

The New Doctor

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"I do well enough. Why don't you pay your toll?"

The doctor broke the habit of a lifetime and returned a soft answer.

"My contract with the mining company provides that I shall not pay toll. The company is heavily interested in the road."

"Well, I'm interested, too; and I don't intend that you should have any favors."

"You'll have to settle that with the company, sir. Good day."

Catheart hoped to get away before his temper broke; but as he finished speaking, the old man, whip in hand, jumped to the ground and seized his horse by the bit, leaving his own to the keeper.

"We'll settle it here and now!" he retorted. "You pay toll or you don't go on this road."

The insolent action loosed all the ire in Catheart's nature and it flooded the more violently for having been dammed so long.

"I will go on this road and I won't pay toll! But first I'm going to tell you something. You've had things your own way in this region so long that you've come to think you own every man, woman and child in it. You don't know a real man when you see one; you've got people and cattle and dollars all mixed up."

His anger and disgust had given an increasingly ugly rasp to his voice, and there was, finally, nothing in his manner and tone but temper and contempt as he said:

"Get out of my way or I'll drive over you!"

Cyrus Drummond towered, for a second, white and tense, at the horse's head. Then the whip in his hand was raised and he started toward the man who had reviled him. One step and another and he was halted, a six-shooter levelled at his breast.

Catheart's lips barely parted as he said:

"One more step will be your last."

Time seemed imprisoned between their glaring eyes.

Then old Tom, holding the sorrel, quavered:

"You wouldn't shoot Cyrus Drummond!"

"I would! And if he ever gets in my way again, I'll do it without warning!"

Catheart flicked the reins over his horse and drove on. Nor was his anger forgotten until he reached the mine and was confronted by the results of the premature explosion of a blast. Thereafter, a nightmare of broken bones and mangled flesh kept him at work until well into the following day; and it was not until he was on his way back to town, after a few hours of sleep, that his mind reverted to his meeting with Evelyn's father.

Catheart was not subject to extreme nervous reactions; but the strain he had endured had left him unusually sensitive, and he felt poignantly a likeness between the effects of the explosion at the mine and the angry clash of wills between himself and Cyrus Drummond. Each had been disorganizing, disrupting, disintegrating. Instead of satisfaction at his victory, he was conscious of the moral crudity of the whole scene.

His spirits sank lower still when he thought of Evelyn, and he prayed that she might never know of what had occurred.

"I've got a longer row to hoe than I had before," he thought, "but I'll hoe it in spite of myself and Cyrus Drummond."

The weeks that followed were, fortunately, filled with work, the exacting and exhausting duties of the country doctor; and Catheart, driving thru heavy autumn storms or working late in his laboratory—he must do much of his own pharmacy and all of his bacteriology—gained in strength and peaceableness.

One night, just as he was about to go to bed, he was again summoned to the Drummond house. Mrs. Drummond met him at the door.

"Doctor," she said, "I've called you to see my husband. He is very ill."

Catheart shook his head in protest.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Drummond; you don't know what there has been between us."

"Yes, doctor, I do know; but"—she came to him and, grasping the lapels of his great-coat, looked straight into his eyes—"I ask you to see him for my sake."

For her sake and for Evelyn he would see the devil himself.

"Of course," he said, "that settles it; but I must insist on Dr. Carver being associated with me."

He would not risk being held solely responsible for the life of a man whom he had threatened to kill.

Cyrus Drummond greeted him with choking breath.

"Pneumonia," diagnosed the physician at a glance.

"Doctor, I'm a very sick man; and mother, there, has shown me that I have not been just to you. I offer you an apology."

"That," thought Catheart, "would come with a better grace if you were not on your back and I were not the only reliable."

But he conquered his impulse and said:

"We'll talk about that later. How long have you had this cold?"

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Days and nights of anxious care ensued. Both lungs of the patient were

involved and the pulse and temperature denoted a coming struggle of more than ordinary intensity. Oxygen was ordered and everything possible was provided to assist that unusually vigorous body when the critical hours should arrive. Catheart came whenever he could during the day and with increasing frequency at night. Carver was there most of the time.

It was soon known thruout the county that the old man was seriously ill; and Catheart, going about among the people, noted their genuine concern. Judging the man from the point of view of the laborer in mill and mine and field, or of the man who was straining every nerve to establish some new enterprise, or to keep one already established up to its full capacity for usefulness, or of the lawyer defending a disputed water or mineral claim, the delayed exploitation of which meant loss of opportunity to hundreds, or of the engineer, or of the politician, or of the shepherd of souls, Catheart began to realize the vitally real worth of that achieving personality. Should he die, the essential interests of a whole region would lie in chaos, and progress would cease during the period of readjustment. Such men are natural forces; they act with the rigidity of laws; the bitterness they engender is incidental to the necessary limitation of their natures. Catheart came to see it thus.

He fought for the life of Cyrus Drum-

mond with tenacity and skill. Six days had passed and the battle was undecided.

"It's all a question of vigor, of vitality, Mrs. Drummond," he said, "and your husband is a strong man."

He saw the anxiety, the love, the loyalty in her eyes, and he longed to allay her pain. He thought, too, of other eyes, so like them; and he wondered if they could ever be brought to show the same feeling for him.

The seventh day came and went and still the issue was ahead of them.

"If the crisis had come by this time, I should have had no fear," he said. "But Mr. Drummond is losing ground and there is no abatement of the disease."

"Do you think I had better—"

"Yes, Mrs. Drummond; you had better telegraph for your daughter."

He knew that her mother had written to her every day and that she held herself in readiness. Was her fear any the less, he asked himself, because she knew he was caring for her father? She would leave the city that evening and would arrive early the following morning—the morning of the ninth day, which would surely be decisive.

But while Catheart was at dinner he received a message from Carver:

"Temperature rising alarmingly; pulse very bad."

It was coming. Evelyn would learn the decision when she arrived. He went

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