

# In the Promised Land

by

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ROGER LUDLOW was riding slowly along an endless white road that lay like a string of tape on the darker soil of the desert. One might well have wondered why any road should be there, for there was no sign of place whence it might reasonably be set out or whither it could be desired to lead, and there seemed to be no travelers save this solitary horseman. Some such thought as this was in Roger's mind, as he wearily looked ahead whenever a rise of ground gave a new glimpse of what was before him, yet without appreciable change of prospect. His memory assured him that the road had once led him from his uncle's ranch on Twelve Mile Creek, and with this in mind he was still able to believe that it would ultimately bring him to Uintah and the Union Pacific Railroad.

Otherwise he would almost have been tempted to think it an illusion—an imaginary line formed by the eye in the trackless landscape, like the paths that cross the surface of the ocean toward dim destinations on the horizon.

He had set out in the first gray light of morning, had rested and fed himself and his horse for a couple of hours at midday in almost the only bit of shade they had found in the journey, and was now riding into the twilight; yet Uintah still hid from sight. Once Roger had fancied he heard the distant whistle of a locomotive, but he was not sure even of that. The strange night chill of the desert, which follows so abruptly upon the heat of the sun, was already driving him to button his coat close about his neck, and was slightly hastening the steps of General Custer. General Custer was the horse.

“Plod on a little more, General,” Roger observed cheerfully from time to time, “and we’ll surely come to something. I hope it will prove to be of the nature of supper.”

Now the white road was turning to gray in the dimming light, and only the nearer distance was visible—that is, on the low levels; but high at the southwest a wonderful light still bordered the range of the Uintah

hills. These hills were of the deepest indigo, having lost all their mysterious pink tints of daylight, and their ridges were made to stand out against the sky as by a beveled edge of yellow. Not the least breath of mist shadowed or softened the twilight outlines, which were therefore marvelously clear for a time so close to the coming of darkness. The sagebrush and chaparral had changed from green to purple, and the bushes seemed to huddle together as if for warmth. The hot wind of the afternoon had ceased and the night wind had not yet risen; so everything was doubly still, with only the steady muffled beat of the General's hoofs in the sand.

It was still only a few months since Roger Ludlow had come to this Western country, and the strangeness of it was not worn off. He could not yet reconcile it with his preconceived ideas of the size and character of the world. Far from feeling contempt for the people he found here, or from despising their comparatively simple manner of life, he was nevertheless puzzled by all the indefinable differences of detail, and still wondered whether this world was as real and as human as that in which he had always lived. If it was not a hardship to live on a ranch here in Idaho or Utah—and some of his best friends certainly did not count it such—was it then a hardship to

live in Boston or New York? Could both regions be held tolerable for the same race of beings? Was it not necessary to cleave to the one and despise the other? Roger had not yet made up his mind.

The desert seemed to him to symbolize all the strangeness. Its vastness, and its difference in form and color from any landscape that he had known before, were—according to his mood—sometimes exhilarating and sometimes oppressive. He could not have believed that mountains (with which he had always been on the most affectionate terms) could possibly be so remote and uncanny as these bare, pinkish, staring slopes, with no suggestion of cool mossy crevices or wildflower-nursing springs. Even the smells of this land were wholly strange, and on his first coming he had found himself snuffing the air at intervals with the vain hope of catching some familiar odor either of noon or twilight time; but the dry desert wind brought him only alien airs that had never known field of clover, or leaf-strewn forest, or open sea. Above all, the inhumanity of the desert expressed the want of those close relations in which men lived with one another where their dooryards touched and their houses were bound together by electric wires. There were days when Roger felt that to be in “the full tide of humanity,”

whether at Charing Cross or on Broadway, was the only thing worth living for, and that out here one was as good as in his grave. But there were other days—and these grew more numerous at the expense of the others—when the mysterious pink of the barren mountains satisfied him, and the sweep of the desert suggested only room and plenty and largeness; then he felt that to be confined to narrow streets would be imprisonment indeed.

Tonight he was turning these thoughts over in his mind as he rode along in the stillness. It was perhaps the first time that he had been alone in this country for an entire day, certainly the first time that he had been in so solitary a state at nightfall, and he was a little surprised that he was not more oppressed by the experience. Uintah still seemed to be pretty far away; he must have let the General go more slowly than his uncle had calculated; yet Roger, admitting that he was hungry, was not discouraged. He summed up his reflections, as his habit was, in an audible remark to his horse:

“Well, General, you and I don’t talk very much, but I don’t see but we’re fairly good company. Indeed, I don’t know that I would ask for more, unless perhaps for the moon, if this is to keep up much longer. Hello! What have we here?”

