

ST. JOHN STAR, SATURDAY, AUGUST 18, 1908.

# LAST CHANCE IN THE WATER-WAGON - By Allison Yewell.

Cities are sometimes astounded. Jokes are made, sometimes at the expense of the water-wagon. But seldom, indeed, is a camp paralyzed as was Last Chance in the matter of Jase Hickett.

Chicago dates everything from "the Big" to "the little" from "the big" to "the little." "California from '48," and so on. East Chance marked in red letters the day when Jase climbed onto the water-wagon.

No incoherent or so ruthlessly disillusions a coming people or deal an undisturbed tradition such as a solar eclipse. The thing was utterly unprecedented. It struck at the foundations of Last Chance society, and resentment ran neck and neck with bewilderment.

"What!" exclaimed Last Chance, when the first hint of the extraordinary occurrence was breathed. Then when the hint was "made more certain," as the bays would say, Last Chance expressed itself thus wise: "Well, I'll be—"

Last Chance was a bit incoherent. Just what it said might have been one thing and it might have been another. But it sounded like "I'm damned," or "I'm framed," or something of that sort.

Why, if every other man in the camp had sworn off, Jase would have been relied upon to hold out manfully to the last. Hadn't that Harvard chap that came out here to get back his nature dined him "Hic Jacet" instead of Jase Hickett, because it could so often be said, as one stood in the barroom of the Golden Fawn, "here lies" Jase Hickett?

When it became known that Jase had refused to drink, the news circulated with the rapidity of a stray bolt of lightning among a bunch of marooned cow-punchers. Sickness was so rare in Last Chance that nobody had any idea of "first aids to the injured," or any interest in therapeutics.

We all knew that Jase must be in a bad way, but there wasn't any doctor nearer than Greeley, where you would call the veterinarian up at the mine, whose specialty was epizootic, a doctor. We didn't think Jase and that, but Bud Wilson, set off post-haste for Greeley, while I hit the trail for Jase's cabin, mentally wording the fun of the day, which I expected to call upon him to deliver.

"What's the trouble, old man?" I asked as tenderly as I could. "Do you feel an ingrowing flatulency, a difficulty in breathing, loss of memory, and blue spots before your eyes?"

I had read something like this out of a patent medicine advertisement I found on the mine and I thought, "Now don't you get any, Bill," I exclaimed Jase, frowning up. He didn't appear to be sick at all. On the other hand he looked better than I had ever seen him before. The cabin was straightened up with the propriety, and Jase knew it. There was an implicit agreement about him himself that was suspicious. He had washed up and his hair was combed.

"I don't want none of your almanacs. But she was as true as steel, as

truce as the sunflower to the sun, true to the memory of what I was. I never dreamed she would visit this town, but it seems that some teachers' association is coming to Denver on an excursion, or to a convention, or something of the sort, and she is going to shake the bunch at Denver and come here. I have tried to keep her away, but I can't."

"But why don't you go to Denver and stay off I'll stake you."

"Well, you see, I've told her what a prominent citizen I am. My official duties keep me working like a minute mule about fifteen hours out of the twenty-four."

"Your official duties?" I queried.

"I don't want any more officers—not even a marshal."

"You see, I am the mayor, and an office justice of the peace, and town marshal."

I whistled.

"Well, you have been going it pretty strong, haven't you? Last Chance hasn't got enough people to make a village of the fourteenth class."

"Colorado law she won't know any other about," replied Jase. "It won't be any surprise to her to find a full set of municipal officers in good working order."

"She is to stay at Jim Brodie's Palace Hotel, Mrs. Jim will see to her while she is here, and I'm to grubstake her."

"She will find me sober and clothed in my right mind and a suit of clothes, with a blue shirt on the side—that is, on the back. She will find me driving into the town of the mine, mountains in the daytime, and in the early hours of the night, and I will see me arrest a few of you tough galsos just for the preservation of the public peace, and then, next day, it will be back to the mines for me."

