

OUR FARM HOMES



THE three highest titles that can be given a man are those of martyr, hero, saint.—Gladstone.

Winning the Wilderness

(Continued from last week.)

"WELL, be active. I'll give you till to-morrow night; that's ample," Smith snapped back. "Hans and you are all the people in town who know I'm here now except the fat woman who waits on the table at Wyker's. I'm lying low right now, but I won't stay hid long; Wyker'll keep me over one more day, I reckon. Even he's turned against me when I've got no money to loan him, but I'll be on my feet again."

"Say, Smith, come in to-morrow night, but don't hurry away now." The big man's tone was too level to show which way his meaning ran, and like to go into matters a little with you."

Smith settled back in his chair and waited with the air of one not to be coaxed.

"You are right in sayin' I'd like to hide some transactions. Not many real estate men went through the boom days here who don't need to feel that way. We was all property mad, and you and me and Wyker run our bluff same as any of 'em, an' we busted the spirit of the law to flinders. And our givin' and gettin' deeds and our buyin' titles an' forty things we done, was so irregular it might or might not stand in court now, dependin' altogether on how good a lawyer for technicalities we was able to employ. We know'd the game we was playin', too, and excused ourselves, thinkin' the Lord wouldn't find us special among so many qualified for the same game. Smith, I know danced well I'm not so ashamed of it as I should be. The thing that hurts me wouldn't be cards for you at all. It's the brutal, inhuman things no law can touch me for: it's trying to do honest men out'n their freeholds; it's holdin' back them grasshopper sufferin' supplies, an' here in the very men I robbed treatin' me like a gentleman now, that's cuttin' my rhinoceros hide into strips and hangin' it on the fence. But you can't capitalize a thing like that in your business."

"Well, I know what I can do." "As to what you can do to me, you've run that bluff till it's slick on the track. And I've know'd it just as long as you have, anyhow. Here's my particular stunt with you. I had business East in '96, time of the big May flood, and I run down to Cloverdale, Ohio, for a day. The waters was a higher'n they'd been know'd for some years."

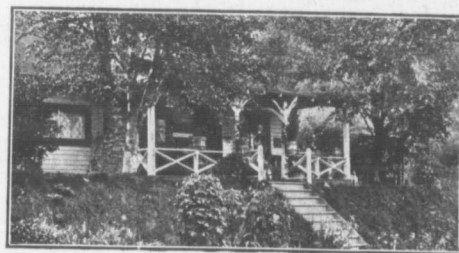
Thomas Smith had stiffened in his chair and sat rigidly gripping the arms. But Chambers seemed not to notice this as he continued:

"The fill where the railroad cuts across the old Aydelot farm was washed out and kep' down the back water from floodin' the low ground. But naturally it washed out considerable right there."

Smith's face was deadly pale now, with the crooked scar a livid streak

across his forehead. Chambers deliberated before he went on. All his blistering method disappeared and he kept to the even tone and unruffled demeanor.

"The danged little creek, other side of town got rampagous late in the afternoon, and the whole crowd that had watched Clover Creek all day went pellmellin' off to see new sights, leavin' me entirely alone by the washout. I remember what you said about pretendin' to commit yourself



"The cottage was a bower of bliss."

The charming home of Mrs. Rutherford, Nelson, B. C. A love for beauty in the individual house makes itself

to your Maker there in an agreement between you as cashier an' Tank Shirley, an' the place interested me a lot."

A finer-fibred man could hardly have resisted the agonized face of Thomas Smith. A cowardly nature would have gotten the anger back of it.

"It was settin' laze and pretty cloudy still, and nobody by, an' I staid round, an' staid round, when just at the right place the bank broke away and I see the body of a man—just the skeleton mainly, right where you skelton commit your pretended suicide. Somebody committed it there for you evidently. There was a big set ring with a jagged break in the set that swiped too swift across a man's face might leave a ugly scar for life, and if the fellow tried too hard to drown himself he might wrench a man's right arm so out o' plum he couldn't never do much sinnin' his name again. I disposed of the remains decent as I could, for Doc Carey was leisurely coming down National pike from Jane Aydelot's, an' it was settin' late, an' no cheerful place nor job in a crowd in sunshiny weather, let alone there in the dusk of the evening. Wow! I dreamt of that there gruesome thing two weeks. I throwed the shovel in the creek. Would you like me to show you where to go to dig, so's you can

be sure your plan with Tank Shirley worked and you didn't drown, after all? And are you sure you ain't been misrepresenting things to me a little as against Tank Shirley? Are you right sure you ain't Tank Shirley himself? I've kep' still for four years, not to save you nor myself, but to keep Leigh Shirley's name from bein' dragged into court 'longside a name like yours or mine. I never misuse the women, no matter how tricky I am with men."

