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THE MIDLANDERS

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

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CHAPTER VIII

The Tramp of the Young Men.

Mr. Curran was in his office working on a rush job for the Gem Restaurant whose illumination across the Square, "Home Cooking—Chicago Style," was in his eyes as he kicked the old press treadle, when Harlan came in. Harlan had not intended to see Wiley again, so deep was his hurt and humiliation, but when he crossed the Square and heard the clankety-clank of the News job department, he could not resist old faiths and arders. Wiley, too, would be hurt if Harlan departed without a word. So it seemed the most natural thing to lounge in, sink down in the editor's chair, while the editor held up his inky hands a minute to wave them cheerfully.

And always it was something like this: "Hello, Harlan!"

"Hello, Wiley!"

"Were you down at the Junction for the seven-ten this evening?"

"Yes."

"Who came in?"

"Old Lady Hicks and that Sheasby girl from Ottumwa, Billy said."

"Hash 'em up for the local. Give Old Lady Hicks a real snifter—her subscription is about out and I want a renewal!"

So Harlan reached for some copy paper and scrawled the items, and looked over the stuff on the local hook.

"News Notes" will be rotten this week. The brakeman on Ten said his wife had a baby."

"Shove it in."

"I don't know his name."

"Shove it in anyhow. Splash it on thick—jolly him about the cigars and Number Ten, and let folks guess who it is."

So Harlan scrawled on while the editor rehearsed all the news he could think of. "Tear up some editorial dope—local option. Saloon must be kept from our midst.... Home and Fireside.... Remember Our Boys.... Outlaw the Unholy Traffic...." murmured Wiley above the clankety-clank.

Now, Mr. Curran had no boys, and the unholy traffic had piled bear bottoms so high behind the News' fence that wagons could barely pass; and his Home and Fireside consisted of one round old lady who had followed his haphazard fortunes from Puget Sound to the Rio Grande and back to the old town, but nevertheless, Harlan patiently denounced the traffic for a stuckup.

"There'll be," mused the editor, "Banbury tarts and coffee in a minute when Aunt Abby comes from prayer meeting. Arne and Janet will drop in—it'll be farewell sprees for old, old boy. I'm glad we had you last, after all."

This was rare comforting. Harlan had wanted to be distant to Wiley, but one couldn't. Even Aunt Abby couldn't, and she ought to know his worst. He was a man, like many a bachelor, who sought the mothering stimulus of older women. He was his gayest and his best with them. Aunt Abby had followed all the latter years of his wandering; had homesteaded with him under the gray low-hanging skies of the Dakota winters; she remembered the ceaseless winds and sands of Nevada where he had prospected, and the dim buttes of the southwest where they had slept under the stars in lonely cow camps. Always she had saved him from sheer vagabondia, given the respectability of motherhood to his vagaries, defended him against town gossip; was proud of him against all the world. "That limb, Wiley T." he was to her lonely need of love.

"Janet," mused Wiley, "and Arne—and you—that's about all there's been to the old town for me. It's been lonely here, Harlan—and I'm a bit gray around the temples. You three have made the town more green and fair and livable."

His eye had an unvoiced sparkle today as he worked. Presently a smart team drew to the door, and by way of welcome, with his hal, the editor hurried a begrimed newspaper director to the newcomer's feet. A tall, swarthy-cheeked young man with the air of the fields upon him, followed Miss Vance into the shop. The woman superintendent of schools listened to her brother's exuberant chaffing of the others for a moment; she seemed mentally taking stock of the place—Curran wiping his hands on an em-purpled towel, Harlan impaling copy on the hook; the general nerf-de-well atmosphere of the Rome, Iowa, News.

"Tents," said the editor, "and coffee. Maybe bear. Who likes bear? Nobody. It's unlawful. But there's a case under Aunt Abby's bed, and the good old lady, all unsuspecting, is at prayer-meeting."

"We've dined," rejoined Miss Vance, "keep on with your work."

Mr. Curran was noted for his pretexts to evade work—which explained a deal about the News' circulation. Miss Vance sat down in the swivel chair at the editor's desk which Harlan had vacated. She was tailored fair beyond Rome's possibilities even if Sarah Coyne, the dressmaker, had, since a recent trip to Chicago, changed the legend on her shop-window to "Modiste." Tailored and groomed, thirty, aggressive, keen, reserved—the county said it was not for nothing she was daughter of Jake Vance, the political farmer. Janet was accredited to be the most effective campaigner in the court house; she had been elected to her second term by a splendid majority after having carried her first election to the courts. The old-line party men had not wanted her, but they had had to accept a woman school superintendent. She looked Harlan over with critical interest; Mrs. Van Hart and High street had not given her much support.

Arne was poking among Wiley's exchanges, snorting militantly now and then. He was on his way back to the

all's said and done, to be a "Geek" and call on all those girls who flutter summer evenings in and out of the Van Hart gate is a much greater thing. Which is reasonable and proper and according to the light of the Best People in many places east and west other than Rome, Iowa.

