

The Voice of the Pack

A Story of the Oregon Mountain Country



One cloudy afternoon in entry No rember found Silas Lennox cutting wood on the ridge behind his house. It was still an open question with him whether he and his daughter would of course wanted to remain, yet there were certain reasons, some very definite and others extremely vague, why the prospect of the winter in the snow fields did not appeal to the mountaineer. In the first place, all signs the fall had come late, the snows were exceptionally early. The duck flight was completed two weeks before its valleys. usual time, and the rodents had dug their burrows unusually deep. Besides too many months of snow weigh heavily upon the spirit. The wolf packs sing endlessly on the ridges, and many unpleasant things may happen. On previous years, some of the cabins on the ridges below had human occupants; this winter the whole region, for nearly seventy miles across the mountains to the foothills, would be wholly deserted by human beings. Even the ranger station, twelve miles across a steep ridge, would soon be empty. Of course a few ranchers had homes a few miles beyond the river. but the wild cataracts did not freeze in the coldest of seasons, and there were no bridges. Besides, most of the more prosperous farmers wintered in the valleys. Only a few more days would the road be passable for his car; and no time must be lost in mak-

Once the snows came in reality, there was nothing to do but stay. Seventy miles across the uncharted ridges on snowshoes is an undertaking for which even a mountaineer has no fondness. It might be the wisest thing, after all, to load Snowbird and Dan into his car and drive down to the valleys. The fall roundup would soon be completed. Bill would return for a few days from the valleys with new equipment to replace the broken lighting system on the car, and they could avoid the bitter cold and snow that Lennox had known so long. He chopped at a great log and wondered what would suit him better-the comfort and safety of the valleys or the ringged glory of the ridges.

But at that instant, the question of whether or not he would winter on the Divide was decided for him. And an instant was all that was needed. For the period of one breath he forgot to be watchful-and a certain dread Spirit that abides much in the forest saw its chance. Perhaps he had lived



He Fell Struggling.

usually punished with death. He had just felled a tree, and the trunk was still attached to the stump by a strip of bark to which a little of the wood adhered. He struck a furious blow at it with his nx.

He hadn't considered that the tree lay on a steep slope. As the blade fell, the great trunk simply seemed to leap. Lennox leaped too, in a frenzied effort to save his life; but already the leafy bows, like the tendrils of some great amphibian, had whipped around his legs. He fell, struggling; and then a curious darkness, strenked with flame, dropped down upon him. An hour later he found himself lying



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on the still hillside, knowing only a great wonderment. At first his only impulse was to go back to sleep. He didn't understand the grayness that had come upon the mountain world, attempt to winter on the Divide. Dan his own strange feeling of numbness, of endless soaring through infinite spaces. But he was a mountain man, and that meant he was schooled, beyond all things, to keep his self-control. He made himself remember. Yes -he had been cutting wood on the pointed to a hard season. Although hillside, and the shadows had been long. He had been wondering whether or not they should go down to the

> He remembered now: the last blow and the rolling log. He tried to turn his head to look up to the hill.

He found Mmself wholly unable to do it. Something wracked him in his neck when he tried to move. But he did glance down. And yes, he could turn in this direction. And he saw the great tree trunk lying twenty feet | doors. below him, wedged in between the young pines.

He was surrounded by broken frag ments of limbs, and it was evident that the tree had not struck him a full blow. The limbs had protected him to some extent. No man is of such mold as to be crushed under the solid weight of the trunk and live to remember it. He wondered if this were the frontier of death-the grayness that lingered over him. He seemed to be soaring.

-He brought himself back to earth and tried again to remember. Of course, the twilight had fallen. It had been late afternoon when he had cut the tree. His hand stole along his body; and then, for the first time, a hideous sickness came upon him. His need of that knowledge now. She hand was warm and wet when he brought it up. The other hand he couldn't stretch at all.

The forest was silent around him, except a bird calling somewhere near the house-a full voice, rich and clear. and it seemed to him that it had a quality of distress. Then he recognized it. It was the voice of his own daughter, Snowbird, calling for him. He tried to answer her.

