

way," said the Sheriff, "an' he gave that boy his word that if he got out he'd give up the road, and go to Texas and raise stock. And what do you think? that little cuss was so sharp that he stuck a Testament through the window and made Bill swear on it."

"If he comes to trial," said the Major reflectively, "he'll get the full term—twenty years. He'd *rather* be hung by Regulators than stay in jail that long, if there's any live spirit in him. And then if he ever did break out, he'd be worse than ever—men always grow worse in jail than they do anywhere else."

"Why not let him get out to-night?" said the Sheriff. "I'm the one it'll come hardest on; I'll lose my re-election by it, and p'raps get something worse. *You* fellows haven't got anything to lose by it."

"I didn't lose a hoss by him, I s'pose?" growled Garman.

"You've got him back, and a decent saddle with him," retorted the Sheriff; "you may steal *my* horse every week on those terms, if you like."

One by one the Regulators left their points of observation and clustered about the speakers, until only one man remained watching the jail. Suddenly the watcher cocked his pistol; in an instant the Sheriff snatched it away. Looking through a knot-hole, he saw the prisoner's head and shoulders emerging from the window, while Lem stood on a box beneath the window, trying to assist.

"Boys," said the Sheriff, rapidly and hoarsely, "let him go. I swear here before the whole crowd to own up to the whole trick myself, if Bill's ever heard of again as being at his old tricks. I'll—"

"He's getting out," whispered a man on the look-out. "Duty! boys—duty!"

Fully half the men sprang toward the fence. The Sheriff snatched his pistols from his pocket, ran back and forth, pushing men back as he whispered—almost hissed:

"There, I'll do *my* duty. By virtue of the authority in me v *ed* by the State of Illinois, I command you to disperse, and allow me to recapture my prisoner. These pistols are revolvers—six shots a piece. I'll shoot the first man who lays a hand on or fires a shot at my prisoner—so help me God!"

"Have it your own way, Sheriff, if you mean to re-capture," said the Major with exquisite blandness, after a moment, in which every one had dropped his pistol-hand. "You agree to call on us if you need help to grab him?"

"Yes," whispered the Sheriff, peering through a crack in the fence. "He's he

comes—the little chap with him—they're talkin'—now listen for yourselves."

Everybody squeezed close to the fence. The horse-thief and his deliverer reached a corner of the fence and halted. Hixton faced Lem and put out his hand.

"You're the first real friend I ever had in my life," said the thief, "and I don't know how to thank you enough."

"You don't owe me anything," said Lem, "only don't get into the old business again. Remember your mother."

"I wish I had something to give you," said Hixton, "but I gave all my money to a counterfeiter the other day to have me got out; and the Sheriff seems to have found my revolvers and packed 'em out on the sly, I couldn't find 'em just now when I got ready to leave."

"I'll give you the money *I've* got—you can send it to my mother—Mrs. Pankett, Middle Backville, New York, when you earn it, honestly," said Lem.

"I won't take it," said Hixton. "I can work my way wherever I go. Look here, boy, you want to look out for yourself. There's hard cases in this part of the State just now, and you're the sort of a fellow they'll get for to do their dirty work for 'em. If you see any strangers with plenty of money, shy off from 'em—you hear?"

"Never mind me," said Lem; "remember everything you've promised."

"If this thing should be tracked to you," said the thief, "I'll hear about it some way, and see that you're helped to break out."

"I don't want you to," said Lem. "I'd rather be tried and go the penitentiary than have you do that."

Outside the fence, Mr. Garman slipped up to the Sheriff and whispered:

"Let him go, Sheriff, for the boy's sake—he's clear grit."

"Good-bye, my boy—time's flyin', and I must have my tracks covered before daylight," said the thief.

Lem dropped on his knees and leaned against Hixton.

"You're the best friend I ever had," said he. "I hope I'll see you again some day."

The horse-thief stopped and put his hands on the boy's head. "I'll keep track of *you*," said he, "and if I don't behave myself for any other reason, I'll do it to oblige the only man who ever put himself out on my account. Now, travel—I won't get over this fence till I see you off—our roads don't run the same way."

Lem hurried off to the front of the yard; at the same time the Major approached the Sheriff and whispered:

"Let him off for his *own* sake!"

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