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had drifted across the face of the moon.
VI

If there was a cloud over their hearts, it soon lifted before the enthralling task of laying out the garden and planting the seeds. Side by side they worked, refusing to let any hands but theirs do the planting. Jane murmured over every little seed, a soft little croon in her voice, while Barlow's efforts were largely devoted to restraining the dog, who seemed to regard it all as a mammoth burying of bones, and was naturally inquisitive.

When Christmas came, the garden was in full bearing. It was a new Christmas to them—a bright, warm, day, clear as a jewel, and alluring as a gipsy with a rose in her mouth. Miguel had climbed fifteen miles into the mountains for a ragged little pine, which they bedecked for the children nearest the hacienda; and there was a special limb for the dog.

When the happy children had gone, and the Maker's glowing pencil had dotted in the star-periods, they sang all the old carols they could think of; and when the last was finished they fell silent. It had been a pleasant day, but somehow memories are always the sweetest.

When she turned to him, her lashes were wet.

"I'm such a fool; but the old songs always make me sad," she said. "Why, I don't know, for I have nothing to regret. I am far happier now than I've ever been in my life."

Then he, too, came out of the past with a shrug, for he was honest enough to admit to himself that the day had brought him much.

"It isn't half bad here, is it? I never thought I could stand living away from where things were being done. But I suppose it is because I realize now that it doesn't make any difference."

His bitterness had to crop out, but he was immediately ashamed of it, and glanced at her contritely. She was smiling at him, but it wasn't the smile which made him stare. There was about her something intangible, subtle, disturbingly sphinxlike. It hinted a secret that he could not guess. He was still pondering it when he fell to sleep that night.

He was fated to be troubled by it many times thereafter. When the reaction came from his interest in the maps that he was making of the whole district, with a view to irrigation, and the bitter realization of the hopelessness of all his efforts welled up in him, he would start up with a groan and pace the floor, biting his lip, after his habit.

"Just think of all I could do, could do; just think! Look at all that land! It could be bought for a song and developed into one of the greatest irrigated projects in the Southwest. The supply of water is inexhaustible!"

He would glare at her as if she were to blame for it all, only to find the strange smile on her lips, the almost mocking smile which he was too proud to ask her to explain. Angrily he would go off on long climbs, until the exertion stifled the heat within him.

She, too, found much to occupy her while he was thus finding respite from himself. Flowers followed flowers the whole winter thru in that wonder country, and her interest in the tiny growing things never seemed to abate.

Very capable she looked, striding here and there in her short skirts. Her sleeves were rolled high on her well-browned arms, and about her hips was the holster carrying the little pistol which he had given her, and with which constant practise had made her surprisingly proficient. They were very busy, those two, and very happy, for he, at least, had forgotten the days.

Winter melted into spring—a change almost unrecognizable, and only marked by the red and yellow glories of the cactus and the northward passage of the birds. First came the geese, plaintive, disembodied cries high in the night, stirring Barlow strangely with vague desires of unrest. Yet it was not the wander call; he did not want to leave the rancho, for it had become too much a part of him, of all the dreams that he had planned. He found himself watching Jane; and when he caught

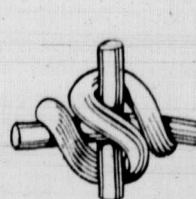
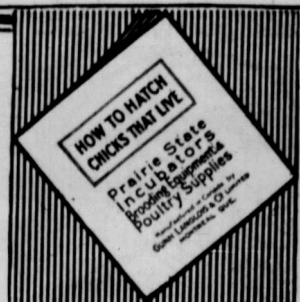
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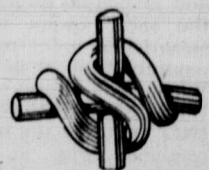
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