

UNDER THE LION'S PAW

By Hamlin Garland (from his 1891 collection *Main-Travelled Roads*)

Dramatic version by Dawn Hogue

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Setting

- An Iowa farm, beginning of winter

Characters

- Stephen Council
- Sarah Council
- Ike Council (minor role)
- Tim Haskins
- Nettie Haskins
- Jim Butler
- Narrators 1-5

Part I

Narr.1: It was the last of autumn and first day of winter coming together. All day long the ploughmen on their prairie farms had moved to and fro in their wide level fields through the falling snow, which melted as it fell, wetting them to the skin all day, notwithstanding the frequent squalls of snow, the dripping, desolate clouds, and the muck of the furrows, black and tenacious as tar.

Narr.2 Under their dripping harness the horses swung to and fro silently with that marvelous uncomplaining patience which marks the horse. All day the wild geese, honking wildly, as they sprawled sidewise down the wind, seemed to be fleeing from an enemy behind, and with neck outthrust and wings extended, sailed down the wind, soon lost to sight.

Narr.3: Yet the ploughman behind his plough, though the snow lay on his ragged great-coat, and the cold clinging mud rose on his heavy boots, fettering¹ him like gyves², whistled in the very beard of the gale. As day passed, the snow, ceasing to melt, lay along the ploughed land, and lodged in the depth of the stubble, till on each slow round the last furrow stood out black and shining as jet between the ploughed land and the gray stubble.

Narr.4: When night began to fall, and the geese, flying low, began to alight invisibly in the near corn-field, Stephen Council was still at work "finishing a land." He rode on his sulky plough when going with the wind, but walked when facing it. Sitting

¹ tying him down, restraining him

² shackles, irons

bent and cold but cheery under his slouch hat, he talked encouragingly to his four-in-hand³.

Council: Come round there, boys! Round agin! We got t' finish this land. Come in there, Dan! Stiddy, Kate, stiddy! None o' y'r tantrums, Kittie. It's purty tuff, but got a be did. Tchck! tchk! Step along, Pete! Don't let Kate git y'r single-tree on the wheel. Once more!

Narr.5: They seemed to know what he meant, and that this was the last round, for they worked with greater vigor⁴ than before.

Council: Once more, boys, an' then, sez I, oats an' a nice warm stall, an' sleep f'r all.

Narr.1: By the time the last furrow was turned on the land it was too dark to see the house, and the snow was changing to rain again. The tired and hungry man could see the light from the kitchen shining through the leafless hedge, and he lifted a great shout, "Supper f'r a half a dozen!"

Narr.2: It was nearly eight o'clock by the time he had finished his chores and started for supper. He was picking his way carefully through the mud, when the tall form of a man loomed up before him with a premonitory cough.

Council: Waddy ye want?" was the rather startled question of the farmer.

Haskins: Well, ye see," began the stranger, in a deprecating tone, "we'd like t' git in f'r the night. We've tried every house f'r the last two miles, but they hadn't any room f'r us. My wife's jest about sick, 'n' the children are cold and hungry--

Council: Oh, y' want 'o stay all night, eh,?

Haskins: Yes, sir; it 'ud be a great accom--

Council: Waal, I don't make it a practice t' turn anybuddy way hungry, not on sech nights as this. Drive right in. We ain't got much, but sech as it is--

Narr.3: But the stranger had disappeared. And soon his steaming, weary team, with drooping heads and swinging single-trees, moved past the well to the block beside the path. Council stood at the side of the "schooner"⁵ and helped the children out two little half-sleeping children and then a small woman with a babe in her arms.

Council: There ye go! Now we're all right! Run right along to the house there, an' tell Mam' Council you wants sumpthin' t' eat. Right this way, Mis' keep right off t' the right there. I'll go an' git a lantern. Come.