Then, as an afterthought, Chambers added: "It's so danged hot this afternoon I can't get over to Grass River; and I got word to meet Jacobs over at the Little Wolf Ranch later, so I think I'll take the crooked trail up to that place; it's a lot the coolest road, and I'll wait till the sun's most down, and I'll wait three thousand dollar mortgage can wait over a day now, less you feel too cramped."

Thomas Smith rose from his chair. His face was ashy and his small black eyes burned with a wicked fire. He saved one long, steady look into Chambers face and slipped from the rear door like a shadow.

Darley Chambers knew he had won the day, and no sense of personal danger had ever troubled him. He settled back in his chair, drew a long sigh of relief, and soon snored comfortably through his afternoon's nap. When he awoke it was quite dark.

find You Yacob, but don't go the creek road. I coom slippin' to tell you to go sure, and I kin' what that stranger man coom leapin' in. I hear all you say, an' I see him troo der crack here, an' he stant out there a long time lookin' back in here. So I half to wait an' you so nappin' an' I still wait. I wait to say, hurry, but don't go oop nor down der creek trail. I do anything for Miss Shirley, an' I like you for tankin' care of her good name; goot names les him to get back if dey gets away. Hurry."

"Heaven bless your good soul!" Chambers said heartily. "But why not take the cool road? I've overslept and I've got to hurry and the storm's bustlin' in."

"Don't, please don't take it," Rosie begged.

The next minute she was gone and as Chambers closed and locked his doors he said to himself, "She does her work like a hero and never will have any credit for it, 'cause she's not a pioneer, she's a hero. But she has saved more than one life, and I snared into that joint I winked at for years."

Then, obedient to her urging, he followed the creek road, his horse toward the Jacobs' stock ranch bordering on Little Wolf Creek.

Meantime, John Jacobs inspected his property, forgetful of the intense heat and the coming storm, his mind full of a strange foreboding. At the top of the hill above where the road wound down through deep shadows he sat a long while on his horse. "I wonder what makes me so lonely this evening," he mused. "I'm not of a lonely nature nor morose, thank the Lord! There's no tellin' why we do or don't want to do things. I wonder where Chambers is. He ought to be coming up pretty soon. I wonder if I hadn't had that dream two nights ago about that picture I saw in a book, when I was a little chap, if I'd had this fool's cowardice about being out here alone to-day. And what was it that made me look over all those papers in my vault box last night? I have helped Careyville some, and the library I built will have a good endowment when I'm gone, and so will the children's park, and the Temperance Societies. Maybe I've not lived in vain. If I have been an exacting Jew. I never asked for the blood in my pound of flesh, anyhow. I wonder where Chambers can be."

He listened intently and thought he heard someone coming around the bend down the dancin' way.

"That's he, I guess, now," he said. Then he turned his face toward the wide prairie unrolling to the westward. Overhanging it were writhing clouds, hurried by winds and driven by twisted, frayed, and burst sunbeams by the titanic forces of the upper air, and all converging - with centripetal violence toward one vast maelstrom. Its long, trailing arms, fine, dipped and lifted, trailing back and forth like some senate thing. With it came an increasing rear from the clashing of timber up the valley. The vivid shafts of lightning and the blackness that followed them made the scene terrific with Nature's majestic madness.

"Must get shelter somewhere," Jacobs said. "If an sorry Chambers failed me. I wanted his counsel before I slipped up on Wyker to-night. I thought I heard him coming just now. Maybe he's waiting for me under cover. I'll go down and see."

The roar of the cyclone grew louder and the long swinging funnel lifted and dipped and lifted again, as the awful forces of the air hurled it onward.

Down at the sharp bend in the road Thomas Smith was crouching, just where the rift in the bank opened to (Continued on page 15.)

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