They had reached the summit of one of the hills crossed by the road, and so gained a view of a new bit of the country that lay before them. Not far from the foot of the hill the scene changed, and a considerable clump of trees appeared at the right of the road. There seemed to be buildings, too, among the trees, and some cultivated ground behind—the sign of water found or brought here. Roger was so much interested that he pulled up his horse and paused before descending the hill.

His first thought was: Here is Uintah; for Uintah might be a mere hamlet, so far as he knew. But he dismissed the idea. No lights were to be seen, and in a village that would be impossible at this hour. Moreover, there was no sign of the railroad, which could scarcely fail to show its track along the landscape even by twilight. This was only a single ranch. But even so, one might hope to beg or buy some sort of supper, and learn how much further Uintah was to seek. Roger and the General ambled hopefully down the hill.

Close at hand the ranch looked just as Roger had conceived it. A barn of moderate size, an unpainted house considerably smaller, a picketed chicken yard, and across the line of the dooryard a row of poplars. Roger tied his horse to one of the trees and advanced to the house. Still

no light appeared. Was the ranch deserted? No, he presently saw that the door was open, and there was an air of habitation about the interior. He knocked, but no one answered. Then he heard the whinny of a horse a short distance off, doubtless in recognition of the arrival of the General. Roger walked in the direction of this sound, and before he had gone many paces he heard another, this time as of someone at work in the yard.

Near the end of the row of poplars, there was a woman digging in the ground. She stood in the shadow of the trees, and Roger could not see her features. She was tossing the sand aside with a will, and was so engrossed with her work that she had apparently not heard either the approach of the horse or the steps of the man behind her. Roger stopped at a few paces' distance, and bade her good evening.

The woman turned abruptly, gave a short cry of surprise, and dropped her spade. Then she made a little gesture toward Roger, whether of welcome or the contrary he felt uncertain.

“Who—what is it?” she asked.

He came a step or two nearer. “I am riding to Uintah,” he said, “and find it a longer distance than I had supposed. I should like to rest my horse a few minutes,

and if you could be kind enough to let me have something to eat, I should be—”

He was uncertain whether to say “glad to pay for it,” or simply “grateful,” not yet knowing what manner of woman he had found.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said the woman, “but I can’t get you anything to eat. I’m all alone here, and I have no time. You see I’m at work, and I must get through before— before my husband comes back.”

This was on the whole a strange reply. Could the woman’s husband be such a brute as to require her to do heavy work and to keep it up after nightfall? It seemed more probable that she was afraid of Roger, and simply wished to be rid of him. Yet in that case, why did she profess to be alone?

“I don’t want you to cook anything,” said Roger, “but just to let me have a bit of something cold, and I’ll gladly pay for it. And if you are in a hurry with your work, I will dig for you while you go inside.”

“Do you know how to dig?” asked the woman suddenly, and with a singular seriousness. Her voice was not just what Roger would have expected on this little

Western ranch. It had a bit of Southern softness to it, and a hint, too, of somewhat better days than these.

“I can’t say I’ve done a great deal of digging,” he answered, “but I presume I could do about as well as a woman, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

The woman gave a little laugh, but it was not a happy one. “You can’t tell what you can do till you have to try,” she said. “I don’t want you to do any work for me, but there isn’t any time to lose.”

With this she reached for her spade again, but Roger had already thrown off his coat, and he took the spade almost from her hand. “See here,” he said, “I can see that you are tired, and this is no kind of work for you to do at this time of day. I’m going to dig a while for you, whether you give me anything to eat or not.”

One could see that the woman had reached the point where sheer fatigue brought her will to bend easily to another’s, and she leaned wearily against the nearest poplar for a moment as Roger prepared to take up her work.

“You’re a kind man,” she said. “I reckon you come from a distance?”

“Yes,” said Roger, “from’way down East, not so very long ago. But I’m already half a Westerner. Is it post holes for a fence?”

“What do you mean?”

“That we’re digging. I thought you were getting down too deep for a garden.”

“Oh,” said the woman, stepping out from the tree again, “I didn’t think. I never thought of your wanting to know what it’s for. I can’t tell you.”

This was really extraordinary. Roger stiffened a little. “I don’t see how I can dig properly without knowing what I am doing.”

“Of course. I didn’t think. I’ll have to do it myself. But I’m just as much obliged to you,” she said.

She put out her hand again for the spade, but Roger had no intention of relinquishing it.

“You talk very strangely,” he said. “I don’t want to know anything about your work from curiosity—only enough to help you properly. You can surely tell me whether you want this hole two feet deep or four.”

She did not answer for a moment, but seemed to be looking directly at Roger, as though considering him. It was uncanny not to be able to see the expression of her

face. Roger began to wonder if she were insane. Perhaps there were people in the house, after all, and she was permitted to amuse herself harmlessly outside. Presently she spoke.

