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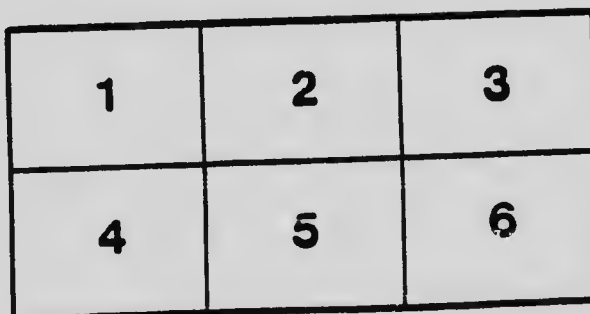
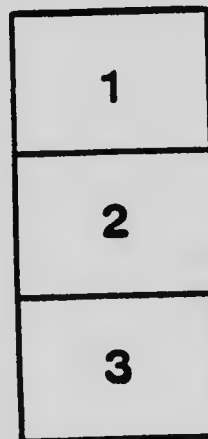
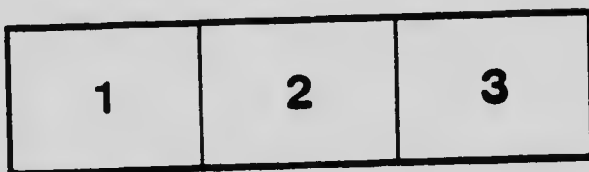
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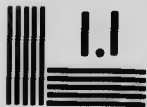
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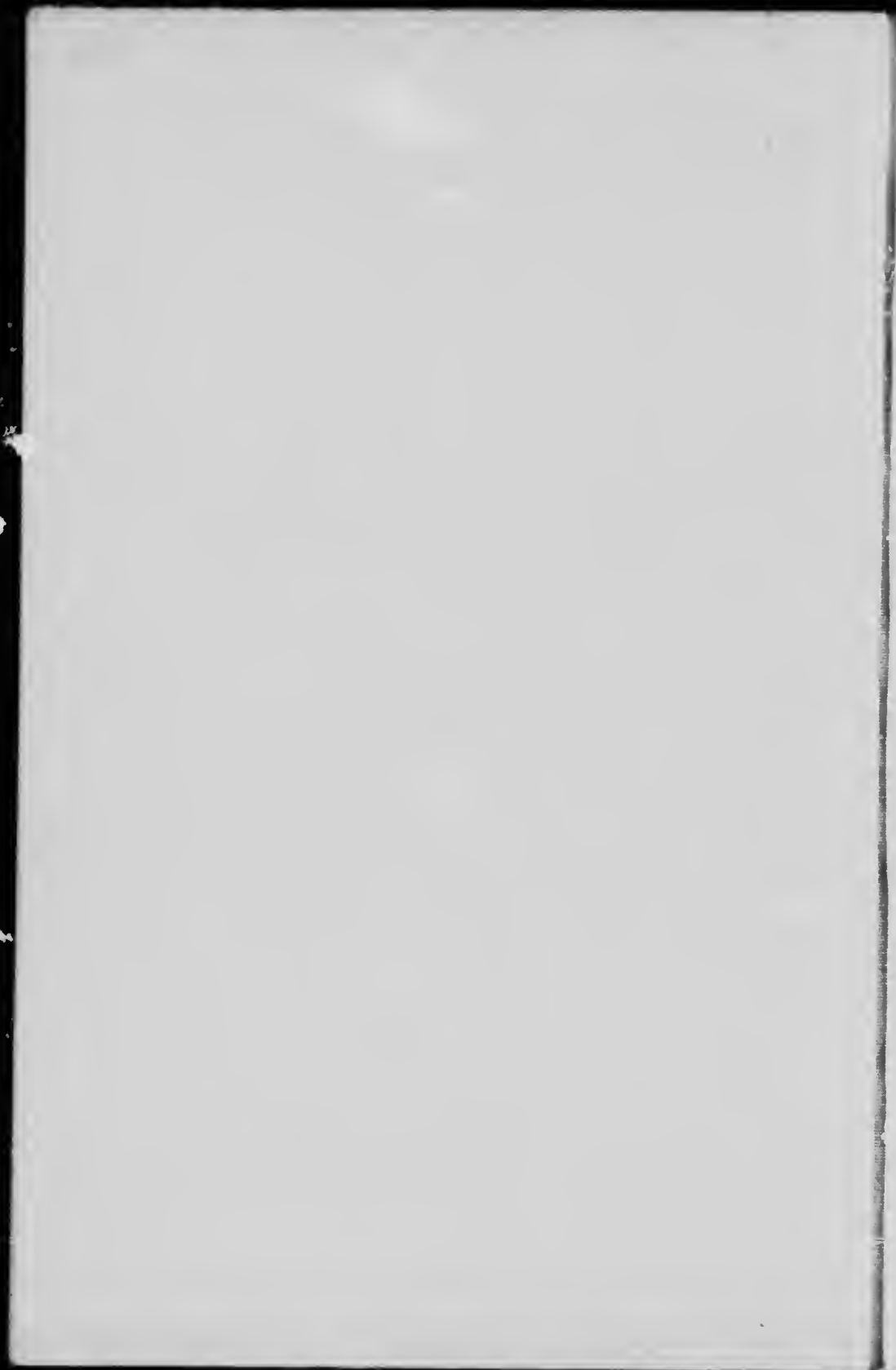


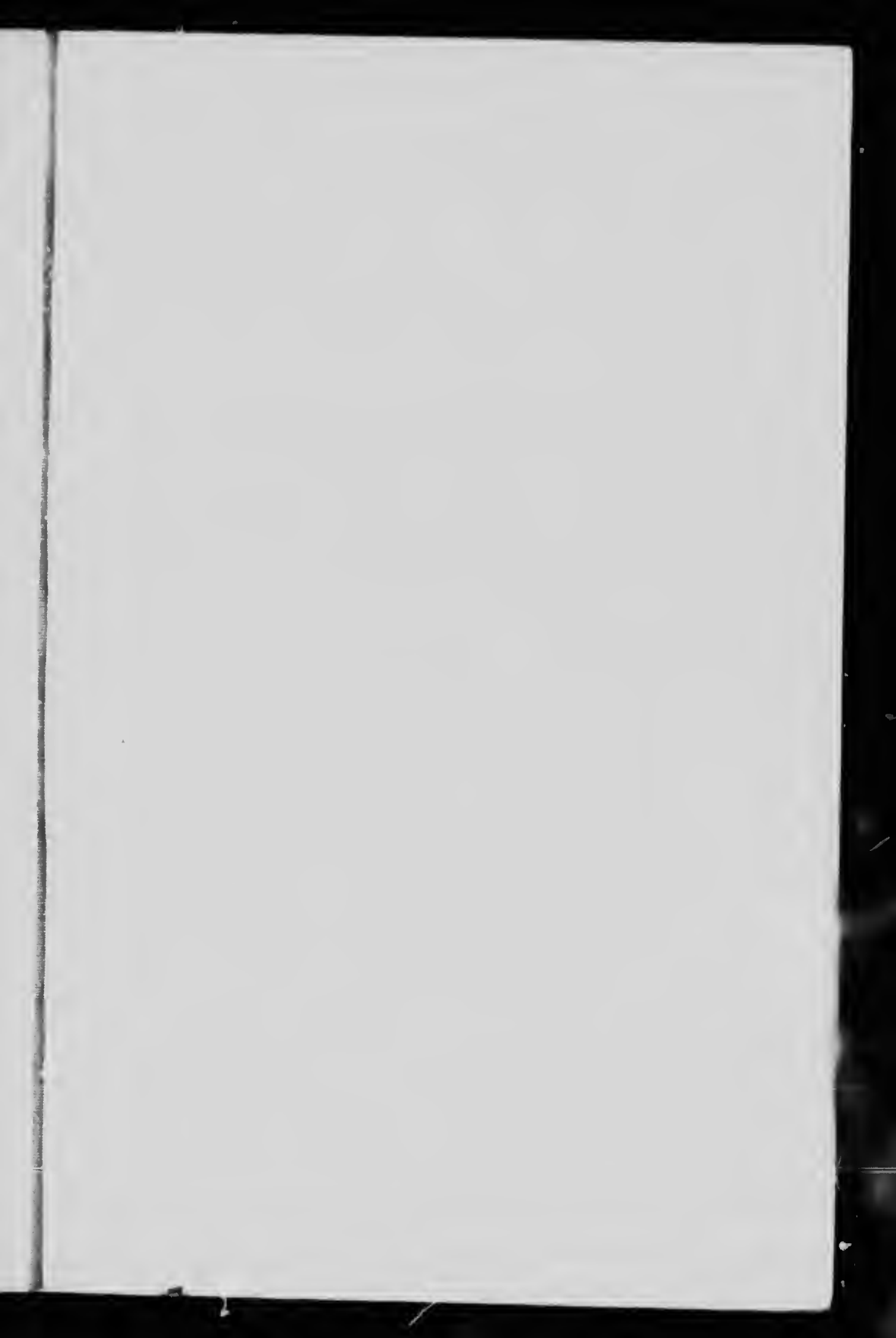
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**COLONEL TODHUNTER  
OF MISSOURI**







Colonel Todhunter

OLONEL TODHUNTER  
OF MISSOURI

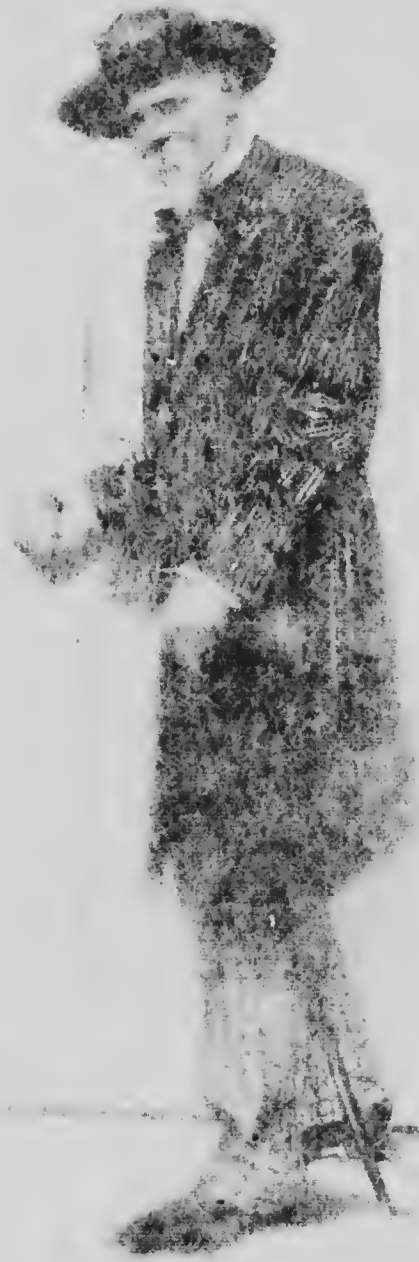
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TORONTO  
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**COLONEL TODHUNTER  
OF MISSOURI**

*By*  
**RIPLEY D. SAUNDERS**

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
W. B. KING**

**TORONTO  
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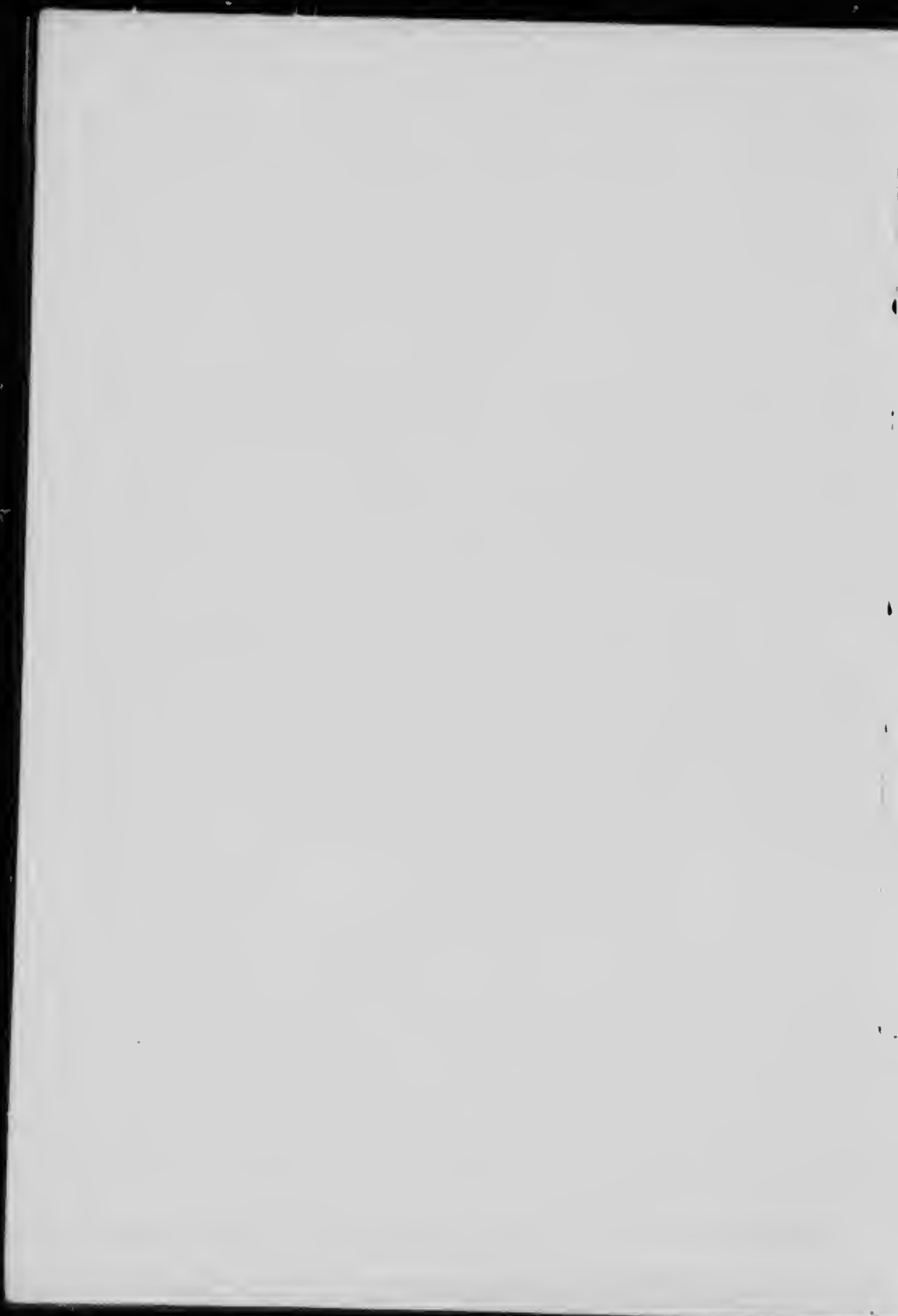


TO  
MARY  
MY DEAR WIFE  
THIS BOOK  
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED



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# COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

## CHAPTER I

### COLONEL TODHUNTER CAMPAIGNS AMONG THE CON- FEDERATE DAUGHTERS

**C**OLONEL Thurston T. Todhunter was undeniably the distinct embodiment of that picturesque native American type, the Kentuckian born and Missourian bred, as he entered old Judge Bolling's law office in Nineveh and saluted its white-haired occupant with a cordially impressive wave of the hand in friendly greeting.

It was the morning of the day preceding the return from St. Louis of the Honorable William J. Strickland, law partner of Judge Bolling and now an avowed candidate for the Democratic primary nomination for governor of Missouri, and Colonel Todhunter's buoyantly aggressive bearing was due to his delight that his lifelong friend had at last

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yielded to popular pressure and made open announcement of his candidacy. The scent of political battle in the Strickland cause was hot in the Colonel's nostrils and he sniffed its savor with militant joy.

Tall and erect, Colonel Todhunter carried his spare but stalwart frame with an ease that somewhat belied the grizzled gray of his hair and the white of his soldierly mustache and old-fashioned "imperial." One could not easily have failed to recognize him for just what he was—a lineal descendant of that colonial Virginian stock whose grandsons followed the pioneer trail that led from the Old Dominion, first to North Carolina, then to Kentucky and Tennessee, and thence to Missouri; a stock that has remained distinctively American since the time of its first taking root in American soil.

True to this type, the Colonel's dress in itself proclaimed his caste. It was that of the well-born rural American of long-established landed estate, a trifle quaint and out of date, yet of a certain unmistakable dignity. The wide-brimmed hat of soft gray wool, the full-skirted and ample-breasted dark frock-coat, the waistcoat of white duck; the wide white linen collar and carefully knotted black cravat, the gener-

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ously shown and many pleated shirt bosom, the comfortably cut gray trousers, falling easily over low shoes tied with broad ribands of black silk, the gold-headed cane swung leisurely in rhythmic unison with its owner's tranquil progress through life—these seemed as much a part of Colonel Todhunter and the class for which he stood as the Colonel's frank and clear-featured countenance itself.

Colonel Todhunter laid his cane on Judge Bolling's office table as he entered and executed his gesture of courteous salutation.

"Well, Judge," he said jubilantly, "the fight's begun, and we've got to rally around old Bill Strickland to a fare-you-well, suh! I-gad, suh, I ain't a-goin' to be content with nothin' less'n whippin' that-there Stephen K. Yancey outfit to a frazzle, suh!"

Especially in his speech was Colonel Todhunter's fidelity to type in evidence. It was a blend of the softly blurred speech of the fully accredited Southerner, some of which is frankly borrowed from the liquid vernacular of the plantation negro. It had a touch of western vigor at times, and, most curiously distinctive of all, it revealed more than a few

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colloquial survivals of that Seventeenth Century England whence came Colonel Todhunter's first American ancestor, Geoffrey Todhunter, younger brother of Sir Giles of kindly and humorous Sussex memory.

Old Judge Bolling smiled at the Colonel's zestful hailing of the imminent combat. "You're right, Colonel Todhunter," he agreed. "And the sooner we get plump into the middle of the fight, the better, sir. It can't begin too soon to please me!"

Colonel Todhunter nodded. Then his gray-blue eyes twinkled significantly. "Judge," he said, "the Nineveh Daughters of the Confederacy are givin' a picnic down at Indian Springs to-day, and they're goin' to set a dinner at a dollar a head for the benefit of the Confederate Soldiers' Home at Higginsville, suh. I reckon all that ain't no particular news to you, but I thought maybe you'd enjoy goin' down there with me, suh. I'd be tickled to death to have you!"

Old Judge Bolling scowled ferociously at the Colonel. "Look here, Thurs, if you think I'm going to start in on this fight by working the Daughters of the Confederacy as a political proposition, you're



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very badly mistaken. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you old campaign fox!"

"Who said I was proposin' to work the Daughters?" retorted Colonel Todhunter. "I'm just sayin' that you and me could have a mighty good time down there at their picnic. Th' ain't no law compellin' us to do any electioneerin' work among 'em, suh!"

Judge Bolling's lips twitched. "You old devil, you! You couldn't any more keep from campaigning among the Daughters than a yearling colt can keep from kicking up its heels in the pasture, and you know it. You can't fool me."

"What I can't do and what a yearlin' colt can't do are two mighty different things, Judge," answered Colonel Todhunter. "But I ain't connected with old Bill Strickland's campaign in no official capacity that I'm aware of, and if I see fit to turn a trick on my own hook, that's nobody's blanie business but mine, suh. Besides, maybe it's N'neveh I'm a-workin' for, 'stead of old Bill Strickland. Maybe Nineveh ain't nothin' but a one-hoss river town, sleepy and old-fashioned like some folks say, but Mizzorah sent a Nineveh man to the United States Senate

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once, don't you forget it, and maybe I'm just workin' to get her to send another to hold down the governor's job in Jefferson City, suh. And if that governor happens to be my friend Bill Strickland, and if it so comes about that the Nineveh Daughters of the Confederacy are led, accidental like, to enthuse a good deal in workin' for old Bill Strickland—well, I reckon th' ain't no great harm done even then, is there, Judge?"

Then the Colonel chuckled. "I'll tell you one thing, and that ain't two: I'd ruther have a woman's promise to make her husband vote for me or my candidate than to have a man's own word on a stack o' Bibles a mile high, suh. It's only up to the man to keep his word. But it's up to the woman to prove that she can manage her husband. And she'll do that, suh, or die in the attempt."

Old Judge Bolling laughed. "Well, Thurs," he said, "I've just been fooling with you, anyway. Mrs. Todhunter herself stopped at our house this morning and took Mrs. Bolling along with her, and she made me promise to come later, so it's all right. They'll have no excuse for saying that we're there in Colonel Strickland's interest, so you and I can go

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down to Indian Springs with a perfectly easy conscience."

"Th' wouldn't be nothin' on my conscience, even if Mrs. Todhunter hadn't asked you, suh," avowed Colonel Todhunter placidly. "I know when I'm sinnin' and when I ain't, and this is one o' the few times I ain't. I could face every last Daughter in all Nineveh this very minute, includin' Mrs. Todhunter herself, without turnin' a hair, suh."

An hour later old Judge Bolling and Colonel Todhunter emerged upon the picnic grounds in company, having driven down in the Colonel's buggy. Mrs. Todhunter, an ardent Daughter, had gone early in the day, taking the old family barouche, laden with good things for the dinner.

"Mrs. Todhunter, suh," the Colonel remarked on the way down, "would ruther feed other people than set herself down to a good meal's vittles any day. I'll be jim-swizzled if I don't believe, when she gets to Heaven, it'll sorter disappoint her if folks don't get hungry there, and if the Old Marster don't let her fix 'em somethin' fit to eat, suh!"

Mrs. Todhunter, a white-haired old aristocrat of the ante-bellum type, advanced to meet her husband

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and his friend. If Mrs. Todhunter had a fault it was that she tacitly regarded all Nineveh as being vassal to her social suzerainty and bore herself something as might the ruling monarch of some little principality. But this manner was not apparent in her bearing toward old Judge Bolling, whom she knew as being of her own caste.

"I'm very glad you've come, Judge!" she said laughingly. "And especially right now. It may take you and Colonel Todhunter both to make our Mary and young Tom Strickland behave themselves, sir. Tom has already kidnapped Mary away somewhere, after I put them to work spreading tablecloths, and I've been vowing all sorts of vengeance on both of them. I don't approve of Tom's behavior at all, Judge!"

"It pains me to disagree with a lady, madam," replied the white-haired old judge gallantly, "but I must say I approve of Tom's conduct in getting Miss Mary Todhunter off to himself at every chance, ma'am!"

"That's all very fine, Judge," said Mrs. Todhunter, laughing and shaking her head, "but Mary has no business permitting Tom Strickland to

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monopolize her. She came out here with Stamford Tucker. I wouldn't blame Stam in the least if he got ugly about it."

"Neither would I, ma'am," conceded the judge. "I'd be more inclined to blame him if he didn't. Miss Mary is too pretty a girl for any young man to lose without feeling cut up about it, and I reckon Stam Tucker's no more than human. Nevertheless, if I was Tom's age, I'd try to do exactly what he has just done, and that's the truth!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Judge Bolling!" exclaimed Mrs. Todhunter. Then she laughed and pointed an accusing finger. "There they are now, looking like butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. Won't you go over there for me, Judge, and tell Tom Strickland to behave himself, and send Mary to me, right away? There's no earthly use in Colonel Todhunter going, because neither one of them would mind a word he says!" Old Judge Bolling, laughing, moved off toward the young couple.

Mrs. Todhunter turned to the Colonel. "You see I know you like a book, Colonel Todhunter!" she said, her eyes twinkling. "You think everything

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young Tom Strickland does is just right, and you'd stand up for him quicker than his own father. And as for Mary, she can twist you around her finger any time. Don't think I place any dependence upon you where they're concerned, sir!"

Colonel Todhunter smiled calmly. "I ain't askin' you to, Mary," he retorted. "In the first place, I approve of Tom's fallin' as deep in love with Mary as he knows how. In the second place, interferin' in these here sentimental affairs is a mighty ticklish business, and I'm here at this picnic to have a good time. I'm a-goin' to have it, too!" Saying which, he beat a hasty retreat.

But he had hardly succeeded in placing a section of the picnic crowd between himself and Mrs. Todhunter when a young girl came running along his trail, breathless, and with mischievous eyes.

"Mrs. Todhunter wants you to come right back to her, Colonel," she announced. "She's short on men to help her, and she's awful busy. Wants you to come right away, sir!"

Colonel Todhunter glanced whimsically at the messenger. "Ain't that just like a man's wife? She didn't want Judge Bolling when she saw him. Oh,

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no. It's me she wants. And I'll bet she's got the hardest job on the grounds picked out for me right now!"

Then he turned to the amused girl. "Thank you, Miss Louise," he said ruefully. "Please tell Mrs. Todhunter I'll be there in two or three minutes. Oh, of course, you got to laugh at me. There's nothin' you women like better than to see a man ordered around by his wife. And I'm a-goin' to obey orders, too. But I'll get back there by mighty slow degrees, I tell you!" With which he began a dignified retreat.

Suddenly, but a little distance ahead, he saw Tom Strickland parting from Mary. They were a handsome couple, the Colonel's daughter an exquisite type of the well-born southern girl, her hair and eyes a rarely pure brown, her skin of almost baby fairness, a proud little mouth, a joyous bearing; the youth a tall and well-built young country-bred gentleman, his eyes a clear blue, his hair a sun-burned yellow, his mouth and chin clean-cut and firm. Colonel Todhunter approved heartily of both.

As Mary left her companion and went to join her mother, a second girl, with obvious intent, crossed

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Tom Strickland's path. She was of a different type, a plebeian beauty, black-haired, with passionate eyes, full red lips, a suggestion of rich animal life in her movements.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tom Strickland!" she said in a low tone, a little break in her voice. "You let me drop like I was somethin' you despised just the minute you caught sight of Mary Todhunter. I wouldn't treat a dog that way, Tom!"

There was something pitiful in the utter frankness of surrender with which the speaker's eyes confessed her liking for Tom Strickland. Colonel Todhunter knew her well. She was the granddaughter of old "Rafe" Doggett, who had been a private soldier in a Confederate regiment during the Civil War. The family belonged to the class once known as "poor whites," but old Doggett had been a good soldier, and Lottie-May, his granddaughter, owed her membership in the Daughters of the Confederacy to the esteem in which he was held.

This was even more than a concession to inferior caste. The darkly beautiful country girl whom old Rafe Doggett's son had married in another state



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had gone away from home one day, leaving her baby daughter behind, and never returned. A picturesque handsome "Indian herb doctor," who had been peddling his wares in Nineveh for some days, and was known to have paid bold attentions to her, disappeared at the same time. Lottie-May Doggett, inheriting the same vital beauty of soft roundness, red lips and sensuous black eyes, had grown up in Nineveh, defiant, under the shadow of her mother's shame.

Tom Strickland stared at the girl, plainly surprised. "Why, Lottie-May!" he exclaimed. "I won't let you think such a thing! I only hurried to say 'howdy' to Miss Mary because she had just got here. Anyway"—and here he smiled teasingly—"I could see with one eye that Stam Tucker was just wild to have a talk with you!"

Lottie-May's eyes flashed. "Stam Tucker—shucks!" she cried scornfully. "I wouldn't wipe my feet on him, Tom, when you're around, and you know it! But I can tell you one thing"—and here a note of proud vanity sounded in her voice—"tryin' hard as he is to git Miss Mary Todhunter to marry him, just like you are, Stam Tucker loves me more

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in one minute than he will love her in his whole lifetime!"

"Lottie-May!" ejaculated Tom angrily, "you mustn't talk like that! You ought to be ashamed. You've got no right to couple Miss Mary Todhunter's name—"

"No, no, that's it!" interrupted the girl hotly. "I mustn't mention Mary Todhunter's name in the same breath with mine. It ain't right, you think! Well, I will—and I hate her! I hate her!"

"I didn't mean that, Lottie-May," protested Tom. "You know I didn't mean that—"

But the girl was gone. Hagar-like, she moved with a sort of outcast pride, her pretty head held high, her eyes flashing. In a moment she had disappeared in the crowd.

"Tom," said Colonel Todhunter, advancing, "you'd better be hurryin' to where Mrs. Todhunter is, and make your peace for stealin' Mary away. You're in hot water, young man!"

Tom Strickland flushed consciously. "Colonel, I reckon you heard what Lottie-May Doggett was saying to me?"

"I couldn't very well help it, Tom."

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"Well, sir, you mustn't draw any wrong conclusions from what she said, Colonel Todhunter. Lottie-May's a good girl, so far as I know, and I've always felt sorry for her. But she's been brought up under a cloud and it's made her sorter reckless and full of the devil. I don't believe she cares how black she paints herself, and I think too much of her to take her at her word about knowing that Stam Tucker loves her and makes love to her without thinking of marrying her. That's just her wild talk, sir."

"She's certainly grown up to be a mighty pretty girl, Tom," said Colonel Todhunter. "And now that you've broached the subject, and I've heard what I have, will you let me give you a word of advice?"

"Certainly, Colonel," replied Tom.

"Well, Tom, speakin' plainly, it's this. You better fight mighty shy of Lottie-May hereafter, suh. I don't mean anything against the girl. But she thinks a lot of you, and she don't mind lettin' you know it, and that makes a mighty dangerous situation. It ain't safe to play with fire, Tom, 'specially when a girl like Lottie-May is blowin' the flame."

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"Oh, pshaw, Colonel!"—but Tom Strickland laughed uneasily. "Lottie-May can't harm me any. And I don't want to hurt her feelings, sir."

"That's all right, Tom. But you just take my word for it. The best way not to hurt her feelin's after this is to keep away from her, suh. I'm a good deal older'n you, and I know what I'm talkin' about."

Then, seeing that the young man was ill at ease and, maybe, inwardly resentful, Colonel Todhunter left him, to his obvious relief.

But the Colonel himself shook his head doubtfully. "There ain't no bigger fool on earth, suh," he communed with himself, "than a healthy young chap in his twenties, with a head fuller of women than a squash is of seeds—and just about as soft as that there squash, too, suh. I don't like to think of Tom Strickland, with Mary on one side of him, and him lovin' the very ground she walks on, and Lottie-May Doggett on the other side of him, and her lovin' him the way she *does* love him. Old Solomon himself'd have his hands full with such a proposition. And old Solomon has forgot more about women than Tom Strickland'll ever know if he lives to be a hundred."

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Even as he thus mused an approaching figure brought a humorous grin to Colonel Todhunter's lips. It was the martial figure of Captain Sim Birdsong of the Nineveh Light Infantry, but without the aggressive support of his regimentals, and with dejection in his every line. Sim's face was the tragic mask itself.

"Great name above, Cap'n!" vociferated the Colonel, mock apprehension in his tone, "what in thunderation is the matter, suh? You look like you'd lost your last friend on earth!"

"Colonel Todhunter," said Sim solemnly, "you're the very man I wanted to see, suh. I'm in a peck of trouble, and I'm a-goin' to ask you to tell me the best way out of it, if you'll be so kind, suh—you havin' more experience in the world than me."

"Sim," replied Colonel Todhunter, "I don't know whether I can or not, but I'll do my level best, suh. Specify your trouble."

"Colonel," responded Sim wearily, "it's Miss Angelica Exall's ma, that's what it is. I can't shake her off, suh. That old woman's worse'n the seven-year itch. I can't get rid of her for a minute, Colonel Todhunter!"

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"My good Lord, man! Are you tellin' me that Mrs. Exall's fastened herself on to you and can't be shook off, suh?"

"It's worse'n that, Colonel. I wish that was it, 'cause then I'd stand some chance of gettin' in a word edgewise with Miss Angelica, anyway. But it's her she's fastened herself on to. Yes, suh, that old 'lady's a-campin' right at Miss Angelica's side, and won't let me come within a mile of her, suh. I've been hoppin' around all day, like grease on a hot skillet, and I ain't spoke to Miss Angelica yet, Colonel."

"What do you want me to do, Sim?"

"I want you to see if you can't toll Miss Angelica's ma away from her for a little while, Colonel, that's what I want. The old lady hates me worse'n poison, so I dasn't come right out and face her, suh. I can see right now, plain as the nose on my face, that I've got to leave this picnic without sayin' a blessed word to Miss Angelica, 'less'n somebody helps me out o' the fix I'm in. Couldn't you figure out some way of doin' it, suh? Miss Angelica's ma thinks a heap o' you."

Colonel Todhunter smiled grimly. "Sim, there

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ain't but one way, and that's by draggin' Mrs. Todhunter into it. I ain't got no business doin' that, but I'll try if I can make the raffle. I'll see if I can't fool Mrs. Todhunter into sendin' word to old Mrs. Exall that she needs her to help with the dinner. But you got to hide out when that word is delivered, suh. From what you say, Miss Angelica'll have to go right along with her ma if there's any sign o' you bein' in the neighborhood, Sim."

"Colonel Todhunter, that's a mighty fine idea, and I believe it'll work like a charm, suh. If I get any kind of a talk with Miss Angelica, Colonel, I'll be grateful to you all the rest of my born days!"

Colonel Todhunter chuckled, but made no reply. The next moment he was headed for the spot where his wife ruled the arrangements for dinner.

"Well, well, Colonel Todhunter!" that lady cried. "I'm certainly surprised to see you, honey. But I reckon you must have heard that all the work's done and dinner's about ready, and you're too hungry to wait any longer!"

Colonel Todhunter laughed into Mrs. Todhunter's bantering eyes. "Mary," he said, "I want you to do a good turn for poor Sim Birdsong."

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"Why, what in the world's the matter with Sim? That boy hasn't gone and hurt himself, has he?"

"Mary," said Colonel Todhunter, "Sim's havin' the very old scratch of a time. He's tryin' to get just a minute's chance to court Miss Angelica Exall and her ma won't let him have it. We got to help him. Don't you need old Mrs. Exall over here for a minute, Mary?"

Mrs. Todhunter contemplated her husband sternly.

"Well, I do declare, Colonel Todhunter!" she ejaculated. "If I was such a dyed-in-the-wool matchmaker as you, I'd be afraid to go out among young folks at all! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

But Colonel Todhunter held his ground manfully—he knew Mrs. Todhunter. Not in all Nineveh was there another happily married woman who cherished a deeper sympathy for young people sweet-hearting under difficulties than did Mrs. Todhunter. Her bosom yearned even now to succor Sim Birdsong in his sentimental plight. Her eyes took on a pensive look. Then she surrendered unconditionally.

"You go and tell Mrs. Exall to hurry over here!"



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she said. "It so happens that I do need her to help dish up the dinner. If I didn't I wouldn't send for her to save Sim Birdsong's life!" But Colonel Todhunter knew better.

Half an hour later Sim waylaid him in a grateful ambush. "Colonel Todhunter," he said, "it worked. And I've said some words to Miss Angelica Exall that I've been trying to say for a month, suh. I'll never forget you and Mrs. Todhunter the longest day I live, Colonel!"

Whereupon, rejoicing, Colonel Todhunter thenceforward devoted himself to a zealous prosecution of the Strickland campaign.

"Judge," he said to old Judge Bolling late that same afternoon, "it don't never pay to miss a chance of makin' a friend in politics. A man never knows till election day just how bad he'll need 'em, and then it's too late to act on his knowledge. Yes, suh—old 'Lost Opportunities' has beat more candidates for office than all the men that ever ran on the opposition ticket, suh!"

A moment later he laughed to himself.

"I'll tell you, suh," he concluded, "if old Bill Strickland ain't solid with the Daughters of the Con-

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federacy here in Nineveh, it ain't my fault. I ain't never worked so hard with the women since I courted Mrs. Todhunter—and she shore did make me work overtime and no mistake, suh!"

## CHAPTER II

### MARY TODHUNTER ENTERTAINS THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

**C**OLONEL TODHUNTER was seated in his favorite cane-bottomed arm-chair at the far end of the wide "gallery" extending across the entire front of his home, an old-fashioned colonial house of hospitable aspect. With Mrs. Todhunter he had just returned from the Daughters of the Confederacy picnic, and they were awaiting the arrival of Mary and her escort, Stam Tucker, before having supper.

The Todhunter residence stood on the crest of a gentle slope overlooking the pleasing sweep of Missouri countryside that intervened between the town of Nineveh and the Colonel's own peaceful fields of growing corn. Mrs. Todhunter sat close to her husband, her hands folded in her lap, her happiness-sweetened eyes contemplating the pastoral picture that had come to seem a vital part of her own life.

"They'd better be almighty quick about gettin'

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here, if they know what's good for 'em," grumbled Colonel Todhunter wistfully. "I'm as hungry as a young hound-dog this very minute. I'll be shot full of holes if my stomach don't feel like my throat's cut, Mary. I could eat a grindstone right now, if somebody'd bust it up and pass it to me on a plate for real vittles!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Colonel Todhunter," smiled Mrs. Todhunter, "after that dinner you ate at the Daughters' picnic! I declare to goodness, I was afraid they'd all think you never got anything fit to eat at home!"

"When I'm ashamed of having a good appetite, Mary," replied Colonel Todhunter, "and 'specially if I ever come to that day when I ain't got it, I'll ask the Old Marster up above to call me to my heavenly home. Th' ain't no man got a right to turn away from wholesome vittles when the good Lord's been bountiful enough to pervide 'em for that man's eatin'. Nature don't never give a man such a right. If he gets so he can't relish his food, it's one of her punishments for his playin' Tom Fool with himself, sinnin' and skylarkin' around. And I ain't never

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seen no piddler at meal times that was fit to do a man's work!"

Mrs. Todhunter laughed outright. "If you're eating to get ready for hard work, Colonel Todhunter, I'm certainly glad to see you eat hearty, because you're likely to be kept mighty busy nominatin' Colonel Strickland for governor of Missouri. You could nominate yourself a heap easier."

"Maybe I could, honey," replied Colonel Todhunter, "but Bill Strickland's a mighty popular man all the same, and he deserves to be. I reckon I could be elected easier'n him, too, knowin' blame nigh every Democrat in Mizoorah, but I'd make a mighty poor governor. You got to handle some all-fired measly customers in politics, and I ain't got patience enough to handle 'em right. That's exactly where old Bill Strickland's got me beat. He can use all sorts o' men, crooked and straight, to gain honest ends—he proved it when he was chairman of the state committee—and that's what a governor's got to do to accomplish anything worth while. That's why I'm workin' for Bill Strickland. He ain't only my friend—he's far and away the best

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man for governor of Mizזורah visible to the naked eye at the present writin'."

Mrs. Todhunter's comprehending eyes rested softly on the Colonel's grizzled visage. "Thurston," she said, "I know better than that. I know better than you do why you'd rather have Colonel Strickland run for governor than to run yourself. It's because they couldn't pull you away from Nineveh and this old home of ours with a yoke of oxen."

Something of incredulous surprise flashed into Colonel Todhunter's face. Then his eyes swept lovingly across the familiar Missouri landscape spread out before him. He looked at Mrs. Todhunter and smiled.

"I reckon you've guessed it, honey," he spoke at last, almost wonderingly. "But I'll be tarred and feathered if I ever realized it until you told me. The good Lord above us, Mary--if I was elected governor and knew I had to live up yonder in Jeff City for four years, I'd die of homesickness the first dash out o' the box. Th' ain't no money and no fame could pay me for doin' it, suh!"

Mrs. Todhunter's eyes gleamed with laughter. "That's you all over, Thurston, and I wouldn't have

## THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

you changed a speck, not for anything in the world. No, not even if the dear Lord Himself told me He was willin' to do it!"

Colonel Todhunter contemplated his wife gravely. "That's a mighty lucky thing, Mary," he replied then, his eyes twinkling just a trifle. "Lucky for you and a blamed sight luckier for me, 'cause I reckon I got to stay just like I am to the end o' the chapter, honey."

At that moment the sound of young voices was heard from the twilight-shadowed avenue leading up to the house. Then a buggy drawn by a high-stepping bay mare came into view.

"That's Mary and Stam Tucker, now," said Mrs. Todhunter. "And I'm glad Mary's home. I don't like that skittish horse Stam Tucker drives."

"That there mare o' Stam's ain't a bit more skittish than Mary Todhunter herself," Colonel Todhunter responded, chuckling. "And they're both a-goin' to give Stam the surprise of his life one o' these days. Just look at Mary, honey! You'd think she was a kitten set right down by a saucer o' cream, she's so tickled. She's havin' as good a time with Stam Tucker as if they wan't no such young man as

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Tom Strickland in all the world. And right this minute she wouldn't give Tom Strickland's little finger for Stam Tucker's whole body and soul and all old Eph Tucker's money thrown in to boot!"

Mrs. Todhunter laughed lightly. "Mary's just beginning to receive company, Colonel Todhunter," she expounded. "And like all girls, she wants to have a good time with her beaux. If it don't happen to be Tom Strickland that's handy, it'll be Stam Tucker. And if it isn't Stam, it'll be somebody else."

