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# Red Saunders

... By ...  
**HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS**

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST PAGE)

Miss Mattie told him she thought that was noble of him, which tribute Red took as medicine and shifted the subject with speed to practical affairs. He asked Miss Mattie how much money she had and how she managed to make out. Now, it was one of the canons of good manners in Fairfield not to speak of material matters, perhaps because there was so little material matter in the community, but Miss Mattie, doomed to a thousand irksome petty economies, had often longed for a sympathetic ear to pour into it a good honest complaint of having to do this and that. She could not exactly go this far with Cousin Will, but she could say it was pretty hard to get along and gave some details. She felt that she knew him so very well in those few hours! Red heard with nods of assent. He had sensed the conditions at once.

"It ain't any fun skidding on the thin ice," said he when they had concluded the talk. "I've had to count the beans I put in the pot, and it made me hate arithmetic worse than when I went over yonder to school. Well, them days have gone by for you, Mattie." He reached down and, pulling out a green roll, slapped it on the center table. "Blow that in and limber up and remember that there's more behind it."

Miss Mattie's pride rose at a leap. "Will," she said, "I hope you don't think I've told you this to get money from you."

He leaned forward, put his hand on her shoulder and held her eyes with a sudden access of sternness and authority.

"And I hope, Mattie," said he, "that you don't think that I think anything of the kind."

The cousins stared into each other's eyes for a full minute; then Miss Mattie spoke. "No, Will," said she, "I don't believe you do."

"I shouldn't think I did," retorted Red. "What in thunder would I do with all that money? Why, good Lord, girl, I could paper your house with \$10 bills! Now you try to fly them green kites, like I tell you."

Miss Mattie broke down. The not fully realized strain of fifteen years had made itself felt when the cord snapped. "I don't know how to thank you. I don't know what to say. Oh, William, it seems too good to be true!"

"What you crying about, Mattie?" said he, in sore distress. "Now hold on! Listen to me a minute! There's something I want you to do for me."

"What is it?" she asked, drying her eyes.

"For dinner tomorrow," he replied, "let's have a roast of beef about that size," indicating a washtub.

The diversion was complete. "Why, Will! What would we ever do with it?" said she.

"Do with it? Why, eat it!"

"But we couldn't eat all that!"

"Then throw what's left to the cats. You ain't going to fall down on me the first favor I ask?" with mock seriousness.

"You shall have the roast of beef. 'Pears to me that you're fond of your stomach, Will," said Miss Mattie, with a recovering smile.

"I have a good stomach that's always done the right thing by me when I've done the right thing by it," said Red. "And, moreover, just look at the constitution I have to support. But say, old lady, look at that!" pointing to the clock. "Eleven-thirty; time decent people were putting up for the night."

The words brought to an acute stage a wandering fear which had passed through Miss Mattie's mind at intervals during the evening. Where was she to look for sleeping accommodations for a man? She revolted against the convention that in her own mind as well as the rest of Fairfield forbade the use of her house for the purpose. Long habit of thought had made these necessities constitutional. It was almost as difficult for Miss Mattie to say "I'll fix up your bed right there on the sofa" as it would have been for Red to pick a man's pocket, yet when she thought of his instant and open generosity and what a dismal return therefor it would be to thrust him out for reasons which she divined would have no meaning for him, she heroically resolved to throw custom to the winds and speak.

But the difficulty was cut in another fashion.

"There's a little barn in the backyard that caught my eye," said Red, "and if you'll lend me a blanket I'll roll it out there."

