



# The COW PUNCHER

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### CHAPTER IX.

Very slowly it dawned upon Mrs. Hardy that this respectable, thriving city, with its well-dressed, properly mannered people, its public spirit, its aggressiveness, its churches and theaters, and schools, its law and order, and its afternoon teas, after all, was the real West; sincere, earnest; crude, perhaps; bare, certainly; the scar of its recent battle with the wilderness still fresh upon its person; lacking the finish that only time can give to a landscape or a civilization; but lacking also the moldiness, the mustiness, the insufferable artificiality of older communities. Even Mrs. Hardy, steeped for sixty years in a life of precedent and rule and caste, began to catch the enthusiasm of a new land where precedent and rule and caste are something of a handicap.

"We must buy a home," she said to Irene. "We cannot afford to continue living at a hotel, and we must have our own home. You must look up a responsible dealer whose advice we can trust in a matter of this kind."

And was it remarkable that Irene Hardy should think at once of the firm of Conway & Elden? It was not. She had, indeed, been thinking of a member of that firm ever since the decision to move to the West. The fact is Irene had not been at all sure that she wanted to marry Dave Elden. She wanted very much to meet him again; she was curious to know how the years had fared with him, and her curiosity was not unmixed with a finer sentiment; but she was not at all sure that she should marry him.

"What, Dave Elden, the millionaire?" Bert Morrison had said. "Everybody knows him." And then the newspaper woman had gone on to tell what a figure Dave was in the business life of the city. "One of our biggest young men," Bert Morrison had said. "Reserved, a little; likes his own company best; but absolutely white."

That gave a new turn to the situation. Irene had always wanted Dave to be a success; suddenly she doubted whether she had wanted him to be so big a success. She had doubted whether she should wish to marry Dave; she had never allowed herself to doubt that Dave would wish to marry her. Secretly, she had expected to rather dazzle him with her ten years' development—with the culture and knowledge which study and travel and life had added to the charm of her young girlhood; and suddenly she realized that her luster would shine but dimly in the greater glory of his own. . . .

It was easy to locate the office of Conway & Elden: it stood on a principal corner of a principal street. Thence she led her mother, and found herself treading on the marble floors of the richly appointed waiting room in a secret excitement which she could with difficulty conceal. She was, indeed, very uncertain about the next development. . . . Her mother had to be reckoned with.

A young man asked courteously what could be done for them.

"We want to see the head of the firm," said Mrs. Hardy. "We want to buy a house."

They were shown into Conway's office. Conway gave them the welcome of a man who expects to make money out of his visitors. He placed a very comfortable chair for Mrs. Hardy; he adjusted the blinds to a nicety; he discarded his cigarette and beamed upon them with as great a show of cordiality as his somewhat beefy appearance would permit. Mrs. Hardy outlined her life history with considerable detail and ended with the confession that the West was not as bad as she had feared and, anyway, it was a case of living here or dying elsewhere, so she would have to make the best of it. And here they were. And might they see a house?

Conway appeared to be reflecting. As a matter of fact, he saw in this inexperienced buyer an opportunity to reduce his holdings in anticipation of the impending crash. His difficulty was that he had no key to the financial resources of his visitors. The only thing was to throw out a feeler.

"You are wanting a nice home, I take it, that can be bought at a favorable price for cash. You would consider an investment of, say—"

He paused, and Mrs. Hardy supplied the information for which he was waiting. "About twenty-five thousand dollars," she said.

"We can hardly invest that much," Irene interrupted, in a whisper. "We must have something to live on."

"People here live on the profits of their investments, do they not, Mr. Conway?" Mrs. Hardy inquired.

"Oh, certainly," Conway agreed, and he plunged into a mass of incidents to show how profitable investments had been to other clients of the firm. Then his mood of deliberation gave way to one of briskness; he summoned a car, and in a few minutes his clients were looking over the property which he had recommended. Mrs. Hardy was an amateurish buyer, her tendency being alternately to excess of caution on one side and recklessness on the other. Conway's manner pleased her; the house he showed pleased her, and she was eager to have it over with. But he was too shrewd to appear to encourage a hasty decision.

slowly. He did not seize upon Mrs. Hardy's remark that the house seemed perfectly satisfactory; on the contrary, he insisted on showing other houses, which he quoted at such impossible figures that presently the old lady was in a feverish haste to make a deposit; lest some other buyer should forestall her.

