

The Claim on Deer Creek.

By A. H. GIBSON.

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CHAPTER III.

The girl drew back within the thicket, afraid to stir, lest her presence might be discovered to the two men. She hoped they would pass on and let her continue her search for the cow unhindered, but they did not.

Hines and his companion stood just beyond the patch of wild plum, at the very foot of a steep bank on the creek. What did he mean by his vile presence there on the corner of her father's claim?

Immediately vague fears were aroused within her, and her first impulse was to steal back to the dugout and alarm her father. But quickly the thought came, what good would that do to startle a sick man who would be unable to defend himself, no matter how dark and terrible was the villain's object in being on the claim.

That he must have some villainous motive the girl was very certain, and it suddenly occurred to her that she must be brave, catch Hines' plot from his own lips, and if possible outwit him. She alone must be her sick father's defender if trouble was coming. Creeping a little nearer to the plotters, she distinctly overheard the following dialogue:

"I tell yer, Finley, thar's money in it—heaps an' heaps. Thar's not so valyble er claim as this hyer anywhers on these puraries." Hines was saying with enthusiasm.

"But ar yer sure, Dick, thet her coal vein extends all erlong this creek?" asked his companion.

"Of course I'm sure! Hain't I dug holes hyer all erlong thet creek ter find out? Yes, sir, dug 'em hyer afore thet ole Hamlet come inter thet country, an' had it all made up ter move inter thet dugout when that ole sinner got erhead o' me. I tell yer I've tested thet creek all erlong hyer, an' thar's big deposits o' thet best kind er coal, enough ter make a dozen men rich, right hyer."



Nancy Hamlet urged her pony forward across the lonely prairie.

"I reckon thet coal business'll be er lively one on these puraries some day."

"Why, Finley, it's bou'n ter be! Kain't help but be! This hyer's a poorly timbered country, an' coal mines is sure ter be somethin' wuth ownin'. Thar's a railroad comin' from Kansas City, cl'ar through the Neutral Lands, an' on ter thet Gulf o' Mexico. Thet country'll be on er big boom purty soon, an' ef we us control thet coal beds hyer on Deer creek we'll be capitalists afore we know wot we us air doin'."

We us must hev thet claim, Finley," declared Hines, uttering an oath that must have made the beautiful sensitive roses, growing luxuriantly at his feet, close their tender, fernlike leaves in terror.

"Maybe this hyer settler's already contracted for the claim?" said Finley.

"No, he ain't. I've been over ter Baxter an' seed thet records. Hamlet hain't thet girt ter contract for it, havin' been warned by thet league not to. Thet league hain't no use for ole Joy, an' though Hamlet ain't er leaguer hisself, I low he's plumb erfard o' thet s'ciety, an' ain't aimin' ter make thet members mad at him."

"But yer er member o' thet league yerself, Dick?"

"Yes," and Hines laughed coarsely, "but darned little I'm keenin' for it or anything else 'ceptin' this claim on Deer creek."

"They'd string yer up ter a blackjack, I reckon, ef yer went back on 'em."

"They hain't goin' ter find it out for some little spell. Thar's more settlers than yer think fur stealin' slylike inter the land office at Baxter and contractin' for thet claims unbeknowns ter thet league. I tell yer, we usn't 'git er contract for this piece o' land, let ole humpy live in thet dugout undisturbed till thet leaguers cool off er bit, then we kin show our papers, and run ole Hamlet an' thet gal off."

"Purty slick, Dick; but wot ef Tom Byers gets wind o' it? They say he's struck bad on thet settler's gal, an' Tom's mighty hard ter contend aginst, let me tell yer."

"I reckon Tom would be er ugly customer to deal with. Durn his big pinter! He's been watchin' me like er hawk this summer, but he's down in thet Injun nation now, pickin' up some shippin' stock, an' I hyar it said thet he's goin' ter sell off his ranch an' leave thet country. Ef he does, we us needn't fix fur any racket with him, an' ef we us gits squatted down hyer on thet claim it'll take more'n Tom Byers ter git us off."

"I reckon it would, with the gang from Lightnin' to back us."

"That's wotever!"

