

Tim Topples Three in Daring Display

LOVE, ROMANCE WEAVE IN QUEST FOR J'VILLE GOLD

By JAMES L. STRAIGHT
One assumes that for lack of enough Gunga Dins and Napoleons and Marco Polos old Dad Time must find most of his amusement in contemplation of just plain folks.

I can see him now, holding a bubbling test tube instead of an hour glass. A bad case of palsy keeps the concoction stirred up plenty, but when in a whimsical mood the patriarch gives the glass an egg-beater movement, even he can't tell what's going to happen until it's all over.

He purses his lips in an anxious frown and lowers his shaggy white brows over the brew. He studies omens and occult signs of mystic portent. Then, with a last dexterous flirt of the wrist and a shrill "By Cracky!" he unwinds the story of Tim O'Farrell and Narcissus Deane and Molly Gould just the way it all happened in the quaint old mining camp of Jacksonville, Oregon.

Prosaciously he first conjures out of his test tube a scene close to the railroad tracks in the nearby city of Medford. A traveling carnival had brought its smells and color and noise to the spot for a week's stand. It was early spring of 1933.

"Oooh!" the crowd was murmuring, as the young prospector, Tim O'Farrell, with one calloused hand and crowbar arm flailed with a heavy sledge like a charwoman beating carpets, and rang the bell at the top of the tall standard until some might have thought a locomotive was approaching the crossroads.

Tim had his left arm nonchalantly around the slim waist of Narcissus Deane.

Not until the crowd "Oooh'd" a fifth time did Narcissus decide they had seen enough. Tim turned with a grin at the tug on his shoulder, his gray eyes meeting her admiring gaze.

"Had enough of this?" he asked. "Yes, dear. Let's go see the hula dancer."

"They don't allow women in there, honey."

"I know, but you can get me in, can't you?" She pouted beautifully, and put her painted fingertips together expressively. "I've always wanted to see what those girls do that's worth 25 cents for a look." Narcissus laughed lightly. Narcissus never giggled, like most girls of her 21 years. She was the only daughter of Sam Deane, the Medford lumber and fruit millionaire. The only real heiress between Sacramento and Portland. Her lissome height brought her taffy-yellow hair to Tim's shoulder; her gowns and cars were always in the latest mode. Such a girl couldn't giggle. But she could give way to a melodious, girlish laugh, as it sounded to Tim. He was, as usual, captivated to her whim.

"Well, you stand at one side of the ticket box and then come in just behind me," he instructed, thinking, if she doesn't see this show there won't be any show.

The ticket taker saw a bit of skirt just a second before Tim's ham-like paw closed over his face. It was a hushing gesture certain to produce the desired effect. The finger and thumb marks showed white against the carnival man's tan.

Inside, twenty or thirty men were jostling about a roped rectangle that resembled a prize-fighting ring and, at the crash of a cymbal, the dancer scampered in. She was young and, if not beautiful, displayed a well-rounded torso and tanned, smoothly muscled legs to the circle of observant eyes. Her grass skirt parted at coveted intervals as she began her seductive dance, revealing more of the warm brown skin above her knees. Soon, as the notes of her accompanist's melodian gained tempo, her art had brought the pounding of pulses of most of the spectators into time with her undulations.

Each smooth, suggestive movement further whetted the nerves of the mine laborers, prospectors, lumbermen and nondescript transients grouped about her. Some betrayed their rising temperatures with stifled exclamations and heightened color. One fellow leaned a hand casually on the rope line and puffed his cigarette coolly, but another, completely entranced as his starved senses drank in the rare sight before him, his eyes fixed on the moving line of white

skin where a purple breech cloth joined the tan of the girl's legs, clutched the rope with both hands until his cigarette burned his lips and was spat to the ground with a curse.

As the dance went on the men, at first wide-eyed and inarticulate, gradually passed the almost hypnotic effect of the dancer's overture and were able to exchange snickering comments. One shouted "faster, gal, faster!" Another wheezed, "Mammy!" A teamster heaved a stentorian sigh and exclaimed, "Jesus! I'd shore want a surisingle on that one!"

So keenly aware of the wisp of femininity clinging to his side, Tim himself was grinning sheepishly until the teamster made his comment just in front of the couple. Narcissus must have heard, thought Tim. She was looking up at him expectantly. His breath quickened, and he laid a trap-like grip on the teamster's right shoulder, almost pulling the burly fellow over backward.