“I reckon perhaps I might as well tell you. If you wanted to know very much you could find out anyhow, and if you only mean to be kind you can help me. It’s a grave.”

“A grave!” cried Roger, confirmed in his momentary suspicion. “For whom?”

“For a man, a friend of mine. He died today—this afternoon. And there’s no one but me to bury him.”

Roger was now seized with a great pity for the woman in her loneliness. What she had said about her husband returning must have been a bit of fiction.

“He was staying here, with you?” he asked. “And you were alone with him when he died?”

“I was alone with him when he died. But he did not stay here. He was only a friend. I live with my husband.” She spoke with a touch of matronly dignity.

“But if your husband is soon to return,” Roger pursued, “why do you not wait for him?”

“He would not bury him. It was he that shot him.”

The pronouns were mixed, but the meaning was horribly clear. Roger found himself without further words.

“Come here,” said the woman, “and I’ll show him to you.”

She led the way around the end of the poplars to the deep shadow on the other side, and there Roger saw first of all the figure of the horse he had heard whinnying. Two or three paces from where it was tied, at the foot of one of the trees, lay a long white form upon the ground. Roger stopped instinctively and took off his hat.

“He lies just where he died,” said his companion. “’Twas about an hour before sundown. And since then I’ve made that shroud and sewed it around him, and begun the grave. You see his horse standing there still. I tried to take him to the barn, but he whinnied so it went to my heart, and I let him stay. He looks like he’s mourning the whole time.”

Roger was still silent. The situation was very vague, and he felt almost mentally benumbed in the effort to grasp it, but the terror and the pathos were clear enough.

“You must hear about it all, now,” the woman continued, “for if you didn’t you might think I killed him

myself. Other folks might think so too, so it may be a good thing that you came. It would look bad that he died here when I was alone. But you can see just how it was. They met about a mile from here, I judge, and my husband could see he was coming this way; he had done it before, to see how I was doing; and he'd told him that if he ever did it again, he would shoot him. And so he did."

She paused a moment, and drew a long, shuddering breath, as though the story made an uncommon demand upon her vitality; then she proceeded.

"He thought he'd left him dead, I reckon, but he hadn't, for he was able to climb on his horse again, and hung his arms around its neck, and put his head on its head; and the horse brought him straight here, walking gently, as if he knew all about it. And the way he hung against the saddle kept the blood back, it seemed; but when he slid off here under this tree, the wound opened again, and I tried to stop it, but it wasn't any use. I put cold water on his face till he could open his eyes and speak a few words and let me know how it was. And then he died."

"And your husband—?" Roger did not finish the question, for it was not easy to phrase it. He desired to know the woman's attitude toward the author of this

murder, and her opinion as to the probability of punishment.

“He went on to Huntsville,” she said simply, “and will come back when the moon’s up. I reckon if he found him he would take him out to the desert again, and—oh, I couldn’t bear to have him. I want him to have a decent grave, even if it’s not consecrated ground. You don’t think I’m doing wrong to bury him, do you?”

“No, indeed,” said Roger, “except—unless the matter of his death should be investigated first. But that, I suppose, cannot be. Your husband—will he not be in any danger if the disappearance of this man is known?”

“Oh, no. He had no friends about here. He only came here to try to get some knowledge of me. I told him not to, and he knew what was likely to happen. My husband wouldn’t do anything underhanded. Everyone knows him. And he’s an elder besides.”

“A what?”

“An elder. Some say he’s sure to be an apostle before very long.”

The touch of pride in this reference to her red-handed husband smote on Roger’s ear horribly.

“Do you mean to say, then,” he asked, “that you place no blame on your husband for having shot this man? That is as much as to confess your own guilt.” He felt the sternness of an officer of the law in this land where there seemed to be no law.

“I haven’t anything to confess,” said the woman somewhat sullenly. “We were always friends, and I never liked anyone as I did him, and my husband knew it when he married me. He married me to save my soul, and I married him for that too. But, O God! Sometimes I wish I’d lost it!”

Her voice broke into something like a sob, and even in the darkness Roger instinctively turned away his face. But she quickly recovered herself.

“My husband isn’t to blame, according to his lights, for having shot him. No one hereabouts would blame him. He couldn’t believe we could be only friends, and see each other. And I told him to keep away, but ’twas no use.” Again the pronouns were mixed, but the meaning was unmistakable. “He would stay around, because he thought I wasn’t happy; and so today he walked right to his death for me. I can’t do less than bury him, can I?”

Roger gathered himself together and forced his manner to composure he did not feel.

“No,” he said with assurance, “I’m certain you cannot. We are only losing time. I will go directly to the digging, and finish it.” And he turned back through the poplars.

