

The Voice of the Pack

A Story of the Oregon Mountain Country

Lennox was not on the divan where he had left him. He lay instead on the floor near the fireplace; and he had the passion-drawn face with entire calmness. His motives were perfectly plain. He had just made a desperate effort to procure Dan's rifle that hung on two sets of deer horns over the fireplace, and was entirely exhausted from it. He had succeeded in getting down from the couch, though wracked by agony, but had been unable to lift himself up in reach of the gun.

Cranston read his intention in one glance. Lennox knew it, but he simply didn't care. He had passed the point where anything seemed to matter.

"Tell me where it is," Cranston ordered him. Again he pointed his rifle at Lennox's wasted breast.

"You know what I want—and it isn't money. I mean those letters that you found on the ridge. I'm through fooling, Lennox. Dan learned that long ago, and it's time you learned it now."

"Dan learned it because he was sick. He isn't sick now. Don't presume too much on that."

Cranston laughed with harsh scorn. "But that isn't the question. I said I've wasted all the time I'm going to. You are an old man and helpless; but I'm not going to let that stand in the way of getting what I came to get. They're hidden somewhere around this house. I've watched, and he's had no chance to take them into town. I'll give you—just five seconds to tell me where they're hidden."

"And I give you," Lennox replied, "one second less than that—to go to—"

Both of them breathed hard in the quiet room. Cranston was trembling now, shivering just a little in his arms and shoulders. "Don't get me wrong, Lennox," he warned.

"And don't have any delusions in regard to me, either," Lennox replied. "I've stood worse pain from this accident than any man can give me while I yet live, no matter what he does. If you want to get on me and hammer me in the approved Cranston way, I can't defend myself—but you won't get a civil answer out of me. I'm used to pain, and I can stand it. I'm not used to fawning to a coyote like you, and I can't stand it."

But Cranston hardly heard. An idea had flared in his mind and cast a red glamor over all the scene about him. It was instilling a poison in his nerves and a madness in his blood, and it was searing him, like fire, in his dark brain. Nothing seemed real. He suddenly bent forward, tense.

"That's all right about you," he said. "But you'd be a little more polite if it was Snowbird—and Dan—that would have to pay."

Perhaps the color faded slightly in Lennox's face; but his voice did not change.

"They'll see your footprints before they come in and be ready," Lennox replied evenly. "They always come in by the back way. And even with a pistol, Snowbird's a match for you."

"Did you think that was what I meant?" Cranston scorned. "I know a way to destroy those letters, and I'll do it—in the four seconds that I said, unless you tell. I'm not even sure I'm going to give you a chance to tell now; it's too good a scheme. There won't be any witnesses then to yell around in the courts. What if I choose to set fire to this house?"

"It wouldn't surprise me a great deal. It's your own trade," Lennox chuckled once on his place on the floor.

"I wouldn't have to worry about those letters then, would I? They are somewhere in the house, and they'd be burned to ashes. But that isn't all that would be burned. You could maybe crawl out, but you couldn't carry the guns, and you couldn't carry the pantry full of food. You're nearly eighty miles up here from the nearest sawpohs for the three of you and one dinky pistol. And you can't walk at all. It would be a nice pickle, wouldn't it? Wouldn't you have a fat chance of getting down to civilization?"

The voice no longer held steady. It trembled with passion. This was no idle threat. The brain had already leaped upon the scheme with every intention of carrying it out. The wilderness lay stark and bare, stripped of all delusion—not only in the snow world outside but in the hearts of these two men, its sons.

Cranston, the fire-madness on his face, hurried to the outbuildings. There he repeated the work. He touched a match to the hay in the barn, and the wind flung the flame through it in an instant. The sheds and other outbuildings were treated with oil. And seeing that his work was done, he called once to the press



He Called Once to the Prone Body of Lennox.

body of Lennox on the snow and nudged away into the silence.

Lennox's answer was not a curse this time. Rather it was a prayer, unuttered, and in his long years Lennox had not prayed often. When he prayed at all, the words were burning fire. His prayer was that of Samson—that for a moment his strength might come back to him.

CHAPTER II.