"Sleep in the barn! You'll not do any such thing!" cried Miss Mattie. "You'll sleep right here on the sofa or upstairs in my bed, just as you choose."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather not. So help me Bob, I'd smother in here. Had the damndest time coming on that ever was—hotels. Little white rooms with the walls coming in on you. Worse than rattlesnakes for keeping a man awake. Reminds me of the hospital. Horse fell on me once and smashed me up so that I had to be sent to get patched up again, and I never struck such a month as that

since I was born. 'T'd ought to me a mustn't move, but I told him I'd chuck him out of the window if he tried to stop me, and up I got. I'd have gone dead sure if they'd held me a week more. I speak for the barn, Mattie, and I speak real loud; that is, I mean to say I'm going to sleep in the barn, unless there's somebody a heap larger than you on the premises. Now, there's no use for you to talk—I'm going to do just as I say."

"Well, I think that's just dreadful!" said Miss Mattie. "I'd like to know what folks will think of me to hear I turned my own cousin out in the barn." Her voice trailed off a little at the end as the gist of what they might say if he stayed in the house occurred to her. "Well," she continued, "if you're set I suppose I can't object." Miss Mattie was not a good hand at playing a part.

"I'm set," said Red. "Get me a blanket." As she came in with this he added, "Say, Mattie, could you let me have a loaf of bread? I've got a habit of wanting something to eat in the middle of the night."

"Certainly! Don't you want some butter with it? Here, I'll fix it for you on a plate."

"No, don't waste dish washing. I'll show you how to fix it." He cut the loaf of bread in half, pulled out a portion of the soft part and filled the hole with butter. "There we are, and nothing to bother with afterward."

"That's a right smart notion, Will, but you'll want a knife."

In answer he drew out a leather case from his breast pocket and opened it.



Miss Mattie stood in the half opened door and listened.

Within was knife, fork, spoon and two flat boxes for salt and pepper. "You see, I'm fixed," said he.

"Isn't that a cute trick?" she cried admiringly. "You're ready for most anything."

"Sure," said Red. "Now, good night, old lady." He bent down in so natural a fashion that Miss Mattie had kissed him before she knew what she was going to do.

Down to the barn, through the soft June evening, went Red, whistling a Mexican love song most melodiously.

Miss Mattie stood in the half opened door and listened. Without was barn and starlight, and the spirit of flowers breathed out in odors. The quaint and pretty tune rose and fell, unheeded, lifted along as it listed without regard for law and order. It struck Miss Mattie to the heart. Her girlhood, with its misty dreams of happiness, came back to her on the wings of music.

"Isn't that a sweet tune?" she said, with a lump in her throat.

She went up into her room and sat down a moment in confusion, trying to grasp the reality of all that had happened. In the middle of the belief that these things were not so came the regret of a sensitive mind for errors committed. She remembered, with a sudden sinking, that she had not thanked him for the necktie. And the money lay even now on the parlor table where he had cast it! This added the physical fear of thieves. Down she went and got the money, counted out, to her unmitigated astonishment, \$300 and thrust it beneath her pillow, with a shiver. She wished she had thought to tell him to take care of it. But suppose the thieves were to fall on him as he slept? Red's friends would have spent their sympathy on the thieves. She rejoiced that the money was where it was. Then she tried to remember what she had said throughout the evening.

"Well, I suppose I must have acted like a ninny," she concluded. "But isn't he just splendid!" And as Cousin Will's handsome face, with its daring, kind eyes, came to her vision she felt comforted. "I don't believe but what he'll make every allowance for how excited I was," said she. "He seems to understand those things for all he's sent a large man. Well, it doesn't seem as if it could be true." With a

half sigh, Miss Mattie knelt and sent up her modest petition to her Maker and got into her little white bed.

In the meantime Red's actions would have awakened suspicion. He hunted around until he found a tin can, then lit a match and rummaged the barn amid terror stricken squawks from the inhabitants, the hens.

"One, two, three, four," he counted. "Reckon I can last out till morning on that. Mattie, she's white people—just the nicest I ever saw—but she ain't used to providing for a full grown man."

He stepped to the back of the barn and looked about him. "Nobody can see me from here," he said in satisfaction. Then he scraped together a pile of chips and sticks and built a fire, filled the tin can at the brook, sat it on two stones over the fire, rolled himself a cigarette and waited. A large, yellow toment came out of the brush and threw his green headlights on him, meandering tentatively.