"Mrs. Todhunter," returned the Colonel, "you're wastin' your breath tellin' me things like that. I know Mary Todhunter, and I knew you when you was Mary Todhunter's age. If she ain't the livin' likeness of what you was then, I'll eat my hat, so what can you tell me that I don't know already? Tom Strickland will have his hands full bringin' her to a standstill, I tell you!"

By this time Mary and her escort had reached the house and Stam Tucker was assisting her from the buggy. Mrs. Todhunter and the Colonel advanced to meet them.

"You've got to stay to supper, Stam," said Mrs.



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Todhunter. "I know you must be good and hungry, and Colonel Todhunter will have old Jupiter take your horse around to the stable. You and Mary come right in now."

Stam Tucker gladly accepted the invitation, the Colonel calling to old Uncle Jupiter, the faithful family retainer, to take charge of the bay mare, and then the Todhunters and their guest went in to supper.

But, hungry though he had declared himself, and grateful as was the Missouri supper of fried chicken, egg-bread, butterbeans and corn on the ear, with coffee made under Mrs. Todhunter's own supervision, Colonel Todhunter found time to divert himself vastly with the two young people.

"You boys and girls these days are a mighty low-spirited lot," he announced gravely. "I was a-study-in' all of you at the Daughters' picnic, and I never in all my born days saw young folks miss so many chances for havin' fun!"

"Why, father!" indignantly cried Mary. "I think we had the nicest kind of a time! I know I did, anyway. Didn't you, Mr. Tucker?"

"Indeed I did, Miss Mary!" promptly replied

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Stam Tucker, but with a discomfiting recollection of Tom Strickland in his mind. "And it certainly was a big success for the Daughters, too. They must have made a lot for the soldiers' home, I should think."

"They'd ha' made a lot more," said Colonel Todhunter, "if you young people had been more'n half alive. What the Daughters ought to ha' done was to have a good old-fashioned fiddler out there and got up a big barn-dance, chargin' everybody extra for dancin'."

"A barn-dance—oh!" mocked Mary, her pretty nose uptilted. "I'd like to see myself taking part in a barn-dance—just like we were living in the backwoods!"

"You'd see yourself enjoyin' a mighty fine frolic if you did, young lady!" declared the Colonel valiantly. "Good old Virginia reels and cotillions, and a mazurka and schottische or two sandwiched in between 'em, ain't to be sneezed at, let me tell you!"

The speaker glared at the scornful young couple. Then he chuckled. "And you ought to ha' played kissin' games, too," he resumed. "'Spin the Plate,' and 'Pleased or Displeased,' and 'Heavy, Heavy,

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Hangs Over Your Head.' Great name above, th' ain't nothin' like them there old games for makin' young people real sociable!"

Mary tossed her head disdainfully. "Kissing games, indeed!" she cried. "If that ain't old-fashioned, I'd like to know!"

"'Course it's old-fashioned," agreed Colonel Todhunter, the light of relishful teasing in his eyes. "So is kissin' itself, for that matter. But I won't trust none of you Nineveh girls behind the door when there's any kissin' goin' on, old-fashioned or no old-fashioned, Miss Mary Todhunter!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, father!" cried Mary, mightily indignant. "What in the world will Mr. Tucker think?"

"I don't care what Stam thinks, it's true all the same," returned Colonel Todhunter gravely. "And what's in it to be ashamed of? The trouble with you young folks nowadays is that you're skeered to death o' bein' natural. You know you've got to play the old game, but you think you're smart enough to play it in a new way, and you ain't. All you do is to spoil the game, like to-day. I didn't see ary single one o' you do a real natural thing from beginnin' to

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end—and I had my eyes peeled every last blessed minute!”

“I can vouch for that!” laughed Mrs. Todhunter. “You can’t keep yourself out of young people’s affairs to save your life, Thurston.”

“I want to help ’em along, that’s why,” chuckled Colonel Todhunter. “But I must say I had mighty hard sleddin’ on that there job this day!” At this every one laughed.

“Anyway,” continued Colonel Todhunter, as they left the supper table and returned to the front gallery, “it’s more the fault o’ the young men than it is o’ the girls, I’ll be flam-jiggered! ain’t. I never saw such a lot of I’ll-run-if-you-touch-me beaux since the good Lord made me. Ain’t that so, Stam?”

“I hope not, Colonel,” replied Stam Tucker, laughing. “I certainly did my best to give Miss Mary and the other young ladies a good time.” He looked a bit reproachfully at Mary as he spoke.

“Indeed you did, Stam!” said Mary quickly, remembering Tom Strickland’s better treatment by her. “You’re just as nice an escort as any girl could ask.”

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Colonel Todhunter snorted. "Long-sufferin' patience!" he mocked. "That's just the trouble, Stam Tucker! All you Nineveh boys are good enough when it comes to fetchin' and carryin' for the girls, but that don't count for shucks. The sort o' man they like is the man that bosses 'em around, that throws his handkerchief at 'em and makes 'em come when he calls, and none of you Nineveh sparks seems to have sand enough for that. You needn't tell me you've got it, Stam Tucker, and not even Tom Strickland—"

"Speak of the angels, Colonel," Tom Strickland's own voice interposed from the lowest step of the gallery, "and you hear the flutter of their wings!"

"No, I don't, not by a jugful," retorted Colonel Todhunter, unruffled. "When any of you Stricklands begin sproutin' wings, the world's comin' to an end. How are you, Tom? I didn't know you were there!"

"Why didn't you come in to supper, Tom?" asked Mrs. Todhunter.

"I had supper at home, thank you, Mrs. Todhunter," answered the young man, ascending to join the little group as he spoke. "Howdy, Miss Mary.

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Hope you're not feeling tired after the picnic. How are you, Stam?"

The jealous antagonism between the two young men made itself instantly felt. Stam Tucker plainly resented Tom's entrance upon the scene. The latter as plainly showed that he had come purposely to be in his rival's way. The situation was greatly to Colonel Todhunter's humorous liking.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed innocently. "Great Scott and Maria, you must have hot-footed it away from your vittles, young man! If your daddy'll only get such a move on for governor we'll win hands down!"

Tom Strickland laughed. "It all depends, Colonel," he made pointed answer, "on how badly my father wants to be governor. If he wants it half as bad as I wanted to call on Miss Mary this evening, I'll back him for a winner against all comers!"

The note of challenge was unmistakable. Stam Tucker's face darkened with anger. Mary Todhunter blushed to the roots of her hair. The Colonel's grim lips twitched with amused approval, his eyes twinkling under their shaggy gray brows.

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But Mrs. Todhunter came to the rescue with some placid remark that eased the momentary strain.

A little later she and Colonel Todhunter withdrew to their own end of the gallery, leaving Mary to entertain her callers. Colonel Todhunter was vastly tickled.

"Lord, Mary," he confided to his wife, "them two young rascals wouldn't like nothin' better'n to get at each other, hammer and tongs, this very minute! I declare, honey, this here old world of our'n don't change a bit. It's percisely like our own young days, I'll be eternally whipsawed if it ain't, and it's been that way for all time—as it was in the beginnin', is now, and ever shall be, world without end, amen!"

And so profoundly interested was the Colonel that he would gladly have lingered to see which of the two young men "sat the other out" had not Mrs. Todhunter fairly compelled him to accompany her into the house at last. It was with a sigh of genuine disappointment that he arose to do her bidding.

"Bless my soul, it's as good as a show!" he said. "But I don't wonder you pull me away from seein' it, Mrs. Todhunter. Your daughter Mary's playin' every one o' your old tricks over again. You've got

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good reason for not wantin' me to keep tab on 'em at this late day, madam!"

The moon had just moved majestically out from behind a little silver-edged cloud. Colonel Todhunter's eyes swept across the softly mellowed Missouri night-picture. Then he nodded his head as if communing with himself.

"You're right, honey," he spoke finally. "Good Lord above us! I'm just as much a part of all this as our old house here, or the trees and the grass and them there cornfields 'way across the pike yonder. Go away from Nineveh? Why, they'd have to pull me up by the roots to make me do it, suh!"



## CHAPTER III

“FOR GOVERNOR—WILLIAM J. STRICKLAND OF  
NINEVEH”

**C**OLONEL TODHUNTER'S heart swelled with an unselfish pridefulness.

The favorite old Mississippi steamer, *Gray Eagle*, now in full view from where he stood at the Nineveh landing, was bringing homeward the Honorable William J. Strickland of Nineveh, at last an avowed candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor of Missouri.

Colonel Todhunter himself had organized the public reception at this very moment awaiting the most distinguished of Nineveh's citizens. "I'll be shot full o' holes, suh," he said to Dick Cantrill, editor and proprietor of the *Nineveh Weekly Blade*, "if we don't show the people of this here state what old Bill Strickland's home-folks think of him, anyway. Th' ain't nothin' more helpful to a candidate than provin' that them as knows the most about him has the least against him, suh."

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"What about Squire Tucker's opposition, Colonel?" asked Dick Cantrill.

"That's better'n his indorsement, suh!" retorted Colonel Todhunter. "Long as I've known Bill Strickland, if I knew old Eph Tucker was supportin' him I'd be against him on suspicion, suh, blamed if I wouldn't!"

Knowing the speaker better than he knew himself, Dick Cantrill laughed. Colonel Todhunter and Colonel Strickland were friends from boyhood. Friendship was something in the nature of a religion with Colonel Todhunter. In his simple creed he did not simply "like" his friends. He loved them with a trustful steadfastness that knew no limitations of loyalty or of potential sacrifice.

"Barrin' his wife and children, suh," Colonel Todhunter was wont to say, "a man's friends is all that's worth while in this here world of our'n. And his old friends, them that was young with him when he was makin' as many different kinds of a fool of himself as the law allows—well, suh, th' ain't no price can be set on 'em, neither gold nor rubies nor jasper nor frankincense and myrrh, as the Good Book says, suh!"

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Colonel Todhunter had been vastly impatient for the return of the Honorable William J. Strickland. When the *Gray Eagle* rounded the bend in the river two miles below Nineveh and waked the Missouri echoes with the mellow tunefulness of her famous baritone whistle, the Colonel's face became splendidly illumined.

"There he comes, folks!" he cried. "There comes old Bill Strickland, the man we're a-goin' to nominate and elect governor of Mizזורah! All ready, now? Hip! Hip! Hooray!"

A mighty cheer rose from the crowd assembled on the Nineveh wharf-boat and smote afar the ears of Colonel Bill Strickland, where he stood beside Captain Beverly Leigh, on the *Gray Eagle's* upper deck. The candidate's eyes twinkled as they met those of the weather-beaten river-man.

"That's old Thurs T. Todhunter's doing, Bev," he spoke. "I'll bet he's got nigh about all the male population of Nineveh rallyin' around him at that landing. The old rascal!"

Once more the cheering from Nineveh throats rose as the *Gray Eagle* neared the landing and the Honorable William J. Strickland waved his hand

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toward the waiting multitude. It increased in volume as he made his way downward until he stood pictorially framed in at the farther end of the lowered gang-plank. It was a great moment for Nineveh.

Already the Nineveh brass band was playing *Hail to the Chief* with tremendous fervor. The gorgeously uniformed Nineveh Light Infantry stood in company front at parade rest behind the band. All Nineveh, it seemed, was assembled back of them on the wharf-boat and along the immediate river front. The ardent gathering split the air with shouts of high acclaim as the well-known figure of Colonel Bill Strickland crossed the steamer's gang-plank. The next moment Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter, advancing, was seen to grasp his hand.

Each man accomplished a splendid cavalier sweep of his wide-brimmed soft hat. Then they stood facing each other in a fine attitude of cordial dignity. They were prime types of two of the four strains of pioneer blood that are blended in the Missouri type itself, Colonel Todhunter coming of Kentucky stock and Colonel Strickland of Tennessee. Virginia and New England were the other contributors to the

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blend. The three southern states named are responsible for the emotional endowment that has made Missouri "spell-binders" long famous on the stump. The eastern states have supplied that cooler, steadier and more practical strain that constitutes Missouri's balance-wheel in character adjustment.

Linking arms, Colonel Todhunter and the Honorable William J. Strickland moved through the applauding hosts to an open carriage.

"After you, suh!" said Colonel Todhunter ceremoniously, waving his companion to the seat of honor. "And, suh, I beg to notify you that this is the beginnin' of your triumphal progress to the executive mansion at Jefferson City, suh!"

Renewed cheering greeted this imposing announcement. The Honorable William J. Strickland took his place in the carriage. Colonel Todhunter followed him. The mayor of Nineveh, the editor of the *Blade* and other local celebrities occupied the remaining vehicles.

Captain Sim Birdsong of the Nineveh Light Infantry, a veteran of the Spanish War, now stiffened until his spine was as straight and rigid as a ramrod. Ordinarily Sim was rather an awkward young Mis-

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sourian, sandy-haired, freckle-faced and easily abashed. But he became fiercely martial the moment he donned his regimentals.

"Cump'ny—'Tenshun-n-n!" roared Captain Sim. "Carry—humps! Shoulder—humps! Right fo'ward—fo's right—march! Col'm right—march!"

Even as the thrilling commands were given and the Nineveh Light Infantry, in column of fours, came swinging on and took its station in front of the Strickland carriage, the Nineveh brass band at the head of the column struck up *Stars and Stripes Forever* and the first parade of the Strickland campaign for the governorship of Missouri was under way.

"Seems to me, Bill," said Colonel Todhunter as the carriage moved off, "that you came out for the nomination at exactly the right minute in that St. Louis announcement of your'n. The old machine crowd's a-backin' Steve Yancey to a fare-you-well, and the people's sick and tired of the whole outfit, suh. I miss my guess if th' ain't a stampede in your direction."

Colonel Bill Strickland smiled doubtfully. "Our side seems to think that I'm the best man to make the

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race, Thurs," he spoke, "but you're 'way off if you think there ain't going to be a fight. It'll be hot and heavy straight down the line. Whoever wins will win after the toughest scrabble you and me ever saw in Missouri politics, my friend."

"I ain't objectin' none to a fight," said Colonel Todhunter. "But this is the fust time in the history of Mizoorah that the Democrats nominate their candidate for governor at the polls, 'stead of in a nominatin' convention, and I b'lieve they're a-goin' to make sure of an honest man. It looks good to me, suh."

Pausing for just a moment, he resumed. "Here's the way I size up the situation. Mizoorah Democrats know now that the old gang is crookeder'n a dog's hind leg, suh. They know you've been frozen out of the state committee chairmanship because that bunch ain't got no more use for you'n a hoss-thief's got for a square sheriff. You stand for a return to straight politics, in their eyes. And now the voters don't have to leave the nominatin' business to a convention that's fuller of tricks'n a cur dog is of fleas, suh. That's why I'm a-countin' on your bein' nominated."

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"Maybe so," replied the other. "But the machine's going to fight me all it knows how, from start to finish. The fight'll begin right here in my own town. Old Eph Tucker, the richest man in Nineveh, is Stephen K. Yancey's personal representative in this neck o' the woods, and old Eph Tucker hates me so hard it keeps him awake at nights."

"Well, suh," chuckled Colonel Todhunter, "if the old gang waits for Eph Tucker to spend any of his money in politics, they'll wait a mighty long time, suh. He squeezes ev'y dollar o' his'n till the eagle screams and flies back into his own pocket, and you know it."

Colonel Strickland laughed. Suddenly he held up one finger. "What's that?"

A sound of strident music, punctuated by terrific and hollow thumpings at rhythmic intervals, came from the little strip of Nineveh lying between them and the town hall.

The light of battle leaped into Colonel Todhunter's eyes. "I'll be eternally flimflammed," he cried, "if it ain't that-there Nineveh bugle and drum corps that's been cavortin' 'round here at the head of the



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Stephen K. Yancey Campaign Club! You look-a-here, Bill Strickland! If them fellows has had the impudence to turn out on parade when we're a-welcomin' you home to Nineveh, I'll sick our boys on to 'em as sure as my name's Thurs T. Todhunter, suh!"

Colonel Strickland was laughing outright. "What did I tell you?" he said. "They haven't lost any time declaring war, and somebody's paying good money for it, too!"

Colonel Todhunter leaned out of the carriage and spoke to the nearest Strickland partizan. "You run up yonder at the head of that-there band," he said, "and tell Samson Meek to come back here a minute. I want to

Samson Meek, leader of the Nineveh brass band, hurried back. He was so buttoned up and padded in his gorgeous drum-major's uniform, topped off with a gigantic fur shako, that the sweat poured down his lank and honest Missouri face like rain.

"Samson," spoke Colonel Todhunter ominously, "if we run across that Stephen K. Yancey bugle and drum corps, I want you to drown 'em out and keep 'em drowned out, suh. Do you understand?"

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Samson Meek brought his baton to a present. "Colonel Todhunter, we'll smother 'em, suh. I just been waiting for the chance."

"Then you go back and tell your horn-tooters what's expected of 'em, suh," commanded Colonel Todhunter. "'Specially that little fat fellow with the horn bigger'n he is. Tell him to blow himself inside out. This-here Strickland parade ain't a-goin' to be interrupted by no Steve Yancey and Eph Tucker foolishness as long as I'm in charge of the ceremonies, suh!"

Then he turned to Colonel Bill Strickland. "That settles it, suh!" he snorted. "I'll be shot full o' holes if I don't take the stump for you myself, P'll Strickland, if they're startin' the fight right in your own town, suh, the fust minute you come home, suh. I'll make imperial Mizzoorah howl for William J. Strickland, too, suh; hang my picture if I don't!"

In full view of the parading crowd Colonel Bill Strickland grasped Colonel Todhunter's hand. "You old war-horse!" he cried. "I'd rather have you stumping Missouri for me than all the state committee spellbinders that ever breathed the breath

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of life! Bully for you, Thurs! We'll fight 'em to the last ditch!" Great was the cheering at this incident.

But the Strickland parade did not encounter the Nineveh bugle and drum corps and the Stephen K. Yancey Campaign Club at this juncture.

The encounter came later.

It came at that tremendous moment when Colonel Thurston T. Todhunter, majestic on the town hall stage, was just reaching the fervid peroration of a speech that was to close with the inspiring mention of the name of the Honorable William J. Strickland as Missouri Democracy's sure choice for governor.

It was a premeditated blow at the glory of the Todhunter brand of oratory, the cherished pride of Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter's ardent soul.

Entering the town hall and defiantly marching up the main corridor to the wide double doors that gave a view of the Strickland meeting, the Nineveh bugle and drum corps, heading the Stephen K. Yancey Campaign Club, awoke the resounding echoes.

Never, it would seem, had earth heard such clamor of trumpet and tambour.

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It crashed into and through the town hall assembly room. It rose to the roof and came thundering back into the aisles. It smote the ears as with cataclysmic bolts of sound. It stilled the eloquence of Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter as if that mighty speaker were an infant lifting voice against the voice of elemental chaos.

And Colonel Todhunter paused, crestfallen.

Then the lust of righteous battle flamed from his indignant eyes. He waved his right hand with a Jovian gesture. "Drive 'em away, Samson!" he shouted. "You and Sim Birdsong. I ain't done yet!"

And the gallant Samson Meek rose to the occasion. With a mighty wave of his baton he rallied his bandsmen in close order behind him. Captain Sim Birdsong, no less dependable, formed the Nineveh Light Infantry in line behind the band. There was a magnificent flourish of Samson Meek's silver-knobbed rod of office, a quick command from Captain Sim Birdsong, and then—

The Nineveh brass band and the Nineveh Light Infantry deployed into the corridor and charged the enemy.

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It was an assault sonorous and irresistible. Its slogan was "Hail Columbia!" This gave the big horns an almost unearthly opportunity. The "little fat fellow with the horn bigger'n him" seemed resolved to obey Colonel Todhunter's injunction and "blow himself inside out." His fellows followed his example. The resultant cyclone of wind-clamor wiped out the Nineveh bugle and drum corps as if it had not been. Triumph shone on the face of Drum-Major Samson Meek, truculently waving his glittering baton.

But an ominous cry rose from his front. "Rush 'em, boys! Make a rough-house!"

Even as the Strickland forces leaned forward for a countering rush into combat, however, a resolute figure sprang in between the battle lines. It was the figure of Constable Pete Fanshaw, embodying the law of Nineveh. It waved a sternly forbidding hand.

"None o' that, you boys!" he shouted. "I ain't takin' no sides, but this-here's a public meetin' and it's my sworn duty to see that there ain't no disturbin' of the peace. Stam Tucker, you turn your men right around and march 'em out o' here double-

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quick! And you, Tom Strickland, quit your edgin' up to git a lick at Stam! There ain't goin' to be no fightin' here this load o' poles!"

Every young chap in Nineveh knew Pete Fanshaw's fiber. He stood restrainingly between the lines. He was not to be trifled with. If necessary, he could enlist either faction under the standard of the law, to punish the aggressor if battle were precipitated.

Stamford Tucker glowered at him for a moment. Then his eyes narrowed in a venomous flash at Tom Strickland. At last, sullenly, he gave the order that set the Yancey clan in motion to abandon the field.

War had been averted.

And five minutes later, again getting up steam, Colonel Todhunter completed his speech. The Honorable William J. Strickland advanced to the front of the stage and began his own address. Soon the first rally of the Strickland campaign for the governorship of Missouri peacefully reached its appointed finish.

"What did I tell you, Thurs?" asked Colonel Bill Strickland. "Didn't I say the fight would begin here in my own town?"

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Colonel Todhunter nodded his head, defiant. "Let 'er begin, suh! We'll stay with 'em till hell freezes over! And old Eph Tucker'll get more'n he bargained for, too. That was his son Stamford a-leadin' them rapsCALLIONS that tried to break up our meetin', suh!"

Colonel Bill Strickland grinned. "Well," he said, "my son Tom was makin' a rush for Stam Tucker from our side, so we're about even, I reckon!"

Colonel Todhunter laughed outright. "Bill," he said, "I'll be shot full o' holes if this-here campaign ain't openin' the way I like, suh!"

Colonel Bill Strickland's eyes twinkled. "That's you all over!" he retorted. "Don't you know I'm going to be put to my paces for all I know how, and that it's pull Dick, pull devil, from now till the last Democratic vote's counted on election day?"

Colonel Todhunter gazed at his friend almost pensively. "Bill," he said, "man that is born of woman is of few days and fearfully and wonderfully made, as the Good Book tells us, suh. I want you to win. I'll move Heaven and earth to make you win. But I'll be eternally condemned, suh, if I'd care the snap of a whip for a winnin' that wasn't

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the result of the hottest fight we knew how to put up, suh. I reckon we're constructed that way on purpose. We'd be a mighty scrubby lot if we wasn't always ready to wrastle our blamedest for whatever's worth havin' in this-here world, suh!"



## CHAPTER IV

### LOTTIE-MAY DOGGETT WEAVES A WEB FOR TOM STRICKLAND

**L**OTTIE-MAY DOGGETT, her dark and eager face alight with excitement, had attended the political meeting which followed the Strickland parade. Nearly all Nineveh, indeed, ordinarily so quiet, was in public evidence this night, grateful for a little diversion.

The girl was a witness, therefore, to the dire interruption of Colonel Todhunter's speech, and had also seen the clash of the rival factions headed by Tom Strickland and Stam Tucker. Her eyes shone with expectancy of a personal encounter between the two young men.

"Lord, I'd like to see 'em clench!" she exclaimed, pushing a bit forward as she spoke. "They'd make a good fight, too, seein' as how there ain't been no love lost between 'em for some time. I bet they'll get at it!"

Her companion, a girl who envied Lottie-May

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that partial acceptance by Nineveh's good families which was due to her grandfather's honorable Confederate record, laughed a bit significantly. "It won't be your fault if they don't fight some day, Lottie-May Doggett!" she charged. "I hear you've been settin' your cap at both of 'em in a mighty dangerous way."

"I ain't been doin' nothin' of the sort!" indignantly denied Lottie-May, resentment in her face. "It ain't my fault if Stam Tucker sets up to me, is it? And I reckon Tom Strickland's got the same right, ain't he? You better mind your own business and let my affairs alone!"

"Land alive, what a spit-cat about nothin'!" protested the other. "But Tom Strickland better leave Stam Tucker alone. My brother says Stam always carries a pistol and is a dangerous man when his blood's up."

Lottie-May's eyes flashed instant disdain. "I reckon Tom Strickland can take care of himself," she retorted hotly. "I wouldn't be afeared for him in a difficulty with Stam Tucker!"

Her companion laughed triumphantly. "I caught you that time, Lottie-May!" she cried. "I just

## LOTTIE-MAY WEAVES A WEB

wanted to see which you liked the best, Stam or Tom. And it's Tom, that's who it is!"

"You think you're smart, don't you?" countered Lottie-May, but blushing angrily. "Well, you ain't. Neither one of 'em is makin' me lay awake of nights, I can tell you."

"It'll be Tom does it, if anybody does," calmly returned the other. "But they ain't a-goin' to clench this time, at any rate. Pete Fanshaw's just called 'em down and put a stop to their foolishness."

Lottie-May was still fuming with resentment of this open bantering concerning Tom Strickland and Stam Tucker when she started homeward. Not at all unwilling to accept the secret wooing of either, she intuitively shrank from the open coupling of their name with hers. The shadow of her mother's shame oppressed her, and it was only in moments of sudden anger or other excitement that she surrendered to a mood of reckless defiance of her dark inheritance.

Even now, however, it gave Lottie-May a thrill of vainful triumph to remember that Stam Tucker was awaiting her somewhat farther along her lonely homeward way through the night and that he would

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accompany her as near to her suspicious old grandfather's house as she dared permit. But Tom Strickland himself intervened before her meeting with Stam Tucker this night. He, too, was homeward bound, encountering the girl at a secluded crossing of their respective roads. Lottie-May's heart gave a great leap as she recognized him in the darkness. A sudden impulse of passionate enticement possessed her soul.

"Goodness me, Tom Strickland!" she cried. "You skeered me 'most to death! I took you for one of them Black Bottoms men from the trappin' camp."

Emphasizing her claim of panic she stood very close to Tom. A loose strand of her hair blew against his face. Her dark eyes were velvety with unconcealed tempting, her voice vibrant with the appeal of sex.

"You oughtn't to be going home by yourself at this time of night, Lottie-May," said Tom. "It ain't safe—for as young and—and as pretty a girl as you are." His voice shook just a little.

Lottie-May laughed. "There, Tom, you've actually paid me a compliment!" she exclaimed, a perilous exultation curving her red lips. "It's the first

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one, too. Maybe you ain't so hard-hearted in the night-time as you are in the daytime, Tom!"

There was the frankest wooing in the girl's manner. She moved until her softly rounded young shoulder touched Tom's arm. The young man breathed quickly, his eyes suddenly glowing.

"I never saw the day I was afraid to tell you how pretty you are!" he said. "But that's just the trouble right now. I don't like to see you going home alone so late at night."

Lottie-May Doggett felt a hot glow of love for Tom Strickland thrill her young body through and through. At the same instant, though remembering, she recklessly ignored the fact that Stam Tucker was waiting for her farther along the way.

"Maybe you better come home with me then, Tom," she said softly. All the lure of sexual surrender sounded in her speech. Tom Strickland laughed.

"That's what I'm going to do, Lottie-May," he responded. "I'd never forgive myself if anything happened to you, with me knowing you had to go home alone. You—you're sure you're willing for me to come with you?"

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The girl's eyes were liquid soft. "Willin'?" she repeated. "You know I'm willin'—and more than willin', Tom. I just asked you—and I ain't never goin' to forget this night as long as I live!"

Again Tom Strickland laughed. "You'll have me making love to you, first thing you know!" he said. "You'd better be careful, Lottie-May, if you ain't willing!"

"I dare you to, Tom!" the girl replied in a low voice. "I dare you to! And no real man ever took such a dare from a girl!"

They were moving side by side along the road. The girl's free carriage seemed that of some wild and beautiful young animal of the woods and the passionate night. Tom Strickland bent toward her, passing his arm about her soft little waist.

"You don't have to dare me," he said, drawing her closely to him. "I can love you to death!"

"Kiss me!" whispered Lottie-May in reply. "Kiss me, Tom! I love you so!"

Even as she spoke Tom Strickland had taken her in his arms, pressing his lips to hers, crushing her body against his own. The girl's red mouth seemed as honey to him.

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And at that moment Stam Tucker, waiting to meet Lottie-May by appointment, stepped out of the shadow at the road's edge. His face was black with jealous rage.

Lottie-May Doggett gave a little cry of dismay. "Why, Stam!" she cried, releasing herself from Tom's arms and essaying to laugh. "You are waiting for me after all, ain't you? I was afeared you'd gone home, so Tom Strickland here was goin' with me instead."

An ugly sneer was on Stam Tucker's face. "So I see," he replied, glancing venomously from one to the other. "And you seem to be having a good time, both of you."

"Oh, shucks, now, Stam, it's nothin' but foolin', that's all!" cried the girl, a note of pleading in her voice. "I was teasin' Tom for bein' bashful, and I dared him to kiss me, and he wouldn't take a dare—and that's the whole truth!"

"I reckon it's all the truth you intend to tell," replied Stam. "But I'll tell you what it looks like to me. It looks like—"

"Stop right there, Stam!" interrupted Tom Strickland. "If you've seen anything you don't like, I'm

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the responsible party. Say whatever you've got to say to me, not to a woman!"

"I don't ask anything better, Mr. Tom Strickland!" instantly retorted Stam, turning swiftly from the girl. "And I won't mince any words saying it, either. You're a—"

"Stam!" cried Lottie-May, running to the speaker and placing a restraining hand on his, that had suddenly been thrust back to his hip pocket. "You shan't do it! You mustn't do it, Stam! It'd ruin me in Nineveh for ever and ever!"

"Let him alone, Lottie-May," said Tom Strickland. "He won't shoot. Just you stand aside and let him crack his whip."

Stam Tucker made a movement to throw Lottie-May off, but the girl clung to him desperately. Tom Strickland's eyes hardened, as they watched Stam Tucker, with an ominous alertness.

A farm-horse drawing a ramshackle spring-wagon emerged into view around a bend in the road some distance away and came lumbering along toward the three.

"Good Lord, it's granddaddy!" cried Lottie-May Doggett. "For my sake, please—please, Stam,



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you and Tom both—don't let him see there's been any trouble!"

Old Rafe Daggett, white-haired and stern of visage, scowled suspiciously at Lottie-May and her companions as he brought his horse to a halt.

"Where in the world have you been till this hour of the night, Lottie-May?" he asked. "I was on my way to town after you. What have you been doin', girl?"

Lottie-May stood shamefaced. "Why, granddaddy," she replied nervously, "I just stayed to the political meetin', that's all. There was to be a brass band there, and speakin', and all that, and I just couldn't come away till it was over!"

The old man kept his accusing eyes on the girl's face for a moment. Then he turned and looked searchingly first at Stam Tucker and then at Tom Strickland. Tom felt a sudden and overwhelming sense of shame and self-reproach and pity for the good old man whose dread-harried eyes were so somberly bent on him.

There was a moment of silence. "Well, seein' all there was to see," old Rafe Doggett resumed then, "what did you do after that, girl? How comes

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it that you're here on the road with Stam Tucker, facin' Tom Strickland like there'd been a quarrel? Tell me the truth!"

Lottie-May Doggett flashed a quick appeal of her eyes at Tom Strickland. It was plainly a mute and desperate entreaty for his forbearance with whatever she was about to say.

Then—"Why, granddaddy," she made answer, "Stam offered to escort me home, and we met Tom on the way, and we just all three stopped to talk for a minute—that's all. Quarrelin'? Stam and Tom wasn't thinkin' of such a thing, that's the truth, I cross my heart, please, sir!"

The girl's voice trembled with fear of her grim old grandfather, to whom her mother's memory remained but as meaning a lifelong disgrace and humiliation. The old man seemed not entirely satisfied with her explanation. He sat silent, still studying the group confronting him. Then he sighed.

"Well, Lottie-May," he spoke at last, "since Stam wants to escort you home, he can still do it, I reckon. But you both better come along with me in the wagon. There ain't no sense in your walkin', now."

Lottie-May's frightened eyes were pleading with

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Stam and Tom to abide by her story and comply with her grandfather's wishes.

"All right, Mr. Doggett," spoke Stam finally. "I'll be specially glad for Lottie-May to ride. I reckon she's pretty tired by now, so I'll just see her home that way, along with you."

Tom Strickland stood silent as Lottie-May was lifted into the wagon by Stam Tucker, who mounted to the seat beside her. Old Rafe Doggett clucked to his horse.

"Good night, Tom!" cried the girl.

"Good night, Lottie-May," replied Tom. "Good night, Mr. Doggett."

The next moment they were gone.

And Tom Strickland, shamed to the soul at thought of what he had seen in old Rafe Doggett's worn and wasted face, made his own way homeward.

## CHAPTER V

### A LIVELY SESSION IN THE NINEVEH "BLADE" SANCTUM

**T**HE Honorable William J. Strickland and Colonel Todhunter were parting company for a few days, after a final conference concerning preliminary campaign plans.

"I'll have to get back to St. Louis and see how things are starting off at my headquarters there," said Colonel Strickland. "Then it'll be necessary to take a run across the state and establish headquarters in Kansas City, right under Steve Yancey's nose. I'll want you to make a few speeches for me in St. Louis about next week, Thurs, old fellow. And don't forget—I'm going to hold you to your promise to stump the state for me."

"I ain't forgettin'," responded Colonel Todhunter. "I'm cocked and primed for a campaign that'll bring every old-time Democrat in Mizoorah out o' the brush and set 'em to whoopin' things up for you to beat the band, suh. The almighty dollar ain't the

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only thing that talks in this here state yet, not by a jugful, and I'm a-goin' to prove it, Bill."

"It's what we've got to beat, though," commented the candidate. "Things ain't like they used to be in Missouri politics, my friend."

"That's why we got so many o' them professional politicians and so few real statesmen nowadays," replied the other. "But all the same, the people of Mizזורah's honest, if the politicians ain't, and this-here new primary law's a-goin' to give 'em their best chance to name their own choice for governor, suh."

"It will—if there's no crooked work at the polls," said Colonel Strickland. "I'm afraid of the cities for that reason. It's the city crooks that beat the country vote in anything like a close race, Thurs."

Colonel Todhunter nodded his head emphatically. "I'll just be jig-whiffled if all the corruption in American politics don't seem to come from the big towns, suh. It looks like it's plumb natural for cities to be sinful. It's been that way ever since Sodom and Gomorrah, suh. Do you reckon the Old Marster up above couldn't ha' found ten honest men among the shepherds watchin' their flocks and the husband-

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men tillin' their fields in the country? He couldn't ha' missed findin' 'em—'less'n He'd struck a bunch of 'em like old Eph Tucker here in Nineveh, suh!"

Then, after a reflective pause: "The trouble with old Eph Tucker, suh, is that he's got so he can't see anything but money. I ain't talkin' against money in its rightful proportion to the rest of life. I like to have it as well as the next man, and sometimes I need it mighty bad, too, but I'll be struck limber-jawed if it ain't plumb foolish to plug up your eyes with it, suh. It don't cost a cent to see the beauty and goodness o' this-here world, suh, not a cent, and if you miss seein' it, you miss seein' the whole show. That's too big a price to pay for the privilege of lookin' at a dollar instead, suh."

The Honorable William J. Strickland contemplated Colonel Todhunter with a smile on his grim lips.

"Thurs," he said, "I don't know anything sounder than your faith in the good of life and your enthusiasm for livin' it on that basis!"

"Faith in the good of life ain't nothin' more or less'n common sense, suh," spoke Colonel Todhunter. "It's justified by the facts, as every blessed

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last one of us realizes when he begins to see the finish and size up the whole thing. And enthusiasm ain't nothin' more or less'n interest in the game, suh. Just the minute mine's all gone, I'll be willin' to lay down my cards and quit. I don't know nothin' more triflin' and insignificant than a bottle o' soda-pop that won't fizz, suh."

It was shortly after this that the two old friends parted. Colonel Todhunter went direct to the office of the *Nineveh Blade* when he had seen Colonel Bill Strickland off for St. Louis.

Dick Cantrill, editor of the *Blade*, was a red-headed young Democrat who cherished old-fashioned principles. There was no thought in his clean mind of devious ways to make politics pecuniarily profitable. One could no more have "bought" him than one could have "bought" Patrick Henry or "Old Hickory" Jackson, and he was just about as fiery and fearless as those two earlier Americans. Consequently, many politicians spoke of him as "that stubborn young fool, Dick Cantrill of the *Nineveh Blade*."

As Colonel Todhunter entered the *Blade* office a fuming little man almost extinguished under a big

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and very rusty silk hat was terminating what had plainly been a stormy interview with Dick Cantrill.

"Hello, Eph!" said Colonel Todhunter, surprised. "It ain't often I find you hobnobbin' with Dick Cantrill. Go right ahead—don't let me interrupt you!"

There was a wicked smile on young Cantrill's mouth. "We're just about done now, Colonel," he interposed. "Squire Tucker was trying to induce me to support Yancey in this campaign, but I had to decline. The *Blade's* for Colonel Strickland, tooth and nail, now that he's out for the nomination."

"And you and the *Blade* are both durned fools, sir—that's all I've got to say!" snapped the little old man under the big hat. "You don't know which side your bread's buttered on, Dick Cantrill!"

"Squire," said Dick, grinning coolly, "that ain't the only viewpoint from which I look at the matter. I know Colonel Strickland and I know Steve Yancey, and I know Strickland's the best man. That makes it my duty to support him, Squire!"

"It's to your interest to support the winner, you young idiot, and I was talking to you for your own good!" cried old Tucker. "Stephen K. Yancey has got all the money influence behind him in this cam-



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paign, and he'll be nominated by an overwhelming majority. You'll put up a mighty poor mouth then, Dick Cantrill, begging for the public printing in the *Blade*—and I'll see to it that nothing comes your way!"

"Go right ahead—crack your whip, Squire!" retorted Dick Cantrill calmly. "I reckon you and I have different ideas about politics, but there needn't be any hard feelings unless you insist on it. Anyway, we might as well get the whole thing threshed out right now, as long as we've got started."

"I'll see if I can't make you change your tune before I'm done with you, sir!"—and old Tucker's cold little eyes narrowed venomously. "You're talking mighty big now, Dick Cantrill, but the Yancey administration'll have the last say, my young gamecock!"

"The Yancey administration be damned!" replied Dick Cantrill—and then he laughed and settled back in his chair. "But, shucks, Squire, I can't talk to you like I could to a younger man! Let's go easy. You're for Yancey, and I'm for Strickland, and that's all there is to it. Every man's got a right to his own opinion in a free country, Squire."

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"Very well, sir, very well, if you will have it that way," retorted old Eph Tucker. "But you're backing a loser, Dick Cantrill, and you're going to suffer for it. Stephen K. Yancey will snow Bill Strickland under so deep that Bill's friends'll never be able to dig him out, sir!"

