



# His Unluckiest Wife

By Raymond  
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OLD Jeff Tavell had money. He had grubbed for more than forty years. He had traded in lands; had laughed at smart Alecks who offered him new boots and easy-chairs for coal and iron and timber tracts; had bought and sold craftily, with an eye on the real values. Among his own people he played for little profits.

The old skinflint pretended that he couldn't see well enough to read coarse print, and some people believed him, till they signed written contracts with him and watched the contracts developed. Drill Wister, the storekeeper at the ford, dickered with him once, and Wister received two hundred dollars against old Jeff's nine thousand dollars at the completion of a land bargain.

Every few years old Jeff's wife would die, and he would marry again.

After his third wife died, he rode down to Quinn Nurning's and saw that Tessile Nurning was good to see—a pretty brown-eyed girl with a plump little body—who could have learned spunk from a rabbit because a

rabbit at least knows how to run away.

Old Jeff's first wife had been a plain, sensible and ambitious woman who drudged him into the beginnings of his fortune and then died; his second wife had been proud, fat and forty; his third wife came from almost quality folks; and then he turned to look at Tessile.

"It 'd be a shame to take her to his old shack," people declared instantly. "Old Jeff's so mean he's proud of living humble an' poor an' killin' off his wives by poverty."

There was a sharp rivalry for a little while between old Jeff and Arden Trense for the favor of Tessile. Old Jeff did not have a chance so far as the girl was concerned; but with the girl's father old Jeff was winner, with Arden nowhere. The only people who favored Arden for Tessile were the several broods of Tavell children, who hated to see a young wife interposed between them and their hopes of fortune.

Quinn Nurning could have no choice, in one way. He had two thousand acres of

land, grown to woods in one part, cropping coal in another part, running wild to a great orchard in another section—all kinds of wealth, but no market anywhere! The mortgage held by old Jeff was a dead load, and the interest piled up with all the relentlessness of a mathematical demonstration.

So old Jeff carried the girl out of the old home mansion, where it was comfortable at least, and put her down in the big barn of a log-cabin up Tavell Run, in a clearing that was surrounded on all sides by wilderness. The clearing was run to weeds and brush and pastured mules and horses which old Jeff traded—he was no farmer, just a trader of anything.

There he left her while he went away on long trading trips, swapping mules, horses, land, timber, and anything that people would trade in. Commonly he made money—people said he could trade a live mule for a dead one and make a profit on the boot.

So he traded a good mortgage for a pretty wife and good luck followed Quinn Nurmung's release. Nurmung had hardly made the exchange when a railroad passed through his big land tract and developed a market for all his fruit. He sent down a hundred tons of coal a month; coal that chemistry people had to have, and paid double rates for.

Thereafter, Nurmung sneaked little comforts up to his daughter in the clearing cabin—shoes and dresses, jewelry and other things—and old Jeff bragged around that he had got a good wife for nothing and didn't have to support her, either, which he said was a big relief for a poor man. But to his wife he used the mean, slighting, stinging language of the bully that he was, his scraggly goatee jerking as he spoke.

"Yo's shore a costly bit of baggage!" he sneered. "Costin' me a sight an' a heap! Hadn't be'n fo' you, I'd had that Nurmung place an' made a hundred thousand dollars!

That's what I paid fo' you, an' you ain' wuth nothin'—settin' aroun', not liftin' yo' hands. If yo' was the kind of a wife my fust one was, yo'd be woth yo' keep, but yo' ain't a quality woman. Yo' ain't as proud as a buziard, yo' ain't."

Tessile tried to make believe that his way of talking was a fond kind of swearing, and she smiled under his taunting. She kept the house the best she could, but she had neither the strength nor the knowledge to make an old, dusty log-cabin comfortable and clean and attractive. The moment she mopped the floor, old Jeff would come stumping in, his leather boots clotted with yellow clay, just to let her know that in his own house he'd do as he pleased.

