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NEIGHBORS

by Eugene Manlove Rhodes

The Southwestern was building steadily northward on its line from El Paso to the Panhandle. The men of Temporal were all "at the front," either freighting at one cent a mile per hundred or driving a slip on the dump, where they earned two dollars a day.

Men, in this case, meant pretty much everything that had outgrown skirts, for such unexampled opportunities for amassing wealth were to be improved to the full. So Temporal's milk-cows and bees, and her checker-board of gardens, orchards, and alfalfa fields were turned over to the women and girls, and boys under twelve.

Two men only remained: Grandpa Harrison--the town patriarch, kin to most of the village by blood or marriage, white-haired and merry, full of years and honors--who, with a slow smile, shrewd, but not unkindly, looked from his threshold at the endless panorama of the world's passing show, and Prescott, the town drunkard.

Much to grandpa's surprise, the rock of water-rights, on which so many Southwestern communities crash, was passed in safety; the women calmly ignored the cumbrous and unwieldy regulations, and divided the water informally, but fairly.

So Temporal, quiet, peaceful, and happy, basked drowsily In the mellow March sunshine--an island of delight, fragrant with bud and blossom, apple and cherry and peach and rose, set about by the vast, dim desert, cruel and hungry and gaunt and gray. Crowing babies rolled and tumbled in the deep shade of the cottonwoods;

the gardens grew apace; the hen put forth her cheerful lay; the milk-calves called lustily to their mothers in the pastures.

Knee-deep in the billowy, wind-bent alfalfa, where the shimmer and sheen of the purple blooms formed new and riotous combinations of color with every changing cloud or breeze, the women irrigated, rubber-booted and sombreroed, with kilted skirts, or leaned on their hoes and chatted blithely, while the life-bringing water flowed in to brim the terraced borders. The ever-present slumberous hum of questing bees mingled with the murmuring lullaby of the acequias in woven harmony--a song of cheerful toil. "The world went very well then."

Alas! as Eve came to Eden, the Apple of Discord to Olympus, or the Wooden Horse to Troy, so, even now, Progress and marked this smiling village for her own.

On a fateful day Mrs. Tyrell drove to Alamogordo with the village consignment of luscious black cherries, eggs, butter, and early lettuce. On her return she summoned her especial allies to a tea-fight, and there solemnly propounded the query: should they, the ladies of Temporal, be outdone by Alamogordo the Upstart?

Perish the thought, replied the ladles of T., with great enthusiasm; likewise that T. was the Pearl of the Desert, and they would so maintain it with their lives. She then unfolded her scheme.

So the Temporal Woman's Improvement Association came into being; object: the building of a clubhouse.

"Say it again, Mary--slow," said Grandpa Harrison. "You want to build a clubhouse to give dances in, when men-folks get back, and plays and suppers and other entertainments to raise money to pay for the clubhouse, so's to give dances and plays and suppers

and suchlike in it?"

"You don't understand, father, remonstrated Mrs. Tyrell. "The clubhouse is not an end in itself, but the means to an end. We intend to uplift."

"Ye-es--that's why the kitten was chasing her tail--she had an end in view. Run along, daughter, and enjoy your new plaything before the paint wears off."

Temporal joined the new movement enthusiastically, including members of the best Mexican families, but from the first there was friction.

Mrs. Kettle an austere churchwoman of the most uncompromising type, objected strenuously to the dancing and theatrical features, and was backed by a resolute minority. Their idea was to have the clubhouse devoted to debates, essays, discussions of current events, the study of literature, and all things calculated to uplift, inform, and improve, as distinguished from mere pleasure.

Some little acerbity developed, but the amenities of parliamentary procedure were observed until Miss Thurber came back from her trip East. (She called it "East"--San Antonio was where she had really been.) Having been duly admitted to the T.W.I.A., she at once arose to direct the course of events.

"Mrs. Chairman and ladies" (beaming graciously on the assembly): In rising to express my thanks for the honor you have done me, I am reminded that this is not the first movement for the betterment of conditions In Temporal that I have joined.

"Long ago we had a church society here, but the members moved away, one by one, till Sister Kettle and I alone were left. We raised one hundred and eighty dollars altogether, toward building

a church, which sum I, in my official capacity of treasurer of the defunct society, deposited with Mr. Myers at La Luz.

"I now move you, Mrs. Chairman, that this fund be used as a nucleus for the larger one we are raising for the purpose so ably set forth by the speaker who preceded me. And I further move you, that unfinished album quilt left in my custody by the Church Society be completed and raffled off for the benefit of the Club-house."

