

BELOW ZERO

A Romance of the North Woods



By
Harold
Titus
W.N.U.
SERVICE

Clear and shrill, that voice, and she caught breath for another warning scream, but Gorbels palm, hard over her mouth, shut it back. He gathered her in his arms, held her close, ran with her the length of the room and threw her, sprawling, in to that dark, windowless chamber. He seized the door, dragged it shut on the sagging hinges and slipped the heavy iron hook into its staple.

He staggered back to where he had dropped his gun, snatched it up and aimed through the shattered window. Out there in the open burning the sound of that shot, the whine of the wild bullet, stopped John Belknap in his tracks. He whipped Nat's pistol from his pocket, a foolish gesture, and as he realized the futility of giving battle to a screened adversary he heard a girl's voice lifted. Muffled, the sound was, but he caught the last words clearly.

"Stay back!" someone had called, and he thought the words were preceded by his own name!

Stay back, he had been warned! But why stay back? A quarter of a mile of open lay behind him, and before he could cross the sheltering ridge to the southward he would be made a sieve by even the most inaccurate of marksmen.

Shelter was in only one direction, straight on toward that cabin from which his life had been attempted, and he began to run. At any leap now his flesh might be rent. He could not hear the muffled sounds of scuffle within the cabin, could not know that he had seconds of safety. He took the only chance open to him and ran until blood roared in his ears, and as he dropped forward into the snow, another rifle shot crashed again, the missile clipping a bare birch twig from its branch in line with where his head had been.

Then, as his pulses slowed, he made out an odd, indistinguishable sound coming from the cabin. It rose and fell, stopped, began again. Then another, a man's voice, cursing sharply. . . . And a shot!

On that the girl in the cabin screamed again. His name!

"John!" she called. "John Belknap! Are you hurt?"

He stiffened at the muffled sound, raised his head in an ineffectual effort to see through the thick growth before him.

"Not hurt!" he cried. "Not hurt!"

The rifle crashed. A bullet tore through the screen of boughs to his right. Another snapped above his head, a third to the left; a fourth went into the stump before him with a plunking spatter.

Then silence once more. . . . A woman, a woman who knew him, had given warning. . . . What woman?

"Ellen?" he shouted.

Her answer came from the close confines of the fur room: "John. . . John, are you all right?"

"Right!" he shouted again. "Where a bit so his voice would carry better. 'Is it you, Ellen? Where are you?'"

Again the rifle, shooting savagely, aimlessly now. Six times, shot after shot, until echoes came ringing back.

"Right!" he shouted again. "Where are you?"

... fur room. At the east end. . . . Stay safe," she called. "He has a world of ammunition and is shooting at you through the window!"

Another voice then, a muffled snarl of warning.

And on the sound John hunched to his knees, rose to a nearly upright position, pistol in hand. He could see now, through the upper branches; he saw a movement within, a shadowy, indistinct movement, and fired. A pane of glass pulverized, the figure in there shifted quickly; he shot again and his ball tore through the other of the two windows, he could see.

He dropped for shelter and cried out: "Stay back, Gorbels! I'll drill you, a'help me!"

He pressed his body against the stump, but the man inside did not reply, with words or gunfire. That silence descended again.

All manner of impulses, of hopes, of fears, a vast array of miscellaneous and conflicting emotions, surged through John. . . . Ellen, here with Gorbels! Ellen, under the same roof with a man who had nothing to lose but his liberty now! Why had she come? Why had Gorbels borne so straight for this place?

"Ellen!" he called, suddenly frantic. "You all right?"

"Right!" Her voice was fainter now, husked with tears.

The rifle spoke again, six barking shots, and on the last John leaped up. Two small windows flanked the cabin door on this, the western exposure.

He ran for the end of the building, sinking deeply, floundering and straining until he threw himself flat in the great drift at the corner. He wriggled close against the log wall, holding the pistol at ready, holding his breath, listening. No sound came to indicate that Gorbels had seen him close in.

John removed the snowshoes and crept along the wall, movements silent in the new snow, ducking low as he passed the near window, coming to a halt beside the door.