Old Jeff's thin lips would break into a horizontal grin, his little slit-brown eyes would glitter humorously, his voice would rise in a shrill cackle, as he ordered her to pull his muddy boots off for him; and he took delight in letting the boot go so that she would tumble over backwards with her feet in the air at the sudden release.

But Tessile was not unloved.

Arden Trenae loved her, and he was tall and slim and blue-eyed—shiftless, people said, from the day he was born. He lived in the mountains, almost anywhere. He knew a thousand caves in which to sleep; he would oust rattlesnakes from their dens—he dwelt in abandoned cabins and swung his twine-hammock on the crests of mountains and by the side of pools in streams.

Yet, starting with nothing at all but his shiftlessness, he learned all about birds, beasts, plants, rocks, and trees. He cluttered his mind up with all kinds of useless things, and in spite of the blight upon him, he went down to Richmond, Norfolk, Wheeling, Lexington, Louisville, and got to know more quality people than ever entered the mountains! It was said that people actually paid to hear Arden Trenae talk; could anything

be more ridiculous than that?

He began to be a lucky "wild man," too. He bought a little piece of land, all stone and cliffs and without a timber-stick on it. People were amazed when they learned that the stone was marble, and that it was worth forty thousand dollars instead of the four hundred dollars which Trense paid for it.

With all that money, no one knew what the man did with it. He still lived out in the mountains, still wandered around with a pack on his back, like a pedler, looking at birds through glasses and taking photographs of squirrels, and pheasant, and blue jays.

He swung far and wide through the mountains, but often he crossed the waters of Tavell Run. Old Jeff, hearing that he had forty thousand dollars, tried to get acquainted with him, and suggested that they go into a deal together—buy a tract of land and then sell it to some of those rich folks down in Piedmontaine country, or down the Ohio River.

"What do ye say?" old Jeff coaxed. "Look't the money there's in it? You know the land I mean—the Cool Spring tract! There's ten thousand acres into it, an' me'n you'll take it at thirty thousand dollars, eh? You sell it at five an acre, eh?"

Arden shook his head. He would not think of it, he said. He didn't believe he could sell it; he admitted, though, that perhaps he could. For months Old Jeff coaxed and persuaded. He argued the question in season and out; he invited Arden to his cabin to talk it over. The young man accepted the invitation with alacrity. Old Jeff brought the question up at the ford store. He saw only the chance to make money.

Old Jeff had a mortgage on the land and a half-interest besides. The other half was owned by Mrs. Crume. He had an option on her share for five thousand dollars.

"Y' see, you put in fifteen thousand dollars for half-int'rest. an' I'll have half, an'

look't the money we'll make? You sell it for fifty thousand dollars; you do that, thaw's big money into it!"

"What would you do about it?" Trense asked Mrs. Tavell before the fireplace one noon.

"She'd do same's I would!" old Jeff exclaimed savagely, as the young woman hesitated. "Wouldn't you, Tessile?"

"Oh, yes," she hastened to say.

"Well, perhaps I'd better think about it," Arden hesitated.

Old Jeff, with his evil scheme made up, saw how the land lay. He sent his wife out into the smoke-house after a ham for dinner, and then followed immediately. A few minutes later Tessile returned alone. Old Jeff had gone up to corn his horses and mules.

"It would make it easier for me if you'd go in with—him," she said to the visitor directly. "But I think he 'lows to skin you alive!"

"I'll do it—for your sake!" Trense exclaimed. "You know what I'd do for you."

"Oh, I know. If I—if we could of known before!"

"He treats you mean?"

"Specially when he's be'n down to the forks."

"Noman's cabin?"

"Yes."

Old Jeff entered, and a little later they sat down to dinner. After dinner the old man asked:

"You 'n' me better go partners into that."

"All right," Arden assented. "I think it's a good chance. Only I couldn't sell it for more than fifty thousand dollars, probably not more than forty thousand dollars."

"You'll 'gree to sell hit fo' forty-five thousand dollars?" old Jeff asked casually.