³ team of horses

⁴ energy

⁵ covered wagon; prairie schooner

- Narr. 4: He led the dazed and silent group to the fragrant and warmly lighted kitchen.
- Council: Mother, here are some wayfarers an' folks who need sumpthin' t' eat an' a place t' snoot.
- Narr.5: Mrs. Council, a large, jolly, rather coarse-looking woman, took the children in her arms.
- Sarah: Come right in, you little rabbits. 'Mos asleep, hey? Now here's a drink o' milk f'r each o' ye. I'll have sam tea in a minute. Take off y'r things and set up t' the fire.
- Narr.1: While she set the children to drinking milk, Council got out his lantern and went out to the barn to help the stranger about his team, where his loud, hearty voice could be heard as it came and went between the haymow and the stalls.
- Narr.2: The woman came to light as a small, timid, and discouraged looking woman, but still pretty, in a thin and sorrowful way.
- Mrs. C: Land sakes! An' you've traveled all the way from Clear Lake' t'-day in this mud! Waal! Waal! No wonder you're all tired out Don't wait f'r the men, Mis'--.
- Nettie: Haskins.
- Sarah: Mis' Haskins, set right up to the table an' take a good swig o tea whilst I make y' s'm toast. It's green tea, an' it's good. I tell Council as I git older I don't seem to enjoy Young Hyson n'r Gunpowder [types of tea]. I want the reel green tea, jest as it comes off'n the vines. Seems t' have more heart in it, some way. Don't s'pose it has. Council says it's all in m' eye.
- Narr.3: Going on in this easy way, she soon had the children filled with bread and milk and the woman thoroughly at home, eating some toast and sweet-melon pickles, and sipping the tea. She laughed at the children.
- Sarah: See the little rats! They're full as they can stick now, and they want to go to bed. Now, don't git up, Mis' Haskins; set right where you are an' let me look after 'em. I know all about young ones, though I'm all alone now. Jane went an' married last fall. But, as I tell Council, it's lucky we keep our health. Set right there, Mis' Haskins; I won't have you stir a finger.
- Narr.4: It was an unmeasured pleasure to sit there in the warm, homely kitchen, the jovial chatter of the housewife driving out and holding at bay the growl of the impotent⁶, cheated wind. The little woman's eyes filled with tears which fell down upon the sleeping baby in her arms. The world was not so desolate and cold and hopeless, after all.

⁶ powerless

Sarah: Now I hope Council won't stop out there and talk politics all night. He's the greatest man to talk politics an' read the *Tribune*⁷. (pause) How old is the baby?

Nettie: Two months 'n' five days.

Sarah: Ye don't say! I want 'o know! The dear little pudzy-wudzy! "Pooty tough on 'oo to go gallivant'n' 'cross lots this way--

Narr. 5: Just then the men came in from outside.

Council: Yes, that's so; a man can't lift a mountain. Mother, this is Mr. Haskins, from Kansas. He's been eat up 'n' drove out by grasshoppers.

Sarah: Glad t' see yeh! Pa, empty that wash-basin 'n' give him a chance t' wash."

Narr.1: Haskins was a tall man, with a thin, gloomy face. His hair was a reddish brown, like his coat, and seemed equally faded by the wind and sun, and his sallow face, though hard and set, was pathetic somehow. You would have felt that he had suffered much by the line of his mouth showing under his thin, yellow mustache.

Council: Hadn't Ike got home yet, Sairy?"

Sarah: Hadn't seen 'im."

Council: W-a-a-l, set right up, Mr. Haskins; wade right into what we've got; 'taint much, but we manage to live on it she gits fat on it.

Narr.2: After supper, while the women put the children to bed, Haskins and Council talked on, seated near the huge cooking-stove, the steam rising from their wet clothing. In the Western fashion Council told as much of his own life as he drew from his guest. He asked but few questions, but by and by the story of Haskins' struggles and defeat came out. The story was a terrible one, but he told it quietly, seated with his elbows on his knees, gazing most of the time at the hearth.

Haskins: I didn't like the looks of the country, anyhow. I was ust t' northern Ingyannie, where we have lots o' timber 'n' lots o' rain, 'n' I didn't like the looks o' that dry prairie. What galled⁸ me the worst was goin' s' far away acrosst so much fine land layin' all through here vacant.

Council: And the 'hoppers⁹ eat ye four years, hand runnin', did they?"

