

A Dawn in the Desert

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The candidate, in his great swing through the West, made a loop far down into the country which is called semi-arid by its inhabitants and by boomers, but which seems to anybody else only a sea of hot sand under a hotter sky. At least Harley of the *New York Gazette* could find in it neither beauty nor use, as he stared through the car window at the low, rolling expanse of brown, dotted here and there with clumps of the thorny cactus. It was monotonous, ugly, and, above all, awful in its loneliness.

In the car the heat quivered like a mist, and the passengers drew deep panting breaths. They could not open the windows, because the moment they lifted the glass, even for an inch, the burning sand, borne on the breath of the desert wind, drove in like hail, powdering the face, filling the eyes, creeping under the collar,

and harrying like one of the seven plagues of Egypt. So they abode in the still, thick heat, lying limply against the backs of the seats, and enduring as best they could.

„My God! what a country!“ said Harley to himself as he stared at the sandy ocean, rippling away in its ugly brown billows.

Three or four of the correspondents, worn out by the great campaign of the Candidate—inconstant work night and day—had taken an earlier train for Deepdeane, in order that they might get a little rest, leaving the others to handle the news for them in their absence from Jimmy Grayson's side; by and by they would return the favor, and the understanding was complete, good faith being a matter of course.

In three more hours they would be in Deepdeane, and Harley repeated the name to himself more than once. There was a sort of grim satisfaction in rolling it under the tongue; its smooth poetic sound and its significance were in such striking contrast with the country in which it lay; he had noticed before this frequent peculiarity of the desert people, their fondness for names redolent of green grass, clear running water, and trees in bloom. He would not be surprised to pass, one after the other, such stations as Lovers' Lane, Silver Water, Green Grove, and Meadow Grass, all in the brown desert.

„You can talk of the glories of freedom and unlimited space,“ said his friend Barton, „but there isn't money enough to hire me to live here. Better a year of a Harlem flat and an *L* strap than fifty years of this.“

Harley did not reply, and Barton, exhausted by this small display of energy, was silent until they reached Deepdeane, a few hours later.

Deepdeane was all that Harley had expected, merely a dozen houses, the majority of corrugated tin or adobe on the bare plain, but sheltered somewhat from the sandstorms by a curving brown ridge to the south and to the west. It was all bleak and desolate, without a drop of water anywhere save that which was brought in tanks by the railroad. Hundreds of empty tin cans, many of them battered into curious shapes, glittered in the sun. Of all the raw crude towns that Harley had seen in the desert, this was the rawest, the crudest, and the ugliest. „Barton was right,“ he murmured.

The correspondents, valises in hand, stepped from the train, faces, clothing, and grips alike powdered a whity-brown by the alkali dust.

The train whistled, started with a rumble, and quickly disappeared in a brown cloud of dust under the southwestern horizon.

„My God! we are marooned! left alone on a desert island!“ exclaimed the volatile Barton, looking at the fleeting brown cloud as the abandoned looks after the departing ship.

Harley felt the force of his words. Although three of his comrades were with him, he had never before known such a sense of desolation and desertion. All of civilization seemed to be hanging on to the rear platform of the ugly ordinary day train which had just disappeared in the brown cloud. „I'd go crazy if I had to live here,“ was his thought.

„I wonder if the place is alive,“ said Barton. „It may be an abandoned town. The fact that Jimmy Grayson is to speak here is no proof that it isn't, because when he

speaks all the cowboys in a ring of a hundred miles come to hear him, and one spot is as good as another.“

As he spoke, a cowboy, in sombrero, hickory shirt, and leggings came out of a low adobe hut, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

„It is inhabited!“ exclaimed Barton, triumphantly, „and that hut, as I infer from the suggestive action of our friend the cowboy, is the saloon. At least we shall not perish in the desert of thirst.“

The cowboy went behind the adobe hut, and when he reappeared he was mounted upon a pony.

„I am willing to wager that our unknown friend is about to desert this God-forsaken place and leave it to us alone!“ exclaimed Barton.

He was right; the cowboy rode into the desert, and he, too, disappeared in a brown cloud. Barton uttered woful lamentations. „We'll never see him,“ he said with pathos.

But when they went further into the village he became more cheerful, even joyous.