It was only a whisper, at first. Yet she was coming nearer; and her own voice sounded louder. "Here, Snowbird," he called again. She heard him then: he could tell by the startled tone of her reply. The next instant | But she always liked the sound; and she was at his side, her tears drop- she missed it especially tonight. ping on his face.

recalled his speeding faculties. "I -and a leg. But we'll have to winter

she cried. She crawled along the pine needles beside him, and tore his shirt from his breast. He was rapidly sinkshe dreaded most-that his back might be broken-was evidently not true. There were, as he said, broken ribs and evidently one severe fracture of the leg bone. Whether he had sustained internal injuries that would end his life before the morning, she

had no way of knowing. At this point, the problem of saving her father's life fell wholly into her hands. His broken body could not be carried over the mountain road to physicians in the valleys. They must be transported to the ranch. It would take them a full day to make the trip, twelve miles distant over a mountain mountain, four miles off, had been disconnected when the rains had ended the peril of the forest fire.

remaining horse had been ridden by meant he would not return until ten o'clock. There was no road for a car to the ranger station, only a rough disregard it. steep trail, and she remembered, with sions in the valley was to procure a new lighting system. By no conceivable possibility could she drive down that mountain road in the darkness. But she was somewhat relieved by the thought that in all probability she could walk twelve miles across the mountains to the ranger station in nuch less time than she could drive, by automobile, seventy miles down to the ranches at the foothills about the

Besides, she remembered with a daddening heart that Richards, one of the rangers, had been a student at a medical college and had taken a position with the forest service to regain his health. She would cross the ridge to the station, phone for a docor in the valleys, and would return on horseback with Richards for such first aid as he could give. The only problem that remained was that of

getting her father into the house. He was stirring a little now. Evidently consciousness was returning to And then she thanked heavert for the few simple lessons in first aid that her father had taught her in the days before carelessness had come upon him. One of his lessons had been that of carrying an unconscious numan form-a method by which even woman may carry, for a short distance, a heavy man. It was approximately the method used in carrying wounded in No Man's Land: the body brown over the shoulders, one arm brough the fork of the legs to the

woman. She knew at once that this problem was solved.

The hardest part was lifting him to her shoulders. Only by calling upon her last ounce of strength, and tugging upward with her arms, was she able to do it. But it was fairly easy, in her desperation, to carry him down the hill. What rest she got she took by leaning against a tree, the limp body still across her shoulders.

It was a distance of one hundred yards in all. No muscles but those trained by the outdoors, no lungs except those made strong by the mountain air, could have stood that test. She laid him on his own bed, on the lower floor, and set his broken limbs the best she could. She covered him up with thick, fleecy blankets, and set n bottle of whisky beside the bed. Then she wrote a note to Dan and fastened it upon one of the interior

She drew on her hob-nailed bootsneeded sorely for the steep climband pocketed her pistol. She thrust a handful of jerked venison into the pocket of her coat and lighted the lantern. The forest night had fallen, soft and vibrant and tremulous, over the heads of the dark trees when she started out.

CHAPTER IV

Snowbird felt very glad of her intimate, accurate knowledge of the whole region of the Divide. In her infancy the winding truils had been her playground, and long ago she had acquired the mountaineer's sixth sense for traversing them at night. She had slipped into her free, swinging stride; and the last beams from the windows of the house were soon lost in the pines behind her. It was one of those silent, breathless nights with which no mountaineer is entirely unacquainted, and for a long time the only sound she could hear was her own soft tramp in the pine needles. The trees themselves were motionless. That peculiar sound, not greatly different from that of running water which the wind often makes in the pine tops, was entirely lacking. Not that she tell that certain tenderfeet, dying of hurry on the trail. thirst in the barren hills, have been.

With a tremendous effort of will he listen, there would be many faint couldn't hear it at all. sounds in the thickets-those little the least care to hear these sounds. mind on a long walk over the ridges.

The wilderness began at once. Whatever influence toward civilizaing into unconsciousness. The thing tion her father's house had brought to the wilds chopped off as beneath a blade in the first fringe of pines. This is altogether characteristic of the Oregon forests. They are much too big and too old to be tamed in any large degree by the presence of one house. No one knew this fact better than Lennox himself who, in a hard winter of four years before, had looked out of his window to find the wolf pack ranged in a hungry circle about his house. Within two hundred yards after she had passed through her father's door, she was perfectly aware that the wild was stirring and throbeven if she could get word to them at bing with life about her. At first she once; and twenty-four hours without tried very hard to think of other medical attention would probably cost things. But the attempt wasn't enher father his life. The nearest tele-tirely a success. And before she had phone was at the ranger station, covered the first of the twelve miles. the sounds that from the first had trall. The telephone line to Bald been knocking at the door of her consciousness began to make an entrance.