I listened in bewilderment.

"Now how are you going to work all this?"

"You fellows are going to help me," he said coolly. "You have elected me mayor, and you must know, and this position carries with it the judicial work. I shall allow you to select your own jury, and you are about the limit in the way of neglected opportunities and general good-for-nothingness. I am going to put you in charge of the mine, and what's all this got to do with your sudden reformation?"

"But I was just naturally shiftless. I thought a little plain talk would be best."

"Come here!" I echoed. "What in the name of goodness is she coming here for?"

"Well, you see, I have been writing stuff about this camp, and I thought I'd write a chamber-of-commerce boomer from Denver. I've cautioned her that it is a wild western camp and all that. But I didn't have the face to admit how worthless I was. I cared at first. God knows I did. I respected her to get after a while, and I started going to the mine. I thought she would meet somebody else and forget me."

"And you don't think people will say things?"

"D—drat people! It's just you and me an' 'Goodie' it's a helper engine down to Como, an' who's to know? You'll strike Denver with the swell on the regular—an' I bet I'll be tame as the ride I give you. But if it's you, Bess, I'd make up my mind what's right for me, an' then open my throttle an' run 'em down to my own schedule, whizzin' through such sooty minded folk like the lightning express through cattle. Give 'em a warning too for right o' way, an' p'raps a few cinders left in their eyes'll keep 'em from lookin' for dirt in yours."

Laughing, Bess blew him a tantalizing kiss as she hurried away to prepare for the evening's adventure.

"Silly! I mean it is proper."

"Now, little woman, the track's clear. So don't be calling 'red light' ahead when it's all white running for the wedding. It's no fault of mine we ain't married. But won't freeman 'Goodie' Gorman chaperon us equal to any petticoat highbinder? 'Course you'll be welcome to sleep what's left of the night with cousin Jennie, at Como, an' you can go on down to Denver with the regular in the morning."

"You know, Sunny, I actually wish we were married—cause—"

"Now you're going some, Bess. But there's the license an' we've hardly got time to couple up before—"

"Down breaks, sir, I mean just for tonight," and she drew away justly. "But when wedding trains are made up it's for a long run, sir. You can't get agin' without somebody bein' wrecked. No, a tie up's a tie up, an' if we run at all it's on the same track—an' plum to the Great Home yoution."

New Orleans, and they were spending their honeymoon here.

"But I had written so much boom stuff that she just thought I was working overtime as an amateur humorist, and advised me to send some of my jokes to a Sunday supplement."

"But say, Bill," he said with sudden seriousness, "this isn't to be a mere flim-flam game on a dear little woman. If you boys just help me out, I'm going to brace up, put a good, strong, stoupe under the falling walls, timber up generally, and when she goes back home I'm going to work at that little old hole in the ground out there, that's a good bunch of coin in it if it is only worked right. I mean it, every word of it. The first step I took was to get the lower step of the water-wagon."

I grasped Jase's hand and wrung it heartily.

"I'll help you, Jase," I exclaimed, feeling sort of solemn-like, just as I had done when I saw "Hazel Kirt" down at Denver. "The boys'll chip in on the game, and if Last Chance doesn't fall all the promises you've made, it will not be our fault."

Last Chance wasn't such a terribly tough place, but the idea of being respectable according to the law books was just a trifle humorous. The Carroll gang was not looked upon with any great favor, and that was a couple of points for us, for the Carroll gang was made up of a half-dozen maverick card-sharps and suspected claim-jumpers who had come into their money a month or so before. The gang had kept pretty quiet, but it was chiefly because the fellows knew we had the drop on them.

The boys fell with the humor of the plan proposed by Jase, and when, Glenwood dashed up in front of the post-office and the old shakedown was called the Police Force, I wish could have seen and heard the reception which was tendered Miss Norah Higgins. I wish I could have seen the fine edges of some of the things Jase had written.

