The Fire-Warden

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"The Maids of Paradise," "Cardigan," "The Maid-At-Arms," "The King in Yellow"

"AND of course what I buy is my own," continued Burleson, patiently. "No man here will question that, I suppose?"

For a moment there was silence in the store—ready stores then in Tarlo, most splashed native arrow from behind the counter, showing his scarred hands deep into the ragged pockets of his trousers.

"Young man," he said, briskly, "there's a few things you can't buy, you more think you can buy, you, you may pay for 'em, too, but they can't be bought and sold. You thought you bought Grace Grace? You thought you bought a lot o' sheep and birds an' fish, scrubbed them and sent to timber and a dream [illegible] Mr. Burleson.

A hundred yards away [illegible] against the [illegible] "We called some to Grace, and he said not. He come here, too, just like you."

The county measure set two pairs of white shoulders in Young Burleson's [illegible] he answered calmly.

"What a man believes to be his own is seldom [illegible] from him at this [illegible]."

"That's kinder like our [illegible]" observed old man Sawtry, chewing [illegible]

Another man leaned over and whispered to a neighbor, who turned a grey eye on Burleson without replying.

As for Burleson and his argument, a vacant circle had been completed, and there was little chance of an understanding. He saw that plainly, but, loath to admit it, turned towards old man Sawtry once more.

"If what I have been common [illegible] is true," he said, "Mr. Grace, from whom I bought the spent timber tract, was much in defending what he believed to be his own. I want to be decent. I desire to preserve the game and the timber, but not at the expense of human suffering. You know how [illegible] Tarlo, been the history of Lost Cove county. Twenty-five years ago there was a large [illegible] lumber-mill, paper-mills, [illegible] tannery, lumber-mill, paper-mills, [illegible] power. Today the timber is gone, and so is the town except for your homes, twenty houses, perhaps. Your soil is rated and slate, fit only for a new forest; the entire country is useless for farming and it is the natural home of pine and oak, in the deep and portrides."

He took one step as one the silent circle around the stove. "I have offered to buy your timber. Grace hammed you in on every side to force you out. I do not want to force you. I offer to buy your land at a fair appraisal. And your answer is to put a prohibitive price on the land."

"Big price," observed old man Sawtry. "We've got you hooked. That's business, I guess."

Burleson flashed out: "Not business! Blackmail, Sawtry."

Another silence, then a man jumped: "Is that what they call it, Sawtry? Mr. Burleson—"

"I think so."

"When a man wants to put up a [illegible] paper on' gives all for the keyhole, and the owner of the keyhole holds out for [illegible] price, do they call it blackmail?"

"No," said Burleson: "I think I speak [illegible]."

Not a sound broke the stillness in the store. After a moment old man Sawtry closed his clasp knife, leaned forward, and shave Off a thin slice from the cheese on the counter. The [illegible] fished [illegible] pipes. Men all around him [illegible] in their chairs, spitting, [illegible] Pippin the conference had ended.

"I am sorry," said young Burleson. "I had hoped for a fair understanding."

Nobody answered.

He tucked his [illegible] under his arm and stood watching them [illegible] the [illegible] glasses. Then with a [illegible] he turned and [illegible] the door, [illegible] the [illegible] door.

[illegible] to leave in the [illegible] "I want to [illegible] with my neighbors [illegible] to make no [illegible] [illegible] Lost Cove [illegible]

[illegible] embodiment of an [illegible] in all the world.

And [illegible] "Good morning," saying [illegible] with a nod his head, and [illegible] a [illegible] handle as he rode, swerving [illegible] across the wooden bridge [illegible] house stood beyond.

The September woods were [illegible] enough to set it fire. His troubled eyes swept the round growth as he drew bridle [illegible] a gate set in a fence eight feet high and [illegible] constructed of wire net interwoven with barbed wire, and heavily fledged with barbed and hook-thorn.

He dismounted, unbolted the iron gate, led his horse through, secured the gate and walked on his horse following as a trained dog follows at heel.

Through the still September sunshine [illegible] leaves drifted down through interlaced branches, and the whispering rustle of their fall filled the [illegible] silence. The wood road, corrected with brilliant [illegible] wound through second growth, following the [illegible] of a dark, swift stream, then swept westward [illegible] the pines where the cushion of brown needles [illegible] every step, and where there was no sound save the [illegible] of a flock of [illegible] birds fall [illegible] in the feathery fronds of a white pine. Upon the road [illegible] showing a [illegible] of slate rock through which the stream ended with the sound of a [illegible] and [illegible] the stream a [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] prices ranging around 25 cents per [illegible]