„Behold!“ he exclaimed, pointing a long forefinger. „See the splendor! and the reminder of home, too!“

They came to a two-story wooden building, from which all the paint had been blown long since by the desert winds, but over the low veranda was written in glaring letters, „NEW YORK HOTEL.“

Harley shared Barton's joy. The question of food and lodging in the desert, even where the railroad ran, was not always easy to solve, and this building, despite its wind-blown air of neglect, gave promise.

They entered the house, and the landlord, a bedraggled man in carpet slippers, shuffled forward to meet them.

„When the sun's so 'tarnal hot as this,“ he said, „I don't go out to meet the train; I reckon if anybody stops they kin find the hotel theirselves, an' they won't find any but mine, 'cause there ain't any other.“

„The grasping hand of monopoly is felt even here,“ whispered Barton.

Yes, he had rooms, plenty of them, and he could give them something to eat, canned goods from Chicago and beef. If the gents would be seated, Bill would take the valises up to their rooms, and he'd have dinner ready in half an hour.

Illustration:

Bill

They gladly resigned their valises to „Bill“, a large, stoop-shouldered, sun-browned man even more ragged and unkempt than his employer, and then, after washing their faces with imported water in a little lean-to behind the house, felt much refreshed.

„It isn't what you have, but what you haven't had, that makes a thing good,“ said Barton, with a contented sigh. „After that hot train this old ramshackle is a regular Waldorf-Astoria in the desert to me.“

„All the same, it's the jumping-off place,“ said Harley, looking out at the dusty plain.

The landlord, who was making some effort at a hospitable welcome, joined them, and said that dinner would be ready in a few minutes.

„I reckon you gents belong to Jimmy Grayson’s outfit that’s due here tomorrow,“ he said, tentatively. „I reckon there ain’t anythin’ else that would bring so many stiff collars to Deepdeane.“

„You are right,“ replied Harley; „we are newspaper correspondents travelling with Mr. Grayson, but in order to enjoy your town part of us have come on ahead, as you see.“

„That’s right,“ replied he of the hotel, affably. „Deepdeane ain’t much on looks, I’m willin’ to allow, but if a fellow knows how to go about it he kin have a right good time here. Now, you gents are hungry, and you kin go right in. Bill’s ready with the dinner.“

All sat at one table covered with a cloth not too clean, but long fasting made the beef and the canned goods sweet to their taste, and they ate with sharpened appetites. The big man, Bill, waited on them in silence, but once when Harley asked him if he could not get him a glass of water he replied, „Yes, sir; it will take only a moment,“ in a voice low, but so well modulated, so mellow, and so perfect in accent that Harley looked up in surprise. He saw only a face covered with unkempt brown beard, and the waiter suddenly turned his eyes away when they met Harley’s. None of the others had noticed the quality of the waiter’s voice, and Harley said nothing, but he watched Bill as he moved about the room serving the dinner.

There was nothing attractive in the waiter’s appearance; his clothing was without a touch of neatness; his hair had not been combed for a week, but noticeable above all was his manner, which inspired mingled repulsion and pity; it was impossible for him to stand the gaze of any one; if anybody’s look by chance met his, his eyes dropped at once. The whole effect that he created was spiritless and abject. It seemed to Harley that if Deepdeane was the jumping-off place here was the fit inhabitant of it.

Barton was talking as only he could talk—that is, all the time, and his flow of spirits occupied all except Harley, who, out of the corner of his eye, was watching the dejected waiter. At last he said to the man,

„How far is it ahead to the next town?“

„Sixty miles, sir,“ replied Bill, using only three words, but they were liquid, flowing, and musical.

Harley started; some old memory in him stirred, but when he sought to trace it and make some connection it was gone in a moment like a breath. He spoke again, and more than once to the waiter before the dinner was over, but Bill no longer replied in words, merely with a nod or a shake of the head, and the correspondent turned his attention back to his comrades.

The landlord, John Keyes he gave his name, was pleased with his guests; in some dim, remote day, when he was a farm lad in Indiana, he had gone with a car-load of cattle to New York, and he felt that the fact established a strong connection with the correspondents, all of whom were from the metropolis. When Barton gave him a chance he talked glowingly about the country and its prospects.

