

FLAME TRAIL

BY MARI DE NERVAUD

SYNOPSIS: Kay Crandon impulsively hires Ted Gaylor, a jobless puncher. He helps her fight Josh Hastings, a "friendly" neighbor who wants Kay and her ranch. Ted and Scrap Johnson, a cowhand who molests Kay, shoot it out, wounding each other. Hastings sneaks up and kills Scrap with Ted's gun. Ted is arrested and tried for murder, but Kay stops the trial by technical protest. Ted escapes and rescues Kay from Hastings' cellar lock-up. Then he goes to aid Marion who saved his life with her nursing. He finds her father dying at the edge of the forest fire he started.

Chapter 49

Revenge Misfires

"Pitch 'em, damn you, and be quick about it!"

Torn rudely from his musing, Ted whirled about to face Josh Hastings, gazing excitedly at him over the barrel of his gun.

Ted obeyed with a grim smile, the ironic thought flashing through his mind that here was the probable ending of his career too, beside Marion's father.

Lifting his eyes a second as he raised his hands, Ted saw a gleam in the topmost branch of the pine tree that spread over Josh Hastings. Instantly, his fatalistic acceptance of the inevitable of the moment before, gave way to a renewed hope that reawakened all his natural instinct of self preservation.

By one of those extraordinary freaks of forest fires, a spark had been carried an incredible distance, bringing destruction with it. If he could keep Josh Hastings from firing the fatal shot until—

"Reckon you won't need that second trial?" Josh Hastings voice brought Ted back from his desperate speculations. "I can save the state a lot of money, and nobody'll be any the wiser!"

"Why didn't you do it in the first place, up on the central divide?" Ted grasped at anything to prolong the moment.

"Because I intended to have you branded as a murderer in Kay Crandon's sight, and I expected you to die anyway!" Hastings explained with a shrug of indifference.

Out of the corner of Ted's eye he could see the blazing branch directly over Josh Hastings' head. At all costs, he must hold his attention!

"Kay Crandon will never believe I'm a murderer!" he challenged.

"Won't she, though? Hold it!" Hastings barked as Ted shifted from one foot to the other. "I've got a thing or two to tell you before I give you a duplicate of the shot that killed Scrap Johnson."

He gave a harsh laugh at Ted's involuntary start. "Too bad you can't use that information, isn't it?" he sneered, in evident enjoyment of his revenge, and loath to terminate it too soon. "Well, you know now it doesn't pay to try to get the best of Josh Hastings! You got the worst of it before, and this time—"

A short rending sound cut him short. Glancing up, he saw the burning branch crashing through the lower branches of the pine. With an oath he sprang back, his gun exploding harmlessly as Ted ducked.

But Josh Hastings was the fraction of a second too late. The burning branch struck him a glancing blow on the head, and he pitched forward.

Saving The Murderer

Ted sprang to his side, and dragged the unconscious form away from the fire that licked up the dry pine needles, creeping toward him. With superhuman strength, half dragging, half carrying him, Ted made his way back to where he had tethered his mount.

He seized his rope and tied Josh Hastings' wrists and ankles. Then he slung him over the saddle and, guiding his frightened horse, started to retrace his steps.

In the far distance he could hear shouts, as the fire fighters rallied to this new area of danger. But after a moment's hesitation, Ted pushed on, with an anxious eye on his unconscious burden.

One thought was uppermost in Ted's mind: He must save Josh Hastings until he could repeat that confession before witnesses. His freedom and his whole future depended on it! If Josh Hastings died now, even though Ted might escape, his name would never be cleared. Suspicion would always cling to him and he would be handicapped by this cloud on his reputation, wherever he might go.

He must get back to Marion, with the news about her father, and between them they must revive Josh Hastings enough to force the confession from him that he had killed Scrap Johnson and framed Ted for the murder.

Riding when possible, and walking over the steep places where his mount could not carry double, Ted pushed ahead over the interminable backward trail to Marion's shack.

It had been hard enough going before. Now, as he left the illumination of the conflagration behind, Ted found it almost impossible to negotiate the return trip with the double handicap of his unconscious burden and the darkness, with no stars to guide him.

After pushing on blindly for what seemed an eternity, he decided finally that he would save time in the long run by waiting for the dawn. He called a halt and lifted off the bulky form of Josh Hastings. Laying him on the ground, he bent close to feel his prisoner's pulse and listen to his heart.