Two miles across the ridges, Dan and Snowbird saw a faint mist blowing between the trees. They didn't recognize it at first. It might be fine snow, blown by the wind, or even one of those mysterious fogs that sometimes sweep over the snow.

"But it looks like smoke," Snowbird said.

"But it couldn't be. The trees are too wet to burn."

But then a sound that at first was just the faintest whisper in which neither of them would let themselves believe, became distinct past all denying. It was that menacing crackle of a great fire, that in the whole world of sounds is perhaps the most terrible.

"It's our house," Snowbird told him. "And father can't get out."

She spoke very quietly. Perhaps the most terrible truths of life are always spoken in that same quiet voice. Then both of them started across the snow as fast as their unwieldy snowshoes would permit.

"He can crawl a little," Dan called to her. "Don't give up, Snowbird. I think he'll be safe."

They mounted to the top of the ridge; and the long sweep of the forest was revealed to them. The house was a singular tall pillar of flame, already glowing that dreadful red from which firemen, despairing, turn away. Then the girl seized his hands and danced about him in a mad circle.

"He's alive!" she cried. "You can see him—just a dot on the snow. He crawled out to safety."

She turned and sped at a breakneck pace down the ridge. Dan had to race to keep up with her. But it wasn't entirely wise to try to rush so fast. A dead log lay beneath the snow with a broken limb stretched almost to its surface, and it caught her snowshoe. The wood cracked sharply, and she fell forward in the snow. But she wasn't hurt, and the snowshoe itself, in spite of a small crack in the wood, was still serviceable.

The only thing that can be done. I can't walk, and you can't carry me on your backs. What else remains? I'll stay here—and I'll scrape together enough wood to keep a fire. Then you can bring help."

He kept his eyes averted when he talked. He was afraid for Dan to see them, knowing that he could read the lie in them.

"How do you expect to find wood—in this snow?" Dan asked him. "It will take four days to get out; do you think you could lie here and wait with a fire for four days, and then four days more that it will take to come back? You'd have two choices: to burn green wood that I'd cut for you before I left, or the rain-soaked dead-wood under the snow. You couldn't keep either one of them burning, and you'd die in a night. Besides—this is no time for an unarmed man to be alone in the hills."

Lennox's voice grew pleading. "Be sensible, Dan!" he cried. "That Cranston's got us, and got us right. I've only one thing more I care about—and that is that you pay the debt! I can't hope to get out myself. I say that I can't even hope to. But if you bring my daughter through—and when spring comes, pay what we owe to Cranston—I'll be content. Heavens, son—I've lived my life. The old pack leader dies when his time comes, and so does a man."

His daughter crept to him and sheltered his gray head against her breast. "I'll stay with you, then," she cried.

"Don't be a little fool, Snowbird," he urged. "My clothes are wet all ready from the melted snow. It's too long a way—it will be too hard a fight, and children—I'm old and tired out. I don't want to make the try—hunger and cold; and even if you'd stay here and grub wood, Snowbird, they'd find us both dead when they came back in a week. We can't live without food, and work and keep warm—and there isn't a living creature in the hills."

"Except the wolves," Dan reminded him.

"Except the wolves," Lennox echoed. "Remember, we're unarmed—and they'd find it out. You're young, Snowbird, and so is Dan—and you two will be happy. I know how things are, you two—more than you know yourselves—and in the end you'll be happy. But me—I'm too tired to make the try. I don't care about it enough. I'm going to wave you goodbye, and smile, and lie here and let the cold come down. You feel warm in a little while—"

But she stopped his lips with her hand. And he bent and kissed it.

"If anybody's going to stay with you," Dan told them in a clear, firm voice, "it's going to be me. But aren't any of the cabins occupied?"

"You know they aren't," Lennox answered. "Not even the houses beyond the North Fork, even if we could get across. The nearest help is over seventy miles."

"And Snowbird, think! Haven't any supplies been left in the ranger station?"

"Not one thing," the girl told him. "You know Cranston and his crowd robbed the place last winter. And the telephone lines were disconnected when the rangers left."

"Then the only way is for me to stay here. You can take the pistol, and you'll have a fair chance of getting through. I'll grub wood for our camp meanwhile, and you can bring help."

