

Kilgour & Co.

by
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THE last time old Pop Treadwell canned me and Jim Caldwell we plunged into a vortex of commercial activity, but the next time we are fired off the ranch for general disobedience and insane behavior we will carefully refrain from doing anything at all and just sit still until Pop takes us unto his bosom again.

Every so often the boss seems to get tired of seeing me and Jim. Then he discharges us from the pay-roll, with some of the most profane and scandalous language that ever fell from the human tongue. We always know we will recover our jobs if we wait long enough, because down in his heart Pop loves us. Sometimes you can't tell by his conduct or manner of speech that he loves us, but he does, nevertheless.

We broke off diplomatic financial relations not long ago and soon after the big poker-game at the Tulena Hotel. That is, we didn't break them off, but Pop did. There came a cigar drummer from Chicago and an insurance agent from Omaha and a horse-buyer from Phoenix, and when these three gentlemen arrived in Tulena and saw what kind of a town it was they began to get uneasy. The fell clutch of monotony threatened them, and they inquired.

They stated in public that they would

like to pass the lagging hours playing the ancient game of poker, and they said it would make things brighter and better if a couple of neighborhood yokels could be drawn into the pastime to make a holiday for them. Jim Caldwell and I heard about it. We volunteered to go and be the local suckers, and pretty soon the game commenced.

That was on Monday morning. On Wednesday afternoon we were still playing, though a trifle groggy. We hadn't paused for food, sleep, baths, shaves, or fresh shirts, and among the other things we neglected was our job out on Pop Treadwell's ranch. When Pop heard about us and our poker-game he said some words you can't find even in the Bible.

The boss had told us on the previous Saturday that he wanted Jim and me to take a busted tractor into Tulena. We didn't do it on account of those three traveling persons and their poker-game, and by Wednesday afternoon Pop Treadwell was so mad you could light a cigar on him.

The game ended from personal and physical exhaustion. When we local suckers—meaning Jim and me—looked over the finished results, we found we had won four hundred and ninety dollars, which we split about even. The traveling salesmen were

mildly annoyed, because they had figured on something else, but when it ended Jim put his money into one pocket, I folded the rest into a neat bundle, and then we went out into the air.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Pop was a little anxious about us." Jim said to me. "This is Wednesday. What was it he said about a tractor?"

"I won't go back to the ranch," I remarked. "You can go on up if you feel you want to meet the boss, but I prefer to stay here in Tulena, where things are comparatively calm. Somehow or other I have a feeling that when Pop sees us he's going to try to restrain himself without success. You go ahead, and I'll linger."

Being a person of little judgment, Jim wandered on out to the ranch, while I remained behind in the Tulena bar. When I saw Jim again he told me about it. He said he walked right up to Pop Treadwell, smiling a friendly smile and pretending that nothing was the matter, and that Pop lit into him like nine million bricks falling on a passer-by. In no time at all Jim lost his wage-earning position and mine, too.

"And tell that frog-faced, no-good son of a sand-lizard that if I see him around here I'll hang a whipple-tree on his dome," said Pop in closing his remarks. The person he referred to was me, although I am not what he said, nor anything like it.

Thereupon Jim left the Treadwell ranch with a pained and embarrassed expression, while Pop walked behind him as far as the garage, pouring out what you might call invective. Pop is one of the world's champion invective-pourers, and Jim said afterward he could feel the hide gradually peeling off his spinal column.

"So," concluded my partner in crime, winding up his report, "you can see for yourself that we ain't got any jobs left."

"Correct," I agreed, "but we've got some funds, which those traveling gents didn't

expect to leave among us. We won't starve. In time the boss will return our jobs to us and shake hands, like he always does. We'll take rooms at the Tulena Hotel and spend the time having our shoes shined."

That's what we should have done. And we would, too, except for Jim. Every so often his mind begins to ferment and he regards the give-off as thought. Furthermore, he sometimes fools me into regarding it likewise. After we had idled away some days Jim began to look restless. One of these ideas of his was crawling over him and making him unexpected.

"Shorty," he said to me, "you know I've always thought I'd like to dabble in business and ventures. Now that we are surrounded with a little time and the necessary money, why can't we embark upon commercial enterprises?"

"Meaning what?" I asked, thinking apprehensively of my three hundred fish, which represented my entire corporeal wealth.