She sat down with an air of conscious merit.

Up rose then Mrs. Kettle, small, fiery, black-eyed, vehement, her face aglow with the light of battle.

She had heard, Mrs. Chairman, the astounding, the unprecedented, the utterly absurd proposition of Miss Thurber. She could scarcely believe her ears. That money had been raised painfully, by nickels and dimes, to erect a church. It was not intended to be used to build a theater, Mrs. Chairman, nor a billiard-saloon, nor a dance-hall, and should never be used for such purposes--not One penny of it.

She had used the word astonishment, Mrs. Chairman, in referring to Miss Thurber's project. She begged to retract. From another, such an impudent proposal would have been surprising; from Miss Thurber it was simply characteristic. Having known Miss Thurber for thirty years--yea, thirty-five--she was not surprised. In fact, half anticipating that Miss Thurber would give way to her unfortunate propensities, she had written to all the Ladies once belonging to the Church Society whose present addresses she could obtain, inquiring what disposition should be made of the money in Mr. Meyer's hands.

They had replied, in every instance, that the money should be kept intact until it could be used for the purpose for which it was raised. As to the album quilt, there were two hundred names that she, with her two hands, had embroidered on it herself, at ten cents a name; and it had been their intention to dispose of it at auction. It had not occurred to them to raise money for the church by gambling.

But she was forced to admit that if the proceeds were to go toward building a dance-hall there was nothing inappropriate in gambling off the quilt. Quite the reverse.

But if the ladles desired to gamble, why did they not take out a license and start a monte table or shoot craps? She understood it was quite profitable. Perhaps if they would keep Mr. Prescott in liquor he would kindly consent to deal for them until such time as they were competent to take charge.

In conclusion, Mrs. Chairman, as it was a poor rule that wouldn't work both ways, she begged to move that hereafter Miss Thurber's Jersey cow should belong exclusively to her, Mrs. Kettle; and she hereby respectfully tendered her resignation. And flounced down.

These remarks were punctuated by the Chair, and several members repeatedly called Mrs. Kettle to order; to all of which that dauntless warrior gave no heed.

A dozen members arose to obtain recognition, while Miss Thurber, shaking a trembling forefinger at Mrs. Kettle, cried, choking:

"You--you spiteful--tabby-cat! You never brought back that cake-pan you borrowed, and my best table cover--when the minister was stopping with you!" She burst into tears. "And your poor

husband afraid to call his soul his own."

Here she was interrupted by Mrs. Kettle calmly observing with a sniff, that if Miss Thurber ever did succeed in catching a husband--

Whereupon Miss Thurber waited to hear no more, but gave way to hysterics, and Mrs. Kettle's views on the subject were forever lost.

The T.W.I.A. was on the floor clamoring for recognition, but the Chair, Mrs. Tyrell, with great presence of mind, declared the meeting adjourned and fled through the back door to Grandpa Harrison's in search of consolation.

The old man listened to the tale of Mrs. Kettle's misdeeds, looking out across the desert to the serrated sky-line of peaks beyond, his hands clasped above his cane. His answer cane between puffs of smoke.

"Why, surely, daughter, there is nothing we need so bad as a clubhouse. Just the other day I was talkin' to a lot of movers. They didn't say nothing about no church or schoolhouse. They just asked did we have ary a clubhouse; and when I told 'em we didn't, the feller just shook his head kind of sorrowful and said they'd have to drift farther.

"It was mighty cheeky of Ida to put in and object to Miss Thurber's doing what she pleased with that money. Wasn't she treasurer, I'd like to know? And of course, when she jined your outfit, the money jined with her. If she was to marry now, reckon Mr. Thurber would have a right to Use it--or if she was--Hi, Mary! Why, she's gone!"

And the old man solemnly winked at a point in space.

Five minutes later Mrs. Kettle bore down upon him swiftly.

The patriarch eyed her warily as she approached.

"Mornin', Ida. You're lookin' right peart."

For ten minutes she discoursed eloquently on her wrongs. Then grandpa put in, sympathetically,

"It does beat all how religion and rheumatiz sets folks agin dancin', don't it? But you're dead right.

But I wouldn't resign if I was you, Niece Ida. They're apt to have right smart trouble before they get done. And you bein' a Christian, you'd orter stay there to pour ile on the troubled waters and set an example. Some of them frivolous women, 'speshel that dancin' crowd, is li'ble to get spiteful and overbearin' in their talk. And you could teach 'em charity and forbearance and lovin' kindness."

