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The Manager of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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much admired Miss Poppeton. From the crown of her small dark head, with its tightly braided "pig-tails" down to her trim little foot he had esteemed her as wholly adorable; but, after all, his affair of the heart had been an affair of the winter only. With the coming of summer he had found more serious things to think of. He was learning to swim and to chew tobacco. The mastering of these accomplishments pretty well occupied his time.

"Say," he repeated, "got another?" Still Clarence blinked at the fierce sunlight which danced on the rails and said nothing. Spide slid skillfully down from his perch, but his manner had undergone a change.

"Who thought that snipe away anyhow?" he asked disdainfully. Clarence turned his eyes slowly in his direction. "Look here. You fellows got to keep out of these yards or I'll tell McClintock. First we know some of you kids will be getting run over, and then your folks will set up a lively howl. Get on out! It ain't no place for little boys!"

He put the cigarette between his lips and took a deep and tantalizing pull at it. Spide kept to his own side of the ditch that ran between the fence and the tracks.

"Fuh!" with infinite scorn. "Who's a kid? You won't be happy till I come over there and lick you!" "First thing I know you'll be stealing scrap iron!"

"My gosh! The Huckleberry 'd have to stop running if I swiped a coupling pin!" Clarence had recourse to the cigarette, and again Spide was consumed with torturing jealousies. "Where did you shoot that snipe anyhow?" he inquired insultingly.

Once more Clarence allowed his glance to stray off up the tracks. "For half a cent 'd come across and do what I say," added Spide, stooping down to roll up his trousers leg and then casting an unelastic "gallows" that cut his shoulders. This elicited a short and contemptuous grunt from Clarence. He was well pleased with himself. He felt Spide's envy. It was sweet and satisfying.

"Say!" with sudden animation. "You fellows will be going around on your uppers in a day or so. I'll bet you'd give a heap to know what I know!" "I wouldn't give a darned cent to know all you know or ever will know!" retorted Clarence promptly.

"Some people's easily upset here in the cupola," tapping his brimless covering. "I wouldn't want to give you brain fever. I don't hate you bad enough."

"Well, move on. You ain't wanted around here. It may get me into trouble if I'm seen fooling away my time on you."

"I hope it will," remarked Branyon's boy, Augustus, with cordial ill will. He was literally bursting with the importance of the facts which he possessed, and Clarence's indifference gave him no opening.

"What will you bet there ain't a strike?" "I ain't betting this morning," said Clarence blandly. "but if there is one we are ready for it. You bet the hands won't catch us napping. We are ready for 'em any time and all the time."

This, delivered with a large air, impressed Spide exceedingly. "Have you sent for the militia already?" he asked anxiously.

"That's saying," noting the effect of his words. "I can't go blabbing about, telling what the road's up to, but we are awake, and the hands will get it in the neck if they tackle the boss."

To Clarence, Oakley was the most august person he had ever known. He religiously believed his position to be only second in point of importance and power to that of the president of the United States. He was wont to invest him with purely imaginary attributes and to lie about him at a great rate among his comrades, who were ready to credit any report touching a man who was reputed to be able to ride on the cars without a ticket. Human grandeur had no limits beyond this.

"There was a meeting last night. I bet you didn't know that," said Spide. "I heard something of it. Was your father at the meeting, Spide?" he asked, dropping his tone of hostility for one of gracious familiarity. The urchin promptly crossed the ditch and stood at his side.

"Of course the old man was. You don't suppose he wouldn't be in it?" "Oh, well, let 'em kick. You see the boss is ready for 'em," remarked Clarence indifferently. He wanted to know what Spide knew, but he didn't feel that he could afford to show any special interest. "Where you going—swimming?" he added.

"Yep." But Spide was not ready to drop the fascinating subject of the strike. He wished to astonish Clarence, who was altogether too knowing.

"The meeting was in the room over Jack Britt's saloon," he volunteered. "I suppose you think we didn't know up at the office. We got our spies out. There ain't nothing the hands can do we ain't on to."

Spide wrote his initials in the soft bank of the ditch with his big toe while he meditated on what he could tell next.

"Well, sir, you'd 'a' been surprised if you'd 'a' been there."