"Not more'n forty thousand dollars."

"All right; that's ten thousand to split between us."

Then they sat down and drew up a contract, by the terms of which Arden Trense bought a half-interest in the Cool Spring tract for fifteen thousand dollars.

Old Jeff, for his part, agreed to sell Trense the half-interest and retain a half-interest himself.

The contract further stipulated that Arden Trense should find a purchaser of the land who would pay forty thousand dollars for it "or relieve party of the first part within six months of his holdings in same." Old Jeff was the party of the first part. They rode down to the ford to find a justice of the peace to act as notary and witness the agreement.

When the agreement had been made and old Jeff and Arden had put their copies into their pockets, old Jeff grinned:

"Hit's what I call a fust-class bargain, suh!"

"So do I," Arden admitted, and he rode away.

When the young man was up the road, old Jeff turned to the justice:

"Theh! I sold that danged ole Cool Spring tract fo' forty thousand dollars, an' hit's wuth about ten—twelve thousand, sho. No timber, an' nothin' but graze lands!"

"Suppose he doesn't find a buyer?"

"He's found one already. Look 't that! 'Or relieve party of first part within six months of his holdings in same.' Plain's day! If he don't sell hit, he buys hit hisse'f!"

Old Jeff cackled his delight. He rode away, and prepared all the papers and performed his end of the bargain to the last dot. Moreover, he was so pleased with his wife's persuading Arden to part with the forty thousand-dollar marble-quarry money that he promised to build her a new house down at the ford, on a school lot he owned.

"Yo' got a good business hand on yo'!" he declared proudly, for after all his wife was making money for him.

"Neveh mind!" she told him. "It'd cost

you a lot of money to build down theh."

This further evident of her thoughtfulness awakened a keener appreciation in his mind.

I can afford to be plumb generous to any one that's wuth forty thousand dollars into one bargain to me. Hue-e! I bet young Trense'll sweat raisin' taxes onto that land."

Old Jeff went up and down, bragging about the dicker he had made and telling how he had taken care of Arden Trense's forty thousand streak of luck. It was the most profitable deal old Jeff had ever put through; and as the months went by without any sign of a prospective purchaser, though Trense went down into the valleys several limes, old Jeff grew more and more contented.

"He shore takes that Cool Spring tract off'n my hands," he declared.

He went frequently down to Noman's cabin, in the forks of Tavell Run and the river. There he played poker and drank moonshine with several cronies. While he was gone his wife would sit beside the fireplace and poke the coals and wood with her andirons.

To the clearing, on such nights. Arthur Trense would come and creep up to the cabin, where he could lurk in the dark, as though he would guard the woman from any fear. A strange fatality pursued the dogs that old Jeff liked to have around. Their stark figures would be found around the cabin.

The noise of the falling run resounded through the silences of the little clearing in the valley. Mrs. Tavell sat beside the fire-Place, in the shadow under the mantel. Just her knees, with her hands on them, and the drape of her skirt showed that she was there. It was a blue skirt, and it hung straight, clean and unrumpled. It hung with style, and it was pretty.

If she knew that Arden Trense lurked without she did not show it. If she wondered in his presence what killed old Jeff's favorite dogs, she asked no questions.

Then one night three masked men rode down to the cabin and started toward it. They stopped to whisper half-way up to the cabin, near the spring-house.

"Vassuh," one said, "she knows where that ole scoundrel keeps his money. We got to put her feet in the fiah if she don't tell."

At that moment three red flashes spurted from the spring-house, and the three robbers fell upon their faces. Old Jeff, riding up in the small hours of the morning, heard some one groaning, and found the three, two dead and one begging for a chance to tell what he knew. This one was Terry Temple, who had fallen into bad company.

He told old Jeff just what had happened and admitted that they had planned to burn the woman's feet to make her tell where the money was.

"But she didn't know," old Jeff exclaimed. "Who shot yo'?"