I didn't blame Jase a bit for being ashamed to own his dereliction. Rather, I marvelled how any man could do it. If he had been a boy and physically when he had such a sweet little woman waiting for him back in Denver, he would have been a different man.

There was quite a little bunch of fellows hanging around the stage as it passed when the stage stopped, Jim Brodie, proprietor of the Palace, and who acted as postmaster on the side, and a crowd of miners, and a few saluted Miss Higgins with a sweep that would have done credit to Caesar.

"Miss Higgins, I presume," said Brodie, with a delicate rising inflection, and she was especially noticeable when he had a few extras under his belt.

"You will pardon the informality of my reception, let me bid you welcome to Last Chance. Last Chance is a town with open arms—this was true in principle, so far as most of the

fellow were concerned—"and I am requested by his honor the mayor to express his regrets that an important council-committee meeting prevents his immediate presence, but that he will call upon you within an hour."

With these words Jim escorted the young lady into the Palace Hotel, where Mrs. Brodie met her and at once took upon herself the duties of hostess and guardian.

Jase, during these proceedings, was playing checkers, with his nose on the window-pane in the barroom of the hotel, but it was thought that the bluff of his being occupied with city business would have a good effect.

"If you will permit me, I shall introduce you to a few of our prominent citizens," suggested Jim graciously, as Miss Higgins blushed prettily at the warmth of her reception. "This is our city treasurer, Mr. Simpson; this is our street commissioner, Mr. Wilkins; this is our assessor, Mr. O'Neil; this is our city clerk, Mr. Jenkins; and this is our deputy sheriff, Mr. Walker. I have the honor to act as city attorney. Allow me to come to our mid and wish that your stay may be long and pleasant."

Miss Higgins replied to this stately welcome in a becomingly confused manner, and everybody was at ease a few minutes. There were two or three men in the camp whom we could permit ourselves to introduce to Miss Higgins, and before her hour was up Jase came bustling up, red-faced and out of breath, apologizing for not being able to meet the stage and rather wearily brushing his hair back off the heated mayoral brow. He was, of course, and we all swore to Lynch Jase Hickett if he didn't make good to that little woman.

What they said in private we of course did not know. But by dint of the hardest kind of work, chiding, and pended along the line of self-restraint, we did our part, and for four days we united give Miss Higgins a lesson of high life—and this was not so difficult as it might seem, for Last Chance has an altitude of nearly nine thousand feet.

We escorted her through the mines at committee meetings. We drove her over every wagon-trail that was a safe and sound route. We showed her that could only be traversed by a good, healthy burro with a pair of first-class drivers.

But one of the funniest things was the mock council meeting we got up for her special benefit. Then one of the boys, just to show that he was a good fellow, stole a mythical set of drills and a sack of bacon from the city treasurer's cabin. Jason presided at the trial, and the last Miss Higgins saw of the rampant culprit he was, ostensibly, on his way to the Canon City penitentiary; actually, he went to Greeley for supplies.

Little by little the virus of respectability—possibly the sky-plot at Greeley—was being called off the leaven of righteousness—took effect.

"I feel better than I ever did in my

life," Jason remarked to me one day. "If we could just get rid of this Carroll bunch, I think we would have a town that would soon have Jerusalem using the whip to keep up with us for enterprise and general goodness. By the way, Bill, I heard Bud Wilson make a remark that set me to thinking. He was talking with Carroll at the Golden Eagle, and I heard him say something about Wednesday night at the pike. He said there ought to be three thousand dollars apiece."

"What's that you say, Jase?" I exclaimed. Bud Wilson was one of the worst of the Carroll bunch, and the pike was the worst spot on the road I had to pass.

Wednesday night was my night to have the pay for the mine boys in my strong-box, and if the gang had figured they would be three thousand dollars apiece, there would be about four of the toughest citizens in this part of Colorado to deal with.

"I guess you have a pretty good idea of what it means, Jase," I replied, "and I'm much obliged for the tip. Of course it's supposed to be a secret when I carry the pay for the boys, but it seems to me you have found it out somehow. I can count on you, I know."