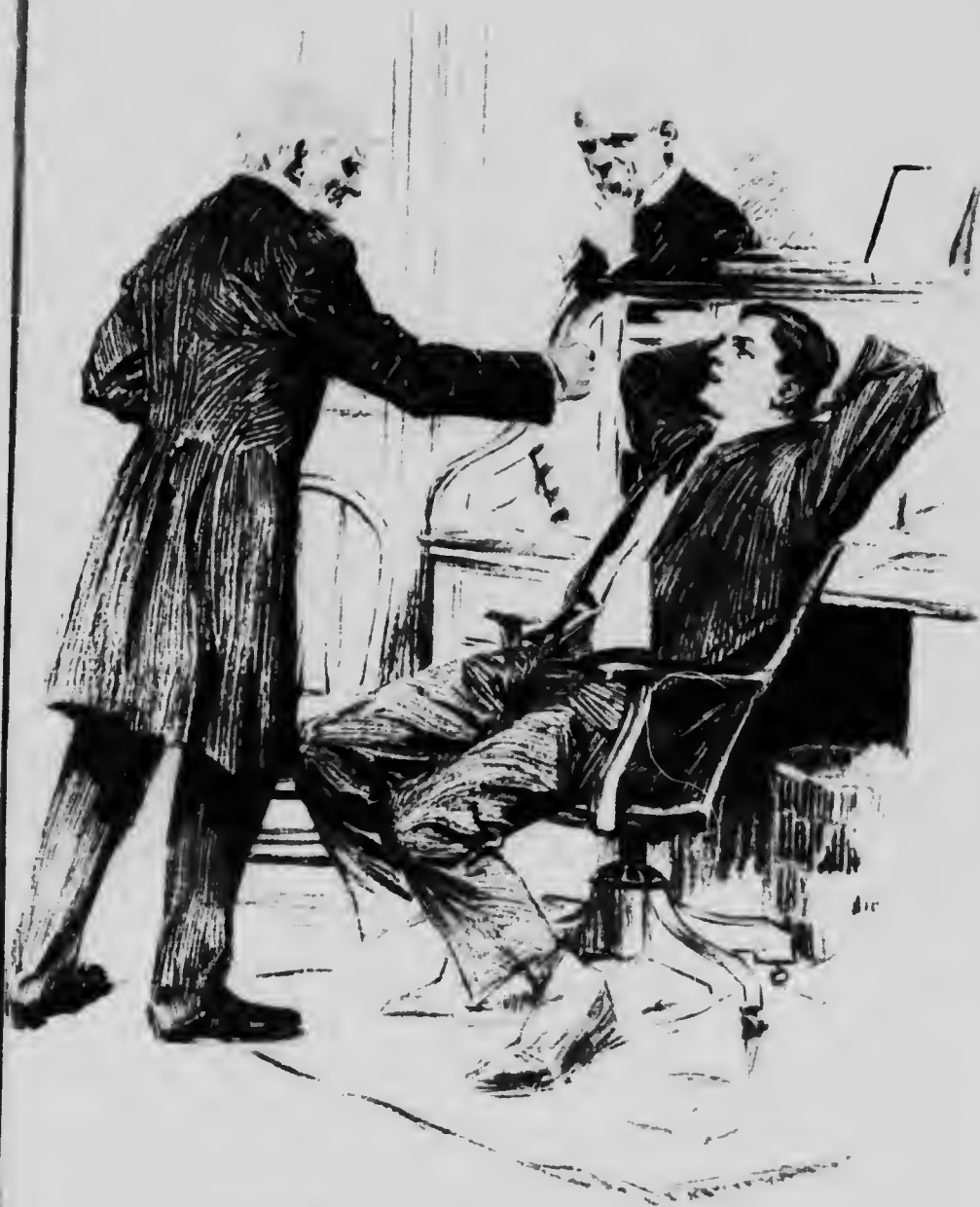
Dick Cantrill stretched his arms above his head. "Such being the case, Squire," he replied, "it don't make any difference to you Yancey people what me and the *Blade* see fit to do, so you can just keep your shirt on. There certainly can't be any occasion for your worrying if you've got us beat from the jump."

Old Tucker glared at the amused speaker.

At this moment a fourth figure was added to the group. It was that of Lycurgus Quivey, the schoolmaster of Nineveh, a gaunt and homely representative of rustic learning, with a face pathetic in its meek wistfulness.

"Well, well, Lycurgus!" cried Dick Cantrill cordially, "I'm glad to see you! Blest if I hadn't begun to fear the *Blade* wasn't going to have a poem from you this week. And that would never do, sir!"

The shy schoolmaster colored at the greeting.



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"It's mighty good of you to say so, Mr. Cantrill," he replied. "I reckon my poems don't amount to as much as that, but I try my best to keep 'em up to a high standard. The world don't seem to care much for poetry now, though."

"It's always been that way, Lycurgus,"—and a whimsical smile came on Dick Cantrill's lips. "The only time the world has ever loved and honored its poets is after they've been starved to death, sir. But what have you got now?"

Lycurgus Quivey cleared his throat nervously. "I reckon you'll be surprised, Mr. Cantrill," he said at last, "but the truth is, I've written a political poem this time. I know Colonel Strickland so well, sir, and I like him so much, that I thought I'd write a Strickland campaign song. It might do some good at mass-meetings and barbecues and such things, it seemed to me."

Old Eph Tucker snorted and glared at the embarrassed speaker. Colonel Todhunter beamed his approval. Dick Cantrill's sense of humor reveled in the situation.

"Bully for you, Lycurgus!" he exclaimed. "That's just fine! You bet the *Blade* will print your

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campaign song. And, by George, sir, come to think of it, here's Squire Tucker doing his level best to convert me to the Yancey cause—I'll just read your poem to him and see if it won't bring him over to the Strickland side!"

At this old Eph Tucker's wrath exploded.

"You won't do anything of the sort!" he ejaculated. "You and your fool poets can go it alone supporting Bill Strickland. It's about all the support he'll get!"

Then he turned on Lycurgus Quivey. "As for you, Mr. School-teacher," he snarled, "if writin' campaign poetry for Bill Strickland is the best you can do I'll see if we can't get you more time for it by getting you out of the Nineveh school, sir. I can do it, too. I'm chairman of the school board, and I'll h'ist you out of your job without letting any grass grow under my feet!"

"No, you won't, Squire," spoke Dick Cantrill quietly. His steady eyes held those of old Eph Tucker with a distinct menace.

"Squire," Dick continued, "I know you just well enough to know that you're willing to make that threat good. Don't you dare do it, sir. This man is

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a worthy man in his place, and, outside of his working hours, he's privileged to write poetry to whom-ever and whatever he damn pleases, and to make his own choice in politics, sir. I give you a piece of advice, Squire Tucker. Don't you lift a finger to get Lycurgus Quivey fired, sir. If you do, it'll be the worse for you."

Old Eph Tucker glared at the speaker. "What'll you do, Dick Cantrill? That's mighty big talk to come off of such a little stomach, sir. What'll you do if I see fit to teach Lycurgus Quivey to mind his own business?"

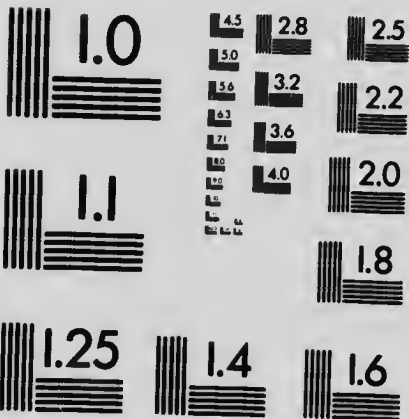
"What'll I do?" repeated Dick Cantrill, his eyes flashing. "I'll skin you alive, Squire Tucker, that's what I'll do. I'll flay you from head to heels, sir, and then I'll hang your hide out here in front of the *Blade* office, so the people of Nineveh can see just what a miserable skunk you are, sir. If you're going to make a personal fight on this man because he backs William J. Strickland for governor of Missouri, I'll make the same sort of a fight from the Strickland side of that proposition. And you'll be the first man I'll make it on, Squire. I've got the material to do it with, and you know it. You know





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## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

your own record. You won't last a minute if the *Blade* goes out after your scalp, Squire Tucker. You'll shrivel up quicker than a dry oak-leaf in hell, sir!"

A grim silence followed these words. Then old Eph Tucker spoke.

"Well," he said slowly, "it strikes me you're going off half-cocked, Dick. We've both lost our tempers a little and probably said more'n we meant. Anyway I haven't done anything against Lycurgus Quivey yet. Maybe you better just keep cool and wait till I do before you start in to tear up things the way you've been threatening, sir."

Dick Cantrill laughed. "Sure, Squire," he replied. "I can wait just as long as you can, I reckon. But not a minute longer. Keep that in mind, Squire. Not a minute longer!"

A few moments later Colonel Todhunter was alone with Dick Cantrill. "That was a right lively session while it lasted, Dick," he chuckled. "You called old Eph down almighty hard, suh."

"The old scoundrel!" exclaimed Dick. Then he added: "I don't like to talk to a man of his age that way, Colonel, but that cold-blooded threat against

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Lycurgus Quivey, as defenseless a man as ever lived, sir, flung me off my balance."

"I reckon you ain't done no harm, Dick," said Colonel Todhunter. Then his eyes twinkled. "Th' ain't none of us old sinners, I reckon, but what's all the better for bein' brought to a conviction of sin every now and then, suh. Anyway it worked fine with old Eph." At this Dick Cantrill's laugh was good to hear.

"Dick," asked the Colonel then, "are we gettin' any news of how the other side regards Bill Strickland's candidacy?"

"Well, Colonel," grinned the *Blade's* editor, "there's some mighty amusing surface indications. They haven't lost any time springing one old moss-grown political trick on us, at any rate, sir."

"What trick is that?" quickly asked the other.

"Why, sir, they've induced Hamp Judson, of Carthage, and Judge Sanford, of Bowling Green, to come out, both of 'em, in the race for the nomination. Each of 'em will take votes away from Colonel Strickland. It's an old move, but a shrewd one, Colonel. They know Yancey will get the solid vote always controlled by the machine, and they're work-

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ing to divide the rest between Strickland, Judson and Sanford, sir."

"I'll be eternally condemned, Dick," vociferated Colonel Todhunter, "if I'd ha' believed either Hamp Judson or Jim Sanford would lend themselves to such a game, suh. I hate to think it of 'em now, even on your say-so."

"It isn't my say-so, Colonel; it's the cold facts," replied Dick Cantrill. "Judson and Sanford both entered the race within twenty-four hours after Colonel Strickland announced his candidacy down there in St. Louis. They know they haven't got the ghost of a show for the nomination. All they're working for is to get solid with the old Jefferson City ring by helping to defeat Colonel Strickland. I'd be willing to bet that their campaign expenses, down to the last dollar on the last day, will be paid by Yancey's campaign managers, sir."

Colonel Todhunter looked at the speaker indignantly. "And you're a-settin' there ca'mly, suh," he inquired, "knowin' these things and not movin' a finger to expose their game?"

"Colonel," replied Dick Cantrill, laughter in his eyes, "don't you be uneasy. I've got my end of the

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fight started. At the proper moment, and that moment isn't far off, you'll see Hamp Judson and Judge Sanford jumping and howling at every crack of the *Blade's* whip, sir. I'll make 'em the two sickest men in Missouri before I'm through with 'em!"

"That sounds like business!" cried Colonel Todhunter, much relieved. "Give it to 'em good and hard, Dick. Th' ain't nothin' on God's green footstool that I hate worse'n a renegade that goes back on a friend when his help's most needed. And I don't know whether it's the treachery of it that I hate most or the yellow streak that always goes with it, suh!"

"Colonel," said Dick Cantrill, "don't you worry about their not getting what's coming to them. They'll get it good and plenty."

A little later, crossing the town square, Colonel Todhunter held counsel with himself.

"Well, suh," he said, "the owner of a newspaper ought to flop down on his marrowbones every night and pray 'Our Father, deliver us from temptation!' He can help or hurt crooked men more'n any other one influence, and they know it. He sure must have a hard fight to keep straight—the longer he stays

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virtuous, the more they're willin' to pay for him. I'm glad I ain't in the business, suh—old Satan's got grip-holds enough on me as it is!"

## CHAPTER VI

### THE STRICKLAND-TUCKER FEUD HAS ITS OMINOUS BEGINNING

**T**HE colonel was still deep in philosophic musings, not more than half-way across the town square, when he was interrupted by a genial hail.

"Howdy, Kunn'l Todhunter; howdy, suh! You sho'ly ain't gwine walk right p'intedly pas' me 'thout sayin' howdy to you' ole A'nt Mirandy, is you, suh?"

The speaker was a fat, gray-wooled black woman, festively arrayed in a gaudy calico dress, a handanna handkerchief knotted around her head like a turban, a big market-basket on her arm. She emphasized her greeting by lifting her disengaged hand with an almost ecstatic gesture.

"Well, well, Aunt Mirandy!" returned the Colonel. "I ain't seen you for so long that I reckon I wouldn't h' known you anyway—you're lookin' so peart and gaily. How are you, Mirandy, and how's that no'-count husband of your'n?"

The ancient negress cackled joyously. "I tell you

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de gospel trufe, Kunn'l Todhunter, and I sho' ain't tellin' you no lies—dat-ar wufless ole man o' mine an' sutt'nly mighty triflin', suh. He gittin' wuss'n wuss ever' day, too, Kunn'l. Whut you reckon done happ'n to him now, suh? Well, I jes' gwine tell you—dat ole Jed been out fishin' an' come traipsin' back home wid de roomatis', suh, an' layin' fiat on he back gruntin' an' groanin' lak he gwine die ever' minit, suh! I 'clar to goodness, Kunn'l Todhunter, dat nigger gwine drive me 'stracted yit, suh!"

"You're too easy on him, Mirandy; that's the trouble!" laughed the Colonel. "You ought to take a broomstick and wallop him till he ain't too proud to work, the old rascal! Quit cookin' such good vittles for him, Mirandy, and let him go hungry for a while!"

Old Mirandy rolled her eyes heavenward. "Kunn'l Todhunter," she gurgled, "I jes' nachully kain't do dat, suh. 'Tain't dat ole Jed don't 'serve it, kase he do, but he sho' kin put up sich a po' mouf, suh! He's de mos' mizzabul nigger on a em'ty stummuck, suh, dat I ain't got de heart to 'fuse him when he say he hungry. Dass de fac', Kunn'l—I jes' ain't got de heart, suh."



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"Well, but, good Lord, Mirandy, you must be put to it mighty hard to 'tend to your washin' and look after that triflin' old scoundrel at the same time!"

"I sho' is, Kunn'l—I ain't nebber had no baby what's mo' trubble'n dat-ar old Jed! Whuss I doin' now, suh, but rubbin' dat ole fool's j'int's wid liniment whilst I oughter be right at my wash-tub all my time, suh? I tell you, suh, I got to scrabble fo' a libbin' wuss'n a scratchin' hen dese-heah days, suh!"

"Where are you livin' now, Mirandy?"

"Whah I libbin'? Whah I libbin'? Well, now, suh, I mos' shame fo' to tell you, suh, but me'n ole Jed is jes' a-squattin' down yander in a 'serted cabin whut wuz em'ty on de Black Bottoms road, suh, 'twell me'n him jes' sorter moved into it, suh. Yass, suh, hit's ercross f'um whah ole Mister Rafe Doggett an' he young granddaughter, Miss Lottie-May, libbin', suh. An' hit sho' am a lonesome place—ef hit wan't fo' some skylarkin' young man a-comin' out f'um Nineveh to cote Miss Lottie-May when her ole granddaddy ain't home, I tell you p'intedly, Kunn'l Todhunter, hit'd be jes' lak a graveyard, suh!"

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"I reckon so," said the Colonel. "And who are the young scamps that come out to see Miss Lottie-May, Mirandy?"

"Lawd bless you, suh, dey's two three uv 'em, suh—Mister Stam Tucker's one, an' Miss Lottie-May sho' am a pow'ful han'some young g'yel, suh. An' her ole grandda., he sutt'nly do 'pear to be mighty skeered 'case she so gay an' flirtatious-like, suh!"

"Well, Mirandy, I reckon that's only natural for a pretty girl. I saw Lottie-May talkin' to young Tom Strickland at the picnic down at Indian Springs yistiddy—you ain't never seen Tom callin' on her out there, have you?"

"No, suh, not to reckernize him, Kunn'l Todhunter, but dat ain't sayin' he ain't been dar whilst I been away so much o' de time, Kunn'l. Huccome young Mister Tom Strickland talkin' to anybody but Miss Mary Todhunter, yo' own daughter, suh? Ain't he jes' p'intedly head over heels in lub wid Miss Mary, suh?"

"He ain't tellin' me so, Mirandy," laughed the Colonel. "But I reckon Lottie-May ain't no more to

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him than any other of a dozen pretty girls—I was just wonderin', that's all."

Then he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a bill.

"Here, Mirandy," he said. "I wouldn't be surprised but what this might come in handy while you're a-wrastlin' with that old scamp Jed and his rheumatism. And if you'll stop by and see Mrs. Todhunter next time you come to town, I'll ask her if she can't give you a basketful of vittles she don't need."

"Glory halleluoyah!" cried old Mirandy. "Dat-ar money looks big as de side of a house to me, suh—it sho' do! Yass, seh, an' I gwine drop by you-all's house, too, suh. An' I ain't nebber gwine fer-git you fo' it, Kunn'l; I sho' ain't. Some o' dese bright days I gwine pay you back more'n dat-ar money; you see if I don't, suh!" Sudden tears had come into the brave old woman's eyes.

"That's all right, Mirandy," said Colonel Todhunter. "If you want to tickle me the most, you just wallop the stur-in' out of old Jed the first good chance you get!"

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An amused guffaw from Mirandy greeted this request, and then, pouring out a flood of thanks, she hobbled happily away.

Colonel Todhunter looked after her almost sadly. "Them old niggers," he said. "I love 'em just like they was kin to me, and they love us, too. But the new breed—they hate us, and I ain't got no more use for 'em than I have for a snake. It's curious, and it's somethin' of a tragedy, too, suh. I'll be dadblamed if I know what's goin' to come of it all, some day!"

Half an hour later, as Colonel Todhunter emerged from the law office of Judge Bolling, he heard a sudden hurrying of footsteps and Sim Birdsong joined him, breathless and much perturbed.

"What's on your mind now, Sim?" asked the Colonel. "'Tain't often you go gallopin' aroun' with your tongue hangin' out o' your mouth like a young dog's in his first rabbit chase. What's the trouble?"

"I was jes' startin' out to look you up, Colonel," replied Sim. "There's trouble enough, suh. Tom Strickland's got to drinkin' and picked a quarrel with Stam Tucker in the hotel bar-room, and you

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better come quick, suh, and prevent its bein' a mighty serious difficulty."

"I ain't got no patience with you young fellows here in Nineveh, Sim Birdsong," commented the Colonel. "When Tom Strickland gets two or three drinks under his belt and wants to pick a fuss, why don't some of you turn in and lick the stuffin' out'n him? That's one of the best cures for the whisky-quarrelin' habit that ever was invented, suh."

The Colonel chuckled as he spoke. "The most quarrelsome man in his cups I ever knew, Sim, was old Bob Prewitt, in my regiment durin' the late unpleasantness, and he was cured just that way, suh. Sam Fossbrooke made a point of campin' on Bob's trail ever' time Bob got to naggin' any o' the other fellows, and Sam'd thrash Bob till his own mother wouldn't ha' known him, suh. And, suh, before the war was over, I'll be double hamstrung if Bob Prewitt wasn't a teetotaler, suh—and he never got fightin' drunk after the war, neither, till he'd put two whole counties between him and Sam Fossbrooke. Some of you boys ought to try that plan on Tom Strickland, Sim."

"Colonel," answered Sim solemnly, "it's a sort o'

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curse on the Stricklands, that fierce temper o' their'n when they get under the influence of licker, suh. You mustn't forget that Tom's own uncle killed his best friend, Lawrence Tolliver, durin' a spree, and then drank himself to death afterwards, tryin' to forget it, suh. It's a curse, suh, that's what it is!"

"It ain't no curse that can't be lifted easy as raisin' your little finger, Sim Birdsong," said the Colonel. "All in the world Tom Strickland's got to do is to leave whisky alone—he ain't a hard drinker now, and maybe he never will be, but he's got to leave it alone altogether. It don't agree with him. The Todhunters has got that same kind of a curse in their family, only it's cucumbers 'stead of whisky. Th' ain't none of us Todhunters can eat cucumbers without bein' doubled up with cramp colic. Well, suh, I lifted that curse by cuttin' cucumbers out o' my list of vittles same as if such a thing never growed, and Tom Strickland or any other man can do the same thing with whisky, suh."

Then the Colonel tapped Sim on the shoulder. "And let me tell you one thing, my boy," he continued. "All this-here talk about the turrrible hard

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fight necessary to break off from a bad habit makes me tired, suh. A man don't never have to fight but one day's fight at a time, and there's always a night's rest comin' in between if he don't lay awake pityin' himself, suh. I know what I'm a-talkin' about. It ain't but a twelve hours' fight no time, and a man who can't fight that long is a mighty measly specimen of a man, suh!"

"That's all very well, Colonel," spoke Sim uneasily, "but Tom has egged Stam Tucker on till Stam's hurried out o' the bar-room, white in the face, hollerin' over his shoulder that he'll be back in a minute—and you know just what that means, suh!"

Colonel Todhunter's face grew instantly grave. "He's gone to get his shootin'-iron—the damned little fool!" he exclaimed. "Tell me, Sim—is Tom Strickland armed?"

"I don't think he is, suh, but he's a-waitin' for Stam Tucker in that-there bar-room, and he's just feelin' reckless enough to give Stam every chance in the world for shootin' him after he himself picked the fuss and forced the personal difficulty, Colonel."

"You come along with me, Sim!" said the Colonel.

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"Why the blue blazes and Sam Hill didn't you tell me all this at the start, suh?"

Swiftly they crossed the town square and entered the bar-room of the Nineveh Hotel. Tom Strickland, alone now but for the bartender, stood with one elbow resting on the bar.

"Howdy, Colonel!" he cried. "You and Sim are just in time to join me in a drink, sir. What'll you have?"

"Tom," replied the Colonel, "ordinarily I'd be glad to accept your invitation, but not to-day, my boy. I want you to go home, Tom."

Young Strickland smiled. "I'm sorry to disoblige you, Colonel," he replied, "but I don't feel like going home right away."

"You've got to go, Tom," replied the Colonel.

"Well, now, sir," suggested the other, "that's fairly open to argument, in spite of your being so positive about it. I've got a special reason for staying, Colonel."

"Yes, I know, Tom. You're waitin' to have a personal difficulty with Stam Tucker, suh."

Tom Strickland laughed. "You've called the turn, sir! And, under the circumstances, you'll have to



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agree yourself that I can't go now—not for a few minutes, anyway.”

“I don't agree to no such thing, you blamed young fool!” ejaculated Colonel Todhunter. “Do you reckon I'm a-goin' to let you and Stam Tucker shoot each other full o' holes, or let you wait, unarmed, for him to get a crack at you, just because you've seen fit to come into town and begin drinkin', suh?”

“We're both free white and twenty-one, Colonel,” said Tom Strickland. “How are you goin' to prevent it?”

At this Colonel Todhunter lost his temper. “I'll prevent it by thrashin' you within an inch of your life, suh, if you don't turn right around and get out o' this-here bar-room—that's how!” he announced resolutely. “I ain't a-goin' to stand no foolishness, Tom!”

“That ain't fair, Colonel Todhunter,” protested Tom Strickland. “You're Miss Mary's father, and you're my father's oldest and best friend, sir. I wouldn't lift my hand against you for the world—but I've got to wait here till Stam Tucker gets back!”

“Tom,” said Colonel Todhunter, “you've either got to go home right now, suh, or thrash me, or take

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the best thrashin' from me you ever got in all your life, suh!"

Tom Strickland looked into Colonel Todhunter's eyes. They shone with the light of righteous battle. It was a preposterous situation. The humor of it suddenly struck the younger man and he laughed outright. Then, suddenly, looking beyond Colonel Todhunter, his own eyes hardened into a dangerous anger.

"It's too late, Colonel!" he exclaimed exultantly. "Here comes the very man we're talking about!"

As he spoke, Stamford Tucker entered the bar-room, advancing directly toward him.

"I reckon you still insist on a personal difficulty with me, Tom Strickland?" he asked. "You ain't changed your mind none since the last few minutes?"

"I don't change my mind that easy," replied Tom Strickland, smiling. "Especially when a damned little upstart like you gets to talking too freely about my father. You've got to stop it or else make up you mind to take the consequences."

"It ain't what I've said about your father that's rubbing you the wrong way," retorted Stam Tucker. "It's because you've found out that I'm standin' too

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good a chance with Miss Mary Todhunter to suit you—”

Tom Strickland sprang at the speaker. As he did so, Stam Tucker whipped out a pistol. It was quickly done, but not quick enough to give an opportunity to fire before the other struck. Tom's fist smashed into his face and felled him to the floor. The pistol flew ten feet away.

There was a moment's silence.

“Get up,” said Tom. “And come at me like a man. I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!”

Stam Tucker staggered to his feet, wiping the blood from his face. But he made no move toward the man who had struck him.

Tom Strickland stepped coolly to where the pistol lay, picked it up deliberately and put it into his own pocket.

“I'll get even with you for this, Strickland!” cried young Tucker. “I'll even up things before I'm done with you!”

“You'll never have a better time than right now,” replied Tom. “But if you ain't in the humor, I'll leave your pistol with the bartender here in a little while and you can get it later. But I give you fair

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warning, Stam Tucker. The next time you make a move for a weapon, you're going to get badly hurt. I'll be ready for you since you insist on it."

Stam Tucker moved toward the door. His little eyes were venomous with hate.

"I'll get even with you!" he repeated. "You'll suffer for this yet!" And then he disappeared.

"You've played the wild on your watch, Tom," said Colonel Todhunter sternly. "This ain't no time for you to be pickin' fights with old Eph Tucker's son. It don't look right, and it won't help your father none in his political fight, either."

"I didn't bring it on, Colonel," replied Tom Strickland. "Stamford Tucker's seen fit to say things about my father that no man can say and not get a licking from me, if I'm man enough to lick him. That's all there is to it, sir."

To save his life, Colonel Todhunter could not continue his rebuke. But he managed to part from Tom Strickland with something like an expression of disapproval on his countenance.

"I reckon I ain't cut out to preach to other people what they should do and what they shouldn't," he confessed to himself later. "I ought to have given

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that blamed young fool a lecture as long as my arm, but it just wasn't in me to do it under the circumstances. And that's wrong, because the only good excuse an old man's got for livin' is to sorter act as a guide-post to keep young men from followin' the roads that lead to trouble. Bein' mighty little good in that line myself, I'm a-goin' to unload my responsibility on old Bill Strickland and let him straighten Tom out his own way, suh. And then I'll ask the old Marster up above to make me better fitt'n for my duty than I seem to be at this precise moment, suh, judgin' from the way I weakened on Tom!"

## CHAPTER VII

### SIM BIRDSONG RESOLVES UPON PLAYING YOUNG LOCHINVAR

**E**VER since Sim Birdsong's return from bloodless service in the war with Spain, Colonel Todhunter had found delight in badgering that young hero with comments upon his military career. The Colonel liked Sim tremendously—and enjoyed him even more.

On a certain morning before his departure for St. Louis in the campaign interests of Colonel Bill Strickland, Colonel Todhunter's lips twitched with a wicked smile when Sim Birdsong came to him with the announcement that the local camp of Sons of Confederate Veterans had completed its plans for a grand reception and ball at the Nineveh Hotel, the subscription fees for admission and refreshments, paid by the Sons and other bachelors of the town's society, to be for the benefit of the Confederate Soldiers' Home, the beneficiary of the Daughters' picnic of an earlier date.

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"I'll just be jim-swizzled, Sim," said the Colonel, "if I can see what business you've got with the Sons o' Veterans now, anyway. It's true, your father fought on our side, and I used to think you was proud of it, but now, you blamed little renegade, you've switched over from the gray to the blue, and if I had any say-so in the matter I'd have you fired out of the Sons so quick it'd make your head swim. I ain't got no use for a turncoat, Sim Birdsong!"

"Colonel," replied Sim indignantly, a quick flash springing into his freckled face, "if any other man in this world called me a turncoat, I'd knock him down, suh!"

"Maybe you would, Sim, maybe you would," spoke the Colonel. "Th' ain't never no tellin' what a man'll do, and it depends a good deal on the size of the other fellow, but even if you did knock him down, that wouldn't alter the facts in the case. And that ain't all, suh. You not only turned your coat from gray to blue, Sim Birdsong, but you was so dog-gone proud of the blue coat that you went and had yourself photographed in it in about a million different terrifyin' attitudes, more or less. And that sticks in my craw mightily, I can tell you, suh!"

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For a moment Sim Birdsong gazed at Colonel Todhunter in mute protest. Then a sudden grin came upon his lips.

"That's all right, Colonel Todhunter," he said. "And I'm willin' to abide by your argument if you'll do the same, suh. Because, accordin' to your own logic, Colonel, I'm a good deal less of a turncoat'n you are yourself, suh!"

"You impudent little simlin'-headed runt, you!" cried the Colonel. "If you stand up there and call me a turncoat, you little spindle-shanked imitation soldier, I'll break your neck for you!"

"It's a mighty poor rule that won't work both ways, Colonel," replied Sim calmly. "And facts is facts and logic is logic. Ain't I heard you more'n a thousand times braggin' that your great-grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War, suh?"

"You've heard me say that—yes, suh, certainly."

"And that your grandfather fought in the War of 1812?"

"Yes, suh, that's true, too."

"And that your own father fought in the Mexican War?"

"He did, suh—under old Zachary Taylor!"



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"Well, Colonel, accordin' to them facts, and accordin' to your own argument, then, the only difference between you'n me on th' turncoat proposition is that you turned your coat from blue to gray and I've turned mine back from gray to blue—that's all, suh!"

Colonel Todhunter's grizzled face darkened. "Sim," he said sternly, "I never expected that I'd live to hear the son of a confederate soldier make such an argument, suh."

"I ain't makin' the argument, Colonel Todhunter!" exclaimed Sim Birdsong quickly. "The only thing I'm doin' is followin' out your own argument to prove that it ain't fair to me, suh. By rights, your turncoat charge don't stick to me, Colonel, and you know it, and mine don't stick to you, and I know it, but one's just as plausible as the other on the surface, suh. And it hurts, suh, to have that word throw'd around promiscuous—I'd lick the man that used it to you, Colonel Todhunter, if it was the last thing I done in this world!"

There was a little pause, then Sim laughed. "Besides, suh," he continued, "they ain't neither one of us consistent. I can't keep from hollerin' when I

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hear *Dixie*, not to save my life, and I heard you holler for *Yankee Doodle* to beat the band, suh, the day us Spanish War volunteers took the train for Chickamauga. And not only that, suh. You yourself made us a rip-snortin' speech that very day, sayin' how proud you felt when we answered the president's call, and that we was goin' out to fight under the best flag in the world, suh. And you meant every word you said, Colonel!"

Colonel Todhunter chuckled. "You infernal young scamp! Anyway, I done some fightin' in my case to prove I was in earnest, and that's more'n you can say, suh. Why, Sim Birdsong, you wouldn't know a Spanish soldier if he come right up to you this minute and stuck his nose in your face! You never got in a thousand miles of one of 'em, for all your 'heppin' and 'hay-foot' and 'straw-foot' drillin', and you know it, you little fo'-card flusher, you!"

Now it was Sim's face that showed the hurt. Colonel Todhunter put a swift hand on his shoulder. "That's all right, Sim," he spoke heartily. "I was just gettin' back at you for makin' fun of me. It wa'n't your fault. You tried your level best to get at the Spaniards, and if Uncle Sam had needed you

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he knew right where he could put his hands on you. And about this blue and gray business—the old soldiers on both sides fought it out back there in the sixties, and they ain't got no quarrel now. A good fight ought to make a good peace afterward, is the way they look at it. The only men that's still a-quarrelin' is the men that didn't wear either the blue or the gray when they was any fightin' to be done—and they didn't get mad till the war was all over, suh!"

"You're shoutin' now, Colonel," agreed Sim, to whose homely countenance its customary expression of honest good-nature had returned with the touch of the older man's hand on his shoulder. "And it's true, as you say, that us Spanish War fellows didn't see any real fightin', but even the rough-and-tumble fist fights a boy has to run into at school taught me that a good set-to is the best way in the world to put a stop to quarrelin'. It just wipes the whole thing off the map—and I reckon that's precisely what the Civil War done for the men that really fought it, suh."

Colonel Todhunter nodded emphatically. A moment of silence intervened. Then, suddenly, a look of apprehension crept into Sim Birdsong's face.

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"Colonel," he spoke, a somewhat sheepish grin on his lips, "talkin' about fightin' and bein' skeered and all that, I got to tell you, suh, that I'm facin' a proposition in that line right now that's got any ordinary war skinned a mile, suh."

"What's the difficulty, Sim?" asked the Colonel interestedly.

"Why, suh, it's Miss Angelica Exall's ma, that's what it is, suh. Things is takin' a mighty serious shape, Colonel Todhunter. That dod-rotted old lady is a-movin' Heaven and earth to make a match between Miss Angelica and Pohter Scruggs, suh, for the simple reason that he owns a good farm an's got a few thousand dollars in bank, and she wants Miss Angelica to sell herself for them things, suh. And her first move to'ards catchin' Pohter Scruggs, Colonel, is to make Miss Angelica get rid of me, knowin' I ain't as well off as him, suh."

"That's pretty bad, Sim. But you shorely ain't thinkin' of leavin' the field, are you?"

"I'll be dog-goned if I know just what to do, suh. It looks mighty poor-spirited for a man to let himself be bullyragged out of his rights by a woman, but the cold truth is, Colonel, that Miss Angelica's

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ma is an all-fired terrifyin' lady, suh. The case looks mighty serious to me, Colonel Todhunter."

"It is serious, Sim. The reason why it's serious is that you've let that old brigadier of a Mrs. Exall bluff you till you're skeered half to death of her."

"I'm skeered all right, there's no two ways about that, suh. I'm so skeered that I get weak and trembly in my shank-bones ever' time I have to face her, and that's the Lord's truth."

"And that's right where you're going to lose out, Sim. You've let that old catamaran see that you're skeered of her, and she ain't a-goin' to show you no more mercy'n a rabbit. It's all right for a man to feel shaky before the girl herself, suh, but if the girl's got such a cantankerous mother as Miss Angelica Exall's got, his only play is to bluff the girl's mother to a standstill. You ought to be like a roarin' lion to that old lady, Sim Birdsong—it's the only chance you've got of winnin' Miss Angelica."

"That's all very well, Colonel. It's mighty easy for you to r'ar back and advise me along them lines, but I'd like to see you try any roarin' lion business with Miss Angelica Exall's ma, suh, brave man though I well know you to be. You begin roarin'

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'round her, suh, and she'll give you a jolt that'll make your back teeth come loose, Colonel."

"How come you to know all this beyond the per-adventure of a doubt, Sim? Have you ever had sand enough to stand up to old Mrs. Exall and fight it out with her, suh?"

"See here, now, Colonel!" cried Sim, aghast. "I'm havin' trials and tribulations enough, holdin' on to Miss Angelica Exall, without cuttin' off my nose to spite my face that-a-way, suh. I wouldn't last in that house any longer'n you can say 'Jack Robinson' if I didn't behave mighty mealy-mouthed when old Mrs. Exall's around, suh. I know what I'm talkin' about."

"Sim," said Colonel Todhunter, "if that's the way you feel about it, you ain't no more goin' to get Miss Angelica Exall than you're goin' to fly. Your goose is cooked right now, suh."

"What do you mean, Colonel?"

"I mean just what I say, Sim. That old female war-hoss knows that she's got you and Miss Angelica skeered to a frazzle, suh. And she's got her head set on marryin' her daughter to Pohter Scruggs for his farm and bank account, suh. She'll shoo you out

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of the way just like you was a fly, Sim—and the first thing you know your Miss Angelica Exall will be Mrs. Pohter Scruggs, suh, and old Mrs. Exall, she'll be a-settin' in their fine house a-laughin' at you for a sway-backed fool that didn't know he held a winnin' hand if he'd only had the grit to play his cards straight, suh."

Sim seemed unable to make reply to this.

"Look here, Sim Birdsong," asked the Colonel indignantly, "have you ever come right out flat-footed and told Miss Angelica Exall that you loved her?"

Sim nodded. "Yes, suh," he spoke meekly.

"And has Miss Angelica ever revealed the state of her feelin's to'ards you, suh?"

A glint of pride came into Sim's eyes. "Yes, suh," he announced. "She done that, suh."

"And it's all right between you two?"

"It's all right between us, Colonel," said Sim fervently. "Though what that sweet girl can see in me, when she's got all mankind to choose from, is one of God's mysteries that's more'n I can fathom, suh."

"You're right about that, Sim"—and the Colonel's eyes twinkled. "But you're sure about it, too,

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ain't you? She ain't doin' no Injun-givin' in your case?"

"Colonel Todhunter," said Sim, "I'd stake my life on it, suh. Miss Angelica Exall loves me, suh, and says she'll keep on lovin' me all the rest of her born days."

Colonel Todhunter gazed at the speaker severely. "And do you mean to tell me, Sim Birdsong, that you didn't go straight to old Mrs. Exall that very minute and tell her you and Miss Angelica was a-go-in' to get married?"

Dismay crept into Sim Birdsong's face. "Well—er—Colonel," he stammered, "the truth is, suh, that I did go to Miss Angelica's ma right then and there, suh, and ask her if I couldn't have Miss Angelica."

There was an ominous pause.

"Colonel," said Sim Birdsong, gulping, "she come mighty nigh bitin' my head off. It was terrible, suh. I didn't know a woman of her age could get so mad, suh. There ain't no other word for it, Colonel Todhunter. It was terrible."

"And you haven't broached the subject since then?"

"No, suh, I have not"—and Sim shivered a little.



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"But I'm a-goin' to, suh, just the minute I feel able—spite'n the fact that she threatened to throw me out'n her house if I ever opened my mouth to her about Miss Angelica again, suh."

"You've got to, Sim," said the Colonel. Then he chuckled. "Do you know what she's a-goin' to do to you," he asked, "when you come back at her that next time?"

"No, suh," said Sim. "What is it?"

"She'll snatch you bald-headed, Sim, that's what she'll do."

"Colonel Todhunter," asked Sim, "I got to ask her, ain't I?"

The Colonel nodded forebodingly. "Just once more, anyway, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!" Sim made no reply.

The Colonel contemplated him meditatively. "Sim," he spoke at last, "things used to be mighty different in this-here country. The young men in my days was a heap more enterprisin' than they seem to be now, suh."

"What do you mean, Colonel?"

"Well, suh," answered Colonel Todhunter, "I don't want to say more'n I ought to, but my experi-

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ence teaches me one thing, certain. It's this, Sim. Love is either the biggest and best thing in life, and therefore entitled to the right-of-way over everything else, or it ain't—and then this life of our'n ain't worth the livin', suh. What do you think about it, Sim?"

The younger man gazed into the elder's face perplexed. "I'll be dog-goned, Colonel," he said, "if I catch what you're a-drivin' at, suh."

"I don't say I'm a-drivin' at anything in particular, Sim," spoke the Colonel. "But there used to be a lot of runaway weddin's in my young days, suh. And them weddin's used to turn out mighty happy, too."

Sim Birdsong caught his breath. "Do you advise, Colonel Todhunter," he inquired, "that me and Miss Angelica Exall run away and get married?"

"I don't advise nothin', Sim," replied the Colonel. "But I do say this. There ain't goin' to be no more'n a grease-spot left of you if you keep on pesterin' old Mrs. Exall for her daughter after this one more time, suh."

The light of a desperate resolve leaped into Sim's eyes. "Colonel Todhunter," he said then, "sometime

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in the near future, suh, I may have to ask a very great personal favor of you, suh."

"Sim," replied the Colonel, "I'll do most anything in the world for a young man I esteem as highly as I do you, suh."

"I thank you, suh," responded Sim Birdsong. "It won't be nothin' that a gentleman couldn't honorably do for a friend, suh, but if everything turns out right, two grateful hearts will be prayin' for you all the rest of their lives, suh." With which assurance Sim bade the Colonel farewell.

And the Colonel fortified himself with philosophic argument. "It'll be the proper thing to do," he reflected. "And I'll be jig-whiffled if I don't hope Sim Birdsong's got manhood enough to do it. It's all mighty fine to talk about the rights of parents over their children. They've got 'em to a mighty far point, and they ought to have 'em. But what right has a mother got that she don't surrender when she's willin' to marry her daughter off for money, knowin' the girl loves another man? Talk about the natural human affections—I'll be shot full o' holes if I believe even a she wild-cat would be capable of doin' such a thing as that, suh!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### COLONEL TODHUNTER ENCOUNTERS A FINANCIAL STRINGENCY

**S**UDDENLY, one day, the Honorable William J. Strickland returned from St. Louis. An expression of acute worryment so contrary to its customary cheerfulness rested on his face that Colonel Todhunter, entering the candidate's Nineveh law office, could not but remark the change.

"What on earth's the matter, Bill?" he asked. "You look like the last of pea-times."

Colonel Strickland attempted a smile. "Oh, nothing particular, Thurs," he replied. "I reckon I was just meditating on the vanity of human life."

"Well, it must have been *Hark from the Tombs a Doleful Sound* all right," laughed Colonel Todhunter. Then he took a second look at his friend.

"You're lyin' to me, Bill Strickland," he said. "There's somethin' gone wrong and it's on your mind. What is it?"

"Thurs," responded the other, "it ain't anything

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you can help. There's no good in my unloading my troubles on you just because you've got broad shoulders."

"Unload 'em anyhow," returned Colonel Todhunter. "You ought to know folks can shed other folks' troubles off'n their shoulders like water from a duck's back."

But Colonel Strickland shook his head. "There's been a backset somewhere along the line," announced Colonel Todhunter stubbornly. "And you've got to tell me what it is. Quit settin' there lookin' like a poor man at a cash sale, Bill Strickland, dumb 'cause money's all that talks."

At this Colonel Strickland laughed drearily. "That's where you hit the nail on the head," he said. "Money, the mean and dirty thing that can whip the best man in the world—that's the trouble, Thurs."