If a person lies still long enough, he can usually hear his heart beating It all depended upon her. Bill was and the flow of his blood in his driving cattle into the valleys, and he arteries. Any sound, no matter how and his men had in use all the horses faint, will make itself heard at last. on the ranch with one exception. The It was this way with a very peculiar noise that crept up through the silence Dan to some distant marshes, and as from the trail behind her. She Dan would shoot until sunset, that wouldn't give it any heed at first, But in a very little while indeed, it grew so insistent that she could no longer

Some living creature was trotting a sinking heart, that one of Bill's mis- along on the trail behind, keeping approximately the same distance be-

tween them. Foregoing any attempt to ignore k. she set her cool young mind to thinking what manner of beast it might be. its step was not greatly different from that of a large dog-except possibly a dog would have made slightly more noise. Yet she couldn't even be sure of this basic premise, because this animal, whatever it might be, had at first seemingly moved with utmost caution, but now took less care with its step than is customary with the wild denizens of the woods. A wolf. for instance, can simply drift when it wishes, and the silence of a cougar is a name. Yet unless her pursuer were a dog, which seemed entirely unlikely. It was certainly one of these two. She would have liked very much to believe the step was that of Old Wolf the bear, suddenly curious as to what this dim light of hers might be; but she couldn't bring herself to accept the Woof, except when wounded or cornered. Is the most amiable creature in the Oregon woods, and it would give her almost a sense of security to have him waddling along behind her. The wolves and cougar, remembering the arms of Woof, would not be nearly so curious. But unfortunately, the black bear had never done such a thing in the memory of man, and if he had, he would have made six times as much noise. He can go fairly softly when he is stalking, but when he is obliged to trotvounded man's band. Her father was as he would be obliged to do to keep of a particularly heavy man, and she up with a swift-walking burnan figure was an exceptionelly strong young -he cracks twigs like a rolling log. the had the impression that the ani-

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smoke at first, but wasn't taking the trouble to do it now.

The sound was a soft pat-pat on the trail-sometimes entirely obliterated but always recurring when she began ered with soft pine needles, it was mounted. practically indistinguishable. The animal was approximately one

dogs in the mountains to follow at an instant but that it was the skeleheel; and she had no desire whatever ton of Landy Hildreth. to meet Shag, the faithful hybrid that used to be her guardian in the hills. For Shag had gone to his well-deserved rest several seasons before. Two other possibilities remained. One was that this follower was a human being, the other that it was a cougar.

Ordinarily a human being is much more potentially dangerous to a woman in the hills at night than a cougar. A cougar is an abject coward and some men are not. But Snowbird felt herself entirely capable of handling any human foes. They would have no advantage over her; they would have no purpose in killing from ambush; and she trusted to her own marksmanship implicitly. While it is an extremely difficult thing to shoot at a cougar leaping from the thicket, a tall man standing on a trail presents an easy target. Besides, she had a vague sense of discomfort that if this animal were a cougar, he wasn't acting true to form. He was altogether too bold.

The animal on the trail behind her was taking no care at all to go silent-He was simply pit-patting along, wholly at his ease. He acted as if the fear that men have instilled in his breed was somehow missing. And could be deceived by it-as stories that is why she instinctively tried to

The step kept pace. For a long mile, up a barren ridge, she heard every step it made. Then, as the She felt that if she would stop to brush closed deeper around her, she

too long in the mountains and grown don't think I'm badly hurt," he told hushed noises that the wild things silence. No. the sound was stopped. Could it be that the animal, fearful at nox's door, then went in on tiptoe. She hurried on, straining to the their presence. But she did not in last, had turned from her trail? And And the first thing he saw when he then for the first time a gasp that opened the door was the grizzled "What does it matter, if you live?" They do not tend toward peace of was not greatly different from a de-



spairing sob caught at her throat. She heard the steps again, and they were in the thickets just beside her.