"And if the wolves come, or if help didn't come in time," Lennox whispered, passion-drawn for the first time, "who would pay what we owe to Cranston?"

"But her life counts—first of all." "I know it does—but mine doesn't count at all. Believe me, you two. I'm speaking from my own desires when I say I don't want to make the try. Snowbird would never make it through alone. There are the wolves, and maybe Cranston too—the worst wolf of all. A woman can't march across those ridges four days without food, without some one who loves her and forces her on! Neither can she stay here with me and try to make green branches burn in a fire. She's got three little pistol balls—and we'd all die for a whim. Oh, please, please—"

But Dan leaped for his hand with glowing eyes. "Listen, man!" he cried. "I know another way yet. I know more than one way; but one, if we've got the strength, is almost sure. There is an ax in the kitchen, and the blade will be good."

"We'll travel mostly at night," Dan told them. "We can see in the snow, and by taking our rest in the daytime, when the sun is bright and warm, we can save our strength. We won't have to keep such big fires then—and at night our exertion will keep us as warm as we can hope for. Getting up all night to cut green wood with this dull ax in the snow would break us to pieces very soon, for remember that we haven't any food. I know how to build a fire even in the snow—especially if I can find the dead, dry heart of a rotten log—but it isn't any fun to keep it going with green wood. We don't want to have to spend any more of our strength stripping off wet bark and hacking at splinters than we can help; and that means we'd better do our resting in the heat of the day. After all, it's a fight against starvation more than anything else."

"Just think," the girl told them, reproaching herself, "if I had shot straight at that wolf today, we could have gone back and got his body. It might have carried us through."

Neither of the others as much as looked surprised at these amazing regrets over the lost, unseamy flesh of a wolf. They were up against realities, and they didn't mince words.



"The Thing Bert Cranston Burned the House Down to Destroy."

the house down to destroy," he explained. "I'm learning to know this mountain breed, Lennox. I kept it in my pocket where I could fight for it, at any minute."

Cranston had been mistaken, after all, in thinking that in fear of himself Dan would be afraid to leave the packet on his person, and would cravenly conceal it in the house. He would have been even more surprised to know that Dan had lived in constant hope of meeting Cranston on the ridges, showing him what it contained, and fighting him for it, hands to hands. And even yet, perhaps the day would come when Cranston would know at last that Snowbird's words, after the fight of long ago, were true.

The twilight was falling over the snow, so Snowbird and Dan turned to the toll of building a sled.

The snow was steel-gray in the moonlight when the little party made their start down the long trail. Their preparations, simple and crude as they were, had taken hours of ceaseless labor on the part of the three. The ax, its edge dulled by the flame and its handle burned away, had been cooled in the snow, and with one sound arm, Lennox had driven the hot nails that Snowbird gathered from the ashes of one of the outbuildings. The embers of the house itself still glowed red in the darkness.

Dan had cut the green limbs of the trees and planed them with his ax. The sled had been completed, handles attached for pushing it, and a piece of fence wire fastened with nails as a rope to pull it. The warm mackinaws of both of them as well as the one blanket that Lennox had saved from the fire were wrapped about the old frontiersman's wasted body—Dan and Snowbird hoping to keep warm by the exercise of propelling the sled. Except for the dull ax and the half-empty pistol, their only equipment was a single charred pot for melting snow that Dan had recovered from the ashes of the kitchen.

The three had worked almost in silence. Words didn't help now. They wasted no sorely needed breath. But they did have one minute to talk when they got to the top of the little ridge that had overlooked the house.

"We'll travel mostly at night," Dan told them. "We can see in the snow, and by taking our rest in the daytime, when the sun is bright and warm, we can save our strength. We won't have to keep such big fires then—and at night our exertion will keep us as warm as we can hope for. Getting up all night to cut green wood with this dull ax in the snow would break us to pieces very soon, for remember that we haven't any food. I know how to build a fire even in the snow—especially if I can find the dead, dry heart of a rotten log—but it isn't any fun to keep it going with green wood. We don't want to have to spend any more of our strength stripping off wet bark and hacking at splinters than we can help; and that means we'd better do our resting in the heat of the day. After all, it's a fight against starvation more than anything else."