"But say, Dick, why don't yer contract for thet claim yerself, an' not take er partner?" the other suddenly asked.

"I would ef I had thet money. I know yer hev plenty o' cash, after stoppin' thet train over in Missouri, and Hines chuckled gleefully, "an' kin pay down thet fee required by thet land agent."

"Waal, I am better heeled than afore I boarded thet train," replied Finley, "an' I'm willin' ter go cohorts on thet claim with yer, Dick. When do yer want ter git thet contract?"

"I thought we could start in thet mornin' afore daylight an' ride ter Baxter," returned Hines. "Yer see, ef we us gits er airy start nobody in thet neighborhood will see us, an' so we us will not be suspected of goin' ter thet land office. Yer know thet league has spies out."

Then the plotters mounted thet ponies, which had been permitted to crop the grass along the margin of the stream, and rode off, chucking with much self-satisfaction over the cleverness of thet scheme to gain possession of Adam Hamlet's claim.

The girl, nearly petrified with fright over the underhand plot to which she had listened, and which, if carried out according to thet villains' plans, would rob her and her father of a home where they had been faithfully toiling all summer, waited until the deepening shades of evening hid the horsemen from view, then leaving the cow to find her own way back, she sped up the creek toward the dugout.

She found her father, pale, thin and weak, sitting in the door, where the cool breath of evening fanned his feverish brow. He looked so ghostlike, so powerless to contend with human affairs, as he half reclined there in the starlight, that Nancy hesitated to tell him what she had overheard down in the wild plum thicket. But it was right that he should be forewarned, and she must break it to him as gently as she could.

"Wher yer been, Nancy?" he asked feebly, as she threw herself on the bench near him.

"Jest down thet creek," she answered, her voice trembling.

"Yer act scart, Nancy, as ef yer'd been a-runnin'," her father remarked, noticing the girl's strange agitation.

"Well, pap, I did see two big varmints down on the corner o' thet claim," she returned, trying to laugh.

"Two big varmints? Wolves?"

"Yes, or leastwise wolves thet hee two feet an' wears trousers—human wolves, wot's er heap more dangerous than thet four footed kind."

"Wot do yer mean, Nancy?" Hamlet asked, mystified.

"I seed Dick Hines an' one o' his gang down thar."

"Dick Hines! On my claim? Wot was he doin' thar?"

"Plottin' ter git er contract fur our claim an' then run us out," and with that introductory explanation she gave her father a clear account of thet villain's scheme as she had overheard it.

"Wot kin we do?" he appealed to the girl in his helpless weakness. "I reckon he'll beat us outen thet claim yit," and the sick man became overwrought with dejection.

"No he won't, pap," and Nancy set her mouth resolutely as she asked herself what she could do to outwit thet enemy. She would not show despair now before her feeble father.

"Ef Tom Byers was only home he might stop Hines," said the troubled settler.

Nancy's face flushed at the mention of that name, and she did not immediately make answer.

"It's awful ter be so no-account as I am," the sick man wailed. "I'm so weak I couldn't take my part agin a crawfish now; an' thar's no use 'pealin' ter thet neighbors, fur thet kinder down on me 'cause I've refused ter become er member o' thet league. Hines is plumb shore ter git thet claim," he reiterated, his old spirit all crushed by disease.

"No, Hines wot'd!" and the girl sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing with the fires of a sudden resolve. "I'll stop him myself."

"Yer, Nancy?"

"Yes, pap."

"How'll yer do it?"

"I'll git on thet pony, ride over ter Baxter, an' tell thet land agent all about thet claim," returned Nancy.

"Hines'll beat yer thar."

"No, he won't, pap, fur I'm aimin' ter start t'night an' git ahead o' him."

"Yer shan't go, Nancy!"

"But, pap, I must. Yer not able, but I am. Ain't I been actin' yer boy, an' tendin' ter thet stock," she reasoned playfully, "an' wot's ter hinder me from goin'?"

"It's so fur, child, nigh onter twenty miles, an' over sich wild puraries. But thet night's thet biggest objection."

