



Chapter 9 Continued

"I think I'm more afraid for you," I confessed. "That clown is getting insufferable. He sets out to bully you."

"I'm afraid, too," she breathed. "I never have been afraid before. I didn't fear Montoyo. I've always been able to take care of myself."

"You have your revolver?" I suggested.

"No. I haven't. It's disappeared. Mormon women don't carry revolvers."

"But you're not a Mormon woman."

"Not yet." She caught quick breath. "Do you know," she queried with sudden glance, "that Daniel means to marry me?"

"But you're not free; you have a husband!"

"Oh!" she cried. "why don't you learn to shoot? Won't you? Let me have your pistol, please."

"You must grasp the handle firmly; cover it with your whole palm, but don't squeeze it to death; just grip it evenly—tuck it away. And keep your elbow down; and crook your wrist, in a drop, until our trigger knuckle is pointing very low—at a man's feet if you're aiming for his heart!"

"At his feet, for his heart?" I stammered. The words had an ugly sound.

"Certainly. We are seeking of shooting now, and not at a tin can! You have to allow for the jump of the muzzle. Unless you hold it down with your wrist, you over shoot; and it's the first shot that counts. Of course, there's a feel, a knack. But don't aim with your eyes. You won't have time. Men file off the front sight—it sometimes catches, in the draw. And its useless, anyway. They fire as they point with the finger, by the feel. You see, they know. Some men are born to shoot straight; some have to practice a long, long while. I wonder which you are!"

"If there is pressing need in my case," said I, "I shall have to rely upon my friends."

"Those gentlemen of yours are Gentiles with goods for Salt Lake Mormons," she retorted. "Are they going to throw all business to the winds?"

"You yourself may appeal to his father, and to the women, for protection if that lout annoys you. I ventured."

"To them?" she scoffed. "To Hyrum Adams' outfit? why, they're good Mormons, and why should I not be made over? I'm under their teaching; it's time Daniel had a wife—or two, for replenishing Utah."

She paused. Then resumed.

"But now if I may lend you a little something to keep you from being shot like a dog, I'll fee as though I had wiped out your score against me. Take your gun." I took it. "There he is. Cover him!"

"Where?" I asked. "Who?"

"There, before you! Oh, anybody! Think of his heart and cover him."

"See that little rock? Hit it!"

I fired. The sand obscured the rock. She clapped her hands, delighted.

"You would have killed him. No—he would have killed you. Quick! Give it to me!"

And snatching the revolver she cocked, leveled and fired instantly. The rock split into fragments.

"I would have killed him," she murmured, gazing tense, seeing I knew not what. Wrenching from the vision she handed back the revolver to me.

"I think you are going to do, Sir. Only, you must learn to draw. I mustn't stay longer. Shall we go to the fire now? I am cold."

We walked almost without speaking, to the Hyrum Adams fire. Daniel lifted his upper lip at me as we entered; his eyes never wandered from my face I was distinctly unwelcome. Accordingly, I said a civil "Good-evening" to Hyrum and raising my hat to My Lady left for my own balliwick. Friend Jenks joined me.

"We were keepin' cases on you, and so was he. He saw that practice—damn, how he did crane! she was givin' you pointers, eh?"

"Yes; she wanted amusement."

Jenks rocked to and fro, as we sat by the fire. "Hell! Wall, if you got to kill him you got to kill him and do it proper. For if you don't kill him he'll kill you; snuff you out like a wall, you saw that can travel."

"I don't want to kill him," I pleaded.

"Why should I?"

Jenks sat silent; and setting silent I foresaw that kill Daniel I must. I

was being sucked into it, irrevocably willed by him, by her, by them all. If I did not kill him in defense of myself I should kill him in defense of her.

Could this really be I? Frank Beeson, not a fortnight ago still living at a jog trot in dear Albany, New York State? It was puzzling how detached and how strong I felt.