"Hit were some feller stopped into the spring-house to take a drink," Temple whimpered, and then choked to death.

Old Jeff's neighbors had their suspicions, but not old Jeff. The robber had told him how it happened, and he was satisfied. He boasted more than a little about the luck that saved him from having a crippled wife.

"Course, she didn't know where I had my loose money," he declared. "I ain' so keerless as all that. Women is awful light-fingered, when they knows where money is."

The incident taught him nothing. He went, if anything, more frequently to Noman's cabin in the forks to play cards and drink moonshine. It left his wife to face such terrors as she might imagine or suffer in the clearing where men had been slain. If she suspected to whom she owed her deliverance, she did not breathe a whisper to any one.

Then Arden Trense rode up to the cabin one day when old Jeff was there.

"I came about the partnership," he said

briefly.

"Sho?" grinned old Jeff, "come in an' set by the fiah to be warm."

Old Jeff would talk no business till after they had eaten dinner, and Arden Trense did not press the subject. Immediately after dinner, however, old Jeff took the matter up.

"So now yo'all've to beg aroun' an' git out 'a' hit?" he asked. "Yo' 'low you made a po'r bargain an' yo' want to git out 'n' hit? Sho, yo' 'low to crawl an' squirm; I 'low we'll live by the contract, suh!"

"I thought we might extend it." Trense suggested, a look of surprise and hidden anger coming to his face.

Old Jeff saw the anger.

"My boy, I 'lowed I'd git that forty thousand, an' 'cordin' to the contract, I got hit!"

"Yes, I suppose so; I suppose I'll have to take the tract, if that's what you figured on," Trense admitted.

"Then yo'll pay up that forty thousan' yo' got fo' yo' marble tract?" old Jeff grinned eagerly.

"Oh, if you want it thataway."

"Then yo' didn't find anybody to buy hit?"

"No; not yet."

"Time's up to-morrow!" old Jeff declared sharply.

"If that's the way you feel about it, I'll take it over to-morrow," Trense remarked.

"Yo' betteh!" Old Jell sniffed. "Hit'll teach yo' a lesson about bargains, suh—an' contracts. If yo' am' got a buyer fo' hit to-morrow yo' take that land, suh, an' I take the money—forty thousand dollars!"

Old Jeff cackled his delight. Arden looked at Mrs. Tavell, and saw her turn away, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, look 't her, ef yo' want to," old Jeff jeered. "A purty wife's some good into a bargain, yassuh!"

Thus shamelessly did the old man

skinflint jeer the young man, who sat with troubled countenance staring at the fire. He was troubled more than a little. It was not easy for him to do what now proved necessary to do.

Abruptly, he rose to go, turning to say:

"Then to-morrow I'll bring you a check for the total amount. I'll meet you down at the justice's at 11 o'clock."

"That's the way to do business," old Jeff grinned. "When yo' git the wust of hit, yo' come aroun' an' settle up, like a man."

"If you look at it that way," Trense exclaimed scornfully.

The following morning old Jeff was at the justice's early. He had the Noman's cronies with him to see the business completed. Old Jeff was merry, and he was laughing when he signed the final papers.

"Yassuh, I'm reliev'in' yo' of yo' partnership," he cackled with glee. "Hit'll be a long time 'fore yo'll be partners of ole Jeff agin, eh? Mos'ly, folks is satisfied to have ole Jeff partner wunst!"

"Oh, I'm satisfied, if you are," Trense smiled, as old Jeff made the twelve or thirteen bystanders sign the papers as witnesses.

"Yo' satisfied?" old Jeff asked, with sudden suspicion, but he burst into a laugh immediately. "Course, yo'd put on thataway!"

"Yes, I'd put on thataway," Trense admitted walking to his horse and leaping into the saddle, riding away.

"The limber, blue-eyed, cat-hipped son-of-a-gun," old Jeff mused, looking after the victim of his shrewdness. "What yo' expect he'll do with that ten thousand acres?"