"Grandpa Harrison," cried Mrs. Kettle, half-angry, half amused, "you're making fun of me--you unregenerate old sinner. I won't hear another word."

And putting her hands to her ears, she ran away."

At the next session of the T.W.I.A Miss Thurber announced, with marked dignity, that, owing to statements made upon this floor, she had written to the absent members of the Church Society asking them if they were willing to have the Church fund used for the clubhouse.

They had all answered, Mrs. Chairman, and she asked permission to read their letters, which request being granted, it appeared that they were quite willing, though a number had stipulated that the building should be used for religious services when opportunity offered.

To all this Mrs. Kettle listened with swelling bosom and a heightened color, making, however, a gallant effort to control her

emotions, Grandpa's advice had not been wholly lost upon her. With downcast lashes, and the meek and lowly air of an early martyr, she asked permission to read letters from the absent sisters, which stated, explicitly and unmistakably, that the Church Fund should not be used for any purpose but the original one.

There would seem, Mrs. Chairman, she said sweetly, to be a slight discrepancy somewhere. Yes. She confessed that she was at a loss.

Blanche Ford, nineteen, unmarried and a dancer, arose with a suggestion.

She said, "Mrs. Chairwoman, Miss Thurber and Mrs. Kettle having tied, it seems obvious that they should write again and let the two best in three decide it."

This was really a sensible, logical, and sportsmanlike plan, yet it was roundly denounced on both sides.

Miss Thurber found it flippant and insulting; Mrs. Kettle declared it vulgar and irreverent.

The next to take the floor was Mrs. Sanders, fat, jolly, motherly, common-sensible, advocating peace with honor. Let them take the Church Fund, add to it, and let the building be used as a non-denominational church on Sundays, and on week-days for other purposes, secular but irreproachable.

As for dancing and amateur theatricals, she owned that she could see no harm in them. Still, many thought otherwise, and it was unreasonable to ask them to contribute to purposes they disapproved. For her own part, her conscience would allow her to let her large room be used for dancing at any time, and hoped they would all turn in and build the church. She had never heard of

a dance failing for lack of a hall.

This plan was finally agreed to, though tae younger women gave promise of being lukewarm in the cause. After the final vote, just as the dove of peace was gently folding her wings to alight, Mrs. Greenleaf, assuming her most saintlike air, and smiling sweetly, desired to make an inquiry.

The church was to be a union church, non-denominational, she said, but of course it was understood that none but Christians should ever occupy the pulpit. She could not, as a consistent Christian, proceed further in this matter until it was distinctly understood that the building should never be used by certain "so-called" religious denominations.

Here several gentle ladies, who professed allegiance to some of these slighted sects, rose silently and left the room.

And behind them discord reigned supreme.

Miss Thurber, Mrs. Kettle, and Blanche simultaneously and impartially fell upon Mrs. Greenleaf and each other, each backed by a chorus of enthusiastic followers.

Epithets of "wordling", "bigot", "meddler", "shrew", "saint", "actress", "hypocrite" and "hoyden" fell like leaves in Vallambrosa.

While Mrs. Tyrell, red-faced and desperate, pounded the desk with her gavel and vainly shrieked above the tumult:

"Order! Order!"

A shadow fell athwart the threshold. Through the open door a man sprang lightly--Slick Miller, cowboy—side-stepped swiftly and stood with his back to the wall, gun in hand, while an expression of ludicrous dismay and utter bewilderment swept over his face as he watched the furious parlia-

mentarians.

Then his jaw fell and he fled, as he had come, unseen.

Prescott, town drunkard, sallied forth to levy tribute of eggs, chili, and frijoles on his humble Mexican neighbors and returned, grumbling, to his wretched adobe hovel.

Gold had flowed through his hands like water. Gold and reputation, family and friends had been thrown to the winds at the bidding of the insatiable fiend that possessed him.

At fifty he was a stooping, palsied wreck; a friendless outcast where his will had once been law. "King of Temporal" they had called him in the wild, old days, and ugly stories were whispered of deliberate misuse of the power that had been his.

An old, sad story of ruin and failure and shame--the hills are scarce older--the desert not more sad.

Long after his property was gone, and after all his worthy friends had despaired of him, he retained much power and a certain evil prestige by his intimate knowledge of the Mexican mind, habits, and secrets, which made him invaluable to the politician.