"Hello, pussy!" said Red. "You hungry too? Well, just wait a minute and we'll help that feeling. Like bread, pussy?" The cat gobbled the morsel greedily, came closer and begged for more. The tin can boiled over. Red popped the eggs in, puffed his cigarette to a bright coal and looked at his watch by the light. "Ge! Ten minutes more now!" said he. "Hardly seems to me as if I could wait." He pulled the watch out several times. "What's the matter with the d—n thing? I believe it's stopped," he growled. But at last "Time!" he shouted gleefully, kicked the can over and gathered up its treasures in his handkerchief.

"Now, Mr. Cat, we're going to do some real eating," said he. "Just sit right down and make yourself at home. This is kind of fun, by jinks!" Down went the eggs, and down went the loaf of bread in generous slices, never forgetting a fair share for the cat.

"Woosh! I feel better!" cried Red. "And now for some sleep." He swung up into the hayloft, spread the blanket on the still fragrant old hay and rolled himself up in a trice.

"I did a good turn when I came on here," he mused. "If I have got only one relation, she's a dandy—so pretty and quiet and nice. She's a marker for all I've got, is Mattie."

The cat came up, purring and "making bread." He sniffed feline fashion at Red's face.

"Foo! Shoo! Go 'way, pussy! Settle yourself down and we'll pound our ear for another forty miles. I like you first rate when you don't walk on my face." He stretched and yawned enormously. "Yes, sir, Mattie's all right!" said he. "A-a-a-ll ri!"—And Chanta Seechee Red was in the land of dreams.

Here, back in God's country, within twenty miles of the place where he was born, the wanderer laid him down again, and in spite of raid and foray, whisky and poker cards, wear and tear, hard times and, hardest test of all, sudden fortune, he was much the same impulsive, honest, generous, devil-may-care boy who had left there twenty-four years ago.

#### CHAPTER V.

THE next morning when Red awoke arrows of gold were shooting through the holes in the old barn, and outside the bird life, the twittering and chirping, the fluent whistle and the warble, the cackle and the pompous crow, were in full chorus.

"Where am I at this time?" said he as he took in the view. "Oh, I remember!" and his heart leaped. "I'm in my own home, by the Lord!"

He went down to the brook and washed, drying hands and face on the silk neckerchief, which is meant for use as well as for decoration.

In the meantime Miss Mattie had awakened with a sense of something delightful at hand, the meaning of which escaped her for the time. And then she remembered and sprang out of bed like a girl. She went to the window, threw open the shutters and let the stirring morning air flow in. This had been her habit for a long time. The window faced away from the road, and no one could see who was not on Miss Mattie's own premises.

But this morning Red had wandered around. Stopping at the rosebushes, he picked a rose.

"That has the real old time smell," he said as he held it to his nose. "Sweetbriars are good, and I don't go back on 'em, but they ain't got the same old time smell."

But in hard, he walked beneath Miss Mattie's windows, and he was the first thing her eye fell upon.

Her startled exclamation made him look up before she had time to withdraw.

"Hello, there!" he called joyfully. "How do you open up this day? You look pretty well!" he added, with a note of admiration. Miss Mattie had the way her hair which is never in better order than when left to its own devices. Her idea of coiffure was not the best becoming that could have been selected, as she felt that a "young" style of hairdressing was foolish for a single woman of her years. Now, with the pretty soft hair flying, her eyes still humid with sleep and a touch of color in her face from the surprise, relieved against the fleecy shawl she had thrown about her shoulders, she was incontestably both a discreet and pretty picture. Yet Miss Mattie could not forget the bare feet and nightgown, although they were hidden from masculine eyes by wood and plaster, and she was embarrassed. Still, with all the supersensitive fancies, Miss Mattie had a strong backbone of New England common sense. She answered that she felt very well indeed and, to cover any awkwardness, inquired what he had in his hand.