The woman on her part went into the house without more words, and in a moment more Roger was working away with the spade, alone in the cold starlight. Of all the strange experiences his Western visit had brought him, he reflected, surely none could be compared with this. Who was this hotheaded lover that had ridden open-eyed to death only that he might see his forbidden treasure, and had brought a strange gleam of the days of chivalry into the sands of the desert, where now his riderless steed kept solitary guard over his bed? One would like to know something of the man one buries, thought Roger, and then remembered that it was common enough that gravediggers should know as little as he.

He had made considerable progress with his work when the woman returned to bid him to supper. “There’s plenty of time now,” she said in response to his hesitancy. “The moon is not up yet, and you can work so much faster than I that I’m not afraid any more of being late.” So they entered the house together.

While Roger ate he studied with some eagerness the face of his hostess, who would not join him at the table,

but sat on a small straight chair at the other side of the room, where the candle lighted half her face somewhat in the manner of a Rembrandt portrait. It was the face of a woman of some thirty years, dark and oval, with shadowy hair drawn plainly back over the ears to a coil behind, yet left loose enough to droop over the temples. Her eyes concealed themselves in the imperfect light, but there was a wonderfully expressive mouth. One could imagine it capable of a dazzling smile, but it had not smiled often of late. It suggested affection, and trust, and endurance, but not so much—Roger thought—of positive courage and strength. When it drooped wearily in a moment of relaxation, and she raised to her hair a hand still slight and supple, though browned and evidently acquainted with labor, the observer fancied he had a momentary glimpse of the woman for whom the stranger knight had died.

When they returned to the poplars it was with a pair of candles, for Roger had said he could hardly complete his task by starlight alone.

“Come this way a minute,” said his companion. “Don’t you want to see his face? I didn’t quite finish closing up the shroud.”

Roger was uncertain whether he really desired to accept this unexpected opportunity to know a little more of the man about whom he had been wondering, but he followed her mechanically. She drew back the white covering from her lover's face, and let the candlelight fall full upon it.

When Roger had looked, his own candle fell suddenly from his hand. "Good God!" he cried. "It's Carl!"

Then for the first time the woman's face lighted up with that resplendent smile which her lips had suggested even in repose. She put out her disengaged hand as though to welcome an old friend.

"So you knew him too?" she said. "Then how very glad I am that you are here."

But for Roger the discovery seemed to make the completion of his work almost impossible. That he should be the one to bury his friend—almost his best friend—and that it should be here in this loneliness, with none of the surroundings or auspices that take from the gloom of such an office, seemed to him wholly awful. He ran rapidly over in his mind the possibilities of doing differently —of waiting, of exonerating the dead man, of demanding investigation, of punishing the murderer, of arranging an honorable and Christian burial. But as

quickly he was obliged to admit that they were impossibilities. Coroners? Constables? Grand juries? Public opinion? He remembered where he was. And for burial, he had seen no place for miles around which he would so willingly choose as this sheltered spot under the poplars.

Even as he stood thus thinking, and gazing down upon the solemn sheeted figure, there came a new light into the world, and the big yellow moon peered at them over the hills to the eastward. That meant that the man who had done this deed, the elder, the prospective apostle, the self-righteous avenger, would be riding homeward. What was to be done must be done quickly. Roger turned silently back to the unfinished grave.

As he dug, his mind surged with memories. It was at the other end of the world, it seemed—that is, at Harvard College—that he and this dead man had made their friendship. Carl Trent had come there a different man from most that Roger had known, and he had always remained different. There was some warm Latin blood in his veins, for one thing, that showed itself in a dark gleam in the eyes, such as no Northern race can counterfeit; and corresponding with it in his nature was a passionate impulsiveness that made his future at any

moment singularly uncertain. He would never be a typical 'Harvard man,' so the fellows used to say to one another, no matter how long he stayed. His clothes would never be precisely right, even should he someday have plenty of money to spend on them. His manners, though those of a gentleman at heart, would never perfectly civilize themselves. He could never learn to be indifferent, or neutral, or blasé, or what you please to call it, but would love and work and fight his own way in the world with a primitive fierceness that bespoke the elemental rather than the conventional man.

It was natural that his friends should be few, but that they should love him devotedly; he would have nothing of any friendship that did less. And Roger Ludlow, whose antecedents and character were in many ways as different from Carl's as could well be imagined, chanced to become the chief of these friends. It was partly a matter of accident: they both roomed on the top floor of Stoughton, and ate at the same club. But it was largely, perhaps, that they so complemented each other. Roger, who was a bit sluggish and easy of temperament, and, like a true Anglo-Saxon, seldom spoke of what emotions he had, seemed to receive much more than he gave; but he brought something of steadiness and poise to his

friend, which perhaps it had been a real misfortune to have withdrawn.

