



"What is it, Brock? I'm plumb willin' to listen to your counsel."

"Then I'll talk outspoken. You try ter cover these men in sote means to have a desperate chance. Ye can't hardly succeed, an' if ye fails ye've been poor paid on the Haveys—ye're gonna' evenally done for."

"Don't you talk to me!"

"You bett' mought. Anse, no man has never questioned yore loyalty to me. I mought as well tell ye what's in my heart as think ye ain't sayin' ter please them so much as her."

"I mought. "What is it?" he demanded.

"I'm gonna' tell that ther Haveys know as much to ye now as ther overseer does. Them have been payin' us ter think ye ain't sayin' ter please them so much as her."

Anse stood for a long minute silent, and his bronzed features grew taut as like he required costly:

"What do you think, Brock?"

"We trust ye till hell freeze."

"All right. Then so as I tells ye, an' I tells I reckons you'll be head o' the Haveys in my place."

Dawn at the school there was going to be a Christmas tree that year. Never before had the children of the "poor-water folks" heard of a Christmas tree. The season of Christ's birth had always been celebrated with mossy rug and revolver. It was dreaded in advance and mourned over its removal.

Now in many childish hearts large dreams were brewing. Eager anticipations awaited the marvels. The howling young fir tree which was to bear a multitude of gifts and lights had been staked out and marked to the ax. Anse Havey and Juanita had explored the woods together, bent on its selection. Perhaps Juanita and Dawn were as much excited as the children, but to Dawn it meant more than to anyone else. She was to accompany Juanita to Lexington to buy gifts and decorations and would have her first wondrous glimpses of the lights and crowds of a city.

Hill was there at college and would be returning about the same time, so the mountain girl secretly wrote him of her coming. And over finding no grave or hope, Anse Havey thought of that tree and hoped that Lake would not come back before Christmas.

That night, while he was sitting with Juanita and the fire was flashing on her cheeks, he said moodily: "I'm afraid you'll have to start despatchin' me all over again."

She looked up in astonishment.

"Why?" she asked.

"I've got to kill a man."

She rose from her chair, her face pale.

"Kill a man?" she echoed.

"You know I hate to do it." He rose, too, and stood before the hearth. "But I reckon it had better be me than Jack."

"Do you mean—" she broke off and finished brokenly, "that Fletch's murderer is back?"

"He's comin'. He's comin' to kill somebody else. Most likely me. It's a question of settlin' scores with a murderer that killed Fletch for a ticket West and a hundred dollars—or lettin' young Jeb McNash go away an' startin' the feud all over again. I reckon ye see that I ain't no choice."

She came nearer and stood confronting him so close that he felt her breath on his face. She broke out in a low, tense voice: "Suppose he kills you?"

"He'll have his chance," said Anse Havey shortly. "I ain't 'lowin' to shoot him down from ambush."

The girl leaned forward and clutched his hands in both her own. Under the tight pressure of her fingers he felt every nerve in his body tingle and leap into a hot ecstasy of emotion, while his face became white and drawn.

"Don't risk your life," she pleaded. "Your people can't spare you; I can't spare you. Not now, Anse; I need you too much."

The man's voice came in a hoarse whisper.

"Ye needs me!"

"Yes, yes," she swept on, and for an instant he was on the verge of withdrawing his hands and crushing her to him, but something in his face had warned her. She dropped the hands she had been holding and said in an altered tone: "It's not just me; it's bigger than that. It's my work. We've come to be such good friends that I didn't go on without you. My work would fail."

For a while he was silent, then he said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But, Anse," she argued, "my work is all that's biggest and best in me. You understand, don't you?"

For a moment his voice got away from him and he rose fiercely:

"I don't give a damn for your work!" he blazed out. "It's you I'm interested in. That's the sort of friend I am."

She looked up at his gleaming eyes, a little amazed, and he went on, quiet and strong now:

"Anse," he replied slowly, "ask me to do anything else in God Almighty's world, but don't ask me that, 'cause if ye does I've got ter deny ye."

"I ain't askin' ye to let the man go unpunished. I'm only askin' you to let me punish him with the law."

Astonishment was writ large in every feature of Jeb's face. He stood in the wavering circle of light whilst the shadows swallowed the corners of the cabin, and wondered if he had heard rightly. At last his voice carried a note of deep disappointment, and he

said very slowly and very bitterly: "Oh, it's just your work that needs me!"

"But