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LEM RODER'S STRIKE
 BY WARREN E. HVEGH.

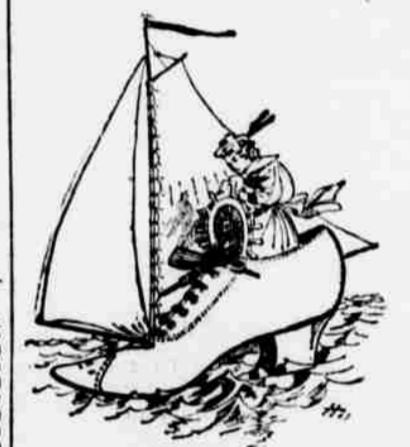
LEM RODER made his strike on the fifth anniversary of the settlement of Boulder.
 In those first five years of its life Boulder had managed to save the sum of \$3,000. Boulder naturally wanted to be the county seat of the county of Boulder, Ariz., and she had staved and stunted herself for those five years in order to save up enough money to persuade the county that she had the best seating capacity anywhere around. We were pleased, therefore, to call this \$3,000 our seating fund.
 Jealous persons in our nearest neighbor, a little town known as "Hell-on-the-Border," about 20 miles away, called this money our corruption fund.
 Roder was chairman and treasurer of the seating committee, and therefore had charge of the fund.
 The chairman and treasurer was about as fine a man as ever came over the Rockies. If he had been a hotel-keeper he would have been called "that most genial of Bonifaces." As he was only a hard-working citizen like the rest of us, apparently wrapped up body and soul in the success of Boulder, with an honest, healthy hand-shake and a heart as large as the Great American desert and as warm in his impulses, he was simply, in the words of Tom Gable, "a decent fellow."
 We had the most implicit faith in Roder. I do not know why. Certainly he had never had a chance to prove that he was over-scrupulous about honesty, but men who live in the open, wayfarers in a strange land, warriors of fortune, friends of nature, grow to be like dogs and little children, and their instinct becomes so abnormally developed that they can pick out a good man the moment they see him. However, I have often seen a dog take a decided fancy for a Bill Sikes; and I have often seen a dog that wouldn't come within a mile of a decent man; and then I've seen a child who would be disgusted with a clean, decent woman, and cry like a little possessed for the arms of its wretched, dirty, decrepit nurse. So that I do not see, and have always refused to see, why Boulder should be blamed for the implicit trust it reposed in Lem Roder. From all of which, therefore, it is to be inferred that Lem wasn't any better than the rest of us, and had his price. The only mistake that Boulder made was in placing Lem's price too high.
 On the day that Lem Roder left Boulder the whole town turned out to see him off, and rode with him some five miles into the desert in the direction of the nearest railroad station. Lem was to take the train there for Phoenix, where he was to prove our seating capacity with that \$3,000 at so many dollars per proof. I have forgotten how many men he had to convince, but I remember that each proof was to be worth several hundreds of dollars.
 Lem expected to be gone about two weeks and to return with Boulder's prosperity in his inside pocket; for with the county seat we know we would get the railroad into our town. We had not a doubt of the success of the venture, and so we gave Lem a rousing send-off and made a hero of him and a heroine of his wife, Mrs. Lem, a little bit of a woman with eyes that shone like mica in a dark canyon, and a sweetness like a babbling spring in a desert.
 Mrs. Lem was not strong, and when Lem kissed her fondly—the big, strong, handsome hero and the weak, sickly, beautiful heroine—there were tears in our eyes, and we meant it when we told him that we'd look out for her and the boy.
 The boy was Buster, four years old, a gallant little chap, who would fight anything his size around, and cry when his mother took him in her arms and hugged him a little and looked into his big brown eyes. Buster, you see, hadn't learned what words he should use to tell his mother how much he cared for her, and so all he could do when the love in his heart hurt him too much was to cry.
 Mrs. Lem was something of a saint to all of us. When she and the boy sat down in the plaza in the afternoon the sun used to shine upon their golden heads, and little halos used to dance all around them. Mrs. Lem had nursed us when the smallpox came to town via a confounded greaser from Reno, and when Buster was taken down with it God Almighty heard some new voices and the recording angel had to look up a glossary to translate the prayers.
 So that there wasn't much that wasn't done for her and that boy when Lem was gone. Mrs. Lem was taken down sick the next day, just from grieving, and then we had a chance to pay her back. Doc Sloane attended to her night and day. There wasn't any bill sent in, either.
 "I'll take it out on the next invalid," said he.
 "If she dies I'll give her the best in the house," said Tom Gable, the undertaker—and he meant it, for he was a warm-hearted fellow.
 But the prospect of such a horrible thing was too much for us, and the Free-for-All did a great business until we had washed down the awful fear in our hearts.
 Mrs. Lem didn't die. She was well in a week, and when she and Buster came out for a walk the desert recoiled over her cheeks, and Mrs. Lem hugged Buster, and Buster was so happy that he cried for five minutes, and was only quieted when he found a big dog bullying a smaller dog, whereupon he brouched the big dog unmercifully.
 We had hardly taken our first drink, an hour later, to Mrs. Lem, Buster and Boulder, when a dog came into town. Bad news, really, with Jim Taylor on Jim Taylor's heels.

