

By RANDALL PARRISH

so there's plenty of room. Never mind about bringing the rest in now; supper's ready."

Shelby put his bundles down with out a word, his eyes quick to perceive the chairs cleared of their debris, the floor swept, the ashes back in the stove. He could hardly comprehend the miracle.

She led the way gayly, leaving her broom in a corner, and carrying the lamp. The lean-to kitchen had been transfigured, and actually presented a homelike appearance. The dirty dishes were shoved out of sight, the floor swept, the fire in the stove blazed cheerfully, and the table was covered with the essentials of a truly appetizing meal. She set the lamp down in the center, fully rewarded by the expression on the faces of the two.

"You boys wash up there in the sink," she commanded; "use that piece of sacking for a towel; it was all I could find. Then we'll get busy."

If Shelby was to live a thousand years he would never lose memory of that meal. The grateful warmth of the stove, the neatness of the table, the good fellowship with which she served, all coupled with the wonderful surprise, left upon him an impression never afterward to be blotted out. She talked about what she was going to do; about what he had purchased in town; about anything which came into her mind that she could manufacture conversation from. He told of their adventures outside, and made her laugh heartily over the struggle of getting the Kid's pony safely into the corral. The Kid himself said little, eating heartily but in silence, only occasionally lifting his eyes from the plate. This pretense at modesty did not seem like the Kid, and Shelby found himself observing the fellow with some wonderment. His looks were not at all prepossessing, now that he saw him more plainly revealed in the lamplight, and he was some years older than he had supposed. The fellow had a hard, dissipated face, and his lips were thin, with a distinctly cruel twist to them. Shelby had intended putting the man in that bunk in the front room, but now decided the stable was good enough for his use.

As soon as they were through he hunted up a second lantern.

"Take the rest of that stuff off the buckboard, Macklin," he said shortly, "and stow it away in the cellar-cave just to the right of the house. I'll be out presently, an' we'll fix things up for the night."

As the fellow disappeared Shelby's eyes encountered those of his wife across the table.

"And what are you going to do?" she asked directly.

"Why, help you with these things, and then clean the shack up a bit; it is in worse shape than I realized."

She shook her head positively.

"Oh, no, mister man. This is my house, and I am going to take care of it—all alone. I have seen your style of housekeeping, and I prefer my own. You go on, and finish the work outside; when you come back it will look better in here."

Shelby went out. Macklin was seemingly busy at the task assigned him, the lantern hung to the broken branch of a convenient tree, lighting his path. Without even speaking, the ranchman passed by down the steep path leading toward the stream below. He was some time in completing his task, and when he finally emerged once more from the stable, the only gleam of light he could perceive above came through the log chinks of the cabin. He wondered what had become of Macklin, yet gave the matter no special thought as he toiled slowly up the path, his mind more deeply interested in the reception awaiting him within.

He passed close enough to the buckboard to assure himself that his orders had been executed, and, believing the fellow had probably re-entered the house for some purpose, passed on directly to the front door. No one was in the main room, nor in the chamber behind. They remained exactly as he had left them. The silence startled him, and he advanced swiftly toward the kitchen, where the light still burned, visible through the open door. It also was deserted, the dirty dishes yet setting on the table untouched. Good God! what was the meaning of this? What had occurred? The outer door stood ajar, and he sprang anxiously forward, peering into the blackness. There was no sound, no movement; the blaze of light had blinded him, and he stepped outside so as to see better. He had taken but one step beyond the protection of the partially open door, when something struck him, and he went staggering down, as though his skull was crushed by the savage blow.

It was gray dawn when Shelby stirred once more, and, with eyes only partially open, stared in bewilderment at the pale arch of sky. Slowly memory came back, and he managed to lift one hand to his head, his numb fingers touching a ghastly scalp wound, the clotted blood matting his hair. He had been struck a desperate blow, and was doubtless left lying there in the belief that he was dead, yet apparently the skull was not crushed, and the

might aghast had congealed the blood. With a supreme effort he drew himself into a sitting posture, and stared rather blankly about at the objects revealed in the gray dawn.