"Was you there, Spide?" "Yep."

"Oh, come off; you can't stuff me."

"I was, too, there. The old lady sent me down to fetch pap home. She was afraid he'd get full. Joe Stokes was there, and Lou Bentic and a whole slew of others, and Griff Ryder."

Clarence gasped with astonishment. "Why, he ain't one of the hands?" "Well, he's on their side."

"What you giving us?" "Say, they are going to make a stiff kick on old man Oakley working in the shops. They got it in for him good and strong." He paused to weigh the effect of this and then went on rapidly: "He's done something, Ryder knows about it. He told my old man and Joe Stokes. They say he's got to get out. What's a convicted criminal anyhow?"

"What do you want to know that for, Spide?" questioned the artful Clarence, with great presence of mind.

"Well, that's what old man Oakley is. I heard Ryder say so myself, and pap and Joe Stokes just kicked themselves because they hadn't noticed it before, I suppose. My, but they were hot! Say, you'll see fun tomorrow. I should not be surprised if they sent you all a-kicking."

Clarence was swelling with the desire to tell Oakley what he had heard. He took the part of a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Have one?" he said. Spide promptly availed himself of his companion's liberality.

"Well, so long," the latter added; "I got to get back." And a moment later he might have been seen making his way cautiously in the direction of the office, while Spide, his battered hat under his arm and the cigarette clutched in one hand, was skipping gaily across the cornfield toward the creek, followed by Pink. He was bound for the "Slidy," a swimming hole his mother had charged him on no account to visit. Under these peculiar circumstances it was quite impossible for him to consider any other spot.

CHAPTER XI.

"SAY," Clarence blurted out, "there's going to be a strike!" Oakley glanced up from his writing.

"What's that you are telling me, Clarence?" "There's going to be a strike, Mr. Oakley."

Dan smiled good naturedly at the boy. "I guess that has blown over, Clarence," he said kindly.

"No, it ain't. The men had a meeting last night. It was in the room over Jack Britt's saloon. I've just been talking with a fellow who was there. He told me."

"Sit down," said Oakley, pushing a chair toward him. "Now, what is it?" as soon as he was seated, and Clarence, editing his reminiscences as he saw fit, gave a tolerably truthful account of his conversation with Spide. The source of his information, its general incompleteness and the frequent divergences occasioned by the boy's attempt to incorporate into the narrative a satisfactory reason for his own presence in the yards, did not detract from its value in Oakley's estimation. The mere fact that the men had held a meeting was in itself significant. Such a thing was new to Antioch, as yet unvisited by labor troubles.

"What is that you say about my father?" For he had rather lost track of the story and caught at the sudden mention of his father's name.

"Spide says they got it in for him. I can't just remember what he did say. It was something or other Griff Ryder knows about him. It's funny, but it's clean gone out of my head, Mr. Oakley."

Oakley started. What could Ryder know about his father? What could any one know?

He was not left long in doubt. The next morning shortly after he arrived at the office he heard the heavy shuffling of many feet on the narrow platform outside his door, and a deputation from the carpenter shop led by Joe Stokes and Branyon entered the room. For a moment or so the men stood in abashed silence about the door and then moved over to his desk.

Oakley pushed back his chair and as they approached came slowly to his feet. There was a hint of anger in his eyes. The whole proceeding smacked of insolence. The men were in their shirt sleeves and overalls and had on their hats. Stokes put up his hand and took off his hat. The others accepted this as a signal and one after another removed theirs. Then followed a momentary shuffling as they bunched closer. Several who looked as if they would just as soon be somewhere else breathed deep and hard. The office force—Kerr, Holt and Miss Walton—suspended their various tasks and stood up so as not to miss anything that was said or done.

Stokes took a step forward and cleared his throat as if to speak. Then he looked at his comrades, who looked back their encouragement at him.

"We want a word with you, Mr. Oakley," said he.

"What have you to say?" "Well, sir, we got a grievance," began Stokes weakly, but Branyon pushed him to one side hastily and took his place. He was a stockily built Irish-American, with plenty of nerve and a loose tongue. The men nudged each other. They knew Mike would have his say.