"It's er heap cooler ridin' at night," she argued. "Say yes, pap, fur I'm bound ter go. Jest think! Our home's at stake, and ef thet wolf's ter be relied on erbout thar bein' coal veins along thet creek, our claim's mighty valyble. I'm goin' ter save it."

"But yer kain't git thet contract without my presence, Nancy," Hamlet said despondently. "I know thet pint o' thet land law."

"No, pap, but I kin see thet land agent an' tell him erbout Hines. An' ef yer willin' I kin take thet money yer've been savin' ter build er house an' pay down on thet claim. Then we'll shore be ahead o' ole Hines."

Hamlet saw it would be utterly useless for him to raise any more objections. Nancy was determined to go to Baxter that night to outwit Dick Hines, and it would require more than his spent strength to induce her to give up thet mission.

About eleven o'clock thet brave girl mounted her pony and rode away from the dugout. Knotted in one corner of a handkerchief were two hundred dollars, which Hamlet had given her to pay down on thet claim. That represented his entire cash account, and had been saved for another purpose that fall, but he yielded it up gladly to Nancy's care, believing with her that it would be better invested in securing a contract for thet land.

She would have to ride about eight miles across thet unbroken prairie before she reached thet "Old Mission" road, as it was called. That gained, she would have a straight, well traveled way to Baxter Springs, near thet southern border of thet country.

The tract of land known as the Neutral Lands comprised about eight hundred thousand acres of fertile prairie, located in the southeastern part of thet state. It had been owned by thet Cherokee Indians who had ceded it in trust to the

United States about the close of the war of secession. The secretary of the interior was the agent of the Indians to sell the land.

After considerable wrangling over the disposal of the land in parcels, as the agent had been authorized to do, the entire body was purchased by James F. Joy, of Michigan, who became owner of the Neutral Lands soon after the arrival of the Hamlet family, in 1868.

The families or settlers who had been located on the Neutral Lands before Joy had purchased them declared the whole business to be a vast swindle, they maintaining a perfect right to take claims there under the pre-emption or homestead acts.

Excitement ran high on those wild prairies, and the anti-Joy settlers organized leagues, and pledged themselves to resist the claims of the purchaser to the death if it became necessary.

The settlers were deceived by thet false rumors of evil agitators, who had nothing to do but ride from one cabin to another, keeping strife so stirred up that thet true situation of thet matter was veiled from thet understanding.

A league was formed near Hamlet's claim, and though he had been invited and even urged to join it he took a position of neutrality. He had faith that congress would adjust thet trouble satisfactorily, and went on making such improvements as he was able on his quarter section, content to await thet final decision of that body.

Nancy Hamlet urged her pony forward across the lonely prairie. There was no moon, but thet bright stars which shone in thet dark blue vault above her enabled her to keep thet proper course.

Alone in thet deep darkness of midnight, out on thet prairie, thet girl's heart felt a sense of desolation and awe that was almost past enduring. Silence brooded somberly everywhere, broken occasionally when her pony frightened up some bird that had been passing thet night in thet rank grass.

Gaining thet main traveled road leading to Baxter thet girl felt a revival of courage. Speaking more hopefully to her animal she galloped away, as if freshly animated for thet mission.

It was a thinly settled region she was passing through, and only a lonely cabin, where all was silent as thet grave, every two or three miles apart, rose dimly before her view.

She neared thet small town of Baxter Springs just as thet eastern horizon toward thet dark woods along Spring river began to grow crimson with thet first flush of dawn.

In thet outskirts of thet place she was halted by a military guard, who regarded thet girl suspiciously.

A sub-officer was called, who, on learning thet thet dauntless Nancy's errand, courteously conducted her himself to thet boarding house where thet agent for thet Neutral Lands had rooms.

He was hastily aroused from his morning nap, and presently appeared in thet little sitting room where Nancy Hamlet awaited him.

After she had confided in him as much of thet trouble with Hines as she cared to, and told her business in coming at such an unusually early hour, thet agent said:

"Well, Miss Hamlet, I must say you have acted bravely in outwitting a villain, and you and your father have my true sympathy in your troubles. Of course, as you are aware, your father's presence will be necessary to make thet contract valid. But you may leave a payment on thet claim in my hands, for which I will write you a receipt, and your father can come in when he is able to make thet trip, and we'll fix up his legal title to thet land."