"Two!" he counted as the rifle crashed once more. . . . After another wait he could whisper "Three!" . . . And then "Four!"

Five and six shots, then, and spruce branches were clipped off and dropped and feet sounded on the cabin floor. . . .

And then John Belknap had his left hand on the latch, his shoulder to the stout door, was swinging it open. . . . No turning back now! He shoved with all his strength and the legs of the table which Gorbels had set across the entry rumbled on the planks as John pushed it sideways.

He had a look at a drawn and haggard face, stamped with terror and cruelty as Gorbels, rifle in one hand, the other outstretched for cartridges scattered on the cot, swung to face this intrusion.

"Drop it!" snapped Belknap. "Drop that gun!"

He knew what was coming before it started. He could have fired then and felled Gorbels in his tracks but he did not. He was no killer; not when the weapon in the other's hand was empty.

But an empty rifle is a weapon, nevertheless. He saw the quick bracing of Gorbels' feet, observed the short, sharp gesture with which he hurled the gun. He ducked, quite sure of himself, too sure of himself. The butt of the rifle missed his head as it sailed toward him, but the barrel, trailing, dropping as it came, rapped him across the skull.

It was a heavy blow. His cap was protection enough to turn it from a stunning shock to simple bewilderment for a second. . . . or a fractional second.

He fired as Gorbels rushed. He fired quickly, with intent to kill; but he fired blindly, too; was off balance when he squeezed. The bullet found some other mark and Gorbels was upon him, beating him down, sprawling over him as the pistol, knocked from John's grasp, skittered across the floor.

Locked together, they rolled over with a mighty threshing of legs, upsetting the table, coming to rest against it, John, head now cleared, on top, grappling for Gorbels' throat.

The body beneath him heaved and bowed. It was like steel, with the strength of desperation.

They were up again, locked once more, and John could feel ragged breath, hot on his cheek. He struck at the hand which groped for his throat. He stamped on Gorbels' feet.

They had an instant of blows, toe to toe, and then Gorbels was on John's throat. He tore at the locked grip and could not break it. He drove his knee upward and though the force lifted Gorbels from his feet his throttling hold did not weaken.

Things began to grow fuzzy, to darken. A buzzing sounded in his ears, growing louder. His legs went limp and he sagged to the floor, Gorbels leaned over him, both hands locked on John's throat, heedless of the other hands clawing at them. . . .

But a man with a job of work to do can't fail, can he? Not when failure means tragedy, can he? John Belknap struck hard; the blow landed squarely on Gorbels' mouth and John was free, with the sweet air flooding his throat, with the buzzing dying out, but as he rolled over the other kicked. His pace caught John in the side, threw him against the wall, knocking down an ax which was leaning there.

He was free, but Gorbels also was free, and scrambling toward the stove, stooping over to retrieve the pistol.

He gave a crow of triumph as he whirled, weapon in his hand. He brought the muzzle to its mark; but as he swung toward him, flung hastily and none too surely. A man on his knees cannot seize an ax and fling it all in one movement and be sure. . . .

But it was good enough. The tongue of flame spurted wide and Gorbels fell heavily as the ax head caught him full on the chin.

John was on his limp body in an instant. He had the hands crossed on the small of the man's back, pinned there by a knee as he stripped his own belt from his waist. He felt the other struggle slightly as he took the first hitch about those hands, and he struggled harder in a second. . . . but it did him no good. He might curse and threaten and thresh the floor with his body. He was bound securely. He was through!

CHAPTER XIV.

John found her cowering against the wall. He lifted her slowly to her feet.

"It's all right, Ellen!" he said gently. "It's all over!"

He led her out into the wrecked room, which showed Paul Gorbels, bound hand and foot in a chair, leaning forward, sobbing, straining with futile movements against his bonds.

The man looked up then. He stared at them with glazed eyes.

"That's what you wanted!" he croaked. "That's what you wanted!" nodding at them as they stood, John supporting the girl by an arm about her shoulders. "That's why you came, eh?"

"No, Gorbels. I didn't know, or it would have been why. I came with a warrant that Nat Bradshaw tried to serve. And there'll be another for you by now. For murder, maybe, Gorbels."