"I'd like to be a business man," Jim went on, with that dreamy look in his eye which I always ought to fear. "I would like to wear a neat brown suit and a gold watch-chain across my vest, and write something in a little book at intervals. Pop ain't going to hire us back to chase cows for quite a while, judging by his rage, and we ought to improve the time."

"I don't mind improving the time, but I hate to have anybody start improving my money," I argued. "My money don't need any improvement whatever. It's good money, and I can spend it anywhere without questions."

"Yeah," Jim rejoined, "but here's a chance to invest in a going business and get to be a stable citizen. Maybe we won't want to go back to those ranch jobs, when Pop offers them."

"All right," I said. "I'll listen. What is this thing that's got you so feverish?"

"The Desert Haberdashery," Jim

explained as though it was something to be proud of.

“The Desert Haberdashery?” I repeated with a question in my tone, and my left hand on my pants pocket, wherein reposed my untouched and virgin roll. “Go right ahead explaining, because up to this point I feel no wild enthusiasms.”

“This is it,” Jim said earnestly. “The Desert Haberdashery is on its last legs, and old Jig Spooner is trying to sell out. He realizes that he ain’t fitted to run a haberdashery, seeing he spent most of his life in the Tulena Livery. He’s got a fancy stock of neat and nobby gents’ goods in his store, and he wants to dispose of the business. There’s our chance.”

“You call that a chance, do you?” I asked, very frigid. “You ain’t been hitting your head on some hard substance?”

“Sure,” said Jim with warmth. “The Desert Haberdashery, in the hands of hustlers like us, ought to produce a monthly profit of a hundred dollars each. We’ll put some ginger into it. Jig tells me his stock is worth a thousand, and he’ll sell for six hundred. You have three hundred and I have the other three. Is that a chance, or not?”

I’ll say one thing for Jim Caldwell. When he warms up to a thing, he warms up all over. He told me excitedly about the present and expected population of Tulena proper, although Tulena isn’t particularly proper, at that. He informed me that the surrounding county would supply us with a steady influx of trade and that nobby young men would come hurrying in from adjacent towns to get our New York neckties. Jig must have given Jim the figures, because he had an armful of them; and finally he talked me into it. I fell reluctantly, but in a downward direction. After a long time I removed my wad from my hip with a sigh and handed it over to Jim.

“All right,” I said. “I got it easy, and it’s going the same.”

I recognized, of course, that what Jim said about Jig Spooner was perfectly true. Jig wasn’t fitted by Nature to be the elegant and genteel boss of a haberdashery store, because Jig wears long, confused whiskers and chews fine-cut. His own manner of dressing leads you to believe that he collects his garments at night, after people have thrown out the refuse. In a well-conducted haberdashery people expect the clerks and the proprietor to look immaculate, like the magazine pictures. Jig didn’t look like any magazine picture, except maybe a war scene.

Hurrying over the financial and commercial details, Jim slipped our six hundred to Mr. Spooner, and we received large, ruled papers, stating that we now owned the Desert Haberdashery, in fee simple. Jig took the fee without any comment, and Jim and I remained just as simple as ever. The very first crack Jim wanted to change the name of the going concern.

“The Desert Haberdashery is a poor title,” Jim stated. “Anyhow, it has a bum reputation among the people. Let’s call ourselves Caldwell & Co.”

“No,” I said; “not a chance. I never liked Caldwell, and I don’t now. Somehow, Caldwell makes you think of undertakers and the last sad rites. We want a good, cheerful-sounding name, so let’s call us Kilgour & Co.”

It took me a long time to win that argument, because Jim is a vain cuss and likes to see his name in print, even if it’s on a sign-board. But I won. In fact, I threatened to resign and sue for damages, so Jim gave in, and we had Ollie Drake make us an ornate and expensive sign. He sprinkled it with granulated black gravel and got some near-gold letters, and presently “Kilgour & Co.” looked down on Main Street. I spent quite a lot of time walking up and down, looking at it, while Jim stayed inside, unpacking boxes.

II.

THE first week we were in business I met Pop Treadwell on the street and bowed to him politely. I tried to act dignified, as befits a solid business man, but it is difficult with a guy like Pop Treadwell.

"You two insane polliwogs can come back to work whenever you want to," Pop said, just as though we weren't the budding necktie and suspender kings of Tulena. "You hear me. You can come back to work on my ranch any time."

