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CHAPTER VII. (Continued)

Two days and nights enabled the Countess Courteau to strip the Northern Hotel, to assemble the movable appurtenances thereto, and to pack them into boxes, barrels, and bundles, none of which weighed more than one hundred pounds. This lapse of time likewise enabled the Indians whom Pierce had hired to finish their contracts and return to the coast. In spite of the appalling amount of freight, Pierce believed he had enough men to move it in two trips, and when the hour came to start the Countess complimented him upon his thorough preparations. As swiftly as might be, he formed his packers in line, weighed their burdens, and sent them on their journey. These preparations occasioned much confusion and a considerable crowd assembled. Among the onlookers was a bright-eyed, weazened little man who attached himself to the chief and engaged in the conversation. When the last burden-bearer had departed the Countess directed Lucky Broad and Kid Bridges to stay in the hotel and stand guard over the remainder of the goods.

"Take six-hour shifts," she told them. "I'll hold you responsible for what's here." Broad assured her.

"I'll camp at the Scales with the stuff that has gone forward, and Pierce will bring the Indians back."

"Do you think you can ride herd on it?" Bridges inquired. "I understand there's a lawless element at large."

The Countess smiled. "I'm sort of a lawless element myself when I start," she said. Her eyes twinkled as she measured Mr. Bridges' burly proportions. "You're going

to miss your alfalfa bed before I get you to Linderman."

"The Kid nodded seriously. "I know," said he. "Serves me right for quittin' a profession for a trade, but I got to look over this Dawson place. They say it's soft pickin'." Lucky is taking his stock in trade along, all three of 'em so maybe we'll tear off a penny or two on the way."

Pierce's pack consisted of a tent for the Countess, some bedding, and food; with this on his back he and his employer set out to overtake their train. This they accomplished a short distance below the first crossing of the river. Already the white packers, of whom there were perhaps a score, had drawn together; the Indians were following them in a long file. Having seen his companion safely across the stream, Pierce asked her, somewhat doubtfully,

"Do you think Broad and his partner are altogether trustworthy?"

"Nobody is that," she told him. "But they're at least intelligent. In this kind of a country I prefer an intelligent crook to an honest fool. Most people are honest or dishonest when and as they think it is to their advantage to be so. Those men want to get to Dawson, and they know the Police would never let them across the line. I'm their chance. They'll stand away."

It was mid-forenoon when the Countess halted Pierce, who was a short distance ahead of her, saying:

"Wait! Didn't you hear somebody calling us?"

They listened. They were about to move onward when there came a faint hallo, and far down the trail behind them they saw a figure approaching. After a moment of scrutiny Pierce declared:

"Why, it's Broad!"

"Whew!" he panted. "Thought I'd never run you down. Well, set yourselves."

"What's wrong?" demanded the woman.

"Plenty. You've been double-crossed, whip-sawed. Your noble red men have quit you; they dumped your stuff at the river and made a deal at double rates to move Sam Kirby's freight. They're back in Dyea now, the whole works."

The Countess Courteau exploded with a man's oath. Her face was purple; her eyes were blazing.

"Danny Royal, Kirby's man, done it. Sam's gone on to Linderman to build a boat. I saw Danny curled up on chief's car while you were loading. After you'd gone him and the old pirate followed. Me 'n' Bridges never thought anything about it until by and by back

came the whole party, empty. Danny trooped 'em down to the beach and begun packin' 'em. I know him, so I asked him what the devil. 'Hands off!' says he. 'Sam Kirby's got a rush order in ahead of yours, and these refreshments is going through by express. I've raised your ante money. I'll boost the price again if I have to and keep in boosting it. Then he warned me not to start anything or he'd tack two letters onto the front of my name. He'd do it, too. I took it on the run, and here I am."

"Sam Kirby, eh?" The Countess flaming rage has given place to a cool calculating anger.

Pierce protested violently. "I hired those Indians. We agreed on a price and everything was settled."

"Well, Danny unsettled it. They're working for him and he intends to keep 'em."

"What about your white packers?" the woman inquired of Broad.

"They must have crossed before Danny caught up, or he'd have had them, too. 'Money no object,' he said. I'm danged if I'd turn a trick like that."

"Where's our stuff?"

"At the crossing."

The Countess turned back down the trail and Pierce followed her. "I'll settle this Royal," he declared, furiously.

"Danny's a bad boy." Lucky

Broad warned, falling into step. "If old Sam told him to hold a buzz-saw in his lap he'd do it. Maybe there wouldn't be much left of Danny, but he'd of hugged it some while he lasted."

Little more was said during the swift return to the river. It was not a pleasant journey, for the trail was miserable, the mud was deep, and there was a steady upward flow of traffic which it was necessary to stem. There were occasional interruptions to this stream for here and there horses were down and a blockade had resulted. Behind it men lay propped against logs or tree-trunks, resting their tired frames and listening sympathetically to the profanity of the horse-owners. Hardly did any one offer to lend a helping hand, for each man's task was equal to his strength. In one place a line of steers stood belly deep in the mire, waiting the command to plow forward.

Broken carts, abandoned vehicles of various patterns, lined the way; there were many swollen carcasses underfoot, and not infrequently pedestrians crossed mud-holes by stepping from one to another holding their breaths and battling through swarms of flies. Much costly impedimenta strewed the roadside—each article a milestone of despair, a monument to failure. There were stoves, camp furniture, lumber, hardware, boat

fittings. The wreckage and the wastage of the stampede were enormous, and every ounce, every dollar's worth of it, spoke mutely of blasted hopes. Now and then one saw piles of provisions, some of which had been entirely abandoned. The rains had ruined most of them.

When the Countess came to her freight she paused. "You said Royal was loading his men when you left?" She faced Broad inquiringly.

"Right."

"Then he'll soon be along. We'll wait here." Of Phillips she asked, "Do you carry a gun?"

Pierce shook his head. "What see that she was boiling inwardly, and although his own anger had increased at every moment during the return journey, her question caused him genuine apprehension.

Avoiding a direct answer, the woman said: "If Royal is with the Indians, you keep your eye on him. I want to talk to them."

"Don't imagine any violent measures," Mr. Broad cautioned, nervously. "Danny's a sudden sort of a murderer. Of course if worse comes to worse, I'll stick, but—my rating in the community ain't A. 1. There's a lot of narrow-minded church members would like to baptize me at high tide. As if that would get their money back!"

A suggestion of a smile crept to

the Countess' lips and she said, "I knew you'd stick when I hired you." Then she seated herself upon a box.

Danny Royal did accompany his packers. He did so in a precaution against precisely such a coup as he himself had engineered, and in order to be doubly secure he brought the head Indian with him. The old tribesman had rebelled mildly, but Royal had been firm, and in consequence they were the first two to appear when the procession came out of the woods.

The chief halted at sight of Phillips, the man who had hired him and his people, but at a word from Royal he resumed his march. He averted his eyes, however, and he held his head low, showing that this encounter was not at all to his liking. Royal, on the contrary, carried off the meeting easily. He grinned at Lucky Broad and was about to pass on when the Countess Courteau rose to her feet and stepped into the trail.

"Just a minute!" she said. Of Royal's companion she sternly demanded, "What do you mean by this trick?"

The old redskin shot her a swift glance; then his face became expressionless and he gazed stolidly at the river.

"What do you mean?" the woman repeated, in a voice quivering with fury.

"Him people—" the chief began,

but Royal spoke for him. Reminding his hat, he made a stiff bow, then said, courteously enough, "I'm sorry to hold you up, ma'am, but you're not holding me up; I'm holding you up," the woman broke in. "What do you take me for anyhow?" She stared at the white man so coldly, there was such authority and such fixity of purpose in her tone and her expression that his manner changed.

"I'm on orders," said he. "There's no use to argue. I'd be plainer to you if you was a man."

But she had turned her eyes the chief again. "You lying scoundrel!" she cried, accusingly. "made a straight deal with you and your people and I agreed to your price. I'm not going to let you throw me down!"


(To be continued)

Bogus Dollars Passed at Fair

SALEM, Ore. — Officers were searching for an unidentified man who passed two spurious dollars on ticket sellers at the state fair grounds. Similar bogus dollars were said to have been passed recently in Portland, Seattle and other northwest cities.

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