

A landscape photograph showing a wide, flat valley with low, rolling hills in the distance. The ground is covered in dry, brownish vegetation. The sky is filled with soft, white and grey clouds, with patches of blue visible. The overall scene is arid and expansive.

***HAMLIN
GARLAND***

***OTHER
MAIN-
TRAVELLED
ROADS***

A landscape photograph of a dry, hilly region under a cloudy sky. The terrain is arid with sparse vegetation. In the foreground, there are rolling hills and a valley. In the background, a prominent flat-topped mesa or plateau stretches across the horizon. The sky is filled with soft, white and grey clouds, with patches of blue visible.

***HAMLIN
GARLAND***

***OTHER
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TRAVELLED
ROADS***

Hamlin Garland

Other Main-Travelled Roads

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PREFACE

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Nearly all the stories in this volume were written at the same time and under the same impulse as those which compose its companion volume, *Main-Travelled Roads*—and the entire series was the result of a summer-vacation visit to my old home in Iowa, to my father's farm in Dakota, and, last of all, to my birthplace in Wisconsin. This happened in 1887. I was living at the time in Boston, and had not seen the West for several years, and my return to the scenes of my boyhood started me upon a series of stories delineative of farm and village life as I knew it and had lived it. I wrote busily during the two years that followed, and in this revised definitive edition of *Main-Travelled Roads* and its companion volume, *Other Main-Travelled Roads* (compiled from other volumes which now go out of print), the reader will find all of the short stories which came from my pen between 1887 and 1889.

It remains to say that, though conditions have changed somewhat since that time, yet for the hired man and the renter farm life in the West is still a stern round of drudgery. My pages present it—not as the summer boarder or the young lady novelist sees it—but as the working farmer endures it.

Not all the scenes of *Other Main-Travelled Roads* are of farm life, though rural subjects predominate; and the village life touched upon will be found less forbidding in color. In this I am persuaded my view is sound; for, no matter how hard the villager works, he is not lonely. He suffers in

company with his fellows. So much may be called a gain. Then, too, I admit youth and love are able to transform a bleak prairie town into a poem, and to make of a barbed-wire lane a highway of romance.

HAMLIN GARLAND.

WILLIAM BACON'S MAN

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I

The yellow March sun lay powerfully on the bare Iowa prairie, where the ploughed fields were already turning warm and brown, and only here and there in a corner or on the north side of the fence did the sullen drifts remain, and they were so dark and low that they hardly appeared to break the mellow brown of the fields.

There passed also an occasional flock of geese, cheerful harbingers of spring, and the prairie-chickens had set up their morning symphony, wide-swelling, wonderful with its prophecy of the new birth of grass and grain and the springing life of all breathing things. The crow passed now and then, uttering his resonant croak, but the crane had not yet sent forth his bugle note.

Lyman Gilman rested on his axe-helve at the woodpile of Farmer Bacon to listen to the music around him. In a vague way he was powerfully moved by it. He heard the hens singing their weird, raucous, monotonous song, and saw them burrowing in the dry chip-dust near him. He saw the young colts and cattle frisking in the sunny space around

the straw-stacks, absorbed through his bare arms and uncovered head the heat of the sun, and felt the soft wooing of the air so deeply that he broke into an unwonted exclamation:—

"Glory! we'll be seeding by Friday, sure."

This short and disappointing soliloquy was, after all, an expression of deep emotion. To the Western farmer the very word "seeding" is a poem. And these few words, coming from Lyman Gilman, meant more and expressed more than many a large and ambitious springtime song.

But the glory of all the slumbrous landscape, the stately beauty of the sky with its masses of fleecy vapor, were swept away by the sound of a girl's voice humming, "Come to the Saviour," while she bustled about the kitchen near by. The windows were open. Ah! what suggestion to these dwellers in a rigorous climate was in the first unsealing of the windows! How sweet it was to the pale and weary women after their long imprisonment!

As Lyman sat down on his maple log to hear better, a plump face appeared at the window, and a clear, girl-voice said:—

"Smell anything, Lime?"

He snuffed the air. "Cookies, by the great horn spoons!" he yelled, leaping up. "Bring me some, an' see me eat; it'll do ye good."

"Come an' get 'm," laughed the face at the window.

"Oh, it's nicer out here, Merry Etty. What's the rush? Bring me out some, an' set down on this log."