Carl had broken away from college (being only a “Special” anyway) before graduation, for the sake of some adventurous opportunity in this magnificent West, which he had dearly loved, and Roger had promised to follow him in the next vacation; but a long illness had come in and changed his plans. It was only after more than a year that he had found his way to the West. Carl had written from time to time in his fragmentary fashion, and Roger supposed he was now to be found in New Mexico, where he had intended to see him in the course of another month. Why had he wandered so far in this direction? The reason was all too plain.

It could not be said that there had been no warnings of the impending tragedy. It was not like Carl to conceal anything from his friend, and his letters had told of this woman—for it must be she—with the dark, drooping hair and the wonderful mouth. They had known each other, so it seemed, before ever Carl came East, and he had sought her out as soon as he had returned; this was down in the Mexican border country. But something had come between them. Here there had been much vagueness, and Roger had puzzled vainly in trying to read between the

lines. They did not appear to have quarreled. Carl was sure that she still loved him. But in some way she seemed to have been removed further and further from him. Once he had written in an almost frenzied fashion: "They have her now, body and soul. It is too dreadful to be true." And again: "I could give her up, I think, old man, if I thought she were happy. But I cannot leave her so. I can't tell you more now. Heaven knows how it will end."

These sentences came back to Roger now with burning accuracy, as he dug steadily there in the moonlight. He was little versed in the lore of lovers, and had had to content himself with hoping vaguely that when he found Carl he would understand it all and somehow comfort him. Now he thought he knew with fair clearness what had happened. The woman had been beguiled by a Mormon elder. He had married her "to save her soul." Doubtless he cared thus for the souls of many women. And this was the loss to which, since it was no gain to her, Carl could not resign himself. He had returned again and again to keep a certain doglike watch over her, if he could do nothing more, and today for the last time. She followed Roger, and was looking down on him as he stood now almost shoulder-deep in the grave. Presently, when he paused for a moment, she spoke.

“You are not a Saint?”

“A what?”

“A Saint?”

“I never claimed to be,” he answered shortly.

“Neither was he,” she said sadly, “but it will be all right. I shall be baptized for him. The first minute I can get away I shall not eat or sleep till it is done. I had always planned to, if it was given to me to live long enough.”

To this Roger refused to reply.

“If you are not a Saint,” she went on, “I reckon you can’t understand how I feel; but I’ve been thinking that if he was to die, I’m almost glad it could be here. It’s not only that I am here, and you, so that he’s among friends, but this is the Promised Land.”

“What do you mean?”

“The land that was promised to the first Saints that came out here over the desert. You saw how a little grass begins here, and the trees? This is the very edge of it, and I like to have him buried here.”

Roger looked at her for a moment silently. Then he said: “Perhaps you are right,” and went on with his work.

But his thoughts were once more at the other end of the world. “The Promised Land!” The phrase was one of Carl’s own, and Roger remembered the moment when he had used it, with a vividness that seemed almost supernatural. It was an April night in Cambridge, and the last before Carl had started for the West. They had gone out together for a farewell dissipation—one of their pathetically modest dissipations, a late Welsh rarebit at Ramsden’s—and were returning to their room with their arms around each other’s shoulders. Carl was overflowing with enthusiasm for his new life in the West.

“Oh, you’ve no idea, Roger,” he would cry, “how cramped up I sometimes feel here, even though I love it. We’re all so much alike, and we never shall do much of anything, nor even expect to, as long as we stay here. But out there there’s opportunity for anything. It’s the real Promised Land.”

As Roger dug away in the earth, he could almost hear the clanging of the car bells on Harvard Square, and see the little patches of light in the windows across the Yard, and feel Carl’s arm warm about his shoulder in the clasp of love that is closer than the love of women. That was the promise; and here, where the moon poured its wasted loveliness over endless miles of sand, lighting also with a

faint yellow the wall of this new grave— this was the fulfillment?

The work was now finished, and in a few minutes more the body of the dead man had been carried between the trees to the place prepared for it. Roger found his companion ready and effective in the work that was laid upon them, and in no way disposed to give way to grief. But when they were ready for the burial, she drew aside once more the covering from the face of her lover, and knelt on the ground beside him. The moon had now risen high enough to give abundant light. The face that they saw by its beams was strong and calm in its silence, with curling dark hair not altogether unlike the woman's straighter locks, and a mouth which, though less lovely, was firmer than hers.

“Do you think it would be any harm if I should kiss him once, now?” she suddenly asked of her companion.

Roger shook his head.

“I don't think I've as much as touched his hand since I was sealed to my husband, except when I was tending his wounds while he lay dying. And I reckon he didn't know that I cared for him still. Perhaps that was as it ought to be, but some time, even if it is wicked, I shan't be able to keep from wishing that he had known.”

