

CALL of the WEST

By R. G. MONTGOMERY

CHAPTER XLV
BALL sat on his horse and looked down over the slopes of the mountain. It was good to be after fighting the desert. The clear and free from dust in every little canyon was and cold. He sighed and another cigar.

Stan bent low and whirled toward the door. He could stay no longer. As he leaped a groan came to him from the west wall. Whirling he sprang across the room and his outstretched hands touched a crumpled figure. Stan grasped the man around the shoulders and tried to lift him. The limp form was bound fast to the wall. Like a flash, Stan whipped out his saddle knife and slashed the rope.

The return to safety was a mad scramble and Stan suffered an agony of heat and choking fumes. He staggered out into the clearing with his burden and laid it in the grass then sat down to choke and cough the smoke from his lungs. When he was able to see again and had recovered his breath he bent over the man he had rescued.

Turning him over, Stan stared at the blue and choked features. "Asper Delo!" he muttered in astonishment. Then he went at the work of restoring the old man with grim speed.

Asper came around slowly, not injured to any great extent. He recognized Ball as soon as he opened his eyes, and a smile parted his blistered lips.

"If you can make it, I'll try to cut back some of the brush around this cabin so that the fire will not cross the clearing," Stan grinned.

Stan tried every trick that he knew to keep the flames from spreading and then returned to Asper. But his work was futile. The old man would have to ride in and get help; that was the only way a disaster could be averted. He ran around the cabin and ducked through the smoke. Stopping where he had left Asper he looked around, then his lips pulled into a straight line. The timber man was gone!

"Still bent on taking me, I guess," Stan spoke bitterly. "Think he can get a range of men here while I fight the fire." Tossing aside a green bough he had been using to beat out grass flames, Stan whistled to his mare. He might as well make a run for it before he had to use a gun to get away.

He had a foot in the stirrup when a husky voice halted him. "Just a minute, Ball." Stan whirled to see Asper running through the smoke toward him. "I had to get a swallow of water to talk," Asper held out a grimed hand.

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"I've been a fool but I know everything now," Asper's voice was only a rasping whisper. "This was more of Swergin's work?" Stan waved toward the mass of flames that marked the cabin.

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