



TURNING POINT

By Mary Imray Taylor

W. N. U. RELEASE



THE STORY THUS FAR: Jane returned from the cabin, and Jim told her he had phoned the sheriff to come and get Sherwin. Jane turned white. She mounted again and rode off, Jim after her. Soon they could see Stenhart and the sheriff racing ahead. Jim finally stopped Jane's horse. Sherwin was standing on a cliff, Stenhart crawling along a ledge. Sherwin waited, suddenly he confronted his cousin. Then Stenhart crumpled, reeled backward and fell over the ledge. He was caught by a dwarfed tree, limp but not dead. Sherwin looked down and in that moment came the turning point. He uncoiled a rope, tied it, and began to descend the cliff.

CHAPTER X

He sought a foothold, a crevice, and found one where the tree had rooted, a wide fissure in the wall of rock. He swung toward it, got his foot into it, and, holding thus to the rope and the cliff, reached down and laid his hand on Stenhart's body. He thought he was still conscious, for his heavy eyelids quivered, but he lay there, a dead weight. Swiftly, cautiously, Sherwin wound the rope around his body and made it secure under the armpits, balancing himself on a foothold so narrow that a touch might hurl him down. Then, grasping the slack of the rope, he began to climb. The ledge seemed a thousand feet above him, but, at last, he lay on its brink, gasping.

He heard sounds now other than the cataract, the crashing of boughs, voices! He took no heed of them, for, as he rose to his feet, he saw the tree that supported Stenhart go down and the motionless body swing out on the end of the rope. Sherwin braced himself and began to haul him up by main strength. Slowly, surely, he drew his enemy out of the abyss, steadied him at the edge of the rock, brought him safe over and laid him down. His own muscles ached and his head swam, but Stenhart still breathed. He opened his eyes and looked up in Sherwin's face. Sheer terror leaped into his eyes, but he was spent, helpless; his white lips moved, but only one word came in a whisper.

"Water!"

A mountain spring was trickling close at hand, and Sherwin cupped the water in his hands and wet his face and lips, and again Stenhart tried to speak; but, as his rescuer bent to listen, heavy hands fell upon him and there was a shout of triumph.

"Get him, Sheriff!"

Sherwin, on his knees beside the injured man, looked up to find the posse closing in. He shook off the man who had grasped him and rose to his feet just as Jim Keller panted up the trail.

"Hold on, Cutler!" Jim cried, "that man saved Stenhart—I saw him—at the risk of his own life!"

"Ain't taking no chances, Mr. Keller. Here you, Adams, you handcuff him; he's the man we're after!"

Sherwin offered no resistance; he submitted with an iron composure. He had thrown away his dear-bought liberty to save Stenhart.

"I reckon he can walk, after all," said the sheriff. "How you feeling now, Mr. Stenhart?"

Stenhart tried to stand upright, but his eyes had met Sherwin's and his mouth went dry. He wet his lips, shaking all over.

"We'd better carry him," said Jim. "Cheer up, old chap, you're sound, no bones broken!"

"I can walk," said Stenhart thickly, leaning heavily on Jim.

"The ledge is mighty narrow; can you manage without help, Mr. Keller?" The sheriff was solicitous for the man who had helped him make his capture.

"Oh, we'll do!" Jim threw a supporting arm around Stenhart. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell the men to go ahead with the prisoner and bring help from the ranch and a car for the injured man, but he remembered Jane; he must go first himself. The thought impelled Jim to look back at Sherwin, and something in his white face made him recoil at the sight of his bound hands. He beckoned Cutler to him.

"Is it necessary—I mean, those handcuffs? By Jove, I saw what he did; he's a brave man!"

The sheriff nodded grimly. "Can't take chances, Mr. Keller, he's a jailbreaker; swore he was goin' to kill Stenhart. I ain't so all-fired clear in my mind what he meant to do with him anyways—he had him all trussed up with that rope!"

They began the descent slowly. Jim, supporting Stenhart, went ahead; behind came the sheriff, then the men bringing Sherwin. A heavy cloud had risen in the west; its purple edges were sweeping upward. The sunlight went out and, as they entered the steep trail, thunder rolled deeply across the hills. The way, narrow and difficult, grew dim

with the darkness of the approaching storm. Stenhart, weak and stunned from his fall, stumbled and set the stones rolling and tumbling ahead of them.

"Steady, old chap," said Jim, and his supporting arm tightened. It seemed to him that Stenhart suffered with some trouble of the mind as deep as the stiffness of his body; not once had he lifted his dark eyes to look ahead of him, and he was ghastly pale. Jim, glancing back at the steep path, saw the feet of the men following them before he saw their bodies. The sheriff came next; Sherwin, he knew, was last—with his guards. Overhead the trees locked their branches now, and a dense thicket surrounded them. They could hear the cataract less distinctly, but the rush of wind in the tree-tops made a tumult. Jim, steadying Stenhart, spoke slowly in his ear.

"I saw you—you and Sherwin," he said quietly. "I was out in the road; there's an opening in the trees—one glimpses the ravine. How did you come to fall in that way, Max?"

Stenhart roused himself; he lifted his head and tried to meet Jim's



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questioning eyes, but he wavered and gasped.

"I—he was going to kill me!" he said weakly; "that was it. I remember now, Sherwin was going to kill me."

Stenhart passed his hand over his eyes with a groping gesture.

"I can't understand it," he muttered; "he was going to kill me—he hates me!"

"Then, by heaven, he did a great thing—he risked his life for his worst enemy! Are you sure, old chap, quite sure—that he was guilty?"

Stenhart's face took on an ashy whiteness, his lips shook. "I tell you he did it!" he cried wildly. "I—oh, my God, what lightning!"