Haskins: Eat! They wiped us out. They chawed everything that was green. They jest set around waitin' fr us to die t' eat us, too. My God! I ust t' dream of 'em sittin' 'round

⁷ Des Moines; daily newspaper

⁸ annoyed, bothered

⁹ grasshoppers; swarms can destroy crops

on the bedpost, six feet long, workin' their jaws. They eet the fork-handles. They got worse 'n' worse till they jest rolled on one another, piled up like snow in winter. Well, it ain't no use. If I was t' talk all winter I couldn't tell nawthin'. But all the while I couldn't help thinkin' of all that land back here that nobuddy was usin' that I ought 'o had 'stead o' bein' out there in that cussed country.

Narr.3: Ike, who has now come in gets his supper from Mrs. Council and starts to eat.

Ike: Waal, why didn't ye stop an' settle here?

Haskins: Fer the simple reason that you fellers wantid ten 'r fifteen dollars an acre fer the bare land, and I hadn't no money fer that kind o' thing.

Sarah: Yes, I do my own work. I'm a gettin' purty heavy t' be on m'laisgs all day, but we can't afford t' hire, so I keep rackin' around somehow, like a foundered horse. S' lame I tell Council he can t tell how lame I am, f'r I'm jest as lame in one laig as t' other.

Narr.4: And the good soul laughed at the joke on herself as she took a handful of flour and dusted the biscuit-board to keep the dough from sticking.

Nettie: Well, I hadn't never been very strong. Our folks was Canadians an' small-boned, and then since my last child I hadn't got up again fairly. I don't like t' complain. Tim has about all he can bear now but they was days this week when I jest wanted to lay right down an' die.

Narr.5: From his side of the stove, Stephen Council silenced everyone with his good natured roar.

Council: Waal, now, I'll tell ye. I'd go down and see Butler, anyway, if I was you. I guess he'd let you have his place purty cheap; the farm's all run down. He's been anxious t' let t' somebuddy next year. It 'ud be a good chance fer you. Anyhow, you go to bed and sleep like a babe. I've got some ploughing t' do, anyhow, an' we'll see if somethin' can't be done about your case. Ike, you go out an' see if the horses is all right, an' I'll show the folks t' bed.

Narr.1: When the tired husband and wife were lying under the generous quilts of the spare bed, Haskins listened a moment to the wind in the eaves, and then spoke with a slow and solemn tone.

Haskins: There are people in this world who are good enough t' be angels, an' only haff t' die to be angels.

Part Two

- Narr.2: Jim Butler was one of those men called in the West "land poor." Early in the history of Rock River he had come into the town and started in the grocery business in a small way, occupying a small building in a mean part of the town.
- Narr.3: At this period of his life he earned all he got, and was up early and late sorting beans, working over butter, and carting his goods to and from the station. But a change came over him at the end of the second year, when he sold a lot of land for four times what he paid for it.
- Narr.4: From that time forward he believed in land speculation as the surest way of getting rich. Every cent he could save or spare from his trade he put into land at forced sale, or mortgages on land, which were "just as good as the wheat," he was accustomed to say.
- Narr.5: Farm after farm fell into his hands, until he was recognized as one of the leading landowners of the county. His mortgages were scattered all over Cedar County, and as they slowly but surely fell in he sought usually to retain the former owner as tenant.
- Narr.1: He was not ready to foreclose¹⁰; indeed, he had the name of being one of the "easiest" men in the town. He let the debtor off again and again, extending the time whenever possible. Butler could be heard to say,
- Butler: I don't want y'r land. All I'm after is the int'rest on my money that's all. Now, if y' want 'o stay on the farm, why, I'll give y' a good chance. I can't have the land layin vacant.
- Narr.2: And in many cases the owner remained as tenant. In the meantime he had sold his store; he couldn't spend time in it as he was mainly occupied now with sitting around town on rainy days smoking and "gassin' with the boys," or in riding to and from his farms.
- Narr.3: In fishing-time he fished a good deal. Doc Grimes, Ben Ashley, and Cal Cheatham were his cronies on these fishing excursions or hunting trips in the time of chickens or partridges. In winter they went to Northern Wisconsin to shoot deer.
- Narr.4: In spite of all these signs of easy life Butler persisted in saying he "hadn't enough money to pay taxes on his land," and was careful to convey the impression that he was poor in spite of his twenty farms. At one time he was said to be worth fifty thousand dollars, but land had been a little slow of sale of late, so that he was not worth so much.

