

# FORBIDDEN VALLEY

by William Byron Mowery

## Chapter 49 THE KISS

CURT knew something was troubling A-K deeply. He had been noticing it ever since the old officer arrived six hours ago.

"What is it, A-K?" he asked. Marlin turned to him with a resolute air. "I might as well get it over with, I suppose. She, I mean Rosalie, told me to break you the news. I should have, before now, but it's a dismal duty."

In a flash Curt guessed the trouble. Rosalie had landed a more suitable candidate than himself! He wondered sardonically whether the gentleman was the Edmonton banker or the Seattle ship owner.

"I believe I know what you're going to tell me, A-K." For Marlin's sake he hid his sheer delight over the unexpected good news. "Rosalie came to the conclusion that she and I just weren't suited for each other, and so she—"

"You're being generous," Marlin interrupted, more sharply than he had ever spoken of Rosalie. "The conclusion she came to was that she wanted to marry money; and she went after it, and—well, she got it, got a whole steamship line!" He made a weary gesture and stood up. "Well, you know now. I don't think it's altogether a surprise to you. Nor," he added pointedly, "very much of a disappointment."

"No, it isn't," Curt admitted honestly. "I was intending to have a frank talk with her when I was in the city a month ago, but she wasn't there. Rosalie and I can be a lot better friends as things stand than if we'd have married."

"Yes, you're right. She's got one idea of what life's all about and you've got a different idea, and the two would've been oil and water."

When they went out to old John's camp, the company had already gathered. On the packing box Sonya sat talking with Mrs. Hodgins and Paul and a girl. The Indians and prospectors were there, and the young trapper had brought his two wolf cubs, still fuzzy and playful but now grown too big for his pocket.

One person of that former evening was missing, though; and Curt felt the loss keenly. As his glance occasionally met Sonya's across the fire, he knew that she too was thinking of Ralph Nichol, and a lonely lobe stuck up the Lilluara.

Like some wild creature brought in from the mountains, Tenn-Og hung back at the edge of the fire-glow, trying to understand all those strange tongues and strange people of the outerworld. After an exile of one hundred and twenty years, a Klosohee had returned at last to the ancestral home of his tribe.

Curt felt a proprietary interest in that proud little band which had found him so recently. They were his clan, and he wanted to give them a helping hand, and some desperately needed counsel. Even in that isolated country they could no longer hold out against a changing world. Now that the primitive Siam-Klale was dead and Tenn-Og's half brother was leading them, he believed he could wean them from their uncivil ways.

Curt noticed how tired Sonya was, too tired to talk or even listen to the others. The long trip out of the Lilluara, ended only yesterday, had been hard on her; he himself still felt lousy from it.

A LITTLE before midnight she looked across at him with an understanding glance, excused herself and went up toward the factor's house.

After a decent interval he got up and left, as inconspicuously as possible. In the moon shadows of the trading post he found her, waiting for him.

"You were so long, dear," she whispered, "I thought you weren't coming."

Curt disarmed her with a kiss. "I had to wait several minutes, and then I swung out around the Indian tepees so those folks wouldn't know I'd followed you."

He linked his arm through hers and they started out the path toward the old fort.

"Does A-K still think I'm an adventurer, Curt?"

"When I told him how you trailed Karakhan, he wanted to sign you up for the Mounted."

"Oh, that'd be fun! I think I'll do it."

"You will not! You're going to cast your lot with the Provincial Police."

She mused: "Commissioner, wife of the Provincial Commissioner—that's an awfully high position for me to live up to, Curt. I don't know whether I can make good at it or not."

"But think of what I'll have to live up to, sweet. Look"—he took her hand and laid it upon his own, her slender tapering fingers upon his rough calloused ones.

"Don't!" Sonya stopped him. She raised his hand to her lips. "This hand fought for me, and was wounded. Do you remember—they were passing Curt's tent—remember the evening when I came by here and Paul said 'Bon soir' to me? I didn't know you were in the tent or even that you existed. Six weeks ago—it doesn't seem possible, Curt."

A thousand yards from the post they sat down on a lichen-covered rock near the wave edge. Sonya nestled against him, her tired head against his shoulder.

She was motionless and silent so long that he believed she must have dropped off to sleep, but when he glanced down he saw that she was looking up at him, studying him.

"You're sorry, aren't you, Curt?"

"Sorry—for what, dear?"

"That we're not going to live in a country like this. That we're going back to the cities."

"I am, a little," he admitted. "I can't help being, dear. But my place is down there. You helped me see that. And besides, we'll have all this summer for our honeymoon in the Lilluara. I'm being honest with you, Sonya—I don't want to go back down north. This work I'm taking on is a responsible position, and I'm egotist enough to believe that eventually I'll climb on past it."

SHE twined her fingers with his, as though she had been worrying about his happiness and now was reassured by his words.

In the distance he could see the ruddy glow of old John's campfire and the twinkle of figures passing back and forth in front of it. A night wind rustling in the woods behind brought him the purr of an overalls and the sad elemental song of the pines.

Low in the southwestern sky red Antares, Sonya's trust star and the star he had watched at Ralph's death, was sinking out of sight in a notch between two mountains.