"It's generally the other man's money that looks dirty, Bill," Colonel Todhunter commented, chuckling. "I got to acknowledge the corn myself. I never had a dollar of my own that didn't look mighty clean and good to me. But what's this particular money trouble?"

"Well, if you will have it, Thurs, it's this," re-

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plied Colonel Strickland. "I'm up a tree in the matter of campaign expenses. Old Governor Leslie was sure he could raise a Strickland campaign fund by asking the right men and telling them what he proposed to do with it, they knowing that Steve Yancey ain't fit to be governor of Missouri. But so far he's met with mighty poor success. He told me all about it in St. Louis yesterday. I ain't got a dollar in the world—and we've established headquarters in St. Louis and Kansas City that's got to be kept up. How we're going to do it is what I can't figure out."

The two old friends faced each other silently.

"That certainly is a serious situation, Bill," spoke Colonel Todhunter at last.

"It's so almighty serious, Thurs," returned the other, "that I can't see my way out of it."

But at this Colonel Todhunter snorted. "That's where you're wrong, Bill Strickland," he exclaimed. "I've been in tighter places'n anybody on earth, 'ceptin' the fellow who come out of a spree with hot coppers in hades, but I'll be jim-swizzled if I ever got into one I couldn't get out of. And we ain't in that kind of a one now. How much money do you need?"

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Colonel Strickland shook his head. "There's no good you and me figuring along that line, old fellow. We need at least three thousand dollars, and while it's pretty certain old Leslie will raise that amount eventually, that doesn't cut any ice now. We need the money right here at the start."

"And you can't raise it?" asked Colonel Todhunter.

"No, I can't," answered Colonel Strickland. "And I get what a man deserves for thinking he knows how to save the country when he don't even know how to take care of himself."

"That ain't so, Bill," answered Colonel Todhunter sturdily. "And anybody that thinks they can keep you from bein' governor of Mizzoorah simply because you're a poor man has got another think comin', suh. You draw your personal note for three thousand dollars in my favor. I'll indorse it right here—and if I don't get that money it's because the Nineveh National Bank don't know a good thing when it sees it."

"What do you mean, Todhunter?" asked Colonel Strickland, instant protest in his eyes.

"I mean this, Bill Strickland," replied Colonel

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Todhunter. "In the first place, old Governor Leslie is dead sure to raise that-there campaign fund. In the second place, all Heaven and hell hates a quitter, and you ain't a-goin' to be one. In the third place, the Todhunter farm is as pretty a piece of collateral for a three-thousand-dollar loan as old Shylock himself would have the heart to ask."

"That's exactly what I thought you were going to say," quietly commented Colonel Strickland. "But it don't go for a minute. I ain't going to tie you up on this proposition."

"Th' ain't nobody goin' to tie me up," said Colonel Todhunter. "And I ain't goin' to tie myself up, either. I'm goin' to tie the other fellow up. I'll tie up them-there tricksters in St. Louis that's queerin' old Governor Leslie's game. They're the ones that's puttin' a frost on the Strickland campaign fund. If they can do that successfully, they've got you whipped right here and now. But I'm a-goin' to fool 'em."

"No, Thurs, I won't do it," protested Colonel Strickland. "Putting up a good fight is one thing, but ruining your friends is something entirely different. I haven't fallen that low, yet."



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"You haven't fallen anywhere," said Colonel Todhunter. "But you've got my fightin' blood up, and by the Lord Harry, if you ain't man enough to fight alongside o' me, I'll fight by myself!"

"Todhunter," said Colonel Strickland, "it's all wrong. You haven't got any call to do a thing like that for me."

"The man that ain't got no call to help a friend that needs help," replied Colonel Todhunter, "ain't got no call to keep on livin'. You set down there and make out that-there note."

Reluctantly, Colonel Strickland obeyed. But he smiled cynically as he passed the paper to Colonel Todhunter.

"You forget, Thurs," he said, "that old Eph Tucker is president of the Nineveh National Bank. Is he likely to finance our campaign against Steve Yancey?"

Colonel Todhunter laughed. "I ain't forgettin' nothin'," he responded. "And don't you forget that old Eph Tucker was a note-shaver long before he was a politician, and he's got note-shavin' in his blood bigger'n a mule. He couldn't no more let a good piece of paper get away from his bank than he

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could fly—and angels'll have to be mighty scarce before old Eph Tucker does any flyin'!"

Nevertheless, when Colonel Todhunter presented the Strickland note, indorsed by him and with his unincumbered farm as collateral, for discount, he found old Eph Tucker solicitously inquisitive.

"What's it all about, Colonel Todhunter?" the banker asked. "You and Bill Strickland going in together on some business deal? What's the consideration for the note?"

Colonel Todhunter looked old Tucker square in the eyes. "Eph," he replied, "I'm a-goin' to play my cards face up on the table. Bill Strickland needs money to pay his campaign expenses. That's why I'm indorsin' his note and askin' this bank to discount it."

Old Tucker's little eyes narrowed. "And you're gettin' no good out of it yourself?" he asked, studying Colonel Todhunter curiously. "You're lending your credit and risking your farm just to help Bill Strickland along in politics?"

"That's what I'm doin', Eph," replied Colonel Todhunter.

"Then," said the banker, "you're a bigger fool

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than I took you for. Bill Strickland ain't good for a hundred dollars with this bank."

"He's good for any amount with me, Eph," returned Colonel Todhunter, a sudden menace in his tone. "But that ain't the question. Is this note good, as it stands now?"

"Bill Strickland don't stand no more show for the nomination than a rabbit," spoke old Tucker. "He'll never get his hands on the governor's salary, if that's what you're counting on, Colonel Todhunter."

"Eph," said Colonel Todhunter, "I'll look out for that end of the business. All I want you to do is to pass on this-here note."

"Colonel Todhunter," replied the banker, "the indorsement and the collateral make this note good, and it's a banker's business to buy good paper. We'll discount the note. It's your funeral, not ours."

"That finishes the business then," said Colonel Todhunter. "I ain't worryin' about any funerals. But if you're a-countin' on either Bill Strickland or me furnishin' the corpse, Eph, you're goin' to see one of the liveliest corpses you ever seen in all your born days, suh!"

The old banker made no reply.

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Colonel Todhunter was chuckling when he reported to Colonel Strickland. "It's all right, Bill, and you can get back to St. Louis right away," he said. "I got the money from old Eph Tucker. But great Scott and Maria, it was worse'n pullin' eye-teeth! All the same, we got it—and now we'll proceed to lick old Eph with his own money!"

But Colonel Todhunter would not have spoken so confidently if he had heard the gloating speech of President Tucker, of the Nineveh National Bank, a moment or two after his own departure from that institution.

"The two helpless fools!" muttered old Eph Tucker to himself. "I've got 'em both where I want 'em now. We'll ruin Bill Strickland for good and all this time. We'll wipe him off the political map of Missouri. And as for old Thurston Todhunter, I'll make such a lame duck out of him yet that the only Todhunter who can ever live on that farm of his again will have to marry a Tucker to do it—like I'll make Mary Todhunter marry my son Stam before I'm through with her!"

## CHAPTER IX

### COLONEL TODHUNTER CUTS A WIDE SWATH IN MISSOURI'S METROPOLIS

**T**O Colonel Todhunter, a countryman born and bred, and of an innate rusticity of soul that was an essential part of his being, contact with the throbbing life of a big city was so rare and foreign that it never failed to emphasize his picturesque unlikeness to the urban type. He stalked into the busy St. Louis headquarters of the Honorable William J. Strickland on the parlor floor of the Laclede Hotel, the living embodiment of that political figure dear to the amused metropolitan imagination, "the delegate from the rural districts." It was a brave and honest face that showed itself in Colonel Bill Strickland's private office, but somewhat dismayed at thought of an impending ordeal.

"I'll just be eternally whipsawed if you ain't a-tryin' to make a round peg fit into a square hole, Bill!" he protested earnestly, something like awe of his surroundings stamped upon his sunburned features.

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"I'm willin' to do 'most anything in the world for you, and you know it. But when you turn me loose in a big town like this and expect me to behave like anything more'n a wall-eyed plow-horse with his tail full o' cuckle-burs, I'll be everlastin'ly condemned if you ain't makin' a mighty serious mistake, suh!"

"Nonsense, Thurs!" laughed Colonel Strickland. "I'm counting on you for some St. Louis speeces that'll be worth their weight in gold, my friend. We need you here, sir, a man that talks old-fashioned American Democracy straight from the shoulder. City politicians have forgotten what the real Democratic doctrine is, Thurs, and we've got to revive it in the people's hearts if we expect 'em to vote right. That's why I want you to help me open my St. Louis campaign. You've got to do it, Thurs!"

Colonel Todhunter gazed at his friend pensively. "Bill," he said, "I'm a-goin' to do it, as you well know. I'd strip the shirt off'n my back and head a percession wavin' it for a Strickland banner if you asked me to, whether I thought it was the best thing to do under the circumstances or not. But I bid you remember, Bill, that I warned you in time. It'll be

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your fault if you have occasion to regret havin' brought me in from the pasture and stacked me up against these-here bang-tailed city thoroughbreds, suh!"

"I'll take the chances, old fellow!" said the candidate, his eyes twinkling. "You just oblige me now for old friendship's sake and I'll be responsible for everything that happens afterward. I ain't the least bit afraid."

"I'll eat my hat if I don't wish I could say the same, suh!" ejaculated Colonel Todhunter, a vehement panic in his tone. "I'm skeered to the marrow, suh, because I'm out o' my bailiwick and up against a proposition that I don't know any more about'n a hog knows about a holiday, suh. And you're a-goin' to discover, suh, before we get through with this piece of foolishness, that I had mighty good reasons for bein' skeered, too!"

"Shucks, you old war-horse!" laughed Colonel Bill Strickland. "Once you get into the fight you'll warm up like a two-year-old and show these St. Louis folks what a real Missouri Democrat is. You're going to make the hit of your life, sir!"

"Maybe I am and maybe I ain't, Bill Strickland,"

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quoth Colonel Todhunter moodily. "But all I ask at the finish is that you'll remember it wa'n't me that made the prediction, suh. I'm a natural born optimist, suh, but that don't necessarily mean that I'm a natural born jackass at all times and under all circumstances and on all subjects, as some folks seem to think, suh!"

And in this frame of mind Colonel Todhunter returned into the general headquarters offices and was introduced to his Nineveh friend's St. Louis backers and campaign staff.

A quiet young newspaper man who happened to be drifting through the rooms seemed instantly impressed by Colonel Todhunter's picturesque personality. He studied the Colonel intently, a growing appreciation in his thoughtful and latently humorous eyes.

After exchanging a few words with this new addition to the Strickland forces the journalist went into one of the private telephone booths at the end of the reception-room and called up his paper. Then he came back to Colonel Todhunter, engaging him in conversation. A few minutes later a second man casually appeared and unobtrusively stationed him-



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self where he had a good front view of the Colonel, who was being deftly led into political dissertation by his new acquaintance.

Colonel Bill Strickland, passing through the main room at one moment, saw the two with their heads together. Something like a gleam of laughter leaped into his eyes and he nodded, almost imperceptibly, an approving signal to Colonel Todhunter's companion. Then, for an hour or more, the two were left undisturbed.

They chatted pleasantly on many topics. The Colonel himself was led to talk discursively on the political situation in Missouri, the distinctive types of party leaders in the country districts, his own personal views and ample reminiscences of past campaigns in the state, his quaint valuation of Democracy's great historic figures. He was in reality being trapped into a self-revelation. Behind his talk, animating it and shining through its unsuspecting frankness and utter naturalness, appeared the child-like and simple soul of the speaker, presented with absolute unreserve. The Colonel's companion was the most appreciative of listeners, and, as he listened, a light of whimsical regard deepened in his eyes.

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“But I’m a-takin’ up a heap of your time, suh!” exclaimed the Colonel finally. “I reckon you city newspaper men have to trot around after news till your tongue’s a-hangin’ out of your mouth a yard long. You mustn’t let me keep you from other things, suh.”

“Not at all, Colonel Todhunter!” came the quick response. “It’s been well worth while, sir. I intend using some of your talk, if you have no objection, so you’re really helping me out, you know.”

The Colonel looked at his companion pityingly. “You’re wastin’ your powder, young man. I can talk by the hour, but what I say ain’t got no more business bein’ printed in a great city newspaper’n a whiff o’ wind a-rustlin’ the dry leaves in the woods, suh. You better be mighty careful, tryin’ to make some-thing’ worth while out o’ them-there observations of mine—your folks at the paper’ll think you’re worse’n a old huntin’-dog that goes sky-hootin’ off lickety-split after a rabbit when it’s pa’tridges they was a-countin’ on him to p’int, suh.”

The newspaper man leaned back and laughed zestfully. “Colonel, I’m willing to take the chances on that, if you are. And I’ll leave it to you, to-morrow



"You're wastin' your powder, young man" *Page 122*



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afternoon, if I don't know what's worth while when I see it, sir. You've given me a cracker-jack talk on Missouri politics, and I'm very much obliged to you, Colonel."

"You're mighty welcome," replied Colonel Todhunter, genial but doubtful. "I'll be shot full o' holes if I see how you're a-goin' to write a piece from what I've been sayin', suh."

Then, suddenly, he nodded to his front. "What in blue blazes and Sam Hill is that man a-doin' there?" he asked. "The one with that placard in his hand, squintin' at me every two seconds and then jabbin' down somethin' with his pencil? That's the confoundedest most singular proceedin' I ever laid my eyes on, suh!"

The young newspaper man shook with laughter. "Colonel," he said, his humorous lips twitching, "don't you worry about that man. He's perfectly harmless. I know him. He's got a bug on political celebrities, sir. It's a case of bats in his belfry on that one subject. He goes around recording his impressions at close range during every campaign, just the way you see him now. Most remarkable character, Colonel. I've known him for a long time."

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"Well, suh," replied Colonel Todhunter, "I'll be eternally condemned if he mustn't ha' wrote a whole book about me, then. He's been jabbin' that-there pencil o' his'n up and down for the last twenty minutes or so worse'n a little girl playin' tit-tat-to behind her jogaphy endurin' school time, suh!"

The newspaper man wiped tears of laughter from his eyes. "I'll take 'him away now, Colonel," he said at last, rising. "I've got to go back to the office, and it always tickles him to talk to somebody about his impressions. I expect he'll have a lot to say about you, sir."

"Well, you keep it dark, suh, if he does," replied Colonel Todhunter. "I got enough to stand up under, here in St. Louis, without no comments from such an almighty curious specimen o' humanity as that, suh!"

And at this the newspaper man fairly exploded. He was still shaking with laughter when he joined the mysterious stranger. The latter promptly pocketed his pencil, stuck his bit of cardboard under his arm, and then, together, the two departed.

"It's this-here crazy-like city life that makes such wrecks as that poor simple Simon," mused the Colo-

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nel. "I-gad, it beats me why any human bein' is willin' to live it, let alone pay such a price as that for it! But it takes all sorts o' people to make a world, I'll just be jim-swizzled if it don't, suh!"

The next afternoon when Colonel Todhunter's eyes fell on the front page of the leading Independent Democratic paper of St. Louis, he fairly gasped with horror. Then followed an almost tragic pause as he absorbed the full meaning of what had so suddenly stricken him with dismay. The next moment he handed the newspaper to Colonel Strickland.

"What did I tell you, Bill?" he groaned. "I'm a-goin' back to Nineveh just as fast as the good Lord'll let me, suh!"

Colonel Strickland's gaze rested upon the newspaper page. He saw Colonel Todhunter's name boldly typed in the flaring head-line that extended across three columns. A full-length "character-cartoon" of the Colonel surrounded by "thumb-nail" impressions of his face and bodily pose at various interesting moments of his talk of the preceding day surrounded the larger portrait.

Colonel Strickland began a reading of the article. A smile crept upon his face. Slowly his eyes went

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down the printed page. The smile broadened. Soon it became a chuckle. Later, absorbed in the reading, the candidate's shoulders shook as he read. Finally, with one big fist pinning the newspaper to the table in front of him, Colonel Bill Strickland leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"Lord have mercy on us, Thurs!" he gasped. "It's the best and truest thing I ever saw in my life! They've got you finished off to the queen's taste!"

"I don't know nothin' about the queen's taste, suh," spoke Colonel Todhunter grimly, "but I know one thing almighty well. I'm a-goin' to dust that newspaper man's jacket for him the next time he comes in reach o' me. Great name above, suh, th' ain't no man can handle Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter like that and not get it well taken out of his hide, suh!"

Again Colonel Strickland shouted with laughter. "You old fool!" he sputtered. "That newspaper man knows you better than you know yourself—it's wonderful, Thurs! He's made a character study of you that's nothing more or less than a miracle, my friend!"

It was the truth. Colonel Todhunter had come



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under the vision of a masterfully gifted newspaper expert in "character values." The young fellow with whom he had chatted so freely and at such ease on the preceding afternoon had temperamentally "absorbed" him, body and soul. Then he had gone to his newspaper desk and written a descriptive interview that was sheerly the Colonel himself in the flesh. It was a feat of psychological wizardry. The man achieving it seemed to have put aside his own being for the moment and taken on that of Colonel Todhunter instead. As a result of this exercise of the strangest of literary powers, Colonel Todhunter himself, the typical figure of a Missouri Democrat of the old school, talked in his proper person, a living, breathing, almost palpable entity, from the printed page.

And the keenly humorous, appreciative and well-nigh loving quality that signalized the writer's performance of his task was finely reinforced by the work of the cartoonist. The sketches themselves were lifelike, bringing out the Colonel's every salient characteristic in facial expression, bodily pose and gesture.

But this amazing projection of himself in print-

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er's ink on the publicity "screen" of a newspaper's front page appalled Colonel Todhunter. He shrank from it, shocked, with all a countryman's dismay at sudden prominence before the world.

"It's all right for you, Bill—you can afford to laugh!" he said indignantly. "But I'm the one that's holdin' the bag, suh! It's me that's put on that-there infernal circus-poster like the Wild Man o' Borneo, not you. And I'll be shot full o' holes if it ain't me that's a-goin' to hold them-there two young rascals to an accountin' for it, you mark my words, suh!"

Colonel Strickland wiped the tears from his eyes.

"You're all wrong, Thurs—honest, you are!" he protested. "There ain't a line in that story that don't speak good of you, and what you say there is as sound as a dollar. It's you talking, to the life, old fellow, and you're talking for me, and every word you say helps us more than a column of ordinary newspaper stuff. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for it, right now!"

"I'd sell it for a blamed sight less'n that, suh!" hotly replied Colonel Todhunter. "And didn't I warn you—didn't I tell you beforehand that they'd shorely size me up as a country-jake from the very

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beginnin', and that I'd bungle you all up here in St. Louis, suh? Didn't I say that as sure as I came to these here city headquarters o' your'n I'd play the very old blue blazes and Sam Hill 'fore I got through, suh? Yes, suh—and I'm a-headin' straight back for Nineveh this very day, suh!"

"No, you ain't—not by a jugful!" retorted Colonel Strickland, manfully striving to straighten his face into gravity. "No, sir. You'll speak at the Coliseum this very night, just as we've planned, Thurs, and I'll tell you another thing. You'll speak to the biggest and most enthusiastic audience the Coliseum ever held, or else I don't know the signs of a man's popularity when I see 'em, sir!"

"You've got some powerful funny ideas of popularity, then, that's all I got to say, Bill Strickland!" snorted Colonel Todhunter. "Popular be durned! What I ought to do by rights is to sue that-there St. Louis paper for criminal libel, suh. Them cartoons o' me is the confoundedest most terrible lookin' things I ever saw in all my born days, suh!"

In spite of himself Colonel Strickland roared again. "Thurs," he said, "they're the living image of you!"

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And then Colonel Todhunter exploded. "That's precisely the trouble, suh! That's just exactly what makes 'em so blamed libelous, you brayin' wild ass of the desert! The more I look at 'em, the more they look like me. And yet, by the jumpin' jingo, if I resembled them pictures the way I seem to, Mrs. Todhunter wouldn't live with me another day, suh! Anyway, what business they got cartoonin' me? I ain't runnin' for no office. It's you they ought to cartoon, if they've got to cartoon somebody, and you know it mighty well, too, Bill Strickland!"

"Thurs," said Colonel Strickland, "I'd give anything in the world if they would—that's the cold truth. But they won't. I ain't in it with you, my friend—you've made the hit of your life. Why, sir, you're the most famous man in St. Louis this very day!"

Colonel Todhunter looked extremely dubious, however.

And the next moment he found himself in the limelight anew. The same paper, conceding afresh his pictorial and humorous possibilities, cartooned him in another pose as its illustration of the weather prediction for the day, presenting him as its famous

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"weather bird." "High winds blowing from the direction of Nineveh," it gravely announced. "Shifting to-night to the westward, with its storm center at the Coliseum. The famous Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter will speak there, beginning at eight sharp. Increasing wind velocity. Duration of gale unknown."

At this stage of the proceedings it required the combined arguments of Colonel Bill Strickland, his St. Louis backers, and the entire headquarters staff, to keep Colonel Todhunter from going on the warpath in quest of newspaper scalps in general. Colonel Bill, a shrewd veteran in knowledge of what goes to win the people's liking, was tickled almost beyond measure.

"Old Thurs Todhunter's making votes for our side faster than you could count 'em," he said to white-haired Governor Leslie, his political sponsor in St. Louis, who himself had headed a brilliant Missouri administration in earlier days. "These papers have got right at the heart of him, and they're showing him to the people for just the lovable old Democrat that he is, too. It's a good thing all round, Governor—old-fashioned Democracy in the

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flesh is worth while for the younger generation to look at. They need it, too."

The candidate and his friends were finally successful in mollifying Colonel Todhunter. But he went to his night's task in anything but a hopeful frame of mind.

Colonel Bill Strickland, however, had prophesied truly. The Coliseum was packed to the doors.

"Great Scott and Maria, suh," said Colonel Todhunter, describing the scene to Dick Cantrill upon his return home later, "you couldn't ha' wedged a knife-blade in between any two men in that-there crowd, suh. And the way they cheered and hollered when I was interduced by the chairman of the meet-in', suh! Blamed if you wouldn't ha' thought I was the original roarin' ring-tailed guyasticutus of Calaveras County, suh, and the only one in captivity, suh. I never saw grown men behave that way before in all my life, Dick Cantrill, and it made me hotter'n blazes. But I kept my shirt on, suh, sayin' to myself that I was there to help old Bill Strickland all I knew how. So I just took it out in talkin' to 'em like a Dutch uncle, suh, givin' 'em the straight Democratic doctrine and tellin' 'em they needed it

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blamed bad, too, suh. And I laid the law down to 'em, suh, that it wa'n't me, but old Bill Strickland, they ought to be a-hollerin' for by rights, if they was the good Democrats they pertended to be, suh. Yes, suh, and then they hollered louder'n ever. But let me tell you one thing, Dick Cantrill, I'll be shot full o' holes if I didn't have 'em every one up on their hind legs a-whoopin' themselves black in the face for old Bill Strickland 'fore I got through with 'em, suh. I tell you, Dick, that-there Satan-straddled newspaper done its durndest to ruin me, but I got even with it right then and here, suh!"

"Bully for you, Colonel!" vociferated Dick Cantrill, his humorous lips tremulous with mirth. "I'd gladly give the last dollar I had in the world if I could have been there and heard you!"

But the Colonel's face fell. "Dick," he said, "would you believe it? Them-there infernal cartoonists came back at me the next day worse'n ever, suh. They'd been there at that meetin' and got me in action. I'll be eternally condemned if I ever saw such pictures of a livin' human bein' as they drew of me then, suh. It was a sin and a shame. What's a man goin' to do these days, Dick Cantrill? I tell you,

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suh, the present frivolity of the American press is utterly destroyin' the dignity of public life, suh!"

"It is, Colonel—it is!" agreed the editor of the *Nineveh Weekly Blade* contritely. And it is to Dick Cantrill's everlasting credit that he held himself in until Colonel Todhunter had stalked away. Then he laughed as he had not laughed in many a day.

"God bless him!" he said to himself chokingly. "He and his speeches have gained five thousand votes for Colonel Strickland in St. Louis just as sure as the sun rises and sets! And they're worth it, too!"

But the crowning achievement of Colonel Todhunter's visit to St. Louis was when, by mistake, he marched upon the platform at the biggest Stephen K. Yancey mass meeting of the entire campaign and delivered a ringing eulogy of the Honorable William J. Strickland square in the face of the enemy.

It all arose from the blunder of the Strickland headquarters man assigned to guide Colonel Todhunter to his several speaking places on that fateful night.

Rival Strickland and Yancey mass meetings were being held in the same ward that night. The two halls engaged by the respective campaign managers



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were not far apart. Colonel Todhunter's luckless guide got their locations confused. Not until he followed the Colonel in a hurried entrance upon the speakers' stage did he realize his blunder.

It was too late.

An early speaker had just concluded his presentation of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey's claims for the favorable consideration of the Democratic voters as Colonel Todhunter's tall and exceedingly dignified figure emerged into view from the rear of the stage.

It so happened that some stentorian-voiced wag in the audience recognized the Colonel, and grasped alike the humor of the situation as it then existed and its possibilities of further development. This unknown gentleman promptly sounded a mighty and magnetic whoop.

"Todhunter! Todhunter! Hooray for Colonel Todhunter!"

Now, it will never be known if what immediately followed this joyful and enthusiastic cry was due to a similar sense of humor possessed by others in the audience, or if it was merely the natural result of a splendid salutation falling upon the ears of a multi-

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tude waiting and wistful to be stirred by vociferous leadership into tumultuous acclaim. Whatever the cause, the sudden slogan from one throat provoked a magnificent response. It was as though the vast gathering had been electrified into a passion of vocalized fervor. Almost instantly the big hall echoed and reëchoed with Colonel Todhunter's name.

"Todhunter! Hooray for Colonel Todhunter!"

At this psychological moment the original shouter added a new "tag" to his magnificent salutation.

"Speech!" he roared. "Speech! Todhunter! Speech!"

And again the herd followed its leader. An overwhelming insistence upon a speech from Colonel Todhunter rang and rang again through the hall.

Whereupon Colonel Todhunter yielded.

Tremendously pleased, he advanced to the front of the platform, and, after achieving a most impressive bow to the dumfounded chairman of the meeting, struck an attitude worthy of Daniel Webster or Henry Clay at their best. Thunders of applause greeted the all-competent pose. Then Colonel Todhunter spoke.

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"Fellow Democrats!"

The house fairly shook with cheers.

Upon which, Colonel Todhunter, standing alone amidst the embattled cohorts of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, launched himself into a fervent exposition of the great and lasting benefit sure to ensue from the nomination of the Honorable William J. Strickland for the high office of governor of the imperial commonwealth of Missouri. It was a superb effort. Colonel Todhunter in his soul loved the exercise of his old-fashioned oratorical gifts with a passionate ardor. He had now been encouraged to their supremest employment.

And he came astonishingly near completing his panegyric of the shining Strickland virtues before the inevitable interruption.

Suddenly, however, the listening crowd realized what was happening. Blank amazement followed the first shock of realization. Then came the galling consciousness that somebody had played a gigantic joke on the banner Yancey mass meeting of the primary campaign. Undeniably, too, the audacious Todhunter now confronting them from their own

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tribune was a party to the outrage, if not, indeed, its original instigator.

A surging howl of partizan rage arose. The roar of infuriated protest overwhelmed Colonel Todhunter's flow of eloquence. So mighty and resistless was it that the Colonel would as well have attempted to talk down the fury of a tempest.

"Slug him! Throw him out! Kill him!"

Colonel Todhunter turned to the chairman of the meeting. "What's the matter, suh?" he asked, puzzled. "That's a mighty curious way for a Strickland crowd to behave, suh!"

The bull-necked ward "boss" whom he addressed spluttered and gasped apoplectically, his eyes glaring at the speaker. Colonel Todhunter repeated his question.

And then—

"A Strickland crowd—hell!" burst from the chairman's lips. "What's eatin' you? Dis ain't no Strickland rally, you lobster! It's a Yancey mass-meetin' of de Fourt' Ward Democracy—an' dere won't be enough left of youse in a minnit for your frien's to bury, you damned stiff!"

Colonel Todhunter stared at the chairman, hot

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resentment of the words addressed to him leaping into his soul. The chairman stared at Colonel Todhunter, instinctively "sizing up" his indications of fighting power. The crowd roared like so many maddened bulls.

And then to the Colonel's own dauntless mind came a full realization of the humor of the situation and its final possibilities. A smile crept to his lips.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, bowing courteously, "I feel, suh, that it is incumbent upon me to tender to you and this here meetin' my profoundest apologies, suh. I am here by mistake—my mistake, suh—and I apologize!"

Then he turned and calmly faced his direfully threatening audience. He had been seen to salute the chairman of the meeting with elaborate politeness. His own cool demeanor made its certain impression upon the crowd. When he lifted one hand impressively the gesture commanded silence.

"My friends and fellow-citizens—and also fellow-Democrats," said Colonel Todhunter, entirely unruffled, "I have taken up your valuable time without proper warrant. I have no business here. I know it better'n you-all do. You are Yancey Dem-

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ocrats, and I'm a dyed-in-the-wool Strickland Democrat. I apologize to you for intrudin' upon your meetin' by mistake, my hearers!"

A little hush followed.

At its most impressive moment of absolute silence Colonel Todhunter's humorous lips parted in the most engaging smile of unconcealed amusement.

"But, my friends," he resumed, "nothin' is permitted to happen in this-here world of our'n without a wise intention on the part of its Creator. He moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform, a sacred poet tells us, and I believe it, my fellow-citizens. It wouldn't surprise me the least bit, my hearers, but what I was brought here by seeming accident to show you-all the error of your ways. While the light holds out to burn the vilest sinner may return—and I invite every last one of you Yancey men to consider thoughtfully what I've just been a-sayin' about my old friend, Bill Strickland, and—"

A deafening storm of partizan rage burst all bounds at this moment. Colonel Todhunter's guide laid a swift hand upon his collar and dragged him breathlessly to the rear of the stage. At a full run he was directed out through the wings. A door

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opening into a back alley was broken through by the guide's body, used as a catapult. The Colonel felt the fresh night air smite him in the face.

"Now we've got to sprint for it!" gasped the guide. "You follow me, and put on all the speed you got in you. They won't do a thing but massacre us if we don't make our get-away quicker'n a streak o' lightning!"

Five minutes later Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter gained the stage of the Strickland mass meeting to which he had originally been billeted. He was somewhat scant of breath, but otherwise ready for the service of the evening.

"I've been tryin' to convert the heathen!" he whispered, chuckling to old Governor Leslie, chairman of the meeting. "Over yonder on the corner at that four-flush Yancey rally, suh. It was a close shave. But I sowed some seeds, suh—I shorely sowed some seeds!"

The next day the front page of every St. Louis newspaper blazed with the side-splitting story of Colonel Todhunter's unique political exploit. The joke was on the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey and his St. Louis following and the whole town roared

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over the fun of the story. Colonel Todhunter was the hero of the day.

"I'm mighty glad to-night finds me back in Nineveh, suh," he remarked to Colonel Bill Strickland earnestly. "I've pawed up the earth here in St. Louis worse'n a yearlin' bull in springtime, suh. Blamed if I don't seem to have raised such a dust that none of us knows just where we're at. I told you I had no business comin' here, Bill Strickland!"

The Honorable William J. Strickland did his best to straighten his face into soberness. But his lips were tremulous with a grin of pure delight when he spoke.

"That's all right, Thurs," he replied. "You've done wonders on your watch"—and here he shook with laughter in spite of himself. "We'll want you here again, before the campaign closes, my friend."

"You won't get me, Bill," answered Colonel Todhunter grimly. "I ain't no hog—I know when I've got enough. This here St. Louis shivaree has about done me plumb up, suh. I-gad, suh, the only satisfactory seances I've had here was with old Randolph Carter, and that St. Louis chief of police I met yesterday. I laid the law down to old Randolph Car-



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ter for trainin' with the Yancey crowd that's layin' their plots to cheat you out o' the St. Louis vote, and I made him ashamed of himself, suh. And when I found out that this-here Chief Stacey is an old No'th Ca'lina veteran of the Confederacy, suh, I done likewise with him, too!"

Then the speaker chuckled.

"I shorely did talk straight to both of 'em, suh," he resumed. "I made old Ran Carter feel so cheap that he stuck his long nose down into his mint julep and told me he'd break my neck if I didn't hush my mouth, suh. And old Chief Stacey—well, he's white, clear through, and if he could only get half a chance I'd bet the last button on Gabe's coat he'd run his police force the way it ought to be run, suh, 'stead o' bein' a part of the Yancey machine, suh!"

That same night found Colonel Todhunter back in Nineveh. "And thank the Good Marster up above, Mary!" he said to Mrs. Todhunter fervently. "I'm shorely glad to get home. I been playin' the wild in St. Louis. My one comfort is that I told Bill Strickland exactly how it'd be. He's got himself to thank for persuadin' me to go there."

"Why, Colonel Todhunter!" cried Mrs. Tod-

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hunter. "You can't fool me, talking that way! I saw all the St. Louis papers as fast as they got to Nineveh, and they every one said you just covered yourself with glory."

An alarmed look came into Colonel Todhunter's face. "Mary," he asked, "did you see them cartoons?"

Mrs. Todhunter laughed outright. "I couldn't help seein' 'em, Colonel Todhunter! My goodness me! Ain't it wonderful, what likenesses those newspaper artists can make, just looking at a person?"

Colonel Todhunter gazed at the speaker ruefully. Then he shook his head. "That beats the Dutch!" he murmured sadly. "And yet they say a man's wife'll stand by him when he ain't got another friend left in the world!"

## CHAPTER X

### COLONEL TODHUNTER AIDE AND ABETS A YOUNG LOCHINVAR

COLONEL TODHUNTER was luxuriously bathing his soul in the soothing balm of country life when Sim Birdsong emerged into view and hurried up the flower-bordered walk to the Todhunter homestead. The Colonel himself was seated in his big cane easy-chair on the wide gallery, several Missouri newspapers on the table beside him and one already held open in his hand. Mrs. Todhunter had gone into town on some housewifely errand.

"Howdy, Colonel!" Sim saluted the returned campaigner. "I must say that politics seems to agree with you, suh. You're looking as peart as a two-year-old after your St. Louis frolic!"

The Colonel grunted. "If I am, Sim," he replied, "I reckon it's because I must be so natcherly no-count that I ain't worth killin', suh. I've certainly gone through enough since I been away from Nineveh to lay any ordinary man out cold and stiff.

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City politics is a mighty swift proposition, Sim Birdsong, lemme tell you that for keeps. But how did you know I'd got back home?"

"I happened to meet Mrs. Todhunter in town, suh, and she told me you showed up last night," answered Sim.

Then he sat silent, gazing at the Colonel speculatively. At last he spoke.

"Colonel Todhunter," he said, clearing his throat nervously, "I'm a-goin' to do it, suh."

The Colonel laid down his paper. "You're a-goin' to do what, Sim?" he asked blankly.

"Why, Colonel!" remonstrated Sim Birdsong. "You shorely ain't forgot the advice you, yourself, give me, have you, suh?"

"Sim," responded the colonel, perplexed, "I reckon I been givin' so blamed much advice here lately that I've lost hold on some o' the loose ends, maybe. What was it I was advisin' you about in particular, my boy?"

Something like chagrin showed in Sim's surprised face. "Why, suh," he spoke rebukingly, "it was about Miss Angelica Exall, suh. You shorely remember the very important talk you and me had

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about Miss Angelica and her ma, Colonel Todhunter?"

The Colonel's face lightened. "To be sure—to be sure, Sim! Now I remember perfectly. You was a-tellin' me, suh, that old Mrs. Exall's attitude to'ards you gave mighty little hope o' your ever winnin' Miss Angelica's heart and hand."

"Colonel Todhunter," said Sim proudly, "that wa'n't quite it, suh. I have already won Miss Angelica's heart, suh—and the very essence of our talk, Colonel, was about the ways and means of winnin' her hand as well, suh."

"O—it was, eh?"

"Yes, suh, it was. It was your advice to me, Colonel Todhunter, to run off with Miss Angelica Exall, suh, if I found out beyond the peradventure of a doubt that her ma wouldn't never consent to our bein' married, suh."

Colonel Todhunter looked at Sim Birdsong judicially. "Have you found that out, Sim?"

"Colonel," was the other's dejected reply, "if I was to live to be as old as Methuselah, suh, I couldn't never hope to get that old lady's consent, suh. She told me so herself, flat-footed, in about as p'inted

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language as I ever hear in all my life, suh. And she added that even if I did live as long as old Methusalem, and there wa'n't another man left in all the world, suh, she'd prevent my marryin' Miss Angelica if she had to come back from her grave and ha'nt me to keep me from doin' it, suh!"

"Sim," asked Colonel Todhunter, "old Mrs. Ex-all's worst objection to you is that you ain't as well off as Pohter Scruggs, ain't it?"

"It is, suh. If I had Pohter Scruggs' money and land, Colonel, and he didn't have any more'n what I've got now, I'd be the one in that old lady's good graces, suh."

"And it's true, as you say, that Miss Angelica loves you dearly, and that you love her in the same way, suh?"

"That shorely is the truth, Colonel Todhunter. I love Miss Angelica with all my heart and all my soul, and, thank the good Lord, suh, she says that's just the way she loves me."

"But her mother is willing to marry her off to Pohter Scruggs just for the sake of his money and land? She'll do this and make the girl unhappy for life if you don't save her by runnin' away with her?"

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"Colonel Todhunter, that's what's a-goin' to happen just as sure as you'n me's a-sittin' here lookin' each other in the face this minute, if I don't prevent it in some such a way as you have just indicated, suh."

"And you've faced old Mrs. Exall again and asked her the second time for Miss Angelica, tellin' her that the girl herself said she loved you?" inquired the Colonel.

"I have, suh. And that old lady come mighty nigh skeerin' me out of seven years' growth when I done it, suh. But I done it all the same, precisely as you told me to do it, suh."

"And now you feel sure in your own mind, and for all time, that you can't never persuade old Mrs. Exall to give Miss Angelica to you?"

"Colonel Todhunter, it's as certain as the law of the Medes and the Persians, suh. Miss Angelica's ma took particular pains to convince me of this fact, suh. And, finally, she declared that she'd scratch my eyes out if I ever pestered her on that subject again, suh."

Colonel Todhunter straightened up. "Then, Sim," he spoke, the light of a clear conscience in his eyes,

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"the sooner you run off with Miss Angelica and marry her, the better for both of you, suh."

"That's exactly what I've come now to tell you, suh!" cried Sim Birdsong jubilantly. "I'm a-goin' to run off with Miss Angelica this very night, Colonel Todhunter. And we want you to help us, suh!"

Colonel Todhunter gasped.

"You want me to help you?" he repeated weakly. "Why, Sim, what in blue blazes—why, suh, it's you that's got to run off with Miss Angelica, not me!"

"I know that, Colonel," agreed Sim. "But Miss Angelica's powerful skeery, suh, and she feels the need of your moral support and countenance while we're a-doin' it, suh. She knows how you feel about it, Colonel. To tell you the truth, suh, she says she won't marry me the way we got to be married, 'less'n you and Mrs. Todhunter are present at the ceremony, suh!"

The colonel saw a ray of hope. "Sim," he said, "I'm mighty doubtful about bein' able to ring Mrs. Todhunter in on this thing. I been advisin' you accordin' to my own poor lights, and I ain't consulted Mrs. Todhunter on the subject at all, suh. I'm



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afraid she won't see it in the same way we do, Sim. She's mighty likely to take old Mrs. Exall's view of the matter, so far as runnin' away with a daughter is concerned. Women are mighty curious about these things, suh."

"Colonel Todhunter," spoke Sim Birdsong craftily, "Mrs. Todhunter don't need to know a thing about what's goin' on till it's too late for her to back out, suh!"

Colonel Todhunter glared at the speaker. "You young scoundrel, you! You and Miss Angelica have got this thing all cut and dried between you. 'Fess up, Sim Birdsong—what's the plot you've devised and contrived for the whole blamed proceedin', suh?"

An apologetic grin relieved the apprehension which had until now rested upon Sim Birdsong's countenance.

"Colonel," he replied, "I'm a-goin' to tell you the whole truth. I've done seen the Reverend Mr. Lipscombe, suh. He knows just what the situation is, suh. He's willin' to marry us as a runaway couple, knowin' we're both of age. He's a-goin' to invite

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you and Mrs. Todhunter and Miss Mary over to supper this evenin', suh. Then, suh, it'll all happen before you can bat an eye. And Mrs. Todhunter needn't never know but what you and her and Miss Mary just happened to be at Mr. Lipscombe's house that night by pure accident, suh!"