¹⁰ call in the loan in default, take back the land

Narr.5: A fine farm, known as the Higley place, had fallen into his hands in the usual way the previous year, and he had not been able to find a tenant for it. Poor Higley, after working himself nearly to death on it in the attempt to lift the mortgage, had gone off to Dakota, leaving the farm and his curse to Butler.

Narr.1: This was the farm which Council advised Haskins to apply for; and the next day Council hitched up his team and drove down to see Butler.

Council: You jest let me do the talkin'. We'll find him wearin' out his pants on some salt barrel somew'ers; and if he thought you wanted a place he'd sock it to you hot and heavy. You jest keep quiet, I'll fix 'im.

Narr.2: Butler was seated in Ben Ashley's store telling fish yarns when Council sauntered in casually.

Council: Hello, But; lyin' agin, hey?

Butler: Hello, Steve! How goes it?

Council: Oh, so-so. Too dang much rain these days. I thought it was goin' t freeze up f'r good last night. Tight squeak if I get m' ploughin' done. How's farmin' with you these days?

Butler: Bad. Ploughin' ain't half done.

Council: It 'ud be a religious idee f'r you t' go out an' take a hand y'rself.

Butler: (winking) I don't haff to.

Council: Got anybody on the Higley place?

Butler: No. Know of anybody?

Council: Waal, no; not eggsackly. I've got a relation back t' Michigan who's ben hot an' cold on the idea o' comin' West f'r some time. Might come if he could get a good lay-out. What do you talk on the farm?

Butler: Well, I d' know. I'll rent it on shares or I'll rent it money rent.

Council: Waal, how much money, say?

Butler: Well, say ten per cent, on the price two-fifty.

Council: Wall, that ain't bad. Wait on 'im till 'e thrashes?

Narr.3: Haskins listened eagerly to this important question, but Council was coolly eating a dried apple which he had speared out of a barrel with his knife. Butler studied him carefully.

Butler: Well, knocks me out of twenty-five dollars interest.

Council: My relation'll need all he's got t' git his crops in.

Butler: Well, all right; say wait.

Council: All right; this is the man. Haskins, this is Mr. Butler, no relation to Ben the hardest-working man in Cedar County.

Narr.4: Having concluded the deal, the two men headed back to Council's farm.

Haskins: I ain't much better off. I'd like that farm; it's a good farm, but it's all run down, an' so 'm I. I could make a good farm of it if I had half a show. But I can't stock it n'r seed it.

Council: Waal, now, don't you worry. We'll pull y' through somehow till next harvest. He's agreed t' hire it ploughed, an' you can earn a hundred dollars ploughin' an' y' c'n git the seed o' me, an' pay me back when y' can.

Narr.5: Haskins was silent with emotion. Council had already been unexpectedly generous.

Haskins: I ain't got nothin' t' live on.

Council: Now, don't you worry 'bout that. You jest make your headquarters at ol' Steve Council's. Mother'll take a pile o' comfort in havin' y'r wife an' children 'round. Y' see, Jane's married off lately, an' Ike's away a good 'eal, so we'll be darn glad t' have y' stop with us this winter. Nex' spring we'll see if y' can't git a start agin."

Narr.1: And he chirruped to the team, which sprang forward with the rumbling, clattering wagon.

Haskins: Say, looky here, Council, you can't do this. I never saw---

Narr.2: Council moved about uneasily in his seat and stopped his stammering gratitude.

Council: Hold on, now; don't make such a fuss over a little thing. When I see a man down, an' things all on top of 'm, I jest like t' kick 'em off an' help 'm up. That's the kind of religion I got, an' it's about the only kind.