"Yeah." I said, some of my dignity leaving me. "But evidently you don't know about me and Jim. We're in business. Look at our sign."

"I know all about you," Pop said grimly. "That's why I'm saying you can come back to work. I'll be expecting you. Good-by."

He walked away, leaving me with the impression that somehow or other he didn't take our commercial enterprise very seriously. Later on he said he hoped none of his friends had loaned us any money.

When we bought the Desert Haberdashery, we found that Jig Spooner was a sort of a sybarite. He had fixed up two large rooms over the store, furnishing them in a most barbaric and splendid manner. Jim and I moved into these sleeping quarters, and the first night I felt like that picture of Cleopatra. Anyhow, we slept there and we also began wearing pajamas and taking daily baths, clean or not.

In the mean time business went on, but it didn't go any too briskly, even after Kilgour & Co. took charge of Tulena's nobby dressers. We offered them our new neckties, silk socks, and zebra shirts, but the daily cash receipts didn't overwhelm us. Jim got a hair-cut and a shine and became the head clerk, while I put on my good suit and when customers came in I pretended to know more than they did.

Tulena may contain a lot of eager young men who yearn to look like matinee idols, but you'd never have guessed it, to stand in Kilgour & Co.'s store. Our nobby New York pajamas attracted nothing except a little dust. Our stand-up collars stayed in our window so long that they finally had to sit down. The gay blades of the town seemed to be getting on fine without our silk underwear, so I started wearing it myself, on the theory that a thing had better wear out than rust out.

"Listen," I said to Jim, after I saw how things were heading. "We ain't going to make a hundred dollars profit per month. We ain't going to have any profit at all. There's something violently wrong with your figures."

"I know what's the matter," Jim said, removing a splinter from his thumb.

"You always know what's the matter," I answered gloomily, "but what good does it do me? I go broke just the same."

"The trouble is," Jim went on, "the men of this community are only what you'd call fair dressers. They don't know enough yet to crave the latest Fifth Avenue styles in socks, neckwear, gloves, and so forth, and consequently business is comparatively light."

"It is," I agreed.

"But," said Jim, "the spot where we're weak is this: We have no women's department. We ought to sell dry goods for women, because they do all the real buying. We ought to start a ladies' department."

"On what?" I inquired. "We've got just enough money left to keep us on eating terms with food at the Busy Bee."

"We could begin slow," Jim argued. "We have plenty of space for a ladies' department."

"Sure," I said, having a sudden thought. "I'd look slick, wouldn't I, selling those things females wear where you can't see them? Suppose a young woman came in here and asked me to show her something and then talked about it! You're foolish."

"I thought about those details," Jim went on, without even blushing. "Of course, we'd have to hire a lady salesman."

There was more talk on this subject, with Jim pointing to the plain fact that we weren't doing so well with gents' goods, although we might do better in the future. There was no other haberdashery in Tulena, Jim contended. There was no dynamite factory, either, I told him, yet we didn't see anybody rushing in to start one.

In the end Jim won another argument, because I saw my three hundred en route, anyhow. We decided to put in a ladies' department.

"Now," I ventured, "who shall we hire to run it?"

"I've thought that all out," Jim said, with a pleased look.

"You don't seem to be having anything but thoughts lately," I returned, "and each time you think, I move nearer the poor-farm. Who is the lady?"

"Marie Newlands," said Jim. "I've discussed the subject with her, and she'll work for eight dollars a week."

"Marie Newlands!" I repeated, and for the first time Jim's idea began to look plausible. "There's the first sane thing you've said since we left off ranching."

Jim and I have known Marie Newlands ever since she came with her mother to live in Tulena. The mother had something the matter with her, which was why she came West. But there was nothing the matter with Marie. The longer you looked at her, the surer you felt that here was one young female without anything the matter with her. She was as easy to look at as a paying-teller pushing a lot of yellow stuff toward you, and she had a soft, drawling voice that would make a canary come down off a tree and play bean-bag. Marie had a way of wearing things in her hair, and when she smiled you felt sorry you ever said harsh words about women. Several of the

young Tulena men had set their caps at her, but they might as well have set the family clock.

Now and then I used to nod to Marie, and she had nodded back, right friendly, but romance went no further than that. Jim had also approved of her in the past. It happened that Marie wanted a job about the time we determined to fix up the female part of the population with high-grade goods, and so we went after her.