„Great for cattle,“ he said. „an‘ the ground’s full of gold an’ silver. We don’t need nothin’ but capital from the East, an’ we’ll have that as soon as Jimmy Grayson is runnin’ the gov’ment to suit us.“

They were sitting in the veranda now, and with the approach of evening the air was growing cooler and much more pleasant. Harley was in a tilted chair near the door, where he could command a view of the dining-room. Bill was still shuffling about the tables, and it seemed that other guests were expected. In fact, the town disclosed more signs of life, as the sun began to set, and people appeared from mysterious regions. Two or three men went into the dining-room, and Bill served them with the same cringing, abject manner. The last of these was a Mexican, a vicious, yellow little man who first found fault with the food, and then did a thing that no one but Harley saw.

The Mexican suddenly raised his open palm and struck the big waiter in the face. Bill murmured some apologetic words and went on with his work. Harley was so astonished that he could not speak; he had expected to see the waiter, abject and cringing though he was, fell the Mexican to the floor. Then his blood boiled up in furious wrath. That an American should take such a blow from a miserable yellow half-breed was past belief. Yet he had seen it with his own eyes. He brought his teeth together with such a sharp click that it drew the attention of Barton.

„Why, Harley, old man,“ he exclaimed, „what on earth are you looking so savage about?“

„I’ve just seen something that I do not like,“ replied Harley.

He was staring out over the vast, ugly sweep of the brown plain.

„Oh, the desert,“ said Barton. „But there’s nothing new in that. You’ve been seeing it all day. Besides, why glower about it? We’re in Deepdeane now, and there’s a bed and twelve hours of sleep just ahead. It’s to be glad, not mad.“

Harley maintained a discreet silence, and Barton’s attention soon wandered back to the talkative group, of which he and the landlord of the New York Hotel were the centre. But Harley, while seeming to listen, kept an eye on the dining-room, where the big, bearded waiter shuffled listlessly among the tables. Once the man saw Harley looking; but his eyes fell instantly before the correspondent’s glance, and he hurried into a corner of the room where the troubling gaze could not follow him; but before he disappeared Harley saw his whole figure shivering as in nervous alarm.

The sun was sinking in the desert. Brilliant terraces of purple and red and gold, heaped on the horizon, heralded its going. Then it suddenly shot through them and was lost like a stone in water. Darkness, borne on the edge of a chill wind, swept over the plain, and the desert night had come. The men shivered and went inside.

„What a curious contrast the night is to the day here?“ said Harley.

„Yes,“ said the phlegmatic Keyes, „you can cool off now.“

All the correspondents except Harley drifted off to their rooms. He said that he did not care for bed just yet, claiming to have slept in the train. He put on a light overcoat, and announced a desire to wander about the town and see the sights.

„Don’t you go far,“ said Keyes; „if you were to git a half-mile out in the desert you might never find the town again, and that ‘ud be the last of you.“

Illustration:

Scraps and bones

Harley promised, and went out into the so-called street, merely a strip of the broad desert, between the squalid houses, and stood there for a few moments. If the place was desolate in the day, it was awful in its loneliness at night, because then it had a peculiar weird and chilling quality. Out on the desert the wind was moaning like a lost soul, and Harley could readily imagine that he was the only human being within a sweep of five hundred miles, with nothing around him but sand and cactus. Indeed, it was more like fact than fancy.

But it was no part of Harley's intention to explore the desert. He had noticed the waiter throwing the debris from the tables on a heap behind the house, and he walked silently to the rear of the New York Hotel. Presently he saw the man coming; he knew the figure by the size, and the stoop, like a cringe. Bill carried a bucket half filled with scraps and bones, and throwing them upon the heap turned to go back to the house. In the darkness he did not notice the correspondent standing at his elbow. Harley touched him on the arm.

„Harry,“ he said, in a voice low but insistent, „what does this mean?“

Bill stood as if paralyzed. The bucket slid from his hand, and fell with a slight clang to the ground. But Harley's grasp was on his arm. Bill looked up, and Harley, faint though the moonlight was, could see that his eyes were full of terror.

„Harry,“ repeated Harley, his voice growing more insistent, „tell me, what do you mean by this?“

Suddenly the waiter, a man six feet high and with a head like Michael Angelo, began to cry. Harley had seen men cry but a few times in his life, and the sound of a man's sobs drawn deep from his chest unnerved him.

