

do it now. When I brought her here, there was sewed into her little kirtle a deed to their weir land—all the land drained by this arroyo, up to the ridges on either side, that's how it read, and does yet, for I ha' it in the nookie there this day—but I'm afeard it's no good since the fire in the State's house ten years back, that burned all yon records. But that's no what I'm trying to tell ye. I didna tak it to be cleared again, when they called for all the old deeds—Why did I not? Because I was jealous e'en o' the man there; I would ha' the weany to be all mine; I wanted her to ha' naething that I couldna gie her masel'.

With the old man's story still on his mind, Father Corbin had met John Mallory in the morning, and had tried to measure him as a man, while boldly placing him before him the dishonesty of his position. The result had been as we have seen. Mallory, drilled and hammered by the demands of modern methods, remembering the fight of life by which he had risen to his present position, could be reached by no argument except actual legal force. From his name, and even more surely from his clear-cut face, Father Corbin knew Mallory for what he was; knew him to be of that great number of our Catholic boys who for years back have been slipping out from carefully guarded homes all over the East, and giving their lives and their work to the making of the West. Walking slowly up the foot-trail to Barr's cabin, the conviction came to him that this man, Mallory, could yet be awakened to a sense of actual truth and right, if a real test were forced upon him. From what he had learned from Barr the evening before, he foresaw a test that would be real enough.

The old man was sitting dejectedly in the sunshine before the cabin, having no will to work. Father Corbin came up, and, seating himself quietly beside him, told him of his talk with Mallory.

'There's plainly no use appealing to him directly in this matter, but I have a plan in mind, if you will let me try it.'

'Yes, man, then try what you will, though I'm afeard it's no help.'

'Well,' said Father Corbin, 'my thought is this. I do not know, nor do you, whether Juanita's deed is of any value or not. John Mallory is the only man within three days' ride who would know surely. His company's suit against your claims will be decided on Monday; that is four days from now. If it is decided in their favor, and they are once in possession, with their resources against you, you could hardly recover the property, even if the deed proved sound. On the other hand, if you or I were to start at once for Ralston to record the deed, we might be in time; yes; but if the deed proved worthless it would only anger the Bordwin people, and Juanita would be left without even the settlement which they offered.'

'What is there for us, then?' wondered the old man. 'Bring Mallory up here, show him the deed—we can get the truth about its value from him somehow—and then act on what we shall know.'

To the wary old man it did seem a great deal like putting himself into the hands of his enemy; but not for his life would he have worded his doubt of the wisdom of Father Corbin's plan.

Mallory came up to the cabin that afternoon in ready response to a message, thinking, of course, that the old man, advised by Father Corbin, had made up his mind to accept the terms offered.

As the manager stepped into the little living room of the cabin, the air of tense waiting of the three who greeted him, the sense of an impending trial, struck oddly upon his nerves. He could not fight back the feeling that, somehow, he was being brought under a test. He was used to meeting men who blustered or cringed or swore deeply. These three merely waited. Father Corbin grave and alert, the old man grimly steady as a mastiff, the girl intense, almost fierce, in her scrutiny. As if to end the pause, Father Corbin quietly crossed the room and placed a yellowed, closely-written paper in the manager's hand, saying, 'Read this, and then tell us if you will go on with your suit.'

John Mallory, reading down the cramped lines, saw that his warning of a trial had been true. The paper was a clear, well-drawn legal document, dealing to Juanita not only the claims in question, but every claim in the settlement, into which his company had put nearly every dollar of its available capital. It needed only that this paper should be registered at Ralston within four days, and his fortune and those of the men who trusted him would be gone. At first the significance of his own position did not strike him. Then he remembered that he was a lawyer, the only one near enough to be of service, and that this thing was placed upon his professional honor. Anger at what seemed a trap swelled up in his throat. What right had a priest to put him in such a position?