"I'll tend to hiring Marie." Jim said to me, taking the task on himself casually and without effort. "I've got to tell her what we want in our women's department, and how we want it run."

"I can tell her as well as you can," I argued, "seeing neither one of us knows anything about it."

But Jim insisted, and he conducted the negotiations with the fair Marie with such success that within ten days you could step into Kilgour & Co., Main Street merchants, and buy your wife things you could describe but not name, except in a hesitating manner. Behind the counter of the ladies' department Marie Newlands welcomed the trade, and I'll say one thing right here. Marie was a mighty smart girl.

She had a brisk way about her, she pleased the buyers, and she worked fast. She looked intelligent, and she acted intelligent, and if you don't think she was intelligent, keep on plowing through this sea of words and observe the manner in which she used her head, besides making it hold up her curls. When I gaze back upon the scene, I can see now where we erred in hiring a young female with so many brains. We should have employed a moderately stupid assistant, about our own mental caliber, preferably out of the county home.

Well, Kilgour & Co. began to pick up in a brisk and amazing manner. The women of Tulena came into our busy store and bought

dry goods right and left, and every so often Jim and I would look into the rising tide at the cash-register and then go across to Ike Dorman's and buy a few wet goods. It was all very pleasing and genial—too much so to last.

Likewise, the gents' department caught some of the impetus, and the young men of Tulena began to show signs of life. They came in and asked about silk garters with ivory snaps, and bought our colored mufflers.

On the street Pop Treadwell met me again and took a long look at my new silk shirt, which I had drawn down instead of some cash profits.

"Listen," said Pop. "You and Jim will be coming back to the ranch pretty soon now, and I want to repeat that your old jobs are waiting any time you show up."

"Pop," I said, affecting a certain pomposity of manner. "You ain't got us right at all. Jim and me are on the highroad to commercial affluence and integrity. Ten years from now, when this town is a metropolis, people will point to me and Jim as pioneer merchants. Most likely, we'll own the principal sky-scrapers, and the chances are I'll be president of the Chamber of Commerce."

Pop was chewing tobacco, as usual, and at this point he disgustedly drowned a family of red ants, which had been going through the day without a suspicion of trouble. I could tell he didn't regard me as material for the future president of anything.

"You misguided galoots will have to have some place to sleep," he went on, as though he was talking to himself, "so your old bunks will be waiting. Myself, I wouldn't take you back, because you're a couple of lunatics, but Mrs. Treadwell seems to feel sorry for you."

Then he walked away, and I went into Kilgour & Co. to help Jim count over the cash receipts for the third time that morning.

As I say, the business outlook was excellent and getting more so each day. We

ought to have let well enough alone, but we didn't. I used to glance at Marie Newlands, flitting hither and yon about her department and remark to myself that here was a regular girl. Jim was also suffused with similar thoughts, and one night we got together and began discussing things.

"We're paying Marie eight dollars a week," Jim said, with a thoughtful look in his eye, "and for a young concern like us eight bucks is a lot—I've been thinking."

"I have, too," I said. "What's your thought?"

"Well," Jim went on deliberately, "Marie's a nice young girl, and I was thinking this. If one of us was to marry her, it would cut down expenses, because as our wife—as the wife of one of us—she would go right on working, and there wouldn't be any eight dollars paid out Saturdays. Get me?"

"Yeh, I got you. Continue."

"Right now, Marie is only a clerk for Kilgour & Co. If she married one of us, she would be a sort of partner in the enterprise, and as such she would work harder for the firm. As part owner and one man's wife, she would also work without any salary, because nobody is going to put his wife on the payroll. We save money."

"Yeah, and we get a fine wife, too," I put in at this point. "But the question naturally arises, which one of us marries her? You ain't given that a proper amount of thought, it seems to me."

"Me," Jim said unhesitatingly. "I'm the most eligible member of this firm, so it looks as if I ought to marry her."

"No," I said, meaning no, and nothing else.

"Yes," Jim argued. "I suggested it first, so I ought to have first crack at the idea. You know it's just possible that Marie might not want to marry."

"She might not want to marry you," I observed. "At this minute I think Marie is a

smart girl, but if she marries you it's a sign I'm wrong."

"We'll split this up," Jim continued. "I'll go to Marie in the morning and tell her that it'll be best for everybody if she marries me. If, by any chance, she declines the offer, you take your turn. But I propose first because I thought of it first."

