

Red Saunders

... By ...
HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

CHAPTER II.

HOW did I come to get myself disliked down at the Chanta Seechee? Well, I'll tell you," said Reddy, the cow puncher. "The play came up like this. First they made the Chanta Seechee into a stock company; then the stock company put all their brains in one think, and says they, 'We'll make this man Jones superintendent, and the ranch is all right at once.' So out comes Jones from Boston, Mass., and what he didn't know about running a ranch was common talk in the country, but what he knew about running a ranch was too much for one man to carry around. He wasn't a bad hearted feller in some ways, yet on the whole he felt it was an honor to a looking glass to have the pleasure of reflecting him. Looking glass? I should say he had! And a bureau and a bootblackening jigger and a feather bed and curtains and truck in his room. Strange fellers used to open their eyes when they saw that room. 'Hello-o-o!' they'd say. 'Whose little birdie have we here?' And other remarks that hurt our feelings considerable. Jonesy, he said the fellers were a rank lot of barbarians. He said it to old Neighbor Case's face, and he and the old man came together like a pair of hens, for Jonesy had said in spite of his faults. That was a fight worth traveling to see. They covered at least an acre of ground; they tore the air with upper swats and cross swipes; they hollered, they jumped and they pitched, and when the difficulty was adjusted we found that Jonesy's coat was painfully ripped up the back and Neighbor Case had lost his false teeth. One crowd of fellers patted Jones on the back and said, 'Never mind your coat, old horse; you've licked a man twice your age,' and the other comforted Neighbor, saying, 'Never mind, Case, you can ease your mind by thinking how you headed up that rooster and he fifty pounds lighter than you.'

"Jonesy put on airs after that. He felt he was a hard citizen. And then he had the misfortune to speak harshly to Arizona Jenkins when Old Dry Belt was in liquor. Then he got roped and dragged through the slough. He cried like a baby while I helped him scrape the mud off, but not because he was scared! No, sir! That little runt was full of blood and murder.

"You mark me now, Red," says he, the tears making bad land water courses through the mud on his cheeks. 'I shall fire upon that man the first time I see him. Will you lend me your revolver?'

"Lord, Jones, see here," says I. 'Don't you go making any such billy-goat play as that. Keep his wages until he apologizes. Put something harmful in his grub; but, as you have respect for the Almighty's handwork as represented by your person, don't pull a gun on Arizona Jenkins. That's the one thing he won't take from nobody.'

"'D-d-darn him!' snivels Jonesy. 'I ain't afraid o-o-o of him,' and the strange fact is that he wasn't. Well, I saw he was in such a taking that he might do something foolish and get hurt, so I goes to Arizona, and says I, 'You ought to apologize to Jonesy. What Zony replied ain't worth repeating. And you along with him,' he winds up.

"Now, ain't that childish?' I says. 'A six footer like you that can shoot straight with either hand and yet ain't got generosity enough to ease the feelings of a poor little devil that's fair busting with shame!'

"Well, what did he want to tell me to shut up my mouth for?' cried Old Dry Belt. 'Men have died of less than that.'

"Aw, shucks, Zony,' I says. 'A great, big man like you oughtn't to come down on a little cuss who's all thumb hand side and left feet.'

"That be blowed," says he, only he says it different. 'I'd like to know what business such a sawed off has to come and tell a full grown man like me to shut up his mouth. He'd ought to stay in a little man's place and talk sassy to people his own size. When he comes shooting off his bazoo to a man that could swaller him whole without loosening his collar it's indelicacy; that's what it is.'

"Well, as a favor to me?' I says.

"Well, if you put it in that way—I don't want to be small about it.'

"So Arizona goes up to Jones and sticks out his hand. 'There's my hand, Jones,' he says. 'I'm mighty sorry you told me to shut up my mouth,' says he.

"So am I," says Jones heartily, not talking in the sense of the words, but telling that it was all in good intention. So that was all right, and I stood in with the management in great haste for fixing up the fuss so pleasant. But it didn't last. They say nothing lasts in this world. There's some pretty solid rocks in the Coeur d'Alene, however, and I should like to wait around and see if they don't hold out, but I'll never make it. I've been a too much excitement.