"Well, play a lone hand, Jim," replied Jase. "I have instructed the president of the common council, Mr. Hickett, to order the town marshal Jase Hickett, to take such steps as are necessary for the preservation of the public peace."

"And Mayor Hickett has assured us both that he will co-operate in every way in his power to prevent the growth of anything so nearly approaching graft in this municipality as the unauthorized appropriation of the miners' pay by a gang of common, ornery read-agents."

This conversation "took place and was held" Tuesday afternoon. When it was announced that the Wednesday night council meeting was postponed, nobody thought anything special about it. But I confess that I felt just a bit more secure in knowing that, resolutely wrapped up in his overcoat and disguised as a respectable passenger, Jase, the best shot in Last Chance, was inside my old wagon with the other passengers.

"I suppose my hands were expecting to go up when they were told to, but they certainly did go up all-fired quick when they saw that the boys were stepped out from under the dead pine about halfway through the ugly gap known as the pike."

"Up with your hands!" snarled a voice that I thought was Carroll's. "Get down off your seat and let's see what you've got," he commanded.

I climbed down, and while one man stood with his back to the stage, another approached the stage from each side. The fourth man stood to one side, sort of leaning the side of the stage.

Well, there was something doing in three flaps of a coyote's tail. Both the fellows who were approaching the stage went down as if they had been struck with a ton of ore, and Carroll found himself looking into a gun that

I'll bet he thought was four feet long.

The fellow that stood at the horses' heads somehow got tangled up with a six-shooter that I happened to have with me, and the upshot of the whole thing was that when we ambled into Last Chance, bright and early the next morning, Jase was resting his feet on the recumbent forms of Ed. Carroll and Bud Wilson, and holding an oblong box on his lap.

We didn't bother about picking up the other two fellows. There wasn't any undertaken in Last Chance, anyhow, and besides, we had a pretty big load already.

Jase took the boys' demonstrations of appreciation modestly, and improved the opportunity to make a speech. "Gentlemen," he said, "in laying down the honors you have bestowed upon me, I want to say that you have done a great deal more for me than I have done for you or Last Chance. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to show you that my administration has set its foot down on all forms of graft, get-rich-quick schemes, and the like."

"Now I'm going to turn the care of state over to some other aspirant for political honors, and get to work digging a house and lot on Capitol Hill out of this little hole in the ground I've got here, and, in retiring from public life, I propose three cheers for the municipality of Last Chance."

The cheers were given with a will, and it was worth a month's pay to see how Norah Higgins beamed with pleasure over it all. Then I made a little speech myself.

"Friends and fellow-citizens," I said, "what will you have in yours? Now, it seems to me, I went on after a pause, 'that it would ill become a square sport and a good citizen to resign in the manner in which his honor has proposed. I have a motion to make, gentlemen, if I can find a second."

"I move that the temporary organization of this municipality be made permanent for the next two years. All those in favor of the motion say 'aye.'"

You could have heard the "ayes" half way to the pike. Miss Higgins was well posted in parliamentary law, but she thought that everything went in Colorado.

She herself stayed, though, in deference to the wishes of the mayor and some prominent citizens of Last Chance.

# THE MASTER ENGINEER - By Mary Talbot Campbell.

"Bess, do you want that 'thriller' of yours tonight? Just say the word an' I'll go—"

"Sunny" grinned down at his sweet-heart, his homely, lovable face alight with eager expectation. On the pay roll he was "James Gorman, Engineer," but his intimates wrought his cheery nature into a nickname which stuck. "You don't mean a ride on my engine?"

"Sure thing! I've got orders to take 'Old 40' down the High Line division of the C. & S. far as Como, to pull the passenger up grade tomorrow. Now I've got you here at Boreas for the day, we couldn't ask a better chance. Bess, one of the highest roads in the State winds down hill from close on to 12,000 feet at a pretty lively gait, like the fellow in the Latin book when he got started for—you know."