„Harry,“ he exclaimed, „stop! For God's sake, stop!“

The man made no effort to restrain himself, and Harley saw his great shoulders quivering. By and by both were silent again, but out on the desert the wind was yet moaning like a lost soul.

Harley spoke a third time, still calling the man „Harry“; nor was there contempt in his voice, only pity. „Harry,“ he said, „whatever you may tell to me is sacred. You know me well enough to know that it will never go further if you wish.“

The big man suddenly fell forward, not on his knees, but in a limp heap, and grovelled against the earth.

„Charlie,“ he exclaimed, „you have found me, and how have you found me! I never thought that it would come, and even if it should come, I never thought that it would come this way. I thought that I was hidden forever! Why should any one whom I ever knew want to come to such a spot as this in such a desert—this devil's hole! Deepdeane, they call it! You don't know what a mockery that name is!“

„I can guess,“ said Harley, gently.

„Yes, you can guess: anybody can. An hour of it is enough. But I belong here. I'm like it. I'm as God-forsaken as it is. You saw that yellow half-breed Mexican strike me in the face, and I didn't have the courage to strike back. And it isn't the first time I've been struck, either. But you never knew me. I'm not the man. I'm just Bill, the waiter. Kicked about because I deserve to be.“

He put his face in his hands and groaned. Harley walked up and down, taking short steps. He did not know what to do or to say. The wind still moaned across the desert. Behind them only two or three lights glimmered in the little town. They were alone with the universe.

„Harry,“ he asked at last, „what on earth made you come here?“

„To be away from everybody. And it’s the best place for that. You know what I was once, and you know, too, what I am now: but you remember, too, what I’ve been through. There’s some excuse. Oh, I’m low, and, what’s worse, I know it. You might hunt all this Southwest, and you would find nobody else who is kicked and trod upon as I am and who doesn’t resent it; but, Charlie, I’m crushed! I tell you, I’m crushed!“

He repeated mechanically the word „crushed! crushed!“ and though the night was now cold, Harley took off his hat and drew his hand across his brow. When he took it away it was wet.

„I tell you I’m crushed, all smashed up!“ the man went on, monotonously, but in his singular liquid voice like the dropping of melted gold, „and it all dates from that awful night. You were there. You remember it; but as for me, it is like yesterday. I know I had been drinking, drinking for days, and doing other things as bad or worse; but, my God! Charlie, you know what an excuse I had! There had been talk about me—talk in the city, lots of it. and the crowd was one of the biggest that I ever faced—curiosity brought ‘em; and then when I got up to speak I could utter nothing but a miserable little squeak. Think how supremely ridiculous, how idiotic it was! I could have stood everything if I had kept my voice, the one thing that made me famous; but it’s gone, and gone forever.“

Harley stopped in his short walk up and down, and looked curiously at the man whose voice in his agony expressed every range of human passion and woe.

„Harry,“ he said, „you’ve heard that Jimmy Grayson is to speak here to-morrow night.“

„What’s that to me?“

„Listen to what I say. Jimmy Grayson is a great orator. God gave him the gift of tongues. We call him the Golden-Mouthed.“

„Yes,“ said the correspondent as if talking to himself. „I knew but one man who was his equal, but he isn’t before the public now. Perhaps he was Jimmy Grayson’s superior, but, for all his wonderful powers, for all this great gift that God had sent him he was a fool, the biggest fool that I have ever known.“

„Oh, don’t, Charlie!“ groaned the man.

„I speak what I think,“ said Harley, in firm, accusing tones.

„I don’t defend myself; you can call me anything you please: no name will be too hard for me, but think of all that I’ve gone through, what came before that night, and all that has happened since—since I came to this hole. You don’t suppose I’ve forgotten, do you, those old days when I was happy and famous? You remember that first great speech of mine, the one that set everybody to talking! You reported it yourself, Charlie—that was when I first met you—and they gave it four full columns on the front page of the *Gazette*, and even the staid old *Milestone*, which was never known to approve wholly of anybody, said that I was not without promise; don’t you remember it. Charlie?“

„I remember it very well,“ said Harley, glancing out at the dark desert, and shuddering at the loneliness and desolation around him.

