

The Voice of the Pack

A Story of the Oregon Mountain Country

Though the fear was mostly gone, the cougar retained enough of that caution that most wild animals exhibit when hunting a new game so that he didn't attempt to strike Snowbird down at once.

At that instant she had shot for the first time. Because the light had left his eyes before she could find aim, both shots had been clean misses.

The third shot was a miss too; in fact, there had been no chance for a hit. A sound in the darkness is as unreliable a target as can possibly be imagined.

She was making other sounds now—queer, whimpering sounds not greatly different from the bleat that the fawn utters when it dies.

This game was like the deer, and the thing to do was lie in wait. There was only one trail. He wasn't afraid of losing her in the darkness.

When Dan Falling, riding like mad over the mountain trail, heard the third shot from Snowbird's pistol, he felt that one of the debts he owed had come due at last.

He showed no mercy to his mount. Horse-flesh isn't made for carrying a heavy man over such a trail as this, and she was red-nosed and lathered before half a mile had been covered.

The lesser forest creatures sprang from his trail; and once the mare leaped high to miss a dark shadow that crossed in front.

By now he had passed the first of the worst grades, coming out upon a long, easy slope of open forest.

Then he heard Snowbird fire for the fourth time; and he knew that he had almost overtaken her.

"She's only got one shot more," he said. He knew how many bullets her pistol carried; and the danger—whatever it was—must be just at hand.

He lashed at her in vain. She was not afraid in the darkness and the rocks of the trail, but some terror in the woods in front had in an instant broken his control over her.

Whisperfoot crouched lower; and again his long serpent of a tail began the little vertical motion that always precedes his leap.

Thus Falling established before all men his right to the name he bore. And thus he paid one of his debts—life for a life, as the code of the forest has always decreed—and in the fire of danger and pain his metal was tried and proven.

from a nervous collapse do not tend toward cheer. But the natural sturdiness of all three quickly came to their aid.

Of course Lennox had been severely injured by the falling log, and many weeks would pass before he would be able to walk again.

One other element affected the issue. She had whirled to answer Dan's cry just as the cougar left the ground. But she had still been in range.

Hurled to her face in the trail, she saw the cougar sprawl on the earth beside her. The flame in the lantern almost flickered out as it fell from her hand, then flashed up and down, from the deepest gloom to a vivid glare with something of the effect of lightning flickering in the sky.

But the terrible fangs were never to know her white flesh. Some one had come between. There was no chance to shoot; Whisperfoot and the girl were too near together for that.

Nothing had been heard of Landy Hildreth, who used to live on the trail to the marsh, and both Lennox and his daughter wondered why.

Willie it was true that he took rather more than the casual interest that most citizens feel in the destruction of the forest by wanton fire.

He walked twelve feet, then turned back. Out of the corner of his eye it seemed to him that he had caught a flash of white, near the end of a great, dead log beside the path that the wounded Hildreth had taken.

Into a little hollow in the bark, on the underside of the log, some hand had thrust a small roll of papers.

It was a bluff; but it worked. If Gibbs had gone without speaking, Cranston would have known no sleep that night. But the man became more fawning.

"I'm telling you, fast as I can," he went on, almost whispering. "I went to the cabin, just as you said. But I didn't get a chance to search it."

"Why not?" Cranston thundered. His voice re-echoed among the snow-covered pines.

"I'll tell you why! Because some one else—evidently a cop—was already searchin' it. Both of us know

as the eating places in the berry thickets remain open. The cougars had all gone down with the deer, and the migratory birds had departed, and even the squirrels were in hiding.

The scene didn't offer much in the way of clues. Of the body itself only a white heap of bones remained, for many and terrible had been the agents at work upon them. The clothes, however, particularly the coat, were practically intact.

Dan looked about for tracks, and he was considerably surprised to find the blurred, indistinct imprint of a shoe other than his own. He hadn't the least hope that the tracks themselves would offer a clue to a detective.