“It’s not wicked, I’m very sure,” said Roger impetuously. “But it need not be a matter of wishing. He did know; I can prove it to you.” He reached for his coat, drew from one of the pockets a little bundle of papers, and from them chose out a letter—one of the last bits of mail that had chased him to his hiding place in Idaho. He held the sheets where the light fell upon them, and presently put his finger on the spot he wanted. “Here it is,” he said and read:

“If it were only that I love her, and always shall, it would matter very little. But I know that she loves me still, and cannot change that, no matter what she lives through or what they tell her; and this is why it is so hard to give her up.”

The woman had sat down where she had been kneeling, and clasped her hands together in front of her breast.

“You are like an angel from heaven,” she said, “to bring me this. There was nothing else I wanted to know. He could never have given me up, even to save his soul. I gave him up for the sake of both of our souls. God knows which of us loved the most. But I wanted him to know I hadn’t changed.”

Once more she bent over the white face of her lover, and Roger turned quickly away into the shadow of the poplars, and left them alone for their farewell.

When the grave was about to be filled, the woman said in her abrupt fashion: "Could you make a prayer?"

"I'm afraid not," said Roger.

"I want him to have a real Christian burial, and I don't think it matters so much that you're not a Saint."

"I don't know how to make a prayer that would be good enough for such a purpose," said Roger. "But I can say a psalm that perhaps will do almost as well."

"I wish you would."

So, while they stood side by side at the head of the grave, Roger repeated the words that he had learned as a little boy, and never wholly forgotten:

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

"Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

“Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

“In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth.

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

“Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

When he had finished there was a moment of silence. The woman at his side drew a sigh almost as of one satisfied.

“That is good,” she said. “I don’t see how a prayer could be better. It seems to wrap one all around with—I don’t know what—I suppose with God. I shall say that over and over again about a thousand years being only like a day. It will make it easier to live. But now,” (and

she dropped her reflective tone for one of action again) “I want a hymn, too. I know a very good Saints’ hymn, and I’ll try to sing it.”

It was now Roger’s turn to be silent, while she folded her hands again, as she had done while he was reciting the psalm; and her voice, sweet as a nightingale’s, broke forth into the stillness:

“Why should we mourn, or think our lot is hard?  
Tis not so; all is right!  
Why should we think to earn a great reward,  
If we now shun the fight?  
Gird up your loins, fresh courage take,  
Our God will never us forsake;  
And soon we’ll have this tale to tell—  
All is well! All is well!”

Then, with what seemed to Roger pitiful irrelevancy until he invested the words with a kind of symbolic meaning, she sang the lines written to cheer the Saints who were marching toward the Promised Land, on whose edge they too were now standing.

“We’ll find the place which God for us prepared,  
Far away in the West;  
Where none shall come to hurt nor make afraid;  
There the Saints will be blessed.”

And again came the lingering refrain, dying at last into an almost whispered note of melody, as the singer unclasped her hands and let them drop wearily at the end:

“All is well! all is well!”

Thus was the burial service of Carl Trent carried out by the two who had loved him.

“You are not afraid that your husband will be disturbed by this?” Roger asked, when he had brought the soil over the grave to a level with the neighboring ground, yet, of course, not without leaving signs of the digging.

“No,” said the woman. “This is my garden at this side of the yard, and I dig here every day or so. I shall plant flowers here, and will always know the place, and so will you if you come this way again. It’s not like having a stone, but it’s not being altogether forgotten either. And now I’d ask you to come in and rest, but my husband must be well on his way by this time, and he—I’m afraid he wouldn’t give a stranger a good welcome at this time of the night.”

“You said he was coming from Huntsville?”

“Yes. It will be the same road that you came in on. He has another family there.” Roger thought he heard a half-

stifled sigh. “He couldn’t be more particular and—and jealous—if he had only one to care for.”

Roger looked up keenly to discover whether the tremendous irony of this remark was intended by the speaker, but there was no revelation in her face. She held out her hand.

“Good-bye,” she said. “If you hadn’t been here—I shouldn’t have died, very likely, but it’s made all the difference in the world.”

Roger had previously led the two horses, his own and Carl’s, into the stable and given them feed from his bag. He had been more provident for the appetite of his beast than for his own. Now he brought the horses out together.

“I’ll take this one along with me, too,” he said, “so that your husband won’t find the horse. He would recognize it, no doubt, and that would not help things any.”

The woman looked first relieved, then anxious. “It’s hardly safe in this country to be found riding with another man’s horse,” she said, “I reckon you’d better not.”

“Oh, I’ll manage well enough,” said Roger, with a carelessness perhaps beyond what he felt. “They won’t be suspicious of a tenderfoot like me. And if your husband

notices the tracks, tell him a stranger was here with a led horse, and that you let him rest and feed. Good-bye, I may never come this way again, but I shall not forget.”

