

BELOW ZERO

A Romance of the North Woods



By Harold Titus
W.N.U. SERVICE

John itched to be at the bank records, to know what they might reveal, but he could make no move in that direction without exposing his entire hand. So he waited, performing his duties about the barn, spending his evenings in the recreation hall. Since his encounter with Baxter they had ceased their nudging, ceased gloating at sight of a rich man's son taking life as they took it. He was as much one of them as the son of the boss ever could be. They respected him.

It was Saturday night; another week was down. He was buying some necessary things when he met Me-Wethy.

"Say, Gorbelt, he'd bargained for another team to be delivered to-night or tomorrow," he said. "You'd gone when I come past the barn."

"All right; there are empty stalls. They can stand 'em in."

"Watchin' your step?"

"Every move!" And John grinned as the other twisted his head in grim approval.

He went to sleep dreaming of Ellen Richards, and woke with an empty feeling. . . . Hang on! he told himself. Hang on and keep going and you'll be able to show her how much of her trouble can be laid at old Tom's door!

He was out at four o'clock, wading through new drifts towards the barn to feed and water. This was Sunday. He would have little to do throughout the day; might even take to the swamp on snowshoes for a few hours to be alone with his problem, with his regrets and fears and hopes. . . . He felt particularly lonely as he walked.

The barn was silent; no one was about. He opened the door and reached for the lantern that hung inside and lighted it. The warm smell of the stable was strong.

He swung his lantern and looked to the left.

"Hullo!" he muttered. A strange, black horse was standing there, halter rope dangling, eyeing him with head up. Coal black, night black, he was; a handsome creature, though the eye looked defiant.

One of the new horses, delivered last night, probably, and insecurely tied.

"Well, boy, enjoying liberty?" John asked, and slipping the lantern ball over one arm advanced, hand extended to catch the rope.

He should have been warned now, had the light been better. He could not see the tensing of the big animal's frame as he approached. He was wholly unprepared for the charge when it came.

With a squeal that stopped John's heart, with his lip flickering over the long, yellow teeth, with a greenish glitter springing to life in his eyes, the animal rushed him!

So quickly did it happen, so close the quarters, that John could not turn and run. To the left the outer wall blocked him, without niche or corner within reach to use as sanctuary. To the right stood other horses, and as the black squealed the one nearest danced and wrung his tail.

All in a flash. In a split second, John swayed backward, not daring to turn, and used the only weapon he had: the lantern. He swung it as the horse reared. Swung it the whole length of his arm and let it go full in the creature's face as he poised for the downward pitch that would mean broken bones and torn flesh.

The animal cried out as the lantern struck his nose. The glass broke with a crash and a tinkling; the light went out. John had a vague impression of the horse going sideways, over against a stall partition, as he quickly turned and fled.

He did not go far. Feet thudded behind him. The killer squealed again, and as John caught a stanchion in one hand and swung himself in beside another horse the black thundered on his heels.

"Whoa!" he cried, as the horse which gave him protection kicked.

"Whoa, you!"

Against the faint glow from misty yard lights that penetrated the dark windows he could see the black there, stamping, crowding to get into the stall. The tied horse kicked again and squealed and lunged forward as the black's teeth nipped his hip.

John was up in the manger by then, trying to quiet the one horse as the outlaw backed away, stamping.

He stood, a bit shaky, stroking the snuffing muzzle in the darkness.

The black was standing there, waiting for him, he thought, waiting like a surly bear might wait for his quarry to emerge, stamping now and again.

The other horses were restless from the disturbance.

John slipped through into the feed alley, found a pitchfork, walked along to the far end of the building and crawled through the hay window into a box-stall, used for sick horses when occasion demanded.

He stood against the door which gave into the stall row, listening. Then, careful to make little sound, he slid it open. That done, he retreated to the feed alley again and moved along, trying to locate the strange horse. He found that the animal was now standing behind a vacant stall, head down, almost as though listening himself.

Cautiously John crawled through to the manger, standing erect, dragging the fork with him. Then he stepped



"Back, You! Get Back!"

down and with a quick stride, fork held before him, was in the litterway, confronting the black.

"You!" he cried, and leaped forward.

The animal squealed again. His hoofs beat the straw-padded floor as he gathered himself for another charge. And then he cried out in pain as the fork tines raked his face, as they prodded his chest, mercilessly.

"Back you! Get back!"

He could hear the savage teeth popping in the darkness, felt a fore-foot strike out at the torturing fork. But the animal reluctantly gave ground.