"Keep your dirty mouth shut when a lady's around," he muttered through clenched teeth into the teamster's startled face.

Jerking loose, the teamster turned half around, out of Tim's grip, and shoved heavily toward the young prospector. A tent stake tripped him and he fell to one knee, suddenly burning with anger.

"Get outside, Honey," he flung at Narcissus as he rushed back at the teamster, who was now ready for him with powerful flats doubled just in front of his belt.

"I didn't know they was a lady in here, Partner," he said to Tim, "but people don't shove me around like that."

There wasn't anything a man could do about that, Tim felt, but start swinging. His first right-hander, planned before his bound out of the sawdust, missed his opponent's face and in a whistling arc bruised two bystanders who hadn't yet turned around. Tim had rushed with such force that his elbow alone struck the teamster in the jaw, but it dropped the big fellow like a slaughtered lamb.

Accounting for the teamster merely opened the problem. The two whose necks had received a heavy share of Tim's opening attack were bristling with anger. Both leaped at once. One was caught midair on Tim's hard left fist which had logically gotten into action as he pivoted his weight to his right foot, and the other, a second later, received the full impact of the lithe giant's next right-hand blow.

Three men beaten into insensibility and suffering severe contusions about the head, their assailant escaping, the paper said next day.

Narcissus, gushing with curiosity, was waiting for Tim at an eating stand a short distance from the sideshow. She saw him when he parted the tent flaps and walked out, rubbing his knuckles, and she waved to him. He walked rapidly over to the stand and said, "Let's get out of here."

"Oh no, Tim!" she protested. "Let's wait and see some more fun."

Tim shot her a puzzled glance, and was silent.

The two ordered sandwiches and sat down at the counter, half turning to watch the sideshow entrance. Soon men were seen helping the teamster and the others out of the tent, all three still pale and bleeding.

"Tim! You hurt three of them." Narcissus blanched. The sight of blood sickened her.

"Yeah, I'm sorry it happened, now. But I couldn't let that fellow get away with what he said."

"Tim, what is a surisingle?"

Tim laughed drily. "It's a kind of harness for a horse, Narcissus."

Tim was more silent as he drove Narcissus home that night than he ever had been on a similar opportunity for lusty flirtation. Narcissus, sensing that she had made a tactical error if she expected to keep her hold on Tim O'Farrell, figuratively shrugged her shoulders and reflected that he'd be calling for the dance next Saturday night, all right. "As if she could keep him out of fights!"

There were no jocular remarks that night about the wheeze and metallic clamping with which Tim's little roadster came to a stop at the entrance to the walk that led up to the Deane mansion. If it were ever possible for Tim's laughing, mobile features to simulate deep meditation they were doing it now. Leaving his engine running in contrast to his habit of waiting for several goodnight kisses. Tim stolidly rested his chin in his left hand, the elbow on the

"Tim, you look for all the world like Rodin's Thinker," said Narcissus, after a moment of silence, "only more so. Did you get hurt?"

"No, I guess not. Guess I just don't feel very well, honey." Tim hadn't had time to assort his emotions, if he was capable of doing so. He wasn't used to the mixed feelings that suddenly had come between him and Narcissus' allures. The dryness in his tone and the glint in his eyes were not affected consciously. They rose from wells of instinct beyond his knowledge. He only knew that somehow he was hurt worse than those fellows at the carnival.

His silence, attributed by Narcissus to "plain dumbness," hurried the evening's separation with a stiff "I'll be seeing you."

As Tim's roadster sputtered over the five miles of pavement leading west from Medford to the old mining camp of Jacksonville, and thence two miles farther west to his mining property and cabin, his thoughts turned somberly in the direction in which he was traveling.

Three years had passed since he had taken up the driving of the narrow exploration tunnel upon old man Thorpe's death, just after the two had crossed a huge vein of lowgrade gold-bearing quartz deep in the mountain. Tim had followed the vein for many hundred feet, pounding with his drilling sledge and scanty supplies of powder to bore like a gopher along one side of the big, promising ledge.

Tim was in search of highgrade. Some of the fabulously rich stuff for which the Jacksonville district is famous. He wasn't much interested in the big zones of \$5 and \$6 rock he was opening up. Recognized their ultimate value, yes; but nowadays a man had to have highgrade to get capital interested. Especially in a district where no big lowgrade producers had yet been made.