"Oh, Harlan's all right," repeated Arne, "and so are these other people along High street. So is that copper Indian over on the square—he's marking the spot where something once happened. In Earville they're laughing at our row over Sin Creek. Every time a freshet comes, what happens?"

Some of our prominent citizens wake up in the morning and find their lawns strewn with drowned socks and busted stoepkins and brass collar buttons that Sin Creek has swept down on us from the garbage heaps of Earville. Then they roar and talk creek diversion, but nothing was ever done until they made it a county deal with Old Thad Tanner getting the rake-off. Then, being regular, the best families agreed to it."

Sinshawa had been a scandal immemorially, everybody knew. But then everybody loved Sinshawa and Rome without the wanton singing down a dozen channels from the bluff would not have been Rome. One could put up with a vulgar collar button washed down now and then from the alleys of Earville.

"While we're all here," put in Wiley, "let's talk over the Christmas number of our magazine so's we can get it out by April. It's really due to our subscriber!"

Miss Vance looked at him. "Wiley, she said decisively, "I'm going to sell The Inland Empire."

Mr. Curran feigned distress and amazement. "Sell it? Why, you can't—I'm president!"

"Besides," he went on riotously, "we've got a new subscriber. I was afraid our other one would die. The Gem—Chicago Style. Since Sallie Friesby came back from the city she says it's a shame this town has no place where one can go after the theater, so she's going to keep the Gem open until ten o'clock if there's not a soul in the place. She's going to give Rome a touch of high life, and on that aspiration I got her to subscribe to The Inland Empire—if we give her a write-up. Also, we take it out in trade. By Jove, I jumped at it—The Inland Empire does need a square meal!"

Miss Vance looked at him in some despair. "Nevertheless, we're going to sell the magazine—to a Des Moines chap who wants to turn it into a farm journal."

Mr. Curran looked doleful. It is true that he was president of the corporation, but most of Miss Vance's salary had gone of late to get The Inland Empire out of the Earville print-shop. Wiley had long since exhausted his eloquence and his credit. Mr. Curran's touch seemed as irresponsibly fatal to this grand scheme as it had to the News' circulation. Janet had had great dreams of The Empire. She had wanted expression and achievement beyond the routine of her work; she had thought to touch the world, its letters, crafts, movements with her own convictions; they would build their magazine slowly to success, aspiring high but yet keeping to the good earth, with departments for the home, the farm and countryside, while battling for the militant political ideals of the west. It would mean the sweetest of power and freedom—now she was wondering how her own practical mind could ever have supposed it would succeed with Mr. Curran at its business head.

"Wiley," she said severely, "I shall sell it."

"You had better," he murmured again dismally, "consult our stockholders."

Arne and Harlan shouted irrepressibly. "Go ahead," cried Harlan. "Till do me."

"I'm too busy this year to furnish any more Boston Notes," and the athletic resume, any. I move to go down to the Gem, eat out that dollar subscription and then suspend publication at once!"

"Harlan," retorted the superintendent, "Wiley is demoralizing you. I'm glad you're going back to Harvard."

Her brother looked with some frankness on the immaculate young man. The lean-faced student-farmer from Wisconsin had the dyspeptic diaethesis of the reformer. The genial ease of breeding in the judge's son galled him at times, even as did Curran's whimsical impracticability. Arne's black eyes went about the old shop with impatient envy, the old Washington press, the stack of frayed type stained and whitened by generations of wandering printers; the ramshackly desk piled with yellowing and ink-stained papers, gummy with paste and inky accretions except in the one spot where the editor was wont to push everything aside to find writing space—the student-farmer, with his fiery seal, saw in it the power—united, dissipated, perverted. He was forever urging Wiley to further radicalism; and Wiley at his best was irresponsible enough. The Vances and the News had been united from the first by common sentiment; from this same old desk, Jake Vance in war-time days had lilted the body of the elder Curran, helpless with a copperhead bullet, and defied the mob; and in the years of the granger movement the News had supported Vance in repeated hopeless battles for democracy. Arne had grown up in this movement's ferment and vain idealism; he had come back from his "cow college" with a sense of revolt, an impatience to hurry his conservative country of the Reserve into the "young men's" movement of the party.

"Harvard," he growled, and then conscious of his inattention, added: "Well, that's all right. Harlan!"

He had drop all that Bostonese accent when Janet had urged him to run for congress; just as he had laughed, running his blued fingers ruefully through his hair, when she asked of his plans for the abortive Inland Empire. Miss Vance, in the case of Mr. Curran, usually concluded by going on and disregarding him.

"I suppose," he put in now, on Arne's never-ending satire of county affairs. "I'll have to shag along with the old town alone. You boys off to college, and Janet visiting the district schools,

Christmas—who'll be home Christmas?" He appealed to Harlan ingenuously.

"June for me. I'll run down to Washington for Christmas at the senators."

Wiley slowly considered. Senator Fairchild, cousin of Mrs. Van Hart, one-time cabinet officer, intimate of the president, most powerful figure of the time, was the gossip of Europe from the west at Washington. Surely, for a country judge's son, the mere relating of dinner at Fairchild's bespoke a flattering future. Harlan was indeed, the son of fortune.