Was a witness wanted to perjure himself, to convict an enemy or clear a friend? See Prescott. Or a complaisant juror? Ask Prescott. It was Prescott who was furnished money to carry necessary precincts; money for which he was never required to render an account.

Whether it was bribery or persuasion, fear or friendship that secured the tote; whether the ballot-box was stuffed, stacked, or stolen, made no difference. So long as Prescott delivered the goods, no questions were asked.

Slowly, imperceptibly, the tide of American immigration

swelled until there came a day when the purchasable vote was no longer the deciding vote. On that day Prescott was discarded.

His downfall was more rapid because so long retarded. For a while he kept up appearances on borrowed money. Then he could borrow no more and became a sponge, a barroom loafer, cringing, repulsive, incapable of work or of reform, keeping body and soul together by petty blackmail, levied on a few of his old clients by reason of his knowledge of unpunished crimes.

After dinner he sat in the door of his den like some cruel, crafty spider, his swollen, red-veined face wearing its most hopeless expression. He saw Slick Miller loping up the street with a crestfallen look on his dark, handsome face, and hobbled forth painfully to intercept him.

"Hello, Slick! Come have some dinner."

Slick set his horse up, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder.

"For Gawd's sake, judge, what's going on up to Jeff's house? There was the damndest screechin' and cryin' in there I ever did hear, and I hops off and goes in to take a hand, thinkin' 'twas a 'Pache uprisin', and s'help me there wasn't a soul in there but a passel of women, carryin' on like wildcats."

"That? Oh, that's a hen-convention," replied Prescott scornfully. "Building a church, they are. Say, Slick" --anxiously-- "ye haven't got a bottle in your clothes, have ye? I'm dry'r'n old Billy-hell."

Slick produced a small flask, which Prescott drained.

"That's good--that was sure good."

"Don't get much like that nowadays, do you?" said the cowboy.

"Lord, no. I've been beastly sober for six months." He edged closer to the horse.

"Say, Slick," he went on shamelessly, "I helped you a lot in Cruces that time. Can't you stake me to a piece of money? I'm sure wanting some booze bad."

The cowboy put his hand in his pocket and brought out a bright ten-dollar gold piece, which he handed over, half-kindly, half-contemptuously.

Prescott clutched it eagerly.

"Slick, you're a thoroughbred--you're a sport. Stay all night and I'll get my horse this afternoon and go on down to Tularosa with you."

"No, thanks," laughed the other. "I've got to go to Alamogordo tonight. Adios! Ya mi voy." And he set spurs to his horse.

The drunkard got a little Mexican boy to go out after his horse, so he could start early in the morning, and sat gloating over his gold piece and his prospective drunk.

"I'll go to Tularosa, get a demijohn, and go up to Wesley Post's place," he soliloquized. "We'll put old Bally in the alfalfa-patch, kill one of Wes's shoats, and break all records."

By eight o'clock in the morning he was on the road to Tularosa. He made a somewhat better figure on horseback, straightening the bent shoulders and looking like a pitiful parody of the old reckless King of Temporal.

Two miles out he came to a thick clump of mesquite, in which he saw a covered wagon and two way-worn horses. A sound of sobbing attracted his attention and he turned off to investigate.

It so chanced that both Mrs. Kettle and Blanche were abroad

that morning, one looking for a milk-cow that had broken the pasture fence, the other for her work ponies.

Mrs. Kettle rode up from the opposite side just as Prescott came up to the wagon. A sturdy Prohibitionist, she despised Prescott, and wishing to avoid him, drew rein behind one of the biggest mesquite. A minute later Blanche joined her, coming to ask if she had seen her horses, and both listened unseen to the conversation that followed.

Three children were hovering around a fire of mesquite roots.

The oldest, a boy of eight or nine years, was baking bread in a frying-pan and encouraging his little sisters.

"There now, pappy'll get better bimeby and this evenin’ we'll move camps closer to town and mebbe we'll get some eggs and some corn for ole Prince and Nigger."

"Hello, small people!" was Prescott's greeting. "What's the matter? Where's your folks?"

"Paw, he's sick--orful sick," replied the boy, with a trembling lip, "he allows he ain't goin' to get well. He's in the wagon there."

"Hell--that's too bad, sonny . Let's see what we can do for him." He raised the wagon-sheet. "Hullo, pardner, you're up against it, ain't you?"

"It's pneumony," said the sick man feebly. "There's so much snow on the summit crossin' the Sacramentos--and my boots was full of holes. I tuk down here yisterday--an' I'm afraid I've got to the end o' my trail.