Thanking thet agent for his kindness, and taking thet receipt which he made out for her, Nancy mounted her pony and started homeward, her heart in a wild tumult of ecstasy over thet success she had achieved in defeating a bad man.

The sun was just peeping above thet hills, burnishing thet tree tops with lucid amber, as she rode out of Baxter.

There was a warm tint on her oval cheeks, her hazel eyes had thet brightness of triumph in them, while thet breeze from thet southwest played strange havoc with thet unconfined dark locks of thet brave prairie maiden. She was a picture of girlish beauty and modest heroism.

She had not left thet town more than two miles behind her when, on entering a wood lining a stream, she came face to face with Dick Hines and his brutal faced ally.

Her presence so far from home, so near Baxter, made Hines suspect thet truth at once. His face darkened savagely, and fixing her with his hawkish eyes, while an ugly imprecation fell from his lips, he sought to block her passage.

The road had been washed deep by hard rains, with high, steep banks on either side, so Nancy had no choice but to draw her pony aside to let thet men pass. But instead of going on, Hines and his companion halted directly before her, and with a leer in his face thet leader said:

"Wher yer been so airy, gal?"

"Tendin' ter my own business, Dick Hines," she replied with spirit.

"Wot's thet paper yer got in yer hand?" Hines demanded, catching sight of thet folded receipt which she held as too precious to let out of her sight.

"That's my father's. Let me pass."

"Not so fast, gal! Yer been ter Baxter ter thet land agent, an' thet paper hes somethin' ter say erbout wot yer been doin' thar. I'm goin' ter see thet paper," he asserted with a loud oath.

"No, yer not," thet girl cried, trying to force her pony past thet villain. But he grasped her bridle rein and restrained her.

"Finley, yer kin take thet paper from her while I hold thet pony," said Hines, with malignant exultation beaming in every feature of his countenance.

Finley rode toward thet girl's side to do his leader's bidding, but instantly she transferred thet receipt to her mouth and shut her teeth tight together.

"Choke thet darned hussy!" roared Hines, and again Finley approached her, an evil glitter in his green eyes.

At that moment there was thet hurried

clatter of hoofs over thet stony road leading toward thet little ford where Nancy Hamlet had been stopped by thet two scoundrels, and a clear voice that sent thet red blood flowing back into thet girl's fear-blinded cheeks rang out sharply on thet pure morning air:

"Lay one finger on that girl at yer peril!" and Tom Byers, with flashing eyes, covered thet villains with his six shooter.

With muttered curses thet baffled wretches fell back in surprise and confusion.

"Now ride, whelps!" he ordered, following them with thet weapon. "An' keep on ridin' till yer git cl'ar out o' God's country. Don't let me ketch yer back on Deer creek er thet Nechoso river pollutin' thet air with yer rotten devilment, or I'll shoot yer down like two ornery dogs."

They knew there was no jesting in that tone, and they rode off, with rage in thet dark hearts, but daring not to enter a word, in thet direction of thet Indian Territory border.

"Oh, Tom!" cried Nancy, recovering her speech as thet defeated villains disappeared beyond a hill, "how did yer ever happen erlong jest when yer did?"

"I come up from thet Injun nation last night," he answered, riding up to her side. "I was on my way back ter thet ranch, but decided ter stay all night in Baxter. I was at thet very hotel where thet land agent stays. Yer was jest ridin' out o' town as I got up. I'm wot acquainted with thet agent, an' he told me how yer'd happened ter be in Baxter. When he told me wot yer'd overheard Hines an' Finley plannin' ter do I was afoard yer'd meet thet whelps an' hev trouble. So I ordered my horse and rid right after yer."

"I don't know wot I'd done ef yer hadn't rid up," said thet girl, trying to meet thet admiring eyes of Tom Byers.

"Nannie, yer a mighty brave girl," he said, trying to possess himself of her hand, "but yer need some big, honest feller who thinks a heap of yer ter take keer of yer. I was thinkin' o' sellin' out my ranch an' goin' back ter mother, but ef I could only persuade yer to bide long with me thar on thet Nechoso I'd be plumb contented ter live allus out hyer on thet Neutral Lands."