The man, who had risen with the old memories, threw himself upon the sand again.

„Oh, God, Charlie!“ he cried. „I can't stand it! I was called the pick of them all. There was none who could speak as I, there was none who could sway the crowd as I could! Charlie, I always felt the power in me; I could think best when I got on my feet, and then I had the voice. I don't take any credit for that; it was a gift which might as well have gone to some one else.“

Harley had been thinking intently. „Harry,“ he said, „I want you to hear Jimmy Grayson to-morrow night, if for nothing else, to hear yourself as you used to be. I want you to shave off that hideous beard, put on good clothes, hold your head up, and sit near Jimmy Grayson with me, where you can hear every word that he says.“

The waiter shook in sudden terror.

„I can't do it! I can't do it!“ he cried. „There's Blaisdell coming, and if I fix up he'll know me, and there may be more. I can take a blow now, but I can't take that.“

„They need not know you, though it would be all right if they should. Jimmy Grayson, I suppose, will speak on the little square platform that I saw just beyond the hotel, and all except where he stands will be in the dark. You shall be there with me.“

„Charlie, I don't dare! I don't dare,“ said the waiter.

„You shall be there with me.“ said Harley, decisively. „I'll attend to everything. You see. Harry, you can't escape me. This spot in the desert isn't more than three hundred yards across, and I've got you cornered. Good night.“

He held out his hand and the waiter looked wonderingly at it.

„Nobody has shaken hands with me in years.“ he said.

„Harry, are you going to refuse my hand? Do you wish to insult me?“

The waiter seized the outstretched hand, shook it convulsively two or three times, and then, without a word, ran into the house.

Harley remained there a long time, gazing into the illimitable desert, which seemed to him so truly a grave. At last he went in, but as he passed through the lower hall of the hotel he heard the strident voice of the landlord rebuking Bill, the waiter, for laziness and neglect.

„Half them dishes ain't washed up yet,“ he said.

Bill made no reply, but Harley saw him bent over a pile of dirty dishes. The correspondent sighed and went up to his room. When he awoke the next day the sun was high in the sky, hanging like a ball of copper over the burning desert. After breakfast he sought the landlord.

„Mr. Keyes,“ he said, „I want to hire your man, Bill, for this afternoon and evening. He's taken a foolish notion that he'd like to fix up like a gentleman and hear Jimmy Grayson, and I've taken an equally foolish notion that I'd like to have him do it.“

Keyes stared at the correspondent.

„Wa'al, you Eastern people are pow'ful cur'us,“ he said. „You kain#t fix up Bill like a gentleman; you might put gentlemen's clothes on him, but he'd be the same dirty, cringin' fellow without the sperrit of a coyote in him.“

„It's my notion," said Harley, briefly, „and I'm willing to pay for it."

„A man kin be a crank any time he pleases if he's got the price to pay for it."

Harley named a sum for a half day of Bill's services that Keyes promptly accepted, and the bargain was closed.

„There's a Mexican feller aroun' here that I kin ring in in Bill's place," he said.

Barton came to Harley an hour later, when he was sitting comfortably on the veranda, his eyes shaded from the sun, and plumped himself down in the next chair.

„See here, Harley!" he exclaimed, „what is this I hear about you? and you of all fellows, the one whom I never knew to do a cranky thing before? They tell me you are going to dress that slouching dirty waiter, Bill, in good clothes, and take him up on the platform to-night with Jimmy Grayson."

„They tell you the exact truth," said Harley, his eye on a bare red hill in the desert.

„Why?"

„Just a freak idea of mine: I wish to break the monotony."

Barton snapped his fingers incredulously.

„Do you see any hayseed about me?" he asked. „I know you don't do things that way. There's something queer in this—yes, queer."

Harley did not take his eyes off the distant red hill, but he replied, gravely:

„Yes, there is something queer, one of the queerest things I ever met in my life. How long have you been working on the New York papers?"

„Eight years."

„Then you remember the Great Davenport Mystery?"

„Of course; that was too big a sensation to forget, even in this day of sensations—the brilliant fellow who went all to pieces and then dropped off the face of the earth, so to speak. Wasn't there a nasty scandal, beforehand?"

