

The Free Traders

By Victor Rousseau

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And all the while he ran, he was weighing everything. The Free Traders would not know that he was wounded, they would certainly abandon the pursuit as hopeless; he must carry the girl a mile into the forest, where the light of their fire would not betray them, returning for the pack in the morning. He suffered no pain, and seemed momentarily endowed with some extraordinary vitality, but there was a numbness in his side which seemed to be spreading upward.

He had no idea how serious the wound was; everything that was himself was set upon the completion of the last phase of his task, so that, if he died, the girl should at least come back to consciousness in the forest and not in Rathway's hands.

He struggled on, felt himself weakening, felt himself choking, and set down the girl in order to draw breath. But as he raised her again, he felt a sudden stab of agonizing pain, and something grated beneath his heart. He realized then that the rifle bullet had split one of his ribs, probably glancing off again, and that the bone had given way under the strain of the girl's weight.

In a way this reassured him, for a glancing wound of that kind was not likely to be a serious one. On the other hand, the agony was growing unendurable. Every step was now torture. Three or four times, when it seemed impossible to proceed, Lee was forced to set the girl down and, leaning against a tree, to gasp for breath.

Eternities seemed to be passing. All his left side was now a flaming hell of pain, which radiated from the wound throughout his body, and this was becoming an automation, driven by the will. He was no longer conscious of muscular control over it. A hundred times he felt that the next step must be his last. And yet some monitor in the back of his consciousness kept insisting that he must complete the rite he had set himself, and would not let him drop in his tracks.

And as he staggered on, he was surprised to hear himself talking to himself, and he listened with mild interest, as if he were overhearing the remarks of a third person.

He heard himself solemnly addressing Estelle, thanking her for having relieved him of the last vestige of the love that he had once felt toward her.

He had thought he loved her once, and that love, although unworthily bestowed, had not been wholly folly. Estelle had had many good qualities of heart; she was reckless and passionate, but there was nothing petty or mean about her. She was the daughter of a well-to-do lumberman, and she had been well educated; but there was some taint in her blood, some atavistic tendency that drove her upon wild and erratic courses.

For a while she had been on the stage, and had earned some reputation as a clever mimic.

For a long time Lee had known nothing of the stories that were being circulated by all the gossips of the town, nor that her name was associated with that of a man named Keen, whom he had never met. Keen was one of a gang selling liquor to the Indians, and he had a wife in Chicago.

Lee learned, about a month before the date set for their marriage, that he was the consummation and the laughing stock of the little community. When, burning with anger, he went to confront Estelle, it was to find that she had been warned of his discovery, and had fled from the place—to Keen, the gossips said.

her and wrapped her in his mackinaw again.

And with that it was all he could do to hold himself together while he examined his own wound as best he could.

He saw that it was a mere flesh wound. The bone had taken the force of the bullet, which had glanced off, and one broken end was working into the flesh.

He tore some strips from his shirt, and having brought the ends into position, bound them tightly. And then he dropped to the ground at the girl's feet and lapsed immediately into a delicious slumber.

CHAPTER VII

The Girl Awakens

And all that night it was the will that sustained the worn-out body in that fight up through the darkness, and the knowledge that he must retain intact the thread of consciousness if he was to save the girl from the alternative between death in the forest and captivity.

At earliest dawn he must retrieve the pack, in case Rathway's men should decide to beat about the shore and so, perhaps, might find it. He yawned that point he would not let his anticipations carry him.

It was some time before the dawn when Lee heard the girl cry out suddenly, a moan of pain and of surprise as the body, heavy with its coma, struggled to convey the sense of distress to the dazed mind.

That cry drove the phantoms of delirium from Lee's mind, pulling him back to consciousness, and in an instant Lee was at the girl's side, perfectly master of himself, and, as she stirred and murmured, he raised her up and held her, and then, with his head upon his shoulder, as tenderly as if she were some boy comrade, wounded upon patrol.

But as he listened to her broken utterances Lee realized that it was more than physical pain that was tormenting her.

"I cannot go on. It was too heavy a price. I must go back. If you would kill him, save me and take me away. It is not that I didn't trust you, only you didn't understand."

"No, I'm not sure that I trust him. He looks honest, but who knows that he is? He isn't a prospector, he hasn't a pick or a pan. What should he be doing in the range? Yes, I'll go through with it. I'll go with you when he's asleep, only don't harm him. You must promise me not to harm him."

"Yes, he means well and wants to help me. He doesn't know who you are. You must swear that no harm shall come to him—"

She was lying over again the event of the past. Her utterances became more broken, she moaned—suddenly she lay quiet, relapsing into the sleep of profound exhaustion.

And Lee staggered to his feet and lay down once more.

But this time it was neither to sleep nor to fall back into the nether depths of delirium. He saw that a titanic conflict had been going on within the girl, and it seemed to him now that she had been going up to Rathway. Something in the conversation between Rathway and Estelle—what had it been?

He pondered over it all in a disconnected way as he lay there, still aware that another part of him was living over those days of long ago. Then at last the first light of dawn came creeping through the trees, and slowly this pain-racked, throat-tormented being settled down into himself again.

As soon as it was half-light he was on his feet. After looking at the girl, and convincing himself that she was not likely to awake for several hours, he set off, aching in every limb, toward the shores of the lake, in order to retrieve the pack.

In less than half an hour he emerged out of the forest, and, after a careful survey of the lake had convinced him that neither the Free Traders nor their hounds were in evidence, he struggled down to the river, and bathed in the ice-cold waters, lapping them up and feeling new life flow into his veins.

He adjusted and tightened the bandages. The broken rib was snugly held, and Lee felt that he had gone through the worst of it.