With a nod Marietta disappeared, and soon came out with a plate of cookies in one hand and a cup of milk in the

other.

"Poor little man, he's all tired out, ain't he?"

Lime, taking the cue, collapsed in a heap, and said feebly, "Bread, bread!"

"Won't milk an' cookies do as well?"

He brushed off the log and motioned her to sit down beside him, but she hesitated a little and colored a little.

"Oh, Lime, s'pose somebody should see us?"

"Let 'em. What in thunder do we care? Sit down an' gimme a holt o' them cakes. I'm just about done up. I couldn't 'a' stood it another minute."

She sat down beside him with a laugh and a pretty blush. She was in her apron, and the sleeves of her dress were rolled to her elbows, displaying the strong, round arms. Wholesome and sweet she looked and smelled, the scent of the cooking round her. Lyman munched a couple of the cookies and gulped a pint of milk before he spoke.

"Whadda we care who sees us sittin' side b' side? Ain't we goin' t' be married soon?"

"Oh, them cookies in the oven!" she shrieked, leaping up and running to the house. She looked back as she reached the kitchen door, however, and smiled with a flushed face. Lime slapped his knee and roared with laughter at his bold stroke.

"Ho! ho!" he laughed. "Didn't I do it slick? Ain't nothin' green in *my* eye, I guess." In an intense and pleasurable abstraction he finished the cookies and the milk. Then he yelled:—

"Hey! Merry—Merry Etty!"

"Whadda ye want?" sang the girl from the window, her face still rosy with confusion.

"Come out here and git these things."

The girl shook her head, with a laugh.

"Come out an' git 'm, 'r, by jingo, I'll throw 'em at ye! Come on, now!"

The girl looked at the huge, handsome fellow, the sun falling on his golden hair and beard, and came slowly out to him—came creeping along with her hand outstretched for the plate which Lime, with a laugh in his sunny blue eyes, extended at the full length of his bare arm. The girl made a snatch at it, but his left hand caught her by the wrist, and away went cup and plate as he drew her to him and kissed her in spite of her struggles.

"My! ain't you strong!" she said, half ruefully and half admiringly, as she shrugged her shoulders. "If you'd use a little more o' *that* choppin' wood, Dad wouldn't 'a' lost s' much money by yeh."

Lime grew grave.

"There's the hog in the fence, Merry; what's yer dad goin' t' say—"

"About what?"

"About our gitt'n married this spring."

"I guess you'd better find out what *I'm* a-goin' t' say, Lime Gilman, 'fore you pitch into Dad."

"I *know* what you're a-goin' t' say."

"No, y' don't."

"Yes, but I *do*, though."

"Well, ask me, and see, if you think you're so smart. Jest as like 's not, you'll slip up."

"All right; here goes. Marietty Bacon, ain't you an' Lime Gilman goin' t' be married?"

"No, sir, we ain't," laughed the girl, snatching up the plate and darting away to the house, where she struck up "Weevily Wheat," and went busily on about her cooking. Lime threw a kiss at her, and fell to work on his log with startling energy.

Lyman looked forward to his interview with the old man with as much trepidation as he had ever known, though commonly he had little fear of anything—but a girl.

Marietta was not only the old man's only child, but his housekeeper, his wife having at last succumbed to the ferocious toil of the farm. It was reasonable to suppose, therefore, that he would surrender his claim on the girl reluctantly. Rough as he was, he loved Marietta strongly, and would find it exceedingly hard to get along without her.

Lyman mused on these things as he drove the gleaming axe into the huge maple logs. He was something more than the usual hired man, being a lumberman from the Wisconsin pineries, where he had sold out his interest in a camp not three weeks before the day he began work for Bacon. He had a nice "little wad o' money" when he left the camp and started for La Crosse, but he had been robbed in his hotel the first night in the city, and was left nearly penniless. It was a great blow to him, for, as he said, every cent of that money "stood fer hard knocks an' poor feed. When I smelt of it I could jest see the cold, frosty mornin's and the late nights. I could feel the hot sun on my back like it was when I worked in the harvest-field. By jingo! It kind o' made my toes curl up."

But he went resolutely out to work again, and here he was chopping wood in old man Bacon's yard, thinking busily on the talk which had just passed between Marietta and himself.

"By jingo!" he said all at once, stopping short, with the axe on his shoulder. "If I hadn't 'a' been robbed I wouldn't 'a' come here—I never'd met Merry. Thunder and jimson root! Wasn't that a narrow escape?"