"Well, the next thing after Jonesy got established was that his niece must come out during vacation and

pay him a visit. 'Jerusalem!' thinks I, 'Jonesy's niece!' I had visions of a thin, yaller, sour little piece, with mouse colored hair plastered down on her head and an unkind word for everybody. Jonesy told me about her being in college, and then I stuck a pair of them nose grabber specks on the picture. I can stand most any kind of a man, but if there's anything that makes the tears come to my eyes it's a botch of a woman. I know they may have good qualities and all that, but I don't like 'em, and that's the whole of it. We gave three loud groans when we got the news in the bull pen. And I cussed for ten minutes straight, without repeating myself once, when it so fell out that the members of the board rolled out our way the day the girl had to be sent for, and Jonesy couldn't break loose, and your uncle was elected to take the buckboard and drive twenty miles to the railroad. I didn't mind the going out, but that twenty miles back with Jonesy's niece! Say, I foamed like a soda water bottle when I got into the bull pen and told the boys my luck.

"Well," says Kyle Lambert, 'that's what you might expect; your sins have found you out.'

"No, they ain't; they've caught me at home as usual," says I. 'Well, I'll give that eastern blossom an idea of the quality of this country, anyhow.' So I togs myself up in the awfulest rig I could find; strapped two ca'tridge belts to me, every hole filled, and a gun in every holster; put candle grease on my mustache and twisted the ends up to my eye winkers; stuck a knife in my hand and another in my boot; threw a shotgun and a rifle in the buckboard and pulled out quick through the colt pens before Jonesy could get his peeps on to me.

"Well, sir, I was jarred witless when I laid my eyes on that young woman. I'd had my mind made up so thorough as to what she must be that the facts knocked me cold. She was the sweetest, handsomest, healthiest female I ever see. It would make you believe in fairy stories again just to look at her. She was all the things a man ever wanted in this world rolled up in a prize package. Tall, round and soople, limber and springy in her action as a thoroughbred and with something modest yet kind of daring in her aspect that would remind you of a goose, honest boy. Red, white and black were the colors she flew. Hair and eyes black, cheeks and lips red, and the rest of her white. Now, there's a pile of difference in them colors; when you say 'red,' for instance, you ain't cleaned up the subject by a sight. My top knot's red, but that wasn't the color of her cheeks. No; that was a color I never saw before nor since. A rose would look like a tomatato alongside of 'em. Then, too, I've seen black eyes so hard and shiny you could cut glass with 'em. And again that wasn't her style. The only way you could get a notion of what them eyes were like would be to look at 'em; you'd remember 'em all right if you did. Seems like the good Lord was kind of careless when he built Jonesy, but when he turned that girl out he played square with the fambly.

"I ain't what you might call a man that's easily disturbed in his mind, but I know I says to myself that first day, 'If I was ten year younger, young lady, they'd never lug you back east again.' Gee, man! There was a time when I'd have pulled the country up by the roots but I'd have had that girl! I notice I don't fall in love so violent as the years roll on. I can squint my eye over the cards now and say, 'Yes, that's a beautiful hand, but I reckon I'd better stay out,' and lay 'em down without a sigh, whereas when I was a young feller if I had three aces in sight I'd raise the rest of the gathering right out of their foot leather—or get caught at it. Usually I got caught at it, for a man couldn't run the mint long with the kind of luck I have.

"Well, I was plumb disgusted with the fool way I'd rigged myself up, but fortunately for me, Darragh, the station man, came out with the girl. 'There's Reddy, from your ranch, now, ma'am,' says he, and when he caught sight of me: 'What's the matter, Red? Are the Injuns up?'

"Darragh was a serious Irishman, and that's the mournfullest thing on top of the globe, and, besides, he believed anything you'd tell him. There ain't any George Washington strain in my stock, so I proceeded to get out of trouble.

"They ain't up exactly," says I, 'but it looked as if they were a lecture on the rise, and, being as I had a lady to look out for, I thought I'd play safe.'