He had reached the road, and halted under the last of the poplars to adjust the strap of the led horse, when he heard her coming after him. She ran along under the trees till she could lay her hand on the General's neck. With the other hand she pointed up the road behind them, and in a whisper which was yet loud and fervent she bade him—

*“Ride!”*

He was off then, at a good pace, and when out of the shadow turned for an instant in his saddle to look behind. On the upper slope of the hill from which he had had his first view of the little ranch, outlined now in the moonlight, was a horseman coming down toward him at a leisurely pace. Nothing dangerous, surely, in the sight of a respectable saint and elder riding home in the cool of the day. But the elder's wife had evidently imagined that that would not be all.

On they cantered, and then broke into a gallop when over the next rise in the road. It was not till they were climbing a long slow incline, some twenty minutes' ride from the ranch, that Roger was able to look again down a

considerable stretch of the road over which he had come. Yes, he was being pursued. The horseman had passed the ranch, was riding on toward him, now dipping into the first of the hollows on this side of his home.

“Very well, General,” said Roger. “We have a good start. If you and I were alone I should feel sure of what we could do, but as it is I guess we can keep him busy. The only point is that he might send a shot ahead to tell us he is coming. Keep your ears down and go it, old man!”

This ride was a strange contrast to that of the day. The road lay before them for some distance almost as plainly as it had in the sunlight, and the mountains ahead stood out clearly also, but they were now of a luminous purple, and the white and green of the earth about was fused into a broad sweep of almost amethystine blue. The air was splendidly cool for those who had work before them, and the night wind came pouring out of the desert in long heaving breaths, bringing aromatic odors freed from all the heavy heat of the day. And on, ever on, sounded the muffled beat of the General’s hoofs in the sandy road, with the echo of those of the riderless horse accompanying them, while a moonlit mist of dust swept always upward in their train.

Once, as they stood conspicuous on an eminence crossed by the road, there came the sound of a shot somewhere in the rear, and Roger fancied, though he was not certain, that he heard the singing of a bullet close at hand. But almost instantly they dipped out of range again, and the ball, if it was one, must have fallen harmless. As they pounded on with perfect steadiness, Roger began to have excellent faith that these horses, freshened by a considerable rest at the ranch, would easily keep their advantage over the horse that had been traveling straight from Huntsville. Yet there was that six-shooter, with always an uncertainty as to how far it could reach.

Sometimes, moved by the absurdity of fleeing from a horseman who was no highwayman, when he himself had nothing on his conscience to make him fear to face any man, Roger thought his wisest course might be to turn and meet his pursuer, proclaiming himself a gentleman and assuming to be treated accordingly. But there still echoed in his ear the intensity of that whisper, "*Ride!*" This was not the East; to be a gentleman meant very little. And clearly this Mormon elder was not a man to be trifled with. He was a fair marksman, too; there had been sad proof of that today; and while we may recognize

Roger Ludlow as a tenderfoot, I do not think we can call him a coward for thinking that, on the whole, the longer the piece of road there was between them the better for his own skin and for the conscience of his pursuer.

But there was still another point. Roger had done some hard thinking as he rode, and had made up his mind that it would be better for the woman he had left at the ranch if there could be a chance of his being taken for a wandering rascal, more particularly a horse thief, who had fled on the approach of an honest man, than that he should be known as a respectable traveler and a probable friend of Carl's. If she would do her part wisely, it was for him to look after his. So for this reason also he would avoid confronting her husband, and it was this new idea of himself as an abandoned character that suggested to him his next move.

Not more than an eighth of a mile ahead, there rose at the left of the road one of those bald, projecting bluffs, such as he had frequently found along his route, jutting out into the sea of the desert like a promontory. This one was a spur of the mountains to the west, and a good part of its side nearest the road lay black in its own shadow, in striking contrast to the moonlit plain. If he could once make his way into that shadow, Roger reasoned, he was

not only safe, but at a decided advantage over anyone riding down the lighted road. To add to the responsibilities of the situation, there was a short hill to descend before he could come opposite the black bluff. Once under the crown of that, could he reach cover before the man behind him gained the top?

“General,” he said briskly, “now is the chance of your life. You never carried a highway robber before. Do your best, and I guess this other chap will keep up with us.”

Down the hill they sped, and in an instant more were at its foot and making a sudden swerve off the road and into the sagebrush. The horses stumbled a little in the rough sand, but General Custer seemed to grasp the situation almost immediately and led the way into the pathless wilderness, snuffing the excitement of the moment from the very air.