"Go ahead," I said without pleasure. "If you have any bad luck, you'll know who wished it."

The next morning, when I saw Jim, he was as gay as a lark, waiting for Marie to show up. He remained as gay as a lark, roughly, about twenty minutes, and the next time I noticed him he was coming up out of the cellar where we keep the unpacked goods. He looked a little as if he was coming up out of a grave. If he had been run over by a coal-train he couldn't have worn a more disappointed expression.

"Well," I said, "did you ask her?"

"I did," said Jim in a low voice.

"What did she say?" He looked at me like a dying duck, swallowed his palate, and grunted.

"She said she couldn't marry me."

"Fine," I replied, slapping him on the back. "Now I'll go and ask her. You ought never to have proposed, anyhow, Jim. You're nothing but a rough ranch-hand. And it don't really matter which one of us she marries, as long as it's me."

III.

THEREAFTER I hung around the ladies' department of Kilgour & Co. for one hour by the clock, before trade thinned out enough for me to have a quiet talk with Marie. She had a blue ribbon in her hair and her eyes sparkled. I thought, as I stood there beholding her, that I had never before seen anything that made the state of single blessedness so repellent.

"Marie," I began, "how would you like

to join this active and growing firm of Kilgour & Co.?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand," she answered.

"I'm offering you my hand in matrimony," I continued, cheerful enough. "Jim tells me he tried and skidded. Now I'm trying. By marrying me, you not only become Mrs. Shorty Kilgour, but you horn in as one of the partners. Besides that, I might as well admit that I think you're the finest girl I ever knew. I've been foolish about you ever since you and your ma moved in here, and while you may not love me madly now, you'll have plenty of time to learn."

Marie smiled a sad, wan smile, and it dimly dawned on me that the rest of the firm was about to hear some bad news.

"Shorty," she said, "I like you, and I like my job. I would also like to become somebody's wife in this business, because I see a great future for the store. But I can't marry you."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Because I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I can't," she said.

I suppose she would have kept this up all day, so I changed to something else.

"Ain't I a good-looking, husky young fellow, with a future?" I inquired. "Wouldn't I make a good husband and treat you kind and gentle? Wouldn't I let you buy all the clothes you wanted and rent a piano and bring up the children in my religion? Ain't I as good a prospective—"

"All of that and more," Marie said, breaking up the thought. "You would make an ideal husband, Shorty, but I can't marry you. Now let's not talk about it any longer, because it distresses me."

"All right," I said in conclusion. "It distresses me, too. Remember, I feel sore about this. I won't fire you, because I still have some sense, and anyhow Jim wouldn't

let me. But I'm bitter, and I'm going across to Ike Dorman's and get bitterer."

"Won't you shake hands with me?" Marie asked when I started for the door. She looked up at me and smiled.

"Yes, I'll shake hands, but you have wounded me deep, and I won't get over it."

Then I shook hands, and three minutes later I congregated all my woes under Ike's roof and started to drown them. I felt that I didn't want to see Jim until some of the early sorrow had worn off. Ike helped me to wear it off, and after a while I went back to work.

It is a well-known fact that wherever a woman is she's bound to make trouble, and I regret to state that from the fatal morning when we both proposed and had the tinware tied to us, life didn't run along as smoothly as of yore. I could see that Jim regarded me with sullen looks. He wasn't as polite as formerly. Now and then I would find him brooding about something, and when I'd speak he'd strangle his desire to answer me with harsh and insulting words.

On the other hand, I no longer loved Jim with that deep and abiding affection which has been a deathless bond between us. I began to loathe the sucker, and why I cannot explain, unless it was Marie. I think now that it was.

Business went along the same as usual. Marie did her work perfectly, and we fussed around the store selling shirts and things, but underneath there was a smoldering volcano of discontent. I began to feel sorry I ever left Pop Treadwell and embarked upon the perilous sea of barter and trade.

Then I unexpectedly ran into Peyton Gaines and picked up an earful of news that just about shot away all my upper works. I'll explain that Peyton Gaines is our deputy sheriff in Tulena, and hasn't worked in nine years. He had no money and no prospects, but he dressed pretty well for an insolvent gent, and for the last two years he has been one of

Alf Redding's deputies. The total perquisites of a deputy sheriff in Tulena County perk about fourteen dollars per annum, so you can see that Peyton Gaines was no plutocrat.

