



The Free Traders

By Victor Rousseau

He must get after him again. And what had happened to his horse?

Now from where he lay he had a glimpse of the fawn flanks, the shining steel circlets beneath the hoofs. His horse was lying lower down the slope, at the very edge of the rocks beside the torrent. Pelly must have shot his horse as well. Or perhaps it was only the horse, and Lee had been stunned by the fall.

The red rim of the sun was just dipping into the horizon and Lee remembered that when he had last seen it, it was midway in the western sky. But he had seen it from a cliff top.

With that the girl flashed into the picture. Lee saw her and her horse topping down the ravine. He remembered his own fall, the landscape, the dynamite. Memory grew complete, the last links snapped into place.

He realized that he had been flung from the heights above, and that by a miracle of luck his descent into the rock-strewn torrent had been arrested by the scrub growth which held him. Otherwise those rocks would have ground and battered him almost out of semblance to a man, or tossed him into the whirling torrent.

As it was, it was a miracle that he had survived the fall. Probably he was badly injured. He must count on broken limbs.

He tried to rise, and instantly the body screamed its protest. With immense difficulty he succeeded in getting upon his hands and knees. He flexed each of his limbs in turn. He felt his body and ribs, he patted himself all over.

It was incredible, but though every muscle in his body seemed twisted, and he was aching and bruised from head to foot, no bones appeared to be broken.

Peering along the edge of the ravine, Lee saw the girl's horse lying a little distance away.

The effort to get upon his feet seemed to consume an incredible period of time. By the exercise of all his will Lee managed to keep his balance until the rocking earth had grown comparatively stable. Then, forcing his rebellious limbs and muscles into coordination, he started toward the girl's horse.

It was alive, but its back and limbs were broken, so that it was completely paralyzed. He looked at Lee as he neared, eyes instinct with the foreknowledge of death.

Lee was sick with the fear that he would either find the girl dead—battered almost out of recognition among the rocks—or missing; drowned in the torrent below.

He searched every inch of the surrounding terrain within a radius of three hundred yards, and then abandoned hope. Anger, boiling up within him, assisted in reviving strength. He would follow her murderers and shoot them down like the wild beasts they were.

Before leaving the side of the injured horse, Lee drew his automatic, which had remained buckled in his belt holster throughout the fall, and mercifully ended the animal's life with a single shot over the heart.

Now there remained the pursuit, vengeance—then the original duty of picking up Pelly. But he swore that he would take one man, not three, to Manitree.

And, with the decision, he retraced his steps, until once more he stood beside the gorge between the dead horses.

The contents of the packs had burst from the broken canvas and lay scattered everywhere, but the rifle was not to be found. Two or three cartridges at the edge of the chasm, were all Lee found.

Reluctantly he came to the conclusion that his rifle lay at the bottom of the river.

He turned doggedly to take up the pursuit again. But as he was passing the girl's horse, something yellow and shining on the ground caught his eye. He stooped to examine it. Long tresses of pale, yellow-brown hair coiled round his fingers.

It was the hair of the girl!

He tried to pick it up, but the ends were pinned under the dead animal, probably caught in the broken girth. The ends that lay upon the ground appeared to have been roughly severed with a knife.

There was no doubt it was the girl's hair, and the tresses must have been severed within a few inches of her head, for there was more than three feet of them in view, trailing along the ground.

He tugged at them to detach them, but it was a matter of considerable effort, and he only succeeded in releasing them strand by strand. At last, however, he managed to detach them, and, after a moment's hesitation, he thrust them into the bosom of his shirt.

And then of a sudden he understood what had happened, and his heart gave a bound. The girl had not been flung into the water.

She must somehow have become pinned by the hair beneath her horse after her fall. It had come near rolling on her, and her hair had been cut off to effect her quick release.

She was not dead. She had been carried off by the two ruffians.

It was nearly dark when Lee

erility of great strength. He had an untrimmed black beard, he walked with hunched shoulders and there was a look of singular ferocity and cunning on his face.

A dangerous, treacherous customer, Lee thought. Rathway!