"The color kind of went out of the girl's cheeks. Eastern folks are scandalous afraid of Injuns.

"Perhaps I'd better not start?" says she.

"Don't you be scart, miss," says Darragh. 'You're all right as long as you're with Red—he's the toughest proposition we've got in this part of the country.'

"I'm obliged to you, Darragh," says I. He meant well, but hell's full of them people. I'd have given a month's wages for one lick at him.

"I stepped up to her, with my hat,

or my own. Miss Andree, says I, 'she was Jonesy's sister's child,' 'if you come along with me I'll guarantee you a safe journey. If any harm reaches you it will be after one of the liveliest times in the history of the territory.'

"At this she laughed. 'Very well,' says she, 'I'll chance it, Mr. Red.'

"His name ain't Red," puts in Darragh, solemn. 'His name's Saunders. We call him Red because of his hair.'

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," says Miss Loys, all of a fluster.

"That's all right, ma'am. No damage done at all," says I. 'It's useless for me to try to conceal the fact that my hair is a little on the Auburn. You mustn't mind what Darragh says. We've had a good deal of hot weather lately and his brains have gone wrong. Now hop in and we'll touch the breeze.' So I piled her trunk in, and away we flew.

"Bud and Dandy were a corking little team. They'd run the whole distance from the railway to the ranch if you'd let 'em—and I never inter-



"I stepped up to her, with my hat in my hand."

ferred. A straight line and the keen jump hits me all right when I'm going some place, although I can loaf with the next man on occasion. So we missed most of the gulleys.

"The ponies were snorting and pulling grass, the buckboard bouncing behind 'em like a rubber ball, and we were crowding into the teeth of the northwest wind, which made it seem as if we were traveling 100 per cent better than a Dutch clock would show.

"'Goodness gracious,' says the girl, 'do you always go like this in this country? And aren't there any roads?'

"Why, no," says I. 'Hike!' and I snapped the blacksnake over the ponies' ears, and they strung themselves out like a brace of coyotes, nearly pulling the buckboard out from under us. 'Sometimes we travel like this,' I says. 'And as for roads, I despise 'em. You're not afraid, are you?'

"Indeed I'm not. I think it's glorious. Might I drive?'

"If I can smoke," says I, 'then you can drive.' I'd heard about young women who'd been brought up so tender that tobacco smoke would ruin their morals or something, and I kind of wondered if she was that sort.

"That's a bargain," says she promptly. 'But how you're going to light a cigar in this wind I don't see.'

"Cigarette," says I. 'And if you would kindly hold my hat until I get one rolled I'll take it kind of you.'

"But what about the horses?" says she.

"Put your foot on the lines and they'll make. That's the main and only art of driving on the prairie—not to let the lines get under the horses' feet. All the rest is just sit still and look at the scenery.'

"She held my hat for a windbreak, and I got my paper pipe together. And then—not a match! I searched every pocket. Not a lucifer. That is more of what I got for being funny and changing my clothes. And then she happened to think of a box she had for traveling and fished it out of her grip.

"Young lady, I says, 'until it comes to be your bad luck—which I hope won't ever happen—to be very much in love with a man who won't play back you'll never properly know the pangs of a man that's got all the materials to smoke with except the fire. Now, if I have a chance to do as much for you some time I'm there.'

"She laughed and crinkled up her eyes at me. 'All right, Mr. Saunders. When that obdurate man disdains me I'll call for your help.'

"The place for the man that would disdain you is an asylum," says I. 'And the only help I'd give you would be to put him there.' She blushed real nice. I like to see a woman blush. It's a trick they can't learn.

"But I see she was put out by my easy talk, so I gave her a pat on the back and says: 'Don't mind me, little girl. We fellers see an eighteen carat woman so seldom that it goes to our heads. There wasn't no offense meant, and you'll be foolish if you put it there. Let's shake hands.'

"So she laughed again and shook. I mean shook. It wasn't like handing you so much cold fish, the way some women shake hands. And Loys and me, we were full birds from data.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

At one time Cleopatra, while entertaining Mark Antony, required the floor to be strewn with rose leaves to the depth of eighteen inches.

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