Frank admiration shone in Colonel Todhunter's eyes. "Sim Birdsong," he spoke, "you're a heap-sight smarter man than I gave you credit for bein', suh, 'spite o' your havin' made such a bungle of the Spanish War, suh! I ain't got the heart to fail you now, Sim—and I'll handle Mrs. Todhunter the best way I know how, too!"

Profound gratitude was in Sim Birdsong's face. "I knew you'd do it, Colonel!" he exclaimed, heaving a sigh of relief. "And you'll never know all it means to me, suh. I got to get Miss Angelica Exall, suh. If I don't, suh, this world is but a fleetin' show, and I don't care, for one, how soon the show closes, suh."

Colonel Todhunter shook with amusement. "If that's the way you feel about it, Sim," he chuckled, "you certainly can't afford to take no chances on losin' her. You shorely do need a preacher as soon

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as you can get him, suh—there ain't no two ways about that!"

All of which accounts for the fact that Mrs. Todhunter and Mary and the Colonel were the guests of the Lipscombes at supper that same evening. This was not by any means the first time such a thing had happened, and the minister and his wife were frequent guests of the Todhunters. The Colonel, therefore, met with no difficulty in "tolling" Mrs. Todhunter into the trap set for her.

Nevertheless, being a man of honest soul, Colonel Todhunter looked guilty when, soon after supper, there came a knock at the front door and the Reverend Mr. Lipscombe was summoned to his study. Fortunately, however, Mrs. Todhunter was entirely unsuspecting and the Colonel's uneasy conscience revealed itself in his facial expression without exciting her attention.

The minister was gone for ten minutes or more. When he returned there was a smile on his lips.

"It's Sim Birdsong and Miss Angelica Exall," he said. "They want me to marry them."

To the preacher's wife an announcement of this nature had ceased to be a novelty. But Mrs. Tod-

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hunter was aroused to instant and absorbing interest, and Mary was vastly excited.

"It's a runaway wedding!" Mrs. Todhunter exclaimed, every fiber of her sentimental being responding to the appeal of romance. "Just as sure as we're sitting here, they've eloped!"

The Reverend Mr. Lipscombe nodded.

"That is true, Mrs. Todhunter," he replied. "And I have consented to perform the ceremony. I feel that it is right for me to do so. They are a good and worthy young couple, they love each other, they are both of age, and I know that the girl's mother is trying to marry her to a richer man in spite of the fact that she loves Sim Birdsong instead. Under the circumstances, I would not feel justified in refusing to marry them."

Then, after a moment's silence, "And now, Colonel and Mrs. Todhunter," he resumed, "I want to ask you to act as witnesses to the wedding. It will greatly please the young couple, and I told them I felt sure you would consent to do so. I hope you are both willing, and I shall be very much obliged."

Mrs. Todhunter became suddenly flustered. "I don't know just what to do," she wavered. "Not

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that I disapprove of what Sim and Angelica are doing under the circumstances, but mothers are mighty resentful, Mr. Lipscombe! I wouldn't thank any woman for helping my own daughter, Mary, to elope with a young man I didn't like, and I know Mrs. Exall won't thank me, either."

"Mary," remarked Colonel Todhunter casually, "you ain't a-helpin' these young folks to elope. They've already eloped. They're a-goin' to get married whether you see 'em or not. Al! that Mr. Lipscombe asks is that you'll witness the ceremony. I'd do it, if I was you. It may help poor little Miss Angelica to keep her courage up and feel a bit cheerful, Mary."

This was a plausible argument. Mrs. Todhunter beamed on the Colonel. In reality, there was nothing she more dearly loved than helping young people to get married.

"Well, now, that certainly is the truth, Colonel Todhunter!" she cried. "We didn't know a thing about it till this blessed minute, did we? And it ain't our fault that we happened to be here at this precise moment, either. It does seem to me it wouldn't be just right to refuse—and I do feel I

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

ought to help 'em, now that they've gone this far. The poor things!"

Whereupon the Reverend Mr. Lipscombe, Mrs. Lipscombe, Colonel Todhunter and Mrs. Todhunter and Mary marched to the relief of Sim Birdsong and Miss Angelica Exall. They found the young couple, dismally frightened, perched very close together on one of Mrs. Lipscombe's old-fashioned horsehair sofas. Something like a look of dazed recognition came into Sim's panic-stricken eyes as they rested upon Colonel Todhunter's familiar face, and he essayed to smile gratefully, but the smile was appalling in its unlikeness to any ordinary human effort in that direction. As for Miss Angelica Exall, she was pathetic in her fright and frustration. Mrs. Todhunter's motherly heart melted at the sight of her and she went straightway and took the girl in her arms.

"Don't you be scared, honey," she said soothingly. "It ain't half as bad as it seems to you now, and I'm sure Sim's going to make you a good husband!"

Mrs. Lipscombe was patting the runaway bride on her other shoulder, her sweet eyes shining with womanly comprehension. Mary Todhunter drew

## A YOUNG LOCHINVAR

close to her girl friend. Sim Birdsong, seeing the women ministering to his sweetheart, opened his mouth to voice manful thanks, but was utterly unequal to the task. He licked his stiffening lips, instead, a truly pitiful spectacle.

Happily, however, the minister came to the rescue. "My dear young friends," he said, "I have already spoken with you of the gravity of the step you are about to take, and it has pleased me to see that you contemplate its meaning in a proper spirit. The ceremony will now be performed, since the necessary witnesses are present."

The runaway couple arose and stood before the minister. In what for ever after seemed to them an incredibly short time they were made husband and wife. The Reverend Mr. Lipscombe and Colonel Todhunter both shook hands heartily with Sim Birdsong and claimed a kiss from the bride. Their wives, tremendously moved, insisted upon giving Sim himself a motherly kiss each, after which they again sustained the spirits of the bride. Mary Todhunter, too, joined in the work of comforting her.

That is, they essayed to do this in all sincerity, but by this time all three were weeping, and, at sight of

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their tears, the newly made Mrs. Birdsong fell victim to a sudden and dreadful homesickness for her own mother.

"Somebody's got to tell her this very night!" she cried piteously. "I can't bear to think of her being there all alone, the way I left her! Colonel Todhunter, won't you go and tell ma that I've been married to Sim and that I ask her forgiveness for running away to do it? I know you'll do it, Colonel. You've been so good to me and Sim, planning this whole thing out for us and being the first to advise Sim to run away with me!"

Colonel Todhunter's blood went cold in his veins. He felt Mrs. Todhunter's accusing eyes upon him.

"Why, Miss Angelica—er—I mean Mrs. Birdsong!" he gasped. "I—I reckon I done gone about far enough—I—er—well, I'm afeard—I'm afeard your ma may not like it the least bit if I go to her so sudden-like with the news, Miss Angelica!"

At this the bride wept afresh. "Oh, Colonel Todhunter!" she wailed. "You surely ought to do it for me! I never would have run away with Sim if it hadn't been for you. I think you might, Colonel Todhunter—ma'll be so lonesome if you don't!"



## A YOUNG LOCHINVAR

Into Mrs. Todhunter's eyes came the light of justice. Also a gleam of faintly humorous appreciation of Colonel Todhunter's plight. The Colonel's incorrigible sentimentalism was plainly responsible for this elopement. It was also destined, later, to give her a bad half-hour with Mrs. Exall. It would serve the Colonel right to make him pay this demanded penalty for his share in the runaway wedding.

"Angelica is justified in asking you to do this for her, Colonel Todhunter," she spoke firmly. "You can't refuse to do as she asks, and you mustn't think of such a thing!"

The Colonel stood aghast. "Mary!" he protested. "I—I—well, I just can't, that's all there is to it! I'll just be jiggered if I can!"

But he was doomed. The bride clung to him beseechingly. Mrs. Todhunter's voice was against him. The Reverend Mr. Lipscombe and Mrs. Lipscombe seemed to look at him with nominating eyes. Even Mary was plainly of their opinion. Mournfully the Colonel bowed to the inevitable. Mrs. Todhunter accompanied him to the door.

"Mary," he said, "you'll be sorry if anything hap-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

pens to me. I'll come back here to tell Miss Angelica the result, and to take you and Mary home if there's anything left of me, but I give you fair warning, Mrs. Todhunter. You're a-sendin' your husband on a mighty dangerous errand, ma'am!"

Mrs. Todhunter's reception of this foreboding speech was the severest blow yet received by the Colonel. She laughed in his face. "It serves you right!" she said.

And the Colonel went into the outer darkness.

## CHAPTER XI

AND PAYS A TERRIFYING PRICE FOR SO DOING

**H**AVING accepted a perilous mission, the Colonel was too soldierly of soul to think of shirking his duty. He made his way manfully toward the enemy, although in a state of unmitigated panic.

"I ain't never had much use for a man that needed Dutch courage," he said to himself ruefully, "but I'd give a dollar for a stiff horn of whisky right now. And if it hadn't been a preacher's house I was at, I'll be shot full o' holes if I wouldn't have asked for one before startin' out on this Tom Fool business, too. I'll tell the truth and shame the devil!"

Unfortified, however, he knocked at Mrs. Exall's door, feeling much like a criminal about to listen to his rightful condemnation for sin. At first there was no response. The little cottage seemed very dark and still. Finally, however, a light gleamed and the Colonel heard approaching footsteps in the hall. Then the front door was opened on the crack.

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"Who's there?" came an apprehensive voice.

The Colonel gulped nervously. "It's me, Mrs. Exall—Colonel Todhunter!" he made answer. Suddenly he felt very crestfallen and shamed. The voice of the lonely widow, waiting for her daughter, rebuked him. The door was thrown open. Mrs. Exall stood framed in its lighted square, a keen-faced little woman, spare of figure, sandy-gray of hair, with a querulous, thinly curved nose, straight and tightly gripped lips, faint blue eyes with just a suggestion of peppery glint in their cold depths. The eyes surveyed him curiously.

"Why, Colonel Todhunter!" their owner exclaimed. "Whatever in the world is the matter? But come in—I do hope Mrs. Todhunter ain't sick?"

The Colonel entered, abandoning hope. "No, ma'am," he replied, feeling himself flush guiltily, "Mrs. Todhunter's very well, I thank you, ma'am."

By this time they were in the little parlor.

"Take a seat, Colonel Todhunter," said the widow. A deep surmise was in her eyes. "I'm certainly glad there ain't anything wrong with Mrs. Todhunter—"

Then, suddenly, she clasped her hands together.

"It's Angelica!" she cried. "Something's hap-

## A TERRIFYING PRICE

pened to her. That's why you're here! Oh, Colonel Todhunter, tell me! It's something dreadful that's happened to Angelica!"

A mountain's weight of self-accusation fell upon Colonel Todhunter's gray head. Remorseful beyond measure, he stood mute for a moment. Then, desperately, he blurted out the truth.

"Mrs. Exall," he said, "it's about Miss Angelica—but it ain't nothin' dreadful, ma'am. She asked me to come and tell you about it. She's—she's just been married, ma'am. Yes'm, Miss Angelica's gone and got married!"

Vainly did Colonel Todhunter strive to sound a joyous note in this announcement. His voice was as if it came from the tombs. The eagle-faced, formidable little woman confronting him froze into a sardonic statue at his words. A cold suspicion leaped into her eyes.

"Angelica's run off and married that triffin' Sim Birdsong," she spoke, her tone ominous. "She's just fool enough to do it, shuttin' her eyes to a better chance. That's it, ain't it, Colonel Todhunter?"

The colonel swallowed. "Yes'm, she's married Sim Birdsong," he confessed. "But—maybe it's all

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

for the best, Mrs. Exall. Young folks sometimes see clearer than us old folks, ma'am."

Mrs. Exall bridled perceptibly. "I may be old and I may not, Colonel Todhunter," she retorted icily. "But it ain't for you to remind me of it if I am. However, that's neither here nor there. It's my poor, misguided daughter I'm thinkin' of now. Tell me, sir, where they were married, and who married them?"

The abrupt question startled the Colonel. "Why, ma'am—why, Mrs. Exall," he stammered. "Where—who—why—of course, yes, ma'am! They—they were married at the preacher's own house, Mrs. Exall, and the Reverend Mr. Lipscombe, he—yes'm, Mr. Lipscombe himself married 'em, ma'am!"

Mrs. Exall's steely eyes gimleted the speaker. "How does it happen, Colonel Todhunter," she asked, "that it's you who comes to me with this news?"

Colonel Todhunter felt his blood running chill. "Me?" he repeated. "How do I—why, Mrs. Exall, it just so happened. I was—well, me and Mrs. Todhunter and Mary just happened to be spendin' the evenin' with Mr and Mrs. Lipscombe when—when

## A TERRIFYING PRICE

Sim and Miss Angelica came there to get married, ma'am!"

Mrs. Exall sniffed, her eyes snapping. "Oh, yes, I see!" she spoke, biting her words off with blade-like lips. "How nice that was! You and Mrs. Todhunter and Mary were all there to help 'em through. Well, sir, between you, you've ruined my child's life, that's what you've done! And you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, all of you!"

"My dear madam!" cried the Colonel.

"Yes, sir, that's what you've done—ruined her life. She could have married Pohter Scruggs, a rich man, just by crookin' her little finger at him. But no—you and Mrs. Todhunter have encouraged her into marryin' that contemptible Sim Birdsong, who ain't worth the salt to save him—" Here she tossed her head to dash the tears aside.

The Colonel fidgeted in anguish of soul.

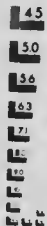
"That's the plain truth, Colonel Todhunter, and it's makin' you squirm, too! I can see through the whole thing. Angelica's been confidin' in you and Mrs. Todhunter, and you-all have sided with her and advised her to marry Sim Birdsong. It was mighty easy for Mrs. Todhunter, with her own





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

daughter Mary courted by Tom Strickland, whom you-all like. But I'll tell her exactly what I think of it all, the very next time I lay eyes on her. And she can like it or lump it!"

What was left of Colonel Todhunter's courage revived at the wrongful blaming of Mrs. Todhunter.

"Mrs. Exall," he said, "Mrs. Todhunter had no more to do with that there weddin' than the babe unborn, ma'am. She didn't know a thing about it till it was all ready to take place. She was rakin' me over the coals no more'n fifteen minutes ago for puttin' my own fingers into the pie—" Here the Colonel pulled up, horror-stricken.

Mrs. Exall's look was withering. "So!" she cried. "It was you who did the meddlin'! And the plottin'! And the contrivin'! It was you, Colonel Todhunter! You and that worthless Sim Birdsong put your heads together and laid out your plans to rob a poor widow-woman of her only child—"

"Madam!" expostulated Colonel Todhunter. "That ain't fair! I'm sorry—"

"You're sorry?" scoffed Mrs. Exall bitterly. "You're sorry? And meantime my poor daughter is married beyond redemption. I'd like to know

## A TERRIFYING PRICE

what good your bein' sorry is goin' to do me, sir!  
And I'd like to know what business you had meddlin'  
in the affair at all, sir!"

"Madam," said Colonel Todhunter desperately,  
"I was honestly tryin' to make them two young peo-  
ple happy. Miss Angelica loved Sim. She didn't  
love Pohter Scruggs. And his money wouldn't ha'  
brought happiness to her, she a-lovin' Sim Birdsong  
instead o' lovin' him. And I come here, ma'am, to  
ask you to forgive them two young people. It'll  
make 'em the happiest young married people in all  
the world if—"

Mrs. Exall rose. She went to the front door and  
opened it elaborately. Then she returned to her  
visitor.

"Colonel Todhunter," she spoke. "My front door  
is open. It is open for you to leave my house, sir.  
When you see my daughter Angelica you can tell  
her from me that she has brought my gray hairs in  
sorrow to the grave. I don't ever want to see her  
again. And as for that low-down Sim Birdsong,  
you tell him that if ever he comes to this house I'll  
throw a kittle of scalding water on him like I would  
on a mangy dog, sir. And you needn't trouble your-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

self to come here any more, either, Colonel Todhunter, neither you nor Mrs. Todhunter nor Mary, sir. I never want to lay eyes on any one of you again the longest day I live!"

"Mrs. Exall!" cried Colonel Todhunter. "For your daughter's sake—for Miss Angelica's sake, ma'am—"

Mrs. Exall pointed to the open door.

"If you don't go away from here, Colonel Todhunter," she said, "I'll scratch your old eyes out, that's what I'll do to you!"

The Colonel's fingers convulsively gripped the broad brim of his soft hat. Awe of this terrifying woman of wrath was in his soul. One look into her face completed his rout. The next moment he began the most ignominious retreat that a sinister fate had ever imposed upon him.

Mrs. Exall followed him through the hall. As his feet crossed her threshold she slammed the door so swiftly and violently that the Colonel for a moment thereafter swore he felt the suddenly projected air strike the back of his neck with a cyclone's force.

Then, fathoms deep in chagrin, Colonel Todhunter made his inglorious way back to the wedding

## A TERRIFYING PRICE

party. But he refrained from laying before the bridal couple the shameful details of his encounter with Angelica's mother.

"If I was you two," he explained, after making a general announcement of Mrs. Exall's refusal to receive them, "I don't think I'd go around there for a little while. She's naturally put out about it. You'd better give her time to cool off some."

But when he reached home he told Mrs. Todhunter the whole story, dismally.

"I got pretty nigh all I deserved," he said. "I'd ha' got it all if some man had been there to lick me within an inch of my life. But, of course, poor old Mrs. Exall couldn't be expected to do that. I'll tell you one thing, though. When I was a-sneakin' out through that there hall o' her'n, like a whipped dog with his tail between his legs, if she'd took a broomstick to me and lammed seventeen different kinds o' stuffin' out'n me, I wouldn't ha' said a word. 'Twould ha' served me just right. I tell you, Mary, hereafter I'm a-goin' to let young folks manage their own love affairs. It's too big a contract for any outside party to assume, 'less'n he's deliberately lookin' for trouble!"

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

Strangely enough, relenting from her original position, Mrs. Todhunter was vastly indignant at the manner of Colonel Todhunter's reception by Mrs. Exall.

"The little old spitfire!" she exclaimed wrathfully, her consoling hand resting on the Colonel's. "That Elvira Exall's got the worst cross-patch of a temper I ever saw. But she mustn't think she can turn it loose on you, Colonel Todhunter, and if she begins stormin' at me, I'll mighty soon let her know it, too!"

"No, you won't, Mary," said the Colonel, a faint grin on his face. "Colonel Thurs T. Todhunter got just what was comin' to him, and nobody knows it better'n him. That poor, lonesome old woman ought to have knocked the top o' my head off!"

But late that night Mrs. Todhunter felt the Colonel shake with sudden laughter as he lay in bed.

"What's the matter, Colonel Todhunter?" she asked.

"I believe I'm glad I done it after all—helpin' Angelica and Sim to get married, Mary," he replied. "I'll be plumb-jiggered if that old catamaran mustn't ha' been turrrible to live with! Yes, suh, I'm glad I done it!"

## CHAPTER XII

### TOM STRICKLAND FACES COLONEL TODHUNTER IN A SENTIMENTAL CRISIS

**H**ONESTLY, Mary," protested Tom Strickland, "it isn't safe for you to drive home alone. It's all very well to make believe that you're not afraid of a horse, but I know better. Won't you let me see you home?"

The two had met in the lazy quiet of Nineveh's town square and Tom was quick to see his opportunity. Mary Todhunter laughed at his apprehensive manner.

"How can you keep a straight face when you say that, Tom?" she asked. "You know as well as I do that I've driven old Solomon a million times, more or less, and that nothing on earth would make him run away!"

"You never can tell about these old reliables," said Tom. "Solomon might take it into his head to get frisky any minute. I can see devilment in his eye right now!"

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

He placed an entreating hand on the buggy's side.

"Well, get in, then," conceded Mary, tossing her pretty head. "I reckon I won't have any peace until I let you have your own way!"

Tom swung himself into the buggy instantly. "That's a mighty wise conclusion, Mary," he remarked, taking the reins and heading old Solomon toward the shady road that led to Mary's home. "I wish to goodness you'd make up your mind to it as a permanent thing!"

Mary flashed mockery at him. "I reckon you do!" she exclaimed. "It's just like you. But there's no danger of it's coming to pass, Mr. Tom Strickland!"

They were now well out of the drowsy town. Old Solomon trotted contentedly along under the leafy foliage that arched his always welcome homeward way.

"That's one reason I'd like to see your father elected governor," continued Mary. "Those Jefferson City girls will soon teach you your proper place, Tom Strickland, even though you are the governor's son!"

"I'm not the governor's son yet, Mary," responded Tom, an intentional meekness in his tone.



## A SENTIMENTAL CRISIS

"And even if the time ever comes that I am, Jefferson City will see mighty little of me."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary. "You'll certainly have to go to the state capital when Colonel and Mrs. Strickland go, won't you?"

Tom's face took on an injured expression. "I declare, Mary," he spoke, "you never seem to realize that I'm no longer a boy. Please remember that I'm a grown man, now, and that I've studied law and been admitted to practice at the Missouri bar!"

Laughter gleamed in Mary's eyes. "Well, Mr. Thomas Strickland, great lawyer that you are," she mocked, "what then?"

"Why, just this—that I intend to stay right here in Nineveh," announced Tom loftily. "It's all settled, too. I'm going to be taken into partnership with my father and old Judge Bolling, and then I can hold my father's practice if he's elected. Anyway, I'm to be a partner. 'Strickland, Bolling and Strickland,' that's how the new sign will read!"

Mary laughed outright. "Goodness me!" she cried. "Won't we be a big man then? Oh, Tom, it'll be such fun to hear you make a speech in court! Ahem—Gentlemen of the jury—"

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

"Shame on you, Mary Todhunter!" cried Tom, reddening boyishly. "It's just like you, though. You've poked fun at me all your life!"

"I haven't, either!" denied Mary instantly. "I've only laughed at your high and mighty ways now and then, and you know it!"

Tom's angry eyes looked straight to the front.

"You had no right to say that about me," continued Mary. "I've been mighty good to you!"

"Up to a certain point, yes," agreed Tom. "But just the minute I get serious about anything you begin laughing at me."

"Why, Tom, I don't do anything of the sort!" protested Mary. "I never dreamed of such a thing! You can try me this very minute and see!"

"All right, I will!" spoke Tom quickly. "Mary, I love you. I want you to promise to be my wife. Won't you? I've loved you all my life!"

"Tom Strickland!" cried Mary, blushing hotly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You've got no right to say that just because—just because I—I was trying to be good to you!"

"Mary," said Tom sturdily, "If you don't know I've been in love with you all this time you must be

## A SENTIMENTAL CRISIS

blind. And now I've told you, why—well, you've got to give me an answer—and I love you so that I'm afraid to hear it! If it's no—well, it'll break my heart, that's all!"

There was no answer to his pleading. Mary had given him one startled look. Then her eyes had softened and turned away from his. It seemed to Tom that she was crying.

"Mary," he said humbly, "I didn't mean to say anything to trouble you, but I had to tell you some time or other. I've loved you a long, long time. Is there any chance for me at all?"

Still there was no answer.

"I reckon I've been the blind one," said Tom sadly. "I reckon you can't care for me the way I care for you. Yes, Mary, I reckon it's me that's been blind!"

"Yes, Tom," replied Mary Todhunter. "It's you that have been blind."

Tom bowed his head. "I ought to have seen that you didn't love me," he said. "I ought to have seen it. Then I wouldn't have given you the pain of having to tell me so."

"I'm not going to tell you," said Mary.

"All right, Mary," replied Tom. "I'll take my

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

answer without hurting you by making you put it into words. I'm no hog, anyway—I know when I've had enough."

To his amazement Mary burst out laughing. "Of all the funny things to say at such a time!" she cried. Her eyes were full of mischief, yet beautifully tender. "Oh, Tom, indeed you are the blindest of the blind!"

A sudden hope stirred in Tom's soul. "Mary!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean—"

"I do, Tom!" softly replied Mary. "How could you believe I didn't love you? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

And Tom Strickland took Mary Todhunter in his arms, leaving old Solomon to go his own way unguided.

"I'll tell Mrs. Todhunter and the Colonel this very day!" he announced a few moments later. "Lord, they'd see it anyway in my face, I'm so proud and happy. I want to know if they think I'm good enough for you."

Mary tossed her head. "They'd better think so!" she retorted indignantly. "Not good enough, indeed!"



"Mary! you don't mean——" *Page 176*



## A SENTIMENTAL CRISIS

But Tom was near to being panic-stricken when they had gained the wide gallery of Mary's home and were confronting her parents.

"Howdy, Tom!" spoke Colonel Todhunter. His glance passed from young Strickland to his daughter with just the faintest twinkle of amusement in his gray-blue eyes.

Tom Strickland had taken Mrs. Todhunter's hand. "Howdy, Mrs. Todhunter—Howdy, Colonel," he said, his face an open book of confession. "I—I—well, I—Mary was good enough to say I could come home with her!"

"We're glad you did, Tom," replied Mrs. Todhunter. "And you've got to stay to supper."

Colonel Todhunter's lips were twitching. "I don't know about that, honey," he spoke. "Tom don't look to me like he's very hungry."

Mary flashed swift indignation at her father. Mrs. Todhunter looked at the Colonel in surprise. Then, in sudden understanding, she shot a quick glance at the young people. Tom Strickland blushed redder than ever. Mary fired at her mother one soft volley of entreaty from dewy eyes and then fled precipitately into the house. Her face filled

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

with comprehending tenderness, Mrs. Todhunter followed Mary, making no excuses.

"Tom," said Colonel Todhunter, "you seem to have been kicking up a mighty funny rumpus this load o' poles, young man!"

Tom stood like a condemned felon in the dock. "I reckon I have, Colonel," he made answer. Then, after a dismay-filled pause, "I—I—I've been asking Mary to marry me, sir!"

Colonel Todhunter's face was impassive.

Tom Strickland stood very erect. Pride shone in his eyes. "I don't know, sir, whether you've noticed it or not," he resumed, "but I've been in love with Mary for a long time."

A relishful twinkle was in Colonel Todhunter's eyes.

"And, sir—and—well, Colonel Todhunter, it's 'just this!' exultantly, but blushing, exclaimed Tom, "I know I don't deserve it—I can't hardly believe it—but Mary says she loves me, too—and—well, sir, I want to ask Mrs. Todhunter's and your consent to our marriage, sir!"

Colonel Todhunter was contemplating the young man with eyes brimful of kindly amusement.



## A SENTIMENTAL CRISIS

"Tom," he said, "as long as you live, you'll never forget how skeered you are this minute, suh. But you got through with it like a hero—a blamed sight better than I did when I asked for Mrs. Todhunter. That sure was a terrible experience!"

But the next moment his face was grave. He laid his hand on young Strickland's shoulder.

"Tom, my boy," he said, "I'd rather give Mary to you than to any other man in the world, and you ought to ha' known it without my tellin' you. I've known you and liked you all the time you've been growin' up, and I love your father like he was my own brother. I am glad you and Mary have got it all settled, and I'm sure Mrs. Todhunter thinks as much of you as I do. God bless you and Mary both, my boy!"

There was a sudden break in the Colonel's voice. "It's up to you and Mary to arrange all the rest of it, young man," he spoke again, after a little pause. Then, with a whimsical smile— "And all of your troubles are ahead of you both—may the good Lord have mercy on your souls!"

A splendid gratitude shone in Tom's eyes. "All I've got to say is this, Colonel Todhunter," he said,

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

"God helping me, I'll make Mary the best husband in the world!"

"You'll need the Good Marster's help considerable, too, my boy," responded Colonel Todhunter quizzically. "And don't bank on bein' too blamed successful in that-there undertakin', suh. Bein' a good husband ain't no sinecure, not by a long shot. It's the biggest contract you ever undertook, and you've got to keep hammerin' away at it ev'ry minute, suh. It's enough to skeer a man to death, Tom, if it wan't for one thing: bein' a good husband means havin' a happy wife, and that's the finest thing on God's green footstool. You just live up to that great truth, Tom, and it's all I'll ask of you."

"You won't have to ask more than once, Colonel Todhunter," replied Tom fervently. "I'll think of nothing but Mary's happiness all my life, sir. And that'll mean mine, too—we're going to be the happiest couple in all the world, Colonel!"

"Now that's where you slip up again, Tom," said Colonel Todhunter. "Married life ain't just one long dream of unalloyed bliss, not by a jugful, suh. You got to take it as it comes, the bad with the good, and

## A SENTIMENTAL CRISIS

sometimes it may look like the good ain't as plentiful as it might be, but that's percisely when you got to sit tight, and watch and pray for a change o' luck. And a man's wife ain't no chronic angel, young man, no more'n a woman's husband is. You'll be powerful lucky if Mary makes you as good a wife as her mother's made me, but, all the same, I've seen days when Mrs. Todhunter looked more like a destroyin' cyclone to me than anything else. And she can tell a hundred shortcomin's on me where I can tell one on her, so there you are, suh. It's give and take, that's what it is, and you just got to do your best, keep on whistlin' for cheerfulness' sake, and stand ready to make a quick duck if things get too stormy, suh!"

Tom Strickland could not help but laugh. "Well, Colonel," he responded, "if Mary and I are as happy as you and Mrs. Todhunter, I'll be more than satisfied. And I'll try to make her a good husband. I promise you that."

"I know you will, Tom," replica Colonel Todhunter. "And I know Mary'll try to fill her part o' the contract the same way, too."

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The young man's gaze went nervously past the door through which Mary and her mother had vanished.

"I wonder where they are, Colonel?" he ventured apprehensively. "I hope there's nothing serious happening!"

Colonel Todhunter tugged at his grizzled mustache to keep from smiling openly in Tom's face.

"Don't you worry none about Mary and her mother, suh," he spoke. "They're just havin' a heart-to-heart talk on the all-absorbin' subject of marriage, Tom, and they got to have a good cry while it's goin' on. I bet they've already shed enough briny tears to float a battleship, suh. That's a woman's way at such a time as this. All mothers has got to wail over their daughters then like they was goin' to die 'stead o' gettin' married. But they're all right after that, suh. When Mary and Mrs. Todhunter get through and wipe each other's weepin' eyes they'll show up out here as serene as a summer's day. I reckon it's the Good Marster's will—they got to do it that way, suh."

At this moment Mrs. Todhunter appeared in the doorway. She went straight to Tom and put both

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hands on his shoulders and kissed him on the forehead.

"God bless you and make both of you happy, Tom," she said, her voice trembling. "Mary loves you very dearly. You've got to be a good man, Tom, for her sake. You will, too, won't you?"

Mary's sweet face was now in Tom's view from where she stood in the shadowy old hall behind her mother. The young man bowed his head at Mrs. Todhunter's tremulous speech.

"God helping me, I will, Mrs. Todhunter," he replied.

Something very like the dimming of tears came into Colonel Todhunter's eyes at the picture thus presented. But he strove manfully to conceal the fact of such emotion.

"Come out here, Mary!" he cried indignantly. "You've been leavin' Tom to face the music alone long enough!"

But when Mary Todhunter obeyed the summons her father took her into his arms and pressed his suspiciously quivering lips to her brown hair.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourself, honey?" he asked. "For bein' so willin' to leave your mother

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and me just because that snip of a Tom Strickland wants you? We're goin' to be mighty lonesome without you, daughter!"

And then, because Mary cried, her face hidden on his breast, Colonel Todhunter scowled ferociously at Tom.

"It's all your fault, you young rascal!" he ejaculated, patting Mary soothingly on the shoulder at the same time. "You had no business wantin' her, and you know it!"

At which not one of his three hearers could refrain from laughing—and this was precisely what the Colonel desired.

## CHAPTER XIII

### COLONEL TODHUNTER TAKES THE STUMP IN RURAL MISSOURI

**A**S a result of Colonel Todhunter's picturesque prosecution of the Strickland campaign in St. Louis he was unanimously chosen by the Honorable William J. Strickland's managers to invade the Yancey strongholds throughout the state.

"Todhunter's a champion vote-getter, Strickland," said old Governor Leslie, "and that's a mighty rare gift. Any ordinary spellbinder can keep a candidate's own friends in line during a campaign, and get 'em to the polls on election day. But it takes a man of uncommon qualities to steal friends away from the other fellow. Todhunter's that sort of man. He's a natural born campaigner, and the sooner we put him right on the firing line the better."

This fitted in admirably with the Colonel's own wishes.

"I'll let 'em know we're alive, anyway," he commented. "I ain't never been able to figure out more'n

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one sure way to win a fight, and that's to crowd the other man from the jump, suh. Keep him guessin' and dodgin' every minute. The first thing you know he's retreatin' and you're advancin' and all the odds is in your favor, suh. I won't like nothin' better'n to batt into them-there Yancey counties, armed for the strife and eager for the fray, I-gad!"

Old Governor Leslie leaned back in his chair and laughed until his spare frame shook.

"There's your man, Strickland!" he cried, flashing his eagle eyes approvingly at Colonel Todhunter. "We can't get him out into the state too quick for the good of the cause!"

"How soon can you take the stump, Thurs?" asked Colnel Strickland.

"Just the minute you-all drop the hat," replied Colonel Todhunter. "You can't curry no hoss by standin' off and lookin' at him, suh!"

That same night, therefore, Colonel Todhunter departed to cover his itinerary in the country districts. He headed straight for that section of Missouri where the Yancey strength reached its fullest tide.

"Th' ain't nothin' like carryin' the war into Af-



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rica," he said. "Them-there folks ain't married to ol' Steve Yancey, they just sorter perfer him, that's all. Well, suh, by the time I get through tellin' 'em all about old Bill Strickland, maybe the sun won't rise and set in Steve Yancey every day in the week and Sunday, too, suh!"

The Colonel knew his rural Missouri like a book, and was temperamentally so attuned to its people that they were like kinsmen to him. He possessed, also, the gift of colorful oratory, larded with rich humor, so dear to the average country Missourian as part of a political spellbinder's equipment. Besides, he was already a famous figure among them, having stumped the state on more than one earlier occasion—and now, for old Bill Strickland's sake, he was fairly outdoing himself. Finally, too, he stood on terms of the warmest friendship with many of the Yancey leaders and enjoyed nothing more keenly than to fight them frankly on a most cordial basis.

"It's all in the Democratic family," said the Colonel, "and there don't need to be no hard feelin's. You-all can stick to Steve Yancey if you insist on it, and I won't never whimper. But I'll just be jim-

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swizzled if I won't bust a gallus tryin' to show you what's the truth—that old Bill Strickland's the stronger candidate of the two and ought to get the nomination for the sake of party success, my fellow Democrats!"

So potently was the Colonel advancing the fortunes of the Honorable William J. Strickland by his characteristic campaign work that Major Bulsom Piper, the Yancey lieutenant in Vernon County, laughingly protested. This was at a county seat gathering where the Colonel had just made a most formidable impression.

"My friends," said Major Piper, "I'm not saying anything against Colonel Todhunter personally, but I want to warn you that he's playing a mighty underhanded game. He's telling too many good stories, my hearers, and it's when he sets you to laughing over them stories that he's playin' tricks with you. It's a peculiar fact, but I notice that, while Colonel Todhunter's stories seem mighty harmless on the surface, every one of 'em makes some kind of a point for William J. Strickland in an innocent sort of way. Now, my fellow-Democrats, I like a good story as well as any man in the

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world, but I put it to you that good stories ain't arguments, and I don't intend to see you made unsettled in your minds without clear logical reasons being advanced. You just keep a grip on yourselves, my friends—we've promised the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey that he'll get the banner vote in Vernon County's long and honorable Democratic history!"

"Oh, shucks now, Major, that's crowdin' me too hard, suh!" laughed Colonel Todhunter in the course of his reply. "I leave it to all you Vernon County folks if the major's a-givin' me fair play. Me and him ain't had a chance to pow-wow together for four or five years, and it's been longer'n that since I had a chance to visit you-all here in old Vernon. Besides, you oughtn't to give a man such good vittles to eat if you want to get rid of him—it ain't consistent!"

Even Major Bulsom Piper, though shaking his head to express disapproval of such specious pleading, joined in the laugh which greeted this remark.

"My friends and fellow-citizens," resumed Colonel Todhunter, "I feel compelled to tell you that my friend Major Piper's objections remind me mightily forcibly of what old Judge Lindsay of Kentucky

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used to say about his nigger, Jim, the biggest chicken-thief in the whole country, suh. Jim's weakness was always gettin' the judge in trouble with his neighbors.

"'Damn that nigger!' old Judge Lindsay used to say, rarin' up and down his front gallery over some new scrape of Jim's. 'He not only steals my own chickens, suh, but I'm held responsible for every blamed chicken stole in this section of the state, by gad, suh! I'll have to break that nigger's neck yet, suh!'

"But the next minute the old judge'd be shakin' his fat sides laughin'. 'No, suh!' he'd conclude at the last, 'I won't do it! That infernal nigger Jim can make me laugh when no other human bein' can—he's cheap at the price, suh!'

"And I tell you candidly, my hearers," continued the Colonel, "my old friend, Major Bulsom Piper, knows as well as we do that he indorses old Judge Lindsay's reasonin'. He better keep me here at the price. He ain't laughed so much in ten years—look at him now, the snickerin' old hypocrite!"

Later that day, when Major Bulsom Piper hauled Colonel Todhunter over the coals, privately, for

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turning the joke on him in such a manner, Colonel Todhunter only chuckled, lingering lovingly over his mint julep.

"I'll tell you one thing, Major," he said. "You've certainly got some almighty fine mint patches here in Vernon, suh!"

But it was at the big barbecue in Dunklin County, where he met the redoubtable Bedford Giles on the stump, that Colonel Todhunter made himself famous throughout the length and breadth of Missouri.

Bedford Giles was probably the finest living master of the old school of perfervid political oratory that once so powerfully swayed the minds of men in the South and Middle West. It may be true that he lacked the sense of humor, but, offsetting this delinquency, he possessed a sort of leonine earnestness that had never failed to score tremendously in the campaigns of which he was a conspicuous figure. The announcement of a speech by Bedford Giles was in itself sufficient to concentrate Missourians at one given point from a radius of twenty miles around. And they were never disappointed, because this renowned spellbinder, in his temperament a ranting tragedian of the old Edwin Forrest type, in-

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variably tore their emotional beings to tatters and left them convinced for all time that they had assuredly been listening to the most irresistible orator of their day.

Against this man was Colonel Todhunter pitted on the day of the barbecue, and the certainty of witnessing a great encounter attracted to the scene of their meeting the biggest crowd ever assembled at a political gathering in that county. Enthusiasm was at fever heat. The fact that it was largely Yancey enthusiasm placed the Colonel at a decided disadvantage, but, instead of depressing his dauntless soul, this seemed rather to key him up to his best fighting mood.

During the forenoon, as was not uncommon, there had been a generous flow of good liquor. The orators of the day were naturally expected to give a satisfying account of themselves in disposing of this Democratic output. Both were seasoned veterans at the task.

It was a peculiarity of Bedford Giles, however, that when he reached a certain stage of exhilaration his mental horizon so widened and his imagination took such wings to itself that his spellbinding elo-

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quence soared more in the realm of fancy than of fact. His figures of speech became overwhelming in bold poesy of conception and application, and, for the time being, the sonorous rounding out of his excited thought into splendid sentences was of far more importance in his estimation than the structure of truth upon which they were supposed to be based. His Missouri hearers enjoyed this phase of his oratory keenly—by the time he was primed to such gorgeous flights, they, too, were similarly primed to accompany him, so that the conclusion of one of Bedford Giles' speeches never failed to witness a scene of magnificent emotional proportions.

Upon this occasion, mellow as a peach, Bedford Giles fairly outdid himself in his barbecue tribute to the virtues of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey. Now, in reality, Yancey was not a candidate of the "magnetic" class. He had many friends, he was known as a steadfast party man, and it was conceded that he possessed a particularly shrewd knack of always "lining up" with the stronger faction in party divisions. It requires more than these things, however, to make of a candidate one of those formidable political figures for whom the party rank

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and file delight to cheer for sheer "love and affection's sake," as the old phrase has it.

But Bedford Giles, the cockles of his heart generously warmed by liberal potations, idealized the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, and the peroration of his speech was one of the finest and most typical examples of Gilesian eloquence.

"I am not asking you, my fellow-citizens," he declared sonorously, "to nominate Stephen K. Yancey to the proud office of chief executive of the imperial commonwealth of Missouri at the sacrifice of others equally deserving. No, my friends, if this were the case, I should not feel the supreme confidence that I do now feel in your entire willingness thus to honor him, nor in the wisdom of your decision in his favor.