"O, Sunny, can I?"

A freckled face of fresh, Western girlhood was lifted excitedly, as Bessie Morgan clasped her hands about the railroader's arm, her feminine mind busy with the prospect.

"It's up to you, Bess. I said you could and will make me queen of the cab."

"Silly! I mean it is proper."

"Now, little woman, the track's clear. So don't be calling 'red light' ahead when it's all white running for the wedding. It's no fault of mine we ain't married. But won't freeman 'Goodie' Gorman chaperon us equal to any petticoat highbinder? 'Course you'll be welcome to sleep what's left of the night with cousin Jennie, at Como, an' you can go on down to Denver with the regular in the morning."

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"Now you're going some, Bess. But there's the license an' we've hardly got time to couple up before—"

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"O, Sunny,"

"O, Honey."

"Don't be funny! But I'll try a short run with you tonight and then we'll see."

"I wish you'd take a thorough tickle, Bess, but I'll try tonight. An' some day you'll drag my train an' then 'All aboard for Happiness!'"

"Thank you so much, it's all so interesting. I feel as if I were in a new world with no end of wonders all about me."

Goodie grinned with pleasure, his face shining out like a ruddy tableau as he fed big chunks of coal to the grating maw of the firebox and "Sunny" jumped aboard.

"Hello, there," was her lover's brief greeting as he stepped to the engine driver's box. An arm, sleeved in blue denim, waved the signal and a cry "All right!" rang out. A whistle shrieked an echoing wail down the heights while with the deafening clatter of the bell Bess felt a titanic thrum.

"Hold hard, little girl. Mind your own eyes. We're off."

She saw his strong hand reach for the throttle, opening it with deafening force, and through the almost ceasing action Bess knew her first rival in "No. 40." The great black throat cleared its way with guttural hoarseness as the monster of iron and steel moved answering to his touch like some mighty steed as it glided ponderously forward.

In the shadow-haunted cab, darkness gloomed save within the radius of a small lantern showing both steam and water gauge and the dial of the chronometer.

As smoothly they cleft the night's mystery, Goodie fed the fire, flooding the place with a ruddy glow as well as a blistering heat. Looming to exaggerated proportions, the girl saw her lover, master of this leaping, quivering force, his eyes unswervingly to the front, a firm grip fast on the steel throttle, his thought riveted on his precious freight.

To Bess, a new womanhood was born as she dwelt on her helplessness, relying upon his power. With enlarged vision she looked round the roadbed of

the future, to see the covering rails of love and trust meet in a shining track of faith, which would surely lead to the land of Heart's Desire, with such a man at the throttle.

The "hijper" had the right of way to Como, and Sunny was determined that Bess should not be disappointed. He turned the wheel with the controlled recklessness of perfect mastery he gave "No. 40" a little reign.

The rush of keen air, the rugged mountains shrouding one another against a star studded sky on one side and what seemed a faithless, night-filled abyss on the other, awed the girl into shy thoughts of the Great Terminus.

But Goodie swung wide the door of the fire-box at its iron chime, and fitting ravine and towering peaks blazed in the red light of some hellish region through which they were dashing, frantic to escape the freman a captured demon making burnt offerings. Then the door slams shut and all is obliterated by a darker mystery than before, while lurid imaginings chase in scurrying cavalcades through the night with fantastic Bess.

"Sit tight, girl! We give her some head here!" shouted Sunny, and the iron steed feeling the loosened rein swings into free action.

Bess clutches the window frame tight in sympathetic excitement. I wish the black horse shows his paces, his strong breath of setting steam beating in her face and whitening the height, while the heart of the lion driving wheels pounding over rails and frogs pulse like lungs fighting for more air. The cold fingers of the night ruffled her hair, whipping it stingingly across her face. Cinders smarting like sharp elms rained down as she leaned out, breathless, exultant eyes glowering in the helving fire from the stack, with its backward swinging spark gemmed banner of smoke.

