

# Red Saunders

... By ...  
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## CHAPTER VIII.

**T**HE work on the mill was pushed, and in spite of the usual amount of unforeseen delays it was ready for business by the latter part of September. The official opening was set for the 27th, Miss Mattie's birthday, and the village of Fairfield was invited to a picnic to be held at the mill in honor of the occasion. It is needless to say that the Fairfield Strawboard Manufacturing company did the thing up in shape. Wagons loaded with straw and drawn by four horse teams went the rounds of the village collecting the guests. It is doubtful if Fairfield was ever more surprised than at the realization of how much there was of her, using the pronoun out of respect to the majority, "when she was launched," as Red said. You would not have believed that struggling, lonesome-looking place held so many people. As Red could discover no means in the town's resources to provide a meal for 200 people, it was necessary a basket party, which struck Mr. Saunders as being grievously like a Swede treat. He made up for it in a measure by having barrels of lemonade and elder on tap at the grounds, stronger beverages being barred, and by hiring a quartet of strings "clear from town."

At half past 2 on a resplendent but hot September afternoon the caravan started for the mill grounds, the women dressed in the most unbecomingly ostentatious and the men ostentatiously at ease in their more of clothes. Every one was in the best of spirits, keen for the excitement and pleasure that was sure to mark the occasion.

Red rode old Buckskin, who has succumbed to the inevitable and only "jumped around a little," as Red put it, on being mounted. It was pretty lively "jumping around," but perhaps Mr. Saunders found some satisfaction in sitting perfectly at his ease, smoking his cigarette, while Buck jumped and Fairfield admired. And, at any rate, Buck had legs of iron and the wind of a locomotive, carrying Red all day and willing to kick at anything which bothered him when night came. He was a splendid beast through and through, from forelock to tail tip, but he had learned who was his master and obeyed him accordingly.

It was a five mile ride, mostly under the shade of fine old trees. The road wound around the hills; here and there a break in the arboreal border showed views of rolling country, well shaped and pleasing, winding up grassy slopes in groves of verdure. Of course most of the freshness of leaf was past, yet the modest gray green gave a silvery sheen to the landscape that brought it into unity.

One member of the party felt that his heart was very full as he looked at it. That was Lettis. "Blast the old office!" he kept saying to himself. "Blast its six dingy windows and the clock at the end! Doesn't this look good, and doesn't it smell good, dust and all?" and then he'd howl at the horses in sheer exuberance of good feeling, making the mild old brutes put a better foot of it to the front.

Red cantered up beside his wagon. "Well, Lettis," he said, "here we go for the opening overture with the full strength of the company—we're great people this day, ain't we?" And the big man smiled like a pleased big boy.

"Oh, what a bully old fellow you are!" thought Lettis as he looked at him. Lettis was thinking of other qualities than flesh, but the physical Red Saunders on horseback was deserving of a glance from anybody; the massive figure so well poised; the clear cut, proud profile; the shapely head with its crown of red gold hair; the easy grace of him by virtue of his strength it would be a remarkable crowd in which Chanta Seechee Red couldn't pass for a man. He was every inch of that from the ground up.

Lettis had come to how down to him in adoration, with all an affectionate boy's worship. To those eyes Red was just right in every particular; likewise to Miss Mattie, who even now was filling her eyes with him from behind the vantage of a broad brimmed straw hat.

At last the whole party disembarked at the flat before the mill and made ready for the official starting of the machinery. The big doors were thrown open, so that the company could see within while resting outside in the shade, and under the cooling influence of what breeze there was. The mill was officially started. Red climbed the bank to the flume and raised the gate. The crowd cheered as the imprisoned waters leaped to freedom with a hollow roar, raising in pitch as the penstock filled and the wheels began to go round. Speech was called

for, and the vigorously protesting Red was forced to the front by his former friends, Demili and Lettis. Thus betrayed by those he trusted, Red made the best of it.

"Ladies and gentlemen, fellow citizens," said he, "the mill is now open to all comers. We hope to make this thing a success. We hope to see every horny handed, hump backed farmer in the country rosin the soles of his moccasins and shove his plow through twice as much ground as he ever did before, and if he comes here with his plunder we'll give him a square shake. We'll pay him as much as we can and not let him be on the ground floor, so he can crawl out through the road hole, as is sometimes done. Now, everybody run away and have a good time, for I don't like to talk this yapp any more than you like to hear it. Kola gans! By-by!"