Two hours before Snowbird had left the house, on her long tramp to the ranger station, Dan had started home, He hadn't shot until sunset, as he had

He rode one of Lennox's cattle ponies, the only piece of horse-flesh that Bill had not taken to the valleys when he had driven down the live stock. She was a pretty bay, a spirited, high-bred mare that could whip about on her hind legs at the touch of the rein on her neck. She made good time along the trail. And an hour before sunset he passed the only human habitation between the marsh and Lennox's house—the cabin that had been recently occupied by Landy Hil-

passed and saw that it was deserted. No smell of wood smoke remained in the air. Evidently Landy had gone down to the settlements with his precious testimony in regard to the arson ring. Yet it was curious that no word had been heard of him. As far as Dan knew, neither the courts nor the forest service had taken ac-

He burried on, four u s farther. The trail entered the he thickets, and he had to ride slowl. It was as wild a section as could be found on the whole Divide. And just as he came to a little cleared space, three strange, dark birds flung up on widespreading wings.

He knew them at once. All mountaineers come to know them before their days are doug. They were the

buzzards, the followers of the dead. | ed on the eyes of some great beast. And what they were doing in the thicket just beside the trail, Dan did not dare to think.

Of course they might be feeding on the body of a deer, mortally wounded to believe that she had only fancied by some hunter. He resolved to ride its presence. Sometimes a twig, rain- by without investigating. He glanced soaked though it was, cracked beneath up The buzzards were hovering in a heavy foot, and again and again the sky, evidently waiting for him to she heard the brush crushing and pass. Then, mostly to relieve a curirustling as something passed through. ous sense of discomfet in his own Sometimes, when the trail was cov- mind, he stopped his lorse and dis-The twilight bad stared to fall, and

already its first graynes had begun hundred feet behind. It wasn't a wolf, to soften the harder thes of forest she thought. The wolves ran in packs and hill. And after his first glance at this season, and except in winter were the curious white her beside the more afraid of human beings than any trall, he was extremely glad that it other living creature. It wasn't a lynx had. But there was no thance to misone of those curiosity-devoured lit- take the thing. The elements and tle felines that will mew all day on a much more terrible agents had each trail and never dare come near. It wrought their change, ret there was was much too large for a lynx. The gristy evidence in plenty to show what feet fell too solidly. There were no had occurred. Dan didn't doubt for

> He forced himself to a nearer. The buzzards were almost dine, and one white bone from the shoulder gave unmistakable evidence of the passage of a bullet. What had happened thereafter, he could only guess.

> He got back quickly on his horse, He understood, now, why nothing had been heard of the evidence that Landy Hudreth was to turn over to the courts as to the activitie of the arson ring. Some one-probably Bert Cranston himself-had been faiting on the trail. Others had come thereafter. And his lips set in his esolve to let this murder measure in the debt he had to pay Cranston.

The Lennox house seemed very stlent when, almost an bur later, he turned his horse into the corral. He had rather hoped that Spwbird would be at the door to meet hm. The darkness had just fallen, andall the lamps were lighted. He strode into the living room, warming his hands an instant beside the fireplace. The fire needed fuel. It had eddently been neglected for nearly an jour.

Then he called Snowbid His voice echoed in the silent room unanswered. He called again, then wet to look for her. At the door of the dining room he found the note that she had left for him. It told, very simply an plainly, that

her father lay injured it his bed, and he was to remain and do what he could for him. She hadgone for help to the ranger station.

man's gray face on the pillow. "You're home early, ban," he said. "How many did you ge!

It was enwrely characteristic. Shaggy old Woof is too proud to how! over the wounds that la him low, and this gray old bear on the bed had partaken of his spirit. "Good Lord," Dan arswered. "How

badly are you hurt?" "Not so bad but the I'm sorry that Snowbird has gone frifting twelve miles over the hills for help. It's dark as pitch."

And it was. Dan could scarcely make out the outling of the somber ridges against the sky They talked on, and their subject

was whether Dan sould remain to take care of Lennot, or whether he should attempt to ofertake Snowbird with the horse. Of course the girl had ordered him to stay. Lennox, on the other hand, said that Dan could not help him in the least, and desired him to follow the firi.

"I'm not often exious about her," he said slowly. "But it is a long walk through the wildest part of the Divide. Some way-I can't bar accidents tonight. I don't like to think of her on those mountains alone."