"But, fellow-Democrats, I speak no more than the simple truth when I solemnly declare, here and now, that the gentlemen competing with Stephen K. Yancey for your suffrages are no more to be compared with that peerless leader than the tallow candle of our forefathers is to be compared with the Almighty's own handiwork of universal illumination, the glorious orb of day that now shines so benign-



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antly down upon this representative assemblage of the sovereign American people.

"I have no hesitancy, my friends, in placing the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey before you to-day as the unrivaled product of a civilization, of a nation and of a people that have in their splendid conjunction produced the most godlike development of the race of man known in the world's history, my hearers. Stephen K. Yancey, my fellow-Missourians, is more than a mere Democrat, high though his title may justly place him in the scale of human progress. He is the spotless archangel of American Democracy. His garments are as pure as the driven snow, and his flaming sword of battle is the weapon of righteousness. His mind is the abiding place of political chastity and his soul cherishes the untainted thoughts of the sweet-minded child, or of those celestial cherubim who are the heavenly parallels of earthly infancy. And I say to you now, my fellow-citizens, that when the mighty Gabriel, with his awakening trumpet, sounds that awful blast that shall summon us all to the judgment bar for a final accounting, supreme among the elect who shall arise on that great day and make answer to their records

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on the open scrolls of the recording angel, the man without one mark to his discredit made by that angelic pen, the man not one jot or tittle afraid of the unfolding of those august registers, the man against whom may be pointed neither the accusing fingers of men nor seraphim in condemnation for the deeds of his doing, will be the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, of Jackson County, in whose behalf I now ask your votes at the approaching primaries. I thank you for your kind attention!"

It was a titanic effort. Bedford Giles had puffed and perspired freely in its deliverance. His arms had cut wide swaths out of Missouri's atmosphere. His hands had bludgeoned emphasis into his words with mighty blows. More than once he had crouched as if to spring upon the presumptuous rivals of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, only to rise again to his full height and hurl forth, with all the effectiveness gained by such bodily exercises, the crushing conclusion of some tremendous sentence. The speaker's Missouri audience could not but respond to such an appeal. Thunderous cheers greeted Bedford Giles as he bowed and seated himself. He received them modestly, swabbing his heated countenance

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with a big handkerchief already dripping with the honest sweat of oratorical toil.

Colonel Todhunter rose to reply. Dismay was in his face.

"My friends of Dunklin County," he began hesitatingly, "I hardly know what to say in reply to Mr. Bedford Giles' magnificent tribute to the virtues of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, his candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor of Mizoorah."

Here the speaker paused, almost gropingly.

Then he resumed. "Fellow-citizens, you all know old Bill Strickland, of Nineveh, as well as I do."

One derisive hoot sounded from the outskirts of the crowd. The speaker seemed hurt, but not surprised.

"And, knowin' him," he continued, "you know as well as I do that he ain't fitten to run for office against no spotless archangel."

A profound silence fell upon the assemblage. Sadness rested on Colonel Todhunter's visage.

"My hearers," he said, "I reckon I got to face the music and take my medicine like a man. Old Bill Strickland, of Nineveh, somehow don't seem to

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stack up the right way against the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, of Jackson County."

From somewhere in the heart of the crowd there came just one snort of appreciative laughter. It was quickly strangled.

"I hate to confess it," continued Colonel Todhunter, "but old Bill Strickland ain't no celestial cherub, neither, like Bedford Giles describes the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey."

An apprehensive uneasiness crept into the faces of the local Yancey managers on the speakers' platform.

"Fellow-citizens," spoke Colonel Todhunter, "old Bill Strickland ain't got no business settin' himself up in opposition to a man who meets all the moral requirements of the heavenly seraphim, like Bedford Giles says the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey meets 'em."

In the very front rows of the crowd facing the speaker broad smiles of humorous comprehension began to be visible.

"And old Bill Strickland ain't got no business," conceded Colonel Todhunter, "askin' you to give him your votes 'stead of givin' 'em to a man that'll

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shine at the judgment bar on the last day, at the blowin' of Gabriel's horn, like Bedford Giles says the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey's a-goin' to shine."

"E-yow-wow-wow!" came a rapturous American whoop of tickled approval from somewhere in the crowd.

"A man," said Colonel Todhunter, "who'll face the recordin' angel hisself, without the flicker of an eyelash, secure in his consciousness of his own immaculate perfection."

A great under-wave of laughter, held in leash, swung to and fro through the confronting assemblage.

And then Colonel Todhunter rose to his full height of six feet, thrusting his right hand into the bosom of his ample-skirted coat.

"My friends," he announced, "all I can say in excuse for old Bill Strickland is that he thought he was runnin' against just a plain human bein' for the Democratic nomination for governor of Mizזורah."

Suddenly he bowed his head, threw out his hands deprecatingly, and then lifted his eyes mournfully as he stood once more erect.

"Fellow-Democrats," he cried, "I hereby an-

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nounce the withdrawal of the Honorable William J. Strickland from this race, and I wish to state that the withdrawal is made in favor of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey on the strength of the description of Mr. Yancey just given by Bedford Giles."

There was a moment of astonished silence.

Colonel Todhunter remained standing. Again he lifted his hand. "Provided," he said, "that Bedford Giles can furnish proof of the truth of the claims he has just made for the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey, coverin' the spotless archangel business, the sword of righteousness, the celestial cherub, the heavenly seraphim, the unfolded scrolls of the recordin' angel, and so forth and so forth, straight down to the garments pure as the driven snow and the mind of political chastity, and includin' the whole blamed outfit, my hearers!"

A mighty roar of pent-up laughter burst forth.

It was like an explosion. Men rocked to and fro on their feet in uncontrollable mirth. They smote one another on the back, shouting in Gargantuan chorus. In the midst of the demonstration Bedford Giles, stricken by the thunderbolt of ridicule, sprang from his seat and actually fled the scene.

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Colonel Todhunter gazed after his disappearing figure in such apparent astonishment that the cyclone of laughter increased in its overwhelming volume. But the Colonel stood unmoved, his face absolutely impassive.

And when the sun set on that memorable day a new record had been made in the colorful history of Missouri political campaigning. Colonel Todhunter, in a five-minutes' speech, had battered down the walls of the Yancey stronghold, until then thought to be the most impregnable in all Missouri.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SHAME OF LOTTIE-MAY DOGGETT—AND ONE OTHER

**A**LMOST the first sight that met Colonel Todhunter's eyes when Mrs. Todhunter and himself arrived upon the scene of the grand reception and ball given by the Sons of Confederate Veterans at the Nineveh Hotel was the astonishing spectacle of Sim Birdsong, his bride, the blushing Angelica, and Mrs. Exall, his erstwhile terrifying mother-in-law, in one group and apparently upon terms of the completest amity.

The hotel dining-room, festooned in bunting for the occasion, was doing duty as a ball-room, the Nineveh brass band was stationed upon a temporary platform at one end, the members of the Nineveh Light Infantry, all Sons of Veterans, were in full uniform, and Sim Birdsong, their captain, was particularly resplendent. A gorgeously glittering martial figure, he posed before his young wife and her mother as proudly as a peacock, this being his golden



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opportunity to convince Mrs. Exall that he was a son-in-law well worth while.

Colonel Todhunter's eyes twinkled at the picture. "Look at that-there Sim Birdsong!" he said to Mrs. Todhunter, chuckling. "Who'd ever think that he's so skeered of that old Mrs. Exall as to sink through the floor this very minute if she let out just one screech at him! I'll be everlastin'ly jiggered if he ain't actually patronizin' the old lady!"

"I'm mighty glad Angelica's mother has forgiven her, and that they're reconciled and on good terms," commented Mrs. Todhunter. "I didn't like to think of that poor child being on bad terms with her mother during her bride-days—it would be just too pitiful for anything. But I can't see for the life of me what could have brought Angelica's ma around so quick. She certainly was mightily put out by the wedding!"

"She shorely was!" agreed Colonel Todhunter feelingly. "But pshaw, Mary—you women can't no more keep away from a young married couple than flies can keep away from sugar—and it's a thousand times worse when your own daughter happens to be the bride. Old Mrs. Exall just had to give in. She'd

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miss too much fun and excitement if she didn't, and she knew it. But I'll bet she's got Sim Birdsong bluffed to just where she wants him, right now, as a condition of her forgivin' 'em!"

Mrs. Todhunter laughed. "That's all right," she retorted. "It's good for a young husband to know his proper place, and it takes some time for the wife herself to be in the necessary frame of mind to teach him. I'm real glad Mrs. Exall's had sense enough to give in to 'em."

"Well," said the Colonel, "now that they're all one happy family, I reckon the old lady don't cherish hard feelin's against us no longer. Let's go over and speak to 'em, Mary."

But to the Colonel's great astonishment, Mrs. Todhunter shook her head vigorously at this. Then she laughed in his perplexed face.

"Do you know what's happened, in all likelihood, Colonel Todhunter?" she asked. "Well, I'll tell you. Old Mrs. Exall has probably reached the conclusion that Angelica and Sim ain't half as much to blame for running away and getting married as you are, with me helping you at the last minute. It won't surprise me in the least if she's holding us responsible

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for the whole thing. And she's very likely to let us know it if we give her a chance!"

"Mary!" cried Colonel Todhunter aghast, a masculine inability to fathom the mysteries of the feminine soul revealing itself on his face. "Do you mean to say that she's goin' to keep on blamin' me for what Sim Birdsong begged me to do, almost on his knees?"

"That's just what I do mean!" laughed Mrs. Todhunter. "And I can see it in Angelica's ma's face right now!"

"Well, suh," said the Colonel, "that certainly does beat the Dutch! Why—why, hang my picture, I'll wring that-there Sim Birdsong's neck for him the first chance I get!"

"It ain't Sim's fault," explained Mrs. Todhunter placidly. "A mother's got to keep on blaming somebody in such cases—and you certainly were mighty lively in advising Sim what to do in his trouble, Colonel Todhunter!"

"I can't believe it," protested the Colonel, dismayed. "I can't believe it, Mary! That there old lady ain't got no more right to nurse a grudge against me than if I never knew there was two such

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people in the world as Sim Birdsong and her daughter, Angelica. If she forgives Sim, I'll be shot full o' holes if that shorely oughtn't to let me out!"

But Mrs. Todhunter was right, as the Colonel discovered before the evening was over.

"Sim," he said, at his first encounter with the happy young husband, "I'm mighty glad to see you and Miss Angelica in company with her ma. That's just the way things ought to be, and I've been hopin' for it ever since the night you-all got married."

"It all come around fine, Colonel!" beamed Sim Birdsong. "And it happened in the most natural way in the world, suh. My wife"—and here the bridegroom's face shone with an exceeding pride—"my wife, Colonel, just happened to go in town this very mornin' to get some little somethin' she needed for the ball this evenin'—and lo and behold! Her ma was the first person she run into! The next minute they was a-huggin' and kissin' each other till the cows come home—and Angelica's ma took dinner with us right afterwards and the whole thing was patched up before you could blink an eye, suh!"

"That's fine—that's fine, Sim!" replied the Colo-

## THE SHAME OF LOTTIE-MAY

nel. "It makes me feel so good that I b'lieve I'll go right over now and tell Mrs. Exall just how glad I am!"

"Colonel," spoke Sim, suddenly embarrassed and stealing a frightened look from Colonel Todhunter to the distant visage of his mother-in-law, "I don't believe, if I was you, that I'd do that right now, suh."

"If you was me?" queried the Colonel indignantly. "What on earth do you mean by that, Sim Birdsong? Ain't I the very one, next to you and Miss Angelica herself, suh, that ought to feel glad over this thing?"

Sim Birdsong cleared his throat nervously. "Colonel Todhunter," he spoke finally, "that's precisely where the trouble comes in. Angelica's ma has forgiven us, suh—but she says she done it only because she now realizes that you are the one that's more to blame than any one else, and she says she can't forgive you the longest day she lives, suh. I know that ain't fair, Colonel, but it seems to be the way she feels about it, and Angelica and I can't persuade her no different!"

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Colonel Todhunter gazed at Sim Birdsong in deep silence for a moment. Then, moving away, he delivered his pained ultimatum.

"That settles it, Sim Birdsong!" he said. "The next time you or any other moonstruck young fool here in Nineveh wants to run off with a girl and marry her, I warn you not to come to me unless you're lookin' for trouble, suh. I'm done with bein' a scapegoat for you young sinners at my time o' life, Sim Birdsong, and that's all there is to it. You go back to your mother-in-law and help her to run me down all she knows how, suh!"

Saying which, and refusing to await the conclusion of honest Sim Birdsong's disclaimer of the remotest intention of joining in Mrs. Exall's condemnation of him, Colonel Todhunter strode loftily away. But he shook with laughter when he related the incident to Mrs. Todhunter relishfully.

"Well," he philosophized, "better me'n them, anyway, because Angelica needs her ma—and I can certainly get along fine without her. But it's a lesson to me, Mary—I wash my hands of all that sort of fool business from this time henceforward, world without end, amen!"

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Half an hour later Tom Strickland came to the colonel with a troubled face.

"Colonel," he said, "that little Lottie-May Doggett is booked for a mighty unpleasant experience in a few minutes, if somebody don't give her a friendly warning."

"What's the matter with Lottie-May now, Tom?"

"Well, sir, it's pretty serious. There's an ugly story about her that's got to the ears of the ladies to-night, something scandalous, in which the name of the man doesn't seem to be known, and I've just had a tip that she's going to be asked to leave the ball-room. It'll shame her beyond redemption, sir."

"Do you know the story?"

"Only as it's being whispered around, Colonel, about some man being seen to leave her house at hours of the night or early morning, that can't mean but one thing, folks are claiming. I'm afraid Lottie-May's in a bad fix, the way things look."

"You ain't mixed up in this trouble, are you, Tom?"

Tom Strickland flushed. "If I was, Colonel," he replied, "I reckon I'd be man enough to try and get Lottie-May out of it myself without bothering any-

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body else. No, sir, I ain't mixed up in it. But, good Lord, Colonel, I went to school with Lottie-May when she wasn't knee-high to a duck, and I swear I'd hate to see her publicly disgraced. And you know—and I know—it would hurt old Rafe Doggett so. It would break his heart, sir!"

Colonel Todhunter made no reply.

"I thought, maybe, if you could get the chance, Colonel," resumed Tom anxiously, "that you might tell her and so make it possible for her to slip away before the ladies can do what they're threatening to do, sir. She'll take it from you, knowing that her grandfather was in your old regiment and that you're telling her for her own good, where she might flare up and kick over the traces if anybody else hinted at such a thing. Don't you think you could work it, Colonel?"

"If I do, Tom," replied Colonel Todhunter, "it'll be for old Rafe Doggett's sake. He's too good a man to be brought face to face with shame in his old age. Yes, I'll try to do it, Tom—but I'd like to wring the neck of the young rascal that's got old Rafe's granddaughter in such a mess, suh!"

In accordance with this promise, Colonel Tod-



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hunter found opportunity to speak with Lottie-May Doggett. Very frankly he told her of the danger in which she stood. The girl, vitally beautiful, apparently as conscienceless as some wild thing of the woods, flashed her hot resentment of his words.

"I ain't thankin' you for what you've just said, Colonel Todhunter!" she cried. "It strikes me you're in mighty small business to come to me with this story!"

"I reckon I am, Lottie-May," agreed Colonel Todhunter in all honesty. "But I wanted to save you and your old grandfather from shame, and that's why I done it."

The girl's bosom was heaving with passionate anger. "I'd just like to know who it was that got you to come and speak to me about it!" she exclaimed. "Who was it, Colonel Todhunter? Was it one of them ladies what thinks I ain't good enough now to associate with their daughters? I've got the right to ask you this, and I do ask it. Who sent you here, Colonel Todhunter?"

"it wasn't none of the ladies, Lottie-May," Colonel Todhunter made answer without the slightest hesitation. "It was Tom Strickland. He heard

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what was goin' on, and he felt sorry for you, the little girl he went to school with when he was a boy. And it wa'n't meddlin' on his part, either. It was plumb good-heartedness."

The girl shivered as if she had been struck. "Tom Strickland!" she repeated, almost as if speaking to herself. "Tom Strickland—of all men! He's makin' love to Miss Mary Todhunter, your own daughter. And he knows that I'd lay down and die for him any day he give the word. And it's Mrs. Todhunter that's been told of all this talk about me, and that's goin' to shame me here before all Nineveh! Oh, but it's a fine game you-all are playin' to get me where I can't do no harm to Tom Strickland or to your daughter Mary, his sweetheart!"

She stood rigid, her hands clenched.

Then, swiftly, she spoke again. "They shan't ruin me this way!" she cried. "Neither Tom Strickland nor Miss Mary Todhunter nor Mrs. Todhunter, nor you, neither! I'll bring you all to taw. I'll make Tom Strickland come in for his share of my trouble! Since him and his sweetheart and his sweetheart's mother have set the ball a-rollin', he's got to face the music along with me!"

## THE SHAME OF LOTTIE-MAY

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Colonel Todhunter.

All color had gone out of the girl's face as she spoke.

"I'll shew you what I mean!" she half-whispered, her fingers fluttering at her throat. "I'll show you! I ain't a good girl no more, Colonel Todhunter. I ain't fitten to breathe the same air with your daughter Mary. Tom Strickland and the rest of 'em's mighty anxious to get me out of the way. I'm a-goin', too. But not till I've said my little say to Mrs. Todhunter, sir. Not till then—not even if judgment day and hell itself come to me the next minute!"

"Stop that, Lottie-May!" cried Colonel Todhunter sternly. "You can't talk that way without reason—and you ain't got no reason to say what you've just said about Tom Strickland!"

For a reply the girl laughed in his face—and the next instant she had darted past him.

Her head high, her eyes flashing, her little hands clenched at her side, her frame all a-quiver with excitement, Lottie-May sped ominously to where Mrs. Todhunter stood with a group of other Nineveh

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ladies, Mary Todhunter standing close behind her mother.

"Mrs. Todhunter," said the outcast girl, her eyes defiantly holding those of the person whom she addressed, "I understand that you want me to leave this party because you think I ain't fitten to be here—that I'm a bad woman. Ain't that so, ma'am?"

Mrs. Todhunter was at first shocked into shrinking from the girl. Then she looked at her pityingly.

"Lottie-May," she replied, with a frank dignity, "'m sorry you've made such a scene. It is true that we think you should not be here. But I was going to tell you this privately, to spare you as much as possible—"

"No, you wa'n't!" interrupted the girl passionately. "You was a-goin' to put all my name on me you could! But I'll say my say before you do it, Mrs. Todhunter. And I ain't denyin' anything, either, nor I ain't a-beggin' any of you for mercy. You're goin' to make me pay for my sin, ain't you?—me, the sinful daughter of a sinful mother? But why don't you make the man pay at the same time, Mrs. Todhunter? That's what I'm asking you. Why don't you make the man pay, too?"

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A dead silence followed these words.

"Maybe you don't know who the man is?" inquired the girl. "Maybe you can't name him? Maybe that's the reason you ain't doin' nor sayin' nothin' against him?"

There was no reply.

"Then I'll tell you who he is!" cried the girl—and at this her voice broke and her fingers again went fluttering to her throat. "I'll tell you his name! It's Tom Strickland, the man that wants to marry your daughter, Miss Mary Todhunter, ma'am—it's Tom Strickland, that's who it is!"

A piteous little cry came from Mary Todhunter. Lottie-May Doggett heard it and sighed.

"Now you've got it good and plenty—both of you—more'n you bargained for!" she cried tauntingly. Already she had moved toward the nearest door. Her reckless eyes were full of scornful defiance.

"Make the man pay, too!" she flung back at the group of which now a mother and her downward-swaying daughter were the central figures. "Make Tom Strickland pay—along with me!"

The next moment she was gone.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE TRAGEDY ON THE BLACK BOTTOMS ROAD

COLONEL TODHUNTER saw Tom Strickland spring to Mary's side, catch her in his arms, and, thus holding her, face the group of women who had fallen back from him.

The next moment Mrs. Todhunter had passed her own arms around the girl, letting her sink into a chair that had been brought. The mother's face was stern in condemnation.

"For sname!" she said to Tom. "You are not fit to touch her. For shame, sir!"

Tom Strickland's face grew white. His eyes, that had met those of Mary in mute entreaty, held Mrs. Todhunter's indignantly. For an instant he seemed about to speak. But the elder lady bent above her daughter, obviously ignoring him. The widening group of women looked at him with accusing eyes. Lottie-May Doggett's dreadful charge seemed still ringing in the air.

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Apparently bewildered, Tom Strickland turned away, his helpless glance resting for a breath of time on Mary's face. The shock and shame of what the girl had just heard were shown in the look that met his. Then she averted her gaze and Tom Strickland left her side, the women whispering behind him. He came direct to Colonel Todhunter.

"I must see you, Colonel," he muttered brokenly. "You heard everything, didn't you?"

The Colonel nodded, studying the speaker closely, as they moved away.

"What is it, Tom?" he asked. "What can I do for you?"

Tom Strickland laughed bitterly. "Nothing," he replied. "But I must tell you the only thing I can do for myself. I've got to see Stamford Tucker and choke the truth out of him!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he's got to tell the truth and face this scandal in my place. He's the one that's responsible, not I. God only knows what possessed Lottie-May Doggett to lay her disgrace at my door!"

Colonel Todhunter drew a quick sigh of relief. "If that's the truth, Tom, you're all right, and I must

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say I'm glad to hear it, because the case looks mighty ugly for you otherwise. I'll have to speak plainly, Tom, as Mary's father. If you've got the proofs that'll call Stam Tucker to time, produce 'em right now."

The younger man looked the speaker in the face, a white-hot anger in his eyes. Then, suddenly, doubt and something of dismay took the place of rage. At last he laughed, mockingly, as if at himself.

"I haven't got a shred of proof," he said, "unless my own conviction, from what Lottie-May herself has told me, can give a hold on Stam Tucker that'll make him toe the mark. I've got the girl's word that Stam Tucker made love to her, and that she met him in secret."

"And Lottie-May has just publicly accused you," commented Colonel Todhunter, a curious expression in his eyes as they rested upon Tom Strickland's pale face. "That's mighty poor evidence, Tom. The girl has made it worthless in advance. Nobody on earth would believe you."

Tom Strickland lifted one clenched hand and smote it savagely into the open palm of the other.



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"Nobody but Stam Tucker!" he cried. "He'll know it's the truth, and he'll know that Lottie-May told me because she was trying to make me his rival. And he's got to confess that it's the truth—by God, I'll kill him if he don't!"

"Stop right there, Tom!" exclaimed Colonel Todhunter sternly. "You're makin' the biggest fool of yourself that's possible on all this earth to a man in your fix, suh!"

"Fool or no fool," cried Tom Strickland, "I'm not going to let this thing lay at my door when I know the guilty man—and know, besides, that he wouldn't ask nothing better'n for Miss Mary to throw me over on account of this, so that he could marry her. That's the situation, Colonel Todhunter, and no man fit to be called a man would let Stam Tucker go free!"

"If you go lookin' for Stam Tucker now, Tom," said Colonel Todhunter quietly, "there'll be a shootin' scrape in less'n two minutes after you two come together, and somebody's mighty apt to get killed. If it's you, the difficulty ain't helped you any, that I can see. If it's Stam Tucker, then you're worse off'n ever, because he'll be dead and you'll be held

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for killin' him, and Lottie-May Doggett's accusation will stand against you. Have some sense, my boy, before it's too late."

Tom Strickland laughed at the words. "I'll have sense enough," he retorted. "I'll see that Stam Tucker don't profit by this thing. And there's only one way to see to it—and that's by having it out with Stam Tucker himself and making him tell the truth. You can't interfere in this matter, sir, even though you are Miss Mary's father. No third party can take a hand in it, sir."

Colonel Todhunter contemplated the speaker earnestly for a moment. Then he nodded.

"You're right, Tom," he conceded. "I reckon you'n Stam Tucker'll have to sift this out between you, and th' ain't nobody else can lift a finger. But I've just got one favor to ask of you before you go any further, my boy."

"What's that, sir?" asked Tom. "I don't mean to be disrespectful, Colonel, and I'm willing to meet you as far as I can, but you see now just how things are between Stam Tucker and me."

"I'm not saying another word," answered Colonel Todhunter. "The only thing I want you to do, Tom,

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is not to go lookin' for Stam Tucker to-night. In the first place, he's right here, and you ain't got no business runnin' the chance of provokin' a serious personal difficulty where there's women, and in the second place, you'd better get a night's sleep for your own good, Tom. I'm talkin' plain to you, my boy, because a good deal depends on it. The chances are a million to one that there'll be some shootin' before you'n Stam Tucker gets through with your argument—and a coc' head and a steady hand are mighty useful things to have at such a time."

"I'm cool enough, sir," replied Tom Strickland.

But the Colonel shook his head. "Tom," he said, "I want you to promise me to go quietly home right now and go to bed. After to-night, the game's in your own hands and you can play it any way you see fit. This is all I'm goin' to ask of you. Go home and get a good night's rest, Tom." There was just the least shake in the speaker's voice.

Tom Strickland hesitated.

"Go home, Tom," said Colonel Todhunter. "I wouldn't be a true friend of your father if I let you take any foolish chances in an affair of this kind. And I'm thinkin' of Mary, too, when I say this. You

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go home, now." The Colonel's grim lips were trembling a little.

Tom Strickland nodded. "All right, Colonel," he spoke finally. "I'll go home. I won't try to do anything further until to-morrow, sir."

"That's all I ask, Tom," replied the Colonel.

But he saw to it that the younger man got away from the perilous scene without being subjected to temptation that might compel him to break his word. And then, knowing that Tom Strickland was safely on the road home, Colonel Todhunter looked up Sim Birdsong without losing a moment's time.

"Sim," he said, "I want you to see Stam Tucker to-night without fail and tell him not to come into town to-morrow. Just say this to him—that Tom Strickland's lookin' for him on account o' this here Lottie-May Doggett business, and there's a-goin' to be trouble if they meet—and then you come back here and tell me what he says. I'm tryin' to prevent a shootin' scrape, Sim, and this is the only way I can see to do it."

"All right, Colonel," replied Sim. "I'll look up Stam Tucker right away and deliver your message, then I'll report to you again, suh."

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"I'll just be eternally condemned," communed Colonel Todhunter to himself when Sim had departed on his mission, "if any other man meddled in a serious private difficulty of mine like I'm meddlin' in this of Tom Strickland's, I'd tell him in pretty plain language what I thought of his interference, even if I was engaged to his daughter. But I ain't got no choice in the matter. I want to save Tom and keep Mary's heart from bein' broken, and I want to save old Bill Strickland from such a tragedy as this would be, and I've got to take the bull by the horns to do it. I'll keep those two young fools apart if I've got to break my neck a-doin' it!"

Sim Birdsong was not gone long. "Well, Colonel," he said upon returning, "I've just seen Stam Tucker and told him what you said, and he told me to say to you that he wouldn't come in town at all to-morrow. Says he don't want to have any trouble with Tom Strickland now, if he can help it, because it would be serious trouble, and he ain't in the humor for it just at present."

"Sim," asked the Colonel, "what did Stam do or say when you told him that it was on account of Lottie-May that Tom was lookin' for him?"

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"Colonel Todhunter," replied Sim, "he got white clean to his lips. I never saw a man's face go white as quick as his'n. But he didn't make no comment on that part of the message, suh. He just stood still for a minute when I got through, and then he told me what I've just said to you."

A look of deep relief sprang into Colonel Todhunter's face. "That's all right, then," he spoke. "And it tells me what I wanted to know. Now, Sim, I'm goin' to ask you if you can't contrive some plan that'll take Stam Tucker away from Nineveh and keep him away, for a few days, at least. If we can do that, Sim, we may be able to prevent the trouble altogether."

Sim Birdsong looked at the speaker with something of helpless bewilderment in his honest eyes. Then, suddenly, his face brightened.

"I-crackey, I've got it!" he exclaimed. "Some of the boys was arrangin' this very night for a fish-in' frolic down on Black Bottoms Lake, and they planned to start before sunrise day after to-morrow. I'll make 'em count Stam Tucker in on the deal, and I'll go out to the Tuckers' and give him their invitation myself, to-morrow, and see that he consents to

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go. Then, Colonel, all we've got to do is just keep him and Tom apart for one day and night—and we've turned the trick!"

"Bully for you, Sim!" approved the Colonel. "It begins to look like we can see this thing through to a sensible finish—and that's a blamed sight more than it looked like to me a few minutes ago, I can tell you!"

Shortly after noon the next day, Colonel Todhunter stopped in at the Stricklands' on his way home, as was not unusual for him to do. In reply to an apparently careless question, Margaret Strickland, Tom's elder sister, told him that Tom had gone into town soon after breakfast.

Colonel Todhunter returned into Nineveh at once, after explaining to Margaret Strickland that he had forgotten to execute certain housekeeping missions for Mrs. Todhunter before driving out. But he found no trace of Tom Strickland until he came to a certain bar-room frequented mainly by the Yancey and Tucker factions in politics.

"Colonel," said the bartender, in answer to a question, "Tom Strickland was in here, sir, about two hours ago, lookin' for Stam Tucker. Not findin'

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him, and waitin' here quite a while in hopes of his turnin' up, he wrote a note yonder at that table and sent it out by one of the town boys to Stam's house. Then he went away, sir."

"Have you any idea where he went?"

The bartender hesitated for a moment. Then—"Well, Colonel Todhunter," he said at last, "I believe, from the way he was talkin', that he went to see that girl, Lottie-May Doggett, that the scandal's about now, sir. He was drinkin' pretty heavy, Colonel, and he talked pretty threatenin' about Stam Tucker, and it seemed to me that the two things was connected in some way—his trouble with Stam and his trouble with the girl. I'm inclined to think there's a difficulty brewin', Colonel!"

Leaving the bar-room, Colonel Todhunter drove directly out to old Rafe Doggett's place. Neither the girl nor her grandfather was at home. Returning into Nineveh he encountered Sim Birdsong, who wore an anxious face.

"I've just seen Stam Tucker, suh," cried Sim. "We aren't a bit too soon in layin' our plans to prevent trouble, Colonel Todhunter. He's just got a note from Tom Strickland tellin' him to come into



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town to-night if he don't want to have serious trouble at his own home instead, so it's plain that Tom Strickland's on the warpath, suh."

"What's Stam Tucker goin' to do?"

"He ain't goin' into town, Colonel. He told me that he had an engagement to call on a young lady, so he wouldn't be at home anyway, if Tom came there lookin' for him, and, besides, he says he'll do most anything to prevent trouble just at this time. He's as anxious to get away on that fishin' frolic as we are to have him get away, Colonel Todhunter."

"I'm powerful glad to hear it," commented the Colonel. "Well, with Stam Tucker not goin' into town, and not stayin' at home, and Tom Strickland not knowin' where he's to be found, I reckon things are pretty tolerable here for to-night. But don't you fail to get Stam off on that fishing jaunt before day-break to-morrow, Sim!"

"I won't, suh," promised Sim Birdsong earnestly. "I'll get him if I have to drag him by the scruff o' the neck!"

Arising early the next morning, Colonel Todhunter drew in a deep breath of fresh air, grateful of soul.

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"Thank the Lord!" he said to himself. "Stam Tucker's gone with Sim and the other boys, and we've got a few days' breathin' time, anyway, before there's any further danger!"

But, even as Colonel Todhunter thus spoke, young Stamford Tucker lay dead at home. He had been shot the night before, and Tom Strickland now was held a prisoner in the little Nineveh jail, accused of his murder.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

**A** MESSENGER bearing these dreadful tidings arrived as the Colonel stood on the front gallery enjoying the freshness of the morning. He came from Tom Strickland himself.

Colonel Todhunter received the news in silence, his gray brows bent until his eyes were but two glints of metallic blue-gray beneath; his grim lips set in an inflexible line.

"Tell Tom I'll be with him right away," he said at the story's completion. "And tell him to keep his courage up—I'm going to do everything I can for him."

Nevertheless, the Colonel's own heart was heavy, for Mary's sake, for Tom's dire peril, and knowing well that it would all come near to breaking the heart of Colonel Bill Strickland, his lifelong friend. But it was no time to sit in cold judgment upon Tom's sin. The boy must receive all the help that was in the power of mortal man to give.

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Halting a moment at the Nineveh Hotel to send a telegram to the Honorable William J. Strickland, now himself campaigning in northern Missouri, Colonel Todhunter then hurried to the jail. The moment his eyes fell on Tom Strickland's face he knew that the lad had been drinking heavily. The two clasped hands and stood facing each other in silence. At last the Colonel spoke.

"Tom," he said, "I want to tell you at the start that I'm goin' to accept every word you say as gospel, and I want you to tell me the whole truth. Then, while we're waitin' for your father to get here, I'll know better what to do in beginnin' arrangements for your defense. You must tell me the God's truth, my boy."

Tom Strickland's plucky eyes, unflickering, though still bloodshot from overnight drinking, held those of the speaker in a level glance.

"I'll tell you the truth, Colonel," he answered. "I won't vary from it by a hair if I know it."

"How did the meetin' between you and Stam Tucker come about, Tom?" asked Colonel Todhunter. "Tell me just when and how you killed him."

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"Colonel," replied Tom Strickland, "I have no recollection of killing Stam Tucker last night. I don't even remember meeting him."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I started out to meet Stam, and that it was my intention to kill him if he didn't publicly tell the truth about him and Lottie-May Doggett, but I ain't clear in my mind as to what happened after I left Nick Bledsoe's bar-room. I got to drinking there, thinking while I was waiting for Stam Tucker to keep an appointment that I made by letter, and I got tired waiting for Stam to show up, so I started out to go to his house, seeing as how he wouldn't come to the place I had named. This much I remember, and I've got a confused recollection of wandering about the edge of town, but the first thing I remember with any distinctness after leaving Nick Bledsoe's, is finding myself in the Nineveh Hotel bar-room, drinking again. Whatever happened between is gone from my memory—I was drinking hard, Colonel Todhunter, and that's all there is to it. I started drinking because I had lost—well, I didn't care what happened to me, sir," Tom concluded.

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"You were armed, of course, when you went to meet Stam and have it out with him?"

"Yes, sir, I had my pistol on me."

"Well, then—well, then, Tom—when you were arrested this mornin' after Stam Tucker's body was found on the side of the road half-way between his home and the town, what story did your gun tell, boy? If you had had a shootin' scrape durin' that time, your weapon would have said so—a man in your condition, with this difficulty settled, wouldn't have reloaded his gun. What fix was yours in, Tom?"

"That was the first thing the deputy sheriff looked at when he placed me under arrest," said Tom Strickland, his eyes dumbly perplexed. "Colonel Todhunter, one chamber of my pistol was empty—I reckon I must surely have met Stam on the road and killed him."

"Tom," said Colonel Todhunter, almost pleadingly, "whatever way Stam Tucker was killed, he got one shot at the man that killed him. His own weapon was a-layin' right at his hand when they found him, and one bullet had been fired from it. In God's name, my boy, if you was that other man,

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you must have some sort of recollection of the shoot-in' scrape. It's the truth I'm tryin' to get at, Tom, the truth of how Stam Tucker came to his death. If you killed him, we've got to know it, because the whole line of defense has got to be based on absolute knowledge of the truth of whether or not it was you that shot and killed Stam Tucker last night. Dig down in your mind, Tom—my God, boy, you've got to remember everything you did every minute of the time you say you was out lookin' for Stam Tucker!"

Tom Strickland drew a deep breath. "It must have been me that killed him," he said. "I was on my way to do it—and who else wanted to kill him? But I can't remember anything about it, Colonel Todhunter—I'd be glad if I could!"

Colonel Todhunter sat helpless for a moment. Finally—"Did you go home after the hotel bar was closed?" he asked.

"No, sir. I slept at the hotel last night."

"What time were you arrested?"

"About six o'clock."

"Yesterday afternoon, when you had been to Nick Bledsoe's bar-room for the first time, did you then go

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out to see Lottie-May Doggett, as you told Nick you was a-goin' to do?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see her?"

"Yes, sir. I asked her to tell the truth and acknowledge that I had nothing to do with her disgrace. I told her if she didn't I was going to see Stam Tucker and make him do it, or else kill him."

"What did she say to that?"

"She laughed at me. That girl's a she-devil, Colonel Todhunter. She wouldn't even acknowledge to me that she had lied in telling Mrs. Todhunter what she did. She just laughed."

"You also hinted to Nick Bledsoe that there was some serious trouble brewin' between you and Stam about Lottie-May, didn't you?"

"I believe I did, sir."

"And you told him you were bound for Stam Tucker's when you left his bar-room last night?"

"I seem to remember saying something of the sort, Colonel Todhunter. I reckon I gave him a pretty good inkling of the whole affair."

"The man you sent to tell me of your arrest says that Stam Tucker's mother and sister says that



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Stam left his home about the same time, accordin' to Nick Bledsoe's story, that you left Nick's place to go out there."

"It's likely, sir, that he was coming in to meet me, in answer to my letter."

"Tom, that would have brought you and Stam Tucker together about half-way between his home and the town."

"Yes, sir."

"And Stam's body was found beside the road just about half-way between his home and the town."

"I know it, Colonel. The evidence against me is about as complete as it could be, unless somebody saw me kill Stam. I wish they did, if I killed him. It wouldn't look so much like a cold-blooded murder in the dark then."

Colonel Todhunter went direct from the jail to the home of Lottie-May Doggett. This time he found the girl there.

She met him with a defiant look in her eyes, but it seemed to Colonel Todhunter that there was something of dread as well, and her manner, despite a certain bravado, suggested a haunting fear.

"If it's grandfather you want to see, Colonel Tod-

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hunter," she said, her voice not quite steady, "he ain't at home right now. He got some work helpin' Lute Burroughs with his hosses, and it keeps him over there most o' the daytime."

"It ain't your grandfather, Lottie-May," replied Colonel Todhunter. "It's you I come to see. But I wish he was here, because I reckon I've got to have a right plain talk with you and I'd rather Rafe was present while we're a-havin' it."

The girl shrank back suddenly. "Then maybe you better call again," she quickly suggested, uneasiness and the hope of delay expressed in her face. "It'll keep till some time when he's home, surely, Colonel Todhunter."

"No, Lottie-May, it won't. That's why I've come straight out to see you, after leavin' Tom Strickland a prisoner in the Nineveh jail. Stam Tucker's been shot and killed and Tom's accused of murderin' him, Lottie-May."

The girl gave a little cry, whitening to the lips. She stood facing the Colonel with horror-widened eyes.

"Lottie-May," continued Colonel Todhunter, "the time has come when you must tell the truth about

## THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

Tom Strickland. His life's in danger, not to speak of his bein' disgraced through what you said about him—and your story caused him to be lookin' for trouble with Stam Tucker—and we've got to know the truth as to whether it was him or Stam Tucker that you had the right to accuse before everybody at the party that night."

A sudden light of fiery venom leaped into Lottie-May Doggett's passionate eyes.

"It ain't me that's to blame!" she cried. "Tom Strickland wanted to kill Stam Tucker because he knew that Stam Tucker would marry Miss Mary Todhunter, your daughter, now that she's got to throw him over. It's her that's to blame for the killin', not me!"

Something came into the girl's throat that seemed to choke her. She threw her hands up to her eyes and began sobbing.

"He wa'n't thinkin' about me at all!" she cried brokenly. "And Stam Tucker didn't really care nothin' for me, neither. They was both of 'em thinkin' about Miss Mary Todhunter—I ain't nothin' but poor white trash in their eyes, to be used and th'owed to one side. And Tom Strickland

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knows I loved him with all my heart and all my soul!" Here her voice broke pitifully.

Then—"And he wouldn't ha' known anything about Stam Tucker's makin' love to me if I hadn't told him myself! Yet he don't think nothin' about me—it's only how he can clear his own skirts by loadin' the blame on Stam. And if he killed him, he killed him for your daughter Mary's sake, out o' jealousy, and nothin' else in the wide world! Well, I've done said my say, and you-all got to take it for the truth whether you're willin' or not. Stam Tucker's dead and gone, but that ain't a-goin' to clear the way for Tom Strickland to marry Miss Mary Todhunter. I've told her mother the truth, and you and Mrs. Todhunter can't let her marry Tom Strickland with the blame for my ruination restin' on his good name."

She threw back her head and laughed at him mockingly.

"You've come here to make me help you get Tom Strickland out o' danger, ain't you, Colonel Todhunter? You're just like all the rest of 'em. I'm settled and done for. I'm dirt under you-all's feet. But maybe I can help save Tom Strickland if I tell

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"He's got just one chance for his life" Page 238



## THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

the right sort of a story—that's it, ain't it? Well, I ain't goin' to do it, Colonel Todhunter!"