The slight as instantly restored his memory; the cabin door stood wide open, just as he left it, and within the lamp still burned on the table, in the midst of the dirtied dishes. She had not returned, then; he had been lying there alone all night. The realization maddened him to effort, and, by grasping at the door for support he attained his feet, and stood there for a moment, swaying dizzily. Exactly what had occurred he could not determine; the whole affair seemed more like a dream than a reality. He had left her there apparently cheerful and happy, the laughter in her eyes a memory to linger with him; he had not been absent to exceed thirty minutes, and no so far away but what any cry would surely have reached his ears. Yet when he returned she had vanished utterly, leaving everything untouched. Whatever occurred must have been brought to pass almost immediately upon his departure, before she even began the work of cleaning up. But how could such a thing happen without any alarm? Why, the Kid was working within ten feet of the house, and must have heard the slightest sound of a struggle. The Kid! where was he anyway? What had become of the fellow all this time? He was nowhere in sight when Shelby retraced his steps up the path. Could it be that the Kid was the one guilty of this deed? If so, what was his object? Not robbery, surely, for the place had not been ransacked, or anything removed from his pockets. Yet surely this was not Indian work; it bore no resemblance to a savage raid. The questions were unanswerable; no mental effort gave him any clue, yet his strength was rapidly coming back, and with it a grim, determined anger, which urged him into action.

First he went through the deserted house, room by room, seeking for the slightest sign of guidance; but finding none. Everything remained precisely as he remembered seeing it the night before. He blew out the light, took down one of the rifles from the wall, loaded it, and then, feeling his old strength returning, cautiously stepped out through the front door. The buckboard stood there, gunt and stripped, except for the box between the rear wheels. He peered into this, and found it still half filled with bundles.



He Went Staggering Down.

Macklin had not completed his job, other evidence being furnished by the extinguished and overturned lantern on the ground just beyond. But there was no sign visible of any struggle.

Surely she had not left of her own choice. That was unthinkable. She had appeared cheerful and contented, even actually interested in the new life; besides, if she possessed the slightest desire to escape, he had offered her every opportunity on the way out, and she had refused. Surely he would never have come way out here to make her disagreeable journey over again at night. Even if crazy enough for such an attempt, the effort could never be made upon foot, and all three ponies were in the corral; he had seen them while coming down. No, that theory might be dismissed at once, and secretly he was glad it was so easily disposed of—it had vaguely haunted him at first, causing him to dread the discovery that it might be true.

Then what was true? Who could be guilty of such an outrage? Indians? White outlaws? Joe Macklin? These three possibilities alone remained, but the first two seemed quite impossible. He was used to Indian foray, but this act bore no resemblance to the work

of savages on the warpath. There had been no attempt to plunder, or destroy. The very fact that the ponies remained undisturbed convinced him that this was no deed of Indian raiders. That it might have been white outlaws was not quite so easily dismissed. There were desperate men hiding out yonder in the Bad Lands, but he never had known of their venturing to attack any settler, except occasionally to run off cattle on the range. In this case there was no apparent object—they had taken nothing, neither food nor stock. Then it must have been Macklin.

His sudden disappearance was, at least, proof he must have had a hand in it. But why? To what end? Shelby straightened up, a new flash of intelligence in his eyes. Perhaps this all harked back to that early mystery in her life. She had told him that Calkins had taken her from place to place, apparently always afraid that he was being followed. Was it possible that he had been hunted down at last; that he recognized the approach of the end, and had committed suicide on that account? And was this strange seizure of Olga part of the plot, either of revenge, or restitution? This explanation seemed more probable than any other; in a way it appeared to fit the case, although he possessed no more knowledge of what it all meant than he did before. Only, evidently all that had been desired was possession of the girl, and that was deemed of sufficient importance to even justify murder. He had been left for dead, in order that she might be borne away alive.

No longer doubting but what this theory at least approximated the truth, Shelby faced the facts frankly, and with no further hesitation. It was up to him to act promptly; there was no one to whom he could turn for help. His eyes darkened, and his jaws set. All right then, he would certainly give the Kid a run for his money. There must be some trail left; such a deed as this could never be accomplished without leaving some mark behind. Whether they traveled on foot, or horseback, the party must surely leave some trace of passage, and Shelby, who had been the best trapper in his regiment, felt confident of being able to run the outfit down.