"That was a good joke on you, wasn't it?" Peyton asked, leaning against the livery horse block and looking at me with mild sympathy.

"What was a joke on me?" I asked, because this was the first news of it.

"About you and Marie."

I regarded the long-legged hellion with a cold eye, wondering just how much he knew.

"I don't quite get you yet," I answered. "Proceed; and if you think you're trying to kid somebody, you're liable to run into a swift punch."

"I'm not trying to kid you," Peyton went on seriously. "Only I know you asked Marie to marry you, and she turned you down."

"You know that, do you?" I said politely. "How'd you find out?"

"Marie told me," he said calmly.

"If that's the case, I suppose my sentimental affairs are just the same in this town as the morning police news."

"No, not that bad," Peyton said. "She didn't tell anybody but me."

"Well," said I, "where's the joke you just mentioned?"

"Don't you know why Marie won't marry you, Shorty?"

"No," I admitted. "If you know, tell me."

"Because she's going to marry Jim Caldwell."

I looked at Mr. Gainer to see if he was drunk and disorderly, but he seemed all right.

"Going to marry Jim." I murmured. "What kind of talk are you handing me, anyhow. Jim asked her to marry him, and she turned him down."

"She didn't turn him down, though."

Peyton Gaines assured me. "He just told you she turned him down. In reality, they fixed it up to get married. Marie don't want you to know their plans, because she thinks you'll get sore. So she told Jim to make you think she had turned him down cold."

"The snake-in-the-grass!" I said, maintaining my poise. "The low skunk. And to think that Jim Caldwell would pull such a trick on an old pal. This beats his worst record."

"It does." Peyton agreed. "It's a deceitful piece of work, but you've got to remember that you don't know Marie Newlands like I do."

"Like *you* do," I said in some astonishment. "What have you got to do with this?"

"Not a thing," Peyton went on bitterly. "Not a solitary thing, only Marie is my girl by rights. She's been my girl for a long time; and now I lose her. Maybe you don't know it, but Marie promised to marry me, Shorty, but after she looked over my financial affairs and my prospects she put me off. Marie is the kind that won't marry a poor man, and I'm that. She wants to be successful, and so she's going to marry Jim Caldwell because she sees that he's a successful business man with a future. So I get thrown down. Have I got a kick coming or not?"

"You have," I said sympathetically. "I didn't think Marie was that sort of a girl."

"She craves worldly success." said the deputy sheriff mournfully. "Not only is she going to marry a man she don't love, but she still confesses that I'm the one she does love. In brief, she sacrifices true love on the altar of ambition."

"You mean Marie would marry you, if you were a successful young galoot, with some dough in the bank and a few stray prospects?" I demanded, thinking of the trick Jim played on me.

"In a holy minute," Gaines answered

"She loves me and admits it. But she must marry some one with a future. She won't wed a guy with one pair of pants and no job."

"Listen," I said suddenly. "Would you marry this girl?"

"Would I!" said Gaines. "Now you are kidding me. I tell you, I'm nutty about Marie."

"Would she marry you—right away—say on Saturday?"

"Why, certainly she would—if I was like Jim, with a bright future."

"All right." I said briskly. "You've got one of the brightest futures in Arizona. You didn't have five minutes ago, but you have now. I'm going to sell you my half of Kilgour & Co., and as you have no coin I'll sell out to you for one dollar, which makes it legal. I ain't doing this because I like you, but because I want to stick a prong into Jim Caldwell and twist it."

"You mean you'll sell me your half?" Peyton asked, somewhat stunned.

"For a dollar," I shouted. "Now go and get the dollar."

In about an hour he looked me up, and he had the dollar. We hurried over to the Tulena County court-house, and in ten minutes I sold out my share of the business to Peyton Gaines.

"And just so we don't slip up on this," I said to him. "I'm going to hold these legal papers until the wedding starts. I don't want anything to happen to this marriage. I want to be sure that Marie marries you. Now go ahead and fix it up with Marie."

The next morning I saw our head clerk of the ladies' department. She came to me with a tear in her eye and shook me by the hand.

"Shorty." she said, with deep meaning, "you have made us very happy."

"I don't like you as well as I thought I did," I said to her. "Anyhow, I have other reasons for doing this."

Then I tried to hire the Temulachai

band for the wedding day, but couldn't, because it was busy. However, I hired an automobile to start the happy pair away on their honeymoon, and then I sat down and waited for Saturday morning.

