

# The Voice of the Pack

A Story of the Oregon Mountain Country

For two very good reasons, Dan didn't call to him at once. The two reasons were that Cranston had a rifle and that Dan was unarmed. It might be extremely likely that Cranston would choose the most plausible and effective means of preventing any further of his crime, and by the same token, prevent word of the crime ever reaching the authorities. The rifle contained five cartridges, and only one was needed.

But the idea of backing out, unseen, never occurred to Dan. The fire would have a tremendous headway before he could summon help. Although it was near the lookout station, every condition pointed to a disastrous fire. The brush was dry as tinder, not so heavy as to choke the wind, but yet tall enough to carry the flame into the tree tops. The stiff breeze up the ridge would certainly carry the flame for miles through the parched Divide before help could come. In the meantime stock and lives and homes would be endangered, besides the irreparable loss of timber. There were many things that Dan might do, but giving up was not one of them.

After all, he did the wisest thing of all. He simply came out in plain sight and unconcernedly walked down the trail toward Cranston. At the same instant, the latter struck his match.

As Dan was no longer stalking, Cranston immediately heard his step. He whirled, recognized Dan, and for one long instant in which the world seemed to have time in plenty to make a complete revolution, he stood perfectly motionless. The match flared in his dark fingers, his eyes—full of singular conjecturing—rested on Dan's face. No instant of the latter's life had ever been fraught with greater peril. He understood perfectly what was going on in Cranston's mind. The fire-brand was calmly deciding whether to shoot or whether to bluff it out. One required no more moral courage than the other. It really didn't make a great deal of difference to Cranston. But he decided that the killing was not worth the cartridge. The other course was too easy. He did not even dream that Dan had been shadowing him and had seen his intention. He was so sure of himself that he had a "reunderfoot" could thus walk behind him, unheard. Without concern, he scattered with his foot the little heap of kindling, and slipping his pipe into his mouth, he touched the flaring match to it. It was a wholly admirable little piece of acting, and would have deceived any one who had not seen his previous preparations. Then he walked on down the trail toward Dan.

Dan stopped and lit his own pipe. It was a curious little truce. And then he leaned back against the great gray trunk of a fallen tree.

"Well, Cranston," he said civilly. The men had met on previous occasions, and always there had been the same invisible war between them.

"How do you do, Falling," Cranston replied. No perceptions could be so blunt as to mislead the premises behind suit in the town. He didn't speak in his own tongue at all, the short, guttural "Howdy" that is the greeting of the mountain men. He pronounced all the words with an exaggerated precision, an unmistakable mockery of Dan's own tone. In his accent he threw a tone of sickly sweetness, and his inference was all too plain. He was stumpy calling Falling a milk-sop and a white-liver; just as plainly as if he had used the words.

The eyes of the two men met. Cranston's lips were slightly curled in an unmistakable leer. Dan's were very straight. And in one thing at least, their eyes looked just the same. The pupils of both pairs had contracted to steel points, bright in the dark gray of the irises. Cranston's looked somewhat red; and Dan's were only hard and bright.

Dan felt himself straighten; and the color mounted somewhat higher in his brown cheeks. But he did not try to avenge the insult—yet. Cranston was still fifteen feet distant, and that was too far. A man may swing a rifle within fifteen feet. The fact that they were in no way physical equals did not even occur to Dan. When the result is great enough, such considerations cannot possibly matter. Cranston was hard as steel, one hundred and seventy pounds in weight. Dan did not touch one hundred and fifty, and a deadly disease had not yet entirely relinquished its hold upon him.

"I do very well, Cranston," Dan answered in the same tone. "Wouldn't you like another match? I believe your pipe has gone out."

Very little can be said for the wisdom of this remark. It was simply human—that age-old creed to answer blow for blow and insult for insult. Of course the inference was obvious—that Dan was accusing him, by innuendo, of his late attempt at arson. Cranston glanced up quickly and it might be said that his fingers twitched and tingled about the barrel of his rifle. He knew what Dan meant. He understood perfectly that Dan had guessed his purpose on the mountain side. And the curl at his lips became more pronounced.