all my fealty to Ross returned, and I knew how I had wronged him.
 "We are quits, Mr. Arden," I answered lightly, yet proudly. "I do not know what better assurance to give you than to inform you of my own engagement, which is only waiting my lover's return from sea to be ratified. Therefore, with many thanks, I will decline your beautiful offering."
 My words had hit the mark. He had not expected a little country girl to meet him upon equal ground, and a dark red flush overspread his handsome face. Then his own generous nature conquered as he said:
 "At least, Miss Rita, I may proffer this as a wedding gift."
 As such I felt I could not refuse it, but he went on:
 "Only one thing I ask, that I myself may place it on your arm."
 Then, taking it up, he slipped it upon her wrist, where it fastened with a tiny padlock, which he locked with a golden key, placing the latter in his pocket.
 "You see you will wear my chains while you live," he said, with hidden earnestness, "and I—shall have only this in memory," holding up the key for one moment, then pressing his lips upon it and again consigning it to its hiding place.
 I was still sitting where he had left me. It was early in the evening, and I had refused to go back to the house, when some one whose footfall I had not heard stood before me. Glancing up, the moon's rays fell full on Ross's face. With a glad cry of delight I sprang to my feet, but, white and stern and still, he waved me back.
 "I have been home one hour," he said quietly. "It seems to me a year. I was told you were here with your lover. Where is he that may share the congratulations I have come to offer you?"
 "Ross!" I said, "what do you mean? Have you no welcome for me?"
 "Welcome!" he exclaimed, "and where is mine? The star to which my yearning eyes have all these months been turned."
 "Ross, you have heard falsely. Do not be so cold, so stern to little Rita. Have you not a kiss for me?"
 My tearful tone had melted him. A great wave of tenderness swept over his face. Almost had his arm unfolded to receive me and let me sob out my confession on his heart, when his glance fell on the bracelet clasping my arm. Again the tiger in him leaped to bay.
 "And what is this?" he said, fiercely. "This token of your falsehood that you dare flaunt in my sight. It is like a woman. They would murder with a smile. Do you know that I too could murder? Yes, your very youth, your very beauty, I could crush as the flower beneath my heel. Take off that bauble and fling it into the sea!"
 "I cannot, Ross," I said. "It is locked. He has the key."
 "Curse him!" he muttered. "Then it is to him I must look. He has locked it, but by the heavens above I will unlock it, if to get the key I have to strangle him." And, leaving me stunned, hopeless, wretched where I stood, he strode away.
 As I lay wakeful, pale and repentant, next morning, my mother entered my room with an awful pallor on her face. I think before she opened her lips I knew all, knew that Ross—my lover, my promised husband—was a murderer, and that my soul must stand with his at the bar of God to answer for the deed. The two men had met the night before—one roused to frenzy, the other refusing to answer to threats when reason might have prevailed. There was a blow, an answering blow, a scuffle as to the possession of a tiny golden key. Ross had gained it, when, throwing his opponent from him he had struggled one moment on the edge of the cliff, then fallen heavily into the sea beneath. From his prison cell Ross sent me the key. With a dull, heavy misery I unlocked the golden thing which had wrought such evil, and sat down to live through the dark days of my lover's trial. It was very short, and each hour was bringing it to its close. There could be little doubt of the verdict. He had murdered one man. I had murdered two!
 On the last day of his trial I roused from my apathy to write him the whole unswerving truth.
 "I took it as my wedding gift, Ross," I said in closing. "You may believe me now, since all my life is wrecked, nor have I saved from it even your love."
 The jury were out deliberating. Ross's life was in their hands. This was the one ever-present torturing thought when a great shout broke the oppressive stillness. What could it mean? I knew not, and dared not hope, until—the messenger of the glad tidings came to us. The trial had come to an unforeseen termination. The grave had given up its dead. Ruah Arden's fall had not killed him, but plucked up by a passing boat he had returned to wreak the noble revenge of striking off his enemy's fetters. All this I heard as in a dream, then the waves of unconsciousness engulfed me and I knew no more. For long weeks I lived over in delirium the tragic scenes which had so lately encompassed me, but when life and reason were restored the flush, not only of health, but happiness, came back to my cheek with the low whispered words with which Ross told me of his forgiveness.—N. Y. Ledger.

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