And then he laughed so heartily that the girl looked out of the window again to see what in the world he was doing. He had his hat in his hand and was whacking his thigh with it.

"Lyman Gilman, what in the world ails you to-day? It's perfectly ridiculous the way you yell and talk t' y'rself out there on the chips. You beat the hens, I declare if you don't."

Lime put on his hat and walked up to the window, and, resting his great bare arms on the sill, and his chin on his arms, said:—

"Merry, I'm goin' to tackle 'Dad' this afternoon. He'll be sittin' up the new seeder, and I'm goin' t' climb right on the back of his neck. He's jest *got* t' give me a chance."

Marietta looked sober in sympathy.

"Well! P'raps it's best to have it over with, Lime, but someway I feel kind o' scary about it."

Lime stood for a long time looking in at the window, watching the light-footed girl as she set the table in the middle of the sun-lighted kitchen floor. The kettle hissed, the meat sizzled, sending up a delicious odor; a hen stood in the open door and sang a sort of cheery half-human song, while

to and fro moved the sweet-faced, lithe, and powerful girl, followed by the smiling eyes at the window.

"Merry, you look purty as a picture. You look just like the wife I be'n a-huntin' for all these years, sure's shootin'."

Marietta colored with pleasure.

"Does Dad pay you to stand an' look at me an' say pretty things t' the cook?"

"No, he don't. But I'm willin' t' do it without pay. I could just stand here till kingdom come an' look at you. Hello! I hear a wagon. I guess I better hump into that woodpile."

"I think so too. Dinner's most ready, and Dad 'll be here soon."

Lime was driving away furiously at a tough elm log when Farmer Bacon drove into the yard with a new seeder in his wagon. Lime whacked away busily while Bacon stabled the team, and in a short time Marietta called, in a long-drawn, musical fashion:—

"Dinner-r-r!"

After sozzling their faces at the well the two men went in and sat down at the table. Bacon was not much of a talker at any time, and at meal-time, in seeding, eating was the main business in hand; therefore the meal was a silent one, Marietta and Lime not caring to talk on general topics. The hour was an anxious one for her, and an important one for him.

"Wal, now, Lime, seedun' 's the nex' thing," said Bacon, as he shoved back his chair and glared around from under his bushy eyebrows. "We can't do too much this afternoon. That seeder's got t' be set up an' a lot o' seed-wheat cleaned up. You unload the machine while I feed the pigs."

Lime sat still till the old man was heard outside calling "Oo-ee, poo-ee" to the pigs in the yard; then he smiled at Marietta, but she said:—

"He's got on one of his fits, Lime; I don't b'lieve you'd better tackle him t'-day."

"Don't you worry; I'll fix him. Come, now, give me a kiss."

"Why, you great thing! You—took—"

"I know, but I want you to *give* 'em to me. Just walk right up to me an' give me a smack t' bind the bargain."

"I ain't made any bargain," laughed the girl. Then, feeling the force of his tender tone, she added: "Will you behave, and go right off to your work?"

"Jest like a little man—hope t' die!"

"*Lime!*" roared the old man from the barn.

"Hello!" replied Lime, grinning joyously and winking at the girl, as much as to say, "This would paralyze the old man if he saw it."

He went out to the shed where Bacon was at work, as serene as if he had not a fearful task on hand. He was apprehensive that the father might "gig back" unless rightly approached, and so he awaited a good opportunity.

The right moment seemed to present itself along about the middle of the afternoon. Bacon was down on the ground under the machine, tightening some burrs. This was a good chance for two reasons. In the first place, the keen, almost savage eyes were no longer where they could glare on him, and in spite of his cool exterior Lime had just as soon not have the old man looking at him.

Besides, the old farmer had been telling about his "river eighty," which was without a tenant; the man who had

taken it, having lost his wife, had grown disheartened and had given it up.

"It's an almighty good chance for a man with a small family. Good house an' barn, good land. A likely young feller with a team an' a woman could do tiptop on that eighty. If he wanted more, I'd let him have an eighty j'inun'—"

"I'd like t' try that m'self," said Lime, as a feeler. The old fellow said nothing in reply for a moment.

"Ef you had a team an' tools an' a woman, I'd jest as lief you'd have it as anybody."

"Sell me your blacks, and I'll pay half down—the balance in the fall. I can pick up some tools, and as for a woman, Merry Etty an' me have talked that over to-day. She's ready to—ready to marry me whenever you say go."