Narr.3: They rode the rest of the way home in silence. And when the red light of the lamp shone out into the darkness of the cold and windy night, and he thought of this

refuge for his children and wife, Haskins could have put his arm around the neck of his burly¹¹ companion and squeezed him like a lover. But he contented himself with saying,

Haskins: Steve Council, you'll git y'r pay f'r this some day.

Council: Don't want any pay. My religion ain't run on such business principles.

Narr.4: The wind was growing colder, and the ground was covered with a white frost, as they turned into the gate of the Council farm, and the children came rushing out, shouting, "Papa's come!" They hardly looked like the same children who had sat at the table the night before. Their torpidity, under the influence of sunshine and Mother Council, had given way to a sort of spasmodic cheerfulness, as insects in winter revive when laid on the hearth.

Part III

Narr.5: Haskins worked like a fiend¹², and his wife, like the heroic woman that she was, bore also uncomplainingly the most terrible burdens. They rose early and toiled without intermission till the darkness fell on the plain, then tumbled into bed, every bone and muscle aching with fatigue, to rise with the sun next morning to the same round of the same ferocity of labor.

Narr.1: The eldest boy drove a team all through the spring, ploughing and seeding, milked the cows, and did chores innumerable, in most ways taking the place of a man.

Narr.2: An infinitely pathetic¹³ but common figure this boy on the American farm, where there is no law against child labor. To see him in his coarse clothing, his huge boots, and his ragged cap, as he staggered with a pail of water from the well, or trudged in the cold and cheerless dawn out into the frosty field behind his team, gave the city-bred visitor a sharp pang of sympathetic pain. Yet Haskins loved his boy, and would have saved him from this if he could, but he could not.

Narr.3: By June the first year the result of such Herculean toil began to show on the farm. The yard was cleaned up and sown to grass, the garden ploughed and planted, and the house mended. Council had given them four of his cows.

Council: Take 'em an' run 'em on shares. I don't want 'o milk s' many. Ike's away s' much now, Sat'd'ys an' Sund'ys, I can't stand the bother anyhow.

¹¹ broad shouldered, muscular

¹² demon, or one possessed by an idea or activity

¹³ pitiable

Narr.4: Other men, seeing the confidence of Council in the newcomer, had sold him tools on time; and as he was really an able farmer, he soon had round him many evidences of his care and thrift¹⁴. At the advice of Council he had taken the farm for three years, with the privilege of re-renting or buying at the end of the term.

Council: It's a good bargain, an' y' want 'o nail it. If you have any kind ov a crop, you c'n pay y'r debts, an' keep seed an' bread.

Narr.5: The new hope which now sprang up in the heart of Haskins and his wife grew almost as a pain by the time the wide field of wheat began to wave and rustle and swirl in the winds of July. Day after day he would snatch a few moments after supper to go and look at it. One night after supper he spoke to his wife.

Haskins: Have ye seen the wheat t'-day, Nettie?

Nettie: No, Tim, I ain't had time.

Haskins: Well, take time now. Le's go look at it.

Narr.1: She threw an old hat on her head Tommy's hat and looking almost pretty in her thin, sad way, went out with her husband to the hedge.

Haskins: Ain't it grand, Nettie? Just look at it.

Narr.2: It was grand. Level, russet here and there, heavy-headed, wide as a lake, and full of multitudinous whispers and gleams of wealth, it stretched away before the gazers like the fabled field of the cloth of gold.

Nettie: Oh, I think I hope we'll have a good crop, Tim; and oh, how good the people have been to us!

Haskins: Yes; I don't know where we'd be t'-day if it hadn't teen fr Council and his wife.

Nettie: They're the best people in the world.

Haskins: We'll be in the field on Monday sure.

Narr.3: Haskins gripped the rail on the fences as if already at the work of the harvest.

Narr.4: The harvest came, bounteous, glorious, but the winds came and blew it into tangles, and the rain matted it here and there close to the ground, increasing the work of gathering it threefold.