Into the Night CHAPTER X

A meeting between My Lady and me brought on, not longer after, the expected crisis. As we talked, suddenly I saw Daniel nearing, striding rapidly, straight for us, a figure portentous in the fading glow, bringing the storm with him.

She saw, too. Her eyes widened, startled, surveying not him, but me.

"Please go. I'll keep him."

"It is too late now," I asserted, in a voice not mine. "I am here first and I'll go when I get ready."

"You mean to face him? I knew it. You will play the man! Watch him close! He'll give you little grace this time. But remember this: I'll never, never, never, marry him. Rather than be bound to his I'll deal with him myself!"

"It won't be necessary, madam," said I—a catch in my throat; for while I was all iciness and clamminess, my hands cold and my tongue dry, I felt that I was going to kill him.

Daniel charged in for us. I did not touch revolver butt; he did not. He barked first at her.

"Go whar yu belong, yu Jezebel! Then I'll tend to this—" The rabid epithet leveled at me I shall not repeat.

"Be careful what you say, Daniel. No man on this earth can speak to me like that."

All his face flushed livid with a sneer, merging together yellow freckles and tanned skin.

"Can't, Can't he? I kin an' I do. Now yu git. I've stood yore fast-an-loose plenty. I mean business. Git! Whar yu'll be safe. I'll not hold off much longer."

"No more of that, you brute," I roared. "If you have anything to say, say it to me."

He whirled.

"Yu! Why, yu leetle piece o' nothin'—you shut up!" By sudden reach he gripped her arm; to her sharp, short scream he thrust her about.

"Git! I'm boss hyar." And at me: "What yu goin' to do?" She's promised to me. Git, yerself, or I'll stomp on yu like a louse!"

I forgot instructions, I disregarded every movement preliminary to the onset! Bullets were too slow and easy!

I did not see his revolver; I saw but the hulk of him and the intolerable sneer of him, and that his flesh was ready for my fingers.

And quicker than his hand I was upon him, into him, clinching him,

clinging to him, arms binding him, legs twining around his, each ounce of me greedily to crush him down and master him.

The shock drove him backward. We swayed staggered, grappling hither and thither. I had his arms pinioned, to bend him. He spat in my face; and shifting, set his teeth into my shoulder so that they clamped like the teeth of a horse, through shirt and hide to the flesh.

We toppled together, came to the ground with a thump. Here we churned, while he flung me and still I stuck.

The acrid dust of the alkali enveloped us. Again he spat, fetid—sprawled upon him, smothering his falling arms; gave him all my weight and strength; smelled the sweat of him, snarled into his snarling face, close beneath mine.

Once he partially freed himself and buffeted me in the mouth with his fist, but I caught him—while struggling, tossed and upheaved, dimly saw that by a miracle we were surrounded by a ring of people, men and women, their countenances pale, alarmed, intent. Voices sounded in a dull roar.

Presently I had him crucified: his one outstretched arm under my knees, his other arm teathed by my two hands, my body across his chest, while his legs threshed vainly.

I looked down into his bulging eyes. "Nuf. Cry 'Nuf!'" I commanded.

"Nuf! Say 'Nuf,'" echoed the crowd.

He strained again, convulsive; and relaxed.

"Nuff!" he panted through bared teeth. "Lemme up, Mister."

"That settles it!"

"I said 'Nuf,'" he growled.

With a quick movement I sprang clear of him, to my feet. He lay for a moment, baleful, and slowly scrambled up.

On a sudden, as he faced me, his hand shot downward—I heard the surge and shout of men and women, to the stunning report of his revolver ducked aside, felt my left arm jerk and sting—felt my own gun explode in my hand (and how it came there I did not know—beheld him spin around and collapse; an astonishing sight.

So there I stood, amidst silence, gaping foolishly, breathing hard, my revolver smoking in my fingers and my enemy in a shockingly prone posture at my feet, gradually reddening the white of the torn soil.