Reassured as to his condition, in spite of the coma into which he had sunk, Ted threw himself down beside him, and was soon lost in a sleep of utter exhaustion.

When he woke, he uttered an exclamation of amazement and dismay to find the sun so high. His exhausted frame, worn out by the strain of the last few nights, had failed him, and instead of the short nap he had expected to take, he must have been asleep for hours.

He glanced over at Josh Hastings and breathed a sigh of relief to find him about as he had been before, still breathing heavily, in the stupor in which his blow on the head had left him.

Ted rose to his feet, and went a short distance to a rocky projection to get his bearings. A long low whistle escaped him, as he gazed incredulously at the panorama stretched out before him.

Hastings Tries A Dicker

HE GLANCED up at the sun, as though challenging its right to be where it was, then looked once more at the cloud of smoke that hung heavy over the ridges. But instead of being behind him, it was to the north and east, and the mountains Ted had expected to get his bearings by, had shifted to unfamiliar outlines.

Admitting finally the evidence of his own senses, Ted was forced to the conclusion that he had completely lost his way in the darkness the night before, and had gone off at a tangent to the southwest, instead of retracing his steps to the north, as he thought he had been doing.

Ted cursed his impetuous haste that had led him astray, as he hurried back to Josh Hastings. Before preparing for the long ride, he ate a bite of the lunch that Marion had insisted on tucking to the crutch of his saddle.

Refreshed by the food and his long sleep, he hoisted Josh Hastings' unconscious body across his horse, and started back.

A fresh breeze had sprung up, and Ted glanced uneasily at the tree tops swaying above him to gauge its velocity. It was characterized by the mounting of a wind that started up around noon, but this one seemed to be gathering alarming force. Once get a strong wind behind the fire, and there was no predicting the extent of the destruction that would most certainly ensue.

Ted resolutely pushed on, following the same method he had the night before, of sometimes riding, but more often walking. Only this time he was traveling in the right direction.

He hated to think of the added anxiety Marion would have over his delay, but there was no help for it. There was one good point, anyway. He was well out of the probable range of the fire fighters, and therefore stood a better chance to escape premature delivery into their hands.

Suddenly, as he walked up a steep incline beside his mount, Ted became aware of a groan and eyes starting at him. Glancing down, he saw that Josh Hastings had regained consciousness.

He made a tentative struggle to free himself, but Ted called a peremptory halt.

"The tables are turned, now," he explained curtly. "If you know what's good for you, you'll keep still!"

A look of hatred flashed in Josh Hastings' eyes before he closed them, and let his head flop back weakly.

"My head!" he groaned. "Water!"

Without a word, Ted took his canteen and put it to Josh Hastings' lips. He took greedy sips of the warm liquid, then opened his eyes again.

"What's the idea?" he demanded, glancing at his bound wrists. "Where are you taking me?"

"Where you can repeat what you told me back there, before a witness," Ted answered grimly. "It would be a hell of a lot easier to have left you to be cremated, as you planned to leave me. But you have some information that happens to be useful to me."

A shrewd look narrowed Josh Hastings' eyes.

"Suppose I give you a signed statement, will you let me go?"

"And have you deny it later? Not on your life." Ted gave a short laugh. "You've framed me once too often! I prefer a witness."

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Ted pushes on, racing against the flames, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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Animal That Forgets to Grow Up

Only through accident was the strange phenomenon regarding the perpetual larval life of the axolotl discovered. Classified by naturalists as a distinct kind of animal, the axolotl was given the scientific name of *Amblystoma tigrinum* and for years after its discovery in the lakea surrounding the City of Mexico was so listed.

In 1865 several specimens of the axolotl were brought to an aquarium in the Jardin des Plantes, Paris. Here they were subjected to routine scrutiny and then, to the amazement of attending scientists, were found to be losing their gills and turning into an ordinary species of adult salamander.

Curse of the Ages

"Daddy needs a new pair of shoes—'em on seven," was possibly the expression used by the Greeks in wooing Lady Luck around the year 1244 B. C. It is that year to which historians attribute Palamedes' invention of dice as we know them today, but the use of numbered cubes as gambling devices predates this by centuries.

Throughout the world various forms of gambling in which dice were used dates back to time immemorial. Dice are depicted on the earliest of Egyptian monuments and have been found in excavations of ancient ruins throughout the world.

Tomorrow; For What Crime Were Prisoners Once Freed If They Plead Guilty?