It was a very successful picnic. They spent the afternoon in wandering around in the usual picnic fashion, developing appetites, until it occurred to Red to give the performance by showing them the art of roping as practiced upon an old cow found in the woods. As a spectacle it was a failure. The combined efforts of all the hooding small boys could not make that cow run. She even stretched her neck toward Red, as though saying: "Hurry up with your foolishness. I have a cud to chew and can't stand here idle all day." So Red galloped by and threw the noose over her head as an exhibition of how the thing was done rather than how it ought to be done. Nevertheless picnic parties are not hypercritical in the matter of amusement, and the feat received three cheers. The last time he missed his cast through overconfidence, where at the old cow tossed her head and tail in the air and tore off at an elephantine gallop, with a bawl that sounded to Red mightily like derision.

"I'm glad she ain't laughing at me," he cried. But as a matter of fact it was a hornet and its unmistakable sting that injected this activity into her system.

It was all very pleasant to Miss Mattie, as one's first picnic in many years should be. She enjoyed the crisp green sod, the great trees standing around, parklike, with the sunlight falling between their shade like brilliant tatters of cloth of gold, while from the near distance came the tiny shouting of cool waters. They had a camp fire at night, making the moonlight still more mysterious and remote by contrast. The quartet of strings played for the ears of those who cared to listen and for the legs of those who chose to take chances on tripping their light fantastic toes over tree roots in the grass.

Red loved music, and he loved the night. The poetic side of his memories of watching the Dipper swing around Polaris while he sang the cows to sleep came back to him. In his mind he saw the vast prairie roll out to infinity, saw the mountains stand out, a world of white peaks, rising from a sea of darkness. Again he heard the plaintive shrilling of an Indian whistle or the song of the lad down creek, made tuneful by the charm of distance.

"Having a good time, Mattie?" he asked, with a smile.

"The best I ever had, Will," she answered, smiling back unsteadily. **Poor lady! The size of an occasion is so many standards, whether the standard be inches or feet or miles.** Miss Mattie's events had been measured in hundredths of an inch, and it took a good many of them to cover so small an action as a successful picnic on a beautiful night. Her eyes were humid; her mouth smiled and drooped at the corners alternately. Red felt her happiness with a keen sympathy, and, as he looked at her, suddenly she changed in his eyes. Just what the difference was he could not have told, nor whether it was in her or in him. A sudden access of feeling, undefinable, unplaceable, but strong, possessed him. There is a critical temperature in the life of a man, when no amount of pressure can ever make the more expansive emotions assume the calmer form of friendship. There was something in Miss Mattie's eye which had warned Red to that degree, but he didn't know it. He only knew that he wanted to sit rather unnecessarily close beside her, and that he would be sorry when it came time to go home. And he was very silent.

During the drive back to the house he spoke in monosyllables; he went straight to the barn with Lettis afterward, and made no attempt to take the usual frank and hearty good night kiss.

"You're as glum as an oyster," said Lettis, when they reached their quar-

ter. "You're the oyster, and you're?"

"I don't know, Let; I feel kind of quiet, somehow."

"Sick? Or something go wrong?"

"No; nothing of the kind. It's just sort of an attack of stillness, but I feel darn good."

Lettis laughed. "If it wasn't you, Red, I'd say you were in love," he said. It was well the barn was dark, or he would have seen a change wonderful to behold come over the expander's face. "The lad has hit it!" he said to himself in astonishment, and he granted "huh!" secretly, and grunted himself for an unnecessary joke or two.

Miss Mattie had noticed the "attack of stillness" and immediately tried to fasten the blame upon herself. What had she done? She couldn't recall anything. She remembered she had said something about the way his hair looked with the moon shining on it. Perhaps he had taken offense at that. The remark was entirely complimentary, but sometimes people are touchy about such things. Still, that was not the least like Cousin Will. She must have said or done something, though. What could it be? Oh, what a pitiful memory that could not recollect an injury done to one's best friend! She tossed and wondered over it for a long time before at length she fell asleep.

Red also looked up at the roof and took account of stock. His face was radiant in the dark. "If I could only pull that off!" he thought. "I must seem an awful rough cuss to her, though. All right for a cousin, but it's different when you come to the other proposition. My Jimmy! I'll take a chance in the morning and find out, anyhow!" said he, and, eased in mind by the decision of action, he too shook hands with Morpheus and was presently dreaming.

It had never occurred to Red Saunders that he was afraid of anybody. He even chuckled when he got Lettis out of the way with a plausible excuse the next morning. Then he strode briskly into the house, his question on his lips in a plump out and out form.

Miss Mattie looked at him with her slow smile. "What is it?" she asked. Red swallowed his question whole. "I—I wanted a little hot water to shave with," said he. Then a fury took hold of him. "What the devil am I lying like this for?" he thought. He exhorted himself to go on and say what he had to say like a man, but the other Red Saunders refused to do anything of the sort. He took the cup of hot water most abjectly and fled from the house. He had to shave then, and in his hurry and indignation he turned the operation into a clinic. "Oh, Jimmy, look at that!" he cried as the razor opened up another part of the subject. "There's a slit an inch long! If I keep on at this gait I won't have face enough to say good morning, let alone what I want to do. What-alls me? What-alls me? Why should I be seart of the noblest woman God ever built? Now, by all the Mormon gods, I'll just right into the house and say my little say as soon as these cuts stop bleeding!"