But yet it was entirely to be expected that the examination of the body would be an afterthought on Cranston's part. Possibly at first his only thought was to kill and, following the prompting that has sent so many murderers to the gallows, he had afterward returned to the scene of the crime to destroy any clues he might have left and to search the body for any evidence against the arson ring.

As Dan stood wondering, he thought he heard a twig crack on the trail behind him, and he wondered what forest creature was still lingering on the ridges as the eye of the snows.

The snow began to fall in earnest at midnight—great, white flakes that almost in an instant covered the leaves. It was the real beginning of winter, and all living creatures knew it.

The search itself was wholly without result. But because he had time to think as he climbed the ridge, because as he strode along beneath that wintry sky he had a chance to consider every detail of the case, he was able to start out on a new tack when, just before sunset, he returned to the body.

Willie it was true that he took rather more than the casual interest that most citizens feel in the destruction of the forest by wanton fire, and had an actual sense of duty to do all that he could to stop the activities of the arson ring, his motives, stripped and bare, were really not utilitarian.

It was possibly a distance of forty feet, and getting down on his hands and knees, Dan looked for any break in the shrubbery that would indicate the path that the wounded Hildreth had taken.

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and other circumstantial evidence, they could in all probability convict Bert Cranston of murder.

For a long time he stood with the shadows of the pines lengthening about him, his gray eyes in curious shadow. For the moment a glimpse was given him into the deep wells of the human soul; and understanding came to him. Was there no balm for hatred even in the moment of death? Were men unable to forget the themes and motives of their lives, even when the shadows closed down upon them?

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there's nothin' there, anyway. We've gone over it too many times. After a while he went away—but I didn't turn back yet.

"Yes!" Cranston had hard work curbing his impatience. Again Gibbs' eyes were full of ominous speculations.

"He stopped at the body, and it was plain he'd been there before. He went crawling through the thickets, lookin' for clues. He done what you and me never thought to do—lookin' all the way between the trail and the body. I'd already found the brass shell you told me to get. At least, it wasn't there when I looked, after he'd gone. You should've thought of it before. But he found somethin'—else a whole lot more important—a roll of papers that Hildreth had chucked into an old pine stump when he was dyin'.

Gibbs' eyes grew more intent. What was this thing? Cranston's tone, instead of commanding, was almost pleading. But the leader caught himself at once.

"I don't see why I need to explain any of that to you. What I want to know is this: why you didn't shoot and get those papers away from him?"

For an instant their eyes battled. But Gibbs had never the strength of his leader. If he had, it would have been asserted long since. He sucked in his breath, and his gaze fell away. It rested on Cranston's rifle, that in some manner had been pulled up across his knees. And at once he was cowed. He was never so fast with a gun as Cranston.

"Blood on my hands, eh—same as on yours?" he mumbled, looking down. "What do you think I want, a rope around my neck? These hills are big, but the arm of the law has reached up before, and it might again. You might as well know first as last I'm not goin' to do any killin' to cover up your murders."

"That comes of not going myself. You fool—if he gets that evidence down to the courts you're broken the same as me."

"But I wouldn't get more'n a year or so, at most—and that's a heap dif-



Some Hand Had Thrust a Small Roll of Paper.



"You Just Lacked the Guts to Pull the Trigger."



A Strange, Grim Battle.

BOOK THREE

The Payment.

CHAPTER I.

The Leonaux home, in the wilderness of the Umpqua Divide, looked rather like an emergency hospital for the first few days after Dan's flight with Whisperfoot.

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Lodge Directory

Marathon Lodge No. 93, Knights of Pythias Regular meeting Monday evening at 7:45 sharp. By order of the Chancellor Commander, John C. Carroll, C. 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. 1280 L. O. O. M. Meets every Friday at K. of P. Hall.

S. A. Brodhead, Sec.

Tillamook Lodge No. 57, A. F. & A. M. Stated Communication Wednesday evening, January 11, 1921. Visiting brethren welcome.

Harvey Ebinger, Sec'y.

Tuesday eve, 7:30 p. m. Rebekah, Wednesday evening Camp 2-4, Thursday

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