"What a smart little boy," he scorned. "Going to be a Sherlock Holmes when he grows up." Then he half turned and the light in his eyes blazed up. He was no longer now. The mountain men are so intense to play at insult very long. Their inherent savagery comes to the surface, and they want the warmth of blood upon their fingers. His voice became natural. "Maybe you're a spy?" he asked. "Maybe you're one of those city rats to come and watch us, and then run and tell the forest service. There's two things, Falling, that I want you to know."

Dan puffed at his pipe, and his eyes looked seriously bright through the

slim of smoke. "I'm not interested in hearing them," he said.

"It might pay you," Cranston went on. "One of 'em is that one man's word is good as another's in a court—and it wouldn't do you any good to run down and tell tales. A man can light his pipe on the mountain side without the courts being interested. The second thing is—just that I don't think you'd find it a healthy thing to do."

"I suppose, then, that is a threat?" "It ain't just a threat," Cranston laughed harshly—a single grim syllable that was the most terrible sound he had yet uttered. "It's a fact. Just try it, Falling. Just make one little step in that direction. You couldn't hide behind a girl's skirts, then, why, you city sissy, I'd break you to pieces in my hands."

Few men can make a threat without a muscular accompaniment. Its very utterance releases pent-up emotions, part of which can only pour forth in muscular expression. And anger is a primitive thing, going down to the most mysterious depths of a man's nature. As Cranston spoke, his lip curled, his dark fingers clenched on his thick palm, and he half leaned forward.

Dan knocked out his pipe on the log. It was the only sound in that whole mountain realm; all the lesser sounds were stifled. The two men stood face to face. Dan tranquil, Cranston shaken by passion.

"I give you," said Dan with entire coolness. "An opportunity to take that back. Just about four seconds."

He stood very straight as he spoke, and his eyes did not waver in the least. It would not be the truth to say that his heart was not leaping like a wild thing in his breast. A dark mist was spreading like madness over his brain; but yet he was striving to keep his thoughts clear. Stealthily, without seeming to do so, he was setting his muscles for a spring.

The only answer to his words was a laugh—a roaring laugh of scorn from Cranston's dark lips. In his laughter, his intent, catlike vigilance relaxed. Dan saw a chance; feeble

but even now, consciousness still lingered. Dan could hear his enemy's curses—and far up the trail, he heard another, stranger sound. It sounded like some one running.

And then he dimly knew that Cranston was climbing from his body. Voices were speaking—quick, commanding voices just over him. Above Cranston's savage curses another voice rang clear, and to Dan's ears, glorious beyond all human utterance.

He opened his tortured eyes. The mist lifted from in front of them, and the whole drama was revealed. It had not been sudden mercy that had driven Cranston from his body. Just when his victim's falling unconsciousness would have put him completely in his power. Rather it was something black and ominous that even now was pointed squarely at Cranston's breast.

None too soon, a rouser of the hill had heard the sounds of the struggle, and had left the trysting place at the spring to come to Dan's aid. It was Snowbird, very pale but wholly self-sufficient and determined and intent. Her pistol was cocked and ready.

### CHAPTER III

Dan Falling was really not badly hurt. The quick, slashing blows had not done more than severely bruise the flesh of his face; and the mists of unconsciousness that had been falling over him were more nearly the result of his own tremendous physical exertion. Now these mists were rising. "Go—go away," the girl was commanding. "I think you've killed him."

Dan opened his eyes to find her kneeling close beside him, still covering Cranston with her pistol. Her hand was resting on his bruised cheek. He couldn't have believed that a human face could be as white, while life still remained, as hers was then. All the lovely tints that had been such a delight to him, the play of soft reds and browns, had faded as an after-glow fades on the snow.