Back in Conway's office, while the agreement was being drawn, Irene was possessed of a consuming desire to consult with Dave Elden. She was uneasy about this transaction in which her mother proposed so precipitately to invest the greater part of their little fortune. "I think I would . . . estate, mother," she cried. "If you buy this house we will have only a few thousand dollars left. Your health may demand other expenditures—"

"My health was never better," Mrs. Hardy interrupted. "And I'm not going to miss a chance like this, health or no health. You have heard Mr. Conway tell how many people have grown wealthy buying property and selling it again. And I will sell it again—when I get my price."

"It is as your mother says," Conway interjected. "There are very rapid increases in value. I would not be surprised if you should be offered an advance of ten thousand dollars on this place before fall."

"There must be an end somewhere," Irene murmured, rather weakly.

But her mother was writing a check. "I shall give you five thousand dollars



"There Must Be an End Somewhere," Irene Murmured, Rather Weakly.

now," she said, "and the balance when you give me the deed, or whatever it is. That is the proper way, isn't it?" "Well, it's done," said Irene with an uneasy laugh which her excitement pitched a little higher than she had intended.

In an adjoining room Dave Elden heard that laugh, and it stirred some remembrance in him. Instantly he connected it with Irene Hardy. The truth was Irene Hardy had been in the background of his mind during every waking hour since Bert Morrison had dropped her bombshell upon him. And now that voice—

Dave had no plan. He simply walked into Conway's office. His eye took in the little group and the mind behind caught something of its portent. Irene's beauty! What a quickening of the pulses was his as he saw in this splendid woman the girl who had stirred and returned his youthful passion! But Dave had poise. He walked straight to Irene.

"I heard your voice," he said, in quiet tones that gave no hint of the emotion beneath. "I am very glad to see you again." He took the hand which she extended, in a firm, warm grasp; there was nothing in it, as Irene protested to herself, that was more than firm and warm, but it set her finger tips a-tingling.

"My mother, Mr. Elden," she managed to say, and she hoped her voice was as well controlled as his had been. Mrs. Hardy looked on the clean-bellied young man with the dark eyes and the brown, smooth face, but the name suggested nothing. "You remember," Irene went on, "I told you of Mr. Elden. It was at his ranch we stayed when father was hurt."

"But I thought he was a cow puncher!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardy.

"Times change quickly in the West, madam," said Dave. "Most of our business men—at least, those bred in the country—have thrown a lasso in their day. You should hear them brag of their steer-roping yet in the Ranchmen's club."

Irene's eyes danced. Dave had already turned the tables; where her mother had implied contempt he had set up a note of pride.

"Oh, I suppose," said her mother, for lack of a better answer. "Everything is so absurd in the West. But you were good to my daughter, and to poor, dear Andrew. If only he had been spared. Women are so unused to these business responsibilities, Mr. Conway. It is fortunate there are a few reliable firms upon which we can lean in our inexperience."

"Mother has bought a house," Irene explained to Dave. "We thought this was a safe place to come"—A look on Elden's face caused her to pause. "Why, what is wrong?" she said.

Dave looked at Conway, at Mrs. Hardy, and at Irene. He was instantly aware that Conway had "stung"

them. It was common knowledge in inside circles that the bottom was going out. The firm of Conway & Elden had been scurrying for cover, as quietly and secretly as possible, to avoid alarming the public, but scurrying for cover, nevertheless. And Dave had acquiesced in that policy. His position was extremely difficult.

"I don't think I would be in a hurry to buy," he said, slowly turning his eyes on his partner. "You would perhaps be wiser to rent a home for a while. Rents are becoming easier."

"But I have bought," said Mrs. Hardy, and there was triumph rather than regret in her voice. "I have paid my deposit!"

"It is the policy of this firm," Elden continued, "not to force or take advantage of hurried decisions. The fact that you have already made a deposit does not alter that policy. I think I may speak for my partner and the firm when I say that your deposit will be held to your credit for thirty days, during which time it will constitute an option on the property which you have selected. If, at the end of that time, you are still of your present mind, the transaction can go through as now planned; and if you have changed your mind your deposit will be returned."

Conway shifted under Dave's direct eye. He preferred to look at Mrs. Hardy. "What Mr. Elden has told you about the policy of the firm is quite true," he managed to say. "But, as it happens, this transaction is not with Conway & Elden, but with me personally. I find it necessary to dispose of the property which I have just sold to you at such an exceptional price—he was looking at Mrs. Hardy—and naturally I cannot run a chance of having my plans overturned by any possible change of mind on your part."

"I am entirely satisfied," said Mrs. Hardy. "The fact that Mr. Elden wants to get the property back makes me more satisfied," she added, with the peculiarly irritating laugh of a woman who thinks she is extraordinarily shrewd and is only very silly.

