



Chapter XI Continued

Away they tore, while the file slackened, to watch. Our trail of flight bore right athwart the wolf's projected route. There was just the remote chance that the lad would overrun it, in his eagerness; and for that intervening moment of grace we stared, fascinated, hand clasping hand.

"He's found it! He's found it!" she announced, in a little wail.

In mid-career the boy had checked his pony so shortly that the four hoofs ploughed the sand. He wheeled on a pivot and rode back for a few yards, scanning the ground, letting the wolf go.

The youth flung up a glad hand and the band galloped to him.

"Yes, he has found it," she said. "Now they will come."

"I'll do my best, with revolver," I promised.

"Yes," she murmured. "But after that—"

I had no reply. This contingency—we two facing Indians—was outside my calculations.

"Shall we make a break for it?" I proposed.

"It would be madness on these poor mules," she murmured to herself.

"Yes, they're Sioux! I must talk with them."

"But they're coming," I rasped.

"They're getting in range. We've got the gun, and twenty cartridges. Maybe if I kill the chief—"

Ere I could stop he My Lady had sprung upright to mount upon a rock and, all in view, to hold open hand above her head.

The sunshine glinted upon her hair; a fugitive little breeze bound her gown closer about her slim figure.

They had seen her instantly. The chief rode forward, at a walk, his hand likewise lifted.

"Keep down!! Keep down, please," she directed to me, while she stood motionless. "Let me try."

The chief neared until we might see his every lineament—a splendid man, his eyes devouring her so covetously that I felt the glowing thoughts behind them.

He called inquiringly; a greeting and a demand in one, it sounded. She replied. And what they two said, in word and sign, I could not know. Then he cantered back to his men, while Edna stepped lightly down; answered my queering look.

"It's all right. I'm going, and so are you," she said, with a faint smile, oddly subtle—a tremulous smile in a white face.

"Where? We are free, you mean? What's the bargain?"

"I go to them. You go where you choose—to the stage road, of course. I have his promise. No, no," she said checking my indignant cry. "Really I don't mind. The Indians are about the only persons left to me. You can go home, and I shall not be unhappy. Please believe that! The wife of a great chief is quite a personage—he won't inquire into my past. But if we try to stay here you will certainly be killed, and I shall suffer, and we shall gain nothing. You must take my money. Please do. Then good-bye. I told him I would come out, under his promise."

CHAPTER XII

TWO BULLETS LEFT

She and the rocks reeled together. That as my eyes, giddy with the rush of blood, surging and hot.

"Never, never, never!" I was shouting.

"You sha'n't go, I sha'n't go. But wherever we go we'll go together. We'll stand them off. Then if they can take us, let 'em."

"Listen," she chided, her hand grasping my sleeve. "They would take me anyway—don't you see? After they had killed you. I would be the worse for both of us. No, Mr. Beeson, I have closed a good bargain for both of us. He is impatient. The money—you will need the money, and I shall not. Please turn your back and I'll get at my belt."

The chief was advancing accompanied by one warrior.

I could not deliver her tender body over to that painted swaggerer—any more than I could have delivered it over to Daniel himself.

At last I knew, I knew! History had written me a fool, but it should not write me a dastard.

We were together, and together we should always be, come weal or woe, life or death.

I leaped before her, answered the

hall of the pausing chief.

"No," I shouted. "You go to hell!"

He understood. The phrase might have been familiar English to him.

I saw him stiffen in his saddle; he called loudly, and raised his rifle, threatening; with a gasp—a choked "Good-bye" and she darted by me, running on for the open and for him. In a stark blind rage I levelled revolver and pulled trigger. The chief uttered a terrible cry, his rifle was tossed high, he bowed, swayed downward, his comrade grabbed him, and they were racing back closely side by side and she was running back to me and the warriors were shrieking and brandishing their weapons and bullets splattered the rocks—all this while yet my hand shook to the recoil of the revolver and the smoke was still wafting from the poised muzzle.

What had I done? But done it was.

She arrived breathless, distraught, instantly to drag me down beside her, from where I stood stupidly defiant.

"Keep out of sight," she panted. And—"Oh, why did you do it? Why did you? I think you killed him—they'll never forgive. They'll call it treachery! You're lost, lost!"

"But he sha'n't have you," I declared. "Let them kill me if they can. Till then you're mine. Mine! Don't you understand? I want you."

A burst of savage hoots renewed interrupted. "They're coming!" She knelt up, to peer; I peered. The Indians had deployed, leaving the chief lying upon the ground, their fierce countenances glaring at our asylum.

A glory glowed in her haggard face and shone from her brimming eyes.

"We will fight, we will fight!" she chanted. "Oh, my man! Had you kissed me last night we would have known this longer. We have so little time." She turned from my lips. "Not now. They're coming. Fight first; and at the end, then kiss me, please, and we'll go together."