"It's just this, Mr. Oakley: There's a man in the carpenter shop who's got to get out. We won't work with him no longer!"

"That's right," muttered one or two of the men under their breath.

"Whom do you mean?" asked Oakley, and his tone was tense and strenuous, for he knew. There was an awkward silence. Branyon fingered his hat a trifle nervously. At last he said doggedly:

"The man who's got to go is your father."

"Why?" asked Oakley, sinking his voice. He guessed what was coming

next, but the question seemed dragged from him. He had to ask it.

"We got nothing against you, Mr. Oakley, but we won't work in the same shop with a convicted criminal."

"That's right," muttered the chorus of men again.

Oakley's face flushed scarlet. Then every scrap of color left it.

"Get out of here!" he ordered hotly. "Don't we get our answer?" demanded Branyon.

While the interview was in progress McClintock had entered and now stood at the opposite end of the room, an attentive listener.

"No!" cried Oakley hoarsely. "I'll put whom I please to work in the shops. Leave the room, all of you!"

The men retreated before his fury, their self confidence rather dashed by it. One by one they backed sheepishly out of the door, Branyon being the last to leave. As he quitted the room he called to Dan:

"We'll give you until tomorrow to think it over. But the old man's got to go."

McClintock promptly followed Branyon, and Clarence darted after him. He was in time to witness the uncorking of the master mechanic's vials of wrath and to hear the hot exchange of words which followed.

"You can count your days with the Huckleberry numbered, Branyon," he said. "I'm hanged if I'll have you under me after this!"

"We'll see about that!" retorted Branyon roughly. "Talk's cheap."

"What's the old man ever done to you, you infernal loafer?" "Shut up, Milt, and keep your shirt on!" said Stokes in what he intended should be conciliatory tones. "We only want our rights."

"We'll have 'em, too!" said Branyon, shaking his head ominously. "We ain't dagoes or Polacks; we're American mechanics, and we know our rights."

"You're a sneak, Branyon! What's he ever done to you? You needn't be so particular about the old man's record. You know as much about the inside of a prison as he does."

"You're a liar!" Nevertheless McClintock spoke only the truth. At Branyon's last word he smashed his fist into the middle of the carpenter's sour visage with a heavy, sickening thud. No man called him a liar and got away with it.

"Gee!" gasped the closely attentive but critical Clarence. "What a soak-er!" Branyon fell up against the side of the building near which they were standing. Otherwise he would have gone his length upon the ground, and the hands rushed in between the two men.

Stokes and Bentic dragged their friend away by main strength. The affair had gone far enough. They didn't want a fight.

McClintock marched into the office, crossed to the water cooler and filled himself a tumbler; then he turned an unruffled front on Oakley.

"I guess we'd better chuck those fellows—fire 'em out bodily, the impudent cusses! What do you say, Mr. Oakley?"

But Dan was too demoralized to consider or even reply to this. He was



"The man who's got to go is your father?" feeling a burning sense of shame and disgrace. The whole town must know his father's history or some garbled version of it. Worse still, Constance Emory must know. The pride of his respectability was gone from him. He felt that he had cheated the world of a place to which he had no right, and now he was found out. He could not face Kerr nor Holt nor McClintock. But this was only temporary. He couldn't stand among his ruins. Men survive disgrace and outlive shame just as they outlive sorrow and suffering. Nothing ever stops. Then he recognized that, since his secret had been wrested from him, there was no longer discovery to fear. A sense of freedom and relief came when he realized this. The worst had happened, and he could still go on. How the men had learned about his father he could not understand, but instinct told him he had Ryder to thank. Following up the slew Kenyon had given him, he had carefully looked into Roger Oakley's record, a matter that simply involved a little correspondence.

He had told Branyon and Stokes only what he saw fit and had pledged himself to support the men in whatever

action they took. He would drive Oakley out of Antioch. That was one of his motives. He was also bent on cultivating as great a measure of person-

al popularity as he could. It would be useful to Kenyon and so advantageous to himself. The congressman had large ambitions. If he brought his campaign to a successful issue it would make him a power in the state. Counting on this victory, Ryder had mapped out his own career. Kenyon had force and courage, but his judgment and tact were only of a sort. Ryder aspired to supply the necessary brains for his complete success. Needless to say, Kenyon knew nothing of these benevolent intentions on the part of his friend. He could not possibly have believed that he required anything but votes.