They said the plans call for stops en route to inspect the federal power navigation and reclamation projects at Grand Coulee and Bonneville on the Columbia river.

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ROOSEVELT ROUTE WEST WOULD MISS MEDFORD

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31.—(AP)—Informed persons said today if President Roosevelt could carry out projected plans for a Pacific northwest visit in late September, he will go to Seattle by way of Wyoming, Yellowstone park, southern Idaho, Spokane, Wash., and Portland, Ore.

Collins, who is an old-time hard rock miner.

The revival in quartz mining which has taken place in this region in the last few years is expected to add greatly to the interest in the event, which will be held on Saturday, September 11.

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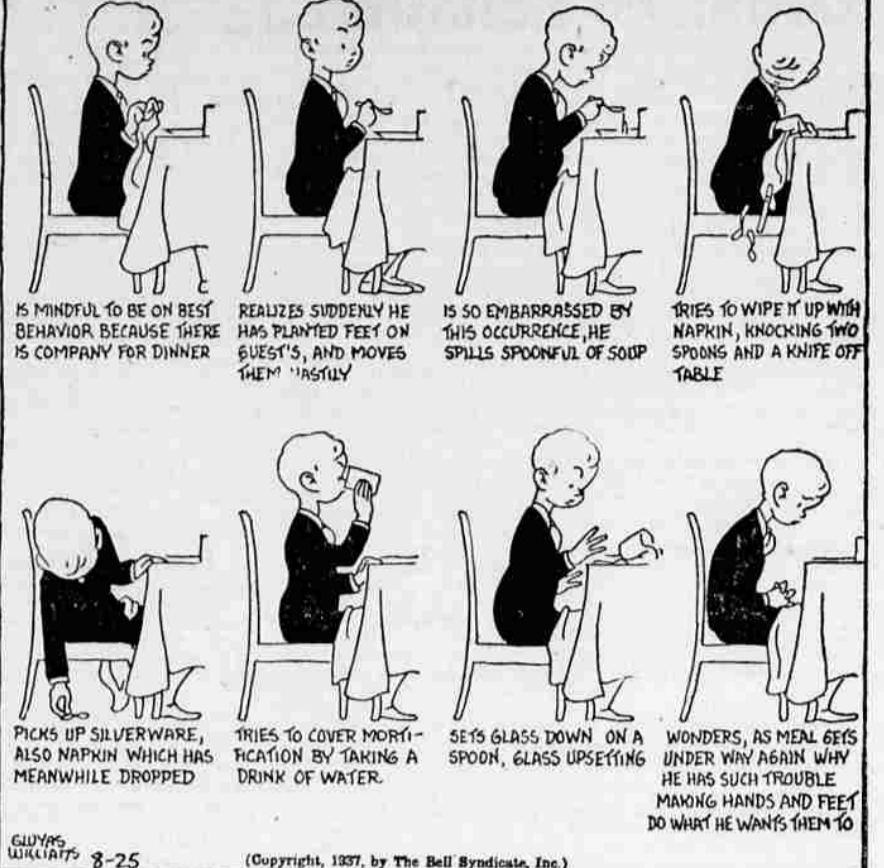
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GOOD BEHAVIOR By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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By HAL FORREST



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ADDICT TRANSFERS HARD ROCK MINERS ACTIVITY TO K. F. TO VIE AT YREKA

KLAMATH FALLS, Aug. 31.—(AP)—City police today sought a narcotics addict in their drive to solve a wave of surgical kit thefts.

Two local physicians reported their cases had been taken from their cars over the weekend. Late last week three others were similarly stolen.

Physicians' automobiles at Weed and Medford have also been robbed recently, police have learned.

SALEM, Aug. 31.—(AP)—The state land board will meet here September 13 at 10:30 a. m. to determine the best method of blocking 750,000 acres of eastern Oregon grazing lands. State Treasurer Rufus C. Holman said today.

YREKA, Cal., Aug. 31.—(Sp.)—Hard rock miners from all parts of northern California and southern Oregon are expected to take part in the rock-drilling contest, which will be a feature of the Yreka Miners Gold Rush at Yreka, September 10, 11 and 12.

Prizes totaling \$425 are being offered for the two events, which will include a single jack and a double jack contest. Three prizes will be given in each contest; for the double jack first money \$150, second \$75 and third \$25. Prizes for the single jack contest will be \$100, \$50 and \$25.

Grants from the Humboldt district will be used for the contests, which will be under the direction of Leon