When he glanced down at Sonya again, long minutes later, he saw that her eyes were closed. He did not stir, or wake her; it was too precious to have her asleep in his arms. She seemed so different at heart from what she had been on their trip north—more cheerful and at peace. With the death of Karakhan a black load had fallen away from her. She could begin to forget that tragedy in distant foggy Vladivostok, and start to live again.

He marveled at the strange destiny which had brought her to him—from the Volga of old Russia, across Siberia, China, Canada, to this northern wilderness where he and she had met. He thought of the night when he had seen her looking out into the rain, lonely and moody, with that fearful trip ahead of her.

Far away across the lake a wolf lifted its wailing crescendo, its voice laden with the loneliness and savagery and beauty of the Northland. He would miss all that, Curt thought sorrowfully—the Arctic prairies, the Nahanni Mountains, the happy freedom which had been his for a year and which he would put behind him irrevocably that fall.

It seemed to him that when he had sent his plane crashing into Karakhan's ship, it had been like folding up his wings and bidding good-bye to adventure. From the very beginning of the Karakhan hunt intangible bonds had been tightening upon him little by little, drawing him back to his destined course of life.

But he did not feel that he was leaving the wilderness for good and all. They could come back to it, he and Sonya, and live for a while in it.

There would be times when they would need to come back—to keep their perspective and get a new hold on their strength. What if he did regret the musk-ox prairies and the white-wolf hills? One could not have everything.

He felt, as he smoothed a wisp of hair from Sonya's cheek, that he had received his full share, and more. He had health and courage, and a position that challenged all his powers, and the vista of still more challenging heights toward which he and Sonya could climb together.

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THE END.

# YANKEE SAILORS LAND IN FOOCHOW

FOOCHOW, China, Jan. 15.—(AP)—United States sailors landed here today to protect American lives and property in disorders accompanying the evacuation of this fallen rebel capital by the retreating 19th Route army.

At the request of Gordon Burke, vice consul in charge of the United States consular district, a naval party came ashore from the American gunboat Tulsa and immediately went on guard in the quarter.

The Tulsa had been standing by since nationalist troops began their drive southward down the Min river valley north of Foochow to put down the secessionist movement in Fukien province. Early today, two nationalist marines were slain by a leaderless rebel band. Further disorders developed among opposing Chinese factions.

# 21 KILLED WHEN QUAKE JARS INDIA

CALCUTTA, Jan. 15.—(AP)—At least 21 persons were killed and

many were injured in a protracted earthquake which shook all India today. The wife and children of G. W. Brown, the British manager of the railway work shop, and the wife of the Indian district medical officer were killed in the collapse of the Jamalpur railway station.

Eight persons were killed at Patna and nine at Gaya. Office occupants in Calcutta, panic-stricken, rushed into the streets and many buildings were slightly damaged including the high court and electric corporation buildings, two churches, the Imperial bank and the general postoffice. The quake started here at 2:45 p. m. local time (3:45 a. m., E. S. T.)

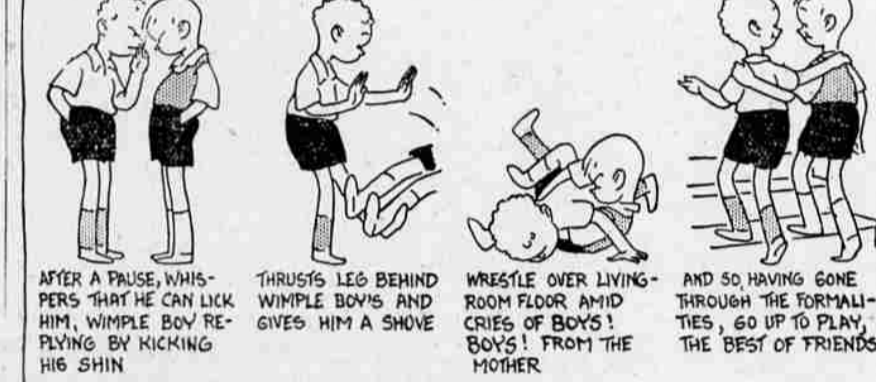
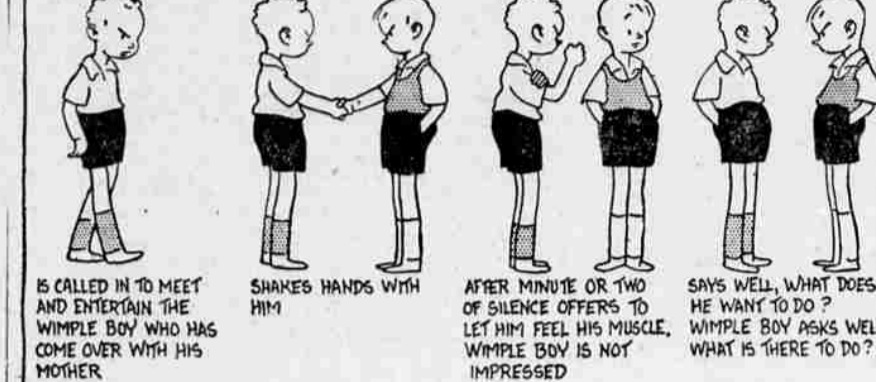
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