„Yes, his wife, you know—another man—Davenport got a divorce, of course, but that couldn't cure the wound. Began to drink, to drink at a terrible rate—the same imaginative quality that made him a great orator, pushed him to the very depths of dissipation. I suppose."

„I remember," exclaimed Barton, with increasing interest. „Then he was to speak in the Madison Square Garden—enormous crowd there, all his political enemies, too, looking for at least a part of what came—I was present at the reporter's table—what a scene! He broke down, not an idea, and what was worst of all, his voice, that wonderful voice, was gone: he just squeaked. How his enemies howled! I was present at the reporter's table, and I can't forget that look on Davenport's face: it was like a man struck by lightning—and he so young, too—he couldn't have been much more than thirty."

„It was all just as you say," said Harley.

„But, what has all this to do with this fool thing you are planning?"

„A lot."

Barton wheeled in his chair and stared at Harley. But Harley was still looking at the bare red hill out in the desert, and his hat brim was low down over his eyes.

„You don't mean—"

„Yes, I do mean. Now, Barton, old man, don't say a word, but just do as I tell you, and make the other fellows do the same. You promise?"

„Yes, I promise,“ replied Barton, and said no more, but he was the victim of a devouring curiosity.

After the twilight Harley took the waiter up to his room, the man weakly protesting, but obeying the stronger will of the correspondent as a dog obeys his master. Harley forced him to shave off the hideous beard, and when it was gone he was surprised to observe how little the features had changed, how the old, bold classic outlines reappeared. Then he produced from his valise what he called his „Sunday suit.“ Long black frock-coat, vest, and light trousers that he wore sometimes when he came to the larger towns in the West.

„Harry,“ he said, „I’m a big man, too, and this will fit you well enough for tonight. Not a word now! Throw off those old things of yours and get into this suit at once.“

The man glanced timidly at Harley, but he seemed afraid to speak, and after a moment’s hesitation put on the clothes. Apparently the good garments, of a cut that belonged to the present, exercised an effect upon him as he straightened up and looked at himself in the dusty glass on the wall. A faint gleam as of a spirit long gone appeared in his eyes, and he threw back his shoulders. Harley, looking at him, was surprised. The man, now that he did not stoop, stood more than six feet high. His smoothly shaven face was broad and open, and the hair beginning to thin at the temples, retreated slightly from the brow. Harley was more than surprised, he was startled.

„Strange that two men with the same gift should look so much alike,“ he murmured.

The waiter did not notice him, but was still staring at himself in the glass, as if all the old memories were busy. Harley looked again at the man, the tall, erect figure, the smooth, massive features, the hair rather long, slightly tinged with gray and brushed back from the forehead, the black string tie and the long black coat, buttoned tightly about the broad chest.

„How like!“ he murmured.

The waiter turned away and glanced at the window.

„Come, Harry,“ said Harley, briskly, „the crowd has gathered, and it’s time to go. Don’t you be nervous; it’s pitch-dark everywhere except at the very edge of the speaker’s platform, and nobody will see you.“

He put his hand firmly upon the man’s arm, and together the two went out of the house and toward the improvised stage in the open from which Jimmy Grayson was to speak.

Black night enfolded the desert, as the moon was not yet risen. The crowd had gathered already, although the candidate’s train was not due until 8.30, and that was fifteen minutes away. It was a typical Southwestern crowd, drawn from a circle of a hundred miles—prosperous cattlemen, cowboys, mining prospectors and wanderers, all quiet, orderly and waiting, ready to applaud every sentence that their hero, Jimmy Grayson, might utter. Closely packed, they formed a wide black ring around the speaker’s stand.

Harley, with his hand still on the waiter’s arm, pushed his way through the crowd toward the platform, which was almost wholly in the dark, except at the table beside which Jimmy Grayson would stand, where two lanterns flickered. He

and the waiter climbed upon the platform where Barton and his comrades were already seated at the table placed for the correspondents.

„Pretty dusky for writing, eh Barton?“ said Harley.

„Oh, it's all right.“ replied Barton, easily. „Long practice is a good thing, and there isn't a fellow here who couldn't write in the dark.“

He looked up and by the flickering light he caught a glimpse of the waiter. He started and was about to utter an exclamation, but he remembered his promise and was silent.

