

LORD OF THE DESERT

By PAUL de LANEY.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

"Dunder and Blixen."

It was after midnight before the troops arrived. It was also this hour before the Indians had quieted down to sleep. The afternoon's war dance over their captive victims, the wild excitement of the torture and the arrival of the Pollette party with the two captives had aroused the blood of the savages and many tales of former acts of bravery and daring were told beneath the willows and the tepees in Hell's Trap, that night.

Hammersley had decided to go on his mission of rescue alone. It was decided first to station the troops at every point at which the Indians could possibly appear and then for the trapper to attempt the rescue. Should he fail or fall in the attempt it was the purpose to force the best terms possible with the savages, but should he succeed, it was the determination to wreak that merciless revenge upon the Indians that the occasion seemed to justify.

The men had all been informed of the torture and death of the four white men and of the arrival of the two new captives, and this stirred the soldiers to a revengeful spirit that caused them to forget their tired and hungry condition and loss of sleep. They now felt that they had at last encompassed the enemy and they were eager to strike the blow.

Ten well armed and equipped soldiers accompanied by five cowboys were placed in each gap in the rimrocks and 100 men, including cowboys and soldiers under General Crook, guarded the neck of the peninsula.

It was half way between midnight and dawn when the trapper started on his perilous mission. Armed suitably for the occasion he entered the channel of the stream and hugged the banks with the silence of a beaver, always keeping in the shadows of the willows and never striking the ground upon his feet until he knew they were firmly placed.

While his task did not prove a difficult one, it was a tedious one. His bearings had been so well taken that he recognized the very clump of bushes in which Bertha's tepee was pitched without trouble. Farther away from the stream he saw the dismal thicket to which Oscar Metzger, the other captive, had been taken, and from which the four cowboys on the previous evening had been taken for their last walk.

Like a snake he crawled up the embankment through the dense undergrowth, moving inch by inch, until he reached the rear of Bertha's tepee, and while the guards dozed near the front he ripped a hole in the rear wall of the tent and soon gave Bertha an assuring touch that told her a friend was with her.

In a few moments time they had retraced the trapper's steps to the bed of the stream, in the same manner as he had approached, and Bertha, hiding in a dark nook under the willows, which hung over the embankment, Hammersley went to attempt the release of the other prisoner.

He found Metzger so securely tied that even the Indians did not fear his escape. Bound hand and foot and stretched full length between two sapplings, his body barely touching the ground, he was enduring a torture that would have killed an ordinary man. But his was one of those iron constitutions of the desert.

The trapper was a welcome visitor and his knife furnished immediate relief. When released from his cramped position the cowboy stood erect and, ascending his limbs, he collected himself for a moment before he indicated that he was ready to go. The trapper handed him a revolver and a knife and the two walked silently away ready to defend themselves, even unto death.

When they reached the place where Bertha was concealed the trapper was struck with awe. He saw twigs of willows and tops of sage brush and bushes of a floating down the stream. These increasing at every moment. Seizing the woman he drew her after him and Metzger followed at a rapid pace.

It was two hundred yards to a shallow place in the stream and when this was reached the river was already rising at a rapid rate. The trapper seized Bertha in his arms, as if she were a mere child and plunged into the foaming rapids, followed by the cowboy. Against the heavy current, which almost swept their feet from under them, they made the far shore, and as they ascended the bank, the trapper exclaimed:

"Great luck! A head rise!" Hammersley and his companions ran across the open meadow for the nearest opening in the rimrocks. The light of breaking morn made them recognizable to their friends on guard in the rimrocks who could not directly restrain applause. But the drilling of a soldiers' life prevented this outbreak.

The water came with a rush down the mountain stream. The sound changed from a murmur over the pebbles to a ripple over the rocks; and then to a roar over the boulders and against the steep banks. So long as the growing roar that the savages were awakened. Dan Pollette rushed to the tepee of his fair captive and finding that she was gone, he kicked the doorway in his side in their side and gave the alarm.

The whole camp was astir instantly. Discovering the fleeing fugitives, Pollette plunged into the stream, followed by some of the most daring warriors, and gave pursuit. But when within 50 yards of the opening in the rimrocks where the fugitives had passed safely through, a cloud of smoke rose, a report of a dozen rifles rang upon the morning air and a half dozen Indians sank down in the meadow. Another volley and the ranks were thinned to a remnant.

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It is early in the afternoon. General Crook is seated at the bedside of a very sick man in the main room of the Stone House. He is delicious for long periods and conscious for short ones. His conscious moments are moments of agony.

It is the Lord of the Desert. He had remained sober during the siege of the Stone House and had taken as oath at the time that he would never drink intoxicants again. As soon as the siege was over and the soldiers and cowboys had gone and the excitement died out, he had collapsed. For more than a week he had neither eaten nor slept. The collapse of his years of dissipation had come. His bloated form was rapidly assuming its natural state. He was but a sponge, a dry decaying sponge with all of the substance gone. He was a human wreck, made so by sin and alcohol. He was not an isolated case; it was the same old story. Written and unwritten history abound with such stories.

"It is too late, general," it is too late," said the unfortunate man in a moment of consciousness. "I have taken the oath; I will never drink again, but it was taken too late. It might stimulate me for a few hours, but it would make death the more agonizing."

"It is true, Mr. Lyle," replied the general. "His effects are always temporary, except the injury to the system. This is permanent. A man may feel good for a moment; his life may even be prolonged by it for a brief spell, but he must suffer the consequences in the end."

After a more exhausting delirium, the dying man spoke again.