"Was gain' to Tucumcari to work on the railroad. I never had no luck, noway. T'was bad enough before I tuk sick. I was out o' money and no chuck but straight flour and salt and fat pork.

Gawd! What'll become of my pore motherless kids I don't know."

Prescott was not without knowledge of sickness and he saw that the man's condition was critical. He paused for a moment.

Then, down in his heart something stirred, a feeble glimmering spark of his forgotten manhood. It smoldered, glowed, burst into flame. He straightened the bent shoulders more. It seemed to the listening women that something of pride, of self-respect swept over the bloated face, and there was a new ring of tenderness and rough sympathy in his voice.

"Now, pardner, don't you worry about the kids. Temporal folks is pretty Good gente. The men's all up to the front, but them's sure good women. They'll see you through and take care of the little shavers, And if the worst comes--and I ain't denyin' that you're bad off--they'll give the little chaps a home. I'll answer for it. They're real good folks. They're Christians, they are."

(Behind the mesquite, Mrs. Kettle was tightly gripping Blanche's hand, their enmity forgotten).

"I'm goin' right on up to Mescalero and get the agency doctor for you, and I'll send the little boy to Temporal to get help. You got a saddle?"

"No--but he can ride either one bareback."

Prescott caught a hobbled horse, knotted a hackamore swiftly, and led him up.

"Come here, chapo, and listen right. You go to Temporal and ask for Mrs. Sanders or Mrs. Kettle, it doesn't make any difference which one it is. Just tell 'em about your pa being sick, and that a stranger's gone for the doctor and medicine, and they're to come

out here at once and take him in."

"S-s-sh!" whispered Blanche, with instinctive delicacy. "Don't say a word. Let the boy go, and after Prescott has gone, we'll hitch up to the wagon and take them in. Some one'll have to go for the doctor anyway, and I don't think Prescott would be pleased to have us know-- "

"What his left hand doeth," grimly interrupted Mrs. Kettle, with averted face.

"Here, Bub, take this and don't lose it, and get what things you want at old Mrs. Jones's store." And he handed over his gold piece to the boy. "Now, hurry!"

The boy rode off. "Now, pard, rest easy. I'll have the sawbones down here to see you by two o'clock."

The sick man raised on his elbow.

"Shake hands," he whispered. "Gawd--Gawd bless you:"

"Shucks," said Prescott shamefacedly, 'So long. The women-folks'll be out in no time. You just sit steady in the boat. Come along, Bally!"

And he turned his bleared, watery eyes toward the Rinconada trail, and trotted away through the brush.

Two white-faced, dry-lipped women looked at each other blankly. Tears were streaming down Blanche's cheeks and there was a catch in Mrs. Kettle's voice as she put her hand to her throat.

"Prescott:" she gasped. "Prescott Now--what--do--you--think--of--that?"

Tender hands had conveyed the sick man to Temporal and ministered to him, hours before the agency physician arrived. When he

came out of the sickroom he told the waiting women that there was no hope, that the man must die, probably before morning, his constitution being broken down before this last attack.

An hour later, Mrs. Sanders went into the darkened room and broke it to the stranger that he was to pass over the range.

"And If you don't want to send the children to their folks, I thought you would like to know that we would take care of them like our own."

"I haven' any folks, ma'am, none that I could send them to. But if you'll look out for the little ones---"

"All right." she whispered, smoothing the sufferer's brow. "We--we was building--we had a sort of society here and a lot of money raised for--for something else. And Miss Thurber's going to adopt them, kinder for all of us, you know, if you're willing. She’s better off than most of us--and she's real fond of children. And our society money is all to go to help out with the children."

Meantime, Prescott had ridden painfully back as far as Wes' Post's ranch. Here he would. have spent the night talking over the "good old times", but his craving for sympathy prompted him to tell the story of the day to his old crony.

This was ill-advised, for that worthy was dry himself and his wrath at the thought of the glorious drunk they had missed made him unprintably bitter. He drove Prescott from his door with revilings and reproach, shaking his fist at him as he rode, dejected and weary on to Temporal, and cackling shrilly after him: "Fool! Fool! Fool!"

Perhaps. Perhaps, too, the Great Accountant, whose values are not ours, prized more this humble offering from a miserable and broken wretch, than vast cathedrals builded by mighty kings, or princely

foundations laid in the sweat of the poor.

It was Madames Sanders, Kettle, and Tyrell, with Misses Thurber, and Ford, who went together at sundown to apprise Grandpa Harrison of the untimely demise of the T.W.I.A., and a softened and chastened Kettle was the spokeswoman—or spokesman.