"The agreement is signed," said Dave. He walked to the desk and picked up the documents, and the check that lay upon them. His eye ran down the familiar contract. "This agreement is in the name of Conway & Elden," he said. "This check is payable to Conway & Elden."

Conway's livid face had become white, and it was with difficulty he controlled his anger. "They are all printed that way," he explained. "I am going to have them indorsed over to me."

"You are not," said Dave. "You are charging this woman twenty-five thousand dollars for a house that won't bring ten thousand. The firm of Conway & Elden will have nothing to do with that transaction. It won't even indorse it over."

A fire was burning in the grate. Dave walked to it and very slowly and deliberately thrust the agreement into the flame.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all!" Mrs. Hardy ejaculated. "Are all cow punchers so discourteous?"

"I mean no discourtesy," said Dave. "If my behavior has seemed abrupt, I assure you I have only sought to serve Doctor Hardy's widow—and his daughter."

"It is a peculiar service," Mrs. Hardy answered, curtly.

"I can only apologize for my partner's behavior," said Conway. "It need not, however, affect the transaction in the slightest degree. A new agreement will be drawn at once—an agreement in which the firm of Conway & Elden will not be concerned."

"That will be more satisfactory," said Mrs. Hardy. She intended the remark for Dave's ears, but he had moved to a corner of the room and was conversing in low tones with Irene.

"I am sorry I had to make your mother's acquaintance under circum-



"Are All Cow Punchers So Discourteous?"

stances which, I fear, she will not even try to understand," he had said to Irene.

"Oh, Dave—Mr. Elden, I mean—that is—you don't know how proud you don't know how much of a man you made me feel you are." She was flushed and excited. "Perhaps I shouldn't talk like this. Perhaps—"

"It all depends on one thing," Dave interrupted.

"What is that?"

"It all depends on whether we are Miss Hardy and Mr. Elden or whether we are still Renee and Dave."

Her bright eyes had fallen to the floor and he could see the tremor of her fingers as they rested on the back of a chair. She did not answer him directly. But in a moment she spoke. "Mother will buy the house from Mr. Conway," she said. "She is like that. And when we are settled you will come and see me, won't you—"

### Dave

When the Harbys had gone Conway turned to Elden. "We had better try and find out where we stand," he said, trying to speak dispassionately, but there was a tremor in his voice.

"I agree," returned Elden, who had no desire to evade the issue. "Do you consider it fair to select inexperienced women for your victims?"

Conway made a deprecating gesture. "There is nothing to be gained by quarreling, Dave," he said. "Let us get at the facts. When we have agreed as to facts, then we may agree as to procedure."

"Shoot," said Dave. He stood with his shoulder toward Conway, watching the dusk settling about the football city.

"I think," said Conway, "we can agree that the boom is over. We have done well on paper. The thing now is to convert our paper into cash."

### (Continued in Next Issue)

### SIGNS OF ILL LUCK

Never leave a room backward.

When the nose fails a-bleeding it is a bad omen.

It is unlucky to hand anyone anything over your shoulder.

Boast of having an article for a long time and you will lose it.

The person who sits down first at a gathering will have good luck.

A horse falling down before a house will bring back luck to the house.

When the nose itches it is a sign of company that day, or of good news.

If your shoestring or apron string breaks, your sweetheart is thinking of you.

Make a rhyme involuntarily, before speaking again make a wish, and you will get it.

Eating all the food on the table at supper time means tomorrow will be a fair day for you.

If you are told something and immediately after you sneeze, what has been told you is true.

Don't cross under an elevated railway when a train is going over it unless you wish bad luck.

To have a picture drop out of its frame or a stone out of its setting

while wearing it is a bad omen.

If you have money in your pocket on first sight of a new moon it is a sign you will not be out of money before the next moon.

If a spider, weaving a web in some high place, comes downward before your face, you may look for money from some unexpected source.

In Paris it is heared a bank messenger who disappeared with 1,400,000 francs met with foul play. In the U. S. A. it would be feared he had not.

Scientists say that 40,000 germs are shifted with each kiss. At that rate, a young couple ought to shift all the germs there are in an evening's session.

### BUSINESS MAN'S SCHEDULE

A Boston business man has the following schedule of time for interviews hung over his desk:

- My wife, never too busy.
- Book agents, three seconds.
- Unclassified bores, thirty ditto.
- Old associates, one hour.
- People to pay bills, no limit.
- Employees wanting increase of salary, one minute.
- Friends to make a touch (it takes time to explain why you are broke), five minutes.
- Poor relations, always out.—Boston Transcript.

It is gleaned from the bandit statistics that some drive into the oil stations for radiator alcohol and some to make the manager thaw out.

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