He found the pack. It contained a blanket and waterproof sheet, tea, sugar, bacon, flour, cream of tartar, salt, corn meal, some dried apricots, matches, and pills; there were a pot, a pannikin, plate, knife, fork, and spoon, an axe and a small saw.

His wound made it impossible to carry this on his back, but with the axe in one hand Lee sliced off a number of pine branches, out of which he constructed a rough framework on which to hang the pack. An hour's work and an hour's struggle through the woods brought him back to the girl.

She was sleeping naturally, and there was a faint tinge of color in her cheeks. After a short rest Lee set about the task of making camp. He gathered brushwood and built a fire, and set on to boil the not which he had

brought back full of water. And, having on the return journey discovered a small, clear stream near by, he decided that that would be a safe camping place until they could proceed, and accordingly bent down some saplings and proceeded to thatch them with branches, to make a shelter for them.

He had just begun when he heard a low call behind him. The girl was awake and conscious at last. She was



"Where Am I? What Has Happened?" She Asked.

looking at him in wonder, but not in fear.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she asked.

Lee saw at once that she had no consciousness of anything that had occurred since the catastrophe, and probably it would be some time before the memory of that came back to her. He must protect her against the shock of the realization until she was able to bear it.

"Your horse threw you," he answered. "You hurt your knee and cut your head. You will have to keep still for awhile, and we shall have to remain here for a few days. Are you in much pain?"

"My head aches, and my knee—yes, it does hurt a little. It isn't broken, is it?"

"It was dislocated. I had to set it."

"Oh!" A faint color crept into her cheeks. There was a little silence.

"Are you a doctor, then?"

"No, I was just a humble orderly and stretcher bearer on the western front," Lee answered. "But you see, it had to be attended to, and so I—well, I did it. After you've drunk some tea I'm going to be an orderly again and retubulate your head."

(Continued next week.)

thorough cutting out and disinfection of the existing cankers, follow; by a summer bordeaux spray as employed for anthracnose.

The object of spraying for fungus diseases is to cover all exposed surfaces with a fungicidal poison, which will kill the disease spores that are carried to the plant and thus prevent infections. Thoroughness in spraying is essential to success. Any bit of unprotected surface will be an open port of entry for diseases.

All shrivelled fruit and dead twigs and spurs left in the top of Oregon prune, apricot and cherry trees should be removed at pruning time as they may be a serious source of blossom blight infection if left on the tree.

FRUIT TREES HARD HIT BY WINTER FREEZE

Many of the 950 varieties of fruits in the variety block of the agricultural college and experiment station were damaged by the freeze last winter. Most of the trees are in pairs and in some cases both trees of a variety have been killed. Usually the varieties injured most are not of commercial importance here, though they may be of value elsewhere.

The trees were girdled by the freezing of the cambium layers—the actively growing portions of the trunks. In many cases where the girdling was not complete, bridge grafting will be resorted to. Trees completely girdled are often saved by bridge grafting when the importance of the tree warrants the expense.

The fruit of the college orchards is used in the classes in systematic pomology for the students to identify and become acquainted with. There are 225 varieties of apples, 115 of grapes, 75 of plums and prunes, 60 of pears, 20 of filberts, 25 of cherries, 30 of walnuts, 300 strawberries at one time or another, and 100 miscellaneous varieties of fruits.

When the Clothes Go Round—As my clothes closet was too small for my clothes, I unfastened an old velocipede wheel and attached it to the shelf so it would swing around easily. I hang my dresses on hangers and place them on the rim of the wheel. This saves space and pressing of clothes. E. S.

Ever Ready Biscuit Flour—Make my own "ever ready biscuit flour" by sifting to every two cups of flour four teaspoons of baking powder and one teaspoon of salt. These I put in a paper bag, insert in an old cereal box with lid and place on my cupboard shelves. It requires but a jiffy to add shortening and milk.—H. G.

Homemade Bias Binding—Now for those who like to save and especially the mother that does much sewing and uses a great deal of bias binding I would like to suggest that they try my plan. Take a piece of the material from which a garment is being made and cut it into bias pieces one inch wide. Sew the ends together and wind on cardboard or large ribbon spool. I find that this makes satisfactory trimming for other dresses and having a variety on hand it isn't difficult to match colors.—C. F.

Food Grinder Easily Cleaned—Here is my method of keeping

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Tray Plays New Role—Families having little children will find a small tray—I prefer one of oblong shape—a help in keeping tablecloths clean around their plates. Just put the plate and knife and fork in the tray. It is neat and clean and easily washed. Most children enjoy trying to keep the tray clean so they learn to eat more carefully.

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ing fruit from sticking to the food chopper. Waste of the fruit is stopped too. Before I put the fruit through I pour in slowly one teaspoon melted butter, turning the crank at the same time. Then when I put the fruit through it comes out smoothly and doesn't adhere to the chopper. Mrs. G. H. W.

To Keep Potatoes Warm—If family or guests are late to dinner and you have planned hot mashed potatoes for one vegetable go ahead and season them, using plenty of cream. Beat until fluffy, then cover tightly and place in a pan half filled with hot water, with a cloth or wire dish cloth in the bottom to set the kettle on so the potatoes won't scorch. Set the pan over a slow fire. You can keep the potatoes hot as long as you desire.—Mrs. J. E. H.

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No Mixing of Flavors—Tea, coffee, chocolate, lemonade, milk, and punch are carried in the same thermos bottle at different times. I have found that the corks absorb flavors very readily and are likely to spoil the perfect flavor of the liquid in the bottle. To avoid this, buy six corks to fit your thermos bottle. Cut the letter T in one, C in another, Ch in a third, L, M, and P, in the three others. Use the correct cork for every beverage and you will have no more difficulty.—Mrs. H. E.

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