He was upon his face, his revolver hand outflung. He was harmless. The moment had arrived and passed. I was standing here alive. I had killed him!

Figures rushed in between. Hands grasped me, impelled me away, through a haze; voices spoke in my ear while I feebly resisted, a warm salty taste in my throat.

"I killed him. I didn't want to kill upon him, into him, clinching him, him. He made me do it. He shot

first."

"Yes, yes," they said, soothing gruffly. "Shore he did; shore you didn't. It's all right. Come along, come along."

Then—

"Pick Beeson up. He's had hurt himself. See that blood? No, tain't his arm, is it? He's bleedin' internal. Whar's the hole? Wait—he's busted something."

They would have carried me.

"No," I cried, while their bearded faces swam. "He said 'Nuf'—he shot me afterward. Not bad, is it? I can walk."

As they hustled me onward the world had grown curiously darkened, and I dumbly wondered whether I was dying myself. Across a great distance we stumbled by the wagons and halted at a fire.

"You're all right," Jenks apparently had looked me over and was ministering to me. "Swallow this."

The odor of whiskey fumed into my nostrils. I obediently swallowed. Hands were rummaging at my left arm; a bandage being wound about.

"Did I kill him?" I besought. "Not that! I didn't aim—I don't know how I shot—but I had to. Didn't I?"

"You did! He'll not bother you ag'n. She's yourn."

That hurt.

"But it wasn't about her! He bullied me—dared me. We were man to man, boys. He made me fight him."

"Yes, shore," they agreed—and they were not believing. They still linked me with a woman, whereas she had figured only as a transient occasion.

Then she herself, My Lady, appeared, running in breathless and appealing.

"Is Mr. Beeson hurt? Badly? Whar is he? Let me help."

She knelt beside me, her hand grasped mine, she gazed wide-eyed and imploring.

"No, he's all right, ma'am."

"I'm all right, I assure you," I stammered thickly, and helpless as a babe to the clinging of her cold fingers.

The group about me dissolved. Jenks seated himself close beside us.

"Your arm won't bother you," he said. "Just a flesh wound. You two can eat and rest up a bit, and if you set out fore moon-up you can easy get clear. We'll furnish mounts and grub and anything else you need."

"Mounts!" I blurted. "Set out, you say? You mean that I—we—should run away? I'll not leave the train and neither shall she, until the proper time. Or do I understand that you disown us?"

"Hold on," Jenks bade. "Tain't a question of disownin' you. But you've killed one o' the Mormons, the wagon boss's son; and when he comes in the mornin' demandin' of you for trail by his Mormons, what can we do? We'll take the chance on sneakin' you both away, and facin' the old man."

"I think we'd best go," I agreed.

"It's the only way."

And it was. We were twain in menace to the outfit, and to each

other but inseparable. We were yoked.

The fact appalled. It gripped me coldly. I seemed to have bargained for her with first and bullet, and won her; now I should appear to carry her off as booty; a wife and a gambler's wife. Yet such must be.

"Moon'll be up in a couple o' hours," Jenks said. "I'd advise you to take an hour's start of it, so as to get away easier. If you travel straight south-ard you'll strike the stage road in the mornin'. When you reach a station you'll have ch'ice either way."

"I have money," she said; and sat erect.

For the first half mile we rode without a word.

What her thoughts were I might not know, but they sat heavy upon her, closing her throat with the tor-

ture of vain, self-reproach. That much I sensed. But I could not reassure her. My own thoughts were so grievous as to crush me with aching woe.

This, then, was I: somebody who had just killed a man, had broken from the open trail and was riding, he knew not where, through darkness worse than night, himself an outlaw with an outlawed woman—at the best a chance woman, an adventuring woman—now the spoils of killing!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

A Smart Maid

He kissed the parlor maid and the girl screamed.

The wife came in and looked around suspiciously.

"Fif, why did you scream?"

"Through joy, madam. The master has just doubled my wages."

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