With this once settled in his mind, and his plan of pursuit outlined, Shelby threw off his depression, and became cool and resolute. First he searched over every foot of ground within a quarter of a mile of the house, seeking to discover just how Macklin had operated, and, whether or not, he was alone. The result was only partially successful. The hard-packed earth revealed little of value. Down below the cabin on the sloping side of the hill, he found the mark of a high-heeled boot such as the Kid wore, and, a foot or so beyond, the plain impression of a moccasin. A hundred yards to the north the footprints were again visible, making it clear to his mind that the fugitives were then making for the lower ford. The girl was evidently being carried, and two men must have been engaged on the job, one of them possibly an Indian. He passed straight on to the ford to verify this theory, and here the mud exhibited clearly the movements of both the fellows, while close at the water's edge he came upon a narrow pink ribbon, which the girl had evidently hurriedly dropped in avoidance.

It was clearly manifest now the direction in which they had disappeared, and Shelby remained unsatisfied. He could not believe that they would attempt to escape thus on foot with their burden. If Macklin had one assistant, it was highly probable there could be others also engaged in the affair. The opposite shore was deserted, and he crossed over, wading to his thighs in the swift water, with life dug forward, and eyes intently searching the further bank. The trail was plain at this point; he could easily trace the steps of both men passing up a narrow gully into the first line of bluffs, and there, in a little open glade, he found where horses had been tethered and tramped the turf. They had evidently been held for some time; had entered from the north down a slight coulee, and departed westward along a shelving bank. There were five animals, all mounted, to judge from the deep impress of hoofs, and he followed their passage as far as the crest of the bluff. They were well beyond view, of course by this time, across that rough, broken country, but he satisfied himself that they were heading straight for the Bad Lands.

Shelby knew now something of what he must contend with. The act of abduction, and attempted murder, was a sudden temptation assailing Macklin, but undoubtedly part of a well-organized plot. Whatever their object, the men were concerned in the outcome, their intention probably the making of the girl a prisoner. In Shelby's judgment she was probably no immediate danger. If the fellows had intended taking her life, she could never have thus been spared and carried away, apparently unharmed. Their purpose evidently re-

quired that she be kept alive, but helpless in their hands.

He was cool now; grimly determined, but intent on preparing himself for a long and dangerous quest. He was to be one man pitted against five, and every instinct of long experience on the plains, warned him against being rash. He recrossed the stream, built a fire in the stove, and, after washing the blood from his hands, ate heartily; then packed a leather haversack with food, and was ready. He took this time in which to plan out his course, and then went forward unhesitatingly, filling his pockets with rifle cartridges, and flinging the haversack over his shoulder, before starting for the corral. He decided upon the buckskin as being the better animal for his purpose—a vicious brute, harder to handle, but tireless, and able to exist where either of the others would starve. It required a good half-hour to rope and saddle the beast, but he had plenty of time. Once on the trail he could easily outstride the party he was following, and he had no desire to approach them closely until well after dark.

Once firm in the saddle, however, rifle under the flap, with haversack strapped on the opposite side, and blanket-roll behind, he gave the plunging, bucking demon between his legs



He Followed Their Passage.

little mercy. The man was in no mood for play of any sort, and set himself to conquering the brute in the quickest possible way. It was a rough, hard struggle, but the human won, and, under the merciless sting of the quirt, the maddened but subdued animal, nostrils distended, and eyes vicious as ever, yielded final obedience to the rein.

CHAPTER VII.

An Hour Behind.

There was no marked trail, but the instincts of a plainsman kept Shelby's course directly to the northwest. The bronco, now thoroughly tamed, and obedient to the slightest pressure of the rider's leg, kept a tireless gait, picking out unaltered the easiest paths. From the general direction of the trail left by the raiders he had decided they were heading for a certain portion of the Bad Lands, and, if this theory was correct, he ought easily to cut across their tracks again late in the afternoon. Sitting upright in the deep saddle, with the straight back of the cavalryman, his eyes watchful, his lips grimly set, he rode steadily on hour after hour, thinking, planning, beginning now to realize the depth of his own interest in this effort at rescue. He had hardly comprehended before that this girl was really his wife—that her life had become his to guard. The affair between them had occurred so swiftly, so unexpectedly, he had not before awakened to its true meaning. But now it became very real, and he was positively surprised to learn the strength of hold she already had upon him.