Dan's glance moved with hers to Cranston. He was standing easily at a distance of a dozen feet; and except for the faintest tremble all over his body, a muscular reaction from the violence of his own fight, his entire being regained his self-composure. This was quite characteristic of the mountain men. They share with the beasts a passion of living that is wholly unknown on the plains; but yet they have a certain quality of imperturbability known nowhere else. Nor is it limited to the native-born mountaineers. No man who intimately knows a member of that curious, keen-eyed little army of naturalists and big-game hunters who go to the north woods every fall, as regularly and seemingly as inexorably as the waterfowl go in spring, can doubt this fact. They seem to have acquired from the silence and the snows an impregnation of that eternal calm and imperturbability that is the wilderness itself. Cranston wasn't in the least afraid. Fear is usually a matter of uncertainty, and he knew exactly where he stood.

It is extremely doubtful if a plainsman would have possessed this knowledge. But a plainsman has not the knowledge of life itself that the mountaineer has, simply because he does not see it in the raw. And he has not half the intimate knowledge of death. An absolute requisite of self-composure. The mountaineer knows life in its simple phases with little tradition or convention to blur the vision. Death is a very intimate acquaintance which he may meet in any snowdrift, on any rocky trail; and these conditions are very deadly to any delusions that he has in regard to himself. He acquires an

instinct for life that is not shared by the plainsman. He knows just where he stands, and on a level that is not shared by the plainsman. He knows just where he stands, and on a level that is not shared by the plainsman.

He had never seen

her eyes ever thus. The light that he had always beheld in them had vanished. Their utter darkness startled him.

He sat up straight, and her arm that had been about his neck fell at her side. He took her hand firmly in his.

"We must go home, Snowbird," he told her simply. "I'm not so badly hurt but that I can make it."

She nodded; but otherwise scarcely seemed to hear. Her eyes still looked with darkness. And then, before his own eyes, their dark pupils began to contract. The hand he held filled and throbbled with life, and the fingers closed around his. She leaned toward him.

"Listen, Dan," she said quickly. "You heard—didn't you—the last thing that he said?"

"I couldn't help but hear, Snowbird."

"Then if you heard—pay attention to his words. You can't see, knowing the girls that live on the plains. You were the cause of his saying it, and you must answer."

It seemed to Dan that some stern code of the hills, unwritten except in the hearts of their children, inexorable as night, was speaking through her lips. This was no personal thing. In some dim, half-understood way, it went back to the basic code of life.

"People must fight their own fights, up here," she told him. "The laws of the courts that the plains people can appeal to are all too far away. There's no one that can do it, except you. Not my father. My father can't fight your battles here. If your honor is going to stand, it's up to you, Dan. You can't pretend that you didn't hear him. Such as you're weak and sick to be beaten to a pulp in two minutes, you alone will have to make him answer for it. I came to your aid—and now you must come to mine."

Her fingers no longer clasped his. Strength had come back to him, and his fingers closed down until the blood went out of hers, but she was wholly unconscious of the pain. In reality, she was conscious of nothing except the glowing line in his face. It held her eyes in passionate fascination. His pupils were contracting to little bright dots in the gray irises. The jaw was setting, as she had never seen it before.

"Do you think, Snowbird, that you'd even have to be?" he demanded. "Don't you think I understand? And it won't be in your defense—only my own duty."

"But he is so strong—and you are so weak—"

"I won't be so weak forever. I never really cared much about living before. I'll try now, and you'll see—oh, Snowbird, see, and trust me, understand everything. It's my own fight—when you kissed me, and he cried down that word in anger and jealousy, it put the whole thing on me. No one else can make him answer; no one else has the right. It's my honor, no one else's, that stands or falls."

He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it again and again. He saw the tears gathering in her dark eyes. "But you fought here, didn't you, Dan?" she asked with painful slowness. "You didn't put up your arms—or try to run away? I didn't come till he had you done, so I didn't see." She looked at him as if her whole joy of life hung on his answer.