¹⁴ economy; careful with money; not wasting

- Narr.5: Oh, how they toiled¹⁵ in those glorious days! Clothing dripping with sweat, arms aching, filled with briars, fingers raw and bleeding, backs broken with the weight of heavy bundles, Haskins and his man toiled on. Timmy drove the harvester, while his father and a hired man bound on the machine.
- Narr.1: In this way they cut ten acres every day, and almost every night after supper, when the hand went to bed, Haskins returned to the field shocking the bound grain in the light of the moon. Many a night he worked till his anxious wife came out at ten o'clock to call him in to rest and lunch.
- Narr.2: At the same time she cooked for the men, took care of the children, washed and ironed, milked the cows at night, made the butter, and sometimes fed the horses and watered them while her husband kept at the shocking.
- Narr.3: No slave in the Roman galleys could have toiled so frightfully and lived, for this man thought himself a free man, and that he was working for his wife and babes. When he sank into his bed with a deep groan of relief, too tired to change his grimy, dripping clothing, he felt that he was getting nearer and nearer to a home of his own, and pushing the wolf of want a little farther from his door.
- Narr.4: There is no despair so deep as the despair of a homeless man or woman. To roam the roads of the country or the streets of the city, to feel there is no rood¹⁶ of ground on which the feet can rest, to halt weary and hungry outside lighted windows and hear laughter and song within, these are the hungers and rebellions that drive men to crime and women to shame.
- Narr.5: It was the memory of this homelessness, and the fear of its coming again, that spurred Timothy Haskins and Nettie, his wife, to such ferocious labor during that first year.

Part IV

- Narr.1: Haskins was showing Butler around the place. He had not seen it for a year, having spent the year in Washington and Boston with Ashley, his brother-in-law, who had been elected to Congress. Butler's eye took in the neat garden, the pig-pen, and the well-filled barnyard.
- Butler: M, yes; 'm, yes; first-rate. You're gitt'n' quite a stock around yeh. Done well, eh?
- Haskins: Yes, I've laid out a good deal of money durin' the last three years. I've paid out three hundred dollars f'r fencin'.

¹⁵ worked

¹⁶ quarter of an acre, archaic

Butler: Um h'm! I see, I see.

Haskins: The kitchen there cost two hundred; the barn ain't cost much in money, but I've put a lot o' time on it. I've dug a new well, and I--

Butler: Yes, yes, I see. You've done well. Stock worth a thousand dollars.

Narr.2: Butler considered Haskins' words while picking his teeth with a straw.

Haskins: We begin to feel's if we was gitt'n' a home f'r ourselves; but we've worked hard. I tell you we begin to feel it, Mr. Butler, and we're goin' t' begin to ease up purty soon. We've been kind o' plannin' a trip back t' her folks after the fall ploughin's done.

Narr.3: But Butler was evidently thinking of something else when he said, "Eggs-actly!"

Butler: I suppose you've kind o' calc'lated on stayin' here three years more?

Haskins: Well, yes. Fact is, I think I c'n buy the farm this fall, if you'll give me a reasonable show."

Butler: Um m! What do you call a reasonable show?

Haskins: Well, say a quarter down and three years' time.

Narr.4: Butler looked at the huge stacks of wheat, which filled the yard, over which the chickens were fluttering and crawling, catching grasshoppers, and out of which the crickets were singing innumerable. He smiled in a peculiar way.

Butler: Oh, I won't be hard on yeh. But what did you expect to pay f'r the place?

Haskins: Why, about what you offered it for before, two thousand five hundred...

Narr.5: But Haskins saw Butler shake his head and so he quickly added

Haskins: ...or possibly three thousand dollars.

Narr.1: Butler's voice was careless and decided as he offered his assessment.

Butler: This farm is worth five thousand and five hundred dollars.

Haskins: What! What's that? Five thousand? Why, that's double what you offered it for three years ago.

Butler: Of course, and it's worth it. It was all run down then. Now it's in good shape. You've laid out fifteen hundred dollars in improvements, according to your own story.

Haskins: But you had nothin' t' do about that. It's my work an' my money.

Butler: You bet it was; but it's my land.

Haskins: But what's to pay me for all my--

Butler: Ain't you had the use of 'em?"