"Hunt butterflies onto hit likely," some one suggested. "He's be'n tromplin' all up an' down hit all summer. I seen him totin' chunks of rock aroun' an' burnin' 'em with one of them brass fire-roarers they use to burn paint with."

"He went aroun' tryin' to git somebody to buy hit," old Jeff declared. "He's

be'n down aroun' tryin' to find a buyer."

"He said yisterd'y he'd likely get you to develop the land with 'im," the justice suggested.

"He tried to," old Jeff laughed, "but I wanted this here forty thousan'. Look 't! Hit's a certified check by the bank."

"He didn't take it hard," some one suggested.

"He's proud; them proud fellers wouldn't admit they got hurt," old Jeff grinned.

Arden Trense was not yet out of sight. He turned back suddenly and rode up to old Jeff and his cronies again.

"You're satisfied?" he asked. "You've no kick coming of any kind?"

"I sure am satisfied. Why?"

"Nothing; but we forgot something. Your wife ought to sign these land papers too. A husband cannot sell land without his wife's consent."

Old Jeff's face as blank.

"She'll sign! She'll sign!" he cried. "Come on up the run. I plumb forgot. Sho! Ain' I the ole fool!"

So they rode up Tavell Run to his cabin, and swarmed into it. Nothing would do but Mrs. Tavell must sign forthwith, but she shook her head.

"No," she said. "Hit ain' a fair trade. Hit ain' right." "Yo' sign them papers!" old Jeff shouted. "Sign!"

She shook her head. Old Jeff shivered and turned yellow.

"It would be friendly to me if you'd sign," Arden Trense suggested.

"Would hit?" she asked, looking at him wonderingly.

"Yes," he smiled; "I'm more than twenty-one years of age; I'll be satisfied."

"Then I'll sign," she submitted, and signed as she was told.

Old Jeff sucked in his breath with relief. Unexpectedly, he had found himself

confronted by a dilemma, and in that moment he had seen forty thousand dollars slipping from his grasp, and now he seized the money again; he did not notice what he was giving for it.

Arden folded his papers up again and old Jeff thumbed the certified check, a check that he did not notice then was worn and old and had often been thumbed, having long been carried for this hour. He turned away, shuffled to his horse and galloped down the run road, to carry the check to his bank; to make certain that the money was transferred immediately to his account. The bank down to Newport did not close till 4 o'clock.

When he was out of sight, she turned and demanded:

"Why did you do that?"

"To please you," Arden retorted.

"But that land tract's no good."

"It has served me very well," he declared.

"So—how?"

"It enabled me to do a favor for you and then—then yo' kindly did a favor for me."

"Sho!" she exclaimed impatiently, and then, puzzled, she asked: "But what account? What good'll this all do yo' Arden Trens?"

"It'll help me laugh," he chuckled, and as she stared at him, he bowed courteously backed away and bowed again.

"Yo'—yo' got to hurry?" she parried.

"Eh—yo'—"

She bit her lip and then shook her head decisively.

"I plumb fo'got," she exclaimed. "Yo' git!"

"Suttinly," he laughed, and went to his horse, mounted and cantered away; but he waved good-by to her from the clearing edge, and she waved a reply.

Old Jeff rode down to the Newport bank, and as he climbed the stone steps he met Colonel Frunon, an old Shenandoah Valley farmer.

"Hello, Jeff!" Colonel Frunon exclaimed. "How yo' coming?"

"Sho! Comin' like them houn's oveh the mountang! Know that old Cool Spring tract? Well, suh, I sold hit—sold it to my partner!"

Old Jeff poured the story out, telling about the tricky contract, the worthlessness of the land; and he waved the check for forty thousand dollars in the air.

"Look 't!" old Jeff cried. "Theh's the certified check, suh!"

"So young Arden Trens took you in on that?" Colonel Frunon exclaimed. "I wouldn't have believed it of him."