There was an ominous silence under the seeder, as if the father could not believe his ears.

"What's—what's that!" he stuttered. "Who'd you say? What about Merry Etty?"

"She's agreed to marry me."

"The hell you say!" roared Bacon, as the truth burst upon him. "So that's what you do when I go off to town and leave you to chop wood. So you're goun' to git married, hey?"

He was now where Lime could see him, glaring up into his smiling blue eyes. Lime stood his ground.

"Yes, sir. That's the calculation."

"Well, I guess I'll have somethin' t' say about that," said Bacon, nodding his head violently.

"I rather expected y' would. Blaze away. Your privilege—my bad luck. Sail in ol' man. What's y'r objection to me fer a son-in-law?"

"Don't you worry, young feller. I'll come at it soon enough," went on Bacon, as he turned up another burr in a very awkward corner. In his nervous excitement the wrench slipped, banging his knuckle.

"Ouch! Thunder—m-m-m!" howled and snarled the wounded man.

"What's the matter? Bark y'r knuckle?" queried Lime, feeling a mighty impulse to laugh. But when he saw the old savage straighten up and glare at him he sobered. Bacon was now in a frightful temper. The veins in his great, bare, weather-beaten neck swelled dangerously.

"Jest let me say right here that I've had enough o' you. You can't live on the same acre with my girl another day."

"What makes ye think I can't?" It was now the young man's turn to draw himself up, and as he faced the old man, his arms folded and each vast hand grasping an elbow, he looked like a statue of red granite, and the hands resembled the paws of a crouching lion; but his eyes smiled.

"I don't *think*, I know ye won't."

"What's the objection to me?"

"Objection? Hell! What's the inducement? My hired man, an' not three shirts to yer back!"

"That's another; I've got four. Say, old man, did you ever work out for a living?"

"That's none o' your business," growled Bacon a little taken down. "I've worked an' scraped, an' got t'gether a little prop'ty here, an' they ain't no sucker like you goun' to come 'long here, an' live off me, an' spend my prop'ty after I'm dead. You can jest bet high on that."

"Who's goin' t' live on ye?"

"You're aimun' to."

"I ain't, neither."

"Yes, y'are. You've loafed on me ever since I hired ye."

"That's a—" Lime checked himself for Marietta's sake, and the enraged father went on:—

"I hired ye t' cut wood, an' you've gone an' fooled my daughter away from me. Now you just figger up what I owe ye, and git out o' here. Ye can't go too soon t' suit *me*."

Bacon was renowned as the hardest man to handle in Cedar County, and though he was getting old, he was still a terror to his neighbors when roused. He was honest, temperate, and a good neighbor until something carried him off his balance; then he became as cruel as a panther and as savage as a grisly. All this Lime knew, but it did not keep his anger down so much as did the thought of Marietta. His silence infuriated Bacon, who yelled hoarsely:—

"Git out o' this!"

"Don't be in a rush, ol' man—"

Bacon hurled himself upon Lime, who threw out one hand and stopped him, while he said in a low voice:—

"Stay right where you are, ol' man. I'm dangerous. It's for Merry's sake—"

The infuriated old man struck at him. Lime warded off the blow, and with a sudden wrench and twist threw him to the ground with frightful force. Before Bacon could rise, Marietta, who had witnessed the scene, came flying from the house.

"Lime! Father! What are you doing?"

"I—couldn't help it, Merry. It was him 'r me," said Lime, almost sadly.

"Dad, ain't you got no sense? What 're you thinking of? You jest stop right now. I won't have it."

He rose while she clung to him; he seemed a little dazed. It was the first time he had ever been thrown, and he could not but feel a certain respect for his opponent, but he could not give way.

"Pack up yer duds," he snarled, "an' git off'n my land. I'll have the money fer ye when ye come back. I'll give ye jest five minutes to git clear o' here. Merry, you stay here."

The young man saw it was useless to remain, as it would only excite the old man; and so, with a look of apology, not without humor, at Marietta, he went to the house to get his valise. The girl wept silently while the father raged up and down. His mood frightened her.

"I thought ye had more sense than t' take up with such a dirty houn'."

"He ain't a houn'," she blazed forth, "and he's just as good and clean as you are."

"Shut up! Don't let me hear another word out o' your head. I'm boss here yet, I reckon."