His mind would linger over a thousand little womanly peculiarities which somehow had unconsciously impressed him—the soft glow in her eyes, the wistfulness of her smile; the slight dimple in her chin; the pulsing of blood in her cheeks; the round firmness of the white neck; the peculiar gracefulness of her walk; the nameless attractiveness of poise, all came back now in odd fascination. He was not aware before that he had even noticed these things, but now their memory dominated him, caused his senses to quicken. He had known little of women since boyhood, and never before had he encountered on terms of intimacy this type of a woman. She had been a revelation to him even in its blindness, but now, under the spell of memory, she had suddenly changed to an inspiration. His wife, Olga Arlyn, his wife! He said the words over, as though he recalled a dream, the sound of the words causing the startled buckskin to cast back an evil eye at his unconscious rider.

"What's the idea of stealin the girl?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Before asking a favor of a man a wise woman gives him a good dinner—with a little flattery on the side.



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The KITCHEN CABINET

Yes, the task that is given to each
man no other can do;
So the errand is waiting: it has waited
for ages for you;
And now you appear and the Hushed
Ones are turning their gaze
To see what you do with your chance
In the chamber of days.

GOOD THINGS FOR THE INVALID



In serving a tray for an invalid one should avoid serving too many things at once. It is a pleasure to have the food served in courses when it can be done without too great a burden to the caretaker. After the meal is over the tray and all food should be removed at once.

Malted Milk Cocoa.—Mix one tablespoonful of malted milk powder with one teaspoonful of cocoa and three-fourths of a cupful of boiling water. Sweeten to taste, stirring well. Boil three minutes. Serve hot.

Egg Nests.—Toast a circular piece of bread; butter and place on a hot plate. Beat the white of an egg until stiff, heap on the toast and drop the egg unbroken in the center; season with butter, salt and pepper, if used. Set in a moderate oven until the white is firm.

Potato Baked in the Half Shell.—Bake a good-shaped potato and scoop out the inside. Season well and return to the shell, brush over the top with the beaten white of egg or milk and brown slightly. If cheese can be eaten a sprinkling of grated cheese may be added to the potato for flavor.

Egg Lemonade.—Beat one egg, add two tablespoonfuls of sugar, two tablespoonfuls of lemon juice and one cupful of cold water. Add the water gradually, stirring until smooth and well mixed. Strain and serve. Egg-nog is made in the same way as the lemonade, adding a grating of nutmeg, a bit of vanilla or fruit juice and milk in place of the lemon and water.

Brussels Sprouts With Butter.—Boil one quart of sprouts in two quarts of boiling salted water about fifteen minutes. Let drain on a cloth, then toss in a frying pan with four tablespoonfuls of butter; when the butter is absorbed, sprinkle with one teaspoonful of chopped parsley and a dash of salt; mix and arrange in a mound on a serving dish. Surround with toast points.

Community Spirit says: "I am under obligations of service to my neighbor next door, whoever he is. I am under obligations of service to my community; I am no longer a resident only; I am a responsible citizen. I must make it my duty to see that schools and churches teach first of all good citizenship."

FAVORITE WINTER RECIPES.

For those who find it necessary to serve meat substitutes, the following is worth trying:



one cupful each of strained tomato and bread crumbs, salt and pepper to taste. Combine the ingredients, form into a roll. Brush with melted fat and bake in a moderate oven for a half hour.

Cottage Cheese Pie.—Take one cupful of cottage cheese, two-thirds of a cupful of maple sirup, two-thirds of a cupful of milk, the yolks of two eggs, well beaten; two tablespoonfuls of melted butter, salt and one-half teaspoonful of vanilla. Mix in the order given and bake the pie in one crust. Cool slightly, cover with a meringue and brown in a slow oven.

Raisin Paste.—Put two cupfuls of raisins, washed and dried, through a meat grinder; add one-half cupful of orange juice, two tablespoonfuls of lemon juice, one teaspoonful of salt and one cupful of nut meats, ground, or half a cupful of peanut butter, mix until smooth, pack into jelly glasses and cover. It will keep a long time and is delicious for sandwiches.

Gluten Muffins.—Take two cupsful of gluten flour, two cupsful of milk or two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one well beaten egg, mix the dry ingredients, stir in the beaten eggs and milk. Beat thoroughly together and half fill well buttered gem pans. Bake 10 minutes.

Fried Rice.—Take six cupfuls of cooked rice, one cupful of cold salt pork, chopped, two onions and caps, chopped, two tablespoonfuls of oil, one tablespoonful of salt, two eggs, add the salt to the fat; heat; add the meat and onion. Let fry a few minutes; add rice; mix well and when thoroughly heated add the eggs whole; stir well; cook until the eggs are set, and serve at once.

Nettie Maxwell