"Murder? Murder?" His voice was shrill and he wrenched his wrists against the unyielding belt. "No, no! That can't be. . . . No murder! Mistake! Mistake, I tell you, Belknap! D—n mistake!"

"Tell you"—licking his lips. "I'll tell you. . . . I'll trade with you, Belknap. . . . John, I'll trade. You got her now. . . . She's yours, when she knows. . . . I'll trade you what I know for this warrant you talk about!"

He was panting, as if just in from an exhausting foot race. "Tell you, John. . . . I'll trade. Yes, she's what you want; she's more than anything else to you. More'n a warrant. . . . More'n anything. . . . Let me loose. . . . I'll tell you everything."

"I'm not going to untie you, Gorbels," John said evenly while he watched as one fascinated the play of desperation on that wretched countenance and felt Ellen press closer to him.

"Oh, yes, you will!" Tears sprang to Gorbels' eyes. "I'll give you all you want now, for just a moment's start! I'll go away; I'll stay. . . . I'll never bother you again. You can go to your father then, and tell him you found out what he couldn't. Great man, old Tom; smart. But you'll be smarter than he."

He licked his lips again.

"See? It'll give you prestige; that's what you want now. . . . after Ellen, there. Prestige with the old man! Yes. That's it! You can tell him how I crossed him up. North Star Lumber company? Ever hear of it? That's me; Paul Gorbels. . . . Dummy company in St. Paul. I got the good grades of lumber at cut prices, see? I paid with notes at the Belknap & Gorbels bank in Kampfest. I took it all, every dime. Belknap & Gorbels had been insolvent in another year if it hadn't been for you. . . . When old Tom got suspicious we forged inspector's reports and changed car numbers on him. He couldn't check up. North Star looks great on paper; St. Paul banks like us. But it was me. . . . all me! See? Your finding out'll make a hit with him!"

He laughed shrilly.

"Arson? . . . Arson, John? Got that warrant? Give it to me now. . . . I've come clean; you give me a break. . . ."

"Oh, don't! Don't let him go on!" Ellen whispered.

She buried her face on John's chest, and he gathered her close, turning his back to Gorbels whose chin now sagged low as he sobbed hoarsely.

"Hold it!" he whispered, mouth against her ear. "Hold it, old fellow! It's an ordeal but—"

"But worth it!" She caught up his word and lifted her face to look into his. "Anything's worth it. . . . to know. . . . oh, John, John! How could I ever have believed it? What a silly, blind girl I—"

She might have said more had his lips not stopped her words. They stood so in that first, long kiss.

They did not hear the opening of the door, did not see Wolf Richards' amazed and truculent gaze sweep his room with its littered floor, the smashed chair, did not see him stare at Paul Gorbels nor at them.

But as he stepped in and stamped snow from his feet they sprang apart, wheeling toward him.

"S all right!" he yelled. "S all right! Don't mind me, young uns! H—i to pay here, I see! Place ruined! Paul Gorbels under my roof where I'd never have him. Tied up, too, which means somethin'! But's all right! S all right! Nothin' matters but what ails you two, for sure! Nothin' else matters a-tall!"

It was evening when that strange feat, John Belknap in the lead, Wolf Richards behind him, dogs and toboggan with its bundled burden next and Ellen walking in the trail they made.

The town swarmed about them until John had to call on others to clear the way. . . .

Night, then, and wires commenced to sing and the next morning's newspapers told the story in bold headlines for Harrington to read in the Belknap Lumber company offices, for others to read the world over; some in a Paris hotel.

Harrington could not get John the first dozen times he called because the boy, with Ellen in the corridor outside, sat at the bedside where Nat Bradshaw fought for his life.

"Tell them I'll answer no 'phone calls," he whispered to Ellen. "That goes until Nat is . . . until a change comes. . . ."

And so other telephone calls had time to be made, even calls which spanned the ocean.

It was evening before the doctor, who had leaned over the bed with such concentration for so many minutes, this time, straightened with a sigh.

"You mean he's going to make it?" John whispered.