Oakley turned to Clarence. "Run into the carpenter shop and see if you can find my father. If he is there ask him to come here to me at once."

The boy was absent only a few moments. Roger Oakley had taken off his work clothes and had gone uptown before the men left the shop. He had not returned.

Dan closed his desk and put on his hat. "I am going to the hotel," he said to Kerr. "If anybody wants to see me you can tell them I'll be back this afternoon."

"Very well, Mr. Oakley." The treasurer was wondering what would be his superior's action. Would he resign and leave Antioch or would he try and stick it out?

Dan hurried uptown to the hotel. He found his father in his room, seated before an open window in his shirt sleeves and with his Bible in his lap. He glanced up from the book as his son pushed open the door.

"Well, Dannie?" he said, and his tones were mild, meditative and inquiring.

"I was looking for you, father. They told me you'd come uptown."

"So I did. As soon as I heard there was going to be trouble over my working in the shops I left."

"Did they say anything to you?" "Not a word, Dannie, but I knew what was coming and decided to quit work."

"You shouldn't have done it, daddy," said Dan, seating himself on the edge of the bed near the old man. "I can't let them say who shall work in the shops and who not. The whole business was trumped up out of revenge for the cut. They want to get even with me for that, you see. If I back down and yield this point there is no telling what they'll ask next—probably that the wages be restored to the old figure."

He spoke quite cheerfully, for he saw his father was cruelly hurt.

"It was all a mistake, Dannie—my coming to you, I mean," Roger Oakley said, shutting the book reverently and laying it to one side. "The world's a small place after all, and we should have known we couldn't keep our secret. It's right I should bear my own cross, but it's not your sin, and now it presses hardest on you. I'm sorry, Dannie." And his voice shook with the emotion he was striving manfully to hide.

"No, no, father. To have you here has been a great happiness to me."

"Has it, Dannie? Has it really?" with a quick smile. "I am glad you can say so, for it's been a great happiness to me—greater than I deserved." And he laid a big hand caressingly on his son's.

"We must go ahead, daddy, as if nothing had happened. If we let this hurt us, we'll end by losing all our courage."

"It's been a knockout blow for me, Dannie," with a wistful sadness, "and I've got to go away. It's best for you I should. I've gone in one direction and you've gone another. You can't reconcile opposites. I've been thinking of this a good deal. You're young and got your life ahead of you, and you'll do big things before you're done, and people will forget. I can't drag you down just because I happen to be your father and love you. Why, I'm of a different class even, but I can't go on. I'm just as I am, and I can't change myself."

"Why, bless your heart, daddy," cried Dan, "I wouldn't have you changed! You're talking nonsense. I won't let you go away."

"But the girl, Dannie; the girl—the doctor's daughter! You see, I hear a lot of gossip in the shop, and even if you haven't told me I know."

"We may as well count that at an end," said Dan quietly.

"Do you think of leaving here?" "No. If I began by running, I'd be running all the rest of my life. I shall remain until I've accomplished everything I've set out to do if it takes ten years."

"And what about Miss Emory, Dannie? If you are going to stay, why is that at an end?"

"I dare say she'll marry Mr. Ryder. Anyhow, she won't marry me."

"But I thought you cared for her?" "I do, daddy."

"Then why do you give up? You're as good as he is any day."

"I'm not her kind; that's all. It has nothing to do with this. It would have been the same anyhow. I'm not her kind."

Roger Oakley turned this over slowly in his mind. It was most astonishing. He couldn't grasp it.

"Do you mean that she thinks she is better than you are?" he asked curiously.

"Something of that sort, I suppose," dryly. "I want you to come back into the shops, father."

"I can't do it, Dannie. I'm sorry if you wish it, but it's impossible. I want to keep out of sight. Back east when they pardoned me every one knew, and I didn't seem to mind, but here it's not the same. I can't face it. It may be cowardly, but I can't."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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