Lime came out with his valise in his hand.

"Good-by, Merry," he said cheerily. She started to go to him, but her father's rough grasp held her.

"Set *down*, an' stay there."

Lime was going out of the gate.

"Here! Come and get y'r money," yelled the old man, extending some bills. "Here's twenty—"

"Go to thunder with your money," retorted Lime. "I've had my pay for my month's work." As he said that, he thought of the sunny kitchen and the merry girl, and his

throat choked. Good-by to the sweet girl whose smile was so much to him, and to the happy noons and nights her eyes had made for him. He waved his hat at her as he stood in the open gate, and the sun lighted his handsome head into a sort of glory in her eyes. Then he turned and walked rapidly off down the road, not looking back.

The girl, when she could no longer see him, dashed away, and, sobbing violently, entered the house.

II

There was just a suspicion of light in the east, a mere hint of a glow, when Lyman walked cautiously around the corner of the house and tapped at Marietta's window. She was sleeping soundly and did not hear, for she had been restless during the first part of the night. He tapped again, and the girl woke without knowing what woke her.

Lyman put the blade of his pocket-knife under the window and raised it a little, and then placed his lips to the crack, and spoke in a sepulchral tone, half groan, half whisper:—

"Merry! Merry Etty!"

The dazed girl sat up in bed and listened, while her heart almost stood still.

"Merry, it's me—Lime. Come to the winder." The girl hesitated, and Lyman spoke again.

"Come, I hain't got much time. This is your last chance t' see me. It's now 'r never."

The girl slipped out of bed, and, wrapping herself in a shawl, crept to the window.

"Boost on that winder," commanded Lyman. She raised it enough to admit his head, which came just above the sill; then she knelt on the floor by the window.

Her eyes stared wide and dark.

"Lime, what in the world do you mean—"

"I mean business," he replied. "I ain't no last year's chicken; I know when the old man sleeps the soundest." He chuckled pleasantly.

"How 'd y' fool old Rove?"

"Never mind about that now; they's something more important on hand. You've got t' go with me."

She drew back, "Oh, Lime, I can't!"

He thrust a great arm in and caught her by the wrist.

"Yes, y' can. This is y'r last chance. If I go off without ye t'night, I never come back. What makes ye gig back? Are ye 'fraid o' me?"

"N-no; but—but—"

"But what, Merry Etty?"

"It ain't right to go an' leave Dad all alone. Where y' goin' t' take me, anyhow?"

"Milt Jennings let me have his horse an' buggy; they're down the road a piece, an' we'll go right down to Rock River and be married by sun-up."

The girl still hesitated, her firm, boyish will unwontedly befogged. Resolute as she was, she could not at once accede to his demand.

"Come, make up your mind soon. The old man 'll fill me with buck-shot if he catches sight o' me." He drew her arm out of the window and laid his bearded cheek to it. "Come,

little one, we're made for each other; God knows it. Come! It's him 'r me."

The girl's head dropped, consented.

"That's right! Now a kiss to bind the bargain. There! What, cryin'? No more o' that, little one. Now I'll give you jest five minutes to git on your Sunday-go-t'-meetin' clo'es. Quick, there goes a rooster. It's gittin' white in the east."

The man turned his back to the window and gazed at the western sky with a wealth of unuttered and unutterable exultation in his heart. Far off a rooster gave a long, clear blast—would it be answered in the barn? Yes; some wakeful ear had caught it, and now the answer came faint, muffled, and drowsy. The dog at his feet whined uneasily as if suspecting something wrong. The wind from the south was full of the wonderful odor of springing grass, warm, brown earth, and oozing sap. Overhead, to the west, the stars were shining in the cloudless sky, dimmed a little in brightness by the faint silvery veil of moisture in the air. The man's soul grew very tender as he stood waiting for his bride. He was rough, illiterate, yet there was something fine about him after all, a kind of simplicity and a gigantic, leonine tenderness.

He heard his sweetheart moving about inside, and mused: "The old man won't hold out when he finds we're married. He can't get along without her. If he does, why, I'll rent a farm here, and we'll go to work housekeepin'. I can git the money. She shan't always be poor," he ended, and the thought was a vow.

The window was raised again, and the girl's voice was heard low and tremulous:—

"Lime, I'm ready, but I wish we didn't—"

He put his arm around her waist and helped her out, and did not put her down till they reached the road. She was completely dressed, even to her hat and shoes, but she mourned:—

"My hair is every-which-way; Lime, how can I be married so?"

