

# Red Saunders

... By ...  
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## CHAPTER VI.

**T**HERE was a great din of whacking and hammering that morning. Red worked like a horse now, that he had company. A sudden thought struck him, and he went into the house.

"Mattie," said he.

"Well, Will?"

"I see a use for the rest of that nice big roast of beef I spent in the oven—let's have all these fellows stay to dinner and give 'em one good feed. What do you say?"

"Why, I'd like to, Will, but I don't know—where'll I get them?"

"Couple of boards outside for a table—let them sit on boxes or something. Get plates and things enough?"

"My, yes! Plenty of such things, Will."

"Then if it ain't too much trouble for you we'll let it go."

"No trouble at all, Will—it will be a regular picnic."

"Boys, you'll eat with me this day," said Red.

"They spread the board table beneath an old apple tree and cleaned up for the repast in the kitchen scum shed with an apologetic 'Sorry to trouble you, Miss Saunders,' or such a matter as each went in.

Just as Miss Mattie was withdrawing the meat from the oven there came a knock at the door.

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

"Sure!" said Red and went to the door. There stood two women of that indefinite period between forty and sixty, very decently dressed and with some agitation visible in the way they fussy adjusted various parts of their attire.

They started at the sudden spectacle of the huge man who said pleasantly, "How der do, ladies?"

"Why, how do you do?" replied the taller instantly and in a voice she had never heard before. "I hope you're well, sir," a remark which filled her with surprise.

"Thanks, I'm able to assume the perpendicular, as you can see," responded Red, with a handsome smile of welcome. "How do you find yourself?"

"I'm pretty well," said the dumber lady. "How do you do?"

"Turned if we ain't right back where we started from," murmured Red to himself. "If it's one of the customs of this country saying 'how der do' an hour at a stretch, I pass it up." Aloud he said, "Coming along fine. How's your father?" "Bless me if I don't shift the cut a little anyhow," he added mentally.

"Why, he's very well indeed!" exclaimed the lady, with fervor. "How?" She got no further on the query, for the other woman interrupted in a tone of scandal. "Mary Ann Demitt, how can you talk like that? Your father's been dead this five year last August!"

The horror of the moment was broken by the appearance of Miss Mattie, crying hospitably on seeing the visitors. "Why, Mary and Pauline, how do you do?"

The shorter one, Pauline, looked up and said sharply, "We're well enough, Mattie." She was weary of the form.

"Come right in," said Miss Mattie. "You're just in time for dinner."

There was a great protest at this. They hadn't a moment to spare, they were just going down to the corner and had stopped to say, etc.

"You've got to help me," said Miss Mattie. "Will here has invited the boys who are working for him to stay to dinner, and it won't be any more than Christian for you to help me out."

"Ladies," said Red, "if you don't want to starve a man who's deserving of a better fate take off your fixings and come out to dinner. No," he continued to their protests, which he observed were growing weaker, "it's no trouble at all. There's plenty for everybody. Come one, come all, this house shall fly clean off its base as soon as I. Now, for heaven's sake, ladies, it's all settled—come on!"

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 air of 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. Demitt'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. Demitt'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 became 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 chance 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

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

"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 Chama Secence 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 Demitt, who may be kin to the gentleman you're seeking."

"Mr. Thomas F. Demitt?" 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 Demitt wishes to say," cut in Miss Doolittle, with some asperity, "is that Mr. Thomas Faulkstone Demitt 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 Demitt myself."

"Thank you," said Lettice. "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 Lettice. "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 Lettice 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. Demitt 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 Lettice 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 cowboy did not blame people who took obvious ways and dealt in subterfuges, 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 to be one of the principal objects in life was to compound the poverty which would persist in sticking its grained 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.

Lettice 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 pain like that is going to cost some money, ain't it?" asked Red.

"Too much for me, I'm afraid," replied Lettice. "I have \$5,000 to put in, and I suppose I could borrow the rest, but that's saddling 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 lumber to keep stone mules. 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 darn sight.'"

Lettice's 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. Demitt 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 Lettice.

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

"Well, good day, Lettice," 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 boss—well, sir, it just makes me trouble 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, Lettice, 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 out, son, for all I may seem easy. The man that does me a trick has a chance for bad luck, and you can bet on that."

"Lord, I believe you!" replied Lettice, taking in the dimensions of his new friend. "Well, goodbye 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 things are 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, fellows?"

"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. "Were paid plenty as it is."

"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 fellows will talk one at a time, perhaps 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 cowboy, 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 Indians that fellow's killed?" piped up the youngest. "Huh! He could grab hold of a man and wring his neck like a chicken."

"Aw, isn't?" remonstrated the blacksmith. "But the elders stood by the younger this time."

"Yes, he could, Mr. Farrell!" said they. "You ought to see 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 extra 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

or 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 bronched 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

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 fellow'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 fare—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 fare 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 fare 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.

[To be continued.]

At a dinner to which Mark Twain was invited his name was associated with the toast of "Literature" by an orator, who referred with great eloquence to Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and—Mark Twain. In response the humorist thanked the speaker for his kindly references and excused himself from making a longer speech by saying, "Homer is dead, Shakespeare and Milton are no more, and I—I don't feel very well myself."



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