Cobwebs stopped the cuts, and other cobwebs stopped Red Saunders, late of the Chanta Seechee ranch, 250 pounds of the very finest bone and muscle. And the cobwebs held him, foaming and boiling with rage and disgust, calling himself all the yaller pups he could think of, but staying strictly within the safe limits of the barn. It was a revelation to the big man, and not a pleasant one. How was he to know that the most salient point of his apparent cowardice was nothing less worthy than respect for the woman's security? That if he would stop swearing long enough to get at the springs of his action he would find that he hesitated because the new light on the matter made huge shadows of the slips in the career of a strong, lawless, untrained but rarely tempted man? He knew nothing of the sort, and the funniest of comedies took place in the barn. He would reach the sensible stage. "Pah! All foolishness! Go! Of course he'd go, and this very minute, and have the thing done with, good or bad." He was quite amused at his former conduct until he reached the door; then he felt skip nimbly back again, with a hot feeling that somebody was watching him, although a careful inspection through the crack of the door revealed no one.

Red discovered another thing that afternoon, which was that the more nervous you are the more nervous you get. He growled in perfect misery: "Ohoho! That I should have seen the day when I was afraid to ask anybody anything! What's come over me anyhow? It's this darn country, I believe. Tain't me." Then he stopped short. "What you saying, Red?" he queried. "Why don't you own up like a man?" The fact that it had a funny side struck him, and he laughed half forlornly and half in thorough enjoyment. He suddenly sobered down. "She's worth it anyway," said he. "She's the best there is, and I ought to feel kind of leery of the outcome. Well, now I guess I won't say anything till there's a downright good chance. I see I didn't savvy this kind of business like I thought I did. 'Twouldn't be no kind of manners to step up to a lady and shout, 'I'd like to have you marry me if you feel you've

got the thing.' Don't you know it's more than a Chairman on roller skates. Your work is good, Red, but it's a little lumpy in spots. Then two left feet bother you. You're good in your place, but you'd better build a fence around the place, don't you? Sinoberation! I think she likes me, all right, but when it comes to more'n that—oh, blast it, I'll just have to wait for a real good chance! Now come, old man, get four feet on the ground and don't roll your eyes. Take it easy till the chance comes."

Little he knew the chance was coming up the street at that moment. He only saw Miss Mattie step out into the bed of flowers, her face looking unusually pretty and youthful under the big straw hat, and start to reduce the weeds to order. She glanced around as though in search of some one, and Red felt intuitively that the one was himself.

"Here's where I ought to act as if I wore long pants," said he. "Now, what's to hinder me from going out there and get a talking?" And then he sat down hastily, more disgusted than ever, and snore the air with his fist. "You'd think the nicest, quietest woman that ever lived was a wild beast the way I act; yes, sir, you would!"

Meantime the chance drew nearer. It was not a pleasant looking opportunity. His eyes, full of dread and dreadful, peeped out from beneath a



She glanced around as though in search of some one.

brush of matted hair. A tough,ropy foam hung from its mouth. If you put as much of that foam as would go on the point of a pin in an open cut, you would have an end that your worst enemy would shudder at, for this was the most horrifying of dangerous animals—a mad dog! Poor brute! As he came shambling down the road he was the grisly mask of tragedy.

It was near noon, intensely hot, and the street of Fairfield was deserted. No one saw the dog, and if his occasional rattling, straggling howl reached any ears they were dead to its meaning. He was unheeded until he lurched through the gate which Lettis had left open, as usual, and, spinning around in a circle, gave voice to his cry.

It brought Miss Mattie to her feet in an unknown terror; it brought Red from the barn in a full cognizance—he had heard that sound before when a mad coyote landed in a cabin full of fairly strong nerved cowmen and set them screeching like hysterical women before a chance shot ended him.

Red saw the brute jump toward Miss Mattie. Instinctively his hand flew to his hip, and instantly he remembered there was nothing there. Then with great, uneven leaps he sprang forward. "Keep your hands up, Mattie, and don't move!" he screamed. "Let him chew the dress! For God's sake, don't move!"

She turned her white face toward him, and through the dimness of sight from his straining efforts, he saw her try to smile as she obeyed him to the letter, and without a sound. "Oh, brave girl!" he thought and threw the ground behind him desperately.

At twenty feet distance he dove like a base runner, and his hands closed around the dog's neck. Over they went with the shock of the onset, and before they were still the hands had finished their work. A clutch, and a snap, and it was done.