They were nearing the horse and buggy now, and Lime laughed. "Oh, we'll stop at Jennings's and fix up. Milt knows what's up, and has told his mother by this time. So just laugh as jolly as you can."

Soon they were in the buggy, the impatient horse swung into the road at a rattling pace, and as Marietta leaned back in the seat, thinking of what she had done, she cried lamentably, in spite of all the caresses and pleadings of her lover.

But the sun burst up from the plain, the prairie-chickens took up their mighty chorus on the hills, robins met them on the way, flocks of wild geese, honking cheerily, drove far overhead toward the north, and, with these sounds of a golden spring day in her ears, the bride grew cheerful, and laughed.



At about the time the sun was rising, Farmer Bacon, roused from his sleep by the crowing of the chickens on the dry knolls in the fields as well as by those in the barn-yard, rolled out of bed wearily, wondering why he should feel so drowsy. Then he remembered the row with Lime and his subsequent inability to sleep with thinking over it. There

was a dull pain in his breast, which made him uncomfortable.

As was his usual custom, he went out into the kitchen and built the fire for Marietta, filled the tea-kettle with water, and filled the water-bucket in the sink. Then he went to her bedroom door and knocked with his knuckles as he had done for years in precisely the same fashion.

Rap—rap—rap. "Hello, Merry! Time t' git up. Broad daylight, an' birds asingun.'"

Without waiting for an answer he went out to the barn and worked away at his chores. He took such delight in the glorious morning and the turbulent life of the farmyard that his heart grew light and he hummed a tune which sounded like the merry growl of a lion. "Poo-ee, poo-ee," he called to the pigs as they swarmed across the yard.

"Ahrr! you big, fat rascals, them hams o' yourn is clear money. One of ye shall go t' buy Merry a new dress," he said as he glanced at the house and saw the smoke pouring out the stovepipe. "Merry's a good girl; she's stood by her old pap when other girls 'u'd 'a' gone back on 'im."

While currying horses he went all over the ground of the quarrel yesterday, and he began to see it in a different light. He began to see that Lyman was a good man and an able man, and that his own course was a foolish one.

"When I git mad," he confessed to himself, "I don't know any thin'. But I won't give her up. She ain't old 'nough t' marry yet—and, besides, I need her."

After finishing his chores, as usual, he went to the well and washed his face and hands, then entered the kitchen—

to find the tea-kettle boiling over, and no signs of breakfast anywhere, and no sign of the girl.

"Well, I guess she felt sleepy this mornin'. Poor gal! Mebbe she cried half the night."

"Merry!" he called gently, at the door.

"Merry, m' gal! Pap needs his breakfast."

There was no reply, and the old man's face stiffened into a wild surprise. He knocked heavily again and got no reply, and, with a white face and shaking hand, he flung the door open and gazed at the empty bed. His hand dropped to his side; his head turned slowly from the bed to the open window; he rushed forward and looked out on the ground, where he saw the tracks of a man.

He fell heavily into the chair by the bed, while a deep groan broke from his stiff and twitching lips.

"She's left me! She's left me!"

For a long half-hour the iron-muscled old man sat there motionless, hearing not the songs of the hens or the birds far out in the brilliant sunshine. He had lost sight of his farm, his day's work, and felt no hunger for food. He did not doubt that her going was final. He felt that she was gone from him forever. If she ever came back it would not be as his daughter, but as the wife of Gilman. She had deserted him, fled in the night like a thief; his heart began to harden again, and he rose stiffly. His native stubbornness began to assert itself, the first great shock over, and he went out to the kitchen, and prepared, as best he could, a breakfast, and sat down to it. In some way his appetite failed him, and he fell to thinking over his past life, of the death of his wife, and the early death of his only boy. He was still trying to

think what his life would be in the future without his girl, when two carriages drove into the yard. It was about the middle of the forenoon, and the prairie-chickens had ceased to boom and squawk; in fact, that was why he knew, for he had been sitting two hours at the table. Before he could rise he heard swift feet and a merry voice and Marietta burst through the door.

"Hello, Pap! How you makin' out with break—" She saw a look on his face that went to her heart like a knife. She saw a lonely and deserted old man sitting at his cold and cheerless breakfast, and with a remorseful cry she ran across the floor and took him in her arms, kissing him again and again, while Mr. John Jennings and his wife stood in the door.