„Sit here. Harry, and you can hear well.“ whispered Harley, placing a chair in the farthest and darkest corner of the stage. The big man sat down obediently and Harley sat near him.

Time passed and the crowd standing there in the darkness thrilled with expectation. In a few minutes Jimmy Grayson, their idol, would be there, and they would hear the golden notes of his voice.

The multitude now began to give forth all the familiar sounds of a great political gathering. There was the noise of moving feet, of long breaths, of men making comparisons and recalling other speeches. In the distance horses stamped and rattled their bits.

Harley, despite the dark, was watching Bill, the waiter, and he was so close that he could see. When the multitude first began to talk and show expectation the man suddenly raised his head, and a fire that had long seemed dead began to kindle in his eyes. Harley, watching him, said nothing, but despite his habitual calm a strange excitement rose in his breast at what he saw.

The old familiar sights and sounds, this block of life projected from the past, went on, and the soul of Bill, the waiter, continued to expand. The fire in his eyes grew brighter, his figure expanded, and he raised his head higher and higher. Harley had seen wild animals in their cages suddenly lift their heads and sniff the air as if forgotten whispers of the wild, free jungle, had suddenly come back to them. He thought again of this, as he looked now at Bill, the waiter.

The expectation of the crowd mounted higher, and the shuffling noises, the hum, and the occasional cheers increased.

„Now is the favorable moment; he ought to appear.“ murmured Bill, the waiter.

Harley heard him, but said nothing.

A whistle came from the desert, then a roar, and the train pulled into the station. Harley heard the noise of men leaving it, and then dark figures for which the crowd made way climbed upon the stage beside him. One that stumbled over him was Blaisdell of the *Eagle*.

„Where's Mr. Grayson?“ asked Harley.

„Why, there's the deuce to pay!“ exclaimed Blaisdell. „Mr. Grayson was beguiled out on the branch line for a little speech; he thought he'd make the connection all right and get back in time, but he didn't. Two of the fellows are with him, and the rest of us are here. Where's the chairman of this meeting? I've got a telegram for him, explaining and apologizing, but Mr. Grayson, I'm sure, is all broken up over it. You know how honest he is in these matters. He knows that lots of these men have come a hundred miles to hear him.“

Harley snatched the telegram out of the astonished man's hand.

„I’m the chairman.“ he cried, „or at least I’m going to be. Listen how the people are yelling and cheering and calling for Grayson! They think he’s here on the stage with us, and he isn’t! Yes, he is! I swear he is! Jimmy Grayson himself or his double! Just you wait half a minute and you’ll hear him at his best. Now, Billy, do exactly what I say and don’t ask a word; you don’t know how much depends on it. Get right in the crowd this instant and raise that famous old battle-cry, the war-whoop the boys used to raise when Harry Davenport was up to speak! Yes, Harry Davenport. *Harry Davenport*. the greatest, the only heaven-born orator New York ever knew.“

He pushed Blaisdell directly off the platform into the crowd, but he saw his friend rise and disappear among the figures. The next instant the people were startled by a long-drawn, high-pitched cry that rose in wave on wave and burst in a final explosion like fireworks. It caught the crowd in an instant, and the facile Westerners imitated it. Led by Blaisdell the tremendous battle-cry poured now from hundreds of throats, rose and swelled in volume again and again until it echoed far out on the desert.

But Harley scarcely heard it. At the first note of the old familiar cheer he turned his eyes upon Bill, the waiter. The man had been sitting in a sort of daze, but the correspondent saw him leap to his feet at the sound, his eyes flashing and his chest heaving. He ran to him and seized him by both shoulders.

„Come!“ he cried, in compelling tones. „It’s you they want! they’ve found you out at last! They know that you are Harry Davenport, the great orator! Don’t you hear the old cry never raised for anybody but you?“

„I believe you’re right,“ the man said under his breath, but not so low that Harley did not hear.

In a moment the strong arms of Harley pushed him down to the edge of the stage, and then the applause doubled. Harley raised his hand, and instantly there was silence.