Jim Caldwell avoided me, but whenever I saw him I thought of what he had coming to him, and I felt better.

Saturday morning was a regular day for getting married. The sun shone brightly, and the people came put to see Peyton Gaines marry Marie Newlands—everybody except Jim. I looked all around for him, but he was out of sight.

Just before Peyton started for the church I handed him the legal papers, entitling him to my half of Kilgour & Co. He put the papers in his pocket and thanked me. So did Marie. Then they started for the minister, and I lagged behind, wondering what had become of Jim. I certainly wanted him to be around where he could see the ceremony.

The marriage was pulled off on schedule, and a minute later Marie, smiling brightly, got into the automobile with her new husband and it started down the street. I stood on the church steps and hurled some rice at them, and when I turned around I observed my former partner.

Instead of being downcast, he was looking at me with a triumphant grin. I didn't get that at all.

"Well, you Janus-faced old hypocrite," I said, walking up to him. "She didn't marry you, did she?"

"Marry me," said Jim, exploding into mirth. "Why should she marry me? You mean she didn't marry *you*."

He seemed so cheerful that it worried me.

"I never expected her to marry me, because she turned me down. But after I found out that she had arranged to marry you and that you had lied to me, I decided to get even with you if I busted a leg. And I'm even.

There they go, kid. And I sent 'em."

"You must be clean out of your head," Jim said, somewhat puzzled. "Who said she was going to marry me? Didn't I tell you she turned me down?"

"You told me that sure, you lying old hound. But Peyton Gaines told me the truth, which was that Marie was fixing to marry you on the quiet and not let me know about it."

"Peyton Gaines told you that!" Jim said, his voice rising to a semi-howl. "Peyton Gaines told—"

"Sure he did. That's how I know."

"Well," said Jim, "Peyton came to me and told me the same thing about you. And to get even with you, I fixed it so he could marry Marie. Maybe you don't know it, but I ain't your partner. I sold my interest to Peyton. In fact, I handed it to him, so's Marie would marry him from under your nose."

I looked at Jim for a minute, and then a slow, bright light began to steal across my useless brain.

"You sold Gaines your half of Kilgour & Co.?" I demanded in a hoarse whisper.

"I did," said Jim. "I gave it to him, almost for nothing."

"So did I," I shouted. "Between them, Marie and Peyton now own our store. We're ruined."

We moved over together for mutual protection under the catastrophe which we now began to understand. For some time we looked at each other in a dumb way; then we turned and looked at the merry throng down the street, with the bridal automobile leading the gay parade. All was cheerful as a wedding bell, except us.

"I even hired that motor-car," I said regretfully.

"I hired the band," said Jim. "Thirty dollars. Looks to me, Shorty, like we been run through some sort of a machine with cogs in it."

We walked down the church steps

together and passed Kilgour & Co., which was closed in honor of the day's main event.

"So-long, store," I said, saluting. "You were a good old store while you lasted."

"We don't own nothing now, do we?" Jim asked as we stopped in front of Ike Dorman's.

"We don't!" I said. "Look down the street."

Jim looked and observed Pop Treadwell coming along in the ranch car. He drove up and stopped.

"Say," he said, "are you two fat-heads coming back to work on my ranch, or do I give those two jobs to the guys that came in on the freight this morning?"

"Fat-heads is right," I said humbly. "We'll be back to our jobs in the morning, Pop. And you won't have no more trouble with Jim and me. We're reformed."

That's what happened. We are now back among the alfalfa and the prize heifers. Every now and then we go into Tulena and look at the growing haberdashery and dry

goods business which we started.

When they came back from the honeymoon, Marie took charge of the ladies' department and Peyton Gaines began handling the men's side as though he'd done it forever. They are happy, and their work is being rewarded. The other day they took down the sign which read Kilgour & Co., and put up the new one, saying, in gold letters, Peyton Gaines.

"And Peyton does, too," Jim said thoughtfully, as we went into Ike's place. "After all, Shorty, we're only plain ranch hands and that's where we belong."

"I'm just as well satisfied," I said to Jim. "Marie's a smart girl. She was too smart to be working for us, as events proved. Maybe we ought to have hired somebody with about half our brains."

"There ain't anybody with half our brains," Jim remarked cheerfully. "Half our brains is decimals."

Then we went into Ike's and shook horses.