Narr.2: Butler smiled calmly into Haskin's face. Haskins was like a man struck on the head with a sandbag. He couldn't think; he stammered as he tried to speak clearly.

Haskins: But I never'd git the use-- You'd rob me! More'n that: you agreed you promised that I could buy or rent at the end of three years at--

Butler: That's all right. But I didn't say I'd let you carry off the improvements, nor that I'd go on renting the farm at two-fifty. The land is doubled in value, it don't matter how; it don't enter into the question; an' now you can pay me five hundred dollars a year rent, or take it on your own terms at fifty-five hundred, or git out.

Narr.3: He was turning away when Haskins, the sweat pouring from his face, fronted him, to say what he had said before.

Haskins: But you've done nothing to make it so. You hadn't added a cent. I put it all there n' to buy. I worked an' sweat to improve it. I was workin' for myself an' babes--

Butler: Well, why didn't you buy when I offered to sell? What y' kickin' about?

Haskins: I'm kickin' about payin' you twice f'r my own things, my own fences, my own kitchen, my own garden.

Narr.4: Butler laughed at Haskins' inexperience.

Butler: You're too green¹⁷ t' eat, young feller. Your improvements! The law will sing another tune.

Haskins: But I trusted your word.

Butler: Never trust anybody, my friend. Besides, I didn't promise not to do this thing. Why, man, don't look at me like that. Don't take me for a thief. It's the law. The reg'lar thing. Everybody does it.

¹⁷ naïve; inexperienced

Haskins: I don't care if they do. It's stealin' jest the same. You take three thousand dollars of my money the work o' my hands and my wife's.

Narr.5: He broke down at this point. He was not a strong man mentally. He could face hardship, ceaseless toil, but he could not face the cold and sneering¹⁸ face of Butler.

Butler: But I don't take it. All you've got to do is to go on jest as you've been a-doin', or give me a thousand dollars down, and a mortgage at ten per cent on the rest.

Narr.1: Haskins sat down blindly on a bundle of oats near by, and with staring eyes and drooping head went over the situation. **He was under the lion's paw.** He felt a horrible numbness in his heart and limbs. He was hid in a mist, and there was no path out.

Narr.2: Butler walked about, looking at the huge stacks of grain, and pulling now and again a few handfuls out, shelling the heads in his hands and blowing the chaff¹⁹ away. He hummed a little tune as he did so. He had an accommodating air of waiting.

Narr.3: Haskins was in the midst of the terrible toil of the last year. He was walking again in the rain and the mud behind his plough he felt the dust and dirt of the threshing. The ferocious husking-time, with its cutting wind and biting, clinging snows, lay hard upon him. Then he thought of his wife, how she had cheerfully cooked and baked, without holiday and without rest.

Butler: (in a mocking tone) Well, what do you think of it?

Haskins: I think you're a thief and a liar!

Narr.4: At his words, Haskins leapt up, caught a fork in his hands, and whirled it in the air.

Haskins: A black-hearted houn'!

Narr.5: Butler's smile maddened Haskins even more. There was a look of pitiless ferocity in his accusing eyes.

Haskins: You'll never rob another man, damn ye!

Narr.1: Butler shrank and quivered, expecting the blow; stood, held hypnotized by the eyes of the man he had a moment before despised a man transformed into an avenging demon. But in the deadly hush between the lift of the weapon and its fall there came a gush of faint, childish laughter and then across the range of his vision, far away and dim, he saw the sun-bright head of his baby girl, as, with the

¹⁸ derogatory, critical, mean

¹⁹ The dry bracts enclosing mature grains of wheat and some other cereal grasses, removed during threshing.

pretty, tottering run of a two-year-old, she moved across the grass of the dooryard. His hands relaxed: the fork fell to the ground; his head lowered.

Haskins: Make out y'r deed an' mor'gage, an' git off'n my land, an' don't ye never cross my line agin; if y' do, I'll kill ye.

Narr.2: Butler backed away from the man in wild haste, and climbing into his buggy with trembling limbs drove off down the road, leaving Haskins seated dumbly on the sunny pile of sheaves, his head sunk into his hands.