"Poor ol' Pap! Merry couldn't leave you. She's come back to stay as long as he lives."

The old man remained cold and stern. His deep voice had a relentless note in it as he pushed her away from him, noticing no one else.

"But how do you come back t' me?"

The girl grew rosy, but she stood proudly up.

"I come back the wife of a *man*, Pap; a wife like my mother, an' this t' hang beside hers;" and she laid down a rolled piece of parchment.

"Take it an' go," growled he; "take yer lazy lubber an' git out o' my sight. I raised ye, took keer o' ye when ye was little, sent ye t' school, bought ye dresses,—done everythin' fer ye I could, 'lowin' t' have ye stand by me when I got old,—but no, ye must go back on yer ol' pap, an' go off in the night with a good-f'r-nothin' houn' that nobuddy knows

anything about—a feller that never done a thing fer ye in the world—"

"What did you do for mother that she left *her* father and mother and went with you? How much did you have when you took her away from her good home an' brought her away out here among the wolves an' Indians? I've heard you an' her say a hundred times that you didn't have a chair in the house. Now, why do you talk so t' me when I want t' git—when Lime comes and asks for me?"

The old man was staggered. He looked at the smiling face of John Jennings and the tearful eyes of Mrs. Jennings, who had returned with Lyman. But his heart hardened again as he caught sight of Lime looking in at him. His absurd pride would not let him relent. Lime saw it, and stepped forward.

"Ol' man, I want t' take a little inning now. I'm a fair, square man. I asked ye fer Merry as a man should. I told you I'd had hard luck, when I first came here. I had five thousand dollars in clean cash stole from me. I hain't got a thing now except credit, but that's good fer enough t' stock a little farm with. Now, I wan' to be fair and square in this thing. You wan' to rent a farm; I need one. Let me have the river eighty, or I'll take the whole business on a share of a third, an' Merry Etty and I to stay here with you jest as if nothin' 'd happened. Come, now, what d' y' say?"

There was something winning in the sturdy bearing of the man as he stood before the father, who remained silent and grim.

"Or if you don't do that, why, there's nothin' left fer Merry an' me but to go back to La Crosse, where I can have my

choice of a dozen farms. Now this is the way things is standin'. I don't want to be underhanded about this thing—"

"That's a fair offer," said Mr. Jennings in the pause which followed. "You'd better do it, neighbor Bacon. Nobuddy need know how things stood; they were married in my house—I thought that would be best. You can't live without your girl," he went on, "any more 'n I could without my boy. You'd better—"

The figure at the table straightened up. Under his tufted eyebrows his keen gray eyes flashed from one to the other. His hands knotted.

"Go slow!" went on the smooth voice of Jennings, known all the country through as a peacemaker. "Take time t' think it over. Stand out, an' you'll live here alone without chick 'r child; give in, and this house 'll bubble over with noise and young ones. Now is short, and forever's a long time to feel sorry in."

The old man at the table knitted his eyebrows, and a distorted, quivering, ghastly smile broke out on his face. His chest heaved; then he burst forth:—

"Gal, yank them gloves off, an' git me something to eat—breakfus 'r dinner, I don't care which. Lime, you infernal idiot, git out there and gear up them horses. What in thunder you foolun' round about hyere in seed'n'? Come, hustle, all o' ye!"

And they all shouted in laughter, while the old man strode unsteadily but resolutely out toward the barn, followed by the bridegroom, who was still laughing—but silently.

ELDER PILL, PREACHER

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Old man Bacon was pinching forked barbs on a wire fence one rainy day in July, when his neighbor Jennings came along the road on his way to town. Jennings never went to town except when it rained too hard to work outdoors, his neighbors said; and of old man Bacon it was said he *never* rested *nights* nor Sundays.

Jennings pulled up. "Good morning, neighbor Bacon."

"Mornin'," rumbled the old man without looking up.

"Taking it easy, as usual, I see. Think it's going to clear up?"

"May, an' may not. Don't make much differunce t' me," growled Bacon, discouragingly.

"Heard about the plan for a church?"

"Naw."

"Well, we're goin' to hire Elder Pill from Douglass to come over and preach every Sunday afternoon at the schoolhouse, an' we want help t' pay him—the laborer is worthy of his hire."

"Sometimes he is an' then agin he ain't. Y' needn't look t' me f'r a dollar. I ain't got no intrust in y'r church."