"Just think," the girl told them, reproaching herself, "if I had shot straight at that wolf today, we could have gone back and got his body. It might have carried us through."

Neither of the others as much as looked surprised at these amazing regrets over the lost, unseamy flesh of a wolf. They were up against realities, and they didn't mince words.

Den smiled at her gently, and his great shoulder leaned against the traces.

They moved through a dead world. The ever-present manifestations of wild life that had been such a delight to Dan in the summer and fall were quite lacking now. The snow was trackless. Once they thought they saw a snowshoe rabbit, a strange shadow on the snow, but he was too far away for Snowbird to risk a pistol shot. The pound or two of flesh would be sorely needed before the journey was over, but the pistol cartridges might be needed still more, she didn't let her mind rest on certain possibilities wherein they might be needed. Such thoughts stole the courage from the spirit, and courage was essential beyond all things else to bring them through.

As the dawn came out, they all stood still and listened to the wolf pack, snoring on the ridge somewhere behind them.

It was a large pack. They couldn't make out individual voices—neither the more shrill cry of the females, the yapping of the cubs, or the low, clear G-below-middle-C note of the males. "If they should cross our tracks—"

Lennox suggested.

"No use worrying about that now—not until we come to it," Dan told him.

The morning broke, the sun rose bright in a clear sky. But still they trudged on. In spite of the fact that the sled was heavy and broke through the snow crust as they tugged at it, they had made good time since their departure. But now every step was a pronounced effort. It was the dreadful beginning of fatigue that only food and warmth and rest could rectify.

"We'll rest now," Dan told them at ten o'clock. "The sun is warm enough so that we won't need much of a fire. And we'll try to get five hours' sleep."

"Too long, if we're going to make it out," Lennox objected.

"That leaves a workday of nineteen hours," Dan persisted. "Not any too little. Five hours it will be."

He found where the snow had drifted against a great, dead log, leaving the white covering only a foot in depth on the lee side. He began to scrape the snow away, then hacked at the log with his ax until he had procured a piece of comparatively dry wood from its center. They all stood breathless while he lighted the little pile of kindling and heaped it with green wood—the only wood procurable. But it didn't burn freely. It smoked fitfully, threatening to die out, and emitting very little heat.

But they didn't particularly care. The sun was warm above, as always in the mountain winters of southern Oregon. Snowbird and Dan cleared spaces beside the fire and slept. Lennox, who had rested on the journey, lay on his sled and with his unimpaired arm tried to hack enough wood from the saplings that Dan had cut to keep the fire burning.

At three they got up, still tired and aching in their bones from exposure. Twenty-four hours had passed since they had tasted food, and their unrepentant systems complained. There is no better energy in the wide world than the human body. It will stand more neglect and abuse than the finest steel motors ever made by the hands of craftsmen. A man may fast many days if he lies quiet in one place and keeps warm. But fasting is a deadly proposition while pulling sledges over the snow.

Dan was less hopeful now. His face told what his words did not. The lines cleft deeper about his lips and eyes; and Snowbird's heart ached when he tried to encourage her with a smile. It was a wan, strange smile that couldn't quite hide the first sickness of despair.

The shadows quickly lengthened—simply leaping over the snow from the fast-falling sun. The twilight deepened, the snow turned gray, and then, in a vague way, the journey began to partake of a quality of unreality. It was not that the cold and the snow and their hunger were not entirely real, or that the wilderness was no longer real to their eyes. It was just that their whole effort seemed like some dreadful, unburdened journey in a dream—a stumbling advance under difficulties too many and real to be true.

The first sign was the far-off cry of the wolf pack. It was very faint, simply a stir in the eardrums, yet it was entirely clear. That clear, cold mountain air was a perfect telephone system, conveying a message distinctly, no matter how faintly. There were no tall buildings or cities to disturb the ether waves. And all three of them knew at the same instant it was not exactly the cry they had heard before.

They couldn't have told just why, even if they had wished to talk about it. In some dim way, it had lost the strange quality of despair it had held before. It was as if the pack were running with renewed life, that each wolf was calling to another with a excited sort of exultation. It was an excited cry, too—not the long, sad song they had learned to listen for. It sounded immediately behind them.