The head on the pillow moved; the eyes opened and looked up at them, blinking. . . .

"Course, Johnny," Nat whispered. "Sure thing. . . ."

And then a boy could be free to ease a distracted central, to sit in the hospital office and converse in Harrington's methodical way of conversation.

"I guess the newspapers had it all, then," he said, after he had listened for long. "I'm all right; Nat's going to live; we're all set here and I guess you've spent enough on tolls."

"Tolls! Wait until you see the toll bill for a talk I've had with your father today!"

"What! You talked to—? Is he back?" "Back nothing! He's in Paris and read the bulletin in the Herald's edition over there. He got me on the wire and, luckily, the afternoon editions were coming off so I could give him some details. He says, first that he's on his way home on the next boat. Next, he wants me to read you a letter case. . . . well, in case a cathedral fell on him. . . . well, in case a cathedral fell on him. . . . was the way he put it. It's dated in December, the day he left. He wrote it just before you came in from Witch Hill, I guess."

"This is it: 'Dear Johnny—If you read this it will be because the doctors overlooked a lot of shakes and blowdowns when they cruised my insides two weeks ago. I've kept my mouth shut about being under the weather; time enough to worry folks when there's a cause, especially your mother. They tell me that three months of rest will put me spry again. I hope they're right for a lot of reasons, but only one of them frets me much. . . .'

"This is because if I hit the grade for the last time now you are going to beat me to finding out just how big a monkey I've been made in the Kampfest operation. Yes, son, things are wrong up there. I guess you were right in your estimate of Gorbels. For over a year I've been certain that a plenty is being put over on us. I can't run it

down now; that is a job for a well man. I'm going to get well so I can fix what I broke."

"If there's one thing I've prided myself on it was the pickin' of men. I took Gorbels on first, because he had a hold on just the layout you and I needed for the Big Job; and, second, because—spite of all of you—he looked good to me."

"There are some men who can admit mistakes, but a Belknap hates to. When we have to, though, we want to do it ourselves and not have somebody else finding out what fools we've been. Besides, any man with a son like you wants to be able to turn over the works to him without any messes to clean up. I don't even want you to guess that there's a mess until I get it fixed up. Then I can tell you and save my face. That is straining a point, perhaps, but if you ever have the sort of a son you should have—such a son as you are to me—you'll get the idea that the admiration and respect of a boy will keep his old dad hustling to be worthy of them."

"And, above all, you must realize this: That an old man has a devil of a time playing up to what a father of a son like you should be. I'm so proud of you it keeps me awake nights. Good luck; God bless you. . . . TOM."

Harrington paused. His voice had shaken a trifle on the last.

John blinked his eyes and cleared his throat with a brave, long hur-rump!

"I'll . . . I'll . . ." he began. "I guess I'll be d—d—weakly."

"But you should have heard him cheer, clear across the Atlantic, when I told him what the afternoon papers said about all the double-crossing you'd forced Gorbels to confess."

"And he said for you to stay right there in Kampfest and run the job and that he was coming to ask for a chance to help—that's just what he said: To ask for a chance to help—as fast as boats and trains can bring him. Says that he feels fit as a fiddle and had already booked passage two weeks earlier than he'd intended to. You can use your own judgment, of course, but I don't know as I'd make any important changes until he gets here."

John reached out for Ellen's hand.

"How long will it take him?" he asked, commencing to smile.

"Why, not long; ten days, say."

"Ten days! Don't you call that long?" "What's that?"—leaning closer to the phone as the wire went bad for a moment. "Oh. . . . the job! Sure, the job can stagger along for ten days without any changes. But there are other things up here, Harrington, so important that they make the job look like a joke. . . . And ten days? Man, for these other things, ten days is ages. . . . and ages. . . . and ages. . . ."

THE END.

Be sure and attend the mass meeting to be held tonight in the Beaverton high school auditorium. It is the duty of every citizen who has the welfare of Beaverton at heart to be present.

NOTICE OF SHERIFF'S SALE
On Foreclosure of Mortgage in the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon for the county of Washington.