Roger pulled in the horses and looked back at the road instinctively. As yet there was no sign of the rider coming over the hill. Then he dismounted, and led both horses after him carefully, for here it was too dark to risk riding in cross-country fashion. Not far ahead of them there opened a little canyon, leading in toward the heart of the hill, and he made his way into the almost inky blackness of this. Presently he found some shrubs whose

roots, emerging from the hillside, were stout enough to serve for hitching posts, and he fastened the horses hastily. Then he climbed to the upper edge of the wall of the canyon, where he could look again into the world of moonlight.

The horseman had reappeared. He was descending the short hill, and seemed, Roger thought, to be slackening the pace of his horse, when he failed to see longer ahead of him the object of his pursuit. Now was the time for action, if one were really to change front and play the part of a villain. Roger drew from his belt the six-shooter with which his uncle had provided him as he started on his lonely ride, and which he had not yet found occasion to use, though he had more than once felt for it encouragingly during this flight from an unknown enemy. Now he raised it, aimed at a point some twenty-five yards ahead of the horseman on the road below, and fired.

The man drew in his horse, and Roger could imagine rather than see how his glance swept the hillside where his enemy had ambushed. For a full minute after the report everything seemed doubly still. Then the rider advanced his horse again. It seemed to Roger that his hand trembled with excitement, but there must be no delay if he was to play his new part keenly, and after all

there was as yet no question of accurate aim. He fired again, keeping his head well down in the darkness of the canyon; then he rapidly ran along under its edge to a point some five or six yards further down, and fired a third time. His idea now was that if the horseman should be watching the flashes, he would have seen two appearing from different places, and perhaps suspect that two men were firing. A rider found for the riderless horse! The discovery should be a thrilling one. Roger began to take an excited pleasure in maintaining his double personality.

The horseman made no further attempt to advance, but seemed to be studying the situation. It would be difficult for him to regard it as favorable. He stood full in the inexorable moonlight, with no shadow within reach save his own, unless he could cross that stretch of rough-grown plain between him and the bluff; and this must be done in full range of the bandit or bandits safely hidden there in the darkness. Even should he reach the shadow, they would know his whereabouts far better than he could determine theirs. Certainly the tables had been turned upon him. He had ridden out as an avenger, and was trapped. Perhaps he had not been sent by the Lord

after this second victim; one deed of cleansing was, after all, enough for a day.

So it came to pass that the excited watcher in the canyon presently saw his enemy turn his horse abruptly around in his tracks, and then, with a parting malediction upon the ungodly, which Roger could only infer from a gesture revealed in silhouette against the road, proceed slowly up the hill which he had lately descended. On the top he paused again, but only for an instant. Then he was lost to view.

The suspense really over, Roger began to feel for the first time how exhausted he was by the tension of the night's events. He waited a few minutes to make sure that he had not misunderstood the situation, and then made his way slowly back to where the horses were standing drowsily at the foot of the canyon. When he had given them a cheering caress or two, he unfastened his blanket from his saddle, rolled himself in it, and lay down in the sand for a few minutes' rest.

He awakened with momentary uncertainty as to how long he had slept. The moon had climbed high enough to look over the edge of the bluff and into the canyon, and was shining full in his face. It was perhaps three o'clock.

He led the horses gently back through the sagebrush, and mounted for the last stage of the journey. The moon was now at its full power, and it seemed to Roger that he might almost swim in the silver sea that appeared to lie before him. He had lost all concern as to finding Uintah, and felt a dreamy indifference as to whether it was two or twenty miles away.

But it was really only a few minutes before he found it. The next hill climbed by the road proved to be the last; for there beneath them, on its further side, was a group of moonlit roofs and chimneys that marked the sleeping town, and outside the town was a line of colored lights that showed where the road to the great world lay quivering along the plain. Those lights of the Union Pacific seemed to Roger the symbols of everything that was opposite to what he had lately passed through. He found himself having a curious hesitancy about descending out of his isolation to this other region, the world of common men, and stopped on the ridge of the hill for a last look over the white tape-like road by which he had come. It had been a long day and a long ride, and he felt perceptibly older. One thing was certain; the desert would never seem so strange or so full of inhumanity

again. He had not only lived in it, but he had found love in it, and a friend, and had left in it a grave.

The night wind came heaving out of the moonlit spaces, and Roger could have sworn for the moment that it bore the sound of singing. He thought he heard her voice rising and falling as it poured out that incredibly hopeful hymn:

“Gird up your loins, fresh courage take,  
Our God will never us forsake;  
And soon we’ll have this tale to tell—  
All is well! All is well!”

### *The End*

Raymond Alden’s short story “The Promised Land” took third prize in a 1905 national short story contest sponsored by *Collier’s Weekly* magazine. “The Promised Land” appeared in print for the first time in the June 1905 fiction issue of *Collier’s Weekly*.