But again Arne growled. Fairchild was the red rag in the face of the state's political rebels; he was one with the gigantic financial interests that dominated his party. Alreadily his re-election was bitterly opposed.

"Eat that dinner, son," roared the farmer-student. "I'll be the last one for that old cuss as a senator! The governor's crowd'll get him! I tell you fellows ought to get an ear to the ground. Here Wiley sits in his old shop kicking off a four-dollar job for the Gem Restaurant when he ought to out among the people. Here's Harlan getting through law and then hanging out for some picayunes, old that Tanner throws him to keep him lined up with the old guard. In a few years he'll be fat and married, driving a car around town, never a hair sweated and—respectable! Oh, lord!" Arne smote his hard fists together—"never a rough and tumble fight in your life, was there, Harlan?"

Harlan smiled. That sort of thing was not for the Van Harts.

"You ought to come up to Wisconsin instead of going east. That Harvard graft is all right for law, but you want to catch the new spirit of the new times. Sometimes up there in the north, I'd like you to climb the hill with me and see the falls from the cow college fight to get into Carmack's lectures on political science. I say, fight to get in! Carmack's the faculty chap the regents would fire if they dared. But I tell you every man who comes out of the class room is a polished gentleman, and the margins of the time. He was a charming man, but entirely unscrupulous. When duely took him away from his royal mistress they wrote love letters, just as ordinary people do, and the letters of the marquis always breathed undying devotion. And, while thus convincing the queen that he lived for her alone, he was quietly laying siege to a young Roman girl of wealth and beauty!"

Wiley's eyes were on the two. Both native sons of the Midlands, one bronzed with the soil, lean with his ardors; the other healthy pink, the beauty of a Galahad, the pure nurture of his father's Victorian standards—or the two he loved Harlan better. There was about him a completion, he was a product of an American era done; the other was in the travail of the making. But he could visualize all of Arne's outcry. He himself, in the wandering old town, had seen the epic of the old west close; he had mingled the wine of his life with it. But now the new land was here, the stately cities rising, the ordered nobleness of form. That was the meaning of the cry and tumult, the fuller democracy; the west had seen and caught the vision; and Curran, the Celtic romanticist, could feel the splendor.

"You shall seek the truth, and the truth shall make you free; that is what they tell us up there," went on Arne. "I've lain in bed after bucking all night on soli-tests and economic history, and listened to the young men going up the hill to Carmack's lectures—the young men up the hill in the snow at seven o'clock! And when he declared that the spirit of socialism was the spirit of every good thing the world was fighting for; when he told them to go out and preach the recall, and the state control of wealth—I've heard them shout, and others going up the hill took up the shout. That's what we're getting, along with soil culture and forest preservation and law and engineering—I tell you it sounds like the march of a new civilization—the tramp of the young men going up the hill."

Harlan listened with his detached and friendly smile. He remembered last week stopping Arne in the post office with a forecast of the Yale-Harvard football season, but the western student had not seemed to hear—perhaps he was filled with his vision of the young men going up the hill seeking the vision of the New America, the truth that should make men free.

"All those young fellows going back to their states jump into Harlan's," went on Arne. "So am I. Harlan's going to go to stump this county talking pigs and politics, and we'll ditch Jim Hall for congress and Fairchild later. And where will you be?"

"Arne," drawled Harlan with a grating calm, "I shall probably be arguing a line-fence case in the justice court."

"Father le Bel," she said, "you are witness that I treat this dog fairly. I give him all the time he needs to justify himself, if he can."

Hearing these words, the marquis began a long pale, trying to explain, trying to apologize, trying to convince the queen that his repentence was sincere. She stood like a statue and listened to it all. When he had said all he could think of, the queen turned again to the priest, as calm and inexorable as ever.

"Father," she cried, "do what you can for the good of his soul. He has failed to justify himself, and he must die."

The good priest dropped on his knees before her and prayed that she would have mercy.

"I have said the words," answered the queen, "and no power under Heaven can make us unsay them."

Then she left the room, and Monaladeschi was left with the priest and the three executioners. He groveled on his knees in a sickening way, like Monmouth at the feet of King James, and implored the priest to make one more effort. So the priest went to Christine and begged for the wretched man's life, but she was adamant.

Bel returned to the gallery and announced that his errand had been useless.

"Prepare yourself to die!" cried the chief of the executioners, and the marquis and the priest prayed together. Then the butchery began. The marquis wore a suit of mail under his clothes and this turned the swords of the executioners, so they hacked him over the head and neck, and he dragged himself over the floor like a wounded snake, and called on God for mercy. But there was no mercy for him in heaven or on earth. One of the butchers finally stabbed him in the throat and ended his misery.

At that period murders were not regarded seriously, but even calloused France was indignant over this barbarous crime. The Cardinal Mazarin, whose conscience wasn't at all sensitive, wrote officially to Christina saying "a crime so atrocious must be considered sufficient excuse for banishing your majesty from the court and dominions of the king, who, with every honest man, felt horrified at the law."

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Arne had been asked to state his

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"To which the old man responded:

"There is as much sense in my way of

swearing that way," said the other, with manifest disgust.

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