Through years of struggle and unscrupulousness he had stuck to that fetish of professional integrity, and was he to lose it now in this way? Out of the whirl of his thoughts, the voice of the old man called him with a steady, insistent question:

'Is no the deed gude an' true?'

To Mallory there was just enough of menace in the question and the tone to steady him. The suggestion of threat was what he needed to bring him back into the world of fighting, jostling men, where he was at home. A bold lie was not so much, when men were badgering you. Already the words—'No, it is not worth the—' were forming themselves on his tongue, when something from the other side of the room seemed to arrest the words on his very lips. As he turned the girl had risen and seemed to be moving towards him, though he knew she had not taken a step. Her eyes, question points of searching light, with the horror of the young, wild, free thing for a lie, seemed to burn down into his very soul. His thoughts froze in his brain, as his own eyes fell before that merciless scanning of Truth itself. Standing, as it seemed, beside himself, he heard his own voice saying with curious, hypnotic precision:

'The deed is entirely right.'

The spell passed, and the full meaning of his admission came, pounding in upon him. The work of years, the hammering, delving toil of days and nights, the trust of men placed in him, all thrown away because a slip of a girl had looked oddly at him. Rage smote him to blind desperation, and he raised the paper in his hands to tear it in bits, there before their eyes. At his motion, before one of the others could raise a hand, the girl, with one lithe spring, was at his side, had caught his wrist, and with the instinct of the wild things of her hunts was driving her nails deep into the flesh, until the paper fluttered noiselessly down to the floor. Without a word, Juanita took her chair again, and he was left there in the centre of the room, looking dazedly down at the paper on the floor.

'You will take that paper, Mallory, and carry it yourself to Ralston, and register it yourself before 10 o'clock on Monday.' It was Father Corbin again breaking the pause. Mallory's first thought was a dull wonder that they should trust him again, after what had just happened. Then the meaning of it struck him, and he turned angrily to the priest.

'What right have you to force a trust upon me? You think I'm a scoundrel already; do you want me to be a still bigger one? Take the deed to Ralston yourselves, and fight it out fairly.'

'There is nothing for us to fight, and you know it,' came the steady answer, probing down into the man's soul, down to the place where he kept shame and self-respect and his notions of manhood; 'the fight is yours alone, with yourself; and when you have won it, as you will win it, then you will be not a scoundrel, but a man—and a good one some day.'

Slowly stooping, John Mallory picked up the paper from the floor and, without a word, passed out of the door and down the trail.

At midnight, Father Corbin, pacing in front of the cabin where he was lodged, saying his Rosary for the night, saw the light in the office of the company blink, blink steadily, as some one passed and repassed. And he knew that Mallory was fighting his own fight. Curiously, he had little fear of the result, but he breathed his prayer to the God of the watching stars above for the character and the soul of this man, in the hour of his bitterness.

John Mallory, striding back and forth across his office, was, in truth, fighting the crucial battle of his life. He realised that he was at the last ditch of manhood, beyond which such things as honor and faith and truth to a man's self do not go. Yet he was not fighting to keep away from that ditch, rather to cross it, and be where those things could not follow him. Yet he could not. Everything about him told him to destroy that deed or to hide it even from himself. The claim-prints on the wall flaunted each its price at him; his report for the month, broken off that afternoon at the words, 'All clear except the two claims under—'; the very ugliness of the homely office itself; all dragged at him to cross that ditch. Yet he could not. The deed itself lay there open, leering at him. Twice he took it to the safe to lock it there and lose the combination until after Monday; and that soul-burning look of the girl was upon him. Twice he seized it, to tear it; and he saw, deep in his wrist, the print of the girl's nails. So through the night. In the hour of the gray dawning a weary-footed man passed out of the office, mounted a pony from the corral at the back; and slipped away into the mist at the ford of the arroyo. On the other side, high up where the draping mists thinned, the figure paused, looking at the things it was leaving, then faded into the mountain shadows on the long north trail—to Ralston.—*Extension.*