"Oh, Tom!" she said, quickly withdrawing her hand, "pap's aillin' consid'ble, an' I must git back ter him."

"I'll ride back with yer, Nannie," Tom declared, and they left thet ford at once.

It was a very pleasant and satisfactory ride to Tom Byers, judging from thet glad light that shone in his blue eyes as thet young couple rode up to thet dugout and were greeted by Adam Hamlet.

"Tom, I'm mighty glad ter hev yer bring my leetle gal safe home. Is all well?"

"All's well," answered Tom, warmly shaking thet settler's hand. "Thet claim's yer'n, an' Nannie's mine!"

The land question was finally decided in thet courts, and new settlers began to flock into thet country. The league excitement subsided, and many of its warmest adherents contracted with Joy for thet lands.

Tom Byers' threats evidently had thet desired effect on Dick Hines, for soon after thet encounter at thet ford he and his gang left thet country for parts unknown. Their places were taken by honest settlers. Consequently no regrets followed them, except that some of them had escaped thet just deserts at thet hands of thet law.

Adam Hamlet secured a legal title to his claim, and in due time developed valuable coal mines along thet creek.

Tom and Nancy have a comfortable home near thet Nechoso river, and are as happy as a well-matched couple can be who possess one hundred and sixty acres of rich land under good cultivation and clear of all incumbrance.

THE END.

Cure is Cure

However it may be effected; but unjust prejudice often prevents people from trying a "proprietary medicine," until other remedies prove unavailing.

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NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT. Notice is hereby given to all whom it may concern in the matter of the estate of William Shurtick, deceased, that I have this day filed my account with the court. Any one objecting to the account will please put objections on file before the 7th day of March, 1922.

SUMMONS. In the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon, for the County of Clackamas, vs. Simon Normile, plaintiff, vs. Mary Carey Normile, defendant. All persons having claims against the plaintiff filed against her in the above entitled suit on or before the 15th day of April, 1922, the same being the first day of the next regular term of said court following the expiration of the time prescribed in the order of publication of the summons, and if you fail to appear and answer said complaint plaintiff will apply to the court for the relief demanded in the complaint, to wit: a dissolution of the marriage contract existing between you and the plaintiff, and the care and custody of a minor child named in said complaint, and for such other and further relief as plaintiff is in equity entitled to. Published by order of Honorable Frank J. Taylor, Judge of said court, duly made on the 23rd day of January, 1922.

Assignee's Notice. Notice is hereby given that J. P. Logan has made an assignment to the undersigned for the benefit of his creditors. All persons having claims against the said J. P. Logan will present them to me, properly verified, at my office in Oregon City, Oregon, and all persons indebted to the said J. P. Logan, are notified to pay the same at once.

Notice of Appointment of Administrator. Notice is hereby given that the undersigned has been appointed administrator of the estate of Alexander McCarver, deceased. All persons having claims against said estate are notified to present to me properly verified, at my office in Oregon City, Oregon, within six months from the date of this notice.

Notice of Appointment of Administrator. Notice is hereby given that I have been appointed administrator of the estate of Gottlieb Jacob, deceased. All persons having claims against said estate are notified to present them to me, duly verified at my home in Oswego, Oregon, within six months from the date of this notice.

Notice of Sale of Real Estate. Notice is hereby given that in pursuance of an order of the County Court of the State of Oregon for the County of Clackamas, has heretofore duly made and entered in the matter of the estate of Peter Steele, deceased, the undersigned as executor of the said estate, do hereby sell at public auction, to the highest bidder, for cash, gold coin of the United States, and subject to confirmation by said County Court, on Saturday, the 27th day of February, 1922 at 10 o'clock, a. m., at the Court House door, in Oregon City in said County and State, all the right title, interest and estate of the said Peter Steele, and all the right, title and interest that said estate has, by operation of law or otherwise, acquired other than or in addition to that of the said Peter Steele at the day of sale, because on confirmation of sale by said County Court. Deed at expense of purchaser.

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