'rou. Seth busted, me—Baptiste—busted too. Come for help, me! Come—rub on."

"Not dead!" gasped Mrs. Herkamer, her face whitening. "Seth ain't dead?"

This brought the half breed to his senses.

"Naw, on'y 'low busted," he reassured her. "Leg hurt so can't walk. Me—Baptiste—busted, too; finger broke. Come for medicine—rub on. Ain't busted bad, non."

With trembling hands Mrs. Herkamer produced some bottles and bandages from the cupboard; her husband reached for his greatcoat.

"We must hurry back to him," he cried. "If his leg's broke it must be attended to at once. You'll have to excuse me," to his guests.

Baptiste raised his squatly figure to its full height.

"No good you go," he declared sturdily. "Bad way t'rou' ravine. Footen mile me come, all time fallin' an' climbin'; take five, six hour. You no strong like young man. Better me go lone. Go two time quick. Leg broke, want look out for soon. Me fix him, den we stay two tree day an' come home all right. Bes' way."

"The half breed's right," said Dr. Brown. "If the leg's broken it needs looking after at once, and Baptiste is just as good at that work as I am. Two old fellows like us, Herkamer, would only be a drag on Baptiste's

progress."

But old Herkamer paid not the least notice. He was resolutely bumping his shoulders into his greatcoat when he felt a light touch upon his arm.

"You had better stay here, Mr. Herkamer," the young minister said quietly.



He strode out into the gathering darkness.

ly. "Your son is in need of help which should reach him just as speedily as possible. I am used to this sort of thing and am young and strong; besides I have some little knowledge of medicine. Mr. Baptiste and I can do all that is necessary." He buttoned his coat and turned to the half breed, who had been listening with open derision. But somehow, when Baptiste met the straight gaze of this young fellow, the contempt faded from his face. Like those who live close to nature, he was accustomed to look into eyes, and these eyes were strangely legible.

"Well, I guess mebbe you go 'long," he acquiesced gracefully. "dat is, if you t'ink you good for tough job."

Old Herkamer stared. That soft handed boy "used to this sort of thing," and Baptiste accepting him in preference to himself. What was the world coming to?

"Why, the boy can't get through that ravine to save his life," he blurted out. "Ain't go t'rou' ravine," Baptiste declared stolidly. "go roun' by hill dis time. Take two time longer, but mo' safe. Go in ravine, find snow tick, mebbe no get t'rou'. Bes' go safe. But no time wait for old peoples."

Herkamer snorted, but slowly removed his coat.

"Well, young fellow," ignoring Baptiste and speaking to the minister, "you'd better put on my big coat an' all the other warm stuff we can scare up. Better freeze comfortable long's you're bound to freeze. An' don't let that half breed push you on too fast. We don't want no remains on our hands even if Seth has broke his leg."

The young minister smiled.

"This costume is all I need, thank you, Mr. Herkamer," he said reassuringly. "I had it made especially for this sort of work, and it is very warm. I do not like heavy wraps for hard walking; the exercise is better. If the wind is hard or the cold becomes very severe I have a hood which I can draw over my head and shoulders."

Now, Baptiste, about the route. Is this ravine you speak of a plain trail? Would a greenhorn like me be likely to lose his way?"

"Non; it be narrow, an' dere be rocks high on bot sides, an' de camp be right in de middle. It can't be miss if one go dat fur. But we ain't goin' in



"My darling!"

taken between her father, who only desired her happiness, and the candid Oakley, who only desired her love.

"Was there any use in my coming? You must be fair with me now. It's too serious a matter for you not to be."

"You think I was not fair once?"

"I didn't mean that, but you have changed."

"For the better, Mr. Oakley?"

"Infinitely," with blunt simplicity.

"You haven't changed a scrap. You are just as rude as you ever were."

Dan cast a hurried glance from the window.

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