Furious yells vibrated among our rocks. The Sioux all were in motion, except the prostrate chief. Straight on ward they charged, at headlong gallop, to ride over us. It was enough to cow, but she spoke steadily.

"You must fire," she said. "Hurry! Fire once, maybe twice, to split them."

So I rose farther on my knees and fired once—and again.

It was a miracle. All swooped to right and to left as if the bullets had cleaved them apart in the center, pelting in bullet and nearly spent arrow.

She forced me down.

"Low, low," she warned. "You have fifteen shots left, for them; then, one for me and one for you. You understand?"

"I understand," I replied. "And if I'm disabled—?"

She answered quietly.

"It will be the same. One for you, one for me!"

A double circle had been formed, to move in two directions, scudding ring reversed within scudding ring, the bowmen outermost. Around and round and round they galloped, yelling, gibing, taunting, shooting so malignantly that the air was in a constant hum and swish. The lead whined and smacked, the shafts streaked and clattered—

"You must stop some of those fiends from sneaking closer," she counseled. "See? They're trying us out."

I had been desperately saving the ammunition, to eke out this hour of mine with her. Every note from the revolver summoned the end a little nearer. But we had our game to play; and after all, the end was certain. So when the next painted ruffian bore down, I guessed shrewdly, arose and let him have it.

She cried out, clapping her hands.

"Good! Good!"

The pony was sprawling and kicking; the rider had hurled free, and went jumping and dodging like a jack-rabbit.

Now they all charge recklessly from four sides; and I had to stand and fire, right, left, before, behind, emptying the gun once more ere they scattered and fed. Upon My Lady's shoulder a challenging oriflamme of scarlet.

"You're hurt!" I blurted, aghast.

"Not much. A scratch. How many left. Nine." She had been counting. "Seven for them."

We looked one upon the other, and smiled. We faced a future together, at least; we were in accord.

The Sioux retired, mainly to sit dismounted in close circle, for a confab.

The Sioux had counseled. We waited, tense and watchful.

Then without even a premonitory shout a pony bolted for us. He bore two riders. They charged straight in, and suddenly the rear rider dropped to the ground, bounded briefly and dived headlong into little hollow of the sand.

He lay half concealed; the pony had wheeled to a shrill jubilant chorus; his remaining rider lashed him in retreat, leaving the first digging lustily with hand and knife.

That was the system: an approach by rushes. "We mustn't permit it," she breathed. "We must rout him out. Can you reach him?"

The tawny figure, prone upon the tawny sand, was just visible, lean and snakish, slightly oscillating as it worked. And I took careful aim, and fired, and saw the spurt from the bullet.

"A little lower—" she pleaded. And I fired again.

She cried out joyfully. The snake had flopped from its hollow, plunged at full length aside; had started to crawl, writhing. A recruit took his place in the hollow; and the courier snatched the snake from the ground. The fellow in the ground burrowed cleverly. I fired twice—we could not see that I had even inconvenienced him.

Suddenly, as I craned, the fellow fired again; he had discovered a niche in our rampart for the ball fancied my cheek with wings of a vicious wasp. On the instant I replied, snapping quick answer.

"I don't think you hit him," she said. "Let me try. I'll hold on the spot—he'll come up in the same place, head and shoulders. You'll have to tempt him."

And I edged farther, and farther, as if seeking for a mark, but with all my flesh a prickle and my breath fast. Abruptly it came—the snake's

strike, stinging my face with the splatter of sandstone and hot lead; at the moment her Colt's bellowed into my ears.

"I got him!"

"Thank God," I rejoiced.

She had sunk back wearily.

"That is the last."

"Won't they try again, you think?"

"The last spare shot, I mean. We have only two left. We must save those."

.....

The Sioux had quieted, and loling upon the bare ground in the sun glare they chatted, laughed, rested, but never for an instant were we dismissed from their eyes and thoughts.

"They will wait, too. They can afford it," she murmured. "It is cheap for them than losing lives."

"If they knew we had only the two cartridges—"

"Where will you shoot me, Frank?" This bared the secret heart of me.

"No! No!" I begged. "Don't speak of that. It will be bad enough at the best."

"You will though," she soothed. "I'd rather have it from you. I think it should be through the temple. That's sure. But you won't wait to look, will you? You'll spare yourself that?"

This made me groan, craven, and wipe my hands across my forehead to brush away the frenzy.

Thirst and heat tortured unceasingly.

She broke with sudden passion of hoarse appeal.

"Why do we wait. Why not now?"

"We ought to wait," I stammered, miserable and pitting.