At the door of the box-stall John swung the fork sideways at the horse's head to turn him. The beast bit and struck. He made a stand, there, until John got the tine points against the neck and shoved, and with a scream the black yielded, turned into the box-stall and thundered to a far corner.

John had the door closed in a second, set the hasp in place and drew a deep breath.

"Now. . . . Something else to figure out!" he muttered.

The first of the teamsters trailed in as daylight drove back the shadows.

"Here, Tim; take a look at this pony, will you?"

The man came down behind the horses and John let down a window in the door of the box-stall.

"My G—d!" the man said. "That's old DeForest's renegade! What's that horse doin' here?"

John explained that the horse had been sold to Gorbelt and had been delivered after quitting time last night. "Gorbelt bought him?" he demanded. "Cripes, that horse's been in this country for five years and DeForest's the only man who walks who can get 'ar him and come away whole. You mean, Gorbelt was thinking of buyin' him?"

John shrugged. "That's the way I took it. Where does this DeForest live?"

"Three mile west and half a mile south."

"I guess, so long as I'm running this barn, we'll try to do without him. What say?"

"If you want me around here; or anybody else who knows that horse, you will! Why, it's a wonder he ain't killed a dozen men. And you handled him alone?"

Three miles west and half a mile south over sleigh roads, and an hour with DeForest; a long, haggling hour that got him nowhere. The horse trader, shrewd, truculent, was a hard nut to crack and his defiant story of an attempt at a sharp sale of undesirable property seemed to hold water.

Gorbelt was spreading out dangerously, but he strengthened his defenses as he went and it would be difficult to prove that he was even remotely implicated in either of these attempts on John's well-being. It gave a man something to think about!

As John went slowly back towards town he saw two people on skis a quarter of a mile away. He watched them for a time and made up his mind that it was Gorbelt with Marie. They seemed to be watching him, too, although because of the glare of an early March sun on the snow he could not be sure.

On Monday morning he stood for the second time in Paul Gorbelt's office. The man turned on him a face that was lined now; hollows showed beneath eyes that roved a bit; eyes that had been so well controlled a fortnight before, so steady, so bland. But they would not obey the remnant of self-control that tried to direct the light in them this day. Uneasy eyes, they were, and the man's voice was slightly husky.

"You sent word by Mac Saturday night that you'd bought a new team," John said.

"Yes, DeForest came in and offered a bargain. I thought I'd let you have 'em tried out."

"Well—dryly—"he just came in to take 'em back."

"So soon? You . . . you tried them?"

"One tried me."

"I don't understand."

"A horse was loose in the barn when I went in yesterday. He'd never been properly tied up."

He spoke dispassionately and watched for change in the face before him; but Gorbelt held steady now.

"Well . . . I don't . . . I don't get you. Did you send the team back because the man was careless on a detail?"

"Don't stall, Gorbelt!" John cried, and the other straightened as color whipped into his face. "Don't stall another syllable. I'm here because good luck was with me!"

Gorbelt shoved back his chair. "What's the idea?" he asked thickly, rising. "I don't like this, Belknap, whatever it may be!"

"No, you don't like it!" Rage, now, had young John; had his eyes and his voice and his gestures. "You tried to frame me with a man once, and with a horse next. You—"

"Frame you!" His voice was a snarl.

"—have known for years, likely, about DeForest's outlaw black. If you haven't, it's the one thing you haven't known about this country! Shut up, now, and let me talk!"—with a commanding gesture as Gorbelt swung around the corner of the desk.

"I found him loose in the barn. He tried to get me and didn't. My teamsters all knew about him; every man-jack of them knew that no sane man would buy the horse."

"I called on DeForest. You'd schooled him well, Gorbelt. You'd probably schooled Baxter well, too, but I didn't bother trying to break him down!"

"Man, you're crazy! DeForest? An outlaw horse? Baxter? What the devil are you driving at?"

His rigidity went from John Belknap's posture and he laughed helplessly.

(Continued Next Week)

Jim—My wife explored my pockets last night.
Friend Tom—What did she get?
Jim—About the same as any other explorer—enough material for a lecture.

The Cook's Nook

After the thrill of shortcake has worn away, try a cocktail made with fresh strawberries combined with citrus juices.

1 pt. strawberries
2 tbsps. sugar
1/3 cup orange juice
Salt

1/4 cup grapefruit juice
1 1/3 tbsps. lemon juice
Let the washed and hulled strawberries stand for an hour with the sugar. Then add other ingredients; mix. Squeeze through cheesecloth. Garnish with mint and serve cold with appetizers or cheese wafers.