"Fought? I would have fought till I died! But that isn't enough, Snowbird. It isn't enough just to fight, in a case like this. A man's got to win! I would have died if you hadn't come. And that's another debt I owe to you. The mountain men are not saved by their women without incurring obligation. She attempted no barren denial. She made no effort to pretend when she had come with her pistol. It was an unavoidable fact. A life for a life is the code of the mountains.

"Two things I must do before I can ever dare to die," he told her soberly.

"One of them is to pay you; the other is to pay Cranston for the thing he said. Maybe the chance will never come for the first of the two; only I'll pray that it will. Maybe it would be kinder to you to pray that it wouldn't; yet I pray that it will! Maybe I can pay that debt only by being always ready, always watching for a chance to save you from any danger, always trying to protect you. You didn't come in time to see the fight I made. Besides—I lost, and little else matters. And that debt to you can't be paid until sometime I fight again—for you—and win." He gasped from his weakness, but went on bravely. "I'll never be able to feel at peace, Snowbird, until I'm tested in the fire before your eyes! I want to show you the things Cranston said of me are not true—that my courage will stand the test."

"It wouldn't be the same, perhaps, with an Eastern girl. Other things matter in the valleys. But I see how it is here; that there is only one standard for men and by that standard they rise or fall. Things in the mountains are down to the essentials."

He paused and struggled for strength to continue. "And I know what you said to him," he went on. "Half-unconscious as I was, I remember every word. Each word just seemed to burn into me, Snowbird, and I'll make every one of them good. You said I am a better man than he, and sometimes it would be proved—and it's the truth! Maybe in a month, maybe in a year. I'm not going to die from this malady of mine now, Snowbird. I've got too much to live for—too many debts to pay."

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

He had never seen

His eyes grew earnest, and the hard fire went out of them. "It's almost as if you were a queen, a real queen of some great kingdom," he told her, trembling with a great awe that was stealing over him, as a mist steals over water. "And because I had kissed your subject, living only to fight your fights—maybe with a dream in the end to kiss your fingers again. When you bent and kissed me on that hillside—and for me to see—it was the same; that I was sworn to you, and nothing mattered in my life except the service and love I could give you. And it's more than you ever dream, Snowbird. It's all yours, for your battles and your happiness."

The great pines were silent above them, shadowed and dark. Perhaps they were listening to an age-old story, those vows of service and self-gained worth by which the race has struggled upward from the darkness.

"But I kissed you—once before," she reminded him. The voice was just a whisper, hardly louder than the stir of the leaves in the wind. "But that kiss didn't count," he told her. "It wasn't at all the same. I loved you then, I think, but it didn't mean what it did today."

"And what—" she leaned toward him, her eyes full on his, "does it mean now?"

"All that's worth while in life, all that matters when everything is said that can be said, and all is done that can be done, and it means, please God, when the debts are paid, that I may have such a kiss again."

"Not until then," she told him, whispering.

"Until then, I make oath that I won't even ask it, or receive it if you should give it. It goes too deep, dear—and it means too much."

"This was their part. Not until the debts were paid and her word made good would those lips be his again. There was no need for further words. Both of them knew.

In the skies, the gray clouds were gathering swiftly, as always in the mountains. The raindrops were falling one and one, over the forest. The summer was done, and fall had come in earnest.

The rains fell unceasingly for seven days; not a downpour but a constant drizzle that made the distant ridges smoke. The parched earth seemed to smack its lips, and little rivulets began to fall and tumble over the beds of the dry streams. All danger of forest fire was at once removed, and Snowbird was no longer needed as a lookout on old Bald mountain. She went to her own home, her companion back to the valley; and now that his sister had taken his place as housekeeper, Billy had gone down to the lower foothills with a great part of the live stock. Dan went these rainy days in to the hillsides, building himself physically so that he might pay his debts.

