



Illustrations
PAUL ROBINSON

edwin legrand sabin

CHAPTER IX.
I Don't Want to Kill Him

One night after we had gone on some time, the sound of revolver shots burst flatly from a mess beyond us, but the shots were accompanied by laughter.

"They're only tryin' to spile a can," Jenks reassured. "By golly, we'll go over and larn 'em a lesson." He glanced at me. "Time you loosened up that weepin' o' yours, anyhow. Purty soon it'll stick fast."

I went with him glad of diversion. The men were banging, by turn, at a sardine can set up on the sand about twenty paces out. The heavy balls sent the loose soil flying but amidst the furrows the tin can sat untouched.

"What you thinkin' to do," Jenks smiled. "Hit that can or plant a lead mine."

"Give him room! He's made his brag," they cried, "and if he don't plug it the pilgrim sure will."

Mr. Jenks drew and took his stand;

banged with small preparation and missed by six inches—a fact that brought him up wide awake.

"Gimme another try, boys," he growled, but they shoved him aside. No, no. Pilgrim's turn!

Willy-nilly I had to demonstrate my greenness so I drew, and stood, and cocked, and aimed. The Colt's exploded with prodigious blast and wrench—jerked, in fact, almost above my head; and where the bullet went I did not see, nor, I judged, did anybody else.

"He missed the 'arth!' they clamored.

"No; I reckon he hit Montany 'bout the middle. That's whar he scored center!"

"Hold down on it, hold down, lad," Jenks urged. "To hit him in the heart aim at his feet! Here! Like this—" and taking my revolver he threw it forward, fired. The can plinked and somersaulted, lashin' in to action.

"By George," he proclaimed, "when I move like it had a gun in its fist, I

can snap it! But when I think on it as a can, I lack guts!"

"By onebody else shot, and somebody else, and another, and the can gyrated, spurring us to haste as it constantly changed the range. Presently it was merely a twist of ragged tin.

Then in the little silence, as we passed, a voice spoke irritatingly.

"I 'laow yu fellers ain't no great shucks at throwin' lead."

Daniel stood by, with arms akimbo, and beside stood My Lady. He towered over her in a maddening atmos-

phere of proprietorship.

She smiled at me—at all of us; at me, swiftly at the rest; frankly. And I knew that she was afraid!

Daniel laughed boisterously, his mouth widely open.

"Set me up a can! That thar one wouldn't jump to a bullet."

A can was produced.

"How fur?"

"Fur as yu like."

It was tossed contemptuously out, and watching it I heard Daniel gleefully yelp, "Out o' my way, yu-all!"—half saw his hand dart down and up again, felt the jar of a shot, witnessed the can jump like a live thing; and away it went, with spasm after spasm, to explosion after explosion, tortured by him into fruitless capers until with the final ball peace came to it, and it lay dead, afar across the twilight sand.

Verily, by his cries and utter savagery and malevolence of his bombardment, one would have thought that he took actual lust in fancied cruelty.

"I 'laow thar's not another man hyar kin do that," he yanted.

There was not, judging by the sil-

ence again ensuing. Only—

"A can's different from a man," Jenks coolly remarked. "A can don't shoot back."

"I don't 'laow any man's goin' to, neither," Daniel faced me in turning away. "That's somethin' for yu to larn, young feller," he vouchsafed.

His gaze shifted.

"Come along, Edna," he bade. "We'll be goin' back."

A devil—or was it he himself?—twittered me, incited me, and in a moment, with a gush of assertion, there I was, saying to her, my hat doffed:

"I'll walk over with you."

"Do," she responded readily. "We're to have singing."

The men stared. Daniel whirled.

"I 'laow yu ain't been invited, Mister."

"If Mrs. Montoyo consents, that's enough," I informed. "I'm not walking with you, sir; I am walking with her. The only ground you control is just in front of your own wagon."

"Thar ain't no 'Mrs. Montoyo,'" he snarled. "And whilst yu're larnin' to shoot yu'd better be larnin' manners. Yu comin' with me, Edna?"

"As fast as I can, and with Mr. Beeson also, if he chooses," said she. "I have my manners in mind too."

"By gosh, I don't walk with ye," he jawed. And he flounced about, vengefully striding on as though punishing her for a misdemeanor.

She dropped the men a little curtsy. "The entertainment is concluded, gentlemen. I wish you good-night."

Yet underneath her rallery there lay an appeal, the stronger because subtle and unvoiced. It seemed to me every man must appreciate that, as a woman, she invoked protection by him against an impending something, of which she had given him a glimpse.

So we left them somewhat subdued, gazing after us, their rugged faces sobered reflectively.

Daniel was angrily shouldering for the Mormon wagons, his indignant figure black against the western glow. She laughed lightly.

"You're not afraid, after all, I see."

"Not of him, madam."

"And of me?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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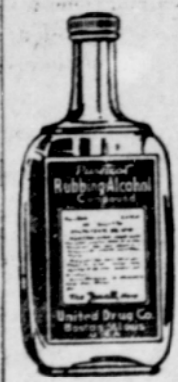
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