"Yes," she whispered, submissive. "I suppose we ought. One always does. But I am so tired. I think," she said, "that I will let my hair down. I shall go with my hair down. I have a right to at last."

Whereupon she fell to loosening her hair and braiding it with hurried fingers.

Then after a time I said: "We'll not be much longer, dear."

"I hope not," said she, panting, her lips stiff, her eyes bright and feverish. "They'll rush us at sun-down; maybe before."

"I believe," said I, blurring the words, for my tongue was getting unmanageable, "they're making ready now."

She exclaimed and struggled and sat up, and we both gazed. Out there the Sioux, in that world of their own, had aroused to energy. I fancied that they had palped of the inaction.

They delayed an instant, gesticulating.

"It will be soon," she whispered, touching my arm. "When they are half-way, don't fail. I trust you. Will you kiss me? That is only the once."

I kissed her; dry cracked lips met

dry cracked lips. She laid herself down and closed her eyes and smiled.

"I'm all right," she said. "And tired. I've worked so hard for only this. You mustn't look."

"And you must wait for me, somewhere," I entreated. Just a moment.

The Sioux charged, shrieking, hammering, lashing, all of one purpose; that, us; she, I; my life, her body; and quickly kneeling beside her (I was cool and firm and collected), I felt her hand guide the revolver barrel.

But I did not look. She had forbidden, and I kept my eyes upon them until they were half-way, and in exultation I pulled the trigger, my hand already tensed to snatch and cock and deliver myself under their very grasp. That was a sweetness.

The hammer clicked. There had been no jar, no report.

The hammer had only clicked, I tell you, shocking me to the core! A missed cartridge? An empty chamber? Which? No matter. I should achieve for her, first; then myself. I heard her gasp. Then I sensed another sound and with slight sharpened I saw. Rising I screeched and waved, as bizarre no doubt, as any animated scarecrow.

I had been a trumpeted note and a calvary guidon and a rank of bobbing figures had come galloping, galloping over an imperceptible swell.

"We're saved, the soldiers are here," I yelled as the Sioux fled, screaming.

She tottered up, clinging to me. We were sitting close together when a lieutenant scrambled to us!

among our rocks; the troopers followed, curiously scanning.

His stubbled red face, dust smeared, queried us keenly; so did his curt voice.

"Just in time?"

He brought curious news. Daniel had not died from my shot after all, but Montoya the gambler had been lynched by Vigilantes.

.....

It was six weeks later when we two rode into Benton, wondering.

Roaring Benton City had vanished.

The iron tendrils of the Pacific Railway glistening, stretching westward to the sunset, and Benton had followed the lure, to Rawlins (as had been told us), to Green River, to Bryan—likely now traveling fast, charging the mountain slopes of Utah. The restless dust had settled.

The Queen Hotel, the Big Tent, the saloons, gambling dens, dance halls, the station itself had subsided into this: a skeleton company of hacked and weakened posts, a fantastic out-crop of coldly blackened clay chimneys, a sprinkling of battered cans. The fevered population who had ridden high upon the tide of rapid life remained only as ghosts haunting a potter's field.

"It's all, all wiped out, like he is," she said. "But I wished to see."

"All, all is wiped out, dear heart," said I. "All of that. But here are you and I."

Through star shine we cantered side by side eastward down the old, empty freighting road, for the railway station at Fort Steele.

THE END

THEY'RE BITIN'

the kind of hooks and flies we sell. Fishermen we equip usually report good luck but it isn't so much luck as it is having the kind of tackle to land them.

RODS, REELS, LINES, LEADERS, BASKETS, and other fishing equipment. We carry a complete stock of the best.

THE FAMOUS HALFORD IMPORTED FLIES.

Henderer Electric Supply
Fifth and Main Street Springfield

Springfield Garage - - - **Main St.**

Danner Motor Co. - - - **5th and A St.**

Double Drive in Exide Batteries

It Means Greater Mileage

Goodyear Tires BUILT WITH SUPERTWIST, are making records of unusually long mileage. They have won splendid reputation for greater freedom from stonebruis.

We render our patrons many services—such as regular tire inspections, prompt repair of minor injuries, cleaning and graphiting of rims—that PREVENT trouble and help you to get ALL of the inbuilt Goodyear service.

Low Cost Pathfinders

Why buy Unknown brands, or send away for tires, when GOODYEAR-BUILT Pathfinder, with our service, costs so little? They Carry The Warranty.

29x4.40 Balloons \$9.45
30x4.53 Balloons \$13.75
30x5.77 Balloons \$18.05

Big oversize Cords at similar Saving prices.

The Bulletin Board

30x3 1/2 Clincher Cord, with the road-holding ALL-WEATHER tread, strong carcass, thick sidewalls, large air volume—**\$11.65**

We have Goodyear tubes at YOUR price.