The dog lay quivering. Red rose to his knees, wondering at the humming in his head. His wits came back to him sharply.

"Did he bite you, Mattie?" he cried. But she had already caught his hands and was looking at them with a savage eagerness one would not have believed to be in her.

"There is no mark," she said, suddenly weak. "He didn't touch you?"

"Answer me when I speak to you!" shouted Red, beside himself. "Did he bite you?"

She answered him, with a sob, "No." And then his question asked itself, and answered itself, although, again, he did not know it. He gathered her up in his arms, kissed her like one raised from the dead and swore and

prayed and thanked God all in the same breath.

His old imperious nature came back with the relief. "Here!" said he, putting her away for a moment. "Take off that dress—that shine on there's enough to kill a hundred men—take it right off!"

Miss Mattie started blindly to obey, then stopped. "Not here, Will—I'll go in the house," she said.

"You'll take it off right here and now," said Red, "and I'll burn it up on the spot. I'd rather have forty rat-lesnakes around than that stuff. Off with it! This is no child's play, and I don't care a d—n what the old lady next door thinks!"

Miss Mattie slipped off her outer skirt and stood a second, confused and dauntless. She took flight to the house, running as lithely as a greyhound.

"By jingo!" said Red in adoration. "Let's see you bring another woman that can run like that!"

He gathered some hay and piled it on the dress, firing the heap.

Then he turned to his antagonist. "Poor old boy! Hard luck, eh? But I had to do it," he said and gave him decent internment at the end of the garden, washed his hands carefully and went into the house on pleasanter duties.

"I'll ask her now, by the great horn spoon!" said he valiantly.

Miss Mattie was in a curious state of mind. There was an after effect from the fright which made her tremble, and a remembrance of Cousin Will's actions which made her tremble more yet. When she heard him coming she started to fly, although now clothed beyond reproach, but her knees deserted her, and she was forced to slink back in her chair. Red came in whistling blithely, vainglorious man.

He had his suspicions, generated by the peculiar fervor Miss Mattie had shown in regard to his hands.

"Mattie!" quoth he, "I'm tired of lying out there in the barn. I want a respectable house of my own."

"Yes, Will," replied Miss Mattie, astonished that he should choose such a subject at such a time.

"Yes," he continued, "and I want a wife too. You often said you'd like to do something for me, Mattie. Suppose you take the job?"

How much of glancing at a thing in one's mind as a beautiful improbability will ever make such a cold fact less astonishing? Miss Mattie eyed him with eyes that saw not. Speech was stricken from her.

Red caught fright. He sprang forward and took her hand. "Couldn't you do it, Mattie?" said he. There was a world of pleading in the tone Miss Mattie looked up, her own honest self. All the little feminine shrinkings left her immediately.

"Ah, but I could, Will!" she said.

Lettis came up on the stoop unheeded. He stopped, then gingerly turned and made his way back on tiptoe, holding his arms like wings.

"Well, by George!" he murmured. "I'll come back in a little while, when I'll be more welcome."

He spoke to Red in strong reproach that night in the barn. "You never told me a word, you old sinner!" said he.

"Tell you the honest truth, Let," replied Red earnestly, looking up from drawing off a boot, "I didn't know it myself till you told me about it."

They talked it all over a long time before blowing out the light, but then the little window shut its bright eye, and the only life the midnight stars saw in Fairfield was Miss Mattie, her elbow on the casement, looking far, far out into the tranquil night and thinking mistily.

THE END.

## Voice of Experience.

"In making an article to a magazine" asked the literary tyro, "is there any peculiar way of arranging the stamps so as to convey the idea to the editor that I am an old hand?"

"You bet there is," answered Percival. "Be sure to arrange enough of them on the inside to prepay the return postage if you expect ever to see the article again."—Chicago Tribune.

## The Morning Tea.

A few years ago a sister of mine called in to see an old lady who lived in a little cottage in Lincolnshire and in course of conversation happened to mention that she had a cold sponge-down every morning.

"Law, miss," said the old lady, "and does your mother know?"

"Yes, certainly, and she quite approves."

"Well," said the old lady, "Ah washes mi fauce livery daay, an' Ah washes mi neck once a week, but Ah've niver bin washed all ower since Ah was a baby."

This good lady lived to the ripe old age of ninety-three.—Cor. London News.

## The Lotus Eaters.

The race of people to whom the name "Lotus Eaters" was applied was a Lybian tribe, known to the Greeks as early as the time of Homer. Herodotus describes their country and says that a caravan route led from it to Egypt. The lotus still grows there in great abundance—a prickly shrub bearing a fruit of a sweet taste, compared by Herodotus to that of the date. It is still eaten by the natives, and a kind of wine is made from its juice.