C. T. Geen and Annette Geen, plaintiffs, vs. Jacob B. Hayward (unmarried), Mrs. F. H. Phillips, Miss T. C. Hayward, heirs at law of Jacob B. Hayward, and all other parties and heirs at law unknown claiming through or thereunder, Defendants.

Notice is hereby given that by virtue of an execution, judgment decree and order of sale, duly issued out of and under the seal of the above entitled court on the 17th day of August, 1933, upon a judgment rendered and entered in said court on the 17th day of August, 1933, in favor of C. T. Geen and Annette Geen, plaintiffs, and against Jacob B. Hayward, Mrs. F. H. Phillips, Miss T. C. Hayward, heirs at law of Jacob B. Hayward, and all other parties and heirs at law unknown, claiming through or thereunder, and against the real property as hereinafter described, for the sum of \$100 with interest thereon since August 22nd, 1932 at rate of 8% per annum, and the further sum of \$50 attorney fees, and the further sum of \$98.02 costs and disbursements, and the costs of said sale and said writ commanding said sale of all the following bounded and described real property, situated in Washington county, state of Oregon, to wit: All of the north eighty eight (88) feet of Lot numbered five (5) of Block lettered "B" of "Reaworth Gardens" as shown by the records of said county and state.

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of said execution, judgment, decree and order of sale, and in compliance with the order of said writ, I will on the eighteenth day of September, 1933 at the hour of 10 o'clock in the forenoon of said day at the east door of court house of said county at Hillsboro, Oregon, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash in hand, all the right, title, and interest which the above named defendants or any of them have in said real property at the date of plaintiff's mortgage, or thereafter or now have in said premises, to satisfy said execution, judgment, decree, and order of sale, interest and costs. Said sale being made subject to redemption privilege as per Oregon statute.

G. A. Cobb, Beaverton, Oregon, attorney for plaintiffs, dated this 17th day of August, 1933.

J. W. Connell, Sheriff of Washington County, Oregon.

Date of first publication, August 18th, 1933.

Date of last publication, September 15th, 1933. adv c-38-42

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT

In the County Court of the State of Oregon for Washington County In the Matter of the Estate of George W. Miller, deceased.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned administrator of the estate of George W. Miller, deceased, has filed his final account and report as such administrator in the County Court of the State of Oregon for Washington County, and that said final account and report has been set for final hearing and settlement before said court at the court room thereof in Hillsboro, Oregon, on Monday, September 11, 1933, at 10 o'clock a.m. of said day.

Dated and first published, August 11, 1933.

Date of last publication, Sept. 8, 1933.

George W. Taylor, Administrator of the Estate of George W. Miller, deceased.

M. B. Rump, residence and address, Hillsboro, Oregon, Attorney for said Estate. adv. c-37-41

SUMMONS

In the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon for Washington County Walter P. C. Bailey, Plaintiff, vs. Claudine Joyce Bailey, Defendant To Claudine Joyce Bailey, of the above named defendants:

IN THE NAME OF THE STATE OF OREGON you are hereby required to appear and answer the complaint filed against you in the above entitled court and suit on or before the last day of the time prescribed in the order for publication of this summons, to-wit: On or before the expiration of four weeks next from and after the date of said first publication of this summons, being on August 11, 1933, and if you fail so to appear and answer, the plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief prayed for in his said complaint, to-wit: That the marriage contract now

existing between plaintiff and defendant be dissolved, and that he have such other and further relief as to the Court may appear equitable.

This summons is served upon you by publication by order of Hon. Geo. R. Bagley, Judge of the above entitled Court, which order was made and dated at Hillsboro, Oregon, August 8, 1933.

D. D. Rump, Attorney for plaintiff, P. O. Address: Forest Grove, Oregon, Box 12. adv 37-41

BEAVERTON LODGE NO. 100, A. F. & A. M.—Regular evening, September 7. Members and visitors are urged to attend.—By order of the W. M. L. D. SHELLINGER, Sec.

Be sure and attend the mass meeting to be held tonight in the Beaverton high school auditorium. It is the duty of every citizen who has the welfare of Beaverton at heart to be present. If it's in the Review, it is true.

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