There was no jeer on the old man’s lips now, though his eye twinkled as he thought that the Church fund had been diverted from its "sacred purpose", after all, largely at the instigation of its fiery defender. But he listened in silence.

"Bring me the Book, Blanche," was his only comment. He fumbled over the pages awhile. "Read it, daughter my eyes are failing, and the light is, too."

And Mrs. Tyrell read:

> Lord when we saw Thee an hungered, and fed Thee?
> or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?
> When we saw Thee a stranger, and took Thee in?
> or naked, and clothed Thee?
> Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came
> unto Thee?

But Mrs. Kettle alone was ill at ease. Her thought dwelt strangely with the absent drunkard. She pictured him in his hovel, weary from his long ride, friendless, hopeless, tossing restlessly, feverishly, tortured with the insatiable, overmastering craving for drink. It was a very thoughtful and perplexed woman who went home.

As she tossed her head on her hot pillow, one thought came to her over and over again:

“He suffers now, because he has played the man this day. There is no fiber of him but craves and clamors for drink, shrieks out indignant rage and disappointment."

Dozing, almost asleep, she started up, her heart repeating:

"All the rest of Temporal is at peace tonight--all but this poor weakling that I dared despise--who has played the man today; who has shamed all of us today."

Sleepy—so sleepy--down, down-—almost asleep--- She woke, her veins atingle with startled blood, seeing, almost with the eye of flesh a desperate battle-ground, where one lowly, vile, despised camp-follower stood alone for one immortal heart-beat in the fore-front of a losing fight and struck out well and bravely for the right.

Men rallied to him for very shame; shoulder to shoulder; onward!

"Prescott," said her heart again, "who suffers--who suffers--who has played the man this day."

Let us not follow too closely the processes by which the rigidly austere is brought to acknowledge the kinship of the sinner, and to an understanding of his miserable point of view. Be sure there were prayers and tears before she justified her action. It may even have been done defiantly, as an act of rebellion, a deliberate giving away to weakness and sin, as her vocabulary was apt a to term all kindly human compromises.

Be that as it may, this is the back-sliding for which we hold her memory dear, and for the sake of which we of the Temporal have long forgiven her many virtues.

Mrs. Kettle's absent lord was a Prohibitionist, too--by proxy. He was not at all bigoted about it. It was not that he loved rum less, but quiet more.

Though Mr. Kettle had long since made up his mind that red liquor biteth like a serpent and stingeth worse, he could not be shaken on one point. Whether he played fair or not, is not known, nor is it material; but he kept a bottle of Pure Old Family rye against the

psychological snake-bite.

Late that night she stole under the trees and through the wavering moonlight to Prescott's 'dobe, listened to his heavy breathing, fearfully opened the door, put her bottle inside, then fled back through the darkness like a guilty thing.

When she woke in the morning, her first thought was of Prescott and her own position.

In the silent watches of the night her action had seemed shaped and destined by tremendous and irresistible forces.

In the cold light of day it wore a different aspect. He had for a moment checked his momentum in his downward course. She had starter him down again. Doubtless he was drunk again and she was accessory to the Jag.

After breakfast she Invented a pretext to excuse herself to herself, and took the road that led by Prescott's door.

She rubbed her eyes and furtively pinched herself. The path was swept; the long disused ditches wore cleared out and Presoott was painfully toiling to prepare a surprise for the little garden. He looked up suddenly, and met her agitated eye.

"Yes" he said grimly, "yes, it's me working. So it was you that brought the jag-juice, was it? I felt sure of it, someway."

She clutched the drooping gate in silence, while he looked at her long and thoughtfully. When he spoke again there was a gentler note in his voice.

"That meant a good deal, from you. Ida, I wonder--- I was a man once. Wait, neighbor."

He went into the house and returned at once.

"I just couldn’t drink this, someway, knowing how you felt about it. If you can do that much for me, I ought to be able to do something for you—and for myself."

His eyes were upon the ground; his head bent humbly as in shame; as if there had passed before him a vision of wasted years, of talents thrown away; as if for a moment the reproachful face of the man he might have been had turned toward him and the sad eyes had looked deep into his.

As he stood there, he seemed to her not unlike one who stood afar off and beat his breast. Then he straightened, almost proudly, with that in his eyes which might have been the light of determination.

Something flashed high in the morning sunlight, whirled, gleamed, fell, and crashed musically to fragments.

"The position," he said, "of town drunkard is hereby declared vacant."

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