Two Hunches for Picnic Lunches
Make your filling in advance, put it in jars, take along crackers and let the picnicers spread their own.

Tart Filling: Chop a 4 ounce can pimientos and enough sweet pickles to make 1/2 cup. Mix with 1/4 cup peanut butter, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 cup mayonnaise.

Sweet Filling: Mix 1/2 pkg. dates with 2 pkgs. cream cheese; add 1/2 teaspoon powdered ginger and enough cream to moisten. Serve with graham crackers.

Cocoanut Fluff Cake
(In which cocoanut is in the batter)

1 1/2 cups sifted pastry flour
2 1/2 tps. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 pkg. cocoanut
2/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup liquid shortening
1 egg
1 tsp. flavoring

Mix and sift dry ingredients. Add cocoanut and mix well. Add shortening and milk (or water), beaten egg and flavoring. Stir ingredients quickly and bake in hot oven for about 20 minutes.

Macaroon whip
1 tbsps. gelatine
2 tbsps. cold water
1 cup boiling water
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup orange juice
1 tbsps. lemon juice
1/2 pkg. dates, sliced
1/2 cup nuts
6 macaroons
1/2 cup cream, whipped

Soak gelatine in cold water and dissolve with sugar and salt in boiling water; add fruit juices.

Cool. When mixture begins to stiffen, stir in sliced plates, cut nuts and broken macaroons. Fold in whipped cream, pour into a mold which has been rinsed in cold water. Chill. When firm, unmold and serve with whipped cream. Serves eight.

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(In which cocoanut is in the batter)

1 1/2 cups sifted pastry flour
2 1/2 tps. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 pkg. cocoanut
2/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup liquid shortening
1 egg
1 tsp. flavoring

Mix and sift dry ingredients. Add cocoanut and mix well. Add shortening and milk (or water), beaten egg and flavoring. Stir ingredients quickly and bake in hot oven for about 20 minutes.

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Soak gelatine in cold water and dissolve with sugar and salt in boiling water; add fruit juices.

Chocolate-Cocoanut Icebox Dessert
20 chocolate wafers
1 1/2 cups whipping cream

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Chocolate-Cocoanut Icebox Dessert
20 chocolate wafers
1 1/2 cups whipping cream

Cocoanut
1/4 tsp. vanilla
Whip 1/2 cup of the cream; add few drops vanilla and 1 cup cocoanut. Spread a chocolate wafer with cream and cocoanut mixture, cover with a second wafer; repeat until there are 6 "sandwiches", each containing four cookies, and 3 layers of filling. Place cookies in refrigerator for at least 3 hours. At serving time cut each pile cookies in half and put on plate with edges touching. Top with remaining cream (whipped and flavored). Sprinkle with cocoanut. Vanilla wafers or ginger snaps may also be used in this way. 6 servings.

Southern Moon Bavarian
1 1/2 tbsps. gelatine
1/4 cup cold water
1 cup hot pineapple juice
1 cup cream, whipped
1/2 pkg. dates, cut
1/2 pkg. cocoanut
6 slices pineapple
Soak gelatine in the cold water. Add hot pineapple juice to dissolve gelatine. Let cool until consistency of egg white. Fold in whipped cream, cocoanut and dates. Pour into individual molds; when firm, unmold on slice of canned pineapple and serve with additional whipped cream. Serves 6.

LOCAL NEWS

Police Officer Baucom, who was shot in Medford by two boys last week, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Baucom of Aloha, who formerly resided in Medford.

Mr. and Mrs. F. S. Brown and family of Denney Road with a group of Portland relatives, picnicked on the Tualatin river near Roamer's Rest on the Fourth.

Mrs. Lyle Metlen of Exeter, Calif., visited a few days at the Gay Carr home this week. The Metlens were former residents of Beaverton. Mr. Metlen is a depot agent.

WESTERN News Features



DOLORES ANDERSON of Spokane has her hands full of hard candy, following the advice of Washington's largest candy manufacturer to include it on every picnic.



SWIMMING all morning at Sea Shore Beach was the beginning of a full summer's day for ROSE DAY and EVA LONG. Hiking, golfing and leap frog at Birch Bay made the day complete.



TUSKO, world's largest elephant, first while en route to North Carolina, was on display at the fair.



THOMAS BENN, founder of Aberdeen, Washington, who came to the Coast in 1859, was 101 years old the first day of July.



A... through Washington summer. It is an educational vehicle, which a large Northwest milling company demonstrates baking.

MICKIE, THE PRINTER'S DEVIL



"All Out for Liverpool"