A startled night bird seemed to stand still in the air, a sculptured thing with widespread wings. Showers of cinders clucked with ineffectual force on her

protecting glasses; but Bess drew back gasping, in an ice pack above the waist, while below, in the sweltering heat of the cab, she felt in a steaming sweat her face against the cold of the night. Her face smarted at the swift change from frigid to torrid zone till Goodie, flushing out the coal dust from behind the fire box with his hose, reached for her wad of waste and soon a delicious coolness assuaged her fevered brow. "If the heavens of hell soundless 'Thanka!' was blown back with the sparks."

"She gets to go!" some now "yell" the first impact he hoped to hold "yell" the freman, trumpeting through his hands. Goodie felt the infection of her exhilaration and a new pleasure in her calling.

Back swings the injection lever and the roar of steaming steam, water churning into the pipe coils of the boiler and dinnang clang of metal pulse sympathetically through her young blood. Trillidity is stamped by a rush of pure elation and delicious indifference as to the lesson. Her cap is whipped from her head with a tear.

"Zip!" Lights streak by and thoughts soar while the girl thrills body and soul, alive every inch of her. The man up in front steals a brief backward look, his will unable longer to resist the compass pointing of his true heart. In a red glory which Goodie accommodately affords, Bess glows upon him rapturously, a radiant tumble of hair, white teeth and great gleaming headlights, through which the fiered of a dauntless spirit fires his heart.

His eyes caress her. Then darkness—and from the heights above the engineer sees hell open.

His glance, reaching beyond the girl, watches the drunken rolling of "No. 7," headlight, reeling down a steep curve above them. A second look convinced Sunny that she was a runaway beyond the limit of the utter destruction of all, with the following freight to pile up on the finish. "No. 7" raced about 2,000 feet behind him, eternity seemed but a foot ahead.

The man thanked God for that. Then a spurt of speed to startle a struts-

ful girl! Intrepid, resourceful, experienced, his all at stake, Sunny formed his plan of action in a second. Heart of steel, he turned the wheel, the soul behind him, but brain clear and face steadily to the front, he tried the one thing with a chance of life—to catch the runaway.

To do this "40" must be spurred into a madened leap toward a probable death ahead in order that the obliterating power behind might crash into her with lessened shock. If alive after the first impact he hoped to hold "yell" the freman, trumpeting through his hands. Goodie felt the infection of her exhilaration and a new pleasure in her calling.

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"Old 40" took the bit in her teeth and bolted.

Bess felt herself and Sunny heart to heart and soul to soul, with the flesh swept away with hers break into the night. Roar, clang, thunderous rumblings shook the earth. Another life flamed to a resigned but exultant soul, launched to conquest or death with the one dearest on earth.

"Things glared red. There was a hurrying crash! The walls of being knew the birth pang of a heaven-sent hope as '40' shot down the line like a cannon ball for fifty feet or more, when '7' smashed her again, but to feel the clamping grip of her master.

"Yelling for sand, Sunny reversed like one possessed. A fiery blaze of protesting color flashed from the tortured rails in angry display as the steel shrieked like a thing in the death throes beneath the grinding wheels.

Clinched with iron hold the huge cogs slid down grade in their death grapple for fully 5,000 feet, though Goodie threw sand by the bushel and Sunny had a full head of steam on the "reverse."

At last, in massive rest, they panted to a standstill, wide unblinking eyes yellowing high teeth bared, feet this side of annihilation and Windy Point.

An aching peace settled on the three, while the physical reclaimed their immortal part through the tyranny of tortured nerves and sore flesh.

From a sooty corner of the cab where she had been thrown, a bruised but glorified girl lifted adoring eyes to Sunny, her stiffened fingers still locked about a roll of waste.

With a grating sob, a blackened, white-faced man gripped her roughly to him, his mouth closed to all words.

"My—Man!"

Sunny's hand shaking on her roughened hair as his hammering tongue groped for speech:

"Little girl, it was—the Master Engineer—that saw us through!"

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