„Gentlemen,“ cried Harley. at the top of his voice, „I desire to introduce to you the speaker of the evening!“

And then he added under his breath, but sharply:

„Now give it to ‘em, Harry! You know how to do it! You’ve lived here and you know how they feel. You feel the same way yourself! Pitch into the corporations and the trusts and the monopolies, and you can sprinkle free silver about, too! I’m against it, but it doesn’t matter!“

Again the cheers swelled, roared, and then died, to be followed by the strange breathless silence that only a crowd can create.

The tall figure, standing there in the more than twilight dusk, wavered for a few moments, but Harley had no doubts. He knew that the hour had come at last. He saw Davenport’s figure straighten and stiffen, and his broad chest heave again. Then the man began to speak in liquid golden notes, in a voice that penetrated, persuaded, and compelled.

Illustration:

A speech in the desert

The people had never seen Jimmy Grayson. They had worshipped him from afar, and, in their minds, had built for him lofty ideals, but now he fulfilled and excelled their highest hopes. No one could resist the beauty of his voice or the strength of his logic. Metaphors, tropes, similes, allegories, flowed from his tongue. He used phrases and illustrations familiar in their daily life, drawn from their own desert, from their own mighty Southwest. He seemed to have upon him the stamp of their vast, free plains; he was one of themselves. They wondered at the way in which he shared their hopes, fears and joys, and they admired. They yielded themselves, too, to his spell, they cheered when he seemed to will it, and they were silent when he wished silence.

Now and then a man would whisper to another: „I knew that Jimmy Grayson was great, but I did not know that he was so great as this,“ and then he would look up again in more than admiration at the tall figure in the long black coat, standing there in the dusk at the edge of the stage, and swaying the people as he would.

Harley, sitting scarcely a yard away, watching every movement of Davenport, and every fleeting phase of his face, understood all. He saw the red tide of manhood flowing back in a full stream, he saw the dead and crushed soul springing into new life all the fresher and stronger because of its long rest, at the touch of the old life, at the sound of the old familiar noises, the inspiration and stimulus of a great political gathering that looked up to him for strength and leading. Harry Davenport's new dawn had come in the desert after a long sleep that he had taken for death, the golden voice that had failed him once was there again, stronger and deeper than ever, returning in a rushing flood. As he sat on the stage he had been in a sort of daze—he was yet in some respects—he thought that all these people had called for him and not for Jimmy Grayson, and the old battle-cry that roused him from the dead ashes was still ringing in his head. He expanded, body and mind alike with the sense of power and triumph. He was Harry Davenport, Harry Davenport, the great orator, who, at thirty, was without an equal, who could hold ten thousand in his spell, as the hypnotist holds his subject.

Harley, watching intently, saw every vestige, the last semblance of Bill, the waiter, slip from the man. Bill, the waiter, merely formed the ashes from which, phoenix-like, came the triumphant resurrection of Harry Davenport. Never again would that tall figure be bowed, and no more would Harry Davenport cringe before any one. If a man struck him he would do it at the risk of his own life.

The wind still moaned on the desert, and the night air grew chill, but no one noticed. There was but a single mind in all that vast assemblage of hard-riding, unfearing men, the mind of Harry Davenport, and he moulded the others into the image of his. He made them see what he saw, and he made them follow where he led. Hour after hour he spoke; all the silent thoughts of years came pouring forth, clothed in beautiful language, adorned with familiar and striking images, and spoken in tones like the swell of organ music. Now and then, when he paused for a moment, the volume of cheers would rise, and always Blaisdell led with the old thrilling battle-cry.

It was past midnight when Harry Davenport turned with the final words, „that is all I have to say, gentlemen,“ and sank exhausted in his chair. Then the cheering

broke forth in a volume greater than ever, and above it rose the voices of men shouting: „Hurrah! Hurrah! for Jimmy Grayson!“ Davenport heard it and turned a startled look on Harley.

„Oh, Charlie!“ he exclaimed in an agonized voice, „what have I done?“

„Nothing except the work for which you were born. Come, Harry, your long purgatory is over; you go with us tomorrow.“

The next day the Eastern train on the main line picked up Jimmy Grayson at the junction, and went on. But in the same coach with The Candidate sat a man wonderfully like him, pale and smoothly shaven, who was dressed in a suit of clothes not his own. And always this man’s mind, like his face, was turned toward the Northeast, and in his ears was the distant roar of the world’s greatest city.