Weary months that would have tried the patience of an Indian hermit had created the thousands of drill holes which, when filled with dynamite, had helped blast away fragments of the tunnel face. Tim used to say his fingernails would grow faster than that blank wall of quartz and porphyry wore away. But he kept on. "Just a few feet farther and—" Oh, he had his dreams, alright.

Down in the musty depths of the mine, after a turn of the vein had one day bereft him of the glimpse of daylight at the tunnel entrance, Tim had worked on with a vision of a slender, fair haired girl floating in the clouds of rock dust and damp air before his eyes.

Old Axel Hanson, long shanks perpetually bowed to keep his skull cap from scraping the tunnel roof, held the steel for Tim's crunching blows. Maybe 10,000 such blows had fallen on the steel drill while Axel steadied it and turned it in a strong grasp just behind his right ear, until that flapping organ retained little utility. The lanky Nordic drew no regular pay. He and Tim were a rare combination of friend and acknowledged boss.

Axel, though he scarcely went to town once a month, knew about Narcissus. One noon her roadster had dived on the steep pitch to the cabin and he had seen Tim light up like a flash of black powder when the girl sounded her horn outside. If Axel approved of her, his watery blue eyes set deeply in a leathery, enigmatic countenance gave no sign. He merely bent lower over his plate of brown beans and seemed determined to make the noise of his spooning and

relishing down the sound of laughter outside, and especially obliterate those moments of low-pitched conversation in which he knew were intimacies not intended for his ears.

Mornings, before the sun was visible over the Cascade peaks to the east, Tim and Axel would bolt their coarse breakfasts and, shouldering heavy tools, trudge up the mountain to the portal. There they would stop to blow up a smouldering forge, point a few drills on the iron block that served as an anvil, duck the drills in a tempering barrel, light their carbide lamps and tramp back into the dark tunnel with a new burden of drills that had been sharpened on the previous morning.

No matter how new Axel's denim-breeches might be, they never whistled when he walked into the mine tunnel. His long strides, with knees bent and bowed outward, kept the hard cloth well apart and at the same time lowered his forehead away from hanging rocks.

Thus Axel always appeared to be sneaking up on something, and perhaps he was. Silent as a deserted stamp mill regarding his own thoughts, he often betrayed his burning interest in what last night's "shot" might have revealed. No matter how Tim hurried, laughing often to himself at the idea of having a race back to see the shattered tunnel breast, Axel's 60 hard years never weighed so heavily on his high, gaunt shoulders that he failed to somehow reach the tunnel breast first. He would be picking around in the face and debris at its foot like a mother hen when Tim strode up.

For two weeks after the carnival left town, Axel had a problem on his mind that might as well have been an Euclidian nightmare

for all the chance he had to solve it. After two years of weekly or semi-weekly "dates," Tim had apparently quit Narcissus cold or else the reverse was true.

Yet that didn't end the riddle. Tim had always been working for the sake of Narcissus! In the midst of the most grueling toil, when he and Axel were wrestling a timber into place or trying desperately for hours to stay a rock slide in the tunnel, Tim had evidently been buoyed on by thoughts of the "Deane girl," mentioning her name in some light-hearted reminiscence just after a sliding rock had taken most of the skin off one angle, or right while they were clipping fuses and concentration on the task in hand might save an eye or a life from the horrors of later driving a pick into an unexploded charge of dynamite.

No, Axel calculated methodically, there was something peculiar here. For with a lover's quarrel in full blast and a spell of abject dependency or reckless rebellion clearly in order, Tim only worked the harder! His heavy sledge would ring on the steel over Axel's shoulder until their rocky cubicle roared and sparks flashed and ricocheted off the hewn walls in a

steady stream. It was as if the young giant were trying to prove to the mocking rock his power and might; or to gut the mountain of all its mighty riches by sheer force.

For three Saturday nights Tim missed the dance and then worked on Sunday. Once before, when Narcissus had failed to invite him to her birthday party, which was being attended by eastern friends, Tim had retaliated by going to the miners' dance at Jacksonville as a stag. He had had two fights that night and nearly landed in jail for drunkenness. That was bad, thought Axel, but it was a worthy sign that something different was wrong now.

(To be continued)

A man is advertising in the Kansas City Star for an honest lawyer; but does he imagine that any lawyer would want such a fool for a client?—Weston Leader.

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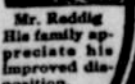
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