It was no great pleasure, these rainy days. He would have greatly liked to have lingered in the square mountain house, listening to the quiet murmur of the rain on the roof and watching Snowbird at her household tasks. She could, as her father had said, make a biscuit. She could also roll up sleeves over trim, brown arms and with entire good humor do a week's laundry for three hard-working men. He would have liked to sit with her, through the long afternoons, as she knitted beside the fireplace—to watch the play of her graceful fingers and perhaps, now and then, to touch her hands when he held the skeins. But none of these things transpired. He drove himself from daylight till dark, developing his body for the tests that were sure to come.

The first few days nearly killed him. He over-exercised in the chill rain, and one anxious night he developed all the symptoms of pneumonia. Such a sickness would have been the end of him. He knew the time had come to make the test. Night after night he would go to bed half-sick from fatigue, but the mornings would find him fresh. And after two weeks, he knew he had passed the crisis and was on the direct road to complete recovery.

Sometimes he cut wood in the forest: first the felling of some tall pine, then the trimming and hewing into two-foot lengths. The blisters came on his hands, broke and bled, but finally hardened into calluses. He learned the most effective stroke to hurl a shower of chips from beneath the blade. His back and limbs hardened from the handling of heavy wood—and the cough was practically gone. His frame filled out. His face became swarthy from constant exposure. He gained in weight.

Continued Next Week



"I Guess You Saw What I Did to Him."



The Battles of the Mountains were Battles to the Death.

## THE SUNSET CAFE

INVITES YOU TO TRY THEIR SERVICE.

EXCELLENT MEALS 35 CENTS AND UP

Chili Con Carne  
Chinese Noodles

WE MAKE OUR OWN PASTRY AND OUR PIES ARE FAMOUS—IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IT, ASK YOUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS.

## Lodge Directory

Marathon Lodge No. 95, Knights of Pythias

Regular meeting Monday evening at 7:45 sharp. By order of the Chancellor Commander, John C. Carroll, C. C.

W. R. C.  
Corinth Relief Corps, No. 54 Dept. of Oregon, meets on first and third Friday evenings of each month, at 8 p. m. in the W. O. W. hall. Visitors welcome.

Minnie Johnson, President  
Elizabeth Conover, Secy.

Corinth Post, No. 35, Dept. of Oregon

Meets on second and fourth Saturdays of each month at 1:30 p. m. in W. O. W. hall. Visitors welcome.

H. W. Spear, Com'dr.  
Samuel Downs, Adjt.

Johnson Chapter No. 24 R. A. M.

Stated convocations every first and third Fridays. Visitors welcome.

I. E. Keldson, Sec.

Tillamook Lodge No. 1260 L. O. O. M.

Meets every Friday at 8 p. m. in K. of P. Hall.

S. A. Brodhead, Sec.

Tillamook Lodge No. 57, A. F. & A. M.

Joint installation with O. E. S. and R. A. M. St. John's day, Monday December 27th. All members be present. Visiting brethren welcome.

Leslie Harrison, Sec'y.

Tuesday eve, 8 p. m.  
Rebekah, Wednesday evening  
Camp 2-4, Thursday

DR. J. G. TURNER  
Eye Specialist

Permanently located in Tillamook Private office in Jenkin's jewelry store. Latest up-to-date instruments and equipment. Evenings and Sunday by appointment.

BARRICK & HALL  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

National Building  
Tillamook, Oregon

DR. O. L. HOHLFELD  
VETERINARIAN

Bell Phone 2F2. Mutual Phone  
Tillamook, Oregon

W. C. DUEBER  
DENTIST

Tillamook Building (Over Haltom's)  
Tillamook, Oregon

Dr. J. E. Shearer Dr. A. C. Crauk  
DRS. SHEARER AND CRANK  
MEDICINE & SURGERY

National Building  
Tillamook, Oregon

R. T. BOALS M. D.  
Surgeon and Physician

I. O. O. F. Building  
TILLAMOOK, OREGON

NOTICE TO PROPERTY OWNERS

All property will be held for water rent after Jan. 1st, 1921. By order of Tillamook Water Commission. 12-215

Let a Headlight Classified ad. work for you