"Took me in?" old Jeff exclaimed. "No, suh! Why, suh. I jes' made that man live up to the contract, suh! I made him do hit! Why, I tricked 'im, an' I wool-hauled him. He tried to extend hit, but when I git a man to rights, I hol' 'im to hit, yas-suh!"

"Oh, I see," Colonel Frunon smiled slightly. "When he wanted more time, you refused it?"

"Yassuh, I shore did!"

"You say you sold hit, all for forty thousand?"

"Yassuh; ten thousand acres of cow pasture that ain't no good: that a man 'd starve to death tryin' to pay taxes on. Hue-e! Forty thousand dollars!"

"Four dollars an acre?"

"Yassuh, hit'd be squandary at a dollar!"

"Arden went all over it before he bought it—before he went in with you. And then he went over it again."

"Yassub; 'greed to find somebody to buy hit fo' forty thousand dollars, an' he was blind; he 'greed to pay forty thousand dollars hisse'f if he didn't find anybody."

"I was wondering about that," Colonel Frunon shook his head. "I offered him a hundred thousand for it, but—"

"What! yo' did?" old Jeff shrieked.

“What fo? Why didn’t yo’ ast me? I’d ’a’—”

“He wouldn’t do it,” Colonel Frunon shook his head, “and his contract was an option the courts couldn’t break.”

“What yo’ want that land fo’?” old Jeff demanded with sudden suspicion.

“Why, that iron vein—”

“Iron! Iron vein!” old Jeff blinked.

“You didn’t know Arden found fifty-two per cent iron ore on that tract; one of the richest veins down thisaway?”

“Why—why, the scoundrel! That ole scoundrel!” old Jeff grimaced. “What yo’ expect I kin do? He robbed me—”

“I thought you said you forced him to live by the contract?”

“Yassuh! Yassuh!” whimpered old Jeff. “I was rough, but—”

“You’re always rough, when you think you’ve the best of the bargain,” Colonel Frunon suggested, as he turned away. “That land’s worth anywhere from a hundred thousand up, ’cording as the drill core shows the size of the ore body!”

Old Jeff hesitated about depositing the check. He had a fleeting notion that he might, by destroying or hiding the check, claim that he had not his “value received,” but he had the swarm of his own witnesses signed to the paper and attested.

Old Jeff rode home, whimpering all the way. He had so seldom been bested in a bargain that the sensation was practically new to him. On a large scale, it was entirely new. Always the other fellow had needed condolences. He remembered that his wife had signed the fatal deed; she had done it when Arden Trense said it would be friently to him!

Therefore, he thought, his wife was to blame. She had helped that scoundrel beat her own husband out of his rightful share in a hundred thousand, and maybe in a million!

“She’s always be’n mean luck,” he thought to himself. “She never done me no

good, nohow! Look ’t how she beat me out ’n her daddy’s farm; I los’ a hundred thousand theh, an’ now hyar’s anotheh hundred thousand. Lawse! Lawse! That woman’ll beat me out of my home yet!”

He had made so clear and plain a case against his wife, by the time he had spent half the night in Noman’s cabin in the forks of the river, where he had gone for consolation, that when he arrived home he threw his bridle at the unfortunate woman when she unbarred and opened the door for him. Then he started after her with his short, rawhide whip, and fairly whipped her out the doorway.

He shut the door and barred it, determined that she should sleep with the mule colts in the corn that night, to settle for her sins.

People had always said that Tessile had no will of her own and that she could learn spunk from a rabbit. To the rabbits she went that night and learned what they taught. She sneaked her own saddle and bridle out of the storehouse and saddled a big mule her father had given her.

She bridled and saddled the mule and quietly drove him to the pasture-bars, led him through and, mounting, walked him down the run road. When she struck the contract road at the ford, she started the big mule into a long, swinging lope, which covered the miles, eight or nine to the hour, till after dawn.