"It is here that I hurt worse, general. It is here," he said, placing his hand over his heart. "If you know what lies there, general, you would pity me though I'm the most wicked man living."

"It is not too late to repent, and do justice," suggested the warrior.

"Not too late to repent, I know, for I am doing that as fast as a guilty soul can confess itself. It is too late to do justice—they are dead, general, they are dead—my brother and his child are dead!"

This confession seemed to ease the man for a moment. Then he continued: "If I could give them back their lives, general, and this mockery called wealth—the half-breed only took a small portion of what I possessed—would I not give them back to me? I do not fear it, general, but to meet my God with this load here. General, for many years I have kept my heart, my conscience, my soul, my bones with strong drink, now, general, it all falls upon me like a mountain. Oh, that it would crush me, dissolve me like vapor, exterminate me that I should not have to meet my Maker."

"I am able to give you some relief," said the veteran soldier. "You are not as guilty as you think."

"Oh, but they are dead, general. No one can give me relief now—it is too late. I will tell you how it happened," continued Lyle, weeping. "I hired Pollette to kill one and old Egan to kill the other."

"I know you think it happened," replied General Crook, "but it is not that bad. Suppose I should tell you that they both live?"

"You would mock me, general, you would mock me."

"No, I speak truthfully, when I tell you that they are both alive and here at this moment," said the general.

"Do not torture me, general, but if they are here let me see them. Let them tell me that they still live!"

Jim Lyle was seated in a chair and seated by the bedside, and Bertha came and stood by her father's side.

"This is Jim, Brother Jim," said the dying man. "Speak Jim, and tell me that you live and that this is your child by your side."

The cripple's spirit of revenge had left him. With tears in his eyes he hurriedly related the circumstances with which the Lord of the Desert was not familiar, and then called Hammersley to his side.

"He is the right heir to all of the property," he said. "He is the only child of the deceased brother, William. Here is a certified copy of father's will, and Al Beach, whom you long since thought was dead, brings the instruments to show that William Hammersley, the trapper, is no more nor less than William Lyle, sole heir to all of the wealth of the House of Lyle."

"Justice has been done," said the dying man. "Thanks to the failure of Dan Pollette in carrying out our murderous plans. Thanks to the bravery of old Egan in not slaying the child. Thanks to God, who I must now acknowledge, guided it all. Death is not near so bitter now. I believe there is hope, even for me."

And the Lord of the Desert passed into a sleep never to waken again in the mortal body.

CHAPTER XXV.

Wages of Sin and Alcohol.

It is several days after the battle of "Dunder and Blixen." General Crook has sent all of his men, except his staff, to the fort and he has stopped at the Stone House to straighten out the matters reported by the trapper.

Bertha and Hammersley are at the Stone House. James Lyle is there, Al Beach has returned. All of the cowboys who escaped the Indian arrows are there. There are many reminiscences to relate. Bertha has long ago told the story of how she and Metzger fell into the hands of Pollette. He had come to the trapper's abode late in the afternoon and left a message to the effect that the trapper desired their presence at the Stone House, and that the half-breed would call about dark for them. They had held a conference before the return of Pollette, and while they followed the report of him, it seemed so probable that his story was true, that they decided to accompany him. Metzger arming himself and claiming that he was the trapper for the Canadian, Pollette came at the appointed time bringing two horses with him, and Bertha leaving Julian Byrd to look after her father, she and Metzger started out with the Canadian toward the Stone House. They had not gone far, however, until they were surrounded by the four braves, who accompanied Pollette, and were in command and hurried them away toward "Hell's Trap," at which place the reader is familiar with what followed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Conclusion.

Pressing as was the military duties of General Crook he decided to remain at the Stone House another day and night. A cowboy was sent to the fort with a message to announce this fact.

The following morning was decided upon for the burial of all that remained of the late Martin Lyle. With military precision General Crook had designated sunrise as the hour and arrangements were made accordingly.

A grave was dug in a small table land high up on the mountain side overlooking the place and promptly at sunrise the general and his staff and

EVENTS OF THE DAY

GATHERED FROM ALL PARTS OF THE TWO HEMISPHERES.

Comprehensive Review of the Important Happenings of the Past Week, Presented in Condensed Form, Most Likely to Prove Interesting to Our Many Readers.

Editor Gonzales may recover from the wound inflicted by Tillman.

John Mitchell has delivered his final address to the coal strike commission.

The Chicago grand jury found indictments against 40 men engaged in the coal conspiracy.

The big 16-inch coast defense gun has passed a successful trial. It is the largest gun ever made in America.

Admiral Dewey has returned to Washington and praises the conduct of

CHAMBERLAIN NOW GOVERNOR

Formal Ceremonies at Salem in Presence of Immense Crowds.

Salem, Jan. 15.—George E. Chamberlain, Democrat, became governor of Oregon yesterday and Theodore T. Geer retired after four years of service. The ceremonies at the state capitol were attended by a crowd that packed every available nook, corner and square inch of space in the great legislative hall. By 10:30 o'clock the corridors of the capitol had taken an appearance of unusual activity, and by 11 o'clock the entrances to the legislative hall were choked.

When the senate appeared to go into joint convention, the sergeant-at-arms and door keepers had no more trouble fighting their way through the almost immovable mass, but they finally made headway. When the senators had taken their seats and President Brownell had assumed the gavel, he read briefly from the state constitution that clause bearing upon canvass of the vote for governor, and then he caused the waiting and expectant crowd to disperse by announcing that the inaugural ceremony would be held at 2 o'clock.

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