

and this letter's something particular I want her to know. By the way, did Leescom speak to you this morning about the note? Said he would.'

Bates finished tying the package he was at work upon, placed it with the outgoing mail, and reached for another little pile of letters to tie. He did not look up or speak. He did not dare to, for fear of what was trembling on his lips and showing in his eyes. He was on duty now.

'Yes,' he said slowly, 'Mr. Leescom spoke of the note. I am coming round to the store to see you about it just as soon as I finish here.'

'Well, do so,' affably. 'And I want to talk with you about the land out that way. I'm thinking some of turning farmer myself. Let's see, your tract joins Lindenwood's, I think, cornering on his land and Leescom's? Maybe we can make a trade.'

Bates made no answer.

Twenty minutes later he finished his duties at the Post Office, and from there went directly to Cheesick's store. No customer happened to be in. Cheesick was sitting upon the counter paring his nails.

'Hello!' he called as Bates appeared. 'Glad to see you in my store. You don't often come. Most all the folks out your way are my customers, but I don't remember that you ever bought much.'

'Not a thing since I traded you a calf for a suit of clothes,' said Bates dryly. 'You remember, I brought back the suit because it was shopworn and ready to drop to pieces, and you refused to accept it because you said it had been a trade. Then you sent me a bill for two dollars on account of beef going down the day I brought the calf, you said. As I didn't take the suit, that would have left me a calf and two dollars behind, provided I had paid the bill, which I didn't. But I'm here now to see about the note.'

'Yes, yes, of course,' sliding from the counter and showing his teeth a little. 'Ready to pay it already, before it's due? I don't see how you mail carriers handle so much money on fifty dollars a month. Only a few days ago you let your brother have over two hundred to meet some crowding bills, I understand, and now you're bringing me as much more. I'm going to give up store-keeping and turn mail carrier. It's the only way to get rich.'

Bates' hands clinched a little, but he managed to keep his voice steady.

'I'm not here to pay the note, and won't even be able to pay it when due,' he said. 'I want you to extend it another six months, as Leescom agreed to do. I will pay you double interest for the accommodation.'

Cheesick grinned. 'That wouldn't be legal,' he objected. 'Of course, I couldn't think of double rates, though it's very liberal of you. No, the only thing is to meet the note when it's due. I suppose you could borrow the money,' with a trace of anxiety appearing in his voice.

Bates shook his head.

'I'm afraid not,' he answered. 'Money is very scarce just now, and I doubt if there's more than two or three men in town who have even that much unemployed. With more time I could arrange it, but I supposed the matter all settled.'

Cheesick was again grinning. 'Oh, well, it doesn't matter,' he said, with assumed indifference; 'the land's a pretty piece, and plenty good for the note. Of course, I'd like the money to use in my business, but I guess the land will be a fair value. Leescom had a mortgage to secure the note, and you understand he turned the whole thing over to me. It'll cost a little foreclosure, of course, but I won't mind that.'

'You'll foreclose, then?'

'Why, it's the only thing I can do,' opening his eyes as though in surprise. 'It's business. But don't you worry over it; Bates,' consolingly; 'it was bound to come to you sooner or later. Visiting saloons and not paying bills couldn't lead to anything else. You've got only yourself to blame.'

Bates made a quick step forward.

'That's another thing I intended to see you about, after the note was settled,' he said sternly. 'You've been telling lies about me to Mercy, and perhaps to others. I suppose that two dollars you couldn't cheat me out of was the debt I wouldn't pay, and—'

'Yes, I told that, I suppose, and a few other things, but not half so much as I might,' tantalized Cheesick. 'It was a clear duty, you know, for Mercy is a nice girl. She said—'

'Stop!' thundered Bates. 'Never mind what she said. We will leave her name out.'

'Mercy said,' imperturbably, 'that she used to have a good deal of respect for you, but of late—'

The two men were of about the same height and weight, but there the similarity ended. What was

brawn and whipcord-like muscles in Bates, made by constant hard work and outdoor exposure, was mostly flesh in Cheesick, induced by his inactive life behind the counter. Already he was beginning to show a double chin.

Evidently he had been trying to provoke Bates to anger, though not to actual violence, for as the mail carrier sprang forward he retreated toward the opening which led behind the counter. Perhaps he thought that some demonstration on Bates' part might further his own interest at the Lindenwood farm; possibly he considered himself as physically the mail carrier's equal. In either case, he was speedily undeceived.

Before the last sentence was finished Bates' grasp was upon his shoulder, swinging him back toward the centre of the floor. In vain Cheesick struggled and swore and threatened. Bates was oblivious of consequences now. One hand was still upon Cheesick's shoulder, where it had closed like a vise; the other was like a steel band round his waist. Sometimes the storekeeper's feet struck his own floor, sometimes the counter, sometimes the wall, knocking down boxes or displayed goods. But irresistibly, little by little, he was dragged and swung across the room toward the door. By the time they reached there Cheesick's breath was gone, and he was almost passive in the mail carrier's grasp.

Then through the doorway and down the steps, still struggling and panting, and across the sidewalk to the horse trough, when Bates, suddenly exerting all his strength, lifted his opponent bodily and flung him at full length into the water. A broom was standing near, which had been used to sweep the sidewalk. Bates caught up this, and as Cheesick rose coughing and sputtering, thrust him back into the water, once, twice, thrice.

'There, you're washed clean outside, at any rate,' he said finally. 'But I'm afraid the meanness is too deep in for broom and water. Now crawl out and go into the store and dry yourself, and, mind, don't ever let me hear of you making free with Mercy Lindenwood's name again,' and, oblivious of the people, who were beginning to gather, Bates dropped the broom and strode away.

At sunset that night the mercury had only dropped to sixty, and many of those who had gazed anxiously at the prediction on the bulletin board began to look wise and say they guessed the weather bureau man had made a slip this time, or else concluded to send the storm around by another route.

At 9 o'clock it had fallen but two degrees, and at 12 but three more. Most people left their chamber windows open.

Between twelve and one, however, the stars in the north-west began to grow dim and obscure, and the mercury fell 20 degrees. By three it had fallen 20 more, and the whole sky was overcast. At daylight it commenced to snow.

If mails were on time, the carriers left the Post Office at 7 o'clock; but if the trains were late, they could be held until eight. At that hour the regulations said they must be released.

This morning the through train was three-quarters of an hour late, and the carriers were detained until a quarter of eight. It was then four below zero, with the snow whirling in blinding sheets before a fifty-mile gale. When Bates struck his route the snow was three inches deep on a level, and drifting in depressions and wherever the wind did not have a clear sweep. Bates urged his horse as rapidly as possible, for he realised that this was only the beginning, and it was ten miles around his route.

For the first five or six miles it was not bad; though he found some drifts of two feet or more which it was almost impossible for his horse to pull through. The worst of these was just before reaching the Lindenwood lane. At this point he was obliged to alight from the wagon and apply his own strength to the wheels.

(To be concluded next week.)

The Northern Roller Milling Co., the well known manufacturers of the 'Champion' brand of flour, direct the attention of our readers to the meanings of Trust, Combine, and Association, and then proceed to state that they are in no way connected with any such combinations; they are free in every respect, and intend to remain so. This means that the Company will not become a party to any organisation formed with the object of raising the price of one of the principal necessities of life. This is a matter which deeply concerns every householder and bread winner in the Dominion....