And remembering what had lain beside the trail Dan felt the same. He had beard, long ago, that any animal that once tased human flesh loses its fear of men and is never to be trusted again. Some wild animal that still hunted the idges had, in the last month, done jist that thing. He left the room an walked softly to the

The night by silent and mysterious over the Divie. He stood listening. The girl had rarted only an hour before, and it was unlikely that she could have tryersed more than two miles of the seep trail in that time. Although the lorse ordinarily did not climb a hill more swiftly than a human being, he didn't doubt but that he could overake her before she went three miss farther. But where lay his duty-with the injured man in the house o with the daughter on her errand of sercy in the darkness?

Then the uitter was decided for him. So faintthat it only whispered at the dim, our frontiers of hearing a sound came pricking through the darkness. On his mouths of listening to the falk sounds of the forest. and the incredole silence of the night enabled him whear it at all. But he knew what it was, the report of a pistol. Snowled had met an enemy in the darknes.

He called oce to Lennox, snatched the shorgun hat still stood where he had placed I in the corner of the room, and betened to the correl. The mare whickred plaintively when he took her free her food.

When Snowbird first heard the step in the thickets beside her, she halted bravely am held her lantern high. She understoodat last. The very extremity of the bears found a reflection in two very curies orcles of greenish fire: a fire that was old upon the world be-fore man ever rubbed two sticks to-gether to strike a flavor. Of course the dim rays and shapty been reflect-

She identified it at once. Only the eyes of the felines, with vertical pupils, have this identical greenish glare The eyes of the volves glow in the darkness, but the circles are usually bright points. Of course it was a cou

She didn't cry out again. Realizing at last the reality of her peril, her long training in the mountains came to her aid. That did not mean she was not truly and terribly afraid. The beast was hunting her. She couldn't doubt this fact. Curiosity might make a lion follow her, but it would never beget such a wild light of madness in his eyes as this she had just seen. She simply clamped down all her moral strength on her rising hysteria and looked her situation in the face. Her hand flew instinctively to her side and the pistol leaped in the lantern

But the eyes had already blinked out before she could raise the weapon



She shot twice. The echoes roared back, unbelievably loud in the silence, at and then abruptly died; and the only sound was a rustling of leaves as the Hall. cougar crouched. She sobbed once, then hurried on.

She was afraid to listen at first. She wanted to believe that her pistol fire would frighten the animal from her trail. She knew, under ordinary conditions, that it would. If he still followed, it could mean but one thingthat some unheard-of heident had occurred to destroy his fear of men. It would mean that he had knowingly set upon her trall and was hunting her with all the age-old remorselessness that is the code of the mountains.

For a little while all was silence: Then out of the hush the thickets suddenly crashed and shook on the opposite side of the trail. She fired blindly into the thicket. Then she caught herself with a sob. But two shells remained in her pistol, and they must be saved for the test.

Whisperfoot the cougar, remember ing the lessons of his youth, turned from the trall when he had first heard Snowbird's step. He had crouched and let her pass. She was walking into the wind; and as she was at the closest point a message had blown

The hair went straight on his shoulders and along his spine. His blood. running cold an instant before from fear, made a great leap in his veins, A picture came in his dark mind: the chase for a deer when the moon had set, the stir of a living thing that broke twigs in the thickets, and the leap he had made. There had been blood, that night-the wildness and the madness and the exultation of the kill. Of course there had been terror first but the terror had soon departed and left something lying warm and still in the thickets. It was the same game that walked his trail in front-game that died easily and yet, in a vague way he did not understand, the noblest game of all. It was living

flesh, to tear with talon and fang. All his training, all the instincts imbued in him by a thousand generations of cougars who knew this greatest fear, were simply obliterated by the sudden violence of his hunting-madness. He had tasted this blood once. and it could never be forgotten. The flame leaped in his eyes. And then he began the stalk.

A cougar, trying to creep silently on its game, does not move quickly. It simply steals, as a serpent steals through the grass. Whisperfoot stalked for a period of five minutes, to learn that the prey was farther away from him at eyery step.

He trotted forward until he came close, and again he stalked. Again he found, after a few minutes of silent creeping through the thickets, that he lost distance. Evidently this game did not feed slowly, like th-It was to be a chase, then Again he trotted within one hundred

Continued Next Week

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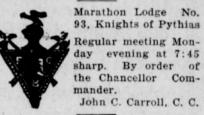
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