The man looked back at the girl, smiling into her eyes. Lennox lay as if asleep, the lines of his dark face curiously pronounced. And the girl, because she was of the mountains, body and soul, answered Dan's smile. Then they knew that all of them knew the truth. Not even an inexperienced ear could have any delusions about the pack song now. It was that oldest of wilderness songs, the hunting-cry—that frenzied song of blood-lust that the wolf pack utters when it is running on the trail of game. It had found the track of living flesh at last.

"There's no use stopping, or trying to climb a tree," Dan told them simply. "In the first place, Lennox can't do it. In the second, we've got to take a chance—for cold and hunger can get up a tree where the wolf pack can't." He spoke wholly without emotion. Once more he tightened the traces of the sled.

"I've heard that sometimes the pack will chase a man for days without attacking," Lennox told them. "It all depends on how long they've gone without food. Keep on and try to for—"



"Maybe We Can Keep Them Bluffed."

get 'em. Maybe we can keep 'em bluffed."

But as the hours passed, it became increasingly difficult to forget the wolf pack. It was only a matter of turning the head and peering for an instant into the shadows to catch a glimpse of one of the creatures. Their usual fear of men, always their first emotion, had given way wholly to a hunting cunning; an effort to procure their game without too great risk of their own lives. In the desperation of their hunger they could not remember such things as the fear of men. They spread out farther, and at last Dan looked up to find one of the gray beasts waiting, like a shadow himself, in the shadow of a tree not one hundred feet from the sled. Snowbird whipped out her pistol.

"Don't dare!" Dan's voice cracked out to her. He didn't speak loudly; yet the words came so sharp and commanding, so like pistol fire itself, that they penetrated into her consciousness and choked back the nervous reflexes that in an instant might have lost them one of their three precious shells. She caught herself with a sob. Dan shouted at the wolf, and it melted into the shadows.

"You won't do it again, Snowbird?" he asked her very humbly. But his meaning was clear. He was not as skilled with a pistol as she; but if her nerves were breaking, the gun must be taken from her hands. The three shells must be saved to the moment of utmost need.

"No," she told him, looking straight into his eyes. "I won't do it again."

He believed her. He knew that she spoke the truth. He met her eyes with a half smile. Then, wholly without warning, fate played its last trump. Again the wilderness reminded them of its might, and their brave spirits were almost broken by the utter remorselessness of the blow. The girl went on her face with a crack of wood. Her snow shoe had been cracked by her fall of the day before, when running to the fire, and whether she struck some other obstruction in the snow, or whether the cracked wood had simply given way under her weight, mattered not even enough for them to investigate. As in all great disasters, only the result remained. The result in this case was that her snowshoe, without which she could not walk at all in the snow, was irreparably broken.

"Fate has stacked the cards against us," Lennox told them, after the first moment's horror from the broken snowshoe.

But no one answered him. The girl, white-faced, kept her wide eyes on Dan. He seemed to be peering into the shadows beside the trail, as if he were watching for the gray forms that now and then glided from tree to tree. In reality, he was not looking for wolves. He was gazing down into his own soul, measuring his own spirit for the trial that lay before him.

Continued Next Week

Give a look at the prices of canned peaches, pears, salmon and berries at the Burge Grocery—a cut of 25 per cent. 12-231f

Let a Headlight Classified Ad do the work for you.

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. 93, 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 K. of P. Hall.

S. A. Brodhead, Sec.

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

Special Communication Wednesday Jan. 19th at 8:00 p. m. F. C. degree to be conferred.

Harvey Ebinger, Sec'y.

Tuesday eve, 7:30 p. m.

Rebekah, Wednesday evening Camp 2-4, Thursday

Help Furnished Free

To Employers of Labor

By the

PIONEER EMPLOYMENT CO.

The Oldest Office in Oregon

Headquarters for Farm, Dairy, Mill, Logging and office help of all kinds.

Phone Bdg. 2272

14 N Second St. Portland, Or.

DR. J. G. TURNER

Eye Specialist

Permanently located in Tillamook Private office in Jewell'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. MutualPhone

Tillamook, Oregon

Dr. J. E. Shearer Dr. A. C. Crank

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