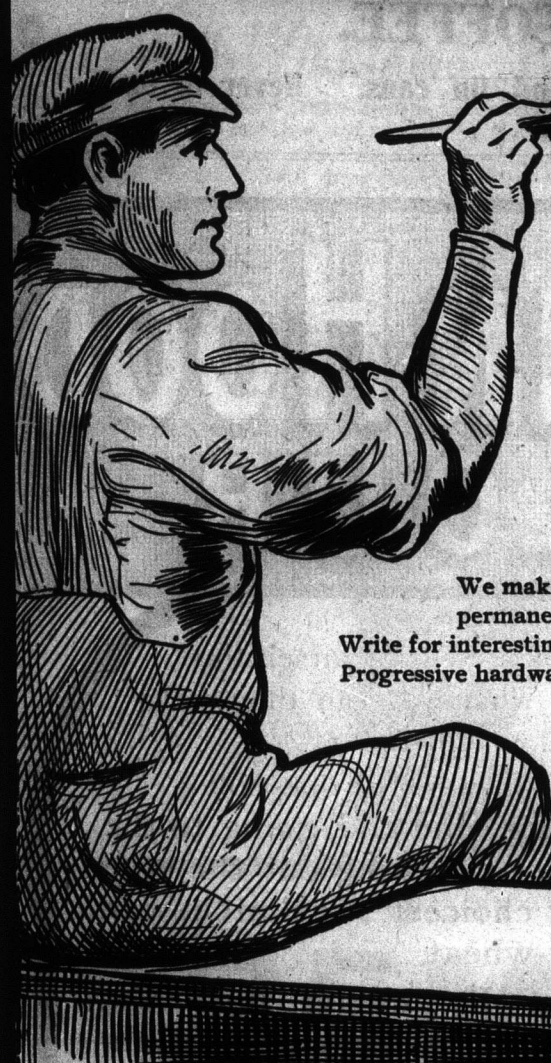


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always starts things with. All we knew was that he was from Texas."

"You know, my dear, when we saw that old brute Diablo coming in at the gate we were furious, simply furious. More gore! More deaths! More smashups! But ride! Why, you don't know what riding is until you've seen the cowboy!"

Mrs. Eldredge answered not a word, but stood quite still, feeling that each wave of sound might submerge her, and almost wishing that it would. Was Jack never coming downstairs to her rescue, she asked herself? Would Sam have the audacity to show himself in his proper character?

"Even Elena lost her head over him. You know how hard Bobby's been trying to teach her to ride. Well, she was in some sort of difficulty this morning before the start, and up rode the Texan, offering to help her out. She does look stunning on that big blue mare of Bobby's, and he wasn't much to blame; but there they sat, he holding her hand and presumably fixing her lines."

"Well, you needn't talk, Edith!"

"No. Edith dropped her stick. The cowboy was racing with her neck to neck, and with only a swerve and swoop he picked it up and gave it back to her. She's been in a daze ever since."

"And you'd never believe it," continued Edith, with a glance of withering scorn at the last speaker, "but Elena was the only one in the finish with the Texan."

"Bobby'll break his engagement if that sort of thing goes on."

"My dear, we'll all break our engagements if the man stays."

"If he stays! Is he still here?"

"But, Gertie, who is he?"

"Has Jack known him long?"

"Has he been at Edgemoor?"

"Where is he stopping?"

"Don't you know anything about him?"

The air was full of interrogation, but Gertrude Eldredge felt that her questions would rise above all the others.

Would Jack never appear? Had Sam in sheer shame and contrition disappeared from the house? This thought, unpleasant as it was in its most sinister aspect, held a modicum of relief. She, at least, would have no part to play in the absurd comedy.

But even this comfort was denied her. While her eyes had been fixed on the portieres screening the hall, Jack Eldredge and the bishop had slipped through the conservatories, and had entered the drawing room at Mrs. Eldredge's elbow. There was nothing for her to do but rise graciously to the occasion.

"My cousin, Bishop Durden. I think he has met all of you, and—" But her conclusion was lost in the confusion of sound that ensued.

"You said he was a bishop!" was the first indignant protest that Gertrude heard.

"So he is," she answered.

"You said he was from Texas!"

This was addressed to Pack Eldredge.

"So he is—he's Bishop of Texas."

"You said he was your grandfather's cousin!" Edith protested violently.

"I said our grandfathers were cousins," corrected Gertrude.

"You said he hadn't come," Edith Maybury was now confronting Jack.

"I don't think it's nice to lie, even in fun!"

"My dear girl," he laughed, "you may remember that you asked me if 'his dignity' had come. I congratulated myself that I could get out of the thing without lying, although I did think it was a very irreverent way for you to speak of a bishop."

"Quite reverent enough for a cowboy bishop," scoffed Edith as she turned away to find herself laughing into the glinting blue eyes of the bishop himself.

And she was his sponsor. For unfortunately for the dignity of the Right Rev. Samuel Carter Durden, he lived in the annals of the Montebello Country Club as "the cowboy bishop."