When he had disappeared within the hut Lee stood up. Craning over the rocks, he could just catch a glimpse of the interior. He saw the



A Single Shot From Where He Stood, Well Aimed, Would Be Sufficient.

man standing over what looked like a camp bed, on which he could distinguish the head and shoulders of a girl, lying perfectly still.

Lee's heart leaped. He gripped his automatic, leveled it.

A single shot from where he stood, well aimed, would be sufficient.

And at that moment instinct and desire struggled with discipline as never before, with the maxim inculcated during his eight years of service, never to take life except when life is in immediate danger.

Then discipline won. Lee let the muzzle drop.

And at that moment he heard the growling voice of the man, and the answer of a third person inside the hut—a woman.

The words were inaudible, and now, hesitating no longer, Lee scrambled over the rocky ridge and made his way toward the door, so as to remain concealed from the sight of those within.

The man's voice rose in a falsetto snarl.

"What do I mean to do with her? What would I do with her? She's mine, ain't she?"

"And what about me?" Lee as the voice was restrained, yet passionate, something about it sent a sudden shiver through Lee, and for a few moments he could only remain a helpless listener.

"You!" he laughed. "You can stay on here's long as you want to, I guess. There's Pierre and Shorty if you want a man."

"You coward!" Her voice was vibrant with indignation. "I tell you you've made a mistake in bringing that girl here. You'll regret it. That mine doesn't exist. And when she finds you've fooled her, what are you going to do?"

"So we're jealous, are we? Well, I've been tired of you for a long time," he jeered.

"Jim—There was desperate pleading in the woman's tones—"I gave up all for you. Let her go. Don't cast me off. I love you, Jim—"

And now Lee knew. A mist trembled before his eyes, and, gripping his automatic, he sprang forward to the door.

He must have shouted, though he was unconscious of everything but the desire to get Rathway by the throat.

Whedding, Rathway swore, and then, heedless of Lee's pistol, leaped.

But in the moment before they closed, Lee saw the woman's face and knew her for his dead love, who had broken his life and changed it utterly.

Estelle.

Lee did not shoot. Instinctively he obeyed that unwritten law of the police tradition not to take life save in the last extremity.

But the sight of this sinister figure, the wholly incredible presence there of Estelle, the woman who had wrecked his life, and the girl lying unconscious on the bed in this man's power, aroused in Lee's heart a sleeping devil of whose existence he had hardly been aware at any time in his life before.

He was conscious only of a mad desire to kill, but to kill with nature's own weapons, in obedience to man's instinctive law.

Clubbing his automatic, Lee leaped to meet Rathway's charge, and breast to breast they met, rebounding like balls of rubber. Rathway's hand shot out and grasped Lee's wrist before the weapon descended. Then, interlocked, they stood almost motionless, matched so evenly that neither budged an inch before the other for a full minute.

Rathway's sneering face was upturned to Lee's. Malice and hate gleamed from his bloodshot eyes. Beside them stood Estelle, with her hands still clasped in the gesture that she had made at the moment of Lee's intervention, struck dumb and motionless with terror and amazement.

Rathway was proving himself the stronger. Malice and hate became triumph, derision. Lee's pistol hand was being bent back. Lee adapted himself with quick instinct to the discovery that he was the weaker in arm and shoulder muscles. As Rathway's body slowly assumed a forward tilt, shifting his center of gravity, Lee suddenly drove his knee into the back of Rathway, causing the man to stumble forward. The impetus of the body projected against him sent the pistol flying out of Lee's hand; but Lee, in the moment of Rathway's loss of equipage, drove his fist home into his face, splitting his lips and sending him reeling.

In an instant they were together again, delivering and receiving a succession of vile-driver blows that fell

My Favorite Stories

By IRVIN S. COBB

The Fear Aim of Mr. Zeno

When the circus reached the small Vermont town the proprietor feared for a while that his afternoon performance might lack its chief feature. The star of the aggregation was Zeno, the Mexican knife thrower, answering in private life to the name of Hennessy. Twice a day Zeno, dressed in gaudy trappings, would enter the arena accompanied by his wife, a young, plump, pretty woman in pink tights, and followed by a roustabout bearing a basketful of long bowie-knives and shining batteases. While the band played an appropriate selection of shivery music the young woman would flatter herself against a background of blue planking which had been erected in the middle of the ring. There she would pose motionless, her arms outstretched and her feet close together. Then Zeno, stationing himself 40 feet from her, would fling his knives and aim at her, missing her each time by the narrowest of margins. Presently her form would be completely outlined by the deadly steel, but such was Zeno's marvelous skill that she took no hurt from the sharp blades which pinned her fast.