She rode up to her father’s house in time for breakfast, and Quinn Nurning, after one look at the welt of the rawhide whip across her cheek, and after a glance at the blue lines over her shoulders said:

“Yo’ done yo’ duty, gal! When a man whips his’n’s wife, she don’ need to stay with him no mo’! Yo’s welcome home—an’ when he comes he gets what he give yo’!”

Old Jeff was looking for his wife the next day. He rode up and down, trying to find her.

“All I done was beat her up ’cause she

cost me that Cool Spring tract," he told around. "She got me into hit—an' hit cost me my profits."

"Yo' whupped that gal?" men asked him, scornfully and angrily.

"But yo' see what she done—the Cool Spring tract!" he whimpered. He rode down to the Nurning place, and Quinn Nurning drove him from the door.

"Yo' whopped my gal! She'll divorce you now," Quinn declared.

When old Jeff grew angry, Quinn took a seven-foot mule-skinner and whipped him past the boundary, and within a week old Jeff was served with divorce papers. In the fall term the story was told in detail before the circuit judge, and item by item old Jeff's property was listed—lands, saw-mills, mortgages, farms, and all.

"He's worth one hundred and fifty thousand dollars," the plaintiff's attorney declared, "and as his lawful wife she is entitled to one-third of his property, especially as she had been of material assistance in obtaining money for him—"

"It's a lie!" old Jeff cried. "She neveh he'ped me."

"Didn't you say that she was instrumental in getting you forty thousand dollars for the Cool Spring tract, for which you paid but ten thousand?" the attorney demanded.

"Hit was wuth a hundred thousand—"

"She obtained thirty thousand dollars more than you paid for it?" the attorney insisted.

So it appeared. Witnesses proved what Old Jeff tried to deny, and' only when the court read to him the section of the statutes regarding the penalties which are incurred when one commits perjury for his own benefit against the interests of another did old Jeff subside.

"She is entitled to one-third of your fortune," the court told old Jeff. " And, as

your income is about fifteen thousand dollars a year, at the least, you may pay her five thousand dollars a year."

Old Jeff blinked. Then he saw a shrewd bargain which he could make. It took a first-class business man to get ten per cent on his money, and if he paid the woman fifty thousand dollars, he would be giving her, in fact, only three thousand dollars a year instead of five thousand.

"I'll be shut of her, all to wunst!" he grumbled, yet with a bright light of satisfaction. "I'll make oveh to her fifty thousand dollars."

So it was done, and the eyes of others glistened with satisfaction which old Jeff failed in his preoccupation to notice. The papers were signed and the exchanges made. Old Jeff stood up from the table and sneered at the attorney for the plaintiff, and at her and at all her family.

"Theh!" he grinned, "I'm shut of yo', an' I've druve a bargain, too. Yo' cayn't git no ten per cent, but only six, an' you'll be lucky to git that!"

"Yes?" the attorney for the plaintiff smiled. " Glad you're satisfied, Jeff. We are entirely satisfied. In fact, we don't understand your viewpoint at all. You see, Jeff, you agreed to pay fifty thousand dollars and you have paid it. The matter is closed, and sealed by the court. Now if you had insisted on paying alimony, one hundred dollars a week, you would have got out of this for two hundred dollars, plus lawyer fees—less than a thousand dollars, anyhow, and all because you didn't understand human nature—and a little law."

"What—what—I'd a got out for a thousand?" old Jeff demanded, bewildered.

"Just so! You'd had two weeks' alimony to pay—and that's all!"

"That's all! That's all? How in the world—"

"Miss Nurning is going to marry in

two weeks.”

“Sho—yes? But—”

“After she married, you would have been released from paying any more alimony.”

Old Jeff blinked. Then he whimpered:

“Theh! Theh! She always was the unluckiest wife I eveh had!”

And, still whimpering, he stumbled out of the county clerk’s office where the papers had been registered, and made his way to his mule.

“I ’lowed—I ’lowed she hadn’t no rabbit spunk, even,” he mumbled, “an’ she had hit—she runned away!”