"Oh, yes, you have—besides, y'r sister—"

"She ain't got no more time 'n I have t' go t' church. We're obleeged to do 'bout all we c'n stand t' pay our debts, let alone tryun' to support a preacher." And the old man shut the pinchers up on a barb with a vicious grip.

Easy-going Mr. Jennings laughed in his silent way. "I guess you'll help when the time comes," he said, and, clucking to his team, drove off.

"I guess I won't," muttered the grizzled old giant as he went on with his work. Bacon was what is called land poor in the West, that is, he had more land than money; still he was able to give if he felt disposed. It remains to say that he was *not* disposed, being a sceptic and a scoffer. It angered him to have Jennings predict so confidently that he would help.

The sun was striking redly through a rift in the clouds, about three o'clock in the afternoon, when he saw a man coming up the lane, walking: on the grass at the side of the road, and whistling merrily. The old man looked at him from under his huge eyebrows with some curiosity. As he drew near, the pedestrian ceased to whistle, and, just as the farmer expected him to pass, he stopped and said, in a free and easy style:—

"How de do? Give me a chaw t'baccer. I'm Pill, the new minister. I take fine-cut when I can get it," he said, as Bacon put his hand into his pocket. "Much obliged. How goes it?"

"Tollable, tollable," said the astounded farmer, looking hard at Pill as he flung a handful of tobacco into his mouth.

"Yes, I'm the new minister sent around here to keep you fellows in the traces and out of hell-fire. Have y' fled from the wrath?" he asked, in a perfunctory way.

"You are, eh?" said Bacon, referring back to his profession.

"I am, just! How do you like that style of barb fence? Ain't the twisted wire better?"

"I s'pose they be, but they cost more."

"Yes, costs more to go to heaven than to hell. You'll think so after I board with you a week. Narrow the road that leads to light, and broad the way that leads—how's your soul anyway, brother?"

"Soul's all right. I find more trouble to keep m' body go'n."

"Give us your hand; so do I. All the same we must prepare for the next world. We're gettin' old; lay not up your treasures where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal."

Bacon was thoroughly interested in the preacher, and was studying him carefully. He was tall, straight, and superbly proportioned; broad-shouldered, wide-lunged, and thewed like a Chippewa. His rather small steel-blue eyes twinkled, and his shrewd face and small head, set well back, completed a remarkable figure. He wore his reddish beard in the usual way of Western clergymen, with mustache chopped close.

Bacon spoke slowly:—

"You look like a good, husky man to pitch in the barnyard; you've too much muscle f'r preachun'."

"Come and hear me next Sunday, and if you say so then, I'll quit," replied Mr. Pill, quietly. "I give ye my word for it. I believe in preachers havin' a little of the flesh and the devil; they can sympathize better with the rest of ye." The sarcasm was lost on Bacon, who continued to look at him. Suddenly he said, as if with an involuntary determination:—

"Where ye go'n' to stay t'night?"

"I don't know; do you?" was the quick reply.

"I reckon ye can hang out with me, 'f ye feel like ut. We ain't very purty, at our house, but we eat. You go along down the road and tell 'em I sent yeh. Ye'll find an' ol' dusty Bible round some'rs—I s'pose ye spend y'r spare time read'n' about Joshua an' Dan'l—"

"I spend more time reading men. Well, I'm off! I'm hungrier 'n a gray wolf in a bear-trap." And off he went as he came. But he did not whistle; he chewed.

Bacon felt as if he had made too much of a concession, and had a strong inclination to shout after him, and retract his invitation; but he did not, only worked on, with an occasional bear-like grin. There was something captivating in this fellow's free and easy way.

When he came up to the house an hour or two later, in singular good humor for him, he found the Elder in the creamery, with his niece Eldora, who was not more won by him than was his sister Jane Buttles, he was so genial and put on so few religious frills.

Mrs. Buttles never put on frills of any kind. She was a most frightful toiler, only excelled (if excelled at all) by her brother. Unlovely at her best, when about her work in her faded calico gown and flat shoes, hair wisped into a slovenly knot, she was depressing. But she was a good woman, of sterling integrity, and ambitious for her girl. She was very glad of the chance to take charge of her brother's household after Marietta married.

Eldora was as attractive as her mother was depressing. She was very young at this time and had the physical perfection—at least as regards body—that her parents must have had in youth. She was above the average height of