"Tom Strickland's got just one chance for his life, Lottie-May," said Colonel Todhunter, "and that is, to prove that you accused him of a sin that ought to ha' been laid at Stam Tucker's door instead, and that he quarreled with Stam and killed him for refusin' to acknowledge publicly that this was the truth. Even this ain't much of a chance, but if we don't get it, Tom Strickland's goin' to the gallows just as certain as the sun rises and sets. If you told what ain't so, Lottie-May, his blood will be on your head."

The girl shrank back and shivered as if she had been struck. Then, again, the hard mocking light leaped into her eyes and she laughed aloud.

"And if I change my story to please you-all," she scoffed, "what does it amount to, Colonel Todhunter? Just two things—and I'll tell you what they are. I help to get Tom Strickland out o' danger for killin' Stam Tucker, and I clear his good name so he can go straight and marry your daughter Mary. That's what I do—if I'm willin' to tell the story you-all want me to tell, and so lift my shame off'n

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

Tom Strickland and put it on a dead man instead—put it on Stam Tucker, that was shot and killed by Tom Strickland because both of 'em loved Miss Mary Todhunter!"

"I'm askin' you to tell the truth, Lottie-May!" said Colonel Todhunter. "That's all. I'm askin' you to tell me now what you will surely have to tell under oath in the Nineveh court-room at Tom Strickland's trial, unless you mean to perjure your soul by kissin' the Bible and then swearin' to a lie. That's where you are, my girl! If you told the truth in what you said to Mrs. Todhunter about Tom Strickland, I ain't got another word to say. But, if you didn't, for God's sake tell it now, Lottie-May, and help me and Tom's father to save his life!"

Again the girl's face had whitened as Colonel Todhunter so suddenly acquainted her with the fact that she must needs be a witness for or against Tom Strickland when he was placed on trial for his life. And again, succeeding this, her eyes hardened with the deadly rancor born of her secret thoughts.

"I told Mrs. Todhunter the truth," she replied. "What I told her, I—I'll tell in court, if I got to. I might be willin' to tell—I might be willin' to tell a lie



## THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

for Tom Strickland's sake if it wa'n't for Miss Mary Todhunter—but I can't do it for her, and I won't! It ain't in my blood to let another woman walk on me to get to the man I love, Colonel Todhunter, and you and all the rest of 'em might as well know it once and for all! I got the same shame on me now that my mother had, and I'm her daughter, body and soul!"

Colonel Todhunter looked at Lottie-May Doggett long and silently. His face was grave when he spoke.

"That's all I wanted to see you about, Lottie-May," he said finally. "It looks like I been on a fool's errand, but I've done the best I could. Good-by, child—and you better think over what I've been sayin' to you after I'm gone."

Oddly enough, a little sob broke from the girl's throat as the Colonel spoke. The next moment, with one hand fluttering nervously at her bosom, she closed the door behind him.

Crossing the country road a few rods from the gate leading into the Doggetts' yard, Colonel Todhunter stopped to speak to Aunt Mirandy Ransom, the old negress whom he had last met in the

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

Nineveh town square, and who now stood at the door of her little cabin. After talking with her some brief time he resumed his way into town.

He met the Honorable William J. Strickland at the entrance to the Nineveh jail. The father's face was gray with anxiety. Colonel Todhunter held his hand with a grip of comforting friendliness.

"The boy's in hell's own hole, Bill," he said. "But you and me'll pull him out of it if we've got to bust the breechin' doin' it, suh!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

OLD Governor Leslie hurried to Nineveh from St. Louis the day following Colonel Strickland's own return home. He came in response to an urgent telegraphic summons from the candidate, whom he found in close conference with Major Gentry Dryden, one of Missouri's most famous criminal lawyers. Colonel Todhunter was with them.

"We'll bring Tom through all right, Governor," said Colonel Strickland, although his worn and worried face belied the brave words, "but in the meantime, I thought it best to get you down here so that I could straighten myself out in the matter of my campaign for the nomination for governor with as little delay as possible."

"What do you mean to do?" asked old Leslie.

"I mean to withdraw from the race," replied Colonel Strickland. "I can't run, carrying this weight of Tom's trouble. It's got me beat right

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

now. I won't ask my friends to make a hopeless fight."

"You'll stay right where you are," said Governor Leslie. "You're not responsible for Tom's reckless folly, and the Democratic voters in Missouri won't hold you responsible."

"The Yancey crowd will make it appear that the killing of Stam Tucker was a political murder," Colonel Strickland answered. "They're doing it already. Their newspapers are handling the case along that line. They've published the story of the quarrel between Tom and Stam Tucker the night we opened my campaign here in Nineveh, and of their fight in the bar-room the next day. They point out that old Eph Tucker is my bitterest political enemy, and that he and his son were working tooth and nail for Stephen K. Yancey, and that this political feud has resulted in the assassination of Eph Tucker's son by my son. It's a pretty black story, handled that way, and it'll do me all sorts of harm throughout the state."

"They can't ignore the facts in the case," retorted Governor Leslie. "In the first place, as I understand it, your son himself doesn't know that it was

## A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

he who shot Stam Tucker. He's bound to plead not guilty, and the prosecution's got to prove the fact of guilt. In the second place, the real reason for deadly trouble between Tom and Stam Tucker was the story told by that Doggett girl, and its bearing upon their rivalry for the hand of Miss Mary Todhunter. The Doggett story puts an entirely new light on the feud between the two boys."

"Not the way the Yancey organs are presenting it," said Colonel Strickland, "it only serves to intensify the original trouble and to make a thrilling 'murder story' with what they call 'romantic' as well as political trimmings. They're featuring it on that basis, and they're going to get Steve Yancey nominated just that way."

"I thought this was what you wanted to see me about," commented old Governor Leslie, "so I had a conference with the St. Louis men who worked with me to put you in the race. But, before I tell you any more about that, I want to ask you just one question, Bill Strickland."

A moment of silence followed these words. Colonel Strickland held Governor Leslie's eyes with his own, inquiringly.

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

"Do you want your son to be convicted of the murder of Stamford Tucker?" asked Governor Leslie.

"Good God, man!" cried Colonel Strickland. "How can you ask such a thing?"

Governor Leslie turned to Major Gentry Dryden. "Dryden," he queried, "what would be the effect of Colonel Strickland's withdrawal from the campaign at this time?"

"It would be taken as a confession of his belief in his son's guilt," replied the lawyer without an instant's hesitation. "It would be the worst blow possible to the defense right now. I should strongly protest against Colonel Strickland's withdrawal."

"There you are!" exclaimed old Leslie, turning to the candidate. "That was exactly the view I took of it—you've got to consider your son's interests above all else, Strickland. And now I'll tell you what your St. Louis backers said. They authorized me to refuse to accept your withdrawal as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor of Missouri. Aside from whatever personal regard they may have for you, they believe that, even as matters now stand, you're the strongest man in the

## A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

state, and that you've still got a better fighting chance to win than any other man would have. You've got to stay in, Strickland."

"But, good Lord, man, how can I fight to any purpose?" asked Colonel Strickland piteously. "I must deal fairly with you, so I tell you right here and now that, compared with Tom's safety, I don't give a damn what becomes of my chances in the campaign. I'm going to stay right here and move Heaven and earth to clear my son of the awful charge against him—and by the time his trial's ended the campaign will be over, too."

"Not quite," answered Governor Leslie, unmoved. "But if that was the case, it wouldn't make any difference. God knows you're justified in sticking to Tom through thick and thin, to the finish, and regardless of all other demands upon you. I wouldn't wipe my feet on you if you were capable of doing anything else. So don't you worry about that. We're going to do all the fighting for you from now on—and we've picked on Colonel Todhunter here as the best man to lead what you seem disposed to call a forlorn hope."

"Now you're talkin', suh!" broke in Colonel Tod-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

hunter, his grim old face alight with the lust of battle. "Damn their cowardly souls, I won't ask anything better'n to get out on the stump and skin 'em alive. They're crowdin' old Bill Strickland to the wall because they think they've got him foul, and Bill's friends has got to stand by him closer'n ever. Turn me loose on 'em, Leslie—I'll make Mizoorah too hot to hold 'em!"

Old Governor Leslie smiled ominously. "We've made arrangements to that end, Todhunter," he replied. "I knew just how you'd feel about it. We want you to tell the Democrats of Missouri just exactly why we wouldn't let Strickland withdraw, just exactly why he himself won't do any more campaigning for the nomination, and just exactly why and where the Yancey newspapers and the Yancey speakers are distorting the truth of this case against Tom Strickland to make it look like a political assassination. And it's going to be pretty hot work, Todhunter—you may have more than one personal difficulty on your hands before you get through with it."

"We needn't talk about that feature of it, Governor Leslie," said Colonel Todhunter. "There won't be no trouble 'less'n some o' the Yancey crowd



## A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

object to a man's talkin' straight from the shoulder. We've just about got time now for a lightning finish on the stump, takin' it for granted that I'm expected to reach all parts of the state, so the sooner I start, the better."

"You start to-morrow, Colonel Todhunter," responded old Governor Leslie. "We've already made the speaking appointments for you, and I've got the list of towns and dates right here with 'me. It's a devilish big contract, sir—and you won't get back here until just a few days before the primary elections."

"I don't want to get back here before then—'less'n I could be of some use to Tom Strickland," said Colonel Todhunter, a sudden huskiness in his throat as his eyes fell on Colonel Bill Strickland's haggard face. "The main thing I want is to give the Yancey crowd a fight they wasn't expectin', suh—and I'll be eternally condemned if we ain't a-goin' to do it, too!"

Wherefore, the following morning, Colonel Todhunter started out in the lead of the forlorn hope that was to make the last stand for Colonel Bill Strickland in Missouri.

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

It proved to be a soul-wearying battle, full of baffling chagrin and disappointment. On the very eve of the trial of Tom Strickland for the killing of Stamford Tucker, Colonel Todhunter returned to Nineveh. He was met by Colonel Strickland, whose face seemed now not only haggard, but hopeless.

"They're pushin' us pretty hard, Bill," said Colonel Todhunter. "I've fought 'em the best I knew how, but Steve Yancey's crowd is working Tom's case against us better'n I thought was possible among folks that know you like our Mizzoorah Democrats know you, suh. It's enough to make a dog sick to see how easy people can be turned against a man when he's in trouble, I'll just be double-whipsawed if it ain't!"

"That's all right, Thurs," replied the other listlessly. "Don't you go worrying yourself any longer about my campaign. I knew I was beat the minute they got Tom's trouble to use as a weapon against me. But what hurts me most now, Thurs, is that Governor Leslie is now finding it impossible to raise that campaign fund we counted on. I'm licked—and I've hurt you mighty bad at the same time."

But Colonel Todhunter fired up at this. "I'll be

## A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

shot full o' holes if you're licked—yet!" he exclaimed. "And I ain't hurt any till you hear me holler, suh. Don't you misunderstand me, Bill Strickland. I acknowledge that we've got a hard row to hoe, but that ain't no sign we ain't a-goin' to hoe it. Anyway, by Godfrey, we'll make an ever-lastin' good stagger at it—the next best thing to livin' victorious is dyin' game, suh!"

Colonel Strickland shook his head. "There's mighty little fight left in me," he spoke sadly.

"I'll do the fightin'," retorted Colonel Todhunter. Then he looked his friend anxiously in the face. "How's Tom's case goin'?" he asked.

"It looks mighty black," answered the other. "It's going to be a political trial, bitter as sin, because the old gang counts on Tom's conviction to drive me out of Missouri politics. The evidence in the case is all against the boy. The court-room will be packed with Yancey heelers—there's no way to prevent it—and they'll make every demonstration possible to influence the jury. And every man connected with the court wears the gang's collar, even to Judge Pittman himself. If we ask for a change of venue we'll jump from the frying-pan into the fire, because my ene-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

mies have got the whip-hand anywhere we turn. By God, old fellow, I believe they'll have my boy's life before they get through!" The speaker's voice broke in spite of him.

Colonel Todhunter's face grew hard and grim. "No, they won't!" he said stubbornly. "They can't do it. They ain't got nothin' against Tom but circumstantial evidence, and it surely ought to be mighty hard, here in Nineveh, to convict a boy like Tom, well known and comin' of a family that's lived here so long, on circumstantial evidence alone. They'll try their damndest to do it, Bill, but they can't. Tom'll get the benefit of the doubt."

There was something deeply pathetic in this eager clutching at the one remaining strand of hope. The two old friends were now making their way toward the jail to see Tom. Suddenly they came face to face with Mrs. Todhunter and Mary.

The girl advanced directly toward them with outstretched hand, her mother following.

"Howdy, Colonel Strickland!" she said, her voice trembling a little. "You're on your way to visit Tom, aren't you?"

"Yes, Miss Mary," replied Tom's father quietly.

## A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

"The trial begins to-morrow, and I only left him to meet Colonel Todhunter, and he's returning with me."

"Colonel Strickland," said Mary resolutely, though her voice shook more than ever, "I want you to carry a message to Tom from me."

There was a curious little pause. Mrs. Todhunter laid her hand gently on her daughter's arm. But the girl moved away from the touch, not harshly, yet as if she felt it to be a protest.

"I want you to give Tom my love, Colonel Strickland," she said. "And I want you to tell him, from me, that I don't believe one word of these awful charges against him—not one word—either about Stam Tucker or about that—that girl!"

And as she spoke Mary Todhunter burst out crying. She dabbed piteously at her face with her handkerchief, unable to control her emotions. Then, sobbing, she turned away with her mother, no other word being spoken.

"God bless that girl of yours, Thurs!" spoke Colonel Strickland, his own voice unsteady. "She's good grit clear through—and, somehow, she gives me more courage than I've had for many a day. They

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

haven't got Tom yet—and they'll have the fight of their lives before they do get him!"

"That's the talk!" cried Colonel Todhunter. "Face 'em that way, Bill, and we'll make 'em strain their souls for every inch they try to gain! They got to do it—by the good God up yonder in them skies, Bill, they got to do it!"

But the little flicker of encouragement caused by a girl's brave words soon died away in the somber shadow of Tom Strickland's prison. It was two very weary and gray-faced old men who came away from the prisoner an hour later and parted at the jail's front, each to go to his own home.

That evening Colonel Todhunter went by appointment to the Strickland home for a conference with Tom's father and Major Gentry Dryden, leading counsel for the defense. It was nearly midnight when he returned to his own home.

He found Aunt Mirandy Ransom there. The old negress rose, trembling, at sight of him, her black hands fluttering toward him in instinctive gladness of welcome.

"Bress Gawd, yo' done come!" she cried. "I been eatin' my ole heart out waitin' fo' yo', suh! Kunn'l

## A STRANGE CRY FROM BLACK LIPS

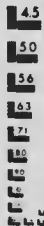
Todhunter, yo' got some mighty quick an' ticklish  
wu'k cut out fo' yo' ef yo' gwine save Mars' Tom  
Strickland's life—das huccome I hyar now to tell  
yo' erbout it, suh!"





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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## CHAPTER XVIII

### COLONEL TODHUNTER RIDES THROUGH DARKNESS INTO THE DAWN

**T**HROUGH the after-midnight blackness that was soon to change into the gray of a cloud-swept dawn a fugitive man and woman fled, two sinister figures of a sinister hour.

Side by side they sat in a light road-wagon drawn by a raw-boned horse whose long and swift stride told of its selection for this special service.

The man, gaunt, swarthy, with keen black eyes that gleamed alertly from under the wide brim of a weather-beaten sombrero, seemed ill content, however, with the progress being made.

Almost incessantly he urged the horse to increased effort, now and then cursing outright in the grip of a feverish impatience.

Save when he leaned forward for this urging, the man sat slouching and limp, the mark of the vagrant Ishmael on every line of body and limbs.

The woman was tense, rigid, her face set always

## THROUGH DARKNESS INTO DAWN

to the front. It was framed in by a shawl thrown over her head and drawn about her shoulders. Once or twice her glance went furtively to the man beside her. Fear and distrust were in her eyes. Her hands were tightly clasped together as they lay in her lap.

Deep woods stretched on either side of the road. Their stillness was profound. The enveloping gloom seemed as of the grave itself. The woman shuddered and drew her shawl closer.

"Lord ha' mercy!" she spoke. "I can't do it, Jesse—I can't! It's worse'n murder—worse'n what's been done a'ready!"

The man laid a cruel lash across his horse's flanks. "You fool!" he muttered. "It's high time I brung you away! You lovesick fool!"

The girl's eyes flashed sullenly. "That word's a lie!" she retorted. "Ain't I goin' with you? And would I be a-doin' that if I was lovesick for somebody else? It's a lie, and you know it!"

The man laughed. "If you had stayed where you was you'd ha' blabbed the whole thing out, and you'd be in jail now, 'stead o' him."

Suddenly the woman threw her arms upward. "It'll ha'nt me to my dyin' day!" she cried. "I ought

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

to ha' told the truth! I wish I had! I wish I had! It couldn't be no worse'n it is now!"

"The hell it couldn't!" savagely returned the man. "You keep your mouth shut! I got all I can do to save us as it is, 'thout'n you waggin' your tongue. You keep your mouth shut!"

The woman passed her hands over her face miserably.

The man again slouched down in his seat. Now and then his moody glance turned apprehensively to his companion.

"I've done a whole lot for your sake, Lottie-May," he spoke at last. "I could ha' got away long ago. I'm takin' big chances on your account. And you don't seem to care!"

Lottie-May Doggett's face grew shamed. "Yes, I do, Jesse!" she exclaimed. "I know just what you're doin' for me. The only show I got is to go with you. And you mustn't think I don't appreciate it." Her hands fluttered piteously at her throat. "My God!" she cried, her voice breaking in anguish. "Tom Strickland's goin' to be hung! He's goin' to be hung! They ain't nothin' on earth can save him!"

Far in the east the gray dawn was breaking.

## THROUGH DARKNESS INTO DAWN

"Damn Tom Strickland!" cursed the man. "I'll be glad when he is hung! You've always been in love with him!"

"He's goin' to be hung!" repeated the girl. "And they ain't no way to save him now!"

An evil mockery leaped into the man's face. "Oh, yes, there's a way!" he retorted. "You go back there to that trial and confess the truth! You're the only one on God's earth that can save him. Ain't that so?"

The girl's face whitened. As the man spoke they had turned from the pike road and were going deeper into the wood. A scant light of day had come. The faces of the two were haggard and worn.

"Yes, I'm the only one!" cried Lottie-May Doggett suddenly. "And that's what I'd do now if I had the chance—tell the whole truth! I ain't thinkin' no more about me. I ain't thinkin' no more about you. I'm thinkin' about Tom Strickland!"

A forlorn and dilapidated cabin was revealed in a barren little opening ahead. The man laughed aloud as he saw it.

"You'll have to take it out in thinkin', Lottie-May!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "I've got you

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

now where you're safe. When you and me leave that shack to-night there'll be no more talk o' you savin' Tom Strickland. We'll be headed straight for Oklahoma then, and all hell can't stop us!"

The girl's eyes rested on the miserable little cabin. An ominous light was in them. The man drew up at the hut and assisted his companion from the wagon. He pushed open a creaking door. The cabin's interior showed black and forbidding.

"That's where we stay till night-time," he said. "I'll take the horse and wagon round where they won't be seen if anybody happens to come along. And I don't want no more o' your foolishness, Lottie-May!"

The girl started as if struck. "Don't talk to me like that!" she cried. "I ain't your nigger yet. I ain't got to do anything I don't feel like doin'. You're takin' too much for granted, Jesse!"

The man seemed to lose all patience at this. Grasping the girl by the shoulders he forced her into the hut. Then he disappeared. A moment later he returned.

The girl was standing against the wall. Her face

## THROUGH DARKNESS INTO DAWN

was buried in her arms. Sobs shook her body. The man closed the door behind him.

Five miles back, on the road along which the fugitives had come, two men on horseback were galloping swiftly in pursuit. One was tall, with cool gray-blue eyes under shaggy brows, gray hair, white mustache and old-fashioned imperial. His seat in the saddle was that of a seasoned cavalryman. The other was small, wiry, with a smooth-shaven, hard-set face, a mouth like a steel trap, cold hazel eyes that kept themselves fixed on the road ahead.

"We oughtn't to be very fur behind 'em now, Jim," spoke the first man. "Th' ain't no way they could ha' dodged from the main road, is there?"

"No, Colonel, they ain't," returned the other. "Not till they come to the old dirt road that leads to the cabin I told you about. That's where they're headin' for, Colonel Todhunter, and it's where we're goin' to run up on 'em. We'll be there pretty soon, too."

Colonel Todhunter's face was grim. "I hate to think of Lottie-May Doggett!" he spoke. "It's

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

mighty bad, mighty bad, suh. I feel that sorry for poor old Rafe Doggett—Lord, Lord, the shame of it all is a-goin' to kill that good old man!"

The wiry little man to whom he spoke snapped his jaws together in angry scorn.

"That can't be helped now, Colonel," he made answer. "I got to do my duty, woman or no woman!"

"I ain't askin' you to do anything less'n your duty, Jim," replied Colonel Todhunter. "And I'm just as responsible as you are. But I'm sorry—and I'm afraid, too. If there's any serious trouble, I hope there'll be some way o' seein' that the girl don't get hurt."

"She won't if she behaves herself," said the other. "But she's got to do that, for there ain't goin' to be no time for foolishness. You've got to forget the girl part of this business if you want to come out on top, Colonel Todhunter."

Colonel Todhunter sighed. "I reckon that's straight, Jim," he agreed.

The two rode on abreast without further word until they reached the cross-road.

"Here we are, Colonel," spoke the little man, h



## THROUGH DARKNESS INTO DAWN

voice low. "It's a safe bet they're layin' up till dark in that old shanty."

The two riders checked their horses to a walk.

Suddenly a woman's shriek broke the stillness. "For God's sake, Jesse!" the cry sounded. "You ain't a-goin' to kill me like a dog, are you?"

Instantly, hearing the cry, Colonel Todhunter pressed his horse to a full gallop. His companion did the same. They threw themselves from the saddle in front of the cabin. Colonel Todhunter hurled his weight against the door. It yielded and he plunged inside.

A girl knelt in the center of the dark little hut. Her hands were uplifted in entreaty. Over her stood a man with a knife raised to strike. His face was black with rage.

Colonel Todhunter covered him with a swiftly drawn pistol. "Hands up, Chickasaw, we'll 'tend to Lottie-May ourselves—and to you. This is the sheriff o' Ralls County I got with me."

The man turned. He looked into the muzzles of two revolvers, the sheriff being well-nigh as quick to draw as Colonel Todhunter. Their menace did not invite resistance. The man saw this truth in-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

stantly Colonel Todhunter's steady eyes held his captors. The Colonel spoke to the girl without looking at her.

"Git off there to one side, Lottie-May," he said.  
"Quick!"

The girl sprang from under the knife. "Thank God, you come, Colonel Todhunter!" she cried.  
"Thank God—oh, thank God!"

And at the girl's cry the man laughed aloud. He threw his knife to the floor. Then, empty-handed, he stood, confronting his captors.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### STATE OF MISSOURI VS. THOMAS W. STRICKLAND— FOR MURDER

**T**HE trial of Tom Strickland had been relentlessly hurried to the day of its closing by a political prosecution working through a complaisant judge servile to machine influence.

From that early moment of the selection of a jury the truth of a merciless haste was in evidence. It was explained by the court that there was imperative need for as little delay as might be possible, the docket being crowded and many cases remaining to be disposed of during the present term. The grim fact was that Colonel Strickland's enemies felt sure of a conviction and were determined that the verdict should be rendered in time to remove whatever peril of his nomination might still remain.

The evidence scored heavily against Tom from the start.

There was plainly sounded a note of somewhat insolent confidence, almost like jubilation, in the swift

## COLONEL TCDHUNTER OF MISSOURI

announcement of the state's readiness for trial Colonel Bill Strickland, gray and pinched of face, recognized its instant menace. His closely shut lips broke their rigid lines piteously, precisely as they had done when Tom was brought into court and took his seat confronting the jury.

At the same moment a swift flash of anticipated triumph leaped into the eyes of old Ephraim Tucker, sitting with the state's counsel. Tom's father saw this and his jaws set hard at the sight.

"They're feeling pretty sure of a conviction," he whispered to Major Gentry Dryden. "Is it likely they've obtained evidence against Tom that we don't know anything about?"

The lawyer shook his head. "I hardly think so," he replied. "We've got a line on all their witnesses, I believe. I can't figure out how they'll be able to spring a surprise on us."

But one sinister sentence in the prosecuting attorney's opening statement to the jury undeceived him.

"We shall prove, gentlemen, beyond a reasonable doubt," the state's counsel said, "the motive which, we claim, led Thomas W. Strickland to slay Stam-

## MISSOURI VS. TOM STRICKLAND

ford Tucker, and then"—moving a step nearer to the jury and lifting one hand impressively—"having proved this, we shall establish, by the testimony of an eye-witness, the fact of Thomas W. Strickland's presence at the scene of the murder at the time of its commission."

Major Gentry Dryden, in spite of himself, started at hearing this crushing announcement. Something of fierce resentment, pathetic in its impotency, showed in Colonel Strickland's grizzled countenance. Tom's face, a helpless perplexity in his eyes, went deadly white.

The atmosphere became tense with the sudden dramatic grip of the situation thus created.

And the hearing of testimony for the state began.

It went forward with merciless precision and despatch, a certainty and rapidity so well ordered as to be overwhelming in moral effect.

The evidence was cruelly against Tom Strickland. Two witnesses, a farmer and his son, testified to finding the dead body of Stam Tucker by the roadside, at a point midway between the Tucker home and the town of Nineveh, at daybreak on the morning of the twenty-seventh day of July just past.

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

They were on their way into town to sell garden produce. The dead man lay on his back just at the edge of the road. There was a bullet hole in his forehead. A pistol, with one chamber empty, lay an inch or two distant from his right hand. The witnesses had hurried into Nineveh and notified the authorities.

Simeon Birdsong testified that bad feeling had existed between Thomas W. Strickland and Stamford Tucker since the night of the clash between the Strickland and Yancey factions at the opening rally of the Strickland campaign. The witness stated that the accused at that time made threats to "get even" with Tucker for attempting to break up the Strickland meeting. On the following day the accused had openly insulted Tucker in the bar-room of the Nineveh Hotel and had knocked him down a short time later when they again met in the same place. It was generally believed that there would be a bloody encounter between them before the campaign closed. Other associates of the dead man and the accused testified to the same facts.

Mrs. Todhunter, whose appearance as a witness

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for the state was a dramatic surprise, and who was pitifully agitated, testified to the fact of the accusation made against Thomas W. Strickland by Lottie-May Doggett at the reception and hop given by the Nineveh Light Infantry, and her testimony was supported by that of several other ladies who heard the accusation.

Nicholas Bledsoe, the bartender in the saloon frequented by the Yancey-Tucker faction, testified to the facts of the two visits to his place made by the accused on the forenoon and evening of the twenty-sixth day of July just past. On the occasion of the latter visit the accused had told him that Stamford Tucker was the man whom Lottie-May Doggett should rightfully have charged with her ruin, that the girl had told him, the accused, of Tucker's meeting her secretly, and that he meant to make Tucker acknowledge the truth publicly or else kill him. This witness' testimony established the hour of eight-thirty on that night as the exact time at which Tom Strickland had left the bar-room to go out to the Tucker home for the purpose of compelling Stamford Tucker to agree to make such an acknowledg-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

ment or of forcing a hostile meeting in the event of his refusal.

White-haired Mrs. Tucker, the dead man's mother; Katherine Tucker, his sister, and Ellen Barry, domestic in the Tucker home, testified that Stamford Tucker had left the house at or about eight-thirty o'clock on the night of the twenty-sixth of July past, saying that he might be late in returning. He had not told them where he was going. They had believed he was going into the town of Nineveh.

Doctor Langford, the county coroner, testified to the established facts of the inquest that had resulted in a verdict holding Thomas W. Strickland for the killing of Stamford Tucker.

Luther Bradfield, proprietor of a hardware store in Nineveh, testified that Thomas W. Strickland had purchased a revolver from him on the morning after the opening of the Strickland campaign in the Nineveh town-hall. He identified the weapon taken from the accused at the time of his arrest as the one thus purchased, and stated that the bullet found in Stamford Tucker's brain was fired from a pistol of the same caliber.



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Colonel Thurston T. Todhunter and Miss Lottie-May Doggett had not answered to their names when called as witnesses for the prosecution. The deputy sheriff, sent to bring them into court, had returned later and announced that he had been unable to find them. This had occasioned much surprise, but, as both the state and the defense felt assured of their appearance at almost any moment, the examination of other witnesses proceeded.

The case against Tom Strickland began to assume its most ominous aspect immediately following the testimony of Bradfield, the hardware dealer.

The prosecuting attorney turned, smiling, from a whispered consultation with old Ephraim Tucker.

"Call Abraham L. Tolliver!" he said.

A negro man about forty years of age took the stand in answer to the sheriff's cry. He seemed frightened and reluctant to testify.

"What is your name?"

"My name Abram Lincoln Tolliver, suh—dass my name."

"What is your occupation, Abram—what do you do to make a living?"

"Mostly I ketches fish, suh. I hunts some, too, and

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I sets traps for coon and mink, down yander in de Black Bottom swamps, suh."

"Where were you, Abe, on the night of July twenty-sixth, just past?"

"Part de time I was right hyar in dis heah town o Nineveh, and atter dat I went on my way to whar I done got my camp in de bottom lands, suh."

"What time did you leave the town of Nineveh to go to your camp in the Black Bottoms?"

"I lef' dess a li'l while atter half atter eight, suh."

"How do you know this?"

"'Case I done ax Ben Dalton, de cullud man whar I been visitin', what was de time dess as I wa a-tellin' him good-by, suh."

"What road did you take to go to your camp in the Black Bottoms?"

"Why, suh, 'cose I took'n de Black Bottoms road suh—leas'ways 'twell I comes to a li'l hog-path wha leads down into de big swamps off'n dat-ar road suh."

"How far is it from town before you come to that hog-path, Abe?"

"Dess 'bout'n a mile, suh, ter de bes' o' my knowl edge, and speakin' sorter off-hand lak, suh."

MISSOURI VS. TOM STRICKLAND

"Do you know where the Tucker place is on the Black Bottoms road?"

"Yass, suh."

"Is that path of which you speak more or less than half-way to the Tucker place as you go out from town?"

"Hit dess a li'l mo'n half-ways, suh."

"Now, Abram,"—and the prosecuting attorney straightened to his full height and spoke with especial earnestness—"I want you to tell the jury exactly what happened to you on your way to your camp in the Black Bottoms that night. Tell it in y<sup>o</sup>ur own way, just as it happened."

The witness looked at his questioner with apprehension in his childlike eyes.

"Mistah Cromwell, you—you done gimme yo' wu'd dey ain't no harm a-comin' to me ef I tells dat?" he cried appealingly. "And you done tole me I hatter tell it, whur' I wants to er no—ain't dat so?"

"That is the truth, Abe. The law compels you to testify to the facts of your knowledge bearing upon this case. And it is the law's intent that no harm shall come to you for so doing."

The witness began in a low voice. "Dey wa'n't

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nothin' happened to me 'twell I come nigh to dat-ar hog-path what cuts off inter de bottoms," he said. "Dess fo' I got dar, suh, I heern shootin'. One shot, and den annurr', hit seem lak ter me, suh. I was skeered when I hear dat-ar shootin' and seem lak I better not go on ter whar I sho' ter run smack into it. Mistah Cromwell—yass, suh, I'se a-tellin' it ter de jury, suh. So huccome I done hid in de brush side o' de road, suh, layin' flat on de groun'. And dar I stayed, suh."

The witness hesitated.

"Go on," said the prosecuting attorney. "Tell the jury precisely what happened next."

"I lay dar, lak I say," resumed the witness. "when, all of a sudden lak, a man come down de road f'um whar I heern de shootin'. He pass straight by me on de road, and he seem to be staggerin' lak. He was talkin' to hisse'f as he pass whar I was hidin' in de brush. He had his pistol swingin' in his hand, suh, lak a man what too excited to put it back attter he use it, suh."

The prosecuting attorney moved a step nearer the witness. "You saw that man plainly, Abe?" he asked. "You got a good look at his face?"

## MISSOURI VS. TOM STRICKLAND

"Yass, suh. Hit was a bright moonlight night. I seen dat-ar man dess as plain as I done see you dis-hyar minnit, suh."

"Did you recognize him?"

"Yass, suh. I knowed him soon's I set eyes on his face, suh."

"Do you see him in this court-room now?"

"Yass, suh."

"Point him out to the jury, Abe."

The negro, now feeling reassured, leveled his black finger at Tom Strickland, dramatically. The eyes of the two, the white man and the black, met, each holding the other's as if fascinated. In those of the witness there was a sort of histrionic relish of the value of the situation, tempered by a latent apprehension. In those of the accused there was a strange and pitiful perplexity.

"Dass him, suh," spoke the witness. "Hit was Mistah Tom Strickland what I seen passin' me on dat-ar road, suh. Lawdy massy! I done know him since he wa'n't mo'n knee-high to a duck, suh!"

There was a sudden stir throughout the court-room, a movement of tense excitement, followed by a sinister hush.

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"After you saw and recognized this man," said the prosecuting attorney, "what happened then?"

"I laid right dar 'twell he done gone out o' sight, suh. He was a-goin' in to'ards town, and I done keep my eyes on him 'twell he turn a ben' in de road and I cain't see him no mo'. Den I wait 'twell I sho' he ain't a-comin' back. Atter dat, I got up and started on my way, keepin' in de shadow side o' de road."

Again the witness paused.

"Well?" asked the prosecuting attorney. "Tell the jury what happened then, Abe."

The witness shuffled uneasily in his chair, something of awe in his black face.

"I—I had come purty nigh to de hog-path whar I was to strike off inter de bottom lands," he resumed, "when I stumbled ovah sump'in a-layin' on de groun', part in de road and part in de grass side o' de road."

He wiped his face with his open palm. "Hit was a man," he said—and then, his voice solemn—"and de man was dead. He been shot. I seen de place whar he shot—right in de head, 'twix' de eyes, on'y des a li'l bit higher up. When I stumble ovah him

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and nigh fall, I stretch out my hand, down-lak, and hit tech de place whar he been shot and got all bloody."

The negro shuddered.

"Did you see the face of this man?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"Yass, suh."

"Did you recognize it?"

"Yass, suh."

"Abram," said the prosecuting attorney, "tell the jury who the dead man was whose body you thus found and whose face you saw and recognized."

"Hit was young Mistah Stamford Tucker," the witness made answer. "I knowed him, suh, dess as well as I know Mistah Tom Strickland settin' right hyar 'fo' my eyes, suh."

The prosecuting attorney waited a moment, his shrewd eyes studying the faces of the jurors.

"Abe," he asked, "why didn't you at once report the finding of Stamford Tucker's dead body and the seeing of Thomas W. Strickland, pistol in hand, as he came away from the spot where that body lay?"

The witness shook his head stubbornly. "'Twan't none o' my business, suh," he replied. "Hit's a

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

mighty fool nigger what goes mixin' hiss'ef up in a shootin' scrape 'twix' two white gent'mun, suh. I was skeered ter do it, suh, dass why—and I dess pick up my feet and make tracks fas' as I could to whar my camp in de bottom lands was, suh. And you ain't heern no wu'd 'bout'n what I seen, and you ain't had me fotched to yo' office, 'cept'n I was fool ernuff ter tell dat-ar ole Isr'el Fant, what I run er-cross down in de bottom lands, suh!"

The state's attorney turned to the counsel for the defense. "You may take the witness," he said.

A searching cross-examination failed to weaken in any respect the testimony just given. At its conclusion Major Gentry Dryden whispered earnestly with Colonel Bill Strickland.

It was plainly a dispirited and hopeless conference. Colonel Strickland leaned back wearily at the end.

"It can't make any difference," he muttered sadly. "They've got the rope around Tom's neck, now."

And, although the words were not audible to others, this certainty of conviction seemed to be in the thought of all. Into the jurors' faces there came a



## MISSOURI VS. TOM STRICKLAND

look of pity as their eyes met those of the accused man, the latter perplexed, bewildered, helpless.

"The state rests its case," announced the prosecuting attorney. A profound and ominous silence followed.

It was broken by the entrance of Colonel Todhunter into the court-room. He came through a door opening from the sheriff's office in the rear. His clothing was covered with dust, as of hurried travel along sun-scorched roads. He made his way direct to where Colonel Bill Strickland and Major Gentry Dryden were sitting. The latter rose a moment later.

"I beg the court's indulgence for a little time," he said hurriedly. "An adjournment is not asked—merely opportunity for a brief conference."

The request was granted.

Taking hasty notes meanwhile, Major Dryden was deep in consultation with Colonel Todhunter. Suddenly he stood erect and faced the trial judge, his eyes ablaze with excitement.

"May it please the court," he said. "New evidence of a most important character has just come into the possession of counsel for the defense. It

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

compels a change in the line of that defense, and beg the court's indulgence to that end."

Then he turned to the Nineveh sheriff. "Call Lottie-May Doggett," he said.

"The witness is not present," replied the sheriff. "She was summoned by the state, and a deputy sent to find her reports now that she has disappeared from her home."

"She has just come back," was the reply. "She is here now."

And Lottie-May Doggett, emerging from the sheriff's own room, took the stand in answer to his call.

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## CHAPTER XX

### THE SUDDEN EMERGENCE OF "CHICKASAW JESSE" BREAM

**T**HE murmur of excitement that had swept through the court-room at hearing Major Gentry Dryden's announcement sank into absolute silence as the girl confronted the crowd. She herself was deadly pale.

"Where were you, Miss Doggett," asked Major Dryden, following the necessary questions as to the witness' name, place of residence, and the like, "on the morning of the twenty-seventh day of July just past?"

"I was at home that mornin', suh."

"Were you alone there?"

"Yes, suh, after grandfather left me, soon as he got his breakfas'—until Colonel Todhunter come there, maybe some two hours later'n that, suh."

"What did Colonel Todhunter come to see you about?"

"He came to tell me that Stain Tucker had been

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shot and killed the night befo', and that Tom Strickland had been arrested for killin' him."

"Was that the first you had heard of Stam Tucker's death?"

"Yes, suh."

"Did you know before then that a threat against Stamford Tucker's life had been made?"

"Yes, suh."

"Did you know by whom that threat had been made?"

"Yes, suh—I knowed the man who made it. He made it to me when him and me was alone together."

"Who was that man, Miss Doggett?"

"It was Jesse Bream, suh—'Chickasaw Jesse,' folks here in Nineveh calls him, 'cause they say his old grandmammy what came from Tennessee, had Chickasaw blood in her, suh."

"When did Jesse Bream make this threat against Stamford Tucker's life in your presence?"

"On the mornin' after that party what the soldier company here in Nineveh gave at the hotel, suh."

"What led him to make the threat?"

"Somethin' that I told him about Stam Tucker,

CHICKASAW JESSE BREAM

suh—somethin' that had come up at the party I just spoke of."

"You must be more definite than this, if you please, Miss Doggett. What had you told Jesse Bream that caused him to make this threat?"

"He come to see me about somethin' I had said to Mrs. Todhunter the night befo', at the party. They shamed me that night—and I told Mrs. Todhunter that Tom Strickland was the man who had brought that shame on me. And then Jesse Bream came to see me the next mornin'. He had been worryin' me to marry him, and he still wanted to marry me, but he said he was goin' to kill Tom Strickland for wrongin' me—and it was then I told him about Stam Tucker."

"What about Stam Tucker, Miss Doggett?"

"Why—I—I got skeered for Tom Strickland, suh—and—and—well, 'fo' I knowed what I was a-sayin', I told Jesse the truth—that it was Stam Tucker and not Tom Strickland, who had brought my shame 'pon me. And it was then that Jesse said he meant to waylay and kill Stam Tucker the first chance."

"Then, Miss Doggett, when Colonel Todhunter

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

told you that Stamford Tucker had been shot and killed, and that Tom Strickland was charged with the crime, you had good reason to believe that it was Jesse Bream and not Tom Strickland, who did the killing?"

"Yes, suh."

"Why did you not tell Colonel Todhunter this?"

"'Cause I was a-fear'd to, suh. Jesse had done told me that he was a-goin' to do it for my sake, and that if I ever so much as breathed a word of it, he would kill me, too, but that he'd take me away and marry me if I didn't. He would ha' killed me, too—I knowed that mighty well!"

"Had you promised Jesse Bream to go away with him?"

"Yes, suh, I had. I wanted to get away from Nineveh where I'd been shamed and disgraced, and he was the only man what would ha' married me after that. I might ha' told Colonel Todhunter the truth—if I hadn't been a-feared o' Jesse, and if I hadn't seen that it would be evenin' things up with Tom Strickland as well as Jesse had evened 'em up with Stam Tucker, if I went away with him."

"What do you mean by evening up things with

## CHICKASAW JESSE BREAM

Tom Strickland? You have just testified under oath that Tom Strickland had done you no wrong."

The girl was silent for a moment. Her face flushed a dark red and then went white again.

"Tom Strickland made me eat my heart out for him!" she cried suddenly, shame and a desperate defiance in the passionate eyes that confronted her audience. "He wouldn't see that I loved him better'n anything else in all this world, and that I wanted him to love me the same way. And the reason he wouldn't see what I was always a-showin' him was that he was so dead in love with Miss Mary Todhunter! That's what made me tell that lie against him when I knowed that Mrs. Todhunter was a-goin' to ask me to leave the party. And that's what made me willin' to run away with Jesse Bream and let Tom Strickland get out of his trouble the best way he could. They wa'n't none of 'em carin' what become of me—well, I wouldn't care what become of them!"

There was a pitiful break in the girl's voice.

"I didn't care the tip of my finger for Jesse Bream!" she cried. "I hated and despised him! But he was willin' to marry me and take me away

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

from Nineveh—and so I kep' my mouth shet and waited for him to come and do it!"

"I am going to ask you, Miss Doggett," said Major Gentry Dryden, "when was the first time you saw Jesse Bream after Colonel Todhunter's visit to you that day?"

"I didn't see him till the day before this-here trial begun, suh. He had gone away to fix things up for marryin' me and takin' me down somewhere in Oklahoma, and he didn't come back till then."

"What time of the day did you see him?"

"I reckon 'twas 'long about three or fo' o'clock in the day, suh. He didn't come clear to the house 'cause he saw grandfather settin' on the front gallery. But he give a whistle I knew, and I went out and met him."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In a little clump o' woods 'cross the road, not far from the old cabin where Aunt Mirandy Ransom and old Jed Ransom, her husband, two colored people, are livin', suh."

"What had he come to see you about?"

"He come to tell me that ever'thing was read for us to run away that very night. He was plan-



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nin' to drive over into Ralls County, and we'd get married there and then start for Oklahoma. And he'd been drinkin' and was braggin' about how he'd killed Stam Tucker. It was then I knowed for the first time, from his own lips, that it was him that killed Stam--but I'd been certain of it in my mind all the time."

"Did you consent to go away with him?"

"Yes, suh, and we went away together. The first day and night he got to drinkin', and when we stopped at the hotel in Sidon he quarreled with me, keepin' on sayin' that I was in love with Tom Strickland and would blab about who did really murder Stam Tucker if I got half a chance. And somethin' I said then, about my wishin' I had told the truth at first, skeered him. 'Stead o' stayin' in Sidon till he was ready to go straight to Oklahoma, he took me away from there the next day. We went fur, too, and he was always a-watchin' me. At day-break one mornin' we come to a tumble-down cabin deep in the woods, and he said that's where we'd stay till dark--and then I begun to be skeered myself."

"Of what were you afraid?"

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

"I begun to feel skeered that he was a-goin' to kill me. We had quarreled and quarreled, and whenever I lost my temper good and proper I told him the truth—that I oughtn't to leave Tom Strickland to be hung when I knowed Tom wasn't guilty and knowed who was. Then—well, all of a sudden, we had our biggest quarrel, and what I'd been skeered of come to pass!"

"What do you mean by that, Miss Doggett?"

"I mean that Chickasaw Jesse tried to kill me, suh. He sorter went crazy and jumped for me with his bowie-knife in his hand—and I'd ha' been dead the next minute if it hadn't been for Colonel Todhunter, suh."

"For Colonel Todhunter?"

"Yes, suh. Colonel Todhunter busted in the door o' the cabin that very minute, bringin' the sheriff o' Ralls County along with him. Him and the sheriff both had their pistols sighted on Jesse and made him throw his knife down. And then I done what I'd wanted to do all the time. I told them it was Chickasaw Jesse Bream who had killed Stam Tucker."

"And what happened when you did that?"

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## CHICKASAW JESSE BREAM

The girl shivered. "I don't like to think about it—he made me feel like a cowardly hound-dog!" she said, a new shame in her reckless eyes. "Jesse Bream just laughed and folded his arms and looked at me and then at Colonel Todhunter and the sheriff and said that I told the truth. 'I killed Stam Tucker because he ruined Lottie-May,' he said, smilin'. 'And I run away with her to marry her. But she's tellin' the truth now to get shet o' me, and I don't give a damn what comes next. Take me and hang me—I'm done!'"

A hush of horror held the crowded court-room in its grip. Lottie-May Doggett suddenly lifted her arms in a gesture of desperate exultation.

"Anyway, I'm glad!" she cried. "I'm glad! I don't know how Colonel Todhunter happened to come there the way he did, but I'm glad! I thanked God when I saw him—because then I knew that Tom Strickland wa'n't a-goin' to hang for what Chickasaw Jesse had done!"

A moment later the witness was turned over to the state. The cross-examination strengthened, rather than shook, her testimony for the defense.

"Call Colonel Thurston T. Todhunter!" said Ma-

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

Major Dryden. The new witness, travel-stained and somewhat worn, physically, took the stand.

Briefly, under the questioning of the leading counsel for the defense, Colonel Todhunter told of his visit to Lottie-May Doggett on the forenoon following the murder of Stamford Tucker.

"Where did you go, Colonel Todhunter," asked Major Dryden, "when you left the Doggetts' house after that visit?"

"I went to a cabin across the road, just a few yards down from the Doggetts' gate, to see Aunt Mirandy Ransom, an old colored woman who lived there."

"Was it in connection with your object in calling on Miss Lottie-May Doggett that you wished to see this colored woman?"

"It was, suh."

"What was your reason for wanting to see Mirandy Ransom that time, Colonel Todhunter?"

"I wanted to engage her to keep a close watch on the girl, Lottie-May Doggett, suh. I did not believe that Tom Strickland killed Stamford Tucker, nor did I believe that he was guilty of wrongin' Lottie-May. He himself had told me that the girl could

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fessed to him that Stamford Tucker had been mak-  
in' love to her secretly. I felt sure in my own mind  
that Stamford Tucker had been killed for wrongin'  
Lottie-May Doggett—and this would mean that he  
was killed by some man who loved Lottie-May and  
knew that Stamford Tucker had wronged her, or  
that the girl herself had killed him. It all looked  
mighty plain to me, suh—and, lookin' that way, I  
couldn't help feelin' that whatever developments  
might come, pointin' to the real murderer, would be  
mighty likely to come right there at Lottie-May's  
home. I wanted somebody to watch that house, and  
I knew I could depend on Aunt Mirandy Ransom  
better'n on anybody else."

"Did you see this woman, Miranda Ransom, sir?"

"I did, suh. She promised to keep a close watch  
on the girl and on the house, and she kept her word.  
It was through her that I learned the news that sent  
me away to Ralls County lookin' for Chickasaw  
Jesse Bream and Lottie-May Doggett, suh."

"Do you mean that she learned of their flight,  
Colonel Todhunter?"

"Yes, suh. She crep' up close enough to overhear  
what they was a-sayin' when they met in that clump

## COLONEL TODHUNTER OF MISSOURI

o' trees between the Doggett house and the Ransoms' cabin, suh. She heard all that went on between 'em, suh—Chickasaw Jesse's declaration that it was him that killed Stamford Tucker, their plans for goin' away to get married and then goin' to live in Oklahoma, and all the rest o' their talk, suh. She was waitin' for me when I got home from Colonel Bill Strickland's the night before this trial began, and she told me the whole story."

"What did you do then, Colonel Todhunter?"

"There wasn't but one thing to be done, suh, if Chickasaw Jesse was to be caught and Tom Strickland saved from bein' found guilty of murderin' Stam Tucker. That one thing was to follow Jesse Bream and Lottie-May Doggett without losin' a minute's time and arrest him befo' he got out o' the state, suh. I left at once, and I drove all that night as fast as I could. I got hold o' Jim Woodleaf, the sheriff of Ralls County, next day, and went to find Chickasaw Jesse and take him into custody. We was slow in findin' his trail, but we did. We done it just in time, too, to keep him from murderin' the girl as well, suh."

The witness then confirmed in detail that part of

## CHICKASAW JESSE BREAM

the girl's testimony relating to the capture of Jesse Bream.

"Did this man, Jesse Bream, make a confession of his guilt as being the murderer of Stamford Tucker?"

"Yes, suh. And, furthermore, under oath, he told a mighty strange story of a happenin' that in itself might ha' hung Tom Strickland if anybody else had seen it and not known all the facts in the case, suh."

There was a quick stir of heightened dramatic expectancy in the court-room. Major Gentry Dryden paused until it had subsided.

"What was that strange story, Colonel Todhunter," he asked, "which, as you have just testified, the man, Jesse Bream, told you and the sheriff of Ralls County under oath?"

"He told me, suh, that Tom Strickland himself appeared on the scene of the murder almost the next moment. 'As I hollered to Stam Tucker, cussin' him, and tellin' him that I was a-goin' to kill him for havin' wronged Lottie-May,' said Chickasaw Jesse Bream, 'Stam Tucker drew his gun and fired just the minit I fired. My shot got him, but his'n

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didn't tech me. When I saw that he was a-layin' still, I ran up to his body, looked down and saw that I had plunked him through the head, right between the eyes, and that he was stone dead. Then I turned and started to run down the road to'ards the town of Nineveh.

" 'I hadn't gone any ways, hardly, when a man came to'ards me on that road. When he saw me he laughed—and the next minit he outs with his gun and fires at me. I was skeered, 'cause I didn't want to be recognized, and I turns and runs straight through the woods, lookin' back once or twice. And that man came to the edge of the woods and I heard him laugh, and then mutter like he was drunk and talkin' to himself—and then he deliberately turned back on the Black Bottoms road and went away to'ards town.' "

"Did Jesse Bream tell you and the sheriff of Ralls County, Colonel Todhunter, that he recognized the man whom he thus met after having killed Stamford Tucker?"

"He did, suh."

"What was that man's name?"

"It was Thomas W. Strickland, suh. Chickasaw



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Jesse Bream swears that he saw him plainly, and he takes his oath that it was Tom Strickland."

"Did Jesse Bream tell you what he did after that encounter, Colonel Todhunter?"

"Yes, suh. He says that he lay out in the woods for about an hour, and that then he went back on the road and came into town, and the next day he went to Oklahoma, not gettin' back here to Nineveh until the day before the trial began, suh."

There was a momentary pause.

"Colonel Todhunter," resumed Major Dryden quietly, "you say that the man, Jesse Bream, made these statements, confessing that he killed Stamford Tucker on the night of July twenty-sixth just past, and including the other facts you have just mentioned, to you and to the sheriff of Ralls County under oath?"

"Yes, suh, he did."

"Is there any record of this confession?"

"Yes, suh. The confession is written, sworn to and signed by Jesse Bream. It is attested by two competent witnesses. It is in the possession of the sheriff of Ralls County. And the sheriff of Ralls County has just delivered the person of Jesse Bream

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to the jail authorities here in Nineveh, suh, charging him, on his own confession, with the murder of Stamford Tucker."

"May it please the court," said Major Dryden "the defense will next place in evidence this sworn confession of Jesse Bream and ask that the case against Thomas W. Strickland, charged with the murder of Stamford Tucker, be dismissed."

There was a sudden and tensely dramatic stir through the crowded court-room. It was followed by a triumphant cheer from a group of Tom Strickland's friends near the door. The next instant the place rang with jubilant clamor, so overwhelming now was the certainty of Tom's innocence.

And twenty minutes later Thomas W. Strickland stood a free man, cleared of the dreadful crime that had been laid to his doing.

But Colonel Todhunter was not among those who first crowded around Tom Strickland with their congratulations. He went instead to where he had seen old Rafe Doggett almost furtively join Lottie-Ma sitting apart within the railed inclosure after having given her testimony. Alike upon the faces of the

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man and his granddaughter there rested an expression of pathetic dread.

"What air they a-goin' to do to my girl, Colonel Todhunter?" asked old Doggett piteously. "'Tain't all her fault that she done what she done, keepin' her mouth shet about Chickasaw Jesse, and then runnin' away with him. She wanted to tell all she knowed, but she was a-skeered for her life, Colonel Todhunter. I ain't excusin' her none for her own badness, God knows, but the law ain't got no call to punish her along o' Chickasaw Jesse's sin!"

"The law ain't goin' to punish her, Rafe," replied Colonel Todhunter. "I've already made sure just how Lottie-May stands. She'd ha' been an accomplice o' Chickasaw Jesse's, for not comin' here at first and tellin' what she knew, if the truth wasn't plain now that she didn't tell because Chickasaw Jesse threatened to kill her if she did. And her wantin' to testify in Tom Strickland's behalf, and doin' it like she did, proves that she was innocent just the minute she was a free agent. I've laid all these facts before the court, Rafe. The law ain't goin' to punish Lottie-May."

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Old Rafe Doggett bowed his white head as if in prayer.

"Thank the Lord God Almighty!" he spoke at last. "An' me and Lottie-May won't trouble Nineveh's folks after this day. I'm a-goin' away f'um here, Colonel Todhunter. I couldn't live here no more to save my life. An' Lottie-May's a-goin' with me—goin' somewhere away f'um here, where her mother's shame and hers won't be in ever'body's mouth like now in Nineveh."

"You can go any time you want to, Rafe," said Colonel Todhunter. "Th' ain't no charge against Lottie-May on the docket o' this court. You can go now, if you feel like it."

The old man and the young girl moved toward the door.

Colonel Todhunter accompanied them, screening both, as far as lay in his power, from the curious staring of the multitude.

Lottie-May spoke no word during their progress. Her face was still tense with the shadow of that dread but lately lifted from her soul. More than ever did she seem the Hagar of this little Missouri

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community—a Hagar now going into uttermost exile.

At the door she turned and looked back into the court-room. Her eyes rested upon Tom Strickland's face. Mary Todhunter stood at Tom's side. A great joy shone in her eyes. Tom's glance lingered with a deep fondness upon this girl whom he loved so dearly.

With a little cry of poignant heartbreak Lottie-May Doggett threw one arm across her grandfather's age-stooped shoulders, seeming to draw him and herself beyond the seeing of that which had so moved her to uncontrollable anguish.

The next moment the door had closed upon the two, shutting them out from Nineveh's vision.

## CHAPTER XXI

FOLLOWING A GREAT VICTORY, COLONEL TODHUNTER  
CONFRONTS DEFEAT

**D**URING a lull in the excited jubilation that followed Tom Strickland's acquittal, and having first congratulated Tom himself, Mrs. Todhunter turned to Colonel Strickland, who stood with her husband a few feet away, Colonel Todhunter having by this time joined the group.

"I feel sure you know how rejoiced I am that Tom has been acquitted," she said, her frank eyes testifying to the truth. "I have always loved him as if he was my own son. But I had to do what I did after that dreadful night of the party at the hotel. The accusation made against him by that girl Lottie-May Doggett, left me no alternative but to forbid him seeing Mary unless he could clear himself of the sin with which the girl herself charged him."

"I know just how you felt, Mrs. Todhunter," replied Colonel Strickland. "It was a terrible situation. Naturally, it hurt us all that Tom was ma-

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to appear guilty, but there was the cold fact that Lottie-May Doggett publicly declared him guilty, and it seemed incredible that she would do this if he was innocent. And I know now that you are sincerely glad because the truth has come out. You don't have to tell me anything about it, ma'am."

At this moment Mary herself, a great happiness shining in her face, although her eyes were wet with tears, joined the group. Colonel Strickland turned to her with a smile.

"I delivered that message of yours to Tom, Miss Mary," he said. "The message you gave me when he was in the jail. I just wish you could have seen how proud and happy it made him! He needed it mighty bad that day."

Mary blushed rose-red. "Please don't remind Tom of my message, Colonel Strickland!" she cried in a pretty confusion. "I'll be ashamed to look him in the face again if you do!"

"I don't see why you should be," laughed Colonel Strickland. "It just simply proved to Tom at a mighty welcome time that the young lady he loved so dearly loved him in return, so you ought to be proud of it instead of ashamed."

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And at this juncture Colonel Todhunter intervened. "Don't you let that Mary Todhunter fool you, Bill Strickland," he chuckled. "She's as proud of that there love-sick message to her sweetheart as such a romantic moment as if it was all in a sentimental story and she was the heroine of the story. And when she and Tom have gone and got married—well, between you and me and the gatepost, I bet poor Tom never hears the last of it!"

Mary blushed furiously as the others laughed.

"When she and Tom are married!" repeated Colonel Strickland, his eyes resting fondly on Mary's face. "Doesn't that sound good, though?"

Then he turned point-blank to Mrs. Todhunter. "When shall it be, Mrs. Todhunter?" he asked. "You and Miss Mary have got to be good now and name an early day! When shall it be?"

But at this alarming question Mary herself gave a little cry of maidenly protest, frantically clutched her mother's arm and fairly dragged Mrs. Todhunter out of range. Yet not with entire success for the latter turned a laughing face back to Colonel Strickland as she was thus convoyed away.

"Never you mind, Colonel Strickland!" she managed to say.



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fleeing answer. "I'm going to work hard for Tom! I ought to do it, and I will!"

Colonel Todhunter, with a parting word to his old friend, set out to join Mrs. Todhunter and Mary. But he had not gone twenty paces when he ran plump into Mr. and Mrs. Sim Birdsong and the redoubtable Mrs. Exall. Astonishing to relate, it was Mrs. Exall herself, her grim face transformed into a beaming visage of the utmost friendliness, who spoke first.

"You and me have just got to be friends, Colonel Todhunter!" she announced fervently. "There ain't no ifs, ands nor buts about it, after what you've done for poor Tom Strickland! I never was so scared for anybody in all my life as I was for him—and I tell you, Colonel Todhunter, the way you worked for his sake and learned all the truth and got him cleared and free was just too fine for anything! I'm sorry I raked you over the coals that way the night you come to my house and told me that Sim and Angelica had run away and got married!"

The Colonel's lips twitched. "I reckon I didn't get any more'n I deserved, Mrs. Exall," he made

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answer. "Anyway, it's all past and gone, and you was sorely tried that night. So th' ain't a-goin' to be no hard feelin's, ma'am. All's well that ends well."

"That's exactly what I say!" conceded Mrs. Exall vigorously. "Maybe Angelica could ha' done better'n to marry Sim, but I'll say this much for him—he's makin' her a good husband, and I reckon that's all I've got a right to ask."

"It certainly is, ma!" cried Angelica, who seemed to be plucking up courage as a wife. "Sim's just everything that he should be, and you know it!"

Sim Birdsong's face had beamed complacently even at Mrs. Exall's guarded indorsement of him. It fairly glowed at Angelica's tribute. And, when the little group had separated, he came back to Colonel Todhunter, radiant.

"It's all right, Colonel!" he said proudly. "We're just as happy as two birds in a nest, and as for Angelica's ma, why, suh, I wouldn't have believed without seein' it, that she could be so sweet! She a-goin' to be just like a second mother to me, Colonel—you mark my words!"

And the Colonel, shaking Sim's joyous hand, con-

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gratulated him in fitting terms. But he contemplated Mrs. Exall's martial back dubiously as her son-in-law rejoined her.

"It may be all right about that 'second mother' business," he muttered doubtfully. "But Sim's got to show me—I'm from Mizoorah!"

That same evening Colonel Todhunter went to confer with the Honorable William J. Strickland at his home concerning the latter's campaign prospects. The outlook was not encouraging.

"Bill," said Colonel Todhunter, "there's just one chance for us. Tom's acquittal may bring about a reaction of public sentiment in your favor, if two days is time enough for the news to sink in and create the natural effect. They'll all know of it—the St. Louis and Kansas City papers are full of the excitin' story of his sudden acquittal, and every other newspaper in the state will have a lot about it. That's where it may prove a boomerang for the Yancey gang—they worked up public interest in the case, thinkin' it would ruin you body and soul."

Colonel Strickland shook his head. "It's too late, Thurs," he replied. "I reckon I'll have to stay beat. But I ain't worrying about that. I want to hear

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now that my campaign fund has been raised, so as to put you out of danger of any loss."

The light of battle was in Colonel Todhunter's eyes.

"I'm thinkin' about your gettin' that there nomination, Bill Strickland!" he exclaimed. "Not about the money: Now that we got 'em beat in Tom's case, I'd like to whip 'em straight down the line, suh."

The other laughed, but shook his head, "They've got too big a bulge on us. Everything's fixed now to steal the St. Louis and Kansas City vote for old Steve Yancey, and that'll settle it. The judges and clerks of election are all Yancey crooks, appointed before Bob Peyton, the Yancey chairman of the Board of Election Commissioners in St. Louis, took sick and died and Randolph Carter was named to fill the vacancy, and the St. Louis and Kansas City vote is what's going to beat me."

Colonel Todhunter snorted indignantly. "A fight ain't over till one side or the other's licked, suh!" he announced. "And I ain't licked till I holler ' 'nuff,' suh! Th' ain't time now to do no more on the stump, but I'm a-goin' to send out a

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mighty big batch o' telegrams to our best workers all over the state and see if we can't make things count the way they ought to count. When I quit fightin' you'll either see the worst whipped man you ever saw in all your born days—or you'll be the Democratic nominee for governor of Mizzoorah, Bill Strickland!"

Colonel Strickland's weary eyes were contemplating the speaker with a whimsical envy in their expression.

"I-gad, Thurs!" he said, "I never thought I'd begrudge another man his pluck, but I'm doing that with you right now, my friend. I'm too tired to fight any longer, old fellow—that's the truth of it. The campaign's over, as far as I'm concerned. I don't want to hear anything more but the final results, and I'm going to write my friends in St. Louis not to bother sending me anything but that. The truth is, Thurs, this trouble of Tom's has taken something out of my spirit that don't seem to come back."

"It'll come back, Bill," said Colonel Todhunter stoutly. "And you've been standing the gaff like a gamecock, suh. You've done all a man in your po-

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sition could ha' done—and your friends will do whatever fightin' remains to be done. You just take it easy, suh!"

Tom Strickland entered the room. He looked pale and worn, but happy, and there was a steady manliness in his face.

"Mother's asking for you and Colonel Todhunter's father," he said. "She wants me to tell you that this isn't any time to be talking politics."

Colonel Todhunter laughed. "Ain't that just like a woman, Bill?" he asked. "And Mrs. Strickland for all she knows, on the very edge of becomin' the first lady of Mizzoorah, suh! I'll be hamjiggered—well, suh, I reckon the good Lord who made 'em understands 'em, but it's a blamed sight more'n I do. Not even Mrs. Todhunter, suh!"

He chuckled. Then he added, "Least of all, Mr. Todhunter, suh!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### MISSOURI SPEAKS AT THE POLLS

DICK CANTRILL, because the *Nineveh Blade* was Colonel Strickland's home organ, enterprisingly arranged for a bulletin service of election returns on the night of the primary vote, and Colonel Todhunter and the Honorable William J. Strickland were among the first to arrive at the *Blade* office that evening.

Dick himself, with Lycurgus Quivey as his assistant, was to handle the bulletins, the poet-schoolmaster's most arduous assignment being that of keeping the *Blade's* "devil" in swift action between the newspaper plant and the telegraph office across the street. There was a quite considerable gathering of *Nineveh* voters to hear what news might come, and much speculation as to the result was being voiced.

"What do you think about it now, Bill?" asked Colonel Todhunter as the candidate himself appeared on the scene.

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"Just the same as I've been saying right along here lately," replied Colonel Strickland quietly. "I'll go into Kansas City and St. Louis considerably ahead of Yancey, and I'd carry St. Louis on an honest count. Kansas City, being Steve Yancey's home, will roll up a big majority for him, even if they've got to give the penitentiary a close shave in doing it. Still, I'd stand a fighting chance if the St. Louis crooks didn't have a free hand—but they've got it, and that's what's going to cook my goose."

"Well, then, givin' 'em St. Louis and Kansas City both, what do you figure your plurality in the state'll have to be to overcome that?"

"I reckon they won't dare to count more'n ten thousand plurality for Yancey in St. Louis—it would be too plain a showing of crooked work if they did—and on that basis I'd need something like a twenty-five-thousand plurality in the state. Where am I going to get it?"

Colonel Todhunter looked dubious. "That certainly is saddlin' a mighty big contract on Mizoorah, to offset the crooked count in St. Louis. But I'll just be double-whipsawed if we won't fight



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'em to the last ditch, suh. No man's licked till he says so himself. Why, right on that point, suh, I knew an old fellow over yonder in Callaway that never got licked in his whole life—he died fightin' to his last breath, like a reg'lar old Davy Crockett, suh!"

The Honorable William J. Strickland smiled. "I'm not throwing up the sponge, either," he responded, "but the wisest way is to look facts straight in the face. If you don't you simply build a fool's paradise that'll make you feel all the worse if things don't turn out right."

Colonel Todhunter chuckled. "All the same," he commented, "I'm a-goin' to use my bricks, right down to the last one, buildin' a house that suits me, not one that suits the other fellow. 'Hope on, hope ever,' that's my motto—and the devil take the hindmost!"

"Here you are, folks!" called out Dick Cantrill. "The bulletins are beginning to come in!

"'Incomplete returns from fifty counties, including Kansas City and St. Joe, give Yancey 38,750; Strickland, 18,248; Judson, 17,416, and Sanford, 10,385.'"

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"Hooray for our side!" exclaimed Colonel Todhunter.

The others laughed.

"What are you hoorayin' about, Thurs?" drawled Colonel Strickland, amused. "Trying to keep your courage up?"

"No, suh, not by a blamed sight!" retorted Colonel Todhunter. "First news, bad news, that's what I'm hoorayin' about. It's always meant good luck, and it means good luck now, as sure as shootin'!"

A ripple of reassured laughter greeted this sally.

"Here we are again!" announced Dick Cantrill. "Jackson, Yancey's home county, gives him 5,000 votes, according to early returns, with less than 100 for his opponents!"

"That isn't so bad," commented Colonel Strickland, "if the later returns don't increase it."

"Greene, Buchanan and Vernon Counties," read Dick Cantrill, "'go for Yancey; also Andrew Cass, Cole, Daviss, Dunklin, Henry, Johnson, Livingston, Platte, Sullivan and Wright.'"

"Shucks!" scoffed Colonel Todhunter. "They've

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been conceded all along. The figgers—the figgers is what we'd like to get!"

Cantrill waved a new bulletin jubilantly.

"'Strickland's heavy lead,'" he read, "'is in Jasper, Callaway, Pike, Marion, Audrain and Laclede Counties. The following counties also go for Strickland: Berry, Barton, Bates, Butler, Camden, Clark, Franklin, Lewis, Lincoln, Macon, Moniteau, Phelps, Pulaski, Polk, Ripley, St. Francis, Ste. Genevieve, Saline, Shelby, Stoddart, Wayne and Webster.'"

"Yeow-wow!" yelled Sim Birdsong. "We've got 'em on the run!"

"Figgers is still what's needed, Sim," said Colonel Todhunter. "We've knowed them was our counties all the time—but by how much? That's the question."

"'Later returns,'" read Dick Cantrill, "'show Yancey leading in Kansas City, St. Joseph and in thirty-three counties by 18,307.'"

"Now we're gettin' down to it," spoke Colonel Strickland grimly. "Let's see—thirty-three counties—um-hum—and St. Joe—say, Thurs, according

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to these figures they're countin' up an all-fired heavy Yancey vote in Kansas City!"

"'St. Louis,'" read Editor Cantrill. "'Many disturbances reported at the polls. Reliable return on vote will be late. Police have made numerous arrests.'" "

Colonel Strickland looked worried. "Todhunter," he said, "the St. Louis gang's getting in its work for Yancey all right."

But Colonel Todhunter disdained this view. "I ain't so almighty sure; who knows but what that's a good sign for us?"

"The police can't reach crooked work done by judges and clerks of election," pointed out Colonel Strickland.

"Well," replied Colonel Todhunter, "they can prevent intimidation at the polls, anyway."

But even he had to join in the laugh that followed.

"'Partial returns from thirty-six rural counties,'" read Dick Cantrill, "'give Yancey plurality of 4,000.'" "

Then the bulletins began to come in swift succession. The *Blade's* editor read them breathlessly.

"'Returns from twenty-five counties, no figures,

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show Strickland leading in thirteen, Yancey in ten, and Judson in two.' "

"The following county pluralities for Yancey are reported: Nodaway, 500; Barton, 700; Jefferson, 200; St. Clair, 200; Linn, 400.' "

"The following county pluralities for Yancey are reported: Cooper, 50; Cole, 300; Buchanan, 1,500.' "

"Henry County's vote for Strickland, 1,063; Yancey, 629; Sanford, 534; Judson, 87.' "

"Country and small towns have gone for Strickland.' "

"Sixteen out of twenty-one precincts in Linn County give Strickland 517 plurality.' "

"Yancey leads in Adair County.' "

"Polk County gives Strickland 307 plurality.' "

"Clinton County goes for Strickland.' "

"Grundy County goes for Yancey.' "

"Close race in Pettis County.' "

"Jefferson City gives Yancey 692; Strickland, 287; Judson, 125; Sanford, 39.' "

"Ten precincts in Sullivan County, Yancey, 248; Strickland, 186; Sanford, 71; Judson, 19.' "

"Lafayette goes for Yancey.' "

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"It is now estimated, accepting Yancey's management's claim of 10,000 plurality in St. Louis that Yancey has a plurality of 15,742.' "

There was an ominous pause.

"Maybe that's so, and maybe it ain't," said Colonel Todhunter defiantly. "But we ain't acceptin' no Yancey claims at this stage of the game—no by a jugful!"

Returns with official figures now began to come in so rapidly that Colonel Strickland, keeping tabs with pencil and paper, made no reply.

Suddenly Dick Cantrill's voice, sounding a note of apprehension, rang out:

"'Kansas City gives Yancey a plurality of 12,093.' "

Dead silence followed the announcement.

Colonel Bill Strickland laid down the pencil with which he had been figuring.

"That settles it, gentlemen," he said, "we're done for."

"We ain't heard from St. Louis yet, Bill," suggested Colonel Todhunter.

"We don't need to wait for St. Louis," replied Colonel Strickland. "If they've counted up a 12,000

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plurality against me in Kansas City, they'll play the game to the limit in St. Louis, too. They're only holding St. Louis back to see what's needed. If necessary, they'll plug me with a 10,000 plurality there. I'm probably beaten by 18,000, the way things look now."

Again Dick Cantrill's voice sounded. "'It is now estimated that Yancey will carry the state by 19,000. His managers claim that he is nominated as the returns now stand.'"

Far down the street arose the sound of music and cheering.

Soon the strains of *There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night* were plainly distinguishable, brought nearer and nearer by a large marching body.

It was the Nineveh Bugle and Drum Corps, heading the Stephen K. Yancey Campaign Club, starting out on a triumphal parade to celebrate the victory of the Honorable Stephen K. Yancey over the Honorable William J. Strickland for the Democratic nomination for governor of Missouri.

Colonel Bill Strickland smiled grimly.

"Look pleasant, Thurston," he said. "Put on

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your sweetest expression. They'll be marching by here in a minute."

"I'll just be eternally condemned if I do!" retorted Colonel Todhunter. "I can take my medicine just as gracefully as the next man when I know it's comin' to me, but I'll be jim-swizzled if it's comin' to me yet. The cards has all got to be laid down on the table before I'll let any man take the pot suh!"

Colonel Strickland shook his head, smiling.

The next moment the vanguard of the approaching column came in sight. In another instant the Nineveh Bugle and Drum Corps and the Stephen K. Yancey Campaign Club, followed by a crowd of cheering Yanceyites, were swinging proudly past the *Blade* office.

"Hooray for Yancey!" the paraders shouted.

Colonel Todhunter, stiff as a grenadier, stood at the open door. His jaws were set hard as he confronted the triumphing foe. Suddenly a mocking voice sounded.

"We're sorry for poor old Bill Strickland!" cried. "But he never ought to ha' bucked up against Steve Yancey!"



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Colonel Todhunter's fighting blood leaped in his veins. "Who are you that's so sorry for Bill Strickland?" he asked. There was an ill omen in his level tone.

No reply came. But Colonel Todhunter identified the speaker by following the glances of his fellows in the line.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Jeff Harris?" he said. "You, that didn't know at first whether you was for Colonel Strickland or old Steve Yancey. Couldn't make up your mind till you saw which way it was most profitable for you to jump. Well, Jeff, your man ain't nominated yet. And, in the meanwhile, I wouldn't like nothin' better, you white-livered skunk, than to wipe up the ground under you—"

But at this critical moment Colonel Bill Strickland, laughing, pulled Colonel Todhunter back into the *Blade* office—and Jeff Harris passed on with the Yancey parade.

"You old firebrand, you!" the candidate sputtered, shaking with laughter. "What the blue blazes and Sam Hill do you want to let a thing like that ruffle you up for? I thought you had more sense!"

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"I've got sense enough, Bill," said Colonel Todhunter. "But all my life I've been ready to clench with any man that tried to mock me or my friends, thinkin' we was down and out—and I'll just be shot full o' holes if I ain't still ready!"

Dick Cantrill's voice interrupted. "Here's another bulletin!" he cried.

Then he read: "Returns from St. Louis just beginning to come in. It is now claimed that Strickland has carried that city. Yancey's managers are charging Randolph Carter, the newly appointed chairman of the Board of Election Commissioners, with unlawfully using his authority in Strickland's behalf. Last night Carter removed many judges and clerks of election, claiming to have proof that they had been appointed to insure Yancey's victory by fraud, and appointed others in their places. The Chief of Police is supporting him by giving the new appointees ample police protection at the polls. Many disturbances at polling places have resulted."

Colonel Todhunter's jubilant hand came down heavily on Colonel Strickland's shoulder.

"What did I tell you about Randolph Carter and



"What did I tell you about Randolph Carter?" Page 320



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old Chief Stacey, Bill?" he cried. "Didn't I say that I made old Ran feel ashamed of himself? And that Chief Stacey was white clear through and would use his policemen in favor of an honest vote if he got half a chance? Yes, suh! I was a-castin' my bread on the waters when I had that-there talk with them in St. Louis—and it's comin' back to us after these many days, you mark my words!"

There was a joyous cheer from his hearers.

But Colonel Todhunter himself held up a warning hand. "Don't be too previous, boys! Leave that sort of foolishness to the Yancey crowd that just went prancin' by here, if anything of that sort's got to be done. Wait for the figgers before you do any hollerin'!"

But Dick Cantrill gave another whoop, notwithstanding. "Here's another bulletin!" he cried. "It is now said that Strickland has a heavy plurality in St. Louis as a result of the honest count of votes cast. Yancey's managers are claiming fraud.'"

And then the "figgers" began to roll in. The returns from St. Louis by precincts and wards, until now delayed, were at last well in hand. Dick Can-

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trill read bulletin after bulletin in unbroken succession. Colonel Strickland, with lips compressed, tabulated the vote by wards. Once or twice he nodded significantly to Colonel Todhunter. At last there came a break in the steady stream of returns. Lycurgus Quivey grasped a bulletin from the hands of the *Blade's* "devil" as the latter rushed in breathless. He handed it to Cantrill.

The *Blade's* editor gave one swift comprehensive glance at the bulletin and excitedly hurled his hat high in the air with an unrestrained yell of exultation.

"'It is now conceded by Yancey's managers,'" he read, "'that Strickland has carried St. Louis by at least 11,000 plurality. With the returns now in from the state, this gives Strickland a total plurality of at least 3,000, with several Strickland counties still to hear from. A conservative estimate indicates that Strickland will be nominated by over 5,000 plurality.'"

Colonel Strickland laid down his pencil and leaned back in his chair.

"That's reliable," he said. "We've got 'em beat, boys. Anybody that feels like hooraying for Strick-

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land now has got my full permission. It's perfectly safe."

At this moment the little "printer's devil" of the *Blade* delivered a personal telegram to Colonel Strickland. As the latter read it an expression of the deepest relief and satisfaction sprang into his face.

"Thank God!" he muttered. "I wanted that special piece of news more than anything else in all this world. Here, Thurs, just you read this, my friend!"

Colonel Todhunter took the bit of paper from Colonel Strickland's hand. The message was signed by Governor Leslie. It read:

"Due to enthusiasm caused by Tom's acquittal and the public's realization of cowardly fight made on you through him, a popular movement to raise fund covering total deficit in Strickland campaign fund was begun to-day and successfully completed at our headquarters to-night. Every dollar needed has been subscribed and paid. Reliable election returns now all in show that you are nominated by nearly 6,000 plurality. Congratulations."

Colonel Strickland laughed as gleefully as a boy

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when Colonel Todhunter glanced up at him from the reading of the telegram.

"That settles it, Thurs!" he cried. "And by the Lord Harry, I'm gladder to know you're safe on the money end of this fight than to know I've been nominated. It's given me more than one sleepless night of worrying, I can tell you!"

"It hasn't made me lose a wink o' sleep," replied Colonel Todhunter calmly. "I know I ain't as religious a man as I ought to be, Bill Strickland, but I got an abidin' faith in the Good Marster up above, all the same. I ain't never doubted He'd see me safe through on that-there proposition. He knows the tricks o' that machine gang we're fightin' better'n we do, and He ain't a-goin' to let 'em prevail over us!"

Saying which, Colonel Todhunter read aloud that sentence of the telegram authoritatively announcing Colonel Strickland's nomination.

Dick Cantrill's loyal voice led the mighty cheer with which this announcement was greeted. Sim Birdsong's was second only to his. Colonel Todhunter, gulping just once after having read the proclamation of victory, did not join in the cheering.



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But, when Lycurgus Quivey came to him with outstretched hands, he took them in a close grip of his own, his dauntless old eyes showing just a hint of dampness.

"Colonel Todhunter," spoke Lycurgus, "I'm going to write a poem describing this great triumph after seeming defeat—it's the finest thing I ever saw in all my life!"

"Bully for you, Lycurgus!" replied Colonel Todhunter. "And I bet it'll be a rip-snortin' good poem, too—that one you wrote at the openin' of the campaign hit the target plumb center, suh!"

Then, amidst the general confusion, the colonel slipped out of the office through a rear door. The next moment, as if in response to a signal from him, a titantic crash of music was heard. Its first echoes had hardly died away when the Nineveh brass band, headed by Drum-Major Samson Meek, wheeled around the corner from where Colonel Todhunter had held it in reserve.

It came to a glorious halt in front of the *Blade* office, where Colonel Strickland stood, his head bared. The assembled crowd that had heard the election returns fell in line behind the band.

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There was a moment of expectant silence.

Colonel Todhunter faced the candidate. "Colonel Strickland," he said impressively, "I reckon you and me, suh, won't take no part in this-here demonstration, which is a-goin' to rub gall and wormwood into the raw places on the hides o' that-there Yancey gang that just went by here, but it's up to you to give the boys a send-off, suh. Yes, suh—they'd like to hear from their successful candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor of Mizזורah, suh!"

Colonel Bill Strickland was one of the most effective off-hand orators in all Missouri. He was profoundly moved by the sudden and totally unexpected change in his political fortunes. Colonel Todhunter's friendly voice, shaking just a little, touched him deeply with its significance of love and loyalty. The men waiting for him to speak were stanch friends to the last one. The little speech with which he answered Colonel Todhunter's appeal was a model of homely eloquence and utter sincerity.

A great and ringing cheer marked its close.

"Now, boys!" said Colonel Todhunter.

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Samson Meek, in all the glory of his full regalia as drum-major, gave his baton a splendid flourish in the air, and then brought it down in front of him with a magnificent sweep. It was an impressive signal.

And as it was given the Nineveh Brass Band smote the ear of night with a clamorous pæon of victory, the bass drum and the snares punctuating it with a compelling rhythm of irresistible time-beat. As one man the Strickland procession moved to its encounter with the Yancey parade. First behind the band itself marched Sim Birdsong, and second only to Sim was Lycurgus Quivey. Down the main street the jubilant procession swung, unwinding its length into a marching column with admirable military precision.

The Honorable William J. Strickland, with Colonel Todhunter by his side, watched the imposing line. As it neared a corner that would mean its turning and disappearance from view, the paraders sent back a rousing cheer.

Colonel Todhunter, one hand resting on Colonel Bill Strickland's shoulder, lifted his gray soft hat with the other and waved it above his head in re-

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sponse. Then, with a suspicious gulping of a sudden lump in his throat, he turned to his companion.

"Look here, Bill Strickland!" he said, almost indignantly. "It's high time we was gettin' home to our folks with all this good news! And let me tell you one thing, my friend, and that ain't two. You and me have got to get a heap more sleep'n we've been gettin' here lately if we mean to dance very sry at Mary's and Tom's weddin', suh!"

THE END

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