But on this day Mrs. Zeno had fallen ill and, although the circus owner offered a reward for some one who would take her place, he could find no volunteers among the members of his staff. In this emergency the invalid's mother—who by the same token was Zeno's mother-in-law—and who traveled with the show in the capacity of wardrobe mistress, stepped forward and agreed to serve as an understudy in order that the performance might not be marred.

The hour came. Forth came Zeno, wearing his professional scowl, slightly enhanced. His mother-in-law, skinnily and homely, with her hair knotted in a knob on her head and her daughter's fleshings hanging in loose folds over her bony figure, followed him closely. She plastered herself flat against the wooden background. Zeno gave her a look seemingly fraught with undying hate. He took up his longest, sharpest bowie-knife. He tested its point-like point upon his thumb. He looked it, aimed it, flung it.

Like a javelin it hurtled on its blazing flight through the air. Striking tip first a scant quarter of an inch from the lobe of the mother-in-law's left ear, it buried itself deep in the tooth caken planking and stood there, the hilt quivering.

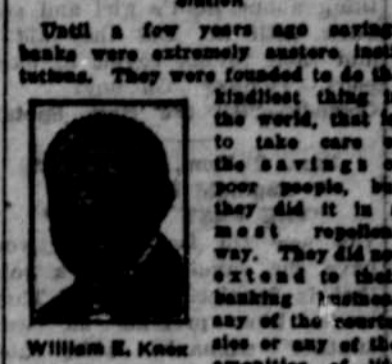
The pause which ensued was broken by the astonished voice of a bank note sitting in the lowermost tier of blue seats industriously milking his whiskers:

"Wall, by Heck—he missed her!"

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THE FRIENDLINESS OF MODERN BANKING

By WILLIAM E. KNOX
President American Bankers Association



Until a few years ago savings banks were extremely austere institutions. They were founded to do the simplest thing in the world, that is, to take care of the savings of poor people, but they did it in a most repellent way. They did not extend to their banking customers any of the courtesy or any of the amenities of life.

They simply took the money, did the depositor the favor of making it, and gave it back to him when he wanted it. And then they considered their full duty done.

The reform and change treated the depositor as though they were entirely beneath them. I myself heard a depositor, an old Irishwoman, say to a teller who had been snappish with her: "Then you better keep a civil tongue in your head. It is the honor of me that keeps the likes of you in your place." In that brief and candid and well-deserved comment she had summed up the whole situation in a nutshell.

There was nothing warm, nothing genial, but as the years went by those who worked at the windows got on friendly and kindly relations with the people coming to the windows.

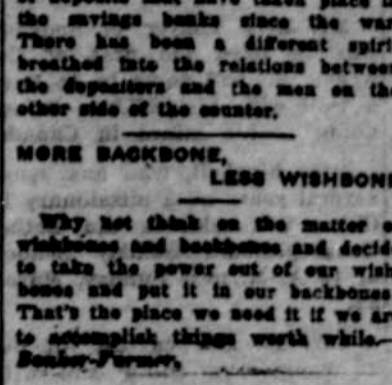
Here and there some man got so close to the people that they began to tell him their personal affairs and ask for his advice, and of late years the banks, too, have been stressing the human element. They have struck a better way of approaching people.

They have taken steps, for instance, to try to get as close as they can to the foreign element. That is one of the great problems in all the large manufacturing and business centers. A great mass of foreigners come here and get together in groups, but they do not get any real touch of American life. They are just as Jewish and just as Italian and so on, twenty years after they came here as they were the day they came, because nobody appears to take any particular interest in them. But when an institution like a savings bank begins to take an interest in the problems of the people, to let them feel that here is a group of people engaged in a business that is willing to listen to them, their troubles, their trials, is willing to advise them, willing to steer them

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