The heavens had been torn by a jagged flash, the dark woods were, for an instant, ablaze with it; then the roar of thunder rolled crashing around them, echoed from height to height.

Jim, trying to steady him, was suddenly swung aside by the other man's blind agony of terror; the fall had broken his nerve—he was almost hysterical. The rain began to fall in a torrent and Jim, trying to catch up with him again, came abreast of a windswept thicket. He heard the men behind scrambling and shouting and thought of Jane. He had made her stay behind; was she out there still, holding the horses? He grasped Stenhart again and they came to the last lap of the descent. It was dusk in the trail and the rain blinded, but suddenly there was a tongue of flame from the thicket, a sharp report, and Stenhart crumpled up and sagged into Jim's arms. At first he did not sense what had happened; it seemed a part of the tempest, of Stenhart's utter collapse, and then he felt something warm and wet on his hands and knew it was blood.

"Good God, he's shot!" Jim gasped. Then he shouted, but his voice was cut off by a volley of shots. The men behind had been quicker than he; they were crashing into the thicket.

Stenhart, meanwhile, hung heavily against him. "He's got me this

time," he murmured. "I'm shot, Jim!" He thought it was Sherwin.

But the sheriff came up, panting. "Hit you, did he? Here, Adams, you hold up Mr. Stenhart. I want you—" he hurried Jim;—"we killed th' fellow who did it, caught him running—"

They pushed into the thicket, rain dripping from their hats and soaking their clothes. Two of the posse were bending down over a prostrate figure. The dead man had fallen face downward, but they rolled him over and Jim saw his distorted face.

"It's Jordan," he said soberly. "He meant to get me—I'm afraid poor Max is done for!"

"By George, then we've killed two birds with one stone—we've got the outlaw and the escaped convict in one bag! Sorry about Mr. Stenhart—maybe the men had better make a stretcher for him, eh?"

"Some one's got to go to the ranch and get a car—I—" Jim stopped short; he saw Jane coming.

She ran to him and clung about his neck, forgetful of the quarrel. "Oh, Jim, I thought you were hurt or—" her voice trailed; she knew that it was not Sherwin, for she had seen him standing grimly between his guards.

Jim pointed to Jordan. "It's done with, Jane; I'm going to have the poor devil decently buried. Jane, ride back to Las Palomas, get Mac to send the big car and—if she can come through this, send Fanny. I'm afraid poor Max got it bad, he's collapsed—be quick!"

"Jim!" she clung to him, whispering, "you know what he did—Sherwin, I mean—don't let them take him away! Do something, say something! Oh, Jim, you—you must!"

Jim loosed her arms from his neck. "Look here, girlie, I'll promise to do all I can, but, for heaven's sake, get out of this quick—get a car. Stenhart may be dying—it may mean a lot to all of us. Quick!"

"Jim, I must speak to him—" Her brother caught her sternly by the arm and dragged her to the end of the thicket. "Now—go!" he said, "or—I swear I'll have him sent off now!"

Jane caught the look on his face and saw beyond him the death-like face of Stenhart, leaning against two deputies, only partly conscious.

"He's all in!" cried Jim. "Can't you see? Beat it!"

The girl, half crying, ran out into the road. The storm had nearly spent itself and she loosed Tex from the sapling where she had tied him, and springing into the saddle, turned his head homeward.

Her heart reproached her for the relief she felt. When she heard the shots she had thought only of Sherwin and her brother.

"My heart, you are dripping!" Teresa cried, seizing her as she dropped from the saddle; but Jane scarcely heard her.

"Call Mac!" she said sharply, panting, her hands clasped tightly against her breast. "And you, Fanny, you've got to go in the car—Jordan tried to shoot Jim and wounded Stenhart; they're afraid he's dying—"

"Fanny, suddenly white, gasped. "Jim's safe?"

Jane nodded, at last aware of old Teresa. The little brown woman dropped on her knees, crossing herself.

"Sangre de Cristo!" she whispered, awed, "it is a judgment—his dreams, his terrible dreams!"

They brought Stenhart back to Las Palomas through the driving storm. The wind was snapping branches off the great trees and whipping the rain across the long slope in mighty gusts. The big car came swiftly, followed by the dripping horses and men of the posse. Jane, watching from the veranda, saw Stenhart's white face and closed eyes as they bore him in, but her own gaze was following the drenched figures going down to the men's quarters. She made out Sherwin's tall head, and then the others closed up about him. She drew a quick breath of relief; he was here—Jim had not let them hurry him away. Then she was aware of other things. She, herself, had telephoned for a doctor, but it would be two hours or more before he could reach them; meanwhile Jim and Cutler had carried the wounded man in and laid him on his bed. Fanny, quiet, competent, greatly concerned, was doing all she could; Stenhart had lost consciousness, but now, under her ministrations, he was slowly coming back to himself. Mechanically, Jane obeyed the young nurse's behests, helping as best she could.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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The Questions

1. Did bull fighting originate in Spain?
2. Thomas Jonathan Jackson is better known by what name?
3. The total steel output in the United States in the year 1860 can now be accomplished in what time?
4. How much yarn is used in making a nylon stocking?
5. Is the caffeine content of the beans taken from one tree equal?
6. What President was the first to mount the Washington monument?

7. Which animal is considered the cleanest?

The Answers

1. No. It was introduced by the Moors.
2. Stonewall Jackson.
3. One hour and a quarter.
4. About a mile and a quarter.
5. No. In one season it may vary as much as 3,000 per cent.
6. President Truman. He went up on